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***The Demise of the Information Research Department in  
1977: The End of Political Warfare in the UK?***

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Politics and International Studies

Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick

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***Declaration***

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work. No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at any other university or institution of higher learning. I further declare that no material contained within this thesis has been used previously, or has been published.

Word Count: 84,534 (excluding references and bibliography).

## *Abstract*

The Information Research Department (IRD) was a unique, quasi-independent unit hidden in the British Foreign Office, from its creation in 1948 to eventual demise in 1977. Conceptualised as an anti-communist propaganda unit in support of Clement Attlee's political warfare offensive against the Soviet Union, IRD grew extensively in the early Cold War years into one of the largest departments in the Foreign Office. Yet, by the late 1960's subsequent budget cuts to overseas expenditure necessitated a reduction in IRD's staff and resources and oversaw a withdrawal from overseas anti-communist operations.

IRD was not merely an overseas propaganda unit. From 1951 the department had embarked on domestic propaganda through a highly secretive in-house unit known as the English Section. In the age of superpower détente, overseas operations decreased and the domestic capacity of IRD acquired greater significance. Expenditure was redirected into domestic work and the department was reconceptualised as IRD Mark II in 1972. The new IRD was instructed to produce and disseminate propaganda in support of a broader range of British foreign policy objectives which fell outside the Cold War context and often had little to do with communism. This included anti-IRA propaganda during the Troubles in Northern Ireland and planting stories in the media promoting Britain's application for membership of the European Economic Community.

In the seventies, IRD's activities had been accepted by successive Prime Ministers as the unattributable arm of British foreign policy. Yet by 1977, the department was shut down by the Foreign Secretary, David Owen. Commentators at the time, including the left-wing investigative journalists who broke the secrecy of IRD's existence in numerous press articles in 1978, surmised that the department's fervent anti-Communism had become an embarrassment to the government who had taken the decision to rid the Foreign Office of this Cold War relic. Whilst right-wing Cold Warriors suggested that the department had been closed by Labour as a 'sop' to the left-wing of the party.

To date, there has been no scholarly investigation of IRD's final years, its reconceptualisation in the early seventies, nor its eventual demise. As such, many long-held misconceptions about the department and the reasons for its closure have remained unchallenged and an accepted orthodoxy has persisted. This thesis aims to address the missing story of IRD's final years and closure. The department was not closed due to ideological puritanism, nor because its methods embarrassed the government. IRD was closed due to bureaucratic pressure for cost

effectiveness in a period of economic crisis in the late seventies. IRD's staff were absorbed into a newly created information division to increase efficiency and extract savings. Unattributable information work continued post-IRD, maintained by Callaghan who acknowledged the importance of such work. When Margaret Thatcher succeeded him, the infrastructure remained in place for her renewed political warfare offensive against the Soviet Union during the Second Cold War.

## ***Introduction***

This thesis examines the Information Research Department (IRD), from its creation in 1948 to eventual closure in 1977. This thesis offers an examination of the British conceptualisation of political warfare during the Cold War, an underexplored concept in the historiography of Britain's Cold War. IRD played a significant role in the British conceptualisation of political warfare as an integral weapon of the nation state. The main contribution of this work is an archivally rich exploration of the bureaucratic politics of the department from the late 1940's until its closure in 1977. The thesis also offers an alternative interpretation for the closure of IRD which challenges more orthodox views about the reasons why the British government abolished the institutional home of political warfare.

IRD was a unique, quasi-independent department within the Foreign Office which enjoyed extensive growth in the early Cold War and became the forefront of Britain's anti-communist political warfare campaign against the Soviet Union. Chiefly involved with overt and covert propaganda, what diplomats termed "unattributable information", IRD was also involved with other, more secretive variants of political warfare, including black propaganda and special political action.

The story of IRD is fascinating, yet little is known about the department beyond its early work in the Cold War. Extensive studies have revealed the origins of the department and its overseas anti-communist operations.<sup>1</sup> There have been more limited explorations of the department's anti-nationalist<sup>2</sup> work overseas and even fewer studies of IRD's domestic anti-communist operations.<sup>3</sup> As of yet, no scholar has examined the eventual demise of the department in 1977, nor the department's reconceptualisation in 1972. This thesis aims to correct this omission from the illustrious, and still expanding, historical appreciation of IRD within the wider context of the development of political warfare as an integral weapon of the British state.

This thesis aims to address numerous misconceptions of IRD and British political warfare which have become accepted narratives in British Cold War history. The conventional story of

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<sup>1</sup> The most well-known perhaps is Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's secret Cold War weapon revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), 353-369.

<sup>2</sup> See Susan L. Carruthers, 'A red under every bed?: Anti-communist propaganda and Britain's response to colonial insurgency', *Contemporary Record*, 9:2 (1995), 294-318; W. Scott Lucas, *Britain and the Suez Crisis: The Lion's Last Roar* (Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Lomas, 'Labour Ministers, intelligence and domestic anti-Communism, 1945-1951', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12:2, 113-133; Thomas J. Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and "State-Private Networks"', *Intelligence and National Security*, 30:5 (2015), 637-666.

political warfare in the UK is one of decline, punctuated by the abolition of its institutional home IRD in 1977. Contemporary observers such as the left-wing investigative journalists David Leigh and Richard Fletcher who first broke the story of IRD's existence in 1978, misinterpreted the closure of IRD which has created a lasting orthodoxy around the department's demise. There is a lingering false assumption that IRD's activities – particularly in Northern Ireland – had become an embarrassment to the government and culminated in the department's closure.<sup>4</sup> On the other side of the political spectrum, right-wing Cold Warrior Brian Crozier argued that IRD's closure had been 'a sop' to the extreme left of the Labour Party.<sup>5</sup>

Political warfare was thought to have re-emerged once Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. Yet this narrative of IRD has never been challenged by scholars or by a rigorous examination of the documentary record. The focus on a Thatcher revival of political warfare is misplaced, the instruments of political warfare were modified and maintained by the previous Labour governments of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. Under Labour, political warfare was reconceptualised as an instrument to be deployed against non-communist as well as communist threats to British interests.

The conception of political warfare as a renewed offensive against the Soviet Union by Thatcher and her US counterpart Ronald Reagan is a red herring. Whilst overseas operations were revived by Thatcher following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Callaghan did not preside over the end of political warfare as previously suggested. Instead, Callaghan had already begun a renewed domestic offensive during the détente years. The story of political warfare has too narrowly focused on the Cold War context. Political warfare thrived domestically during the détente years and many of these activities undertaken during the Cold War were independent of the East versus West context.

The story is more complex than we have hitherto imagined. Indeed, IRD was reconceptualised in 1972 with the domestic context in mind. The department was reorganised and instructed to counter all threats to British interests, not just those from communism. This included the IRA in Northern Ireland and the far left in domestic British politics. The department also branched out to support wider British foreign policy objectives such as membership of the European

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<sup>4</sup> David Leigh, 'Death of the department that never was', *The Guardian*, 27 January 1978; Richard Fletcher, George Brock and Phil Kelly, 'How the FO waged secret propaganda war in Britain', *The Observer*, 29 January 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Crozier, *Free Agent: The Unseen War, 1941-1991* (London, 1993), p. 120.

Economic Community (EEC). IRD's expertise influencing enemy populations had been put to effective use in the government's pro-EEC publicity campaign designed to win over public support for Britain's entry into the community.

The narrative of Labour's suspicions of intelligence bodies is also misplaced. Through numerous Labour governments, from Attlee to Callaghan, the party employed these agencies and poured resources into them to fight domestic subversion from left-wing activists. Callaghan was particularly supportive of the intelligence agencies and of IRD's methods. Labour governments were especially concerned with domestic subversion as it posed an existential threat to the unity of the Labour Party and its continued electoral success, particularly as trade union agitation dominated the political discourse from the 1960's. By the 1970's, Labour's electoral success necessitated a solution to left-wing subversion of the labour movement. The party did not shy away from using all available methods of the state. Callaghan in particular had been keen to deploy IRD to target troublesome union leaders.

Labour was instrumental in creating, maintaining and refining political warfare in the domestic context. The Committee on Communism (Home), created by Attlee in 1951 to direct and supervise domestic operations, was closed by the Conservatives in 1962. Callaghan revived domestic counter subversion committees in 1976 in order to deal with the growing threat from left-wing subversion. Domestic political warfare was revived by Callaghan to focus on subversion of industry and trade unions in the 1970's as Britain became increasingly economically vulnerable. As international political warfare was scaled back in the 1960's, resources were instead put into domestic work in the seventies. Domestic political warfare later focused on Militant Tendency and the frequent miners strikes.

The story of political warfare has focused too rigidly on IRD. The orthodox narrative has interpreted IRD's closure as a complete withdrawal from this method of warfare. Instead, this is a bureaucratic story of IRD's reconceptualisation as part of a reorganisation of information activities, a reimaged infrastructure which continued under Thatcher. IRD Mark II was launched in a period of ongoing difficulties for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Amidst the ongoing economic strife, Callaghan instructed the Central Policy Review Staff to investigate overseas representation, picking up where the Duncan Committee left off. Not enough efficiency for the available resources had been achieved from the Duncan Review. The FCO responded to the coming CPRS review by launching their own investigation of IRD under Colin Crowe.

The outcome of the Crowe report was not abolition but to complete the integration of IRD which had been conceived in the late 1960's but never fully achieved. Crowe emphasised efficiency through a continued propaganda capacity which achieved value for money in an integrated information structure. Crowe's report was part of a decade long investigation of IRD. Its recommendations appeared to have staved off any criticism of IRD but a much bigger threat to the department beyond Crowe was coming. The CPRS's review was conducted on a much wider front and advocated for the abolition of the Diplomatic Service and, therefore, IRD's activities were at risk whilst the whole FCO fought for survival.

Political warfare following 1977 became more dispersed in various departments in Whitehall. Throughout IRD's lifetime this had always been the case. The department was merely one of many units involved in this type of work. Following a reorganisation of the information departments in 1976 which predicated the dissolution of IRD, political warfare became more diversified and indeed specialised amongst the intelligence and information bodies throughout Whitehall. The closure of IRD and integration of information activities was used to the FCO's advantage to stave off challenges from the CPRS.

Whereas IRD had been involved in both domestic and international political warfare, after 1977 political warfare was dispersed with more focus on specialised units. There was a specific unit for overseas propaganda, the Overseas Information Department. Following IRD's closure, overseas work was split from domestic propaganda which was housed elsewhere in Whitehall, most likely in the intelligence and security agencies owing to the sensitivity of the work. Whilst domestic propaganda was possibly relocated away from the FCO, this decision appeared to have been reversed in 1980 as Overseas Information Department was renamed Information Department and continued IRD's surveillance of communist subversion of British peace movements, notably the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. This would coincide with the renewal of anti-communist sentiment within the FCO following events in Afghanistan and a close tracking of Jimmy Carter's disappointed journey from frustrated peacenik to Cold War hawk.

How does this relate to the US case? Since 1951 British agencies had been given a brief for domestic propaganda which the Americans had never had. Therefore, the story of British political warfare is one of domestic and overseas campaigns and is markedly different from the American experience.

IRD's existence remained hidden from the public so long because its work was of a fairly non-partisan nature and its anti-communist position was not controversial. When the department branched out into other areas of domestic concern in the 1970's it became vulnerable to competing partisan interests. IRD's involvement in pro-EEC publicity for example, exposed the department to criticism from right-wing journalists who had previously, and enthusiastically, supported the department's anti-communist work. Whilst controversies over IRD's domestic work threatened to expose the existence of the department to the British public, it was the rather mundane issue of Whitehall bureaucracy which eventually inspired the department's closure.

IRD had operated well under the watchful oversight of involved Foreign Secretaries like Ernest Bevin and Anthony Eden. As IRD's ministerial control waned the department became semi-autonomous and acted as a separate entity in the FCO. By the late 1960's this became an untenable position for the department. The reconceptualisation of the department as IRD Mark II in 1972 aimed to bring the department within closer control of senior diplomats and establish greater coordination with other information departments. The effort failed and by 1976 diplomats chose to close the expensive department and instead redeploy its staff and expertise into a unified information division.

### ***Research Questions***

The research parameters of the project were defined by three overarching research questions in the attempt to support or challenge the overall hypothesis of my research that political warfare continued - and even thrived under the Thatcher government - following the closure of IRD.

1. Why was IRD closed in 1977?
2. What became of political warfare following IRD's closure?
3. Why had IRD become involved in domestic concerns from the 1970s?

The first of these questions sought to explain why IRD had been closed down in 1977, despite the fact that it had grown into a prominent and indeed one of the most expensive units in the Foreign Office. How had such an important instrument of the state endured such a spectacular fall from grace? Left-wing journalists reported in 1978 that IRD's staunch anti-communist sentiment had become an embarrassment to the government and thus resulted in IRD's demise. The academic scholarship on IRD has hitherto focused on IRD's early years in the Cold War and thus the thesis from contemporary journalists had become an accepted narrative and never

challenged. The starting point of this research attempted to find out the accuracy of the received orthodoxy on IRD's closure.

The second research question is intrinsically linked with the first. Due to IRD's closure, the story of British political warfare goes cold, bolstering the perception that the Callaghan government refrained from using political warfare techniques such as state sanctioned propaganda to battle Britain's enemies. Political warfare has largely believed to have been revived in the early 1980's as the anti-Soviet rhetoric returned in British political circles as Thatcher became Prime Minister. Yet initial archival research suggested that at least some element of political warfare, principally overseas propaganda, had survived post IRD in the newly formed Overseas Information Department. Indeed, Labour had been at pains to play down this perception with the Foreign Secretary, David Owen, insistent that Overseas Information Department had not been a direct replacement for IRD. The extensive archival research for this thesis has meant that we are now able to challenge the perception that British political warfare died alongside IRD.

The third research question is perhaps the most important in the overall contribution of this thesis. An exploration of IRD's involvement in domestic political issues has allowed an alternative thesis on IRD's demise to emerge. It was not an exposure of IRD and its overseas anti-communist work that had concerned senior Ministers and diplomats, but revelations of its involvement in anti-IRA and pro-EEC propaganda which concerned the political establishment. With IRD funded on the secret vote its involvement in domestic issues naturally meant a great deal of suspicion fell on the government's motivations and ethics for using a secretly funded propaganda unit to advance domestic policy objectives. By 1977, senior diplomats sought to dispel the lingering suspicions of IRD's involvement in domestic concerns by abandoning the name IRD and dispersing its staff and resources into the wider Foreign Office infrastructure. Such a move was designed to lend legitimacy to the techniques of political warfare which had become an integral instrument of the British state.

### ***Structure of the Thesis***

The first section of the thesis outlines the methodological approach to the research and provides the conceptual framework of political warfare. The methodology highlights some of the issues around studying IRD as the department was viewed by senior diplomats as an entity which straddled the boundaries of information and intelligence. Thus, the most profitable way of researching IRD is to treat it as an intelligence agency and draw on the methods of esteemed

intelligence scholars in order to navigate the redactions and omissions seen so often in the official archival record.

The conceptual framework charts the use of the term political warfare in the scholarship of the Cold War and its usage by practitioners who had themselves used the instruments of political warfare in the Second World War. Scholars have rarely agreed on a homogenous definition of political warfare. Moreover, the concept of political warfare as an umbrella under which numerous instruments are pursued to achieve a nation's objectives is seldom considered. Instead, the literature on the British Cold War contains numerous disparate studies on propaganda, covert action, counterinsurgency, and intelligence activities.

This has impacted how the scholarship has perceived IRD. The department is traditionally seen as an overseas anti-communist propaganda unit, leaving much of its complicated history untold. British political warfare was conceptualised during the Cold War as a domestic as well as overseas weapon. By the 1970's, IRD was reconceptualised to counter all threats to British interests even those with no communist connection. This reconceptualisation coincided with the evolution of political warfare in Britain and of the redeployment of resources from overseas theatres to the domestic space during the years of détente.

The first chapter provides an historical appreciation of IRD from its conception in 1948 up to the late 1960's. This period was seen as the golden era of the department as its staff and resources grew extensively. In 1960, the department underwent what the Assistant Under-Secretary termed "The Great Leap Forward" in which 24 new field officers were recruited and the budget increased to £300,000. This chapter also examines IRD's domestic activities with new research available due to the recent declassification of files from the department's English Section. From 1951, IRD was instructed to undertake action against domestic communists in industry and the unions, thus sparking the department's long running operations against the Communist Party of Great Britain.

A few years after "The Great Leap Forward" and in the midst of the punitive Whitehall cost cutting exercises of the Plowden and Duncan Committees, senior diplomats struggled to justify the expense of IRD. Chapter Two examines how IRD managed to survive the cuts despite Whitehall penny pinchers and some of the department's critics questioning whether Britain needed a dedicated anti-communist unit in the age of détente. The result was a completely reconceptualised and scaled down IRD with the anti-communist sentiment diminished but not completely extinguished. This remodelling of the department sparked greater involvement with

non-communist domestic issues such as the troubles in Northern Ireland and Ted Heath's campaign to join the EEC.

Chapter Three examines the reasons behind the demise of IRD in 1977. IRD Mark II was created in 1972 but just four years later another round of Whitehall reform threatened the existence of the department. As senior diplomats anticipated a major restructuring of information work as a result of the CPRS's Review of Overseas Representation, the Permanent Under-Secretary ordered an internal review of IRD. The department was observed by the sympathetic retired diplomat Colin Crowe who highlighted the issues around the coordination of information work which had long blighted IRD. The reconceptualisation had failed to remedy the issues, thus Crowe recommended the complete integration of IRD into a unified information division. The move would save money which diplomats hoped would prevent further cuts to the information budget by the CPRS review.

Chapter Four examines the wider significance of the CPRS review on political warfare and overseas representation as a whole. The CPRS proposals were radical, recommending the abolition of the Diplomatic Service as a separate entity. The Prime Minister, James Callaghan, rejected the idea and pushed back on the CPRS's conception of Britain as a diminished second tier power. Despite the FCO's reforms to information work, the CPRS still criticised the amount spent on the work. Yet the CPRS were supportive of the type of unattributable information work carried out by IRD and deemed the amount spent on it – roughly ten percent the amount spent on attributable information – was proportionate to Britain's requirements.

The Conclusion provides a post-script analysis of the state of political warfare post-IRD. Following the department's demise, overseas unattributable information work transferred to a new information department, the Overseas Information Department. The fate of domestic work is unknown, however, as the archival record goes cold. This chapter suggests that domestic propaganda possibly transferred to the Security Service (MI5) owing to the sensitivity of such work. Just two years after IRD's closure, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan sparked the renewal of anti-communist sentiment within the FCO and a determination to counter further aggression through a new anti-communist political warfare offensive.

The instruments relied on so often by the FCO were redeployed against the Soviets, yet diplomats opposed the revival of IRD. They deemed such a move unnecessary and too costly when Whitehall already had adequate means at its disposal. The FCO had no need to revive political warfare machinery as post-IRD, much of the department's expertise had been

successfully integrated into the wider diplomatic machinery. During the 1970's, political warfare had been maintained and refined by Labour into a flexible instrument of the British state.

## *Methodology*

### *Introduction*

Any investigation of sensitive research topics such as the Information Research Department (IRD), political warfare and domestic propaganda are beset with challenges for the researcher. Such topics that relate to secret service are subject to similar data restrictions imposed on intelligence research. As a Cold War organisation, IRD's historical footprint is safely tucked away at the National Archives in Kew, albeit hedged around with certain restrictions. Nevertheless, the historical research approach through documentary analysis provides an enticing window through which we can assess the department's infrastructure, guiding principles, operations, and role within Britain's foreign policy machinery.

Documentary analysis of a Foreign Office information department which was officially closed over forty years ago should be a straightforward affair. Yet, IRD was not a normal department within the Foreign Office. Described by the former Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Michael Palliser, as a department which 'straddle[d] the frontier between information and intelligence', examination of IRD is in fact rather problematic.<sup>1</sup> Like its better-known peers the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), the Security Service (MI5) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), IRD's documentary record has been beset by redactions, and, in many cases, complete omission on the grounds of national security. As part of Britain's political warfare machinery, IRD's role as the unattributable arm of foreign policy is better understood, and more successfully researched, as a de facto intelligence agency.

Therefore, undertaking research into IRD can, at times, be as difficult as examining Britain's eminent intelligence and security organisations. As the intelligence historian Christopher Moran has emphasised, regardless of the age of a document or the sensitivity of its content, 'all documents which referred to intelligence found themselves in a never-never land, withheld indefinitely from release'. The so-called "blanket" exemption under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act (1958, 1967) allowed the Lord Chancellor to withhold the release of any document discussing intelligence work or the agencies themselves.<sup>2</sup> The legacy of this policy has greatly affected IRD file releases over the decades. Files which either discussed the department's work

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA): FCO 84/52, letter from Palliser to Berrill, 16 February 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Moran, 'Coming to Clarity: The Pursuit of Intelligence History: Methods, Sources, and Trajectories in the United Kingdom', *Studies in Intelligence*, 55:2 (2011), 34-35.

in the intelligence field or documents which contained any reference to its work in coordination with MI6 and MI5 have been subjected to redactions or completely withheld from the archives.

Moreover, as a quasi-intelligence agency IRD's role in British Cold War history had for many decades been lost behind the cultural veil of secrecy at the UK National Archives. In early 1979, IRD's files from its first year of operation in 1948 were due to be released under the thirty-year rule. The release of these files was the subject of high-level discussion between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. By this point IRD had been closed by the Labour government in 1977 and its activities dispersed among a few FCO departments. The existence of the department which had remarkably remained a secret within the UK for three decades had suddenly been exposed to the British public in a series of articles in *The Guardian* and *Observer*. The then Foreign Secretary David Owen was keen to release a few carefully selected files. Owen acknowledged the 'great historical interest' in IRD and as the department was no longer a secret, files would be selected for their ability to control the narrative that IRD was a product of its time and that the threat from Soviet communism was so great, such a propaganda instrument was warranted.<sup>3</sup>

Owen stressed that transparency from the government would be viewed favourably and to obstruct the declassification would only invite scrutiny. The Cabinet Secretary John Hunt and Permanent Under-Secretary Michael Palliser both objected, arguing that any file releases were likely to invite further scrutiny on IRD and risked eventually exposing not only the department's dubious overseas operations but also, most importantly, its domestic propaganda work. The senior civil servants reluctantly deferred to Owen's wishes. The final decision rested with the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, who was also doubtful that any files should be released. Owen's assertion that withholding the files would only increase interest in the department and reflect unfavourably on Labour's image of transparency was eventually enough to convince a reluctant Prime Minister.<sup>4</sup>

Sometime after Callaghan agreed to release the files some sort of intervention was made. The files never appeared at the Public Records Office in 1978. Indeed, the files from IRD's first year were not released until August 1995,<sup>5</sup> nearly twenty years later. The omission, one can conclude, was due to the fear that if IRD's files were released academics and journalists would

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<sup>3</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1669, Owen to Callaghan, 20 December 1978.

<sup>4</sup> The story of the file releases can be found in Chapter Three: The End of IRD. The specific files can be found here: TNA: PREM 16/1669, Hunt to Cartledge, 21 December 1978; Sanders to Walden, 28 December 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's secret Cold War weapon revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), 353-369, p.353.

pour over the documents and interest in the department's activities would increase. The fear that IRD's domestic propaganda operations could be exposed and damage the Labour Party which had created the department and used it against its enemies in the Communist Party of Great Britain and trade unions meant that IRD's files remained buried for decades.

Following the final release of IRD's files beginning in 1995, the academic retelling of the department's history based on official documentation began. The Cold War had ended some years previously, yet the ostensibly Cold War relic of IRD still inspired intrigue. The release of files held considerable interest for journalists who also poured over the documents to uncover more of the department's secrets. The story of George Orwell's list of Communist sympathisers in the British intelligentsia was a particular fascination for left-wing journalists, sparking numerous stories.<sup>6</sup>

However, even prior to the official release of IRD files, much of the department's history had been pieced together by carefully mining other areas of the Public Record Office. The most notable example of this was Scott Lucas and C.J. Morris's 'A very British crusade: the Information Research Department and the beginning of the Cold War'. With this study the authors pieced together material from the Foreign Office and Cabinet Office and focused on the concept of political warfare itself rather than the machinations of a department which spent its life conducting it.<sup>7</sup>

Happily, the present-day researcher of IRD enjoys access to an abundance of archival material which was for so long denied to earlier colleagues. Yet issues with the archives remain. Despite the declared shift to a twenty-year rule, as a quasi-intelligence agency, IRD's files still remain subjected to the redactions and withheld documentation which blights the archival records of the big three intelligence organisations. The problems of dealing strategically with a so-called 'laundered archive' is the subject of this methodological review. Despite the issues, good research can still be pursued. The key is to make use of the easily accessible files whilst casting the net far wider amongst all the departments in Whitehall who either consumed IRD's material (such as the Armed Services) or managed the Department (the Foreign Office, Cabinet Office, and Prime Minister's Office).

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<sup>6</sup> See Wilford, 'The Information Research Department' for an overview of the press interest in the file releases.

<sup>7</sup> W. Scott Lucas and C.J. Morris, 'A very British crusade: the Information Research Department and the beginning of the Cold War' in Richard J. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51* (London: Routledge, 1992).

### *Methodological Approaches of Intelligence Scholars*

Using official archival data poses significant problems for the researcher and these issues are more pronounced when dealing with data containing secret intelligence material. As one leading intelligence historian has warned, when researching documentation related to British foreign policy in the twentieth century ‘we need constantly to remember that we are dealing with a laundered archive. It is an archive laundered by honourable men in what they believed to be the national interest. But it is still a laundered archive.’<sup>8</sup> It is a stark warning that all scholars examining particularly sensitive research areas like intelligence and political warfare are wise to take note of.

Researchers in the intelligence and foreign policy fields are often forced to pick their way through an incomplete archival record. They frequently face accessibility issues with some areas of documentation being withheld due to the inclusion of sensitive information, or simply due to the resource implications of rapid declassification. Many documents are heavily redacted with sensitive passages removed or even closed to the public entirely. As such, intelligence historians have adapted to these challenging circumstances and adopted sophisticated archival practices to combat issues with accessibility.

Most of the post-war records of Britain’s intelligence agencies – MI6, MI5 and GCHQ – are closed to the public under the legislation of the public records act of 1958 which allows government departments to retain documents on the grounds of national security.<sup>9</sup> Thus, intelligence historians are met with a significant barrier to the accumulation of documentary evidence for research purposes; however, this barrier is not impenetrable. As Wesley K. Wark has noted, if researchers widen their scope of research from the intelligence agencies themselves to the various departments in Whitehall through which intelligence material passed, researchers are able to access a larger volume of data. Instead of researching archives of the departments who produced intelligence, researchers can find greater success when focusing their efforts on the departments who consumed the intelligence output of MI5, MI6, and GCHQ. Therefore, researchers in the intelligence field can often find intelligence reports in the archives of the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Treasury. Scholars can also seek profitable returns when looking beyond the official record and casting

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Andrew, ‘Secret Intelligence and British Foreign Policy, 1900-1939’ in Christopher Andrew and Jeremy Noakes (eds.) *Intelligence and International Relations, 1900-1945* (Exeter: Exeter University Publications, 1987) p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Wesley K. Wark, ‘In Never-Never Land? The British Archives on Intelligence’, *The Historical Journal*, 35:1 (1992), 195-203, p. 195.

their net to include the collections of private papers in a number of research libraries in Britain, such as the Churchill College archives at Cambridge and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at Kings College London.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst the records of the intelligence agencies remain largely closed, the paper trail left by the secret services ‘as they work to impress their intelligence on government departments... can, in the nature of things, never be wholly erased.’ This paper trail strewn across various government departments offers a great deal of intelligence material which has escaped the ‘teams of sensitivity reviewers’ – commonly referred to as “weeders” – who assess which documents are suitable for release to the National Archives. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the agencies themselves and examining the activities of these bodies, researchers can find more profitable documentary evidence when turning to the question of ‘how governments think and act’.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers can effectively bypass these issues surrounding closed archives by widening the scope of research to incorporate the consumers as well as the producers of intelligence and by also ‘widening the basis of the definition of intelligence itself’. Intelligence is not merely confined to the agencies that compile it. As Wark notes, the ‘intelligence community is much larger than MI5, MI6 and GCHQ’, and incorporates departments which have no secret intelligence capacity. These departments regularly collate information which is ‘of importance to government decision-making’ and this information helps intelligence researchers to explore ‘the prevailing mentalities’ which influence policy-makers. This ‘shift[s] the endeavour away from the investigation of the impact of clandestine intelligence on policy in selected events or periods (a matter always surrounded by great difficulty owing to the inadequacy of the documentary record), and towards the issue of how intelligence assessments and action reflect widely held outlooks and images of the world’.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the unavailability of sufficient documentary evidence has had a remarkable impact not only on researchers’ methodological approaches but also on how the intelligence community is analysed and contextualised. This emphasis on the wider intelligence community over a narrow focus on the intelligence agencies has been for the better. As one historian has reflected, the closure of the secret services archives ‘has done historians a service, directing them away

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<sup>10</sup> Wark, ‘In Never-Never Land’, p 201, 199-200.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

from the minutae[sic] of case studies and organizational histories, and towards the interaction of intelligence and high-level policy.<sup>13</sup>

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One of the first practitioners to successfully escape the closed archive is Julian Lewis with his book *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-war Strategic Defence, 1942-1947*. Lewis's study deployed an archival methodology which led him to search for copies of retained government documents in obscure small Whitehall departments, a paper trail which had escaped the government weeders. Lewis began his study in the 1980s, in which the Cold War climate meant that much of the material on British defence and foreign policy post-1945 was deemed too sensitive to be released into the public domain. Thus, many files which were scheduled for release under the thirty-year rule were instead designated for release after fifty or even a hundred years due to the supposed highly sensitive nature of their contents. Through meticulous research, Lewis followed the distribution lists of retained top secret files with restricted circulation, tracking down copies of files which were closed in Cabinet or Foreign Office document series' but available in more obscure department files, such as the Directorate of Combined Operations. Lewis was among a small group who pioneered this technique in the late 1970s, along with David Stafford and Bradley Smith, historians of Special Operations Executive and Office of Strategic Services.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis's study is grounded in exemplary use of the archival record and is a useful example of how researchers in the intelligence field can use documentary analysis to discover hidden aspects of British Cold War history. His analysis of post-war strategic planning is well drawn from an in-depth appreciation of large volumes of documents which allowed the author to reconstruct the story of early Cold War military thinking by the Joint Planning Staff. Lewis focuses this narrative on the arguments in Whitehall between the Chief of Staffs and diplomats in the Foreign Office. Military planners had raised concerns about the long-term viability of the alliance with the Soviet Union as early as 1943, and by 1944 the Chiefs of Staff wanted to initiate 'contingency' planning for the post-war era which centred around the Soviets as a potential aggressor. The Foreign Office, however, refused to recognise the Soviet Union as a

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<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, 'Introduction: Intelligence, strategy and the Cold War', in Richard J. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War* (London, Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, Review of Julian Lewis's *Changing Direction*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter, 2007), 134-5, p.134.

potential enemy and wanted strategic planning to commence on the basis of Three Power cooperation following the end of the Second World War.<sup>15</sup>

This animosity continued until the breakdown of Anglo-Soviet relations gradually brought the Foreign Office round to the military's point of view by 1946. One of the remarkable results was that there were almost no Joint Intelligence Committee reports written on Russia between March 1945 and March 1946, for fear of intruding on this controversial subject. This development of post-war foreign and defence policy is illuminated through several important high-level policy planning documents, a few of which are helpfully reproduced by Lewis in the appendices. Lewis depicts the Foreign Office's changing view of Soviet intentions based on two key policy documents. The first, a report by the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff examining post-war strategic defence policy which was informed by a paper from the Foreign Office providing political background which exemplified diplomats' positive perception of long-term Soviet policy. As Lewis noted, the Foreign Office perceived no immediate threat. The paper's author Christopher Warner concluded that for at least five years, 'the Soviet Union would constitute no menace to British strategic interests and would almost certainly experiment with a policy of co-operating with the United States and United Kingdom in a post-war security system'.<sup>16</sup> This optimistic view continued in the Foreign Office until 1946 and until that point, post-war planning proceeded on the basis of Three Power cooperation. Lewis pointed to a pivotal document which demonstrated the changed position of diplomats' view on Soviet intentions in 1946. 'The Soviet Campaign Against this Country and Our Response to It' concluded that the Soviet Union had embarked 'upon an aggressive policy' which 'directly threatened' the 'interests of this country'. As Lewis contended, the changing position was made even more remarkable in that it was written by Warner who had just two years previously forecast an enduring cooperative post-war alliance with the Soviet Union. The Permanent Under-Secretary endorsed the policy which was adopted two years later by the Cabinet.<sup>17</sup> The use of documents in this way highlights how extremely important engrained perceptions and beliefs are in the policy-making process.

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<sup>15</sup> Julian Lewis, *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-war Strategic Defence, 1942-1947* (London: Frank Cass, 2003, second edition. First published in 1988), pp. 335-6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Another study which has pieced together post-war strategic planning through an often “laundered” archive is Scott Lucas and Kate Morris’s pioneering work on Cold War political warfare. ‘A very British crusade: the Information Research Department and the beginning of the Cold War’ described how during the Cold War, political warfare was coordinated through the Information Research Department (IRD), the secretive anti-communist unit housed within the Foreign Office. IRD closed in 1977 and its files which documented the year of its creation in 1948 had been due to be released by 1979 under the thirty-year rule. Yet it was not until 1995 that these were released to the National Archives.<sup>18</sup>

Lucas and Morris’s study conducted in 1991 was a prime example of a researchers’ capacity to uncover secret history in the absence of readily available documentation. The authors achieved this by turning the focus away from the department itself and its day-to-day dealings in the business of Cold War propaganda and instead focused on the climate in which policy-makers believed such a department was a necessity in the post-war era. Thus, the documentation used is drawn from the Foreign Office and Cabinet Office and the analysis reconstructed the story of how political warfare (a wartime method using coercion and persuasion to achieve one’s goals) was revived during the Cold War. The article documented how diplomats pushed the Labour Cabinet to adopt an anti-Soviet foreign policy.

Lucas and Morris noted that the Foreign Office’s anti-Soviet stance was elucidated through Christopher Warner’s 1946 memorandum ‘The Soviet Campaign Against This Country and Our Response To It’. This position was manifested through the department’s creation of the Russia Committee in the same year to provide guidance on Soviet policy to British policy-makers. Although the recommendations of Warner’s memorandum were initially resisted by the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, this important memorandum would go on to shape British Cold War policy.

The authors used numerous memorandums written by high-level diplomats who hoped to shift the Cabinet toward a more offensive position against the Soviets. Studying these policy documents from Bevin’s advisors provided a fascinating insight into the development of Cold War policy, and the story of IRD documented how central political warfare became in the British approach to international relations. ‘Propaganda became essential to the maintenance of Britain’s status’ which had been greatly diminished by the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> Through

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<sup>18</sup> Wilford, ‘The Information Research Department’, p. 353.

<sup>19</sup> Lucas and Morris, ‘A very British crusade’, p. 86.

close analysis of policy papers which documented the evolution of Britain's foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, Lucas and Morris's study highlighted the importance of individuals in the policy-making process. It is often individuals and their broader ideologies, perceptions and beliefs which influence the ways governments think and act.

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The two studies discussed above are excellent examples of how the researcher can bypass the closed archive. Since the mid-1990s, intelligence researchers have enjoyed more access to the documentary record due to government initiatives for greater transparency. This transparency is not complete, however, and two contemporary studies highlight the difficulties which still persist in this area of research.

As noted earlier, in the literature on Britain's intelligence community very few studies have emerged on the intelligence agencies themselves due to the restrictions on access to source material. Despite the closure of archives, some of the agencies have sought greater transparency with the public in the twenty-first century, exemplified by the publication of the official histories of MI5 and MI6 appearing in 2008 and 2010. This path to post-Cold War openness began with the Waldegrave initiative on open government in 1992 when John Major's government initiated the process of fast-tracking the declassification of previously retained files. It also reflected a personal commitment by particular secret service chiefs to history, for example Stephen Lander, who had himself undertaken a PhD on the Tudor period. This was a welcome departure from the days when the government often tried to suppress publication of sensitive material as evidenced by the notorious ban on Peter Wright's exposé on MI6, entitled *Spycatcher*.<sup>20</sup>

In 2010 Keith Jeffery published *MI6: The History of The Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949*, an official history of MI6 commissioned by the agency itself. Authorised histories can be problematic as the author is inevitably more restrained in their research than independent works. Whilst Jeffery contends that part of his agreement with MI6 'was that I should have utterly unrestricted access to the Service archives over its first forty years' (the post 1949 years were deemed too sensitive for outside scrutiny), he did acknowledge the restrictions placed on the work. One stipulation was that the author was debarred from revealing the identity of any agents not already known in the public domain which led to the 'regrettable' exclusion of 'some

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Lycett, 'Secrets Made Public', *History Today*, 66:2 (February, 2016). Available at: <http://www.historytoday.com/andrew-lycett/secrets-made-public>

significant and important SIS stories’ as the details could have resulted in the identification of individual agents.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Jeffery revealed some unique insights into the processes which govern the organisation’s record keeping. Importantly, he noted ‘the cultural attitude’ of the organisation in which documents were only preserved for their current but not historical value. The MI6 archive was much less complete than that of MI5, who often depended on a good paper trail to pursue their investigations. Documents which fell outside these criteria were subject to ‘intermittent, methodological and substantial destruction’, although he argued that he had ‘found no evidence’ of deliberate destruction ‘as some sort of cover-up to hide embarrassing facts about SIS’s past.’<sup>22</sup>

Despite these restrictions, Jeffery’s access to MI6’s archive as well classified documents retained by other departments in Whitehall provided a rich understanding of the organisation’s bureaucratic battles in Whitehall and its day-to-day running in ‘the process and administration of acquiring intelligence’.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically, however, Jeffery’s privileged access to previously unseen files led the author to an over-reliance on the documentary record with secondary resources, notably memoirs from former officers, and even open National Archives material used sparingly. Jeffery stated that his ‘primary objective has been to base the narrative as closely as possible on the surviving contemporaneous documentary record.’<sup>24</sup> But he freely admitted that the service did not give serious consideration to the preservation of historically important documentary material until 1960, by which point ‘a huge amount of material had already been lost.’<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he acknowledged that this focus on the surviving material contained within the MI6 archive meant that ‘it has sometimes been difficult to recreate the personal relationships between case-officers and agents which lie at the heart of human intelligence work’.<sup>26</sup> To mitigate against the loss of this historically important evidence and incorporate the emotional dimension of intelligence work into this official history, Jeffery’s study would have benefitted by the application of multi-methodological triangulation combining archival evidence with secondary literature.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949* (London, 2010), p. x-xi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>27</sup> Philip H.J. Davies, ‘Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services’, *Politics*, 21:1 (February, 2001), 73-80, p. 75.

Another study examining previously inaccessible material is *Spying on the World: The Declassified Documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013*. This book provided the first analysis of the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) using declassified files from the JIC's archive. It charted the history of the committee from its conception to the present day, primarily using documentary records to assess the committee's work in several key episodes from the Cold War to more recent crises such as Iraq and the Syrian Civil War.

The authors introspectively discussed the advantages and disadvantages of relying upon official documentation as the source material. Whilst archival declassifications enable such a study to be carried out in the first place, the authors ruefully noted, that the 'available records do, however, shape our understanding of the committee in certain ways'. The researcher can draw out a broad understanding of the relationship between intelligence and high-level policy from the files, yet the 'declassified files construct a particular narrative of the JIC's role since 1936.' The files paint a narrow picture of a committee whose primary focus appeared to be long-term trends leaving readers unaware of the JIC's role in dealing with specific crises. Moreover, the absence of various actors in the intelligence community below the level of the committee in the documentary record 'skew interpretations of the Joint Intelligence Organisation as a whole' and gave the misperception of interdepartmental harmony. 'This is not the result of some strategic government conspiracy', the authors argued, 'but merely the by-product of classification policy and a fragmented record.'<sup>28</sup>

The authors of *Spying on the World* subjected a number of files to close documentary analysis. Each chapter carefully developed an analytical framework constructed around significant high-level files from the JIC, with key documents reproduced in their entirety. One such example was the JIC's appreciation of future Soviet policy undertaken in late 1944. This became one of a series of assessments from the JIC which built up a picture of Soviet intentions towards the West from the end of the Second World War to the emerging Cold War. This document and its annual revisions were extremely important in shaping policy towards the Soviet Union and reflected the hardening anti-Soviet stance in Whitehall and the intelligence community in 1946-7. As the authors argued, these assessments of long-term issues 'sit at the foundation of the policymaking process, cumulatively building up consumers' background information and shaping Whitehall's understanding'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, Rory Cormac and Michael S. Goodman, *Spying on the World: The Declassified Documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 424.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121, 427.

### *Methodological Approach of the Thesis*

Documentary analysis is an extremely important analytical tool in the intelligence field. Analysing such documentation allows the researcher to accurately build up a picture of the ideas which were instrumental in shaping government policy. Furthermore, intelligence assessments widely reflected the government's outlook on the world, enabling researchers to carefully reconstruct the ways in which governments perceived events and acted on them. This interaction between intelligence and high-level policy is the cornerstone of intelligence studies, shifting our understanding of intelligence away from the agencies who collected it and towards the people who consumed it and used it to shape policy. This, in turn, reveals its wider significance.

As with more contemporary studies of British intelligence, this thesis has benefitted from the open Government initiatives which have enabled greater transparency. This has meant that since the early 1990s, The National Archives has seen greater releases of documentation from the intelligence field. In 2020, the files on IRD have never been more open and accessible to researchers. This thesis has benefitted enormously from this increased transparency and has been able to document the latter years of IRD, its reconceptualisation in the early-1970's, and eventual closure in 1977. The wider availability of documentation has enabled a revision of the received orthodoxy that has hitherto surrounded the department. The notion of British Cold War political warfare strategy starting and ending with IRD can be dispelled. IRD was an enormous component of Britain's use of propaganda as a peacetime weapon but as the Cold War evolved and the Soviet threat somewhat declined, Britain's propaganda policy also evolved. IRD evolved too, hence the reconceptualisation in 1972. Propaganda evolved from a weapon to fight the Soviets into a capacity to be deployed against all enemies of the British state, foreign and domestic.

The Callaghan Government recognised the intrinsic benefit of maintaining unattributable propaganda as weapon to battle subversives, particularly domestic hard-left subversives. This was a crucial concern for a Labour Cabinet which had witnessed the rise of Militant Tendency within its own party machinery. The story of unattributable information persists after the closure of IRD. Indeed, the demise of the department was merely a bureaucratic move by a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) which was nervous about the forthcoming Central Policy Review Staff's review of overseas information. Senior diplomats anticipated large cuts would again be imposed on the FCO and sought to undercut the CPRS by streamlining and

remoulding the information services in their own preferred style before the CPRS had chance to examine information work and make recommendations.

Any study of IRD has inherent limitations. Its work in black propaganda and close relationship with the intelligence and security services renders an investigation of the more secret operations of the department an extremely difficult task. This history of IRD has been somewhat lost to the government weeders whitewashing the sensitive elements of IRD's operations from the official record. An examination of IRD's organisational structure, as this thesis attempts, is also affected by the propensity for secrecy. Whilst IRD's white and grey propaganda work is well documented, the darker aspects of its operations appear largely scrubbed from the official record.

The internal structure of IRD has at times throughout this study also been difficult to elucidate due to this propensity for secrecy. Although an ostensibly overseas propaganda unit, IRD was also involved with domestic propaganda and had within its infrastructure a small unit for this work, known as the English Section. Not much is known about this unit apart from small scraps of information in the official documentation.<sup>30</sup> Following IRD's closure, overseas propaganda work became the remit of a new information department within the Foreign Office, the Overseas Information Department. Yet there is no mention of what happened to IRD's domestic propaganda capacity. Following IRD's closure, the documentation trail on the domestic work goes cold.

Due to the secrecy around IRD's domestic propaganda work and the need to negotiate gaps in the archival record, this thesis has drawn on the methodology of intelligence scholars, particularly Julian Lewis's approach of searching for documents in other areas of the archives. The main destination for IRD material in the National Archives - FO 1110 (1948-1976) and FCO 95 (1976-7) – predominantly covers IRD's overseas white propaganda operations with very little documentation on the department's internal structure or covert work. More sensitive aspects of IRD's work and guiding policy contained in the FCO 168 file series were only recently declassified at the start of 2019.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the vast majority of the research for this thesis has focused beyond IRD's specific file series and instead been drawn from numerous departments across Whitehall, mainly the Foreign Office, later FCO, Cabinet Office, and Prime

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<sup>30</sup> A few studies have also disclosed information on the English Section, notably Thomas. J. Maguire, *The intelligence-propaganda nexus: British and American covert action in Cold War Southeast Asia, 1948-1963* (forthcoming 2020, Oxford University Press).

<sup>31</sup> Rory Cormac, 'Techniques of covert propaganda: the British approach in the mid-1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:7 (2019), 1064-1069, p.1064.

Minister's Office. Although information on specific covert operations is lacking, there is an abundance of rich material on IRD's structure; its role as a flexible instrument for political warfare both at home and overseas; and its conceptualisation as an integral weapon of foreign policy in the eyes of senior Cabinet Ministers.

This method of researching IRD beyond the confines of the limited documentation on the department's operations allows for a much richer and nuanced understanding of the department's final years. It also enables us to situate IRD within the broader historical context. IRD did not operate in a vacuum, therefore it should not be considered in a vacuum by historians. Albeit a department which, at the height of its operations in the 1940's and 1950's, acted semi-autonomously, IRD was an integral part of the Foreign Office's information infrastructure. The cuts to IRD in the early 1970's was a result of the Duncan Committee which imposed cuts across Whitehall, particularly in the FCO. Pressure to enact major savings in the diplomatic field alongside a reduction in the perceived threat from the Soviet Union resulted in a major restructuring of IRD into its Mark II incarnation. The reduction of IRD took place alongside major cuts to the FCO's information budget. IRD was not singled out because, as some contemporary accounts have claimed, the department had become an outdated department obsessed with 1950's Cold War hysteria.<sup>32</sup> The anti-communist remit was modified and IRD encouraged to branch out to other aspects of British foreign policy. The reconceptualisation of the department reinforced, rather than solidified, the notion that unattributable propaganda had become an integral component of foreign policy in the eyes of senior Cabinet Ministers.

The broader history also allows us to challenge the mythology that has shrouded the department's closure in 1977. Examining the CPRS's review of overseas representation helps contextualise the demise of IRD as a bureaucratic rather than an ideological decision. The rich documentation on the CPRS review revealed that senior diplomats anticipated major cuts would again be imposed on its overseas services and sought to modify their effect by getting ahead of the curve and restructuring the information departments before the CPRS had chance to impose their own reforms. In 1977 IRD was fully absorbed into the information machinery in a move that senior diplomats had wanted to enact since reconceptualising the department in 1972 but which bureaucratic obstacles had prevented. The major barrier was what to do with

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Lashmar & James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War: Foreign Office and the Cold War, 1948-77* (London: Sutton, 1998), pp.169-72. See also Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 261.

IRD's secret sections such as the Special Editorial Unit, responsible for the department's black propaganda work. It was impossible to integrate these units into the FCO's overt information structure and thus IRD maintained its isolated position despite the reconceptualisation and desire of senior diplomats to enact a full integration into the information machinery.

With the existential threat of the CPRS review looming, these bureaucratic barriers were finally overcome. Sir Colin Crowe, author of the Crowe report in 1976 which instigated the integration of unattributable information into the wider information infrastructure, argued that for unattributable information to continue as an effective instrument, overt and covert propaganda must remain together. Crowe suggested listing the secret sections of IRD 'purely for cover purposes' under the Permanent Under Secretary's Department (PUSD).<sup>33</sup> As the PUSD was the main point of liaison between the FCO and the intelligence services we once again run into the issue of researching intelligence related topics. The files of the PUSD in The National Archives in Kew (FO 1093) are extremely limited and only cover the period up to 1951. Documentation related to the Special Editorial Unit (FCO 168) has been even more difficult to obtain with files only declassified in January 2020. The files cover the period up to 1976 and give an insight into the unit's black operations.

Therefore, the intelligence aspect of IRD's work has made the examination of unattributable propaganda post-IRD a difficult task. Documentation from the FCO revealed that IRD's overseas unattributable information work transferred to a new department in the newly formed information division. The Overseas Information Department was created in 1977 with IRD's previous head, Ray Whitney, leading the department. Renamed the Information Department in 1980, the department was largely responsible for overseas propaganda.<sup>34</sup>

The existence of an overseas unattributable information unit post-IRD means certain hypotheses can be asserted. Following IRD's closure, the domestic and foreign components of unattributable information work were separated. Whilst the Overseas Information Department handled unattributable information, MI6 possibly became responsible for all black propaganda operations. During IRD's operative years, recently declassified files show both IRD and MI6 had engaged in these types of operations. Post-IRD, black operations were ringfenced as intelligence related work. This assertion is supported by the then Foreign Secretary's contention that covert operations were not the remit of the FCO and should be contained within

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<sup>33</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>34</sup> See the file series FCO 26.

MI6.<sup>35</sup> Rare memoir accounts of MI6 that have emerged from the 1990's suggest that this organisation undertook a great deal of press work and may well have inherited some of IRD's activities.<sup>36</sup>

As IRD was reconceptualised in 1972 and the majority of its funding moved on to the open vote, unattributable information became a legitimised weapon of the state not just in the overseas sphere. IRD's involvement in the campaign for Britain's entry into European Economic Community demonstrated the importance of domestic unattributable information work to the Government. It is the contention of this author that this type of domestic unattributable information, which erred on the cautious side of black propaganda, was likely absorbed into the FCO's new information division and became a fully legitimised instrument of diplomacy. Fully integrated with the rest of the information machinery, unattributable information was no longer isolated as had been the case with IRD. If IRD's capacity for black propaganda work in the domestic field had been retained it is likely that this would have been relocated in PUSD as Colin Crowe had recommended. This can be only a hypothetical assertion as the PUSD files beyond 1951 have yet to be declassified.

Methodologically, the thesis draws heavily on archival material from The National Archives in Kew with limited archive data drawn from other sources. The reasons for this were twofold: firstly, not many private collections exist with relevant IRD documentation. For example, Churchill College Archives at the University of Cambridge was visited but found to have minimal relevant material apart from the rich Thatcher documentation which was also available at the excellent online catalogue of the Thatcher Foundation and which informed much of the Post-Script analysis chapter. There was also limited material on IRD at the David Owen Papers at the University of Liverpool. I went through the extensive online finding aid but again there was little relevant documentation available.

Secondly, I found that the material on IRD at Kew was a vastly underexplored resource. In particular, the documentation on IRD's domestic work has only recently been explored in the scholarship owing to the classification of that material beyond the thirty-year rule. The files on the English Section's operations and structure were released very recently in early 2020. The documentation on IRD's reconceptualisation and eventual closure were also subjected to only

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<sup>35</sup> Cormac, 'Techniques of covert propaganda', p.1064

<sup>36</sup> Richard Tomlinson, *The Big Breach: From Top Secret to Maximum Security* (London: Cutting Edge, 2001).

recent declassifications. This meant that there was an abundance of untapped resource material in Kew which justified a strong reliance on official archive material.

Another omission in the methodological approach to this research is the absence of interviews. In my opinion documents are superior to interviews but do provide an invaluable addition when facing issues with the archival record. Despite facing accessibility issues around classified documents as discussed earlier, the available material at Kew was rich and allowed for a wide scope of research to be conducted. There were also limitations for interviews due to the restrictions from Covid-19. Nevertheless, the breadth of the archival documentation utilised in this thesis was more than ample to fill a significant gap in the scholarship on IRD and British Cold War political warfare in the 1970s.

## *Conceptual Framework*

### *Introduction*

This chapter seeks to provide the historical background and conceptual framework to understand and explore political warfare during the Cold War. In the historiography of the Cold War, the concept of political warfare is little understood or neglected entirely. It is rarely discussed in its strategic conceptualisation as an umbrella under which various tactics are drawn together to achieve a nation's strategic goals, under both war and peacetime conditions. Instead, scholars have narrowly focused on the instruments of political warfare giving rise to a historiography which is dominated by isolated studies on propaganda, covert action, and intelligence activities which fail to understand these operations under an overarching strategic framework.

These studies have limited our understanding of Britain's Cold War to isolated episodes of diplomacy, intelligence, and propaganda rather than interrogating their interdependence. This has led to an under-appreciation of the multi-faceted approach of British foreign policy before, during, and after the Cold War. Indeed, following the end of the Cold War the debate on contemporary foreign policy analyses has been framed by disparate discussions of "counter-insurgency", "counter-terrorism", and "hard", "soft", and "smart power" which have all overlooked the common and continuing element of political warfare.<sup>1</sup> Political warfare – the effort to use all non-military means to bolster allies and undermine enemies – has considered techniques that span these discussions, yet the existing literature does not engage with the conceptual framework of political warfare which has been embedded in both British and American foreign policy apparatuses since the end of the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup> On counterinsurgency see David Kilcullen *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Petraeus et al., *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago University Press, 2007); John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005). For discussions of counter-terrorism see Bruce Hoffman *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Daniel Byman (2007) *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: Wiley, 2006). For the debate on hard, soft, and smart power see Joseph S. Nye *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011); and A. Slaughter, et al. (2008) *Strategic Leadership: Framework for a 21st Century National Security Strategy*. Available at: <http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/StrategicLeadership.pdf>.

Whilst the scholarship on the Cold War has largely ignored the role of political warfare in Western foreign policy approaches, this is not the case with the civil servants, diplomats, and policy-makers who shaped the West's Cold War strategy. The closest we come to understanding political warfare as a unifying strategic concept comes from the ruminations amongst foreign policy-makers in the early stages of the Cold War. This is particularly evident in the US State Department's Policy Planning Staff's famous memorandum 'the inauguration of organized political warfare'. Written by America's then chief Cold War strategist, George Kennan, political warfare was defined simply as 'the logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives'.<sup>2</sup> This involved a two-fold approach combining overt and covert methods. Overtly, political and military alliances and economic initiatives were developed alongside official government publicity. Such publicity, attributed to a Government source, is more commonly referred to in the literature as "white" propaganda. Propaganda attributed to an official government source contained factual information, albeit slanted favourably towards the propagandist.

On the covert side, black (or subversive) propaganda, encompassing the dissemination of often falsified information emanating from 'someone or somewhere other than the true source' was used to undermine the enemy and to destabilise their political environment. Grey propaganda fell somewhere in between white and black propaganda, the source may or may not be hidden but the accuracy of the material was certainly questionable.<sup>3</sup>

Kennan is famous in Cold War historiography for his role in developing US strategy manifested firstly through a containment strategy in Western Europe and then liberation operations in Eastern Europe. However, the focus on American political warfare has often obscured the significant role Britain had both in the development of the Western response during the Cold War and new approaches to statecraft in the twentieth century. It was the British who first developed an over-arching political warfare strategy to fight against Soviet communism. Prior to the application of political warfare in the Cold War, the instruments of political warfare were used extensively by Britain during the Second World War to support British and allied war

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<sup>2</sup> 'The inauguration of organized political warfare' Policy Planning Staff memorandum, 30 April 1948, available at: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf?v=941dc9ee5c6e51333ea9ebbbc9104e8c>

<sup>3</sup> Giselle Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare: Labour's Secret Anti-communist Campaign in Europe, 1948-51', *The International History Review*, 39:3 (2017), 426-449, p.426; Nicholas Cull, David Culbert and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia, 1500 to the Present* (California, 20013), p. 41.

aims. It's institutional home, the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) organised and coordinated activities, becoming an important element in the fight against fascist regimes in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Accelerated after 1940, political warfare was predominantly considered a wartime method and the PWE was disbanded with the end of the war. However, the concept was soon revived in the early Cold War by Clement Attlee's Labour government to combat the threat of communist expansion in Europe. Britain was the first western power to implement such an approach.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Conceptualising Political Warfare***

In the scholarship on the Cold War, the term political warfare is little understood and its conceptual base under appreciated. Scholars have often used the term interchangeably with propaganda. The confusion relates to the historical usage of political warfare. Notably, during the Second World War, political warfare was narrowly framed as the 'creation and dissemination of propaganda' which, in the British context was organised and distributed by the Political Warfare Executive.<sup>6</sup> Thereby creating the interchange between propaganda and political warfare which has been reinforced in Cold War historiography. During the Second World War, propaganda was often used as a crude weapon, designed to undermine enemy morale in support of the wider battle against fascist regimes in Europe.

With the end of the Second World War propaganda, which had become a staple of the war effort, was no longer required and the PWE was wound up. However, merely three years later Clement Attlee's Labour government faced a new enemy in the form of the Soviet Union and identified political warfare as the primary means for countering this threat. In January 1948, the Labour Cabinet launched its distinctly British strategic approach to the Cold War through the concept of the Third Force, a third way between American capitalism and Soviet communism. The Third Force strategy was centred on the security of Western Europe from communist encroachment.

The Third Force concept was practically pursued through the creation of the Western Union, an economic, cultural, and defensive alliance of West European social democracies. The Western Union was central to Britain's plans to counter the threat of Soviet communism. The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, argued that the Western counter-attack should not be pursued

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<sup>4</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 12-25.

<sup>5</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin and Political Warfare'.

<sup>6</sup> Donovan C. Chau, 'Political Warfare – An Essential Instrument of U.S. Grand Strategy Today', *Comparative Strategy*, 25:2 (2006), 109-120, p. 110.

on 'an exclusively Anglo-American basis'. The Cabinet agreed that Britain's anti-communist campaign should be pitched as an ideological battle on the left, with government propaganda reflecting the fact that it was 'Social Democracy, not Democracy, against Communism.'<sup>7</sup> The Western Union endorsed Labour's core belief in European self-reliance and the advancement of social democracy in Europe.

The Attlee Government pursued political warfare through both existing diplomatic, military, and intelligence services and new agencies such as the Information Research Department (IRD). Although there were limited changes to the infrastructure of political warfare which operated in the Second World War, the concept itself had vastly evolved from its wartime roots to Cold War manifestations. Political warfare could no longer be narrowly defined as propaganda. Under Attlee, political warfare was reconceptualised to bring together various instruments of statecraft into a grand strategy against the Soviet Union. Whilst this included propaganda, political warfare also extended to diplomatic and military initiatives, trade policies and cultural exchanges, all designed to isolate the Soviet Union on the global stage and linked back to the overall objective to preserve the sovereignty of Western European democracies.

From the very outset of the Cold War, the Labour government conceptualised political warfare as an instrument that extended far beyond restrictive notions of propaganda. Yet the conflation of the two concepts has tended to endure in the scholarship on Britain's Cold War. Much of this conflation can be attributed to the historical precedent created during the Second World War wherein the PWE created and disseminated British propaganda. Certainly, the wartime practitioners of propaganda themselves considered political warfare as synonymous with propaganda. These practitioners began recounting their experiences in PWE after the war had ended. Using their knowledge of wartime propaganda operations to argue that such techniques should be deployed against the Soviet Union, political warfare as propaganda began to frame the academic discussion of political warfare in the Cold War.

A prominent example of this came from the head of PWE himself. In a speech at the Royal United Institute Services on 25 January 1950, Sir Robert H. Bruce Lockhart recounted his experiences as Director-General of PWE. Lockhart very much viewed political warfare in the military context. The two main aims of PWE, Lockhart noted, was 'to undermine by overt and covert means the morale of the enemy, and [...] to sustain and foster the spirit of resistance of our friends in the occupied Countries.' Lockhart defined political warfare 'as the application of

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<sup>7</sup> TNA, CAB 195/6/18, C.M. 19 (48), Cabinet minutes, 5 March 1948.

propaganda to the needs of total warfare. It seeks by special knowledge to anticipate and forestall the intentions of the enemy, to commit him to military objectives which appeal to the enemy public but which his forces cannot fulfil, to disturb the morale of the enemy public by secret broadcasting stations allegedly operated by disaffected enemy subjects inside enemy territory, and, in general, to play its part in the various schemes of deception. Described bluntly, its main purpose is to soften the way and render easier the task of the armed forces.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, Lockhart stressed the importance of a strategic framework for political warfare operations. Political warfare is the 'handmaid of official policy and strategy', and the "political warrior", Lockhart stressed, must always 'take his directions from Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff', but remain 'supple' so as to respond opportunities, 'act quickly, to take risks, and sometimes to anticipate the approval of Ministers.'<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, Lockhart argued that he was not 'a whole-hearted advocate' of political warfare, he asserted that it was 'a necessary evil in war-time and as one of the greatest menaces to our civilization and standards of conduct in peace-time.'<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, he envisaged it as a long-term strategic component of British foreign policy, particularly in the fight against the Soviet Union. Lockhart noted that 'political warfare has to-day much the same tasks as it had in war-time. These tasks are to contradict the lies that are told about us, to project the British and human way of life, and to keep alive the spark of hope in the hearts of our friends in the totalitarian or, to be frank, the oppressed Countries.'<sup>11</sup>

In both wartime and peacetime conditions - of which the Cold War ostensibly operated within - Lockhart argued that for a successful pursuit of political warfare, operations required an overarching policy. Ruminating on whether Britain should go on the offensive to push back the Soviets from Eastern Europe, Lockhart noted that such an initiative 'involves a matter of the highest policy' with discussions in the Government, Cabinet, and Chiefs of Staff. Further adding that 'unless the matter is dealt with on the highest level and unless some clear-cut policy is laid down, what political warfare did in the War and what it can do now is, in fact, very limited.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert H. Bruce Lockhart, 'Political Warfare', *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 95:578 (1950), 193-206, p.195.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.204.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.205.

Lockhart's contribution to the discourse on political warfare in 1950 was somewhat of an outlier as the term did not appear in academic discussion until 1962. This is perhaps largely due to the intense secrecy that cloaked both British and American political warfare efforts. IRD, chiefly responsible for all Cold War propaganda which was the cornerstone of the British Government's political warfare effort, was not public knowledge until 1977. Similarly, the foundation of America's political warfare efforts through Central Intelligence Agency funding of front organisations remained secret until the Ramparts magazine expose in 1967.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising that the academic discourse on political warfare slowly emerged a good decade on from the West establishing its political warfare infrastructure.

William R. Kintner's and Joseph Z. Kornfeder's *The New Frontier of War: Political Warfare, Present and Future* conceptualised political warfare along Kennan's lines 'as an instrument of grand strategy'. The authors wrote: 'Political warfare aims to weaken, if not destroy, the enemy by use of diplomatic proposals, economic sorties, propaganda and misinformation, provocation, intimidation, sabotage, terrorism, and by driving a wedge between the main enemy and his allies'.<sup>14</sup> Intriguingly, at a later stage in his career, Kennan turned on his earlier beliefs and offered a vigorous critique of these approaches.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, Kintner and Kornfeder's work did not yet influence the establishment of further work on the subject. Political warfare did not receive substantive academic treatment until the end of the Cold War where the term became more established in an emerging body of literature. Donovan C. Chau has tracked the evolving definition of political warfare in the historiography. The first of these post-Cold War texts, Paul Smith's *On Political War*, appeared in 1989 and adopted what Chau described as the British conceptualisation of political warfare as an instrument of propaganda. Smith wrote: 'Political war is the use of political means to compel an opponent to do one's will, *political* being understood to describe purposeful intercourse between peoples and governments affecting national survival and relative advantage.'<sup>16</sup>

Further establishing the definition of political warfare, or "political war" in this case, as propaganda, Smith argued 'Political war may be combined with violence, economic pressure, subversion and diplomacy, but its chief aspect is the use of words, images, and ideas,

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<sup>13</sup> See Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*, (Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Chau, 'Political Warfare', p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> John L. Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York, 2011), p.356.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Chau, 'Political Warfare', p. 111

commonly known, according to context, as propaganda and psychological warfare.’<sup>17</sup> Here Smith drew a strict demarcation between political warfare and psychological warfare. Propaganda in support of diplomatic objectives was regarded by Smith as political warfare; psychological warfare referred to the application of propaganda in support of military objectives. Thus, Smith’s work added a civilian-military context to the application of political warfare, narrowly defined as a warfare of ideas.

This civilian-military demarcation has been well established in the scholarship and remains uncontested, at least in the British field.<sup>18</sup> This demarcation was necessary for the expanding field of scholarship on psychological warfare, particularly for studies which examined psychological warfare techniques in various conflicts in former British colonies post-World War Two. During the Second World War, political warfare and psychological warfare were often conflated terms with no established definition for either. When discussing political warfare in 1950, Lockhart drew no distinction between the two concepts, and merely remarked that psychological warfare was what ‘the Americans call it.’<sup>19</sup> This assertion has certainly held true in American Cold War historiography where the two terms have often continued to be used interchangeably.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to Smith’s book, at around the same time Carnes Lord presented a definition of political warfare more in line with Kennan’s conceptualisation of political warfare as a combination of overt and covert methods. Lord argued that:

*Political action* means a range of activities including certain kinds of multilateral diplomacy, support for foreign political parties or forces, and support for or work with international associations of various kinds... *Covert political warfare* corresponds roughly to the covert aspects of what the Soviets call active measures, and includes support for insurgencies, operations against enemy alliances, influence operations, and black propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Chau, ‘Political Warfare’. P. 111.

<sup>18</sup> For a recent discussion of psychological warfare as a battle of ideas in the military context see Huw Bennett, ‘“Words are cheaper than bullets”: Britain’s psychological warfare in the Middle East, 1945-60’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:7 (2019), 925-944.

<sup>19</sup> Lockhart, ‘Political Warfare’, p.193.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Kenneth A. Osgood, a leading scholar on American Cold War history conflates the two terms when discussing Eisenhower’s National Security strategy, see Kenneth A. Osgood, ‘Form before Substance: Eisenhower’s Commitment to Psychological Warfare and Negotiations with the Enemy’, *Diplomatic History*, 24:3 (July 2000), 405-433.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Chau, ‘Political Warfare’, p. 112.

Therefore, as scholars began to carve out an established scholarship on political warfare at the end of the Cold War, there was no established definition of what the term actually meant. A dichotomy emerged between so-called American and British approaches to political warfare. The American approach based on George Kennan's concept of overt and covert methods spanned a range of cultural, diplomatic, and military initiatives. Whilst, at least according to the emerging scholarship, the British approach encompassed little more than propaganda.

The confusion around what political warfare actually referred to was compounded by the fact that the concept appeared similar to other methods of persuasion used by the nation state. Political warfare has often been confused with coercive diplomacy, subversion, or notions of hard, soft, or smart power.

Coercive diplomacy is defined by Alexander L. George as 'force [which] is used in an exemplary, demonstrative manner, in discrete and controlled increments, to induce the opponent to revise his calculations and agree to a mutually acceptable termination of the conflict.' Raymond Aron has posited a more explicit definition of the concept which placed military power at the forefront of a nation's capacity to coerce. '[C]oercion among states', Aron argued, 'is expressed by the *threat or use of armed force*.' This led Donovan Chau to refute the conflation of political warfare with coercive diplomacy because political warfare is defined in both Kennan's and the British conceptualisation as 'a nonviolent phenomenon'.<sup>22</sup>

However, if we take Joseph Nye's definition of coercive diplomacy as 'force without war' we can challenge Aron's definition as "*the use of armed force*" as perhaps misleading. As Nye argued, 'Force need not be threatened explicitly. Military forces can be used to "show the flag" or "swagger"'.<sup>23</sup> Yet, whilst the perception of coercive diplomacy as the use of force can be challenged - certainly a definition which hinges on a state displaying its armed potential rather than using it is more apt - the concept is certainly not compatible with political warfare. Particularly in the British context, the Attlee Government viewed political warfare as the 'most effective alternative' to war with the Soviet Union. Badly damaged after the Second World War, Britain's armed forces were in no capacity to deter the Soviet Union from outright conflict. With the threat Soviet communism posed to Western European security, political

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<sup>22</sup> Chau, 'Political Warfare', p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2011), p. 45.

warfare was viewed as the only means at a broken nation's disposal. Political warfare was the alternative to conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Political warfare has also been confused with the term "subversion". Certainly, parallels between these two concepts have been drawn. Angelo Codevilla, for example, has defined subversion as 'a tool of policy, whose success depends primarily on strategy: how well the statesman weaves the connection between ends and means'. In particular, he argued: '[s]ubversion means using agents of influence, propaganda, or paramilitary means to influence policy, shape politics, or to make war.' Donovan Chau has somewhat agreed with this conflation and argued that 'political warfare may be considered a form of subversion.'<sup>25</sup>

Subversion brings a darker edge to conceptualisations of political warfare with a focus on coercive tactics. Yet in the numerous definitions of political warfare offered by academics, practitioners, and Government officials, the art of persuasion through propaganda has been a central component. Persuasion has often been considered the central defining tactic of political warfare and led to confusion with other methods of persuasive diplomacy such as soft power. Joseph S. Nye's concept of soft power was another post-Cold War addition to the academic discussion framing the interplay of states with opposing ideologies. Nye introduced this concept as a corrective against the United States propensity to indulge much of its resources into military programmes which were unable to evoke much influence, as defeat in Vietnam demonstrated. Rather than coercion (hard power), soft power sought to meet a nation's objectives through persuasion. Nye argued that 'when one country gets other countries to want what it wants might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants'. Nye conceptualised soft power as predicated on three areas of persuasive potential: culture, political values, and foreign policies. If deemed attractive and morally just, these held the potential to co-opt other states to fulfil another's objectives.<sup>26</sup>

Chau's study is hitherto the only academic exploration of the historical conceptualisation of political warfare. He concluded his synthesis of the academic literature's varying definitions of political warfare by offering his own. According to Chau, political warfare is '[m]ore than propaganda or information management' and it 'is neither coercive diplomacy nor soft power'.

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<sup>24</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', p.431.

<sup>25</sup> Chau, 'Political Warfare', p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (London: Basic Books, 1990); Michael Howard, review of Nye's *Bound to Lead*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, 14:3 (Summer, 1990), pp.86-88, p.87.

Rather, he argued, political warfare should be understood ‘as an instrument of grand strategy that may be used by any state or nonstate actor with the capabilities and intentions to do so.’<sup>27</sup>

Chau declined to elaborate on what he meant by grand strategy but it is evident that it included ‘nonviolent’ political warfare operations such as ‘targeted economic aid, development projects, exchange visits, public pronouncements, as well as the arming, and equipping of military or forces’, in combination with military coercion. Although ‘nonviolent’, political warfare could lend support to, or lead to violent activities.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Grand Strategy***

Grand strategy, another concept that rose to prominence in the academic scholarship after the collapse of the Soviet Union has, much like political warfare, been ill defined. Hal Brands has argued that ‘[r]educed to its essence, grand strategy is the intellectual architecture that lends structure to foreign policy; it is the logic that helps states navigate a complex and dangerous world.’<sup>29</sup> Thus, grand strategy can be understood as a strategic framework through which foreign policy objectives are pursued. There appears to be little debate within international relations scholarship on this broad definition. Yet there is apparently significant disagreement between policy-makers over what instruments should be included within this framework. John Lenczowski has noted that within the relevant policy making bodies within United States government there exists a cultural divide between soft and hard power advocates. The former are proponents of ‘dialogue, negotiations, mutual understanding, and, to the limited extent that the “soft power” culture [...] chooses to include it, political and cultural influence’. Whilst the hard power advocates lean on the power of ‘guns, money and, to some extent, espionage (mostly of the technical variety).’<sup>30</sup>

According to Lenczowski, the soft power culture has suffered from a conceptual unease around power, hence a tendency to avoid instruments perceived as intrinsically tied in to demonstrating power and instead falling back on ‘diplomacy, dialogue, and engagement’. One of the ‘principal conceptual failures’ of the soft power culture, Lenczowski argued, is the refusal to incorporate instrument of “offensive diplomacy” into its framework. These so-called offensive instruments such as ‘political action, political warfare, psychological strategy, and perception

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<sup>27</sup> Chau, ‘Political Warfare’, p. 116.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Hal Brands, *What good is grand strategy?: power and purpose in American statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, (Cornell University Press, 2014), p.1.

<sup>30</sup> John Lenczowski, *Full Spectrum Diplomacy and Grand Strategy: Reforming the Structure and Culture of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lexington Books, 2011), p.52

management – especially propaganda’ have been rejected for their ugly conations with the exercise of power, yet soft power advocates have failed to acknowledge that their preferred methods such as dialogue are all ‘forms of power in the first place.’<sup>31</sup> In order to cut across the hard and soft power cultural divide, Lenczowski argued that all instruments of statecraft, from dialogue and offensive diplomacy, to guns and money, should be integrated into a national-level grand strategy to meet present and future American foreign policy objectives.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, recent contributions to the international relations scholarship on grand strategy consider political warfare as an instrument of statecraft, a form of offensive diplomacy to be used as part a grand strategic framework to pursue foreign policy objectives. In these contemporary discussions no consideration is given to defining political warfare itself beyond merely suggesting that the concept was predominantly a means to influence a favourable perception of foreign policy objectives. Lenczowski, for example, cited the birth of the American republic and subsequent war against Britain as a demonstration of effective political warfare. According to Lenczowski, George Washington leaned on Benjamin Franklin’s ‘skills in public diplomacy and political warfare to conduct an extensive – and most successful – political influence and public diplomacy campaign in Europe to ensure the proper perception of the American cause.’<sup>33</sup>

For international relations scholars like Lenczowski, political warfare represents a rather vague instrument of persuasion. Therefore, for a more detailed definition of what political warfare entails in practice we return to Chau’s nonviolent methods conceptualisation: ‘targeted economic aid, development projects, exchange visits, public pronouncements, as well as the arming, and equipping of military or forces’. All of these tactics contribute to the concept of political warfare as an instrument used within a grand strategic framework to foster foreign policy objectives. Yet Chau’s definition of political warfare failed to consider political warfare as a concept in itself and merely presented it as a collection of myriad tactics to serve a higher strategic framework. Political warfare extends beyond a mere combination of the various methods of offensive diplomacy. As Angelo Codevilla has argued, ‘political warfare is not the sum of a set of tools employed with a certain intensity’; rather, ‘it is the forceful political expression of policy.’ Thus, the employment of various methods identified as instruments of political war (‘the tools of policy’) are rendered useless unless linked with, and pursued in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>32</sup> Lenczowski, *Full Spectrum Diplomacy*, p.xiii

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.x.

consideration of, a defined policy. Moreover, employing these methods against an enemy in the absence of policy does not in itself constitute political warfare. In short, ‘we cannot confine political warfare to the tools we associate with political warfare’. It is the effort to combine these tools to mobilise support or opposition ‘in order to achieve victory in war or in unbloody conflicts as serious as war’ that define political warfare.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to emphasise that political warfare goes beyond the simple conception of it as a combination of overt diplomacy and covert propaganda. Political warfare is less about the means, and more about the end goal. In the British context the instruments of political warfare were fluid and constantly evolving. Therefore, Chau wrongly defines the British conception of political warfare as the creation and dissemination of propaganda. Propaganda was indeed the main tool of political warfare used against Nazi Germany in the Second World War; but propaganda itself did not constitute political warfare, it was the manner in which it was used and the purposes of deploying this tool which we should understand as political warfare. The overall goal lies at the heart of political warfare operations and is the sole determination of which methods of political warfare are deployed, calculated on their probability of achieving reasonable success. British wartime propaganda was deployed ‘in a manner reasonably calculated to significantly affect the outcome’ of the Second World War.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Hard, Soft, and Smart Power***

The recent discussion of political warfare within the scholarship on grand strategy has placed the concept solely within the confines of foreign policy frameworks. Political warfare, together with various other forms of offensive diplomacy, are deployed against enemy powers designed to persuade or coerce enemy populations and allies alike in support of foreign policy objectives. The restriction of political warfare as a tool of foreign policy has been a feature of the post-Cold War American scholarship. Particularly as the War on Terror dominated international relations discourses, academics turned their attention to grand strategic frameworks which were considered as means to prosecute the war successfully.

However, this academic literature has failed to contextualise political warfare outside the American experience. In the British context political warfare was used extensively in domestic politics, thus the concept was not merely an exercise in foreign policy campaigns. International

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<sup>34</sup> Angelo M. Codevilla, ‘Political Warfare’, in Carnes Lord and Frank R. Barnett (eds.), *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations: Rethinking the US Approach*, (National Defence University Press, 1988), pp. 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

relations scholars, who by trade focus on foreign policy debates, have failed to consider the domestic component of political warfare. This oversight is particularly evident in the scholarship on grand strategy but also in the academic literature on the notions of hard, soft, and smart power.

The scholarship on conceptualisations of political warfare has extended well beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the twenty-first century, the concept continues to have a significant bearing on British and the US approaches to international relations and is extremely popular in the academic discourse. However, in the post-Cold War era, political warfare has seemingly acquired a new label: “smart power”. Smart power was coined by the former US assistant secretary of defense and chairman of the US National Intelligence Council, Joseph S. Nye. In his book, *The Future of Power*, Nye defined smart power as ‘the combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction.’<sup>36</sup> In developing the term in 2003, Nye sought to ‘counter the misperception’ that soft power on its own could effectively meet foreign policy interests. Nye asserted that ‘If a state can set the agenda for others or shape their preferences, it can save a lot on carrot and sticks. But rarely can it totally replace either.’ Therefore, a combination of these hard and soft forms of power into ‘smart strategies’ was deemed a necessity by Nye. He argued that the primary features of a country’s soft power ‘include its culture (when it is pleasing to others), its values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and its policies (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate).’ While the major components of hard power are coercion through the use of military and economic means, Nye warned against a simplistic division of power by resources rather than behaviour: ‘Military and economic resources can sometimes be used to attract as well as coerce’.<sup>37</sup>

The main thrust of Nye’s work was to argue for the adoption of a smart power strategy in the United States to tackle current global threats and mitigate against a preponderance of military resources which merely ‘leads to an image of an over-militarized foreign policy’.<sup>38</sup> This was an argument that Nye had made over ten years prior when introducing his concept of soft power in 1990. With the War on Terror, Nye concluded that the persuasive pull of soft power tactics was not enough to support foreign policy goals in aggressive, often militarised conflicts in the

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<sup>36</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph S. Nye, ‘Get Smart. Combining Hard and Soft Power’, *Foreign Affairs*, 1 July 2009. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2009-07-01/get-smart>

<sup>38</sup> Joseph S. Nye, ‘Smart Power’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 26:2 (Spring, 2009), 7-9, p. 8.

Middle East, some methods of coercion were required. In arguing for a smart power strategy to defeat Islamist terrorism, Nye drew parallels with the struggle against the Soviet Union:

Despite its numerous errors, the United States' Cold War strategy involved a smart combination of hard and soft power. The U.S. military deterred Soviet aggression, while American ideas undercut communism behind the Iron Curtain. When the Berlin Wall finally collapsed, it was destroyed not by an artillery barrage but by hammers and bulldozers wielded by those who has lost faith in communism.

Nye argued that a more effective strategy in the War on Terror would combine tackling the extremists who could never be won over with an attraction to American culture or values by demonstrations of hard power, whilst deploying soft power to 'win the hearts and minds of the mainstream.'<sup>39</sup>

Although Nye hinted at the intellectual origins of his smart power concept, he did not acknowledge that the use of smart power in the twenty-first century would involve the revival of the methods of political warfare more commonly associated with the Cold War. Political warfare predates the notion of smart power and yet despite this, Nye neglects the debate on political warfare in the historiography of the Cold War beyond a brief nod to its perceived success in ensuring the West 'won the Cold War'.<sup>40</sup> By choosing to represent political warfare as an unmitigated success and by not challenging the many failures of US Cold War strategy, Nye missed an opportunity to refine the concept of political warfare in consideration of historical failures, learning from past mistakes to create a more robust approach to international relations. Nevertheless, Nye's work is extremely important for how we consider the concept of political warfare in both historical and contemporary contexts. Framing it as a combination of hard (coercive) and soft (attractive) power into smart strategies goes beyond a simple appreciation of political warfare separated into isolated acts of diplomacy or military operations. Instead we appreciate the linkage of intelligence, propaganda, economic initiatives, military alliances and diplomacy within a strategic framework to meet a nation's foreign policy objectives.

Building on Nye's work, Christian Whiton, a former official in George W. Bush's State Department, has also contributed to the discourse on smart power, and at the time of writing in 2013, he urged the Obama administration to adopt a smart power strategy. Whiton defined the

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<sup>39</sup> Nye, 'Get Smart'.

<sup>40</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 231.

concept of smart power as ‘the missing middle of statecraft that should exist between diplomatic garden parties and going to war.’ Similarly, to Nye, Whitton made the case for the use of a smart power strategy to meet present global threats, albeit with a rebuke of the Obama administration’s pursuit of foreign policy. ‘Smart power’, Whitton contended, ‘isn’t just foreign aid or trying to sing kumbaya with enemies, but the many financial, cultural, rhetorical, economic, espionage-related, and military actions that states can take short of general war to influence political outcomes abroad.’<sup>41</sup> He argued that US foreign policy was caught between a dichotomy of interventionist and non-interventionist approaches. Thus, the ‘neoconservatives on the right’ whose response to global issues ‘so often seem to be sideshow wars are souring Americans to involvement in the world’, whilst the Obama administration’s “leading from behind” approach is dangerous and inconsistent with America’s character’. Whitton criticised US policy-makers for ignoring ‘the middle way’ of the Cold War that previous Presidents such as Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Reagan had successfully pursued.<sup>42</sup>

There is a divergence between Whitton and Nye’s conceptualisations of smart power. Whilst Nye emphasised that US smart strategy should hinge upon the persuasive potential of soft power, Whitton leaned more heavily on coercive tactics. Nye argued against a narrow use of power ‘as getting people or groups to do something they don’t want to do’, instead, he argued, we should also try ‘to persuade others to do what is in fact in their own interests’.<sup>43</sup> However, Whitton was more concerned with a national security strategy that was more coercive than attractive, and predominantly focused on meeting American objectives regardless of the enemies own interests. He argued that smart power ‘crucially should involve a revival of political warfare: the non-violent push of ideas, people, facts, and events with which our adversaries would rather not contend.’<sup>44</sup>

Whitton’s definition of smart power fell firmly on the “hard” side of the smart power spectrum with very little consideration given to the concept of soft power in his book, *Smart Power: Between Diplomacy and War*. Indeed, he argued against an over-emphasis on soft power methods: ‘Often mistaken for the narrower missions of propaganda, or “winning hearts and minds”, smart power can include diverse diplomatic, political, cultural, military, technological, financial, economic, rhetorical, legal, and espionage related tools and practices.’ Similarly, to

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<sup>41</sup> *The Daily Caller* interview with Christian Whitton, 1 July, 2013. Available at: <http://dailycaller.com/2013/11/07/thedc-interview-christian-whiton-explains-smart-power/>

<sup>42</sup> Christian Whitton, *Smart Power: Between Diplomacy and War* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Nye, ‘Get Smart’.

<sup>44</sup> Whitton, *Smart Power*.

Nye, Whiton, also drew on the historical application of smart power in the Cold War. Yet in contrast to Nye, Whiton attributed strong military posturing by the United States as a crucial element in the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. He argued:

Paradoxically, even though it supposedly meant losing “hearts and minds” due to controversy and widespread protest, the West’s necessary use of smart power was actually enhanced when President Reagan deployed a new class of American nuclear weapons to Europe in the early 1980s and countered Soviet military advantages. Determination and a clear mission count for a great deal in foreign affairs as elsewhere.<sup>45</sup>

Whiton has proved not only an advocate of hard over soft power methods, he has also failed to perceive the broader goals of the strategic framework that these methods operate within. He has persuasively argued that smart power involves a combination of various tools from psychological operations to overt propaganda and to use any of these methods in isolation is not conducive to a successful smart strategy. Yet crucially, he has failed to extend this analysis to consider that a successful smart strategy relies on the linkage of hard and soft tactics with clearly defined objectives.<sup>46</sup> As Nye has argued, to successfully combine hard and soft power resources into smart strategies requires ‘contextual intelligence’, that is, ‘the intuitive diagnostic skill that helps policymakers align tactics with objectives’.<sup>47</sup> In passionately arguing for the adoption of smart strategies to counter present threats, Whiton overlooked failings in previous Cold War smart strategies which were undermined by the failure to link methods with defined goals.<sup>48</sup>

Another contribution to the smart power literature was prompted by the War on Terror. Ernest J. Wilson III has noted that the growing interest in smart power can be seen as a reflection of the perceived failings of the George Bush Jnr administration’s foreign policy post 9/11 which has drawn criticisms and ‘unpresented resentment’ globally and ‘greatly diminished America’s position in the world’.<sup>49</sup> This has encouraged the emergence of what Wilson has termed a ‘smart power countermovement’ amongst both soft and hard power

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Nye, ‘Get Smart’.

<sup>48</sup> Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, ‘Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950’, *Diplomatic History*, xxxiii (2009), 39-66, pp. 43-44.

<sup>49</sup> Ernest J. Wilson III, ‘Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science*, 616:1 (March, 2008), 110-124, p. 111.

enthusiasts and from neoliberals to ‘reformed neoconservatives’.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, as Wilson contended, the more strident criticism came from advocates of traditional and public diplomacy and other methods of soft power. Yet the debate over smart power within the soft power school ‘suffer[s] from failures to address conceptual, institutional, and political dimensions of the challenge’.<sup>51</sup> Wilson defined smart power ‘as the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor’s purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently.’ In an effort to redress the conceptual, institutional and political ambiguities, Wilson set out a range of essential recommendations which should be used to build a ‘conceptually robust and policy relevant’ smart power framework. Actors should be aware of:

- The *target* over which one seeks to exercise power – its internal nature and its broader global context. Power cannot be smart if those who wield it are ignorant of those attributes of the target populations and regions.
- *Self-knowledge* and understanding of one’s own goals and capacities. Smart power requires the wielder to know what his or her country or community seeks, as well as its will and capacity to achieve its goals.
- The broader *regional* and *global context* within which the action will be conducted.
- The *tools* to be employed, as well as how and when to deploy them individually and in combination.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst all these recommendations are crucial for a successful smart power framework, Wilson noted that the reflection over the use of tools has been an important theme which is central to the current debates on hard and soft power. Smart power requires careful consideration of the tools used to coerce and persuade. Therefore, as Wilson has argued, substantial examination should be given to which methods are more appropriate in relation to the circumstances and what are the strength and limitations of each tool. Pertinently, what can cultural, political, economic or military methods be expected to achieve?<sup>53</sup>

A fundamental point which Nye, Whiton and Wilson all fail to address is just how far smart power should go in the pursuit of US foreign policy interests. Crucially, in the literature on smart power there is very little engagement with the debate on smart power in historical

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 114, 110.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.116.

contexts. Where the historical application of smart power is addressed in the literature (as in Whiton's work) this does not progress beyond a rudimentary analysis of the success of a smart power framework under Reagan in the Cold War. Yet smart power has a rich history in US and British approaches to international relations through the concept of political warfare and therefore this presents an obvious lacuna in our understanding of the development of hard, soft and smart power.

### ***Political Warfare in the British Context***

While Joseph Nye has carefully laid out a clear definition of smart power in numerous books and articles published on the subject, political warfare has been much more difficult to define as no one clear definition of the concept is pre-eminent in the literature. In both international relations scholarship on grand or smart strategy and the historical accounts of British and American Cold War approaches, political warfare is often misunderstood, and the conceptual framework is vastly underdeveloped.

Despite Britain's role as the pioneer of this method of warfare, it is remarkable that most of the literature on British Cold War activities fails to engage with this or any other conceptual framework. Instead, disparate discussions of anti-communist and anti-nationalist propaganda, espionage, covert action, and counterinsurgency dominate the literature. There is an established body of work on Britain's clandestine activities in support of foreign policy during the Cold War, with more recent work focusing on the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and propaganda. However, this work has not been brought together under the unifying concept of political warfare, thereby limiting our understanding of Britain's Cold War to isolated episodes of diplomacy, intelligence, and propaganda rather than interrogating their interdependence. This has led to an under-appreciation of the multi-faceted approach to British foreign policy before, during, and after the Cold War.

Although the scholarship on the cultural Cold War has been framed in terms of "hard" and "soft" power, the term political warfare has rarely been used in examinations of the West's attempts to secure the Western bloc and undermine the Soviet enemy. Yet the concept of political warfare – developed during World War II - predates notions of "hard" and "soft" power and remains a long-standing component of British foreign policy. Much of the literature on the cultural and intelligence aspects of Britain's Cold War is limited in scope to the hard power tools of coercion.

This over-emphasis on the individual tools of political warfare is evident in the literature on Britain's Cold War. The largest body of work examining British Cold War activities has focused on the early Cold War and the battle for "hearts and minds". This scholarship is predominantly framed by discussion of IRD and its work conducting anti-communist propaganda. Making use of the batch of files documenting IRD's early years which were released in 1995, Hugh Wilford has examined the department's origins and early propaganda output. The department was originally created to produce positive propaganda projecting British values around the World as a suitable corrective to anti-British propaganda emanating from the Soviet Union. The objective of IRD's work was initially focused on attracting non-aligned people in Europe to the emerging Western Union alliance. Wilford argued that this objective was soon abandoned despite the department's creation for the 'avowed intention of promoting Britain as a socialist "Third Force" in world politics'. IRD's propaganda instead focused on attacking the Soviet Union and communist ideology.<sup>54</sup>

Wilford's study is limited to an analysis of propaganda and fails to engage with the wider political debates in which the IRD's work was framed, thereby leading Wilford to argue that the department's focus was mostly out of step with British foreign policy objectives. Whilst the Labour government sought to establish a union of western European social democratic powers independent of both the Soviet Union and the United States, for Foreign Office officials in charge of IRD 'the Third Force appealed more as a propaganda device than as a desirable or practicable foreign policy.'<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Wilford contended that 'the anti-communist Cold War consensus which prevailed in Britain after 1950 did not simply form in response to international events; rather, it was in part deliberately constructed by the British Government.'<sup>56</sup>

Wilford further argued that propaganda output was shaped by the Foreign Office's fervent anti-Communism and suggested that this anti-communist publicity developed independently of wider British initiatives in the international arena.<sup>57</sup> However, if we were to consider propaganda alongside the other hard and soft power methods of political warfare, we find that the anti-communist discourse was less 'deliberately constructed by the British Government' and more a '*response* to international events'.<sup>58</sup> The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin's

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<sup>54</sup> Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (July, 1998), 353-369, p.353.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369. Emphasis added.

propaganda directive in January 1948 which launched an anti-communist campaign and created IRD was initiated after the collapse of the Conference of Foreign Ministers the previous month. Before this irreparable break with the Soviets, the Foreign Office had tried unsuccessfully to convince the Cabinet to adopt such an anti-communist policy. Moreover, IRD's propaganda output was significantly stepped up in response to the Czechoslovakian Coup in March 1948 and then the Berlin Blockade. Bevin's Western Union policy – the effort to unite Western Europe in an anti-Soviet bloc – was also invigorated by events in Prague and this was supported by publicity disseminated by IRD. While some diplomats were sceptical of the Third Force concept, the Foreign Office nevertheless supported the initiative which was eventually overridden by the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Association in 1949. Labour's decision to abandon the Third Force for an Atlantic alliance was for practical reasons – Europe would be more secure with American military backing – and IRD's activities moved in step with these policies.<sup>59</sup> Thus, it was the growth of external pressures which influenced an increase in anti-communist rhetoric from London and intensification in the use of political warfare to meet the perceived threat of Soviet expansion.

Wilford's work is part of large body of literature studying the early years of IRD which have all focused on the department's secretive dealings in anti-communist propaganda.<sup>60</sup> More recent scholarship on IRD has not challenged the narrative of the department as a 'covert anti-communist propaganda organ' for Britain's cultural Cold War offensive. However, this more recent scholarship has embraced the broader context that IRD operated within. Thomas Maguire has situated IRD within the framework of British Cold War state-private networks and the concept of 'transnationalism'. Specifically, Maguire has analysed how non-state actors operated beyond state boundaries to shape British Cold War policy. This work has also examined IRD's domestic activities.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Rory Cormac has contributed an in-depth study of IRD's operations in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, operations which crossed the foreign and domestic boundary.<sup>62</sup> However, both recent and older histories of Britain's Cold

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<sup>59</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin and Political Warfare', pp.437-8.

<sup>60</sup> See for example Andrew Defty, 'Close and continuous liaison': *British anti-communist propaganda and cooperation with the United States, 1950-51*, *Intelligence & National Security*, 17:4 (2002), 100-130; Andrew, Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (Abingdon, 2004); Richard J. Fletcher, 'British propaganda since World War II – a case study', *Media, Culture & Society*, 4:97 (1982), 97-109; Paul Lashmar James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War, 1948-1977* (London: Sutton, 1998)

<sup>61</sup> Thomas J. Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and "State-Private Networks"', *Intelligence and National Security*, 30:5 (2015), 637-666.

<sup>62</sup> Rory Cormac, 'The Information Research Department, Unattributable Propaganda, and Northern Ireland, 1971-1973: Promising Salvation but Ending in Failure?', *English Historical Review*, CXXXI:52 (2016), 1074-1104.

War neglect to consider the concept of political warfare and instead frame discussions of IRD solely within the confines of propaganda. Therefore, the historical appreciation of British Cold War activities place a disproportionate emphasis on propaganda which is merely one technique of political warfare. The scholarship fails to identify how, or even if, propaganda was linked to overall British Cold War objectives. At issue here is the mistaken conception of political warfare as limited to the creation and dissemination of propaganda.

The scholarship on IRD is limited to examinations of propaganda or, as diplomats in the Foreign Office dubbed it, unattributable information. Even in this thesis which considers IRD within the conceptual framework of political warfare, much of the discussion is more narrowly framed in terms of the department's propaganda output. This is because the majority of documentation covers propaganda, only very recent archival releases cover the department's work in black propaganda operations and sabotage, the types of operations more commonly associated with the security and intelligence agencies. As Cormac has noted, recent file releases reveal that IRD's remit went much further than unattributable propaganda. The department was engaged in 'special political action in the information field', which involved 'bribery, propaganda, covert political funding, and, ultimately, orchestrating coups'. Therefore, like MI6 which had a dedicated special political action unit from the 1950s alongside an 'SPA(Prop) unit' for black propaganda, IRD also had a capacity for this type of work and, presumably, worked closely alongside MI6 in this area.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the release of the FCO 168 files series from early 2019 reveals that one long-running special political action operation that IRD was involved with in the early 1960s was designed to keep Salvador Allende and his Popular Action Front out of power in Chile. Working alongside the CIA's Chilean Committee of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, IRD distributed material in support of the right-wing parties whilst diplomats urged 'responsible Chilean authorities to take appropriate action' against the communists in government and the police.<sup>64</sup>

These recent file declassifications demonstrate that IRD was involved in special political action, black propaganda including forgeries of information material from foreign governments or international organisations such as trade unions, and, most significantly for this study, the department conducted numerous domestic propaganda operations aimed at Britain's internal enemies. Through its English Section, IRD kept a close eye on the activities on the Communist

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<sup>63</sup> Rory Cormac, 'Techniques of covert propaganda: the British approach in the mid-1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:7 (2019), 1064-1069, p.1064.

<sup>64</sup> TNA: FCO 168/674, 'S.P.A. in Chile', 24 September 1962.

Party of Great Britain, particularly its views on unilateral nuclear disarmament and influence within the Labour Party.<sup>65</sup>

IRD was first and foremost an unattributable propaganda unit but it is evident that was not all it did. The department dabbled in other areas of political warfare: subversion, special political action, and black propaganda. Thus, historical appreciations of the department as a propaganda unit leave a great deal of the department's history untold. This oversight has only recently been corrected by recent studies such as those from Maguire and Cormac. Therefore, it is unhelpful to view IRD within the narrow confines of propaganda, for a much broader appreciation of the unit we should ground examinations of the department within the conceptual framework of political warfare. IRD was an instrument of political warfare and, therefore, it is beneficial to engage with the rich abundance of international relations scholarship on grand strategy and smart power. We can understand political warfare as interchangeable with the more contemporary label of smart power in that it is 'the combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction.' As Nye asserted, states should predominantly focus their efforts on the persuasive potential of soft power, as it was more prudent to encourage states or groups to do something that was in their own interests, rather than force them to do something they did not want to do.<sup>66</sup> This was certainly the approach Britain adopted during the Cold War. Although coercive tactics such as subversion was used by the British state, much of the effort focused on unattributable propaganda, hence the abundance of IRD histories limited to the battle for hearts and minds.

Whilst scholars on grand strategy and smart power have reinvigorated the discourse on political warfare in the twenty-first century, this discussion has overlooked the historical account of political warfare and therefore misleadingly framed the concept as just an instrument of foreign policy. In the historical record, and especially in the British experience, political warfare was used extensively in domestic politics. Therefore, by contextualising IRD within the foreign and domestic setting, we can add not only to the historical record of the department but add to the bureaucratic and organisational contexts that IRD operated within. The department is a unique case where foreign policy analysis morphs into domestic policy analysis; there was no clear division between foreign and domestic with IRD.

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<sup>65</sup> See TNA: FCO 168/66 and FCO 168/73.

<sup>66</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. xiii; Nye, 'Get Smart'.

This thesis takes the concept of political warfare which has its underpinnings in the Second World War and early Cold War - and later developed in other fields by diplomatic scholars and international relations theorists - and sets it into an institutional approach by a case study of IRD's latter years. This approach provides insights into the institutional, foreign, and domestic policies at a significant point in Britain's history as the country was in decline and forced to carve out a new role for itself in the European Community.

Over its decades of operations from 1948 to 1977, IRD evolved in line with the changing organisational structures of foreign and domestic policy. The department was created in 1948 to counter the threat of emerging communist influences in Western Europe but the anti-communist remit soon morphed into an anti-nationalist crusade. Susan Carruthers demonstrated this institutional shift in foreign policy with IRD's involvement in tackling colonial insurgencies in the 1950s.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Scott Lucas repositioned IRD as an anti-nationalist instrument as evidenced by its role in the Suez crisis.<sup>68</sup> Within five years of establishing the department, British foreign policy had adopted anti-nationalist as well as anti-communist objectives. A recent article by Paul McGarr revealed that IRD operated extensively in India from 1948 until the early 1970s when the department was forced to retreat due to the reconceptualisation of IRD. As a non-aligned democracy, Britain viewed India as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Asia.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, whilst IRD conducted anti-nationalist campaigns in Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya, and Egypt, it also maintained its anti-communist operations in other former colonial territories where communism, rather than nationalism, was deemed the more significant threat to British interests. Cormac's<sup>70</sup> study of IRD's operations against the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s and the simultaneous withdraw from anti-communist operations in India during the same period would suggest that the institutional shift from anti-communist to anti-nationalist concerns was solidified with the remoulding of IRD in 1972. Beyond these studies, as well as Paul Lashmar and James Oliver's<sup>71</sup> broad history of IRD from its inception to demise - there has been a lack of scholarship, not just archival documentation, on this institutional shift which began in the 1950s.

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<sup>67</sup> Susan L. Carruthers, 'A red under every bed?: Anti-communist propaganda and Britain's response to colonial insurgency', *Contemporary Record*, 9:2 (1995), 294-318.

<sup>68</sup> W. Scott Lucas, *Britain and the Suez Crisis: The Lion's Last Roar* (Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> McGarr, 'Information Research Department, British Covert Propaganda, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962: Combating Communism and Courting Failure', *The International History Review*, 41:1 (2019), 130-156.

<sup>70</sup> Cormac, 'Techniques of covert propaganda'.

<sup>71</sup> Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*.

The overriding hypothesis underpinning this thesis is that political warfare evolved through the changing domestic context and institutional shifts into a set of tactics for domestic political culture to bolster the British state and monitor and undermine supposed enemies. IRD's operations in Northern Ireland and in support of EEC membership in the 1970s align with this reconceptualisation as, by this point, the department was no longer predominantly an international organisation.

## *Chapter One: Political Warfare, 1948-69*

### *Introduction*

At the onset of the Cold War, Britain was the first western power to embark on a dedicated counter-response to the Soviet Union's coordinated anti-Western propaganda output. The Soviets were past masters at this activity, having mobilised political and cultural fronts in Europe during the inter-war period, led by figures such as the German communist Willi Munzenberg.<sup>1</sup> Communist front activity continued during the war and co-opted many of the new international organisations that were generated in 1944 and 1945, particularly youth and student movements. Even in 1945, Britain was engaged in an embryonic struggle with communist front activity on this new landscape.<sup>2</sup>

By 1946, the alliance between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union which had defeated Nazi Germany became fraught with disagreements over the future of Germany. This fracture between the West and the Soviet Union's aims and objectives in Western Europe resulted in the complete breakdown of the alliance after the deadlock in negotiations at the Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1947. Britain's Labour government had come to realise the grave threat the Soviet's posed to the security of Western Europe and so they decided to push back with a Cold War strategy using the methods of political warfare. The British were well-versed in this area of warfare having achieved great success during the Second World War with the Political Warfare Executive.

Within the Cold War context, the methods of political warfare were adapted by Labour to serve the relative peacetime aspect of Cold War. It was imperative that political warfare was highly secretive. Exposure would not only alert the Soviet Union to this strategy and potentially accelerate the Cold War towards a more conventional conflict, but also it would also damage British prestige with allied and non-aligned nations, undermining the image of British integrity working with global partners towards a stable long-lasting peace following years of devastating world war.

Thus, Labour's Cold War strategy contained overt and covert methods of political warfare. The overt aspect of the strategy focused on diplomacy which again played to Britain's strengths. With a skilled diplomatic presence in embassies across the world, Labour could counter Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals*. (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Aldrich, 'Putting culture into the Cold War: the Cultural Relations Department (CRD) and British covert information warfare,' *Intelligence and National Security* 18.2 (2003), 109-133.

influence in individual countries political environments. These networks were also useful for distributing anti-Soviet and pro-Western propaganda. The diplomatic effort was underpinned by Labour's efforts to strengthen the anti-communist Western alliance in the political, military, and economic spheres. This first took the form of the Western Union, a personal effort by the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, to unite the Western European powers against potential Soviet expansion into Western Europe. This alliance later evolved into NATO in which the United States committed itself to ensuring the security of Western Europe from Soviet encroachment.

Alongside these initiatives, Bevin also fostered the European Economic Recovery Programme which became known as the Marshall Plan. In support of the Marshall Plan the newly created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other American bodies supported a parallel programme of political warfare alongside the British.<sup>3</sup>

The covert aspect of Labour's anti-communist Cold War strategy centred on propaganda. Such was the importance of propaganda in Labour's strategy, new machinery was formed in the Foreign Office to create and distribute propaganda in the UK and overseas. In January 1948, Bevin announced the creation of the Information Research Department (IRD) to the Cabinet. The department's remit was 'to collect information concerning Communist policy, tactics and propaganda and to provide material for our anti-communist publicity through our Missions and Information Services abroad'.<sup>4</sup> The innocuous term "publicity" referred to information work also known as "white" or "overt" propaganda in which material was attributed to the source. IRD's use of white propaganda involved a general effort to project a positive image of Britain overseas, distributing material attributed to official government sources through British Missions. A more focused campaign centred on the efforts to establish the Western Union and then the creation of NATO in 1949.<sup>5</sup>

White propaganda covered the bulk of IRD's early work, but it was not the only element of the department's total output. When the department was created its objective 'was to encourage "anti-Communism in the countries not under" communist control, rather than attempting to penetrate the Iron Curtain.'<sup>6</sup> Thus, much of the department's output focused on Western Europe. However, merely a year later the department was engaged in a subversive operation in Albania that attempted to overthrow the communist regime of Enver Hoxa in the only pro-

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<sup>3</sup> Sallie Pisani. *The CIA and the Marshall Plan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> TNA, CAB 129/23, C. (48) 8, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy', 4 Jan. 1948.

<sup>5</sup> Gwinnett, Giselle 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare: Labour's Secret Anti-communist Campaign in Europe, 1948-51', *The International History Review*, 39:3 (2017), 426-449, p.430.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5-6.

Moscow state that was geographically isolated from the Eastern Bloc.<sup>7</sup> From 1949, IRD's propaganda effort also incorporated the more politically contentious 'black' element. This meant Britain had been distributing propaganda material behind the iron curtain in which the official British source was hidden, and the information often falsified; accuracy was not a prerequisite of such material.<sup>8</sup>

Exposure of the subversive aspect of Britain's early Cold War campaign had the potential to be extremely politically damaging for both the Labour party and the British establishment. But it was another aspect of Labour's campaign which potentially offered the most damaging blow to British democracy. IRD's remit evolved over a short period to include not just a propaganda effort to combat communist influence abroad but also to counter homegrown communist influences within Britain itself. This involved using the International Department of the Labour Party under Dennis Healey to funnel large volumes of IRD propaganda to the offices of British trade unions. Over a third of the extant material in the files of this unit, now held at the Labour Party archives in Manchester, in fact consists of IRD material.<sup>9</sup> More remarkably, IRD funded anti-communist books that were distributed not only overseas but also at home.<sup>10</sup> Labour Party leaders were anxious that these matters should remain a tightly guarded secret.

### ***Political Warfare in the Early Cold War***

In December 1949, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, created the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas). This exclusive and highly secretive Cabinet committee supervised Britain's anti-communist political warfare activities overseas.<sup>11</sup> Whilst Bevin was pivotal in driving forward Britain's international propaganda campaign, Attlee took a personal interest in countering communist influence within the UK's borders. Of particular interest to Attlee was communists in parliament, particularly within his own Labour Party. In November 1946 the Prime Minister instructed a senior official in the Security Service (MI5) to report on any sufficient evidence that a Member of Parliament was associated with a 'subversive organisation'. The official determined that Attlee's motive was driven 'by a responsibility to the "country to see that such members did not get into positions where they might constitute a

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<sup>7</sup> Michael W. Dravis, 'Storming fortress Albania: American covert operations in microcosm, 1949-54,' *Intelligence and National Security*, 7:4 (1992), 425-442.

<sup>8</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', p.441.

<sup>9</sup> Watson to Healey, 12 November 1948, File: Anti-communist Propaganda, 1948, International Department of the Labour Party, National Museum of Labour History, Manchester.

<sup>10</sup> These were initially published under IRD imprints like Ampersand, but later involved co-operation with mainstream book publishers like Bodley Head and Allen and Unwin.

<sup>11</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', p.428.

danger to the state”.<sup>12</sup> This concern for penetration of the British state led to the introduction of vetting procedures for employees in the civil service. The proposals were discussed during the first meeting of a special Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities (known as GEN 183) chaired by the Minister of Defence, A.V. Alexander, in June 1947. Whilst membership of communist organisations was not illegal and such measures during peacetime could be viewed as excessive, Ministers were in general agreement that it was necessary to bar members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) from ‘work where he may have access to secret information.’ Attlee gave his ‘unequivocal backing’ to the proposals which were announced in Parliament on 15 March 1948.<sup>13</sup>

In February 1949, GEN 183 turned its focus to formulating vetting processes in industry, particularly in the defence sector which was particularly vulnerable to communist infiltration. However, vetting procedures for removing suspicious employers from sensitive work was met with resistance from the Trades Unions Congress (TUC) and British Employers Confederation. The government consulted with representatives from both organisations who urged the government to adopt a ‘covert purge for fear of industrial disputes.’ Hence the adopted policy known as the ‘Industrial Purge’ was not public knowledge and employees removed from their posts had ‘no right of appeal’ although such removals were apparently ‘rare’.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps unbeknown to Attlee, the Labour Party were emulating a low-profile purge programme run by the Conservatives for exactly the same reason during the 1930s.<sup>15</sup>

A series of serious security breaches put the issue of vetting back on GEN 183’s agenda. In 1950 the East German spy Klaus Fuchs had been convicted of supplying the Soviet Union with information from the American, British and Canadian Manhattan Project during and after the Second World War. The following year, Foreign Office diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean defected to the Soviet Union. Both scandals damaged trust with the Americans and threatened the atomic and intelligence sharing relationship.<sup>16</sup> Pressure from the Americans meant a more intensive vetting process was required to weed out potential threats. Thus, GEN 183 approved a move from “negative” vetting whereby suspicious persons were removed from

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers, intelligence and domestic anti-Communism, 1945–1951’, *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12:2, (2013), 113-133, p.118.

<sup>13</sup> Lomas, *Labour Ministers*, p.121-122.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.125-7.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Luff, ‘Covert and Overt Operations: Interwar Political Policing in the United States and the United Kingdom: Covert and Overt Operations,’ *The American Historical Review* 122:3 (2017), 727-757.

<sup>16</sup> Michael S. Goodman, ‘Who is trying to keep what secret from whom and why? MI5-FBI relations and the Klaus Fuchs case,’ *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7:3 (2005), 124-146.

their post to a system of “positive” vetting where employees were required to first pass ‘an open enquiry into his loyalty, character and background’ before gaining access to classified information. The procedure would cover all new employees in the Atomic Energy Division of the Ministry of Supply ‘and “any university specialists or employees of contractors” engaged on secret government work.’ The new policy came into force in January 1952 under the new Conservative government.<sup>17</sup>

These initiatives demonstrated that Labour was emphatically concerned with the threat of communist subversion within British government and industry. By 1948, Attlee’s government was determined to counter Soviet penetration in Western Europe with a political warfare strategy incorporating diplomatic initiatives alongside propaganda. But this strategy stopped at Britain’s own shores; Whitehall had no mandate to counter Soviet influence in Britain itself besides the vetting of civil service employees and outside contractors from industry involved in secret government work. As the leading Social Democratic country in the West, Britain was a particularly attractive target for Soviet anti-Western propaganda, but unlike the Soviet Union, British officials were constrained by democratic principles. Thus, Attlee’s anti-communist campaign in Europe had no publicly acknowledged domestic component.

Following prolonged criticism from the Chiefs of Staff over the efficacy of Labour’s anti-communist campaign, an enquiry was launched in 1949. Under the chairmanship of Gladwyn Jebb from the Foreign Office, an official who had spent much of the war managing special operations and political warfare, the Committee on Communism examined both the foreign and domestic aspects of Labour’s anti-communist strategy. Finding the domestic side of the policy woeful, the committee criticised the lack of activities in Britain. The committee argued that the threat of communist subversion required countering ‘in Birmingham as in Bucharest.’ Christopher Warner, the official in charge of IRD, pointed out the ‘considerable opposition’ to Foreign Office information work within the UK. However, the Home Office - which would be a more suitable home for domestic activities - took a ‘liberal’ view of communist influence in the UK, ‘believing communism was “not illegal” and maintained a policy designed to “let people say what they liked” hoping the “truth would prevail”.’<sup>18</sup> Even had the Labour Party sought to pursue a wholly overseas programme focused on the Soviet Union rather than the

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<sup>17</sup> Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers’, pp.127-8.

<sup>18</sup> Gwinnett, ‘Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare’, pp.435-6; Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers’, p.128.

CPGB, some domestic blowback from its covert propaganda techniques would have been inevitable.

In November 1949, Jebb's committee delivered its report to the Cabinet, putting forward proposals for two coordinating committees to oversee Labour's anti-communist offensive, one for supervision of overseas activities and another to coordinate a UK-based campaign. By December, Attlee had approved the overseas aspect of Jebb's proposals, establishing the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas) and the Ministerial Committee on Communism, which studied and ratified proposed operations. The Cabinet also gave IRD and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) permission to undertake black propaganda activities behind the Iron Curtain which had previously been banned by Senior Ministers. Although Ministers cautioned against any action designed to stir up revolution in the Soviet bloc, Labour permitted the Foreign Office to poke at perceived weak spots in the Iron Curtain utilising propaganda 'to maintain the spirit of resistance' in the population and 'foster mistrust' between communist regimes and the Soviet Union. Subversive propaganda operations were first launched in the Soviet zones of Germany and Austria in 1950 and Czechoslovakia the following year with Poland and Hungary designated future targets 'if circumstances permitted'.<sup>19</sup>

This new encouragement of overseas action by Senior Ministers was not immediately emulated on the domestic front. Whilst the Jebb committee found the level of domestic inaction alarming, with contention that it was 'Communist policy "to wreck this country's vital economic recovery"', they did also recognise the conflict between democratic values and subversion of one's own populace. However, the committee deemed the communist threat to be so great that a publicity offensive was needed to 'discredit the Communist Party in the eyes of the people'. Senior Ministers, however, did not agree with the officials that constituted this committee. Although opposed to any form of communist penetration in Britain, Ministers wished to resist such penetration whilst also 'maintaining freedom of expression and maximum possible civil liberties'. Moreover, a publicly funded campaign to oppose the CPGB which was a fully 'legal political organisation' had potentially grave constitutional implications. Thus, a home offensive was blocked by Ministers whilst activities overseas intensified, the potential exposure

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<sup>19</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', pp.436-7, 443.

of any domestic counter-measures and the likely furore that would follow posed too great a risk for Ministers to contemplate.<sup>20</sup>

Understandably, this domestic activity has also caused considerable controversy amongst historians. Peter Weiler has been the most critical, suggesting that IRD was part of a concerted effort to manufacture consensus within the British Labour movement and to marginalise both the communist and the non-communist left within the trade unions. Weiler considered activity by officials within the Foreign Office central to this process.<sup>21</sup> By contrast Anthony Carew, has argued that Labour Ministers were just as keen to discourage communism within the trades union movement and that the boundary between foreign and domestic was not hard and fast, pointing to work against Soviet influence in the international trade union movement and other international bodies.<sup>22</sup> Thurlow has also suggested that this effort was a happy convergence of Labour politics and foreign office officials, albeit often for rather different reasons. Scott Lucas and Catherine Morris have argued that the turning point for Labour was the idea of the Third Force that allowed Bevin to envisage prompting British socialist ideas as a positive alternative to both capitalism and communism.<sup>23</sup>

Either way, the accelerating Cold War eroded this initial anxiety about domestic activity. In a similar fashion to the development of Labour's overseas campaign, a domestic offensive developed due to practical necessity rather than ideological resolve. Clashes with the Soviets over the Prague coup and Berlin crisis steadily overrode British caution in fighting against Soviet expansionist aims and resulted in a commitment to an anti-communist strategy in Europe. In August 1949, to the surprise of the West, the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb, resulting in nuclear parity and an increased sense of threat in Whitehall and Westminster.<sup>24</sup> As the Cold War further intensified with a proxy war in Korea, Whitehall's diplomats considered measures to counter communist propaganda in Britain an essential component of Cold War strategy. Officials noted that Britain's involvement in the Korean War had inspired communists to attempt to thwart rearmament and wreck British economic

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<sup>20</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers', p.129.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (Routledge, 2004), pp.8-10.

<sup>22</sup> Carew, Anthony, 'The Schism within the World Federation of Trade Unions: Government and Trade-Union Diplomacy', *International Review of Social History* 29:3 (1984), 297-335.

<sup>23</sup> W. Scott Lucas and C.J. Morris, 'A very British crusade: the Information Research Department and the beginning of the Cold War' in Richard J. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51* (London, 1992), 97-122.

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Goodman, *Spying on the Nuclear Bear: Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

recovery 'with some success'. Sir John Slessor, Chief of the Air Staff, argued that it was 'imperative that the present ban on muzzling the Communist Party and its propaganda in the United Kingdom... should be withdrawn'.<sup>25</sup>

Whitehall again began pressing for a domestic campaign. In November 1950, Sir Pierson Dixon, Jebb's successor as the chair of the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas), asked the Cabinet Secretary Sir Norman Brook whether it was an opportune time to put forward a proposal for domestic counter-measures. Brook responded favourably, writing that 'Ministers had been in a mood when they seemed likely to be more receptive of proposals to take a more vigorous line.' The committee submitted proposals for a domestic anti-communist committee to supervise UK based activities. Ministers considered the proposals in February 1951. The new Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison was keen, arguing that the CPGB's potential to disrupt industry through strikes and spread 'lies about national policy' necessitated official government machinery to counter these acts. The material distributed by this machinery would, Morrison argued, be of a positive nature to promote the 'achievements' of British social democracy. But the Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, remained hesitant about launching a campaign against a legal political organisation.<sup>26</sup>

Ede's misgivings did not reflect Cabinet consensus. Brook's assessment of Ministers receptiveness for a domestic counter-propaganda proved correct. The outbreak of the Korean War had indeed eroded Ministers objections to a domestic campaign. The Prime Minister approved a new propaganda policy for the home front which consisted of two central objectives to educate the British public. The first aimed 'to establish the thesis that the Soviet Government aims at extending throughout the world a tyrannical system which is spiritually and materially inferior to our own, in which no one benefits but a small oligarchy at the head of one small political party'. The second objective was to indirectly disseminate anti-communist publicity to the British public so 'they may eventually themselves reject Communist propaganda'. Ministers saw this aspect of educating the public on the communist threat as particularly important within the labour movement. Labour's domestic policy largely reflected the aims of its overseas anti-communist campaign. This desire to expose communism as a totalitarian entity controlled by Moscow reflected the central objective of IRD's remit which underpinned its

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<sup>25</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers', pp.129-30.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

propaganda operations in Europe. With a domestic policy, IRD's target audience now included the British population.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst the necessity of a domestic component to Labour's anti-communist campaign was now accepted as inevitable, Ministers still exercised caution by placing restrictions on the theme of state-sanctioned propaganda. Propaganda operations had to be directed against Soviet or 'Soviet-inspired' activities rather than against communist ideology itself. Moreover, operations had to be defensive in nature and responsive to specific Soviet-backed actions on a case-by-case basis. Ministers were opposed to a 'constant or indiscriminate publicity war' targeted at the CPGB. Yet, as Thomas Maguire has argued, the attempts of senior Ministers 'to draw an artificial line between foreign and domestic actors for reasons of constitutional propriety proved to be a hazy distinction.' Identifying the 'Soviet-inspired' propaganda and activities which required countering over the homegrown efforts which were to be considered expressions of free speech was largely unworkable in practice. This meant that the CPGB itself was left alone as a legal political entity, but individual communists and members of the CPGB were targeted 'in a way that extended beyond merely countering Soviet propaganda.'<sup>28</sup>

Despite the Home Office's reservations, Morrison was instructed to draw up the proposals for new machinery. The Foreign Secretary put forward plans for an interdepartmental committee 'to keep a continuing watch' on communists in Britain and to plan and coordinate counter action. The committee was highly secretive with an exclusive membership and knowledge of its existence kept hidden. The plans were signed off by the Cabinet and the Committee on Communism (Home) came into force in June. Chaired by Brook, its membership included Warner, John Winnifrith from the Treasury and, the head of IRD John Peck, Dick White from MI5, alongside representatives from the Home Office and Ministry of Labour.

Although an interdepartmental committee, the Foreign Office enjoyed a disproportionate level of influence which impacted the direction of the committee's activities. The Assistant Under-Secretary for Information Activities in the Foreign Office, initially Warner, then John Nicholls in late 1951, sat on both committees for foreign and domestic anti-communist activities to aid 'very close liaison'. This provided an inroad for IRD to have significant influence over and direct involvement in both foreign and domestic campaigns. While the Home Office

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and "State-Private Networks"', *Intelligence and National Security*, 30:5 (2015), 637-666, p.658; Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', p.431.

<sup>28</sup> Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p.659

‘maintained a neutral position’ towards British communists, diplomats in the Foreign Office took a more hardened line, viewing ‘communism as a monolithic entity directed from Moscow’. British communists were analogous with their Soviet counterparts and therefore the potential threat from the CPGB was given more credence. ‘As Soviet tactics were “identical with those employed elsewhere”, officials considered IRD best place to lead the campaign against homegrown communists. Although the department’s remit was to counter external threats, IRD had previously been involved in minor domestic affairs, passing information to the Labour Party, Conservative Central Office and the TUC.<sup>29</sup>

On 15 June 1951, the committee held its first meeting, allowing the membership to define the objectives of the domestic campaign. The central objectives were, firstly, ‘[t]o focus all available intelligence about Communist activities in the United Kingdom, and to recommend to Ministers what action can be properly taken to counter such activities’. And secondly, ‘[t]o coordinate any anti-communist activities in this country which may be approved by Ministers’. The committee’s structure closely followed the Committee on Communism (Overseas) with both committees acting as the central planning and coordinating bodies of anti-communist action. The ministerial committee on communism had overall control of the foreign and domestic campaigns. Ministerial oversight provided the necessary checks and balances to any proposed schemes, yet this ministerial oversight committee was abandoned by the new Conservative government following the general election in October 1951. The Committee on Communism (Overseas) continued through to 1956 when it was replaced with another planning body. The domestic committee enjoyed more long-lasting success in Whitehall, surviving until 1962.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Labour’s Domestic Anti-communist Offensive***

In the summer of 1951, the Foreign Office put forward proposals for a domestic campaign for consideration by the Committee on Communism (Home). The objective of the scheme was ‘to educate’ the ‘public as a whole (a) the fact that the Soviet Union is really intent on world domination; (b) the way in which the Soviet Union is trying to do it; (c) the fact that the Soviet Union can be stopped’. Offers of assistance would be made to institutions particularly vulnerable to communist penetration, educating them on ‘the aims and methods of Soviet Government’ to enable them to uncover threats within their ranks.

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<sup>29</sup> Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers’, p.130; Maguire, ‘Counter-Subversion’, p.659.

<sup>30</sup> Maguire, ‘Counter-Subversion’, p.660; see also Gwinnett, ‘Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare,’ p.444.

Discussing the proposals at the committee's second meeting on 22 June, Sir Robert Gould from the Ministry of Labour argued that it was imperative for the campaign's success that the unions should be a focus of activities. With material distributed to appropriate targets, 'it should', he argued, 'be possible to immunise labour against Communist activities' by revealing 'the whole chain of command from the Kremlin'.<sup>31</sup> The key aspect of the campaign was to minimise the attraction of the CPGB as an independent British organisation by propagandising the British movement as part of a global entity which took its orders from Moscow.

The committee agreed with the Foreign Office's assessment that IRD's expertise on communism meant it was the most appropriate body to coordinate the campaign. The department's growing intelligence collection on Soviet methods and propaganda activities made the creation of a new home department unnecessary. By October 1951 a 'Home Desk' or 'English Section' had been created within the department to collect and distribute information on British communist activities to relevant parties. The new section comprised two permanent staff alongside secondments from the Labour and Education ministries.<sup>32</sup>

IRD's expanded brief necessitated closer coordination with the security and intelligence agencies. Since its creation in 1948, the department had received intelligence output from MI5 and MI6 to provide background information that informed the department's output. By late 1949 this cooperation was improved by the formulation of new liaison machinery between the Foreign Office and the intelligence services. The Permanent Under-Secretary's Department (PUSD) absorbed most of the Foreign Office's planning and intelligence infrastructure into a centralised body. This included the Services Liaison Department which was responsible for the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).<sup>33</sup> The PUSD received monthly reports from the various bodies 'principally concerned with the study of Communism and of conditions in the Soviet bloc' to detail current work. The reports were circulated amongst the departments involved in the anti-communist campaign, including IRD, to facilitate coordination between departments and prevent crossover of activities.<sup>34</sup>

IRD's home desk quickly established 'useful contacts' across Whitehall, particularly with the Ministry of Labour who regularly passed on press cuttings. Alongside labour, the education

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<sup>31</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers', p.131.

<sup>32</sup> Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p.660.

<sup>33</sup> Michael S. Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Volume 1: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis* (Routledge, 2014), p.164.

<sup>34</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare', p.433; Richard J Aldrich, *Espionage, Security, and Intelligence in Britain, 1945-1970* (Manchester University Press, 1998), p.110; Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p.661.

system was also perceived as vulnerable to communist infiltration. Communist ideology seemed to appeal to educators with the trend growing rather than declining as the Cold War intensified. CPGB membership amongst teachers had risen from approximately 750 in 1949 to 2000 by 1951. There were also a number of educators in universities who openly espoused communist views. The Ministry of Education had already dealt with several cases of ‘communist subversion’ within schools. One education inspector had reported a teacher for distributing ‘a great deal of insidious Communist propaganda’. The Committee on Communism (Home) became increasingly concerned with this growing threat. In the committee’s third meeting, Warner argued that the “old theory” of impartiality was “no longer valid” and IRD had prepared a series of papers which were ready for dissemination. One reported on the ‘activities of fellow-travellers’ within the education system while another discussed how communists would present themselves favourably as ‘good teachers’ while preserving ‘their main political efforts’ for the National Union of Teachers.<sup>35</sup>

The British Chiefs of Staff were curiously obsessed with the issue of communist school teachers and pressed for action. Nevertheless, the committee demurred on the issue of teachers until revisiting it once more at their fifth meeting. Sir John Maud, Permanent-Under Secretary at the Ministry of Education was in attendance. Although ‘very anxious’ about the issue, he advised the committee against screening teachers for their political views. Distribution of IRD material amongst teachers was deemed inappropriate. Instead the committee agreed to permit IRD to disseminate information to selected school inspectors and Directors of Education. In March 1952, Maud reported that Chief Inspectors ‘were ready to receive’ such information.<sup>36</sup>

Soviet penetration of the Armed Forces was another area which received attention in Labour’s domestic campaign. In February 1951, the Minister of Defence Manny Shinwell informed the Ministerial Committee on Communism that there were approximately 250 affirmed communists in the services. Despite concerns of the potential for communist subversion from Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff, propaganda aimed at the Armed Forces was limited during the early Cold War. One example was a pamphlet titled *Why Britain Re-Arms* which argued the case for Labour’s rearmament policy which had been criticised by communists. The piece was produced by the three service departments with assistance from the Foreign Office and the

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<sup>35</sup> Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers’, p.131.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

Central Office of Information, but further propaganda was deemed unnecessary due to the 'novelty of the subject'.<sup>37</sup>

Further propaganda work came from IRD. The department's pamphlet *Points at Issue* was disseminated to senior officers but the distribution of IRD's work in the military caused unease for the Foreign Secretary. Morrison was concerned that IRD's hand would be revealed and therefore suggested that the department's involvement in the services propaganda output should be limited to aiding in the production of material rather than distributing material directly from the department. The services began producing their own booklet, the *Defence Digest*, with assistance from IRD.<sup>38</sup>

### ***The Controversy of Labour's Domestic Campaign***

As the historian Daniel Lomas has noted, Labour's domestic anti-communist activities paled in comparison to those of the United States.<sup>39</sup> When the vetting procedures were announced in Parliament, the Labour Cabinet faced anger from backbenchers who accused ministers of a 'witch-hunt'. Yet Labour's purge was more nuanced than America's McCarthyism hysteria. When the vetting process was first introduced, 25 officials were dismissed due to security concerns, 25 resigned, 88 transferred, and 33 reinstated at a later date. These figures were dwarfed by the 9,500 civil servants who were dismissed and the 15,000 who resigned due to the McCarthy investigations in the US.<sup>40</sup>

The Labour Party adopted a more balanced approach to protect sensitive government work from communist subversion whilst acknowledging the requirement to protect employees' civil rights. The purge was eventually vindicated in Parliament by increasing Soviet hostility following the outbreak of the Korean War and the discovery of the Fuchs spy scandal and the following Burgess and Maclean affair. Labour similarly took a cautious approach in the development of domestic propaganda. Recognising that a domestic component to the Party's Cold War offensive was highly controversial, Ministers demurred on a domestic policy for some two years. Meanwhile, an overseas offensive was actively encouraged by Senior

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Karen Potter, "British McCarthyism." In *North American Spies: New Revisionist Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 143-57; Gloria Goodman, 'The British government and the challenge of McCarthyism in the early cold war', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12:1 (2010), 62-97.

<sup>40</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers', p.133.

Ministers. Again, the development of Cold War hostilities forced Labour's hand. The Korean War eventually pressured Ministers into adopting domestic anti-communist measures.<sup>41</sup>

Labour's anti-communist offensive overseas was a contentious policy. The subversive operation in Albania and IRD's black propaganda activities behind the Iron Curtain had the potential to inflict serious damage on the reputation of the Labour Party if such activities became public knowledge.<sup>42</sup> However, it was the potential discovery of Labour's domestic campaign that would inflict the most damage on the government. Ministers were acutely aware that state-sanctioned propaganda against a legal political entity presented constitutional issues. IRD's involvement in domestic counter-measures also problematised the campaign. The department had been created as a secret body with knowledge of its work hidden even amongst civil servants. Ministers sought to restrict the IRD's direct involvement in domestic operations in order to minimise the link between the domestic and overseas campaigns. Domestic measures were presented with democratic restraints which did not apply to overseas activities and it was therefore imperative that the domestic campaign was not merely viewed as an adjunct to overseas activities. Labour wanted to create visible separation between the two campaigns. Therefore, individual departments were responsible for conducting anti-communist measures with assistance rather than leadership from IRD. Even Morrison who was an advocate of covert political warfare and pushed for a domestic component recognised the requirement to hide IRD's involvement in the domestic sphere.<sup>43</sup>

The term "propaganda" sounded aggressive and evoked unfavourable connotations. Whitehall officials were keen to stress the defensive aspect of such work and reflect attention away from 'potentially dubious activity' by prefixing the adjective "counter". Hence, the documentation on domestic anti-communist propaganda is littered with references to "counter-measures", "counter-propaganda", and "counter-subversion". The language of domestic action was couched in this way to emphasise that propaganda disseminated amongst the British population - which was largely unprecedented in non-authoritarian democratic states during peacetime - was a necessary defence against external threats. Yet there is very little to distinguish between propaganda and counter-propaganda as separate methods. In fact, as Rory Cormac has argued,

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Hennessy and Gail Brownfeld 'Britain's cold war security purge: the origins of positive vetting.' *The Historical Journal*, 25.4 (1982), 965-974.

<sup>42</sup> Philip H. J. Davies, "From special operations to special political action: The 'rump SOE' and SIS post-war covert action capability 1945-1977." *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:3 (2000), 55-76.

<sup>43</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers', p.132.

‘[c]ounter propaganda... takes on many of the same forms as propaganda and can be just as active.’<sup>44</sup>

IRD’s preferred weapon of choice was the dissemination of unattributable information, commonly known as ‘grey’ propaganda through ‘state-private networks’. Networks of cooperation between the state and private interest groups was first highlighted by Scott Lucas in an examination of early Cold War CIA operations in Europe.<sup>45</sup> Scholars have only recently begun investigating the existence of such networks in the British context.<sup>46</sup>

Yet much of IRD’s reach to the British public was facilitated by these state-private networks. A NATO training pamphlet written by IRD demonstrated how important the private connection was for domestic propaganda work: ‘As a general rule, it seems to us to be a mistake, if not positively dangerous, to attempt to establish direct contact between a government department and the general public, and to pass out direct anti-communist propaganda’.<sup>47</sup> IRD’s briefing materials were distributed to senior contacts in numerous ‘civic and political’ organisations both within the UK and abroad, to inform that organisation’s own publicity output or to provide guidance on methods to counter communist penetration. These briefing materials consisted of analyses of ‘psychological intelligence’, ‘basic papers’ on specific subjects, ‘regular digests of global communist activities, and monitoring reports on communist statements and propaganda lines.’ Retaining at least an element of truth was important for the department’s corporate customers as many of the organisations which consumed IRD’s product, such as the Labour Party and the TUC, had reputations to maintain. The hidden hand of IRD helped to protect these private groups from ‘the charge of receiving anti-communist briefs from some sinister body in the FO’.<sup>48</sup>

The TUC was a particularly important partner in the state-private network. Not only did the body facilitate the dissemination of domestic anti-communist propaganda and provide a bulwark against communist penetration of the unions. The TUC’s anti-communist line

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<sup>44</sup> Rory Cormac, ‘The Information Research Department, Unattributable Propaganda, and Northern Ireland, 1971–1973: Promising Salvation but Ending in Failure?’ *English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXXI, No. 552, 1074:1104, p.1079. See also Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Sage 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2011), p.306.

<sup>45</sup> W. Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s war: The US Crusade against the Soviet Union, 1945-56* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> See Maguire, ‘Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain’.

<sup>47</sup> TNA CAB 134/737: ‘Annexe B: Countering Communism’, n.d., attached to AC(H) (51) 2, ‘Countering Communism’, Top Secret, 7 June 1951. Quoted in Maguire, ‘Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain’, p.643.

<sup>48</sup> Maguire, ‘Counter-Subversion’, p.643.

encouraged public support for Labour's anti-Soviet foreign policy. Following the creation of NATO in early 1949 and a subsequent spike in Soviet propaganda targeting workers in the defence industry, Christopher Mayhew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, noted 'the tremendous potential importance of the TUC at this stage of our foreign policy, when consolidation of public opinion behind the policies of the democratic governments has become as important a factor in foreign affairs as the relations between the governments themselves'.<sup>49</sup>

### *The Concept of Unattributable Information Work*

During the 1940's and 1950's IRD was settling into its role. Ostensibly an information department, IRD was wholly unique in the FCO's information infrastructure. The department's work ranged from the level of fairly innocuous white propaganda to close cooperation with Whitehall's intelligence agencies. As one Permanent Under-Secretary commented, IRD 'straddles the frontier between information and intelligence, and the amalgam is sui generis'.<sup>50</sup> As the defining term propaganda was rejected for its pejorative implications, the department adopted the descriptive classification of "unattributable" or "non-attributable" information to mark its unique contribution to Britain's foreign policy apparatus.

By the 1960's, IRD's role as the unattributable arm of Britain's information effort overseas had been solidified. The 'basic principle' which underpinned the department's core was that its material was 'intended to be passed discreetly to local leaders of opinion in all spheres, political, official, military, educational, trade union, Press, religious, etc. as ammunition to help them fight the threat of Communist subversion in their own way'. The department pitched itself as an objective defender of Western democracy whose 'material is as factual and as accurate as we can make it'. Such 'facts therein', the department argued, 'can all be used openly'. IRD itself claimed that the role of a British department in producing such material was hidden not because the information was false, but because of 'policy reasons' as well as that the charge that an official government department's claim of ownership of the material 'would in many circumstances lessen or destroy its effectiveness'. Thus, IRD's output was itself 'unclassified' but correspondence about it was classified.<sup>51</sup>

IRD's written output was split into three categories. Firstly, there was Category A material which was 'intended for people of considerable intelligence and knowledge'. For these people

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p.649.

<sup>50</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, letter from Palliser to Berrill, 16 February 1976.

<sup>51</sup> TNA: FCO 1110/1355, Memo by L.C. Glass, 28 November 1961; 'Use of I.R.D. written material', November 1961.

the department produced numerous periodicals at least on a monthly basis and basic research documents which were 'factual collations of intelligence'. Periodicals such as "The Interpreter", "Trends of Communist Propaganda", and "Asian Analyst" were designed to provide background information for 'influential individuals' whilst the basic research documents provided 'raw material for specialists in particular fields'. The material was passed on locally from overseas Missions. The Category B material was 'pitched at a lower and more popular level' and consisted of collated material which was 'easily quotable' for journalists and commentators and completed works like radio scripts and articles. Category C material bore 'a publishers imprint'. This consisted of leaflets, books and pamphlets either reprinted or commissioned by IRD or commercially published material which was endorsed by the department.<sup>52</sup>

IRD had become an esteemed department in the post-war era with its anti-communist propaganda deemed an invaluable role such that by the 1960s it had become one of the largest departments in the Foreign Office with 390 members of staff. Yet ultimately this was to be the department's peak. In 1962, the Prime Minister appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Lord Plowden to 'review the purpose, structure and operation' of Britain's overseas representation in foreign countries and the Commonwealth. The Plowden Committee was instructed to make recommendations 'having regard to changes in political, social and economic circumstances in this country and overseas'. The Plowden Committee came at a time of considerable economic change for Britain. The country's economic decline had become an accepted reality and culminated in its application to join the European Common Market. As the Plowden Committee pursued economic recalibration of Britain's overseas representation, Lord Strang was invited to pursue a review of one aspect of this overseas representation: the 'unavowable information services'.<sup>53</sup>

Strang, formerly Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in 1949 to 1953, was asked to 'examine the existing arrangements for the promotion of [Britain's] unavowable information services' and 'recommend what changes, if any, are required to increase the economy and efficiency of the operations involved'. Although 'unavowable information services' was a vague description, the report was ostensibly a review into the operations of IRD and whether or not they gave the government good value for money. It was perhaps expected that in times of economic woe, a non-traditional department would be one of the first to face such scrutiny.

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<sup>52</sup> TNA: FCO 1110/1355, 'Use of I.R.D. written material', November 1961.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Plowden Report', *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 54:215 (1964), 222-227, p.222.

Strang's terms of reference were limited to IRD's overseas output, and whilst he refrained from extensive study of IRD's domestic work influencing the citizens of the UK, he nevertheless touched on the domestic side. 'The attitude and opinion of press and public at home has an echo overseas', he argued, and as such 'is a factor in the conduct of our foreign policy'.<sup>54</sup>

Strang's report, which was delivered to the Cabinet in July 1963, was an extensive review of IRD's 'policy and objectives'. Strang was particularly interested in 'the high policy decisions leading to I.R.D.'s recent expansion'. Concurrently, the Assistant Under-Secretary in charge of IRD, Leslie Glass, had been undertaking his 'own enquiries with the object of seeing whether some internal reorganisation is needed within I.R.D.'<sup>55</sup> Thus, major restructuring of the department as a result of the Plowden Committee reforms was anticipated. Strang's report centred on IRD's 'unavowable activities', or, in the accepted Whitehall 'parlance', 'unattributable operations'. Unattributable had become the accepted descriptor of IRD's work and was used throughout the department's documentation in the 1960s and 1970s. The term suggested a less conspicuous and harmless insight into the department's operations and was possibly used as much to deflect criticism from within the Foreign Office as external criticism across Whitehall. The review was wide-ranging with input from IRD itself, senior diplomats in the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, Ministry of Defence, MI5 and MI6 as well as some Ambassadors, High Commissioners and IRD overseas staff.<sup>56</sup>

Initially, IRD had operated as a 'normal Foreign Office Department'. Yet the nature of its work was a hindrance for the department to operate on the same lines as traditional departments. Before IRD had even completed its first year of operation, issues were apparent. In August 1948, the first head of the department, Ralph Murray, submitted a report on IRD's work which emphasised the unquestionable value of the work yet reluctantly noted that IRD had 'been able to do pitifully little' thus far. The department contained just sixteen staff and 'its output had been meagre and late'. The fundamental issue for IRD's poor performance was with the department's open vote funding. As the then Chief Clerk, Harold Caccia, argued, IRD was ill-suited to act as a traditional department with the subsequent limitations that entailed. The 'speed and elasticity demanded by the "cold war" required', he argued, 'a department which could be freed to a certain extent from the trammels of peacetime establishment procedures'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> TNA: CAB 301/399, 'The unavowable information services of Her Majesty's Government overseas', July 1963.

<sup>55</sup> TNA: FCO 168/719, 'Inspection of I.R.D.', 13 March, 1963; 'Review of I.R.D. work', 18 March 1963.

<sup>56</sup> TNA: CAB 301/399, 'The unavowable information services of Her Majesty's Government overseas', July 1963.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

IRD faced numerous obstacles if forced to act as a traditional department. The innocuous title implying an information and/or research functionality was necessary to maintain the department's cover but ran afoul of the Public Accounts Committee. With IRD unable to explain the true nature of its role it was unable to justify a large build-up of staff and resources to Parliament. IRD was also unable to employ an appropriate amount of staff without affecting the Foreign Office's manpower ceiling. Moreover, at times the department required outside specialists whose 'rather expensive... salaries could not be assimilated to Foreign Office grades'.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, diplomats opted to split IRD's funding between the open and secret vote. The department's established Diplomatic Service officers and some other expenses which could be openly acknowledged would remain on the open vote, but all other expenses would be financed by a starting budget of £100,000 of secret vote money. The secret vote which was usually reserved for expenditure on intelligence work provided the necessary cover for the work and growth of a department whose work could not be acknowledged in Parliament.<sup>59</sup>

IRD's budget of £100,000 was not an insignificant amount. Indeed, IRD only reached this level of expenditure in 1952. Strang noted that staff recruitment and development of operations had taken 'much longer than Sir R. Murray had expected in 1948'. In 1952 the Government made cuts to the information budget for the following year. The fact that IRD was fully protected from these cuts emphasised how important the department was in Britain's foreign policy machinery. Strang in his role as Permanent Under-Secretary had reassured Heads of Missions that the cuts to information services was in no way an indication that the Government desired to withdraw from the ideological battle against the Soviet Union. He argued that 'the Government are resolved to continue their efforts to the highest possible degree'.<sup>60</sup>

When IRD was created in 1948 the department was expected to function as 'primarily an extension of our existing information and propaganda policy'. Initially, IRD material was broadly disseminated to cast sunlight on communist ills, yet by 1952 the department no longer considered 'countering communism as primarily a publicity task'. IRD's technique had evolved to a more targeted placement of material containing 'the necessary facts and arguments' to 'recognised leaders of public opinion... to influence their own following'. Material was disseminated to leaders in governmental and official spheres or to leaders from

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

the general public such as editors and trade union leaders. After two years IRD had developed a successful distribution network. Its material reached ministers and senior officials in 50 countries and influential people outside government circles in 60 countries.<sup>61</sup>

Yet by 1954, the then Permanent Under-Secretary, Ivone Kirkpatrick, realised that IRD's material was only having an effect on the already committed anti-communists. Its material was designed for those already opposed to communism but in need of being 'fed with information and counter-arguments' in order to adequately oppose the ideology in their social circles. This was an important task and a successful strategy in the West European democracies who were IRD's initial target when the department was created. But the strategy provided no benefit beyond these parameters. IRD's output was deemed too 'negative and defensive' to have any bearing on the neutral and non-aligned opinion formers. Such people were 'liable to link Communist and anti-communist propaganda together as a form of warmongering'. This was a significant concern as by the mid-1950s IRD's geographical focus was turning away from Europe toward the Commonwealth. Countries such as India with its non-aligned status and for whom IRD would give increasing attention as the 1950s progressed were ill-suited to receive this type of propaganda.<sup>62</sup>

Diplomats deemed it necessary to 'place our anti-communist propaganda in a positive and forward-looking context by reference to a number of principles' that embodied the "free world". This included emphasis on the freedom of the individual in the West, 'the importance of the consent and cooperation of the people in solving international political and economic problems', espousing the value of the UN, as well as developing contacts within the 'managerial and technical classes' of communist societies so that such people would eventually 'come to realise the falsity of Communist doctrine'.<sup>63</sup>

In 1960, IRD's anti-communist propaganda policy was yet again revised by senior diplomats. In IRD's previous twelve years of operations, propaganda had been guided by three propositions: '(i) that Communism, both in theory and practice, was bad in itself and that the Communist paradise was a myth; (ii) that the methods of achieving Communism were unacceptably unpleasant; and (iii) that the ultimate Communist aim was world domination'. Senior officials were concerned that the 'foundation of our propaganda would be whittled away'. The first proposition was being greatly undermined by Soviet prosperity which no

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

longer afforded IRD much propaganda material. The second proposition did not offer a convincing enough deterrent to the developing world as 'in their desperate poverty they might think any means justified the end'. Moreover, the softening relations between East and West as the Cold War entered a period of détente made propaganda exposing the Soviets ultimate aim for world domination more difficult. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Fredrick Hoyer-Millar, conceded that it appeared 'less convincing if the détente continued'.<sup>64</sup>

As the Soviet Union appeared more prosperous and cooperative the propaganda potential against it diminished. The challenge was how to expose the Soviet's methods which were now more sophisticated and more indirect. Hoyer-Millar argued that the 'real answer to Communism was a matter of fact not propaganda'. Western superiority over the Communist system was deemed a matter of fact but the battle between the two systems largely depended on which side the 'uncommitted world' would fall. Propaganda was essential for putting across the Western case and 'had an important role to play in making this demonstration successful'.<sup>65</sup>

Hoyer-Millar outlined the approach that anti-communist propaganda adopted for the sixties. IRD would concentrate on attacking 'only really vulnerable points in Soviet internal affairs' and 'show a constructive spirit by underlining points of proven Western superiority'. Exposing the means of achieving communism remained a theme of IRD's output but the work focused less on the undesirable material reality of communism with more emphasis placed on exposing the underlying ideology as an extension of 'Russian and Chinese imperialism'. The new propaganda policy was now more geared towards influencing the neutral and non-aligned nations with IRD instructed to produce propaganda that would 'demonstrate that the Western attitude towards nationalism and neutralism is more sincere than the Communist' and also 'underline the real meaning of "peaceful coexistence"'. Senior diplomats also recognised that the Soviet's indirect methods were proving successful and necessitated similar indirect tactics from Western side. Thus, Hoyer-Millar contended that Britain required 'more and better unofficial, unattributable and covert channels for our propaganda'.<sup>66</sup>

Strang noted that between IRD's first review of propaganda policy in 1952 and Hoyer-Millar's revised guidelines in 1960, there was 'a notable shift of emphasis'. In 1952, Europe had been IRD's pressing concern. With Stalin still alive and NATO a still relatively new addition to European defence, the threat Europe faced from communist subversion and aggressive

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

expansionist tactics underlined IRD's 'overriding preoccupation'. Merely two years later with Stalin gone and NATO developed into an 'effective shield', Britain started to question the effect of its anti-communist propaganda on neutral and non-aligned countries both in Europe and the rest of the democratic "free world".

By 1960, the Foreign Office Steering Committee effectively dismissed the notion of Europe as a battleground in the ideological struggle. Europe was not mentioned at all in the Steering Committee's assessment of Soviet policy, which, as Strang pointed out, put across 'the unspoken assumption... that Communism in Europe is no longer a problem at all'. The Committee outlined a conception of the World which consisted of a bipolar ideological struggle between "the West" and the "Soviet or Sino-Soviet Blocs" with the rest of the World holding a neutral or uncommitted position.<sup>67</sup>

This move away from Europe to an emphasis on the non-aligned group of countries was reflected in IRD's expanding geographic output over the course of the 1950s. In 1955, IRD added the first of its non-European productions, *Asian Analyst*, to its repertoire. In 1958, the department began producing regional editions of its *International Organisations* periodical, as well as *Middle East Opinion* and *Developments in China*. In 1961, IRD began producing its first material dedicated specifically for Africa. The new focus on the neutral and uncommitted world meant that certain lines of IRD's work were now completely detached from the department's original anti-communist remit. Certain political agitations like the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation necessitated IRD's involvement in countering anti-British propaganda even though the material that required countering was 'not of Communist inspiration at all'. By the 1960's anti-British non-communist propaganda work represented 'an appreciable part of the effort of the Department'.<sup>68</sup>

The major outcome of the Steering Committee's appeal for 'more and better unofficial, unattributable' outlets for IRD propaganda was a large expansion of the department in the early 1960s. In December 1960, the Permanent Secretaries on the Intelligence Services (PSIS) Committee backed the move to expand IRD. The Committee argued that 'the need for novel and unconventional forms of counter-subversive activity... is growing very rapidly', particularly in Africa and Central and Latin America. The Committee wanted to ensure that 'no opportunities were being lost, whether for lack of money, manpower or other resources'.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Subsequently, the then Assistant Under-Secretary, Ralph Murray, laid out proposals for an enlarged IRD. The proposed expansion included an enlargement of the Editorial Section and Special Editorial Unit with the addition of new publishing methods to produce ‘non-official’ commercially imprinted material. A ‘new cadre of high grade officers with specialist training for service mainly in Latin America, Africa and South East Asia’ was also proposed. These “field officers” supplemented the small amount of IRD research and editorial specialist staff working abroad. The expansion which Murray termed “The Great Leap Forward” was approved by the Treasury in May and totalled 24 new field officers and an increased budget to £300,000.<sup>69</sup>

IRD’s unique funding arrangement meant that it was like no other department in the Foreign Office. Although situated in the Foreign Office and under the authority of the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, due to the department’s secret vote financing the Treasury, which administered the secret vote, had direct financial control of IRD. Under this arrangement, IRD submitted yearly estimates to the Treasury in the autumn of each year. The estimates were then scrutinised by the department in the Treasury which allocated the secret vote and raised queries about expenditure and staff levels with the Foreign Office. Strang argued that the system allowed IRD ‘considerable freedom of manoeuvre’. IRD was not subject to a manpower ceiling like other departments were for example.<sup>70</sup>

Whilst IRD had avoided previous government cuts imposed on the Foreign Office’s information division, it was apparent by Strang’s review that the department had now become too large to receive immunity from the Plowden Committee. Strang noted that IRD was ‘more comfortably staffed than the Foreign Office proper’. It was ‘ten times or more larger than a normal Foreign Office Department’. With a total staff of 288, IRD dwarfed the combined figure of 83 people who staffed Information Policy Department, Information Executive Department and Cultural Relations Department. Due to the freedom IRD enjoyed with no staff ceiling restrictions, Strang argued that the efficiency of the department largely depended ‘on the quality of I.R.D.’s own administration’. He was, however, confident that IRD’s senior officers administered the department ‘with economy and efficiency’ and that ‘nothing is radically wrong’. Yet Strang conceded that this may not provide sufficient reassurance to Ministers who may instead insist on an inspection.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Following “The Great Leap Forward” of 1960, IRD’s expenditure had increased by 10-20% year on year. For the 1964 year, the department’s total expenditure was estimated at £750,000. Strang noted that it was not the Field Grade Officers Scheme which accounted for the large increases but rather operational expenditure. Despite the 10-20% percent annual expenditure increases over the previous four years, IRD’s senior administrators assured Strang that the department’s full expansion would only accumulate costs of £910,000 and once full expansion had been achieved IRD’s budget would be held at around this figure. Strang noted that, allowing for increases in costs and salaries, he did not envision that IRD’s secret vote expenditure would reach £1million ‘for several years to come’. Nonetheless, he recommended a ceiling of £1million until 1967 unless world events necessitated otherwise, but that IRD ‘should be made clear that the one million pounds is a ceiling and not a target’.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, the report on IRD was positive as would be expected from a former Permanent Under-Secretary who ‘had had a hand in its early development’. Strang noted the potential conflict of interest in reviewing the efficiency of a department he had helped create and conceded that he had begun the enquiry with a ‘pre-disposition in favour of I.R.D.’ Nevertheless, he ‘recognised that there might be legitimate misgivings in higher quarters of the Foreign Office and elsewhere about the scope and pace of its recent growth, and about the vigilance of its administration’. As such he had ‘opened my mind... as coolly[sic] and acceptably as I could to possible areas of doubt, and set out to probe them as thoroughly as I was able to do’. Despite any doubts from other quarters of the Foreign Office, Strang did not find any of IRD’s activities worrisome or the size and large sums of secret money involved in financing the department of any concern.<sup>73</sup>

Strang argued that his report was ‘reassuring’. He had suggested changes, but none were of ‘a drastic character’. Indeed, Strang recommended that IRD should in essence carry on with business as usual. He was assured that oversight of the department was sound. As long as those responsible for overseeing the department’s activities remained ‘penetratingly’ observant, ‘I.R.D. may be allowed to proceed safely along its present lines’. Strang felt it was unnecessary to create any new machinery to supervise IRD’s activities. Whilst he advocated an informal interdepartmental Review Committee at the Deputy or Assistant Under-Secretary level to assess the whole of the unavowable information effort and IRD’s activities, this would only be in the context of ‘framing’ the secret vote estimates for IRD and examining ‘any major project referred to it’. Supervision of IRD’s day to day operations would remain in-house. It was up to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the new Deputy Under-Secretary who had now been given the brief of supervising the whole information division to ensure that 'I.R.D. is kept to the mark'.<sup>74</sup>

By September 1963, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Harold Caccia, had approved Strang's review. With no recommendations for changes to the department's policy or expenditure, the only significant outcome of Strang's review was a push for greater coordination between IRD and the rest of the Foreign Office. In particular, Strang's recommendation for 'close association' between IRD and the political departments and coordination of attributable and unattributable propaganda was accepted by the Permanent Under-Secretary who instructed the senior diplomats responsible for IRD to foster better relations with the rest of the Foreign Office. This would be achieved by increasing the political department's awareness of IRD's work, whilst at the same time, ensuring that IRD did not 'overlook the interests of the Political Departments'.<sup>75</sup>

Whilst Strang had praised IRD as a 'key' and 'necessary' part of the Foreign Office which was efficiently run, it was apparent that the department was not working well within the rest of the Foreign Office infrastructure. Although some sections were aware of IRD's work and made use of the department's output, Strang had identified that sufficient knowledge of the department was lacking elsewhere, particularly within the staff ranks of the Political Departments. Part of the issue was IRD's physical isolation in Carlton House Terrace, which was away from the main Foreign Office building and made coordination trickier. Caccia instructed department heads to facilitate coordination between IRD and the Political Departments at the working level. It is not apparent how likely Caccia's instruction to conduct 'regular visits across the park' by IRD's Regional Advisors would help to establish effective coordination; what is evident is that early as 1963, IRD's physical isolation and limited coordination with other Foreign Office departments had been identified as a major issue. The slow bureaucratic response of the Foreign Office meant a solution wasn't pursued until another decade.<sup>76</sup>

One of the emerging trends of IRD that Strang's report highlighted was the consistent evolution of IRD policy in line with British foreign policy both within and beyond the Cold War context. IRD had been issued with three revised policy directives in 1952, 1954 and 1960. All three decrees had directed the department's resources to activities and areas of the world deemed

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> TNA: FO 1110/1614, Memo by Barclay, 4 September 1963.

<sup>76</sup> TNA: FO 1110/1614, Memo from Caccia, 12 November 1963.

most pressing to British concerns, even when, as was the case with the 1960 directive, the target had seemingly little to do with communism. For Strang, persistent scrutiny and revision of propaganda policy was crucial to the department's success as the unattributable arm of Britain's information effort. Although he had declined to recommend additional supervising infrastructure to guide IRD's operations, he did suggest that regular review of propaganda policy was necessary to ensure that secret vote money was being used wisely. He argued that 'the nature' of the department's work made 'it essential that the broad policy upon which that work is based should be deliberately and thoroughly reviewed every two or three years'. He contended that 'the time is ripe' for the immediate undertaking of such a review.<sup>77</sup>

### *Overseas Operations in the 1950's and 1960's*

The emerging literature on IRD's overseas campaigns demonstrates that the department was highly active in disputes involving former colonial territories. Such campaigns were designed to maintain British interest and influence in these former colonies and unattributable propaganda was a particularly useful weapon in countering communist subversion in areas which held particular importance to the British government.

IRD's operations in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s tended to focus on Britain's former colonial territories. As the American Cold War machine began to dwarf the British effort by the early 1950s, the UK's priority diverted from the communist world to the non-aligned group of nations. The US quickly outstripped the British Cold War effort in money and resources and dominated the Western offensive against the Soviet Union. By the mid-1950s Britain had abandoned subversive operations in the communist countries of Eastern Europe whilst the Americans continued to prod for weaknesses in the Iron Curtain.<sup>78</sup> Britain's interest instead transferred to the former colonies where operations were deemed perhaps more likely to produce positive outcomes.

As Paul McGarr has noted, the growing literature on Britain's operations in the non-aligned group of nations enables further understanding of IRD 'beyond its role in an East-West binary'. From amongst the non-aligned nations, India was the most important to the British. Indeed, preventing India from falling to communist ideology 'represented a "cardinal point" of post-war British foreign policy'. This objective was pursued rigorously through information warfare. Archibald Nye, the former British High Commissioner in India in 1948-52, spoke of

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<sup>77</sup> TNA: CAB 301/399, 'The unavowable information services of Her Majesty's Government overseas', July 1963.

<sup>78</sup> Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin and Political Warfare', p.443.

Britain's overt information agencies in the Subcontinent as being 'the spearhead of our attack on Communism'.<sup>79</sup>

In Asia, IRD had a close working relationship with Britain's overt diplomatic agencies. IRD's unattributable information work complemented the positive publicity efforts of the British Information Service (BIS) and the British Council. As McGarr argued, IRD's enthusiasm to work closely with overt information agencies 'was driven by an acceptance' within IRD 'that the impact of its anti-communist material would be maximised only if it were juxtaposed with pro-Western publicity work undertaken by BIS and the British Council'. This was a tactic which had been reaffirmed by the Cabinet Overseas Information Committee as an integral pillar of British Cold War information strategy following the experience of political warfare in the Second World War. In November 1951, the Committee argued that 'experience shows that negative propaganda fails largely of its effect unless it is accompanied by at least as great a volume of positive material'. Propaganda work to expose communist brutality was more effective when coupled with positive information on the benefits of Western style democracy.<sup>80</sup> According to McGarr, whilst IRD was involved in white, grey and black propaganda work in India, the majority of the department's activities in the region fell under the umbrella of grey propaganda, the dissemination of unattributable information.

The importance of India to British Cold War strategy cannot be over-stated. As the World's largest democracy, 'India was viewed in London as an indispensable bulwark against the expansion of communism in Asia'. This interest grew significantly after the fall of China to communism in 1949. The external threat to Indian borders posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) accompanied the internal risk of the Communist Party of India (CPI) who had already instigated an armed insurgency in the south of the country in 1948. The CPI also posed a threat at the ballot box with a nine per cent share of the vote in 1957. The British perceived India as vulnerable to communist infiltration.<sup>81</sup>

IRD's involvement in India began as early as 1948 when the department was created and reached its 'zenith' by the 1960s. At first the department struggled to gain a footing in the non-aligned country. Officials in the Nehru government were unwilling to compromise the country's neutral Cold War position through involvement with anti-communist activity which had the

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<sup>79</sup> McGarr, 'Information Research Department, British Covert Propaganda, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962: Combating Communism and Courting Failure', *The International History Review*, 41:1 (2019), 130-156, p.131.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

potential to damage relations with the Soviet Union and erode its political and economic backing of India. IRD's man in India, Peter Joy had a 'slow and laborious' time establishing contact with Indians who were willing to take covert IRD material, establishing sixty contacts by summer 1962. In the October, the long simmering border dispute between India and China spilled over into outright confrontation culminating in a military defeat for India. India had been outplayed by Chinese military strategists and propagandists. The country had been defeated as much in the publicity realm as it had been on the battlefield.<sup>82</sup>

The humiliating defeat for India presented a remarkable turnaround of IRD's fortunes. Suddenly Indian government departments, journalists and research institutions were 'clamouring' for IRD material 'on the inequities of Communist China'. The Indian government established a committee for 'War Information and Counter-Propaganda' which worked with BIS 'which continued to act as cover for IRD's undeclared operations in India'. The Indian government gave permission for Britain to pass on as much anti-communist propaganda material on China as it wished to Indian government departments and non-official bodies. The proviso was that the material had to be slanted against the Chinese not the Soviet Union as India continued to have in place an 'official ban on propaganda against the Soviet Union or communism as such'.<sup>83</sup>

Whilst IRD had managed to establish a relationship with the Indian government in the dissemination of anti-Chinese propaganda, some within IRD were concerned that this official collaboration would elevate Chinese communism as presenting a higher risk than the Soviet Union in the Indian public's consciousness. With 'instruction from London' Joy began a 'twin-track' IRD operation in India. IRD's official collaboration with the Indian government on anti-Chinese propaganda was accompanied by continuing the secret dissemination of anti-Soviet propaganda under the noses of Indian officials. IRD officers considered the anti-Soviet operation 'much more important' long-term than their official Indian state-sanctioned programme against China.<sup>84</sup>

In much the same fashion as IRD's domestic work in the UK, IRD's underground propaganda against the Soviet Union in India followed a similar formula. The department built an extensive network of roughly 400 'well placed and influential individuals' who received unattributable material and helped to disseminate it. In 1964 Joy had established a relationship with two

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp.142-3.

publishing bodies, the National Academy Publishing House in New Delhi and Siddharta publishing group. Each body published anti-communist literature written by IRD and subsidised by the British tax-payer to the tune of £10,000 per annum by spring 1967.<sup>85</sup>

The broader politics in India and the rest of the subcontinent led to a significant downturn in IRD's operations and influence in the region. Britain's objections to India's 'unwarranted aggression' in its war against Pakistan in 1965 strained Indo-British relations. Relations further deteriorated following the election of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister. Gandhi prioritised strengthening political, economic and military ties with the Soviet Union and had little interest in the UK, apparently due to a sizeable 'chip on her shoulder' for the British. Towards the end of the 1960s IRD was forced to operate in a more hostile climate and now deeply suspicious of British operations in the country, Indian officials suspected IRD's principal officer was 'an "undeclared friend" or MI6 operative'. As a result, John Freeman the British High Commissioner in India paused IRD's operations in the country.<sup>86</sup>

The effects of broader geopolitics in the subcontinent precipitated IRD's decline in India. Whilst Freeman's pause on IRD activity in 1967 lasted merely months, the blossoming relationship between India and the Soviet Union which was underpinned by the Indo-Soviet treaty of friendship and cooperation in 1971 firmly placed IRD's propaganda work 'on the backfoot'. When IRD was reorganised into a downsized IRD Mark II in 1972, the department in turn retracted from many of its global operations and India fell from Whitehall's 'list of the "Top 20" information priorities'. The significantly reduced IRD meant that the department's man in India, P.H. Roberts, was forced to expand his remit to include oversight of operations in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka alongside his responsibilities for Indian operations. Subsequently, the Indian operation shrunk drastically, with little time nor money to maintain the large network of IRD contacts that had been successfully built up in the previous decade. It was, as McGarr argued, evidence that Whitehall withdrew from the expansion of 'IRD's global role' which diplomats had enthusiastically pursued in the 1960s.<sup>87</sup>

### ***The English Section of IRD***

As Anglo-Soviet relations deteriorated after the Second World War, the Labour Government had been quick to respond to the growing threat of Soviet backed communism by launching its

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.144.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp.147-8

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.148.

anti-communist political warfare campaign, of which IRD played a major leading role. The history of IRD's early overseas operations has been well traversed in British Cold War historiographies, but relatively little is known about the department's domestic activities. The primary reason for this omission in the historical record is due to the limited availability of relevant documentation. As archival material on IRD's overseas operations began declassification in the mid-1990s inspiring academic interest in the department, IRD's domestic activities remained classified. It was not until 2012 that archival material was released which would finally allow researchers to examine IRD's propaganda work inside the UK using official documents.

Daniel Lomas made use of the new releases and provided the first account of the Cabinet-level machinery which provided official oversight for anti-communist activities designed to bolster the British state against enemies operating within the UK. The Official Committee on Communism (Home) was established in June 1951, some two years after similar machinery had been established for the overseas anti-communist offensive. The Labour Government had been initially reluctant to commit to a parallel domestic campaign, but the threat of communist influence in the British labour movement had eroded prior unease. Counter-propaganda was deemed necessary to 'immunise labour against Communist activities'. The domestic committee was chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brook, with Christopher Warner, Assistant Under-Secretary in charge of IRD, John Winnifrieth from the Treasury, and Dick White from MI5 in regular attendance. Although the machinery for oversight was interdepartmental, much of the domestic campaign was undertaken by IRD with a new section in the department created specifically for the task.<sup>88</sup>

IRD's English Section, sometimes referred to as the Home Desk, was created in October 1951 to collate 'all open-source and clandestine intelligence on domestic communist activities.'<sup>89</sup> Very little is known about this highly secretive section; the recent articles by Lomas and Thomas Maguire only begin to scratch the surface.<sup>90</sup> Whilst snippets of information on the section's organisational structure began to emerge in file declassifications from the late 2000s, documentation of the English Section's operations only appeared in the archives in January

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<sup>88</sup> Lomas, 'Labour Ministers, intelligence and domestic anti-Communism', p.130.

<sup>89</sup> Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain', p.648.

<sup>90</sup> Daniel Lomas, 'Labour Ministers'; Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain'.

2020.<sup>91</sup> The section itself was merely a tiny aspect of IRD's overall resources. When Strang conducted his review of IRD in 1963, the section had just three staff.<sup>92</sup> By the time Colin Crowe examined IRD in 1976, which led to the eventual integration of the department's responsibilities into the wider FCO information infrastructure, the section had been given a wider brief by then Prime Minister Harold Wilson to counter non-communist, as well as communist subversion in the UK, and grown to four members of staff.<sup>93</sup>

Although the English Section was organisationally small-scale, its activities were well supported by MI5 and MI6 who readily shared intelligence with the unit. As such, the section maintained 'the only governmental record (outside the Security Service) of British Communists, Fascists or fellow travellers.' Strang's review noted that the 'primary aim is unattributable propaganda through I.R.D. outlets', such as newspapers, political parties, and organisations. The section had a vast array of contacts who were 'interested in recognising and combatting Communist activity', through which unattributable information was filtered into the public domain. The English section also produced a monthly publication entitled "British Communist Activities".<sup>94</sup>

The recently declassified files on IRD's domestic activities depict a very limited appreciation of the work. The files contain very little documentation and a large amount of redaction, thus likely to have been heavily scrutinised by the government's weeders when assessing what information was deemed permissible for public attention. Although the files currently reveal an incomplete record, there is invaluable information to be gleaned. Until Wilson widened the scope of IRD's domestic operations to non-communist enemies of the British state, IRD's English Section focused on countering communist influence in areas of British life deemed most vulnerable to far-left ideologies: the education system, trade unions, and the Labour Party.

IRD's domestic campaign centred on exposing the CPGB, its members and front organisations to wider public attention by unattributable means. By exposing the CPGB's nefarious interference in British institutions, it was hoped that 'once the facts are known and public concern aroused those involved will seek their own remedies (in elections, in the courts or in

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<sup>91</sup> Colin Crowe's report on IRD in 1976 (FCO 84/52) was declassified in 2008 and briefly discusses the International Movements Section which the English Section was renamed as. See the series FCO 168 for the English Section's operational files.

<sup>92</sup> TNA: CAB 301/400, 'The English and International Organisations Section', undated.

<sup>93</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>94</sup> TNA: CAB 301/400, 'The English and International Organisations Section', undated.

other ways)'.<sup>95</sup> The collapse of the CPGB's electoral ambitions following the defeat of all its one hundred parliamentary candidates in the 1950 general election had forced British communists to seek indirect political power. The party consolidated its efforts on its various front organisations and planned to capture the labour movement. IRD noted that this plan had almost come to fruition when, by 1955, the CPGB required only one more seat on the National Executive of Amalgamated Engineering Union in order 'to get virtual control of the Trades Union Congress' (TUC). The plan only failed because the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 drove away nearly a quarter of the CPGB membership, severely damaging its penetration of the unions. The party had recovered by the late 1950s to the point where one in ten full-time trade union officials were also members of the CPGB or fellow travellers.<sup>96</sup>

Due to the strong relationship between the Labour Party and trade unions, the latter was a pressing concern for IRD. Seen as a gateway through which communist influence was channelled, the English Section had been given a mandate from the Committee on Communism (Home) to counter the potential agenda-setting power of the CPGB within the large trade unions who held a block vote in the TUC and the Labour Party. The section's operations appeared to have been particularly focused on the 'Communist-controlled' Electrical Trades Union (ETU) who sought to influence Labour defence policy in the late 1950s. Due to its CPGB control, the ETU backed multilateral nuclear disarmament in line with official Soviet policy. Coincidentally, this put the CPGB in common agreement with the Labour leadership who also backed multilateralism but had to face down resistance with the left-wing of the Party whose insistence on a unilateral policy had ignited an internal struggle over Labour's defence policy.<sup>97</sup>

The issue came to ahead at the Labour Party Conference in Scarborough in October 1960. Labour's left-wing Bevanite faction tabled a motion to commit Labour to a policy of unilateral disarmament. The Labour leadership and most of the parliamentary party objected but were defeated due to union backing for unilateralism. An IRD officer from the English Section attended the conference to oversee proceedings and report back. Greatly impressed by the 'oratorical brilliance' of Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, the officer had been assured that despite the Party's ideological split over defence issues 'there is no doubt that, possibly against

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<sup>95</sup> FCO 168/740, 'Committee on Communism (Home): communism in the United Kingdom and counter-measures', May 1961.

<sup>96</sup> FCO 168/739, 'Committee on Communism (Home): communism in the United Kingdom and counter-measures', May 1961.

<sup>97</sup> TNA: FCO 168/73, 'Labour Party Conference, 1960', 10 October 1960.

all the expectations of the pundits, it really is in very good heart'. The officer asserted that the Party had faced bigger crises and would certainly survive.<sup>98</sup>

Although the English Section's file releases reveal very little about operational activities within the domestic space, what is evident is that the section had been primarily focused on monitoring the ideological shifts within the British left. The left-wing unilateralism and multilateralism dispute of the late 1950s and early 1960s sparked keen interest with the section's officers. When the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was founded in January 1958, the English Section, as would be expected from a unit instructed to monitor and counter domestic threats, closely monitored the movement. Whilst CND members were mainly left-wing Labour voters, its position campaigning for unilateral disarmament held a cross-party appeal with all major British parties represented in the membership, except the CPGB whose multilateralism put British communists in direct opposition to the more mainstream left.<sup>99</sup>

The rise of CND offered a bulwark against CPGB influence in Britain. In a report to the Committee on Communism (Home), the English Section contended that the 'rapid growth of the C.N.D. in size and influence greatly embarrassed the C.P.G.B. and the British Peace Committee'. Fear of being usurped by a more influential grass roots movement forced British communists to set aside ideological differences and seek to 'exploit some of this spontaneous enthusiasm for their own ends and add their weight to a movement which [...] embarrassed the responsible leaders of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party'. Whilst unilateralism 'doctrinally offended Moscow', the CPGB and CND both opposed NATO and American military bases in Britain, therefore from 1958, the leadership of the CPGB 'granted dispensation' to individual British communists to become members of CND and instructed CPGB members and front organisations to support CND efforts. The official policy of multilateralism hadn't been abandoned but merely 'muted' whilst the CPGB fought to gain a foothold in the unilateralist movement.<sup>100</sup>

The English Section were not alarmed by these developments. From their perspective it appeared that communists within the movement were tolerated by CND but held with some suspicion. The report written in 1960 noted that no member of the CPGB had ever held a position on the National Executive of CND and most of the executive were 'well-known anti-

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> TNA: FCO 168/66, Memorandum for the Official Committee on Communism (Home): 'The Communist Party of Great Britain and its attitude to unilateral nuclear disarmament', 14 October 1960.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

communists.’ The English Section believed that the lack of CPGB representation within the CND leadership was unlikely to change as the executive was not democratically elected and the leadership itself appeared unwilling to elevate a communist to a position of power.<sup>101</sup>

Evidently, in the early 1960s the English Section did not consider CND to be a grave threat. Indeed, the section viewed CND in a positive light. In their eyes the movement had consolidated the radical left around the issue of unilateralism, a policy antithetical to the interests of British communists. And whilst the CPGB was losing members, CND had drawn ‘considerable support among the intelligentsia and the young of all classes.’<sup>102</sup> The English Section had not been concerned by CND’s ability to successfully steer Labour towards adopting unilateralism, a policy that the section were confident Gaitskell would overturn at the next Labour conference. Instead, Britain’s domestic propagandists had been most concerned by the Labour leadership’s attack on CND as a movement of ‘fellow travellers’. An accusation the English Section deemed ‘a tactical error’ and ‘really quite inaccurate’ as CND had established its opposition to NATO and US military bases in Britain before communists started to join the movement.<sup>103</sup>

The English Section viewed Labour’s defence issue as a pressing concern and one which the leadership had mishandled. Although confident in Gaitskell’s leadership skills, the section’s officer who attended the Scarborough conference of 1960 stressed that the Labour leader would be prudent to avoid any more ‘gaffes’ like the attack on CND. Interestingly, the English Section’s vehement anti-Communism put them at odds with the Labour leadership. Whilst Labour’s paramount concern centred on CND’s growing influence within the party and its ability to shape defence policy, the English Section considered CND’s growth as overwhelmingly positive as it had galvanised the left-wing of the party and pushed the communists even further toward the fringes. The section had been more alarmed by the leadership’s acceptance of support for multilateralism from the communist-backed ETU at previous votes on the issue at the 1957 and 1958 conferences. Evidently, the English Section considered CND as a potential wedge strategy to curtail communist influence in the Labour Party and the TUC.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> TNA: FCO 168/73, ‘Labour Party Conference, 1960’, 10 October 1960.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

The English Section cautioned against a campaign of anti-CND publicity. Although communist penetration of the movement had been evident at branch level, unilateralism had become the official position of the Labour Party and thus acquired political party backing which was dangerous for state-sanctioned propaganda to challenge. Whilst the debate over Labour's defence policy had been hotly contested and likely to be overturned, it was deemed 'sensitive ground even for unattributable publicity'. Therefore, the English Section proposed '[d]iscreet publicity action' to highlight the exploitation of 'the genuine humanitarian sentiment of C.N.D against the bomb for entirely unrelated political purposes in support of the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy'.<sup>105</sup>

The English Section's primary concern over the communist takeover of the ETU leadership was unsurprising. In May 1956, the Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brook, had advised the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, that the time was ripe for countermeasures against communist infiltration of the union whose membership included GCHQ employees. Eden cautioned against strong action against the union; 'we shall have to go very carefully', he warned. Yet by the late 1950s the situation had become increasingly worrying for the government. With GCHQ set to expand its signals capacity close to the Iron Curtain and increase Special Operations, union membership of GCHQ personnel presented an obvious security risk. Thus, the ETU became the focus of MI5's operations against communist entryism in British trade unions, not only because of the GCHQ connection, but also because America's Central Intelligence Agency had become increasingly concerned over communist ballot-rigging in British trade unions. This forced a more robust response from the British Security Service despite Eden's earlier misgivings.<sup>106</sup>

IRD, through its English Section, worked closely with MI5 on the operation against the ETU. The section was given ample propaganda material with a high-profile court case alleging vote rigging in the 1959 election for general secretary of the ETU. Jock Byrne, the union's Glasgow area secretary and avowed anti-communist, had been expected to win the election but ended up losing to the incumbent Frank Haxell, a member of the CPGB. Byrne and another member of the union's Executive Committee, Frank Chapelle, challenged the election result in the courts. In June 1961, a court judgement concluded that a group of the ETU's members

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<sup>105</sup> FCO 168/739, 'Committee on Communism (Home): communism in the United Kingdom and counter-measures', May 1961.

<sup>106</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence*, (John Murray, London 2001), p.546.

including Haxell had prevented Byrne's ascension 'by "fraudulent and unlawful" means'.<sup>107</sup> Haxell was expelled and Byrne became leader and the union began a slow purge of communist office holders. By 1965 communists were banned from all positions of leadership within the ETU. Chapple, a moderate, became general secretary following Byrne's retirement in 1966 and continued to lead the union until 1984.<sup>108</sup>

As expected, the English Section exploited the propaganda potential of the court case. The section informed the Official Committee on Communism (Home) that the case offered 'opportunities for discreetly encouraging a moderate volume of anti-communist press comment'.<sup>109</sup> The unit was aided in this by the Labour MP and journalist Woodrow Wyatt who presented himself as a neutral observer of the ETU dispute but had in fact been a long-standing close contact of IRD and shareholder in the department's Arab News Agency. Wyatt fronted a television documentary on vote rigging in trade union elections which helped to publicise the issue to the wider British public.<sup>110</sup>

In the early 1960s, the English Section considered it their 'principal task' to 'ensure maximum publicity for the results of the ETU Court case'. However, the ETU wasn't the only union under close scrutiny; the section had several other unions 'under active study, in consultation with the Security Service', including the National Union of Teachers even though reports of communist infiltration were considered by the English Section to be 'undoubtedly exaggerated'. Other unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Painters and Decorators were viewed as more at risk of communist penetration of the leadership. The ETU Court case had been a boon for the English Section as it meant parallels were easily drawn with similar allegations of vote rigging in other union elections and the message of communist wrongdoing in the unions could easily be relayed to the British public. The outcome of the court case was also seen by IRD as a vindication of its ten-year campaign against the CPGB.<sup>111</sup>

The remainder of the English Section's resources concentrated on monitoring and exposing the activities of societies and cultural associations either already under the control of communists such as the British Youth Festival Committee, or those deemed vulnerable to communist

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<sup>107</sup> Rob Sewell, *In the Cause of Labour: A History of British Trade Unionism*, (Wellred Books, London, 2020).

<sup>108</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.547.

<sup>109</sup> TNA FCO: 168/63, 'Official Committee on Communism (Home): Communism in the Trade Unions', 6 October 1960.

<sup>110</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.547.

<sup>111</sup> TNA: FCO 168/574, 'Report for Sir Humphrey Trevelyan: The work of International Organisations and English Sections', April 1962; FCO 168/739, 'Committee on Communism (Home): communism in the United Kingdom and counter-measures', May 1961.

penetration. The Movement for Colonial Freedom fell into the latter of these classifications. The movement which was founded in 1954 and led by the Labour MP and anti-war activist Fenner Brockway had evidently elicited concern with the Gaitskell leadership. By early 1962, the English Section had 'improved their already close liaison with the Labour Party'. An arrangement had been struck whereby the section regularly exchanged 'particularly sensitive information with the Opposition Chief Whip'. Evidence of communist penetration of Brockway's movement had been passed on to Labour and the section awaited the results of the party's own inquiries. Presumably, once communist encroachment had been confirmed, the story would be leaked into the British press as had been the case with the London Peace Campaign and the Youth Peace Campaign which had both been exposed as communist fronts by the Sunday Telegraph in 1962.<sup>112</sup>

Towards the end of the 1960s, the presence of a domestic anti-communist propaganda unit housed within IRD had aroused the attention of the Prime Minister Harold Wilson. In 1968, Wilson asked his Cabinet Secretary Burke Trend 'why the "home desk" of IRD is where it is.' As IRD had been tasked with overseas unattributable information work, and resided under the authority of the Foreign Secretary, the presence of a unit for domestic operations puzzled the Prime Minister. The case was compounded further by the fact that representatives from the Home Office had not been included in the official membership of the Committee on Communism (Home) which oversaw the domestic campaign.<sup>113</sup>

Trend reported that Wilson had been 'doubtful about the wisdom of an arrangement which leaves with the Foreign Office the responsibility for certain activities (sometimes of a rather sensitive kind) on the domestic front'. Instead, the Prime Minister asked officials to consider transferring responsibility of the English Section to the Ministry of Labour or Home Office. Wilson's desire to remove control of domestic operations from the Foreign Office had been an unwelcome interference for diplomats. The head of IRD, John Peck, set about justifying IRD's home desk arrangement and attempted to persuade the Prime Minister to maintain IRD's control of domestic operations.<sup>114</sup>

Peck argued that when Ministers had identified the need for a domestic campaign, IRD had been selected as the 'natural location' for the English Section due to the department's

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<sup>112</sup> TNA: FCO 168/574, 'Report for Sir Humphrey Trevelyan: The work of International Organisations and English Sections', April 1962.

<sup>113</sup> TNA: FCO 168/2804, Memo from Trend, 3 April 1968.

<sup>114</sup> TNA: FCO 168/2804, Trend to Greenhill, 22 March 1968; Memo from Trend, 3 April 1968.

knowledge of communist fronts and circle of British contacts. Although Wilson viewed the Home Office as a more suitable location, Peck stressed that this would be inappropriate for 'arguments of constitutional propriety' as the CPGB had not been banned from participating in electoral politics. The head of IRD maintained that domestic activities housed under his department somewhat shielded the government from criticism. If IRD's domestic work was exposed, the government 'could hope to have to have least difficulty or embarrassment in defending them' as part of IRD's work against international communism. Peck also stressed that whilst the English Section came under the general control of the Foreign Office, the section's operations were under monthly review by an interdepartmental group chaired by the head of IRD, with overall authority for domestic activities controlled by the Committee on Communism (Home). Peck added that the absence of representatives from the Home Office and Ministry of Labour had since been corrected.<sup>115</sup>

By April 1968, Peck noted that the Prime Minister 'seemed largely convinced by the reasoning' for maintaining IRD's control of domestic operations. Yet Wilson still requested a meeting on the matter. One issue which concerned the Prime Minister was how the new staunchly left-wing Minister of Labour, Barbara Castle, would react to news of a domestic anti-communist campaign whose activities infringed upon the affairs of her new portfolio. As Minister of Labour, Castle would have to be brought into the picture as the English Section's primary focus was countering communism in the trade unions, but Wilson thought 'she might be less ready than her predecessor to accept the situation'. Peck and Trend opted to downplay domestic work as just a campaign against 'Moscow communism', but instead present Castle with the idea that the English Section countered 'a mixture of various trends of Communism' such as 'Trotskyists, Anarchists and Syndicalists' as well as Soviet-backed communists. Trend thought the notion of IRD pushing back against 'a general problem of decomposition' which these trends of communism threatened would be more likely to gain Castle's acceptance.<sup>116</sup>

By July 1968, Wilson agreed that the English Section should continue under IRD's control and therefore the section remained housed within the department until the demise of IRD in 1977. However, the English Section suffered a diminution of its activities in 1974 due to the Labour Government's Social Contract with the TUC. Under the Social Contract, Labour accepted 'economic and social policies favoured by the TUC in exchange for voluntary wage control',

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<sup>115</sup> TNA: FCO 168/2804, Trend to Prime Minister, 26 July 1968.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: FCO 168/2804, Peck to Denis Greenhill, 9 April 1968.

a deal struck to frantically lower inflation.<sup>117</sup> Due to the new arrangement with the trade unions, the Cabinet Secretary, John Hunt, noted that ‘the political background had now changed’ and therefore it was perhaps no longer expedient to continue IRD’s exposure of communism within the trades union movement. If dissemination of the English Section’s material on the unions continued, greater control of the efforts were now required as the new political situation meant it was undesirable to leave the release of politically sensitive information to the sole discretion the small unit. ‘[I]f Mrs. Castle was negotiating with Mrs. Esther Brookstone’, Hunt hypothesised, ‘it might or might not be desirable to bring out the latter’s Communist affiliations’.<sup>118</sup>

The political significance of the Social Contract for the Labour Party had been paramount and the necessity of the deal for party’s future electoral chances produced a dilemma around the continuation of domestic anti-communist activities. The Foreign Secretary, Anthony Crosland, argued that the English Section’s work should no longer be retained under the direction of the Foreign Office, whilst Wilson, previously supportive of the work, thought that the dissemination of domestic unattributable material should cease altogether. Officials in the Foreign Office contended that even if distribution ceased, the mere collection of information on communists within the unions posed political risks. Following a suggestion to move the whole section to MI5, officials in IRD pressed to retain the home domestic capacity within their department. By November 1974, an agreement had been reached to keep the English Section under the IRD umbrella but suspend its distribution of unattributable information and limit the section to research only.<sup>119</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

IRD’s intriguing domestic operations are yet to be fully scrutinised; this chapter provides merely a cursory overview of the English Section’s work. Hopefully with more file declassifications the full picture of the department’s operations against British communists and its relationship with MI5 will emerge. What can be confidently asserted from these initial file releases is that domestic operations played a significant role within IRD and therefore the department should be relocated in the scholarship as both an international and domestic weapon. The remodelling of IRD as a dual sided domestic and foreign instrument within three

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<sup>117</sup> Roger Tarling and Frank Wilkinson, ‘The Social Contract: post-war incomes policies and their inflationary impact’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1:4 (1977), 395-414, p.395.

<sup>118</sup> TNA: FCO 168/5396, Thomas Brimelow to T. C. Barker, 23 October 1974; memo from T. C. Barker, 29 October 1974.

<sup>119</sup> TNA: FCO 168/5396, memo from T. C. Barker, 29 October 1974; Hunt to Brimelow, 7 November 1974.

years of the department's creation also gives credence to the notion that in the British experience, political warfare was very much a domestic as well as internationally pursued strategic framework.

Although IRD had been created in 1948 to support Ernst Bevin's diplomatic measures to fight off a communist penetration of Western Europe, by the 1960s IRD's international work increasingly had little to do with communism and became more concentrated on anti-nationalist propaganda work in the former colonies.<sup>120</sup> Only India appeared to fall outside this trend. Thus, by the late 1950s IRD's anti-communist tradition was mostly directed at its domestic campaigns and the anti-communist fight became primarily located within the British trade union movement. This work only ceased when it became no longer politically expedient for the Labour Government to pursue when their struggle with the unions appeared to have been solved by the Social Contract with the TUC.

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<sup>120</sup> TNA: CAB 301/399, 'The unavowable information services of Her Majesty's Government overseas', July 1963.

## *Chapter Two: IRD Mark II*

### *Introduction*

As the seventies approached, IRD's future looked doubtful. A series of cost-saving reviews in the 1960's had forced the FCO to downsize and retract from costly overseas diplomatic operations. As the FCO across the board was forced to reduce its expenditure, IRD also had to enact considerable cost saving measures. In 1965, the department had been significantly reduced in size, losing a third of its staff. Yet only four years later, even more cost savings were demanded. At the cusp of the next decade, with the FCO under severe pressure from the Treasury to radically reduce its expenditure, diplomats started to question whether IRD justified its costs which were relatively large in comparison to other information departments. Some even began advocating its closure. After all, the department's output was viewed as fairly unimpressive considering the amount of staff it had on board and there was lingering suspicion created by the perceived dirty tricks aspects of the department's operations. Moreover, the intensity of Cold War conflict had dissipated to some degree, replaced by a new era of détente. This ushered in significant changes, such as the British recognition of East Germany.<sup>1</sup> Many asked: was there even a need for an anti-communist propaganda unit anymore?

The answer in much of Whitehall was a resounding no. By the seventies, Britain had no need for a dedicated anti-communist propaganda instrument. IRD was costly, overstaffed, and communism was no longer the inherent threat to British day-to-day life that it once was. The Communist Party of Great Britain now faced serious competition from a range of Trotskyist groups described as the 'New Left' and entryism from groups such as Militant Tendency.<sup>2</sup> It still remained a concern of course, but East-West tensions had diminished from the pressure-cooker intensity at the height of the Cold War.

Fortunately for IRD, the department was no longer just an anti-communist propaganda unit. During the 1960's, as communism receded from its monolithic threat level, the department had branched out and become involved with other areas which threatened British interests. As the seventies approached, IRD had become involved in non-communist areas of concern in domestic politics, notably Britain's campaign for entry into the European Economic Community (EEC). Here IRD focused on influencing British public opinion in favour of EEC

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<sup>1</sup> Luca Ratti, *Britain, Ost-and Deutschlandpolitik, and the CSCE, 1955-1975*. (London: Peter Lang, 2008); Gerald R. Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European Détente 1949-1967* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> John Callaghan, 'Industrial Militancy, 1945-79: The Failure of the British Road to Socialism?' *Twentieth Century British History* 15:4 (2004), 388-409.

membership. This type of mass-persuasion in internal political affairs was a technique deemed valuable by the Cabinet and worth maintaining in spite of pressures to reduce the size of the FCO.<sup>3</sup>

Because questions were raised as to the value of maintaining an anti-communist unit in the era of détente, a new IRD was born. As the government reinforced its commitment to propaganda as a state instrument, IRD was reconceptualised as IRD Mark II. It was refashioned as a propaganda unit to address all threats to Britain's interests, both overseas and domestic, and legitimised by moving most of the department from the secret to open vote. A department which was openly financed raised fewer suspicions and this was integral to the department's future as it prepared to become further involved in controversial partisan issues affecting British domestic life.

### *Overseas Retraction in response to the Plowden and Duncan Committees*

From the end of the Second World War to the late 1970s, the British government conducted several major reviews of the Foreign Office. The first of which, the Eden-Bevin reforms, was of a bureaucratic nature. These reforms were launched in 1943 by the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and continued in the post-war era by his successor Ernest Bevin. The aim of the reforms was to democratise the Diplomatic Service which included overhauling the recruitment process to allow women to enter diplomatic work rather than just occupying secretarial positions.<sup>4</sup> In the immediate years following the Second World War, Britain still considered itself a leading world power and the size and strength of the Foreign Office reflected this perception. By the 1960's, however, the reality of the UK's economic decline had been realised and the government could no longer maintain a Diplomatic Service which was now too large and costly for the country's reduced global standing. In the 1960's and 1970's, the Foreign Office was subjected to a series of cost saving restructures designed to create a Diplomatic Service which matched Britain's more diminutive economic power.

The second review by the Plowden Committee in 1964 recommended the Foreign Service refocus its efforts on 'bread and butter diplomacy'. The committee argued that while Britain should venture to maintain its influence in global affairs, the loss of empire necessitated a retraction from spaces it could no longer afford to occupy. The country's economic survival

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office and Domestic Propaganda on the European Community, 1960–72,' *Contemporary British History*, 23:2 (2009), 155-180.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World, 1945-9: The View from the Foreign Office', *International Affairs*, 61:2 (1985), pp.223-235, p.225.

was now central to its diplomatic efforts and 'had replaced the traditional focus on external security and political influence'.<sup>5</sup>

Just five years later in 1969, another cost cutting exercise was imposed on the FCO, this time following pressure from the Treasury. In a move that was symptomatic of the time, the establishment of the Duncan Committee coincided with the withdraw of forces from East of Suez.<sup>6</sup> Further compounding the symbolism of that shift in policy, the report noted that the aim of the Committee's inquiry was 'to spell out, belatedly, the logic of the end of empire'. Arguing that Britain was now 'a major power of the second order', the report designated the areas where Britain should focus her limited resources. Thus, the world was divided into two halves according to British interests. The 'Area of Concentration' comprised North America and Western Europe, and as the name suggested, it designated areas of most importance for British diplomacy. The report also identified an 'Outer Area' of interest to British diplomats which included the Middle East, the Commonwealth, and Japan.<sup>7</sup> The Duncan Report was a moment of existential crisis for British diplomats, who were told that their embassies were overstaffed compared to the French and the Germans and coincided with a plan to demolish the historic Foreign Office building next to Downing Street in favour of a series of a new office blocks.<sup>8</sup>

The staunch realism of the Plowden Committee forced the FCO to re-evaluate its expenditure on overseas representation. Although Plowden did not make the same level of cost saving demands as the Duncan Committee, the seeds for reducing overseas representation had been firmly planted. Merely one year after Plowden, IRD's size had been cut by one third. But it was the Duncan Committee, under the Chairmanship of Sir Val Duncan, which would impose the most punitive cost savings on the FCO. The Duncan Report set the tone for IRD's future as the seventies approached. A department dedicated solely to one objective of opposing communist influence around the world could no longer justify its expense. Alongside the staff and budget cuts forced by the Duncan recommendations, IRD was ordered to branch out and tackle other existing threats to Britain's interests. In order to survive IRD was forced to remodelled itself as a flexible auxiliary, ready to counter any perceived threat to British

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Foreign Office since 1945'. In: *Opinion publique et politique extérieure en Europe*. III. 1940-1981. École Française de Rome, 1985. pp.201-211, p.202.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Beeley, 'The changing role of British international propaganda,' *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 398.1 (1971): 124-129; Andrew Shonfield, 'The Duncan Report and its critics,' *International Affairs* 46:2 (1970): 247-268.

<sup>7</sup> Adamthwaite, 'The British Foreign Office since 1945', p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Hamilton, 'Accommodating Diplomacy: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Debate over Whitehall Redevelopment,' *Contemporary British History*, 18:3 (2004), 198-222.

interests. It would become more anti-anti-British, not merely an anti-communist, propaganda unit.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Impact of the Duncan Committee on IRD***

From its conception in 1948, the story of IRD was one of remarkable growth over the subsequent two decades. During the 1950s the department increased in size and budget and from 1951 was given an expanded brief which included responsibilities for domestic propaganda. But the central tenet of the department's remit to expose and counter communist expansionist desires on the international stage remained at its core. The importance of IRD's anti-communist work to successive government's Cold War policies is reflected in the vast growth of the department. In 1949 IRD had just 52 staff. By the 1960s, the department had established itself as a key body in Britain's intelligence and information machinery. It had become one of the largest departments in the FCO with 390 members of staff, 48 of which were based abroad, and a budget of over £1 million from the secret vote.<sup>10</sup>

Under Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, and even the first Harold Wilson government, the Foreign Office was urged to spend less time seeking trade treaties with the Russians and spend more time attacking Moscow in areas of ideological vulnerability and also compete for influence in the Third World.<sup>11</sup> One of the reasons that IRD grew so big in the 1960's was the range of targets that included not only Moscow but also Chinese activity in India and South East Asia, together with Nasserite propaganda in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup>

As the seventies approached, however, IRD's staunch anti-Communism was slightly at odds with rest of the government's policy-making machinery which had begun to soften the anti-communist rhetoric in the emerging era of détente. IRD now gave some attention to domestic propaganda in the context of the European Community.<sup>13</sup> IRD's expertise in Soviet methods

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<sup>9</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Reddaway, 21 July 1970.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Lomas, 'British government's new 'anti-fake news' unit has been tried before – and it got out of hand', *The Conversation*, 25 January 2018. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/british-governments-new-anti-fake-news-unit-has-been-tried-before-and-it-got-out-of-hand-90650>

<sup>11</sup> Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics, 1964-1970* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Paul McGarr, 'The Information Research Department, British covert propaganda, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962: combating communism and courting failure?' *The International History Review*, 41:1 (2017), 130-156; Simon Collier, 'Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda: the Foreign Office Information Research Department in the Middle East and Africa, 1954-1963, (PhD Hertfordshire University 2014); Darius Wainwright, 'Equal partners? The Information Research Department, SAVAK and the dissemination of anti-communist propaganda in Iran, 1956-68,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, (2017): 1-21; Sarah Davies, 'The Soft Power of Anglia: British Cold War Cultural Diplomacy in the USSR,' *Contemporary British History*, 27:3 (2013), 297-323.

<sup>13</sup> Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office and domestic propaganda on the European Community, 1960-72.'

and propaganda was still required, but the department's size and scope had outgrown its need in the changing political climate of the 1970s. The department was forced to change with the times.

The cultural climate necessitated reform of IRD, but it was the issue of money which opened the door to the major reconceptualisation of the department and even potential for its demise. The reorganisation of IRD in the early seventies was a consequence of increasing pressure on the FCO to meet the recommendations of the Duncan Committee. As the FCO was being squeezed, some senior officials began to question whether an organisation such as IRD needed to command such a large workforce and a budget of £1 million. Some openly questioned whether such a department was even needed and began advocating for its closure. Following the committee's report, the FCO was forced into a drastic reorganisation of its information departments. This included the amalgamation of Information Policy Department (IPD) and Guidance Department into one department. Alongside this was the creation of IRD Mark II with its relocation from the isolated Riverwalk House to the heartland of the FCO information departments and a shift of much of IRD's budget from the secret to open vote.<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of the Duncan Committee report, the FCO's inspectorate was required to review the structure and staffing of around 250 overseas posts over the course of three years. The main impetus was extracting economies from the FCO's overseas expenditure with pressure coming from the Treasury and Civil Service Department for the FCO to identify posts which seemed 'to offer the best prospects for early economies'.<sup>15</sup>

For IRD, the Duncan Report presented two challenges. Firstly, the report had advocated for a 'possible retraction of overseas representation', a recommendation the Treasury and Civil Service Department had been determined to enact over the course of the three-year inspection. Thus, the FCO faced budget reductions which would affect IRD as well as any other department involved in overseas representation. But the report also 'envisaged... bringing a number of attaché and specialist posts more closely within the responsibility of the Diplomatic Service administration'. The administration was liable 'to pay for certain overseas posts not at present charged to them'. As IRD staff were drawn from a separate IRD cadre which was separate to

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<sup>14</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Memo from Norman Reddaway, 2 July 1970.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Broadley, 14 April 1970.

the main Diplomatic Service this meant some IRD officers would have to be transferred to the Diplomatic Service Vote.<sup>16</sup>

Diplomats were under pressure from the Civil Service Department to reduce its overall expenditure on overseas representation and, in particular, the FCO's use of the secret vote. By May 1970, the Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary, Edward Peck, received repeated requests from the Cabinet Secretary, Burke Trend, to transfer some of IRD's activities from the secret to open vote. The secret vote, Peck explained to colleagues, could no longer be used to fund activities 'which could equally well be financed overtly' as 'it was under as much pressure as Open Votes'. If no progress on this had been made by the autumn, Trend had threatened 'to terminate without further ado Secret Vote financing for certain IRD overseas posts'.<sup>17</sup> This almost certainly reflected other demands on the Secret Vote from the three main intelligence and security agencies, who required significant funds for new projects such as airborne signals intelligence collection. A fleet of ocean-going vessels for GCHQ was cancelled at this time and although the cover story for these ships was broadcasting propaganda for the *Voice of Britain*, they had actually been intended as intelligence gathering platforms. Ultimately the Secret Vote had spending limitations like any other funding pot and Trend was a fan of the secret services and seems to have prioritised their spending.<sup>18</sup>

The transfer of IRD overseas posts to the open vote placed a tremendous burden on the Personnel Policy Department (PPD) who would be liable for covering the cost of IRD officers from the transferred posts. Frank Mills, head of PPD, 'argued as strongly as I could' that PPD was unable to absorb these costs without agreement from the Treasury and Civil Service Department to enact a proportionate increase in the open vote budget.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Civil Service Department pressured PPD to cut posts which they were reluctant to lose. This worried the head of IRD, Kenneth Crook, who argued to John Broadley of the PUSD that there was 'no guarantee' that if IRD posts were transferred to the diplomatic service vote, 'the work done by them would be deemed to have high enough priority to merit their retention in the new pattern of our overseas representation'. Reluctantly, IRD had conceded to transfer IRD posts in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'IRD' 18 May 1970; Mills to Cowling, 5 May 1970.

<sup>18</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (HarperCollins, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'IRD' 18 May 1970.

Calcutta, Lima, New York and Santiago depending on PPD's agreement to cover the costs on the open vote.<sup>20</sup>

The Under-Secretary for Information, Norman Reddaway, an old IRD veteran, indeed someone who had effectively co-founded IRD along with Christopher Mayhew saw this as an attack on his own creation. He resented the demands from Trend urging colleagues to resist as much of the budget cuts as possible in the FCO's 'present straits'. 'We should not', he argued, 'give anything away to the CSD... until we absolutely had to'. Anticipating a restructuring of the information departments, Reddaway argued it was crucial to get 'all the financial leeway we could find, in order to make the best possible overall bargain on the savings to be offered as a result of Duncan'. To give in too easily to the Civil Service Department's demands would do little to leverage the FCO's position against cuts to the information budget further down the line.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Reddaway resisted cuts to the BBC World Service.<sup>22</sup>

### *A Unified Information Division*

In October 1970, the FCO's important strategy body known as the Policy Planning Committee requested a complete restructure of IRD. The committee not only enforced a substantial reduction in size and cost of the department, but also mandated an overhaul of the direction of the department's propaganda output. By July 1970, IRD had conducted an extensive internal review to establish 'the role, purpose and structure of an IRD remodelled for the seventies.' This reconceptualised 'IRD Mark II' would mark 'a new departure' from its previous incarnation and would be fully operational by early 1972.<sup>23</sup> Notably, the discussions of the recasting of IRD's role frequently noted the necessity of moulding a new ethos for the department in order to meet the specific challenges of the seventies.

As part of the FCO's £30 million annual expenditure 'on the projection of Britain overseas', IRD received around one and a quarter million pounds to fund its activities. In the summer of 1970, the level of expenditure on IRD's anti-communist propaganda work was called into question. Since 1967, the department had undergone six inspections which had requested no major changes to IRD's expenditure, yet unease at this figure was a growing concern within the FCO. The effect of its propaganda was intrinsically hard to measure, and some quarters were concerned that IRD simply did not justify the scale of its expenditure. By 1970 the

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<sup>20</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Broadley, 14 April 1970.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'IRD' 18 May 1970.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Adams, Obituary: Norman Reddaway', *The Independent*, 3 November 1999.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: FCO 95/1065, Memo from Denis Greenhill, 28 July 1971.

concerns were fairly widespread amongst the FCO's senior staff with even Reddaway, a staunch advocate of IRD, conceding that it was 'fair to ask whether £1 million a year should be spent on IRD's countering of subversion'. Writing to the Deputy Under-Secretary for Information, Charles Johnston, Reddaway noted that a 'general agreement has grown up that it should be used more effectively and that it ought to be "integrated" with the other Information Departments and Research Department, and that a major part of it should be located near to those and to the Political Departments, News Department etc.' With this consensus in mind, a review of IRD which was due to be carried out by the Home Inspector, Albert T Lamb, in the autumn of 1970 was pushed forward to the spring. Like his predecessors before, Lamb's review extensively assessed IRD's role within the context of the rest of the information infrastructure and recommend an integrated IRD within it. Such an integration had been recommended since 1967, but by 1970, with shrinking budgets, the FCO were determined to put into practice.<sup>24</sup>

Lamb's review positioned the department as very much an anti-communist unit. IRD's role, the review reported, was 'the preparation and distribution to targeted recipients of non-attributable propaganda mainly of an anti-communist nature'. The aim of this work was 'the effective use of facts which most clearly expose communist activities in order to stimulate others to prevent or counteract them'. At the start of the seventies IRD employed 226 staff, 16 of which were on the Diplomatic Service Vote. 109 staff formed the research section of the department who were responsible for compiling information, 46 staff were in the editorial section who 'ensured' IRD's 'output is in suitable form'. A further 42 staff were employed in administration work for the department, funded mostly on the secret vote. The remaining 29 staff whose stated work was redacted from the report presumably were employed in IRD's covert sections. It is important to remember that IRD worked closely with MI6 especially when it came to overseas distribution of its product.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant recommendation of the report was a proposal to amalgamate the FCO's information departments (Guidance Department, Information Policy Department, Information Administration Department and IRD) into a singular Information Division. The idea of combining information departments had previously been mooted in 1967 when the Chief Inspector of the FCO had suggested an investigation on the potential amalgamation of IRD's research section with the FCO's more generalist Research Department. The proposal was thoroughly investigated by a working party but eventually rejected mainly due to logistical

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<sup>24</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Wright to PUS, 13 July 1970; Reddaway to Johnston, 17 July 1970.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department', undated.

difficulties. The IRD sections to be merged with Research Department would have to be moved from Riverwalk House to the FCO main building to maintain Research Department's close location to the political departments. Accommodating sections of IRD in the main building was deemed 'a very serious obstacle' to the merger. Furthermore, the merger would have also required a 'substantial' transfer of IRD posts onto the Diplomatic Service Vote, the Foreign Office's official funding pot for all its diplomatic officers. The difficulty of this was deemed 'to be so formidable' by the working party that it rendered the scheme 'impracticable'.<sup>26</sup> Under the pressure of budget cuts, mergers and then de-mergers became a major Whitehall phenomenon over the next decade.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, there were cultural differences in the working practices of IRD's research staff and Research Department's officers. The working party 'concluded that problems might arise from the relationship between the methods of research for the formulation of foreign policy and research for propaganda'. These research aims were very different and not easy to overcome. Accordingly, the working party abandoned the prospect of a merger and settled for the 'less ambitious' notion of 'closer co-operation'.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of a merger of IRD and Research Department was again brought up in the 1969 inspection of Research Department by Lamb's predecessor as the Home Inspector, Keith Oakeshott. At this time the prospect of a Central Research Organisation in Whitehall was under examination by the Cabinet Office and this informed some of the backdrop of the inspector's investigation which undertook a partial inspection of IRD alongside a full inspection of Research Department. The Cabinet Office's enquiry resulted in the McIntosh Report which recommended a merger of the sections of IRD and Research Department which dealt with communism, together with the communist sections of the Ministry of Defence's Department of Economic Intelligence. Thus, some level of integration of IRD with other departments was already advocated elsewhere, and sometimes in quite a radical way.<sup>29</sup>

However, this time the differences in the work patterns of IRD and Research Department were considered even more of a hindrance to a merger. The inspector deemed a merger of Research Department and IRD's research sections impracticable because 'their objectives, functions and methods of work are so different' that a merger would be impossible 'without a radical change

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<sup>26</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department', undated.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Hood, Meg Huby, and Andrew Dunsire. "Scale economies and iron laws: Mergers and demergers in Whitehall 1971-1984." *Public Administration* 63:1 (1985), 61-78.

<sup>28</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department', undated.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: FCO 79/183, Review by the Home Inspector of the work of the Research Department, May-July 1970'.

in both departments'. Moreover, such a change would incur 'dislocation' and Research Department's service and IRD's output 'would be seriously affected'. The Chief Inspector was not persuaded that such a merger was even desirable. The 'higher priority' was to improve the relationship between Research Department and the political departments they served, reflecting the changing political environment and shifting strategic objectives. This was of 'paramount importance and must not be impaired even if a larger organisation were to be formed.'<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Cabinet Office's enthusiasm for a partial merger of IRD and Research Department, the proposal was not popular with the experienced senior officials in the FCO who understood their machine rather well. The 1969 inspection decisively put paid to the proposals to amalgamate IRD and Research Department and, as Oakeshott noted rather eloquently, gave the 'proposals a decent burial' which could usefully defeat 'any future attempt at exhumation'. By April 1970, the proposal for a cross Whitehall research organisation was also dead in the water when a working party ruled against any amalgamation of IRD, Research Department and Defence Economic Intelligence. Some level of research coordination between the FCO and Ministry of Defence (MoD) 'on dealing with the Communist world' had been rejected by the Committee of Permanent Secretaries on Intelligence Services. Indeed, the FCO and the MoD were fierce competitors throughout the 1970s on the matter of intelligence.<sup>31</sup>

Research on communist matters would instead be concentrated in the FCO and the question became how best to coordinate research within the FCO infrastructure. Now that the idea of such a merger had been quashed, Peck wanted to move onto to an investigation of 'the possibility of a closer relationship between I.R.D. and the other Information Departments rather than Research Department'. A review was undertaken by Lamb the following year to study the possibility of integration.<sup>32</sup>

The 1970 inspection of IRD by Lamb argued that due to the different objectives, functions and methods of work between IRD and Research Department and the prioritisation of the latter's links with the political departments, IRD would have to justify the 'substantial expenditure' on its operations. Measuring the effectiveness of information work was notoriously difficult, moreover, changes in budget allocations were always the responsibility of the highest levels of

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<sup>30</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department', undated.

<sup>31</sup> R.J. Aldrich, 'The US-UK Intelligence Alliance in 1975: Economies, Evaluations and Explanations', *Intelligence and National Security* 21:4 (August 2006), 557-67.

<sup>32</sup> TNA: FCO 79/183, Oakeshott to Larmour, 4 November 1969; Lamb to Chief Clerk, 7 September 1970; Killick to Chief Clerk, 30 September 1970.

government not inspectors. What the inspection looked at was whether the ‘considerable resources’ IRD had at its disposal ‘can be more fully utilised’.<sup>33</sup>

The inspection found that ‘in the broadest sense one finds great difficulty in identifying institutional arrangements for coherent, overall direction’ of the FCO’s information work. On one side of the coin there was the Central Office of Information (COI), an open department, with a budget of £5 million per annum for information work. It had ‘no editorial policy of its own and [was] subject to the very loose policy control’ of Information Policy Department with no research capacity of its own. On the other side was IRD which was very much a self-contained department with capacities for research, production and distribution. The report strongly criticised the ‘insufficient contact’ between the activity of Information Policy Department, COI, and IRD. IRD’s product, for example, was drawn from ‘papers of first class political quality’ as the department enjoyed access to material which was unavailable to the COI.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, IRD also had access to classified information, produced by MI6 and GCHQ, which was denied to other information departments. The report argued that IRD’s access to high quality and classified information could be utilised to inform the work of other departments and ‘provide more purposive overseas information’. IRD’s readership was highly selective and whilst the detail of IRD’s material could only be fully appreciated by its informed readership, edited or ‘diluted’ versions of IRD’s unattributable work merited wider distribution. The ‘Readers’ Digest’ version would be attributed to the COI and the targeted readership would fall somewhere between the level of IRD’s informed readership and the COI’s ‘diffuse and unsophisticated (in the political sense)’ output.<sup>35</sup>

To facilitate closer links between departments involved in the overseas information effort, the report recommended incorporating Guidance Department, Information Policy Department, Information Administration Department, and IRD into an Information Division located in the Great George Street building which was the current home of Information Policy Department, Information Administration Department and Research Department. As a separate entity from the rest of the information effort, IRD’s ‘true value’ was impossible to gauge accurately. The authors of the report argued that the usual FCO inspection process was inadequate for this task. Inspections were too short and what limited investigation could be carried out ‘made sense to

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<sup>33</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, ‘Information Research Department’, undated.

<sup>34</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, ‘Information Research Department’, undated.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

an Inspector and did not appear to be wasteful in the light of I.R.D.'s terms of reference'. When viewed as part of the larger information effort 'it was apparent... that the research effort is far greater in scale... than the Department's practical effect'. IRD's administration section was singled out as 'overlarge' with 42 staff. With IRD as part of an Information Division housed in one building, the report's authors hoped its administration section's responsibilities could be amalgamated into the wider Information Division.<sup>36</sup>

The proposal to integrate IRD into the wider information structure and relocate its staff to the information heartland of Great George Street was supported by Reddaway and Peck, the Chief Clerk and indeed much of the senior FCO staff. Whilst the proposal was widely supported, finding accommodation to house IRD alongside Research Department was an uphill battle. Following Lamb's report, David Cole, the Assistant Under-Secretary for the FCO and Deputy Chief Clerk, undertook inspections of all the information and cultural departments. Cole supported the proposed integration of IRD, Information Administration Department, Information Policy Department, and Guidance Department but warned the Chief Inspector that the abolition of the Departmental system to go alongside the merger had ruffled feathers with the Administration side of the FCO who were reluctant 'to contemplate a total abolition of the Departmental concept and to devalue the role within the Office of Grade 4 Heads of Department'. To get around Administration's concerns, Cole recommended assigning Reddaway the title of Assistant Under Secretary of State and Director of Information which 'given the particular need for coordination in the Information field', made evident 'his clear directional authority'. But rather than pressing for a complete overhaul of the Departmental system and renaming Heads of Department as Deputy Directors as originally planned, Cole argued IRD, Information Administration Department and Guidance Department 'should remain as separate identifiable departments within an Information Division'.<sup>37</sup>

Cole argued that the re-designation of Reddaway's role would be 'weakened if I.R.D. cannot be included' in the Information Division. Furthermore, if IRD was 'to be brought more effectively under Mr. Reddaway's day-by-day direction', this would reduce its 'considerable' administration overheads and secure better coordination with Research Department and other information departments. Cole stressed that the department had to be relocated within the information heartland. 'This means in effect', he argued, 'that it must come to Great George Street'. But this proposal faced an uphill battle in practice. The main barrier to integration was

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<sup>36</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department', undated.

<sup>37</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Inspection', 10 July 1970.

lack of space in the Great George Street building. Towards the end of 1970 the FCO was expected to be allocated 70,000 square foot of space in Great George Street. At least 40,000 of which would go to the Administration side of the FCO. IRD would require at least 44,000 square feet and if Research Department was to be housed alongside, which Cole argued was the desirable outcome, this would require a further 20,000 square feet. A further 30,000 was potentially available but this had not been allocated to the FCO and Cole argued it would be likely fought over by high level claimants. With 'the pressure for accommodation in the heart of Whitehall' desired by numerous government bodies, Cole argued 'it would be difficult for the P.U.S. to press a claim to bring I.R.D. into 44,000' square foot of Great George Street.<sup>38</sup>

Without relocation of IRD, Cole argued the opportunity to reduce staff overheads of the department and elicit 'close operational coordination' and 'the hope of giving a major look to I.R.D. operations' would be 'seriously reduced'. Yet he deemed the pursuit of space in Great George Street hopeless and with the knowledge 'that a similar opportunity may not recur for some time' argued diplomats 'must accept this'. Whilst Cole was adamant that a major reconceptualisation of IRD was impossible owing to the practical difficulties, he was, however, 'left with considerable uneasiness in my mind as to whether we should leave I.R.D. indefinitely as it is'. Although IRD inspectors had found the department efficient at meeting its terms of reference, he questioned whether IRD's terms of reference were 'right' and whether the department is 'effective and does it serve the national interest commensurately with its cost?' As the FCO were looking to 'streamline our organisation', Cole recommended a 'root and branch review of the whole I.R.D. operation' rather than an 'ordinary inspection'.<sup>39</sup>

Cole was one of the senior diplomats who first floated the idea that IRD had out served its purpose. Reddaway rejected further investigation and insisted that the future of IRD was predicated on the move away from Riverwalk House. Quite sensibly, and considering numerous reviews, he argued 'economies and other benefits' could only be realised 'by the juxtaposition of IRD with the other departments and Research Department' all housed within the same building. The relocation of IRD represented 'a move forward' in the department's evolution. Further enquiry was undesirable. 'We know what IRD is', Reddaway argued, 'We agree that that there are certain ways of improving its use, and that a move forward is the main one'. Such a move would produce economies and 'greater effectiveness' of IRD. He stressed that if the integration of IRD was put on hold pending further inspections 'we shall miss our

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Inspection', 10 July 1970.

chance of a move and of a solution'. Instead of further investigation which would only 'pile on the agony', he pressed for a paper on the matter to present to the Deputy Under-Secretaries 'who could then institute any enquiries deemed necessary' for the relocation.<sup>40</sup>

Despite Reddaway's objections, Cole's recommended review of IRD was supported by the Deputy Under-Secretary and Chief Clerk J. Oliver Wright. Wright's support for a full-scale enquiry was based on his conviction that IRD had outlasted its original purpose and a simple restructure as part of an information division was inadequate. Wright was a veteran of IRD having worked as a field officer for the department in Berlin in 1954-56 and later as an Assistant in the department in 1960. He argued that from its inception, IRD had been an invaluable asset for the FCO and 'helped found the whole science and art of Kremlinology in this country'. Yet he questioned whether 22 years later IRD was still relevant. Writing to the Permanent Under-Secretary, Denis Greenhill, he suggested 'we really ought to take a fundamental look to see whether it has not achieved the objects for which it was founded'.<sup>41</sup>

Wright argued that the sheer size of IRD was no longer sustainable in the current climate of the FCO's 'self-mutilation' forced on the department through the search for savings of around £1.5 million by 1975. With its 226 employees, 42 of which dedicated to IRD's self-administration, and £1 million budget, Wright argued there was 'too little relationship between its input which is vast and its output which is tiny'. Moreover, IRD was one of several departments concerned with the communist world. Eastern European and Soviet Department which produced advice and policy recommendations to Ministers and Research Department which produced communist assessments had around 80 staff combined. Wright pointed out that that figure was dwarfed by IRD's size. The size and budget of IRD, he argued, represented 'a rather alarming wastage of resources and brainpower'. Echoing Cole's sentiments that previous inspections had merely shown IRD operated effectively within its terms of reference rather than adequately investigated the value of that guidance in the current era, he recommended a 'policy inspection'. If IRD was left as it was, he argued, 'like so many quasi-independent bureaucratic empires, it will remain self-perpetuating'.<sup>42</sup>

Wright was mystified by the opposition to a policy inspection and the accompanying argument that IRD had been intensely investigated in the preceding years and as such did not require yet

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<sup>40</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Reddaway to Johnston, 13 July 1970; Reddaway to Johnston, 22 July 1970; Reddaway to Johnston 17 July.

<sup>41</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Wright to PUS, 13 July 1970.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

another inspection. He attributed the opposition to a 'confusion as to what is meant by a policy inspection'. An 'ordinary inspection', he stressed, assessed a department within the framework of its terms of reference to see whether 'departments are doing the jobs they are meant to do and have the right number of people to do them'. Whilst a policy inspection 'as envisaged by the Duncan Committee' directly 'challenges the assumptions on which the department may be operating' and examined whether these assumptions are right. If wrong, then 'the job no longer needs doing' or 'a different job needs doing'. He argued that the basis of Reddaway's paper fundamentally 'posed the wrong problem', namely, how could IRD best serve Britain's interests. The actual question, Wright asserted, was whether Britain's interests 'any longer require an organisation such as I.R.D.'. If IRD was indeed required by the government, a policy inspection would aptly address the question of what IRD should do going forward and the how much manpower it required.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, questions of IRD's future should be left to a policy inspection, Wright argued, but this didn't prevent him from offering his own opinion on the matter. Carefully stating that he did 'not wish to pre-judge what the D.U.S.'s Committee may think' he objected to Reddaway's assertion the IRD should continue its role countering communist propaganda and exposing foreign sponsored domestic subversion. '[I]s this sort of thing really any longer necessary?' he asked. Moreover, Reddaway's recommendation for coordination between IRD and other information departments in support of the government's general interests and policies 'seems to me to be just looking for work'. Nevertheless, if IRD was to be 're-jigged' rather than closed down, Wright argued that its 'low regard' within the FCO would need to be addressed. He hoped that IRD 'would be given a task which would earn it the regard and respect of the Service' and become a department that the Administration would 'cheerfully post people' to and to which service personnel 'would cheerfully go. At present it isn't'.<sup>44</sup>

Kenneth Crook, head of IRD, expressed concern that the move to block IRD's relocation was borne from a personal distaste for the department and its seemingly maverick tendencies. People were 'attacking I.R.D. for what it used to be 10 years ago', he stressed, 'when in fact it is now quite a different animal whose editorial policy and other activities are subject to control by political departments'. He agreed with Reddaway that further inspection of IRD was unnecessary. The department had been scrutinised four times in 1969 alone, another major review 'would be disastrous for the morale of I.R.D. staff'. Crook argued that the benefits of

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<sup>43</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Wright to Johnston, 3 September 1970.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

IRD's integration with the other information departments were 'so enormous that its claims to the necessary accommodation are greater than those of other departments'. The issue was left for discussion at the Deputy Under-Secretary's next meeting scheduled for September.<sup>45</sup>

The distrust of IRD was emblematic of the wider animosity from the administration side of the FCO against the information departments. Since the Duncan review, the information infrastructure had fought to maintain a strong defence against swingeing cost cuts. Voluntary searches for economies was an integral bulwark against criticisms that the information effort cost too much for little reward. IRD's integration with the rest of the information effort was central to its reconceptualisation away from its origins as an anti-communist Cold War relic. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Greenhill alongside Reddaway and Crook wanted to bring the department 'into the open' and as part of an information division to maximise the potential for savings overall and free up money on the secret vote at a time of accelerating costs for GCHQ.<sup>46</sup>

Reddaway's initial attempt to subvert another inspection hit a snag when, unbeknownst to him, Greenhill had already received Cole's recommendation to forego the attempt to relocate IRD and instead conduct a root and branch inquiry to assess what could be done with IRD as a separate unit. The question of whether to press ahead with the root and branch inquiry was due to be considered by the Deputy Under-Secretaries in September. This presented Reddaway with another opportunity to push aside a further inspection and instead rally senior members of the FCO behind the accommodation proposal. Reddaway prepared a paper on the future vision of IRD which the PUS agreed to present at the Deputy Under Secretary Committee's September meeting.<sup>47</sup>

The objective of the paper was to 'make IRD less mysterious and more operational' and ensure 'its talents and resources were more readily available' to the other information, cultural, news and research departments. Moreover, Reddaway wished to 'inter-lock' IRD 'with the FCO as a whole'. He envisaged a contemporary IRD which was well integrated into the rest of the information machinery and represented better value for money. The integration would also help to 'normalise' the IRD and help 'discredit the idea that it is "separate", with mumbo jumbo and ritual dances of its own'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Memo from Mills, 16 July 1970.

<sup>46</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Reddaway, 21 July 1970.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Reddaway, 17 July; Reddaway to Johnston, 29 July 1970.

Reddaway's paper set the tone for the reconceptualisation of IRD into what would be known as IRD Mark II. Reddaway envisaged a propaganda department with a much wider brief. It would still continue to expose communist propaganda and practices through unattributable and 'covert means' but would extend these techniques to other areas of British interest such as the EEC. As Reddaway noted, IRD had already branched out into areas of 'non-communist nuisances' using its skills in support of British efforts to depose Gamal Abdal Nasser in Egypt, President Sukarno of Indonesia as well as activities against Black Power and anarchism. The department had also supported 'specific aspects of policy' in Nigeria and Gibraltar. Thus, IRD had already successfully evolved from its communist *raison d'être* somewhat but the department had no official 'mandate to concern itself, particularly on the research side, on a continuing basis with other aspects of HMG's policies (e.g. the Common Market)'.<sup>49</sup>

Reddaway pressed for a broadening of IRD's research side to 'cover all aspects of HMG's policies' not just 'those that are the object of Communist or hostile attention'. Through this widening of IRD's role the department could 'support and supplement' the work of the other information and cultural departments as well as News Department, particularly with non-attributable techniques, and 'could act generally and specifically in the promotion of HMG's interests'.<sup>50</sup>

Reddaway was a staunch supporter of IRD's work describing the department's capacity to offer 'in-depth briefing and support' to its overseas and UK based contacts as an 'invaluable' resource. In 'the broad counter-subversionary context', he argued IRD was able 'to cope with tasks which other departments are not equipped to handle, and with unforeseen needs and emergencies'. Whilst Reddaway was impressed with the value IRD conferred, he acknowledged that there was 'a feeling in FCO... that IRD is not effective enough, not "operational" enough, too mysterious; that its targets are too restricted; that it is not justifying its large budget and staff'. He argued that the 'main reasons' for this criticism was a result of the department's 'isolation' and partial funding on the secret vote.<sup>51</sup>

According to Reddaway, IRD's various locations during its history had greatly impacted the department's efficacy. At its first headquarters in Carlton House Terrace, the department was easily accessible and close to the main information infrastructure. Research Department was particularly close and an IRD officer regularly attended Information Policy Department's daily

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<sup>49</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department (IRD)', 29 July 1970.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

briefing. ‘Much of IRD’s effectiveness’, Reddaway argued, ‘came from its close links with the Main Office’. At Carlton House, IRD was ‘within easy reach’ of the BBC World Service headquarters, the press heartland of Fleet Street and the headquarters of MI5 and MI6. The move away from Carlton House to Vauxhall Bridge ‘was an operational disaster’ in which the move ‘curtailed these personal contacts’ that close proximity had afforded.<sup>52</sup>

Another issue was the secrecy around its funding. The ‘mysterious “apartness” imposed by IRD’s vote’ had fostered mistrust of the department. Any potential misgivings about IRD’s activities had been mitigated in its early years by its proximity to other FCO departments. At Carlton House Terrace, IRD officers ‘mingled freely’ with other departments and ‘had about ten Foreign Service Officers on the strength’. At Riverwalk House, however, ‘they feel conspicuous and exposed’. Further suspicion of IRD’s activities had been a consequence of what Reddaway termed the “Ramparts” revelations of CIA involvement with “good” organisations’. This alluded to the CIA’s covert funding of various independent American organisations. Ramparts, a New Left magazine, had exposed the CIA’s secret funding of the National Student Association (NSA) in February 1967. From the early 1950s to 1966, the NSA had received an annual subsidy of around \$200,000 from foundations channelling CIA funds. In return, NSA delegates attending international student meetings ‘were expected to exert a moderating influence on decision making... and report to CIA officials about the other student representatives’. The Ramparts revelations blew wide open the issue of the CIA’s covert funding of cultural activities into the public discourse. Newspapers in the weeks following the Ramparts exposure contained near daily revelations of CIA’s funding recipients.<sup>53</sup>

Reddaway noted that the Ramparts revelations had ‘not helped’ to demystify IRD’s activities. Some diplomats may have wondered what revelations could be forthcoming about IRD’s more nefarious work and were, perhaps, bracing themselves for a similar scandal. The exposure of CIA’s covert cultural campaign had clearly damaged IRD’s standing within the FCO. Reddaway also lamented the lack of regular FCO officers. From its ‘peak in the mid-sixties’ IRD had dropped from several to just three “controlling” Diplomatic Service officers. This was

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, ‘Information Research Department (IRD)’, 29 July 1970; Tity de Vries, ‘The 1967 Central Intelligence Agency Scandal: Catalyst in a Transforming Relationship between State and People’, *The Journal of American History*, 98:4 (March 2012), p.1075. See also Karen M. Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Secret Campaign to Enroll American Students in the Crusade Against Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

too few for a department 'as large and unusual' as IRD. Reddaway argued more Diplomatic Service officers 'picked for operational qualities, are needed'.<sup>54</sup>

It was the 'physical separation from FCO' that Reddaway highlighted as 'the main cause of the trouble'. Here in isolation, IRD had become an underused resource with a reduced number of 'high calibre' senior officers. Reddaway argued that there had been 'a tendency (illustrated by Plowden and Besley) not to regard IRD as an integral part of the operational information effort but as something mysterious and apart'. He stressed that IRD had much to offer beside its anti-communist component and had already demonstrated its flexibility through publishing and syndication work 'not confined to its anti-communist purpose'. IRD had also seconded an officer to work on the European information effort. Reddaway's elevation of the non-communist work was important as IRD had begun to draw serious criticism from some quarters of the FCO which perceived the anti-communist bias as now outdated.<sup>55</sup>

Reddaway's vision for the future of IRD was in no way radical. The proposal was more of a practical relocation of IRD's offices and broadening mandate to accommodate all foreign policy issues not just those related to communism. He argued that 'IRD's basic structure and organisation should remain essentially as now (geographical research sections and editorial output section'. But most of IRD's funding should transfer from the secret to open vote, except the department's book publishing activities and 'covert subsidies'. He envisaged that the objective of cost savings stipulated by the Duncan Committee would eventually be met by the incorporation of IRD into an Information Division as such a division would be cheaper to fund than separate information departments.<sup>56</sup>

IRD's future hung in the balance whilst competing factions of the FCO's senior staff argued over the continuation of Britain's capacity for propaganda. Figures like Reddaway and Crook sought a complete reconceptualisation of the department whilst those such as Cole and Wright advocated for a closure of IRD or at the very least major cuts to the department's size and budget. Henry Stanley, Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, appeared to be in the latter camp. He questioned Reddaway's attempt to press forward with a new look IRD without an inspection first. Reddaway, it seemed, wanted 'to let I.R.D continue to do very much what it is doing now, but under his direct supervision and in immediate contact with the other Information Departments'. Stanley argued that whilst this was 'no doubt the

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<sup>54</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department (IRD)', 29 July 1970.

<sup>55</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Reddaway to Johnston, 22 July 1970.

<sup>56</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department (IRD)', 29 July 1970.

most painless' and 'may be the most practical way of proceeding' it failed to address the underlying purpose of IRD. A policy inspection would consider 'what tasks are required by I.R.D in the national interest today, and on what scale should these tasks be carried out' in accordance with economic constraints and 'the general balance of effort in the F.C.O'. If an inspection was overlooked, at the very least Stanley argued, the Deputy Under-Secretaries would need to 'decide policies and priorities' and updated terms of reference before the reorganisation of IRD commenced.<sup>57</sup>

The criticism of IRD as an insular anti-communist department was strongly rejected by Crook. Since 1966, Crook argued that he and his predecessor as head of IRD, Nigel Clive, had supervised the department 'on the basis of a broad, not a narrow, view'. Over the previous four years Crook and Clive had 'questioned every single activity of the department's. Without undue attention to its past record we have concentrated on determining what it has so far evolved into, and how best it could evolve in the future'. IRD was no longer the same department that had existed just four years previous, he contended, and had the potential for further adaptation. Significantly IRD's current and previous head asserted that there was 'no case for the continued existence of a large and quasi-independent organisation solely dedicated to opposing Communism in the interests of the "Free World"'. Instead, Crook argued, IRD should be remodelled into a department which would oppose Communism 'and potentially even more dangerous forms of subversion' to Britain's interests. He argued that since the mid-1960's IRD had already begun to be 'tailored' for this broader role. The remodelling of IRD's remit alongside various inspections had resulted in a one third reduction of the department's size since 1965.<sup>58</sup>

Reddaway's paper was met with considerable pushback from the administration side of the FCO. In September, Cole, Mills of Personnel Policy Department and W. Roger Tomkys from the Planning Staff told Johnston '[w]e in the Administration have some doubts whether, as it stands, the paper provides an altogether appropriate basis for the discussion of this question'. Presenting 'the case against I.R.D', they argued that whilst the department had been necessary in 1948 'the world has now changed'. They questioned the need for a dedicated anti-communist propaganda machine as 'the West is more awake to the disadvantages of the Communist system and the media are more sophisticated and do most of their own homework'. Furthermore, they argued, 'the Communist world is no longer monolithic and has lost its romantic revolutionary

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<sup>57</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Stanley to Donald, 10 August 1970.

<sup>58</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Crook to Reddaway, 21 July 1970.

attraction'. Whilst they conceded the Third World 'may be less sophisticated than we are about Communism' they had nonetheless settled into the status of non-alignment and Western attempts 'to blacken the Soviet reputation' were not persuasive. They also refuted Reddaway's claim that IRD provided an essential weapon against non-Communist enemies. There was little to be gained from countering Nasser, Sukarno, Black Power, nor Anarchism. These were 'complicated issues' they argued, 'and even when we correctly identify a movement hostile to our interests it does more harm than good to institutionalise our opposition to it'.<sup>59</sup>

However, the Administration were not completely against Britain putting across 'our case to the world' but were adamant that this was best achieved through overt techniques of information undertaken by Information Policy Department, Guidance department, and News Department which were 'more appropriate than this cold war weapon'. Nevertheless, the group recognised that the argument to abolish the FCO's unattributable information capacity was unlikely to persuade the operational side of the FCO who may find the 'advantages' of a continuation of the 'current operation'. Nevertheless, money restraints in the age of the Duncan Committee reforms did hold sway. If IRD survived, they argued that its operations 'may be out of scale in our much reduced service'. They pressed for the Deputy Under-Secretary Committee to place the question of monetary value high on the criteria on the consideration of IRD's future. Whilst the 'advantage of flexibility on the Secret vote is undeniable', they argued, 'do we need to build a department employing 240 people around it?'<sup>60</sup>

Whilst Reddaway had set out how the new IRD could look like operationally, the Administration criticised the lack of a detailed outline of IRD's future costings, particularly as money was such a pressing concern for overseas representation under the present 'severe squeeze'. Johnston agreed that Reddaway's paper 'leaves certain questions unanswered' and he invited Reddaway to produce 'a fresh paper' which would be finalised with himself before circulation to the Deputy Under-Secretaries in October. He urged Reddaway to consider Administration's criticisms 'and in particular to try some projection of expected savings'.<sup>61</sup>

Reddaway's revised paper was presented to the Deputy Under-Secretaries Committee in October 1970. The tone of the paper prepared in consultation with Johnston was slightly different to Reddaway's earlier draft. It attempted to present a more balanced and nuanced viewpoint, presenting the arguments for and against IRD. The paper concisely outlined IRD's

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<sup>59</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Cole to Johnston, 1 September 1970.

<sup>60</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Cole to Johnston, 1 September 1970.

<sup>61</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Cole to Johnston, 1 September 1970; Johnston to Reddaway, 3 September 1970.

history from its conception in 1948, through to the era of 'competitive coexistence' wherein 'extra effort' was expounded on preventing communism 'filling the vacuum created by the retreat from Empire'. During this period a 'positive' aspect was added to the department's work through activities designed to 'improve British counter-performance' and maintain long-standing ties in the developing world. As the 1960s progressed, IRD took on more of this positive work.

The paper acknowledged criticisms of the department. It could 'be argued that IRD has outlived its usefulness' as communist propaganda was usually counter-productive and the general public were well-informed and did not require education on the communist threat. But this analysis resided on the assumption that the Soviet Union had effectively withdrawn from Cold War agitation. This was not the case, Reddaway and Johnston argued. Communist fronts were very much active, Soviet efforts to succeed the West's influence in the Third World were 'impressive', and 'their wooing of the non-aligned is constant and at times successful'. Thus, communist inspired propaganda and that of other hostile forces necessitated an organisation like IRD. They argued that this was even more important as Britain withdrew further from Empire. In a stark warning they urged colleagues to not completely abandon the fight: As Britain 'perforce shed our expensive worldwide defence commitments, and watch the Communists move in as we withdraw, we should not lightly discard a relatively cheap operational unit still useful for its traditional tasks and easily adaptable to new ones'.

Besides an ongoing role countering the communist threat, IRD had already developed into a malleable unit which could respond quickly to developing threats which the 'normal FCO machine' was 'not flexible enough' to counter. Recent IRD work on Ireland, Bermuda, and the EEC demonstrated that IRD's resources were not always tied up with its traditional anti-communist role and demonstrated the suitability of maintaining an effective flexible organisation capable of responding to unforeseen emerging threats which no other FCO department could handle. Johnston and Reddaway argued that whilst a complete abolition of IRD was attractive in that eliminating a seven-figure burden would help alleviate the squeeze imposed on the FCO's budget, such action was foresighted in 'liquidating an experienced and efficient organisation'. It was more beneficial, they argued, to retain IRD's expertise and 'plan now for systematic readjustment of its activity and reduction of its cost'. Such readjustment involved retaining some of its anti-communist work but more so expanding its capacity to pursue 'positive tasks for which there is demand and which can only be done by an organisation like IRD'. A 'major' aspect of this readjustment would be its integration into the rest of the

information infrastructure. Such integration was also essential for extracting economies, much of IRD's administration costs could be absorbed by the FCO's general administrative support, producing a reduction of £50,000 in the first year and a 17% reduction (£175,000) attained by the third year.<sup>62</sup>

By the autumn of 1970, the situation had been critical for IRD. One diplomat commented that 'IRD is very much in the melting pot' with 'its very existence being called into question'. It was not merely a few disgruntled IRD critics who challenged the continuation of the government's anti-communist mouthpiece, challenges which could be somewhat easily deflected by people like Reddaway in times of economic prosperity. The financial strain placed on the FCO by the Duncan Committee made IRD an easy target to obtain significant funding reductions. Despite the perceived value of the department, the large budget and significant amount of staff dedicated to a singular objective of exposing communist ills was no longer sustainable. If it was allowed to continue, dramatic change was unavoidable.<sup>63</sup>

The matter finally came before the Permanent Under Secretaries Planning Committee on 13 October 1970. Johnston presented the paper to the Committee and advocated strongly in favour of saving IRD but also seeking 'to modernise and refine it'. As part of this modernisation IRD would identify 'new areas in which it should work' as its current geographical targets 'did not coincide very closely with our assessment of priorities for our interests'. IRD was also criticised for its lack of evidence on the value of its output for those who consumed it. Hitherto, the department had run an autonomous operation. IRD identified threats, produced information to counter these threats and offered its output to those who wished to consume it. But now the FCO demanded an end to this top-down relationship in favour of the consumer driving demand. When identifying IRD's new target areas, these would need to be 'backed by supporting evidence from end users' on the perceived value of the work.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the strong financial incentive for the abolition of the department, the Deputy Under-Secretaries recognised the overriding value of IRD's unattributable information work in the long term. This 'need to keep the capacity for unattributable operations was emphasised' by the Committee and was a consensus 'accepted' across the FCO. It was the aura of the department itself rather than its work which had fractured IRD from the rest of the FCO. The committee agreed that 'it was disturbing that there was a lack of respect in the Diplomatic

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<sup>62</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'The Future of IRD', 9 October 1970.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Quantrill to Barrett, 11 September 1970.

<sup>64</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Extract from memo on DUS's meeting, 2 November 1970.

Service as a whole for I.R.D.’. The Deputy Under-Secretaries argued that before integration with the rest of the information effort could be ‘achieved’, a cultural shift within IRD would have to take place. This required laying out a ‘clearer policy direction within the department’ and establishing ‘general policy guidelines for the department as a whole’.<sup>65</sup>

Greenhill further asserted that a considerable reduction of IRD’s size would have to be achieved before a merger with the Information Division could proceed. Moreover, ‘I.R.D.’s work’, he stressed, ‘must become less divorced from that of the remainder of the F.C.O. than it had been in recent years’. According to the Permanent Under-Secretary, the push to decrease IRD’s size had been a long-standing requirement ‘but the task had hitherto proved intractable’. This was now exacerbated by the cost of keeping IRD at Riverwalk House, hence relocation of the department had become essential to the effort to reduce IRD’s financial burden.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst integration with the rest of the information departments had been put on hold until IRD had been suitably cut in size, such an integration was desired by the Deputy Under-Secretaries. They instructed Reddaway to plan for the integration of a smaller IRD within the Information Division. Reddaway and Johnston’s suggested savings of £175,000 after three years was overly optimistic in comparison to what the Deputy Under-Secretaries demanded. They imposed a financial ceiling of £650,000 for IRD’s budget to be achieved within two years. Most of the projected savings would be cut from the open vote; the Planning Committee suggested £500,000 funded by the secret vote with the remaining £150,000 financed by the open vote.<sup>67</sup>

Such a sizeable budget cut necessitated a simultaneous reduction in IRD’s remit to allow the department ‘to work to the maximum effect within these limits’. The Deputy Under-Secretaries instructed Reddaway to re-evaluate ‘the threat to British interests from Communism and other subversive influences’ to inform the reorganisation of the department, alter its terms of reference, and plan for its future work. The Committee supported a readjustment to more positive activities without completely abandoning its anti-communist work. The Deputy Under-Secretaries also wanted to rehabilitate IRD within the rest of the FCO, instructing Reddaway to consult with ‘interested departments and end-users’ in the reconceptualisation of the department.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

The cut of almost two-thirds imposed on IRD was a major blow to the department which had survived virtually unscathed by Whitehall's cost-saving exercises over the previous two decades. The department had grown extensively during the 1950s and achieved relative autonomy from the rest of the FCO, boasting even its own separate administration. In some ways it was like a smaller version of MI6, a service that it worked closely with when covertly distributing its product to foreign journalists.<sup>69</sup> Although this had begun to be reined in from the 1960s, IRD was still a powerful relatively autonomous unit commanding a large budget and staff presence in relation to other FCO departments as the 1970s approached. The scale of the cuts demanded on IRD was not lost on Reddaway. He argued that until 'we have got down to reassessing, redrafting and readjustment' it was not known 'whether the financial strait-jacket will be impossibly strait'. Could IRD survive on such a tight budget? Reddaway was doubtful but he would nevertheless attempt to reconceptualise a much smaller IRD. He insisted that the devastating reduction of IRD's budget 'should be kept a strict secret' from the department itself. 'Mr Crook will have a less difficult task', he argued, 'if IRD can consider "integration and reduction", without knowing how great a reduction is in prospect'.<sup>70</sup>

### ***The Conceptualisation of IRD Mark II***

At the time, the of restructuring of IRD was described by diplomats as 'major surgery', and this was certainly no exaggeration. IRD's staff and budget was 'cut by more than half'. With a previous budget of around 1 and a quarter million, Reddaway was forced to find savings of around £600,000 and reduce the IRD cadre by more than half, from 225 officers to no more than 80 to 90. The department was to be funded from both the open and secret vote. Whilst the Planning Committee recommended that most of IRD's funding should remain on the secret vote, the FCO were under strict instructions from the Civil Service Department to move most of IRD's non-secret activities onto the open vote.

Therefore, in order to appease the Civil Service Department, planning for the reconceptualisation of IRD proceeded within a framework to transfer the majority of IRD on to the open vote. As IRD would continue to straddle the line between an intelligence organisation which was 'normally secretly financed' and a mostly openly financed traditional FCO information department, IRD funds would always have to be sourced from both open and secret votes. In practice, this meant transferring IRD staff onto the open vote whilst retaining

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen Dorril, "Russia Accuses Fleet Street" Journalists and MI6 during the Cold War,' *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 20:2 (2015), 204-227.

<sup>70</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Reddaway to Chief Clerk, 14 October 1970.

the funding for the department's 'discreet activities' on the secret vote. This potentially meant most IRD posts, bar its secret units involved in covert operations, could be moved over to the Diplomatic Service.<sup>71</sup>

Yet this immediately ran into difficulties. The Diplomatic Service was also under a tight squeeze from the Duncan Committee with instructions to reduce its size by five percent by 1975, meaning a reduction of around 320 home-based staff. During the election campaign, the newly elected Conservative government under Edward Heath had pledged to reduce the size of the Civil Service to 470,000.<sup>72</sup> It was an election pledge that Ministers were 'determined to honour'. Under these restrictions, with very little room for manoeuvrability on manpower ceilings, the Diplomatic Service were against the transfer of IRD staff onto the open vote. The Chief Clerk stressed that the Diplomatic Service was in no position to absorb the proposed 80 or 90 IRD officers to be transferred to the open vote while the Service was itself tasked with significantly reducing staff levels. As of January 1971, four of IRD's posts had been transferred onto the open vote but the Diplomatic Service were reluctant to take any more until the Civil Service Department had agreed that the transfer of IRD's posts would not affect the Diplomatic Service's 'agreed ceiling'. Otherwise the Diplomatic Service would be forced to raise its staff reduction commitment from 5% to around 7%. The slow progress was making Burke Trend 'a bit impatient' but Wright was insistent that the Diplomatic Service could not 'accommodate I.R.D. on the open vote within existing F.C.O. manpower ceilings'.<sup>73</sup>

The Civil Service Department, however, were 'somewhat ambiguous' on the whole affair. They initially refused to assure the Diplomatic Service that the incoming IRD posts on the open vote would raise their manpower ceiling. The reason was down to 'strong political overtones' and 'an aspect of policy to which the Cabinet currently attaches considerable importance'. It was now essential government policy to a commit to a reduction of Britain's expenditure on overseas representation, as mandated by the Duncan Committee, and, therefore, the Civil Service Department were unable to assure the Diplomatic Service that its manpower ceiling would raise following the absorption of IRD. The five percent Diplomatic Service reduction by 1975 despite the absorption of IRD looked likely to be enforced. If allowance for IRD transfers was made, the Civil Service Department argued that '[s]uch an assurance could amount, in certain circumstances, to giving such transfers precedence over all other policy

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<sup>71</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Crook to Reddaway, 30 April 1971.

<sup>72</sup> Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, *The Heath Government 1970-74: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Aspin to Reddaway, 28 July 1971; FCO 79/240, Wright to Morrison (CSD), 1 January 1971; FCO 79/240, Wright to Crawford, 1 January 1971.

requirements both in FCO and elsewhere'. Yet the Civil Service Department also suggested that the absorption of IRD posts would 'constitute one consideration (and a powerful one)' for any future Diplomatic Service manpower decisions, which suggested possible flexibility for future manpower ceiling estimates.<sup>74</sup>

The bureaucratic dispute between the Civil Service Department and Diplomatic Service on the transfer of IRD onto the open vote held up the reorganisation of the department. Civil Service Department's refusal to give assurance that IRD's transfers would not affect the Diplomatic Service's manpower ceiling presented an unquantifiable risk. The IRD posts potentially totalled 100, a significant number which would represent 'a fairly substantial step in the wrong direction as far as the Cabinet are concerned'. William Quantrill of Personnel Policy Department argued that such increase 'might hasten the day when, because of political pressures upon them to show savings in the size of the Civil Service they are forced to resort to an arbitrary reduction'. Pressure from Parliament for a reduction in the size of the Civil Service was also a pressing concern with 'awkward questions' asked about the expansion of some departments in an era of economic retraction. The Diplomatic Service had, Quantrill argued, so far avoided Parliament's spotlight due to its 'healthy record' but 'we could not expect Parliament to give us credit for taking over 100 posts from a secret Department'. Quantrill argued that the absorption of IRD as the Diplomatic Service were undergoing the five percent cut would potentially elicit probing questions from Parliament 'to which we should not be able to give a frank and simple answer' due to IRD's continued secrecy in Westminster.<sup>75</sup>

In mid-April, the Planning Committee was presented with Reddaway's interim report on the planned reduction and reconceptualisation of IRD. The proposed new IRD, remodelled as 'an all-purpose instrument' for 'discreet propaganda work', had come in under the £650,000 ceiling demanded by the Deputy Under-Secretaries. At a cost of £644,000 per annum, £360,000 would be spent on London-based staff and pension costs including those of the future redundancies mandated by the reduction. Overseas staff was allocated £70,000, whilst the remaining £214,000 would cover IRD's operational costs.

Overall, the new IRD would be staffed by 111 home-based officers, 80 in IRD itself and 31 housed in Research Department. More than half of IRD's overseas staff were to be reduced (17 posts down to 7), a saving totalling £90,000. IRD was subjected to a major retraction with the

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<sup>74</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Restructuring IRD: Note of a meeting held on 1 March 1971'; Cooper to Wright, 19 January 1971.

<sup>75</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Quantrill to Aspin, 25 March 1971.

mandated reconceptualisation. At its height in 1965, the department had 360 home and overseas staff, which was reduced by over 100 to 242 by 1969. The reconceptualised IRD Mark II with 118 staff meant that in the space of 6 years, IRD had lost a third of its manpower. The department's future overseas reach would be meagre, concentrated on just four posts in Hong Kong, Singapore, Delhi, and Beirut. IRD staff in other overseas posts were now effectively redundant and 'should be regarded essentially as normal members of Missions' no longer charged on IRD's budget. The necessity of their ongoing employment would be considered by the post-Duncan inspectorial process.

Much of the savings had been extracted from ending IRD's isolation in a self-administered building in favour of a move to the FCO heartland and absorption into the FCO administration. This gave the opportunity for substantial cuts to non-essential staff. Closer coordination with the rest of the information departments afforded further substantial cost savings. Overseas visits and contacts would be coordinated with Information Administration Department and a level of 'joint infrastructure' with Research Department allowed for staff and operational cuts. As well as the cost savings that integration afforded, IRD's 'traditional activities and publications of secondary importance' were to be cut.<sup>76</sup>

The report noted that the reconceptualisation of IRD had been guided by what was actually required for an FCO propaganda unit. Therefore, the best parts of IRD had been maintained, such as 'the essential combination of publicity-minded specialists and of journalistic writers', whilst the ineffective and obsolete aspects had been discarded. But the reconceptualisation would not render IRD's anti-communist remit obsolete. The report argued that 'the primary threat to British and Western interests world-wide remains that from Soviet Communism, nowadays more Soviet than Communist'. In certain areas of the world, 'similar threats' came from China, Cuba, and 'extreme nationalist forces inspired by left-wing ideologies'. In the established democracies, 'violent' revolutionary activities of the "New Left" posed a 'less immediate' threat but were still 'very dangerous' nonetheless and required counter action. Whilst the whole of the FCO was engaged in countering these threats, IRD's capacity as 'a flexible auxiliary, specialising in influencing opinion' made it particularly useful in the information field.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Information Research Department: Restructuring', 29 March 1971.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

The most drastic change to IRD's proposed operational action was its relationship with the rest of the FCO. From a formerly quasi-independent department, IRD's future work would be very much integrated within the Information Division producing a more cohesive and streamlined information service for the FCO. 'If IRD is to work effectively', the report argued, 'it must' work closely alongside Research Department to consistently study ongoing and potential threats for 'operational purposes'. The new IRD would also work closely with Research Department and relevant Political and Information departments in maintaining 'sufficient knowledge of those parts of the world where British interests are likely to be the object of hostile threats, in particular in the Third World'.<sup>78</sup>

Much of the essence of IRD's operational practices would, however, remain the same. The department was encouraged to 'maintain and build up its contacts' within Britain and amongst allied countries who shared 'a common interest with Britain in resisting such threats'. And the department would continue to create and disseminate periodicals, 'though on a much smaller scale'. The publication of periodicals would move to an 'ad hoc' basis 'as requirements demanded' rather than systematic monthly periodicals. IRD's publishing side-arm was retained and the department would continue to helpfully 'stimulate' the dissemination of 'well-informed independent British political commentary' abroad by 'discreetly' circulating articles from the Economist and the Times. IRD was also encouraged to 'maintain close contact and provide discreet support for non-governmental organisations and individuals... who have helpful propaganda potential', such as the Ariel Foundation.<sup>79</sup>

Alongside its propaganda work, IRD would continue to train officers from friendly foreign countries in the techniques of unattributable information and counter-subversion, maintain its status as a nucleus political warfare executive in the event of future war, and continue to work alongside the Ministry of Defence on psychological warfare activities. For example, providing material for the British Army's Psyops team in Oman.<sup>80</sup>

The criticism from some senior diplomats that IRD's output was diminutive in relation to the size of the department, particularly its large research component, had factored heavily into the remodelling of the department. The new IRD would focus less on producing research and more on disseminating information to its myriad networks of contacts. IRD Mark II, the report

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Information Research Department: Restructuring', 29 March 1971; TNA: FCO 79/240, Record of the Interdepartmental Review Committee meeting, 19 May 1971.

<sup>80</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Information Research Department: Restructuring', 29 March 1971

argued, ‘will be essentially an operational and output organisation, getting its material less from its own research organisation and more from a variety of other Departments and organisations’. Indeed, the new structure of IRD would see 31 of its dedicated research officers transferred to Research Department. The ‘strengthened’ Research Department would act as a ‘prime source’ of information for the new IRD. This meant an end to the wasteful crossover of IRD’s research efforts with the work of Research Department which had prompted the mooted but eventually abandoned proposal to integrate IRD’s research element with Research Department.<sup>81</sup>

The separation of IRD’s research staff from its operational core represented a considerable change in IRD’s history. No longer would IRD remain a self-contained, quasi-independent department. It would become a ‘highly necessary’ flexible auxiliary for the Information Division. The splintering of the research side from the operational side was also finally the culmination of long running efforts over various inspections to streamline the FCO’s information division. The previous effort by the Cabinet Office to institute a partial amalgamation of IRD and Research Department had been effectively buried by the FCO Inspectorate in 1969. Yet, under the pressure of the substantial financial and manpower reductions demanded of IRD, the merger was now advocated by the department itself. What was previously deemed impracticable due to the vastly different working and cultural practices of the two departments, was now deemed necessary in the age of Duncan austerity. The FCO could no longer allow IRD ‘to continue as a reservoir of money and talent’ whose output failed to match the scale of its size and resources. Instead, IRD had to become an organisation which was ‘capable of producing creditable results far more cheaply’.<sup>82</sup>

At the Planning Committee, the proposed restructure of IRD on Reddaway’s lines was ‘generally well received’ for its efforts to maintain ‘the best of IRD’ whilst ‘making impressive savings on staff and expenditure’. Yet the ongoing uncertainty of the transfer of IRD funding onto the open vote concerned the Deputy Under-Secretaries. Reddaway’s projected savings for the secret vote in part depended on the transfer of the majority of IRD posts onto the open vote. However, the dispute between the Civil Service Department and Diplomatic Service over allowance for IRD on the Diplomatic Service manpower estimates remained unresolved and it seemed increasingly unlikely that the vote transfer would go ahead. Reddaway argued that the vote transfer presented two main advantages: firstly, it would help make IRD’s contacts from the general public ‘feel rather less inhibited’ to work with a more open department. Secondly,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

it would generate larger savings on the administrative personnel side. If IRD officers remained on the secret vote, then two to three more administrators would be required. Nevertheless, he insisted that besides these two factors, it did 'not make a great deal of difference' if the transfer did not proceed.<sup>83</sup>

The Deputy Under-Secretaries were concerned that if the vote transfer did not go ahead then IRD's projected savings would not satisfy the Cabinet Secretary's insistence for substantial savings on the secret vote. Stewart Crawford, Senior Deputy Under-Secretary for Defence and Intelligence, asked Reddaway to confirm how much IRD spending would come from the secret vote for the 1972/3 year. He reminded Reddaway that any more than £500,000 was unlikely to be an adequate enough reduction to 'satisfy Sir Burke Trend'. Reddaway was unconcerned. Writing to Crawford, he argued that a substantial reduction of IRD's usage of the secret vote could only be achieved by transferring its officers onto the open vote, an exercise Trend had himself initiated but defiantly challenged by the Diplomatic Service. If the exercise failed, 'he can hardly blame the FCO Administration for not still further reducing the Secret Vote!' Moreover, 'Sir Burke should be pleased', Reddaway argued, 'that we have planned for an approximate overall saving of 50% - about £800,000 and 100 bodies'. He also stressed that the FCO as a whole was projected to give Trend 'a windfall through under-spending on the Secret Vote during the year 1971/2'.<sup>84</sup> All this indicated an appreciation across all of Whitehall that the secret services were a favoured area of spending for Trend, who valued their contribution highly.<sup>85</sup>

Crook was less relaxed about the situation but accepted that retaining IRD funding on the secret vote was 'possible'. Although, he added, it would 'increase administrative difficulties', require the retention of 'staff for non-productive purposes', and 'likely increase tensions in Research Department'. Yet even if IRD's retention on the secret vote was possible, it entailed potential ongoing scrutiny from Whitehall's penny pinchers. What Crook really feared in terms of the future of IRD was 'a laborious annual search for bits of operational expenditure which might be placed on the Open Vote' as the pressure from the Cabinet Office to reduce the secret vote was likely to remain firm. In 'the interests of efficiency', he recommended that IRD's

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<sup>83</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Reddaway to Crook, 13 April 1971.

<sup>84</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Reddaway to Crawford, 15 April 1971.

<sup>85</sup> Eunan O'Halpin, "'A poor thing but our own': The Joint Intelligence Committee and Ireland, 1965–72," *Intelligence and National Security* 23:5 (2008), 658–680.

operational costs should be left on the one vote and as most of its work was secret, all of its expenditure should be financed on the secret vote.<sup>86</sup>

The issue of IRD's secret vote funding was having undesirable effects elsewhere. In May, the notorious "spy catcher" journalist Chapman Pincher, well known for his intelligence exposes, had written a piece for the Daily Express alleging that the FCO's European Communities Information Unit (ECIU) was a top-secret government body with access to 'large sums of money being siphoned off from the Secret Vote' and 'using experts in psychological warfare and mass-persuasion techniques'. The ECU and its EEC campaign were, in FCO vernacular, 'unavowable'. The unit's 'information effort in connexion with British public on EEC' had received 'ministerial approval' and Ministers were fully 'aware of IRD's participation'. Pincher's piece on the ECIU came around the same time Enoch Powell had tabled a parliamentary question to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas Home, asking how much money the FCO was spending, whether secret or openly financed, on 'Common Market propaganda'. This placed an uncomfortable spotlight on the FCO's campaign for Britain's membership of the EEC. Crook argued that the allegations that ECIU was in receipt of large sums of secret financing were 'not true' yet the FCO was unable to deny the claim outright as 'we could not say that there is no Secret Vote support'. Two of ECIU's staff salaries were paid by IRD, while a further five employees were either engaged fully or part-time on work in IRD which supported the EEC publicity offensive. This amounted to some £17,000 of funding from the secret vote.<sup>87</sup>

The issue of secret vote financing denied the FCO the option to refute such claims of nefarious activity. As Crook argued, if the IRD cadre were funded on the open vote 'our difficulties would not exist' as the FCO could claim the ECIU was openly financed and was above board. The usage of the secret vote immediately gave the impression of wrong doing. Crook suggested that if the transfer of IRD staff onto the open vote had not yet occurred by the by the end of the EEC campaign, then IRD's involvement should be remunerated on the open vote. This way the FCO could honestly claim that in no way had the EEC campaign received secret vote financing.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Crook to Reddaway, 30 April 1971.

<sup>87</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Crook to Reddaway, 24 May 1971; FCO 79/241, Draft letter to Trend from Crawford, 11 August 1971; Chapman Pincher, Wilfred Sendall, and Maurice Trowbridge, 'Europe – the big sell is on', *The Daily Express*, 24 May 1971, available in FCO 79/241.

<sup>88</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Crook to Reddaway, 24 May 1971.

Reddaway was also concerned by the ‘anti-marketeers’ attack. ‘Their main interest’, he argued, ‘is in discovering a crock of gold which they hope has been placed at the disposal of [British Council of the European Movement] BCEM. This they will not find’. The issue of ECIU salaries was a ‘rather complicated, technical interest and therefore not so dangerous as a publicity gimmick’. Yet Reddaway acknowledged that whilst the financing of the salaries was not the anti-marketeers’ Holy Grail evidence of pro-European government propagandising, it was evidence of their desperation for any ‘ammunition’ on the EEC campaign. ‘The most dangerous line of enquiry is about IRD itself’, he insisted. The desire to attack the campaign meant IRD was a potential target even for people like Pincher who was himself a ‘long-standing contact of IRD’. It was towards IRD, that questions of pro-Europe propaganda was likely to turn with journalists like Pincher asking ‘[w]hat are all those people doing on Vauxhall Bridge? Who pays for them? Is it right that such a mysterious body should be enlisted to support our approach to Europe?’<sup>89</sup>

Whilst the existence of IRD had been in safe hands with British anti-communists, how well would it fair if those same anti-communists were now anti-EEC. For Reddaway, the Daily Express had ‘cried wolf so often and run so many stunts’ its ‘reputation for accuracy and truth’ had taken a beating and so this latest attack did not hold much weight. But he feared more was to come. Britain’s ascent into Europe would be ‘an uneasy time, during which every move and response to enquiry needs to be very carefully considered’. The ‘affair’ added considerable ‘weight’ to the move to get as much of the restructured IRD as possible onto the open vote.<sup>90</sup>

By June, the vote transfer had seen little substantial progress. Whilst Burke Trend appreciated ‘the difficulties’ of the Diplomatic Service in absorbing IRD’s staff costs, he viewed the Civil Service Department’s acceptance of the vote transfer ‘in principle’ as encouraging. Although the Civil Service Department had refused to raise the manpower ceiling, they had offered assurances that the IRD posts would not indicate ‘any failure on the part of the FCO to meet their obligations’ for the five percent reduction by 1975. For Trend this was an acceptable compromise until estimates and manpower ceilings for the 1972/3 year had been decided by Ministers for the whole Civil Service.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst the issue of vote transfer was in limbo, Reddaway’s position on the problem had ‘hardened’. He argued that the restructuring of IRD had made transfer to the open vote a crucial

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<sup>89</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Reddaway to Crawford and Logan, 25 May 1971.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Trend to Crawford, 2 June 1971.

precondition of IRD Mark II's success. Previously as an anti-communist unit, funding the department on the secret vote had presented no potential for controversy as its anti-communist remit dealt with issues 'on which there is pretty general agreement in the United Kingdom'. With the reconceptualisation of IRD into an all-purpose domestic propaganda unit, the 'situation has now changed radically'. IRD Mark II was to adopt a more open relationship with contacts and 'good organisations' which necessitated an image of IRD as an openly financed unit. Furthermore, as the department's remit had broadened it was likely to be involved 'with matters on which there is considerable public controversy within Britain' and 'may well be brought into controversial subjects such as counter-subversion at home'. Reddaway insisted that press criticism 'of our approach to Europe' from the likes of Pincher should serve as a future 'guide'. Criticism of the government's campaign to join the EEC had already demonstrated that any hint of secretly financed campaigns presented quantifiable risk. He argued that IRD was 'fairly well known to wide range of publicists holding strong views on controversial subjects with which IRD is concerned'. This presented the potential for a 'mini-Ramparts' expose and 'serious danger of embarrassment to the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister'.<sup>92</sup>

This observation was prescient and anticipated the shared panic of prime minister James Callaghan and his Foreign Secretary David Owen over IRD and its domestic activities in 1978 when they were finally surfaced by the *Observer*. The reference to 'mini-Ramparts' was an allusion to the front-page *New York Times* story about the CIA funding of liberal anti-communist organisations like the American National Students Association, a story first surfaced by the fringe magazine *Ramparts*.<sup>93</sup>

Reddaway dismissed the vote transfer problem as a 'relatively minor bureaucratic difficulty'. He pressed colleagues to 'make a determined effort' and bring 'in ministerial pressure if necessary' to move 'at least a fair proportion of IRD staff' onto the open vote. 'Not to do so would', he warned, 'be to accept bad risks for insufficient reasons'. He instructed Crook to draft a letter to Burke Trend, outlining the danger of retaining IRD on the secret vote.<sup>94</sup>

IRD's involvement in the EEC campaign had welcomed a new era for the department. In the treatise to Trend, Crook noted that IRD's EEC work had 'been a test of theory, to see whether

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<sup>92</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Information Research Department', memo by Reddaway, 8 June 1971.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Warner, 'Sophisticated spies: CIA's links to liberal anti-communists, 1949-1967,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 9:4 (1996), 425-433.

<sup>94</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, 'Information Research Department', memo by Reddaway, 8 June 1971.

the Department's techniques can in practice be used for non-traditional purposes'. IRD had proved that this was very much the case, he argued, but its secret vote financing was now an issue if it was to continue with this type of non-communist work. As an anti-communist unit, IRD had sufficiently protected itself from exposure by maintaining an effective 'cover story' as an innocuous research department; ensuring to only make contact with individuals 'sympathetic to the anti-communist cause'; and by the fact that in Britain, 'anti-Communism is very much a non-partisan issue'. Thus, the risk of exposure had always come from the Soviets themselves. This remained a threat, Crook argued, but as IRD's anti-communist work reduced so too did the risk of exposure from communists. The main threat to IRD Mark II's exposure now and in the future, he argued, was from domestic sources, and this would only increase as the department would become more involved with more controversial partisan issues.<sup>95</sup>

Crook noted that 'until recent weeks', Britain's entry into the EEC had been viewed as a 'fairly' 'non-partisan' issue but this was now no longer the case. Moreover, 'various' members of the opposition Labour party, for whom internal divisions over the Europe question would lead them to later hold a referendum on membership, 'know what this Department has been doing' and were also aware of its secret vote financing. Pincher's 'allegation that funds provided for purposes of State security were being improperly diverted to influencing public opinion' were, Crook argued, 'dangerously close' to the mark and the 'central point of potential embarrassment' for the government. The charge was not demonstrably false, after all IRD was a department invested in influencing public opinion and its funds had been used to support the ECC campaign via the European Community Information Unit. Crook noted that there had been no serious follow up to the Pincher article, but due to its EEC content he mused that further probing from journalists was likely.<sup>96</sup>

The secret vote funding was, as Crook argued, IRD's greatest 'area of vulnerability', particularly as the department was positioned to have more involvement in controversial domestic issues like the EEC and Northern Ireland. He insisted that there was no longer any advantage in retaining the bulk of IRD on the secret vote. The secret vote, he argued, should only be used to cover the costs of 'the small percentage of staff dealing with covert techniques, and in relation to operational expenditure which is best secretly-provided'. The rest of the

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<sup>95</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Crook to Reddaway, 26 July 1971.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

department should be transferred onto public financing, and as the department was now much reduced in size, it was ‘not difficult to account publicly’ for.<sup>97</sup>

In August, the Cabinet had ‘approved a reduced staff estimate’ for the FCO for 1972. Frank Cooper, Deputy Secretary of the Civil Service Department, told Trend that ‘in the light of future intentions about Civil Service manpower’, planning for the vote transfer of IRD should proceed and take effect on 31 April 1973. If the Diplomatic Service could not accommodate IRD staff without raising their manpower ceiling, the Civil Service Department argued that the transfer should instead be brought forward to the beginning of 1973 ‘as a recognised offset to the reduction’ of the Diplomatic Service manpower estimates. Crawford found this an ‘encouraging’ step forward, but the Policy Planning Department were unwilling to proceed without an agreement from Ministers to raise the manpower ceiling. If the IRD posts were initially agreed as an offset, at some point they would have to be fully absorbed into a reduced Diplomatic Service. Moreover, as the civil service estimates were due to be discussed in Parliament, the Policy Planning Department anticipated questions challenging the increase despite the government’s pre-election commitment to enact the Duncan recommendations for a reduced civil service. For the Policy Planning Department this risked a greater potential embarrassment for the government than the risk of continuing IRD’s secret vote financing.<sup>98</sup>

In principle, the Policy Planning Department agreed to absorb 102 IRD staff (92 London-based and 10 overseas posts) onto the open vote. But they resisted IRD’s claims that the transfer was necessary and the only option available to Ministers. Both the government and Parliament were committed to reducing the civil service and the Policy Planning Department recognised that the transfer was not as simple as IRD suggested. Pressure on the FCO and its information machinery showed no signs of easing. The Prime Minister had ordered a review into the Central Office of Information and the organisation of information work ‘with a view to reducing it’. The desire to reduce the FCO’s information personnel also retained ‘a significant amount of Parliamentary interest’. As the FCO was as a whole ‘shrinking’, the IRD transfer to the Diplomatic Service could potentially ‘give rise to questions’ from Parliamentarians keen to

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Cooper to Trend, 6 August 1971; Crook to Aspin, 10 August 1971; FCO 79/241, ‘IRD vote transfer’, 25 August 1971; Bernard Thimont to J.S. Whitehead, 3 September 1971; Whitehead to Cole, 1 September 1971.

reduce the numbers engaged in information work. Therefore, pressure remained on the FCO to reduce information staffs despite the major surgery to IRD.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, IRD's involvement with European Communities Information Unit's EEC campaign caused some consternation in Whitehall. IRD was very much involved with the unit's activities. Alongside the monetary connection with two ECIU staff salaries drawn from IRD funding, five IRD officers were seconded part-time to the unit and IRD had been involved in the EEC campaign for a year 'as a source of qualified staff... research, briefing and publicity support'. IRD was also involved with planning the EEC campaign with an IRD representative sitting on the Committee on European Information Policy. Yet some senior figures were uncomfortable with the use of secret funds for a high-profile domestic publicity campaign as it 'clearly' represented 'a potential source of embarrassment'. Sir Burke Trend questioned 'the propriety of IRD activity in the European context' while the department remained on the secret vote. At the very least, he argued 'there should be specific Ministerial direction on this point'.<sup>100</sup>

Trend sought confirmation that IRD's involvement had the approval of Ministers which Reddaway claimed it had. The issue of whether or not this approval had been given was somewhat ambiguous. Crook noted that Reddaway's evidence of ministerial approval had been seemingly drawn from a minute from John Ford, the Assistant Under-Secretary in charge of the European Integration Department and the European Communities Information Unit. Ford's minute dated 27 August 1970 had made 'implicit' IRD's involvement in the ECIU's information campaign, but Crook had 'not been able to trace anything more specific'. He suggested that the 'unavowable nature' of pro-EEC publicity may have been 'construed to justify the use of IRD resources'.<sup>101</sup>

Pincher's article had prompted the FCO to evaluate whether it 'should pull IRD out of the EEC information effort'. The involvement of secret funds in the campaign, Crook argued, 'gives unnecessary hostages to fortune'. This meant leaks were possible particularly as the British Council of the European Movement whom ECIU had necessary contact with was 'not a secure organisation'. Yet despite this, Crook argued that to end IRD's involvement in the EEC campaign 'would be wasteful and seriously deplete the resources at the disposal of the Government'. He reiterated that IRD's reconceptualisation as an unattributable propaganda

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<sup>99</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Cooper to Trend, 6 August 1971; Crook to Aspin, 10 August 1971; Whitehead to Chief Clerk, 13 September.

<sup>100</sup> TNA: FCO 79/241, Crook to Crawford, 11 August 1971; 'The EEC information "campaign", IRD and the Secret Vote, undated.

<sup>101</sup> TNA: FCO 79/241, Crook to Crawford, 11 August 1971.

machine involved with controversial domestic issues like the EEC made its transfer onto the open vote a necessity. Crook argued that IRD should be allowed to continue its involvement on the EEC campaign ‘as discreetly as possible’ and take ‘prophylactic action’ in order ‘to protect Ministers from any embarrassment’.<sup>102</sup>

Crawford told Burke Trend that the EEC campaign and IRD’s involvement in it had been approved by FCO Ministers but that this confirmation of ministerial support would now be sought via the Foreign Secretary. Trend also opted to present the issues around IRD’s transfer to the open vote as the Personnel Policy Department continued to block the transfer without a subsequent easing of manpower ceilings for the Diplomatic Service. Both issues were presented to Ministers who were asked ‘to weigh’ between ‘the potential political embarrassment arising’ from continuing IRD’s involvement in the EEC campaign and ‘similarly controversial home-based activities’ or the embarrassment from ‘the consequences of a vote transfer in terms of the overall size of the Diplomatic Service’.<sup>103</sup>

In November the Foreign Secretary opted to approve the transfer of the bulk of IRD officers onto the open vote. Clearly, the risk of continuing IRD’s work via secretly financed campaigns was no longer a risk worth taking as Pincher’s article had demonstrated. Thus, 92 IRD officers were transferred onto the Diplomatic Service with the increase being offset by savings in the manpower estimate that the Diplomatic Service had already achieved in other areas of the service. The transfer was scheduled for 31 March 1972, but the delay still raised issues with secret vote financing of ECIU’s activities. In order to stave off further scrutiny from journalists, Ministers asked the FCO to assess whether the transfer of eight staff involved in EEC work could be backdated to the beginning of the 1971 financial year. The FCO’s Finance Department agreed to a simple ‘bookkeeping transaction’ in order to cover the involvement of secret funds in the EEC campaign.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The drastic reduction of IRD had serious repercussions for the department’s global propaganda reach. This was most starkly demonstrated by the near cessation of IRD periodicals. During the 1950s and 1960s the department produced a wide-range of monthly publications aimed at

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<sup>102</sup> TNA: FCO 79/241, ‘The EEC information “campaign”, IRD and the Secret Vote, undated; Crook to Crawford, 11 August 1971.

<sup>103</sup> TNA: FCO 79/241, Crook to Reddaway, 10 September 1971; Trucker to Reddaway, 1 October 1971.

<sup>104</sup> TNA: FCO 79/241, Norman Aspin to Thimont, 19 November 1971; Stephenson to Quantrell, 15 November 1971.

designated hot-spot regions. Periodicals such as Asian Analysis, African Review and Middle East and Maghreb Topics were mass-persuasion vehicles to influence public opinion in these regions. With the reconceptualisation of IRD these periodicals were limited to ad hoc publication whilst a significant number of periodicals such as East European Notes and Trade Union Topics were abolished outright.<sup>105</sup>

As news of IRD's reconceptualisation and substantial withdraw from overseas work spread to Missions, a number of posts raised concerns to Reddaway. The High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Stephen Olver, was concerned that IRD's revised role in the Third World merely countering threats and criticism of British policy was too defensive. He urged Reddaway to maintain an active role in the Third World, presenting the positive role of the West and Britain particularly in aiding Third World development. He argued that if Britain withdrew from positive publicity work projecting the West as a model for development then this would give leverage to the rising influence of 'State Socialisms of the East'. Furthermore, he argued, the communist issue was not the only residing threat in the region. Third World countries were developing home-grown nationalist movements which were becoming more active. These movements posed a threat to Britain and her interests and IRD, Olver argued, provided a useful weapon in countering them.<sup>106</sup>

Olver suspected that IRD's redefined role in the Third World demonstrated 'a diminution of interest' in the region. Crook argued that 'to a very limited extent this is true'. IRD had become an 'expert in Third World Affairs' due to its status as 'the "threatened" area' in the ideological battle with the Soviet Union. Although anti-communist activities would no longer be a priority for IRD, Crook argued that this did not mean that 'we shall no longer be concerned about the Third World'. He acknowledged that nationalism was indeed a potential threat to Britain's interests. Olver was given assurance that IRD would continue to play a role in Africa getting 'material into the British press, for reading overseas' and preparing background briefs and research assessments to disseminate to local 'influential contacts'. Reddaway told Olver that he agreed with his argument in favour of influencing Africa towards the Western model of development but stated that the shortfall in IRD expenditure in the region would be mitigated by use of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) funds. Overseas Aid had already been used for this goal in the region. In Khartoum during the late 1960's, Reddaway had 'played this for all it was worth, using ODA as a major card supporting our diplomatic,

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<sup>105</sup> TNA: FCO 95/1007, 'IRD written output', undated.

<sup>106</sup> TNA: FCO 95/1007, Olver to Reddaway, 20 August 1971.

information, cultural and commercial interests'. He argued that 'the present trend is very much this way, especially as ODA gets richer and richer'. The Overseas Development Administration paid for the Visits programme sending prominent British figures overseas. IRD's role in the scheme was 'to act as a broker for projects which can be recommended to the Ariel Foundation'. Through this seemingly private NGO, IRD were able to 'pretty effectively stimulate traffic between the United Kingdom and the Third World'.<sup>107</sup>

As Reddaway noted, IRD's involvement with overseas visits was to be a feature of the newly reorganised department. IRD Mark II was tasked with maintaining 'close contact with and provide discreet support for non-governmental organisations and individuals (especially inward and outward visitors) who have helpful propaganda potential (eg the Ariel Foundation)'. The Ariel Foundation, a London based NGO, appears to be a key partner in the state-private network of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Stephen Dorril, the Foundation was an MI6 front set up by Dennis Grennan. Grennan, a staunch anti-communist, was the first member of the Labour Party elected as President of the National Union of Students in the fifties. He was later a foreign policy advisor to the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan and had a 'special interest' in African politics in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>108</sup>

Newly released official documentation reveals that the Ariel Foundation was originally created by IRD as a cover for overseas visits by influential British establishment figures for their propaganda potential. Whilst the story of the Ariel Foundation's beginnings and the intersection between state and private bodies remains unclear, what is apparent is that IRD maintained close links with the front organisation throughout the sixties and seventies. The Foundation had numerous global projects in the Far East, Middle East and Europe as well as in Africa which were supported by IRD. The geographic focus of the Foundation's projects also tied in with the reconceptualised IRD's remit to counter 'hostile threats' in areas of the world where Britain had ongoing interests 'in particular in the Third World'.<sup>109</sup>

One IRD-Ariel Foundation operation involved a Middle East tour by the Labour Middle East Council to Beirut, Jordan and the United Arab Republic in April 1971. The visiting Labour delegates comprised three Labour MPs, Carol Johnson, Denis Concannon, and Frank Tomney,

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<sup>107</sup> TNA: FCO 95/1007, Reddaway to Olver, 8 September 1971; Biggin to Brasnett, 14 September 1971.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service*, (Fourth Estate Ltd, 2000), p.475.

<sup>109</sup> Colin Crowe's report on IRD in 1976 reveals the Ariel Foundation was originally started by IRD, see TNA: FCO 84/52, 'Colin Crowe review of IRD', July 1976. The listed files of the IRD suggest extensive cooperation between the department and the Ariel Foundation; FCO 95/1065, 'Information Research Department – Mark II, confidential annex'.

who were supported by Claude Morris, the Managing Director of Middle East International Publishers and Mick Ashley. The tour was organised ‘under the auspices of the Ariel Foundation’ and IRD considered it a ‘useful public relations operation’ for improving Anglo-Arab relations. One diplomat noted with satisfaction that the delegates ‘appear to have given the impression that concern for the Arabs exist in the Labour Party, in spite of the strong Zionist line taken by some of its prominent members.’<sup>110</sup>

The new smaller IRD was required to undergo a refinement of the ‘[s]tyle and form’ of its output to reflect both the department’s reduced capacity and the requirements of the political landscape. Put simply, senior officials explained, ‘[t]he best things will be kept; activities less essential in terms of the ‘seventies will be discarded.’ The relocation of the department from its isolated premises in Riverwalk House, a modern office block alongside the Tate Gallery, to a more central location in the ‘information main land’ of Great George Street was described as ‘positive’, allowing greater coordination with the rest of the FCO’s information and publicity machinery. However, the change in location as well as the complete reconceptualisation of IRD was to a large extent influenced by economic practicalities. Diplomats hoped that a greater ease of access to the resources of the other information departments would help reduce IRD’s expenditure.<sup>111</sup>

By moving the department from its isolated position, the FCO hoped it would become ‘more outward-leaning, more flexible, more “normal” and, operationally, more active in the field of influencing opinion in favour of British foreign policy’. The department’s modus operandi covertly disseminating ‘unattributable political information’ to ‘like-minded individuals, publicists and agencies’ remained intact. And while the department maintained its overseas work by ‘concentrating increasingly on bespoke productions for specialist clients’ and producing ‘ad hoc analyses or assessments on demand... to meet general or particular policy requirements’ it was apparent that domestic work now superseded the overseas role.<sup>112</sup> IRD enthusiastically embraced their new role in non-communist propaganda and cases specific to British domestic policy. In the early seventies, pro-EEC and anti-IRA propaganda were central campaigns for the reconceptualised IRD. As Britain further withdrew from the former colonies, IRD fashioned a role for itself within Britain’s borders and became increasingly concerned

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<sup>110</sup> FCO 95/1204, letter from F.D.S Head (IRD) to Christine Harte of the Ariel Foundation, 25 May 1971; FCO 95/1204 ‘Labour Middle East Council Visit’, 1 May 1971 .

<sup>111</sup> TNA: FCO 95/1065, ‘Information Research Department – Mark II’, undated.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

with domestic struggles. This was a trend which had its roots in the mid-1960's and grew consistently as the seventies progressed.<sup>113</sup>

Reinforcing the move away from the IRD's traditional role countering 'Moscow and Peking types of communism', IRD Mark II's remit was refocused on wider areas of concern to British foreign and domestic policy. This included Soviet-inspired communism which still remained 'a threat' but also encompassed 'revolutionary violence, industrial unrest, extremist and dangerously nationalist movements of all sorts.' The emphasis was placed on IRD to adapt to the emergence of new threats besides those inspired by communism. Importantly, despite the significantly reduced size of the department, this new IRD would still 'retain its responsibility for countering hostile threats, actual and potential' due to its expertise in propaganda. The overall purpose of the department's restructuring was to mould the IRD into a 'flexible auxiliary' positioned 'to receive, adapt and use all available types of information and specialising in the influencing of opinion'.<sup>114</sup> This provided the IRD with greater scope to address domestic nationalist movements such as the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland. This included covert work countering pro-Republican opinion inside the United States. Overseas anti-nationalism had already been part of IRD's work starting with colonial counter insurgency campaigns in Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya in the 1950s. Although its involvement in anti-nationalist campaigns in British colonial territories often had an anti-communist element even when the insurgencies appeared motivated solely by nationalism rather than communist ideology. The difference now was that in the seventies, IRD's anti-nationalist sentiment became increasingly domestically focused.<sup>115</sup>

A marked difference between the old and new IRD was its target audience. The 1948 conception of IRD was primarily focused on audiences in Western Europe with the department's initial campaigns centred on influencing European public opinion against Soviet communism. As IRD evolved so too did its target audience. In the 1950's Asia and Africa had become major targets for IRD's work alongside Latin America to a lesser extent. By the 1970's 'Europe itself was not a target'. IRD's work in Europe was restricted to cooperation with allies rather than direct operational activities.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, (London: 1998); Rory Cormac, 'The Information Research Department, Unattributable Propaganda, and Northern Ireland, 1971–1973: Promising Salvation but Ending in Failure?' *The English Historical Review* 131.552 (2016): 1074-1104.

<sup>114</sup> FCO 95/1065, 'Information Research Department – Mark II', undated.

<sup>115</sup> See Susan Carruthers, 'A Red under every bed?: Anti-communist propaganda and Britain's response to colonial insurgency', *Contemporary Record*, 9:2 (1995), 294-318.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: FCO 79/240, Record of the Interdepartmental Review Committee meeting, 19 May 1971.

Clement Attlee's Labour government had been initially averse to domestic propaganda, only relenting in 1951 as the Cold War intensified. Attlee attempted to balance the perceived necessity of countering Soviet propaganda in Britain whilst maintaining democratic freedom of expression. By 1970, there were less reservations about domestic activities. Propaganda aimed at Britain's own citizens had become an accepted necessity of educating the public and influencing public opinion towards a position which was favourable for the government. Hence there was no objection to using IRD's techniques in mass persuasion in the campaign for Britain's entry into the EEC. IRD's evolution from an anti-communist propaganda unit to a broad mass persuasion vehicle to be deployed against any threat to British policy and to influence public opinion in favour of state objectives provides a fascinating account of the legitimisation of state-sanctioned propaganda in the Cold War era. As IRD was refashioned as an all-purpose propaganda weapon and mostly openly funded, the use of propaganda in domestic life became a legitimate and acceptable instrument of the state in the seventies.

## *Chapter Three: The End of IRD*

### *Introduction*

Following the Plowden and Duncan Committee reports in the 1960s, the following decade was no easier ride for the FCO. As Britain's economic woes continued, further economies were sought from the Diplomatic Service. In 1975, the then Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, instructed the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS), a Cabinet think tank, to conduct an extensive study of the whole structure of Britain's overseas representation, with a mandate to recommend cuts to services no longer deemed necessary for Britain's reduced status as a second-tier power. Callaghan set this inquiry in motion while a Cabinet Minister, but by the time he received its final report, he had moved to Downing Street as Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup>

The CPRS worked on the enquiry for over a year, finally delivering its radical report in the summer of 1977. Like Plowden and Duncan, the CPRS made recommendations for cuts in services, as would be expected from a government cost-saving exercise, but unlike the earlier reviews, the CPRS extended its criticism into the cultural climate of the FCO. The think tank viewed the Diplomatic Service as an elitist, bloated organisation which was too conservative and middle-class in its outlook. Its diplomatic mission was spread too thin; the CPRS deemed a smaller organisation which undertook more specialised work was more appropriate to meet Britain's ongoing foreign policy requirements.<sup>2</sup>

The CPRS 'Review of Overseas Representation' was published in August 1977 and was by far their most controversial piece of work. The FCO mounted a strong counter-attack by all means at its disposal. This firstly took the form of internal lobbying: according to Joe Haines, a Downing Street insider, well before the proposals were shown to Callaghan, the Foreign Office had managed to get them watered down. As a result, the proposals that Callaghan eventually saw, and approved, were 'modified – or doctored – on the way to his desk'. The head of the CPRS, Sir Kenneth Berrill, had been persuaded to make deletions before the report was circulated to Secretaries of State and the material placed before Callaghan was considerably

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<sup>1</sup> David Allen, 'James Callaghan, 1976-77', in Kevin Theakston (ed.) *British Foreign Secretaries Since 1974* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 53-4.

<sup>2</sup> Controversially, the CPRS ruthlessly took aim at two of Britain's established pillars of foreign policy work: the British Council and BBC External Service. However, with the recommendation to abolish these two institutions the CPRS had overreached itself and had invited criticism not only from the FCO, but business leaders, Parliament and Ministers themselves. The Cabinet quickly rejected the most controversial recommendations. See Chapter Four).

changed.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the FCO organised a press campaign that attacked the CPRS Review well before its publication. Bernard Donoughue, another Downing Street insider noted in his diary entry for 7 February 1977: ‘Had lunch with The Economist journalist Richard Leonard – who told me that somebody from the FCO had got the editor (Andrew Knight) of The Economist to “doctor” an article so it was savagely critical of the (still unfinished!) CPRS report on the FCO. The machine is absolutely unprincipled in defending its interests.’<sup>4</sup> Zara Steiner, in her mastery essay on FCO reform, observed that even decades later, this report still ‘brings gasps of indignation from old timers’ for its iconoclastic recommendation that the Diplomatic Service be merged with the Home Civil Service.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, because of this push-back, the CPRS report on overseas information achieved relatively minor cuts to services rather than the radical restructuring of the FCO it had envisaged. Yet the CPRS team did elicit one major casualty, albeit indirectly. As part of the enquiry, the FCO’s information departments were required to submit reports to the CPRS team. Each department reported on its expenditure, structure, objectives, and the terms of reference which guided its work. For IRD’s report, the Permanent Under-Secretary, Michael Palliser, ordered a ‘special review’ and sought an external figure, Sir Colin Crowe, to thoroughly assess the department. Beginning in February 1976, the review was conducted over three months and provided a ‘quick survey and assessment of all of IRD’s activities.’<sup>6</sup>

The CPRS review troubled senior diplomats like Palliser who feared another round of cost cutting and overall reduction in FCO services. Crowe’s report cleverly engineered a workable alternative to allowing the CPRS to ravage information work unabated. The various information departments, including IRD, were fast tracked into the streamlined information division that senior FCO managers had attempted with the reconceptualised IRD Mark II in 1972. Four years later the merger had still not happened and with the CPRS poised to scrutinise the whole FCO machine, the need to increase efficiency and reduce overall cost on information work became an urgent matter. The proposed information division had been agreed and was actioned whilst the CPRS conducted their review, which ultimately limited the team’s scope and potential for significant recommendations on information work.

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Haines, *The Politics of Power* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), p.37.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary, Vol. Two, With James Callaghan in No. 10* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p.142.

<sup>5</sup> The best academic account is Zara Steiner, ‘The Foreign Office: Resistance and Adaptation to Changing Times’, in Gaynor Johnson (ed.) *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.13-31.

<sup>6</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, letter from Palliser to Berrill, 16 February 1976; ‘Review of IRD’, 5 March 1976.

Colin Crowe was a ‘popular’ and ‘respected’ diplomat who had served as deputy permanent representative to the United Nations in 1961-63, ambassador to Saudi Arabia from April 1963 and later Permanent Under-Secretary to the UN in 1970-73.<sup>7</sup> He was well known for his ‘commonsensical soundness of judgement’ and was thus a robust choice to conduct the review of IRD.<sup>8</sup> Crowe’s review examined ‘the objectives and work’ of IRD ‘in relation to our overseas interests, including its organisation and relationship with other Government Departments and agencies’. Crowe was tasked with making ‘recommendations on the most suitable, effective and economic means of meeting the required objectives.’<sup>9</sup> Throughout his report Crowe expressed support toward IRD as the unattributable arm of Britain’s information machinery and argued such a valuable asset should be maintained despite the threat of major reductions to the information budget as a result of the CPRS review. Furthermore, he implored senior officials to maintain a watchful eye on the Soviets, arguing that Britain required an organisation such as IRD to continue countering Soviet propaganda.

The Crowe report and its subsequent recommendations was very much a continuation of the efforts to integrate IRD into the wider FCO information structure which had been initiated in the late 1960’s with the reconceptualisation of the department into IRD Mark II. This integration had been scheduled to take place once the new IRD had become a scaled down and revamped version of IRD with a new purpose that focused less on communism and gave more attention to domestic concerns. IRD Mark II had become fully operational in mid-1972 but by the time the CPRS had been instructed to review the whole of Britain’s overseas representation four years later the integration had still not taken place. Indeed, Crowe found that despite its relocation to the information heartland in Great George Street, IRD still operated as an entirely separate department. The information machinery of the FCO acted as disparate bodies rather than the unified information division that senior diplomats had envisaged after the remodelling of IRD. Crowe found the information departments lacked coordination with each other, which sometimes resulted in duplicate work.

Crowe argued that to get the most benefit out of unattributable information work and the information service as a whole, the complete integration of IRD into a unified information division was necessary. He also advocated abandoning the name IRD which, due to the innocuous aspect, had helped to shroud the department and its activities under a cloak of

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<sup>7</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry on Sir Colin Tradescant Crowe. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70377>

<sup>8</sup> Obituary, *The Times*, London, 24 July 1989, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, letter from Palliser to Berrill, 16 February 1976; ‘Review of IRD’, 5 March 1976.

mystery. Abolishing the name, Crowe argued, would aid integration and help foster trust within the FCO as the aura of IRD's pre-Mark II conceptualisation as an anti-communist rogue unit still lingered within some quarters.

Crowe's report was in no way radical; indeed, it was evidently a continuation of previous efforts to integrate IRD's work with the rest of the information infrastructure. This view was widely shared amongst senior figures in the FCO, some whom had worked in IRD themselves. Sir Hugh Cortazzi, who had served in IRD in the 1950s, recalled that it had been 'totally remote' from its parent body where mainstream diplomats were regarded as oddities. He added:

It was a strange organisation because the Foreign Office people, like myself, were the temporaries. There were these people who had established themselves. There was a mafia and I wasn't by any means convinced that we were spending all the money efficiently. I'm not saying it was misused, but not efficient and not working.<sup>10</sup>

Cortazzi, as we shall see, was supportive of IRD type work, but like most of his colleagues, he wished to see rationalisation and an end to its isolation. The idea was that whilst IRD as a separate department would be abolished, its unattributable work would continue. This runs contrary to the accepted orthodoxy that IRD and its work had become such a toxic entity within Whitehall that the government and civil servants supported abolishing the department entirely. With the CPRS team poised to cast a critical eye over the whole FCO, diplomats anticipated recommendations from the think tank for major cuts to information work. Thus, trying to get ahead of the curve and pre-empt criticism, senior officials opted to get their house in order and finally instigate the reorganisation of information departments into a unified division with overt and covert information working alongside each other.

### ***Colin Crowe's Review of IRD***

A review of IRD's activities was difficult owing to the nature of its clandestine work. Writing to Berrill, Palliser explained that as the department's work was split between overt and covert activities, the more overt operations were more 'easily understood'. IRD, Palliser contended, 'straddles the frontier between information and intelligence, and the amalgam is *sui generis*.' The implication was that the benefit of such sensitive work was not always apparent, and

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<sup>10</sup> BDOHP interview, CORTAZZI, Sir (Henry Arthur) Hugh, Churchill College Cambridge, pp.13-15.

Palliser sought to pre-empt withdrawal of funding for propaganda work that laymen could not easily perceive the advantage of.<sup>11</sup>

Crowe's report was extensive. It covered the IRD's history from its inception in 1948 as an anti-communist propaganda unit, to its reconceptualisation as IRD Mark II in 1972. Crowe contended that in the 1940's and 1950's '[t]here was no question of fighting Soviet propaganda with its own weapons such as front organisations etc', but by the 1960's 'the operation had tended to get out of hand; IRD became too big, too diffuse and had to be reorganised'. This reorganisation into IRD Mark II followed 'comprehensive rethinking' about IRD's role in British foreign and domestic policy. The department was 'cut by more than half' but the main objective of the reconceptualisation of the department, besides economic retrenchment, 'was to move away from the rather old-fashioned anti-Communism of the early 1950's to something more relevant to the 1970's'.<sup>12</sup>

IRD Mark II employed 106 officers in the UK and eight abroad. Eighty-five staff were paid for by the open FCO vote whilst the rest were on the secret vote. The department's budget was around £978,000, with £458,314 on the open FCO vote and £519,531 from the secret vote. IRD Mark II's operational costs came in at £300,000, all of which was paid for from the secret vote. The new IRD had previously been assessed in 1974 and its inspectors had found the department to be effective in carrying out its terms of reference and appropriately staffed.<sup>13</sup> Yet IRD's budget was significantly larger than the financial ceiling of £650,000 placed on the department by the Deputy Under-Secretaries Committee for the 1972 year.<sup>14</sup> Even allowing for inflation, IRD's budget drifted to close to the £1 million mark which had made it an earlier target for FCO penny pinchers. The continued burden on the secret vote suggested that despite the Cabinet Secretary's desire to ringfence secret vote money for the big three intelligence and security agencies, IRD's covert sections, which had to be funded secretly, survived the downsized reconceptualisation.

This is supported by Crowe's assessment. Despite a previous review of IRD Mark II which found it to be efficiently meeting its terms of reference, Crowe had encountered obstacles to assessing the efficacy of the department's work. 'One of the troubles about IRD', Crowe argued, is that due to its 'extremely secret' and sometimes politically sensitive work 'it has

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<sup>11</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, letter from Palliser to Berrill, 16 February 1976.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, Extract from memo on DUS's meeting, 2 November 1970.

been surrounded by an aura of mystery' which its reorganisation as IRD Mark II had 'not by any means dissipated'. Adding to the confusion, Crowe asserted that the department was 'not helped by the fact that its stated objectives are written in flannel, not to say mumbo jumbo.' Despite the confusion, Crowe emphasised the importance of IRD's work as 'the unattributable arm of HMG's information effort in support of British foreign policy'.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Unattributable Information***

The unattributable information effort had two aspects. The first was 'a positive one of information to supplement with factual background the direct official line put out by News Department, [Central Office of Information]COI, [Guidance and Information Policy Department]GIPD, etc'. The second aspect was a defensive one, exposing external threats to the UK and 'countering activities which hamper the acceptance of HMG's foreign policy or damage British interests abroad.'<sup>16</sup>

Crowe noted that anti-communist operations were still the focus of IRD 'since the major threat to the UK's security, to its stability at home and to its interests abroad is posed by the USSR and international communism of all kinds'. Thus 'the greater part of IRD's efforts are concentrated on monitoring and exposing' the activities of the Soviet Union, other communist states, communist fronts, and communist individuals. The department was 'particularly concerned' with the military balance of power between the West and the communist world, with the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions negotiations, and the Helsinki Accords. Weaknesses in NATO partners Portugal, Spain and Cyprus and the relationship with Western communist parties, particularly in France and Italy, were further areas of concern which guided IRD's work. Following the reorganisation of IRD at the start of the seventies, the department had been tasked with expanding its reach to counter various other threats to British interests. Hence IRD's reach extended to disseminating propaganda against the IRA, particularly in the United States which was a major area of concentration for the IRA's fundraising efforts. IRD had also been active in the Falklands and Belize disputes, and even, quite bizarrely, the 'Cod Wars', the non-militarised battle between Britain and Iceland over fishing rights.<sup>17</sup>

A major criticism from Crowe's report was that the IRD's range of activities and responsibilities was too broad and necessitated a restructure into a narrower focus. The department's main area of work was producing periodicals such as *The Interpreter*, published

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<sup>15</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

monthly on communist related topics. Asian Analysis and African Review were some of the regionally focused publications. Alongside this were “Background Briefs” and Research Papers which provided analysis to Members of Parliament and other individuals of importance. The department also assisted in the publishing and distribution of books written by IRD staff or independent writers. It sponsored and paid for ‘useful visitors from abroad often to learn about counter-subversion’ and also assisted in sending UK visitors abroad, notably MPs, through the Ariel Foundation. IRD also trained foreign friendly governments in ‘counter-subversion techniques, particularly Turkey and Iran through the CENTO counter-subversion Office’.<sup>18</sup>

IRD was also responsible for liaison with the various foundations operating internationally. Crowe was particularly scathing about the location of this activity within IRD, arguing that any of the other information or cultural departments in the FCO could just as well control these liaison structures. He noted that IRD had been deliberately chosen ‘because to put it elsewhere would give it too much importance’. Such a move, he argued, ‘represents an undesirable tendency to treat IRD as a sort of ragbag’. Conversely, the Counter-Subversion Fund which amounted to £70,000 was ‘brigaded with IRD’ but administered by a civil servant outside of the department. Whilst IRD had access to the fund and the administrative officer attended IRD departmental meetings, Crowe argued that the fund was ‘really quite separate from IRD’. This was illogical considering that IRD was the department most concerned with counter-subversion.<sup>19</sup>

Although this work was unattributable it was not particularly secretive, as Crowe emphasised all these activities were in ‘the relatively public domain’. Moreover, IRD’s role in the creation and dissemination propaganda was somewhat an open secret among the consumers of the department’s product. Although unattributable and bearing ‘no marking of origin’, recipients were aware that the material was from British sources and were expected not to reveal the origin as a condition of receiving the material. Yet ‘[I]n certain circles’, Crowe argued, ‘the papers are so well known by now that the veil of confidentiality is pretty thin.’ Sensitive and secretive work was undertaken by a clandestine body within the IRD called the Special Editorial Unit. The unit was a central component of the state-private network. It ‘subsidises certain feature agencies’ in the UK and overseas ‘which are ostensibly commercial and independent who provide a regular feature service to newspapers etc, through various parts of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

the world through which intelligence material can be surfaced in the international press, notably in Asia and Africa.’ This activity was ‘deniable’, yet the Special Editorial Unit had been considerably involved in these supposedly independent agencies output. ‘For some of these agencies’, Crowe noted, ‘the Special Editorial Unit will do all the writing’. In other cases, the private organisations had more of their own input. For example, with African Features, the unit provided ‘certain political articles, the agency does the rest.’ Operations of this kind were also a tactic employed in mainland Europe with ‘covert publicity outlets in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.’<sup>20</sup>

Crowe’s report revealed that IRD’s capacity for ‘grey’ and ‘black’ operations was housed within the Special Editorial Unit, which would explain the lack of scholarship on it. Crowe defined grey operations as ‘the spreading of reports from non-existent organisations or institutions’, namely IRD-operated front organisations. While black operations ‘involve speaking in the name of real bodies’, which most likely referred to IRD’s state-private action in which private organisations would reproduce IRD propaganda and pass it off as their own independent analysis. Crowe stressed that such operations were ‘rarely used’ and were subject to ‘the tightest control’ by high level officials, ‘requiring approval in each instance from the PUS at least.’<sup>21</sup>

There were two further units within IRD who were responsible for the department’s most secretive work, both of which were based in the Regional Section. The first of these was the International Organisations Section which monitored communist front organisations and was responsible for visa policy, granting ‘admission or refusal of visas to undesirables.’ It worked closely with MI5, other relevant Whitehall departments and the Permanent Under Secretaries Department, the FCO’s liaison with the intelligence agencies. The second of these secretive domestic components of IRD was the rather innocuously named International Movements Section. This unit was in fact IRD’s dedicated section for domestic subversion, previously known as the English Section. Following more than two decades dedicated work countering communist subversion in the UK, the section’s original remit for ‘collecting information exclusively about communist activities’ had since been ‘redefined’ by the Cabinet Secretary to include non-communist subversion in the UK. The guidelines, approved by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in January 1975, extended IRD’s reach to cover ‘a much broader field from the various forms of Trotskyism on the extreme left to the neo-Fascists on the extreme right.’ The

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

unit's efforts in 'recent years' had been 'devoted' to countering IRA propaganda, particularly 'in the USA where most of the IRA's financial support comes from.'<sup>22</sup> The new innocuous name alluding to international movements attempted to disguise the domestic nature of the work, whilst the extension of domestic work to counter British fascists was perhaps a concern the Prime Minister held which IRD did not share. Left-wing subversives remained the English Section's priority and there is no evidence to suggest that the unit attempted operations against the far right.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, IRD had maintained its capacity for countering domestic subversion despite the dissolution of its supervising body, the Anti-communist (Home) Committee, in 1962. The English Section provided an effective model for unattributable information work in the seventies. The section had 'limited resources' and just four members of staff, but it was highly specialised.<sup>24</sup> The success of its operation against the communist Electrical Trades Union proved that resources for political warfare did not have to be extensive. The department also worked closely alongside MI5 which demonstrated that political warfare was most effectively pursued through an interdepartmental framework.<sup>25</sup>

With the Committee on Communism (Home) abandoned in 1962 and no machinery created to replace it, Crowe reported 'a lack of regular official consultation at working levels' on domestic subversion. To remedy the lack of coordination, he suggested that the recently revived Committee on Subversion in Public Life act as liaison machinery at the working level. The lack of supervision of domestic operations had not concerned Wilson. In January 1975, he approved recommendations which rejected formal control by a Cabinet level committee in favour of maintaining control of the English Section's operations under 'the responsibility of the FCO'. This was clearly an attempt for the Cabinet to distance themselves from the dubious nature of domestic activities and protect the government from damaging leaks to the press. Should 'any part of IRD's activity in discrediting extremists were to become public', Crowe explained that the government had in place a contingency plan to prevent further leaks. Following such a scandal, IRD would tighten its distribution list to 'a strictly limited circulation confined to Whitehall'.<sup>26</sup> Wilson's deal with Trades Union Congress through the Social Contract had halted

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The limited documentation in the series FCO 168 does not reveal any operations against the far right in Britain, yet this may be proven when further documentation is declassified.

<sup>24</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: CAB 301/400, 'The English and International Organisations Section', undated; Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence*, (John Murray, London 2001), p.547.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

the English Section's active operations planting stories in the press, although its surveillance of British communists continued. Political necessities meant the Cabinet refused to take ownership of domestic propaganda. Interestingly, domestic propaganda had remained in the FCO despite the appeal of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Crosland, to move it to the more appropriate location of the Home Office.<sup>27</sup>

The Crowe report was sympathetic in its analysis of the value of IRD's work. Crowe was unequivocal in his support for a continued capacity to defend British interests, support foreign policy and counter external threats to the UK. Despite the risk of public exposure, '[a]ny government', he asserted, 'that dismantles its defences against subversion, particularly at a time like the present, puts itself at great risk.'<sup>28</sup>

Despite widening its capacity to also include non-communist threats to the UK, Crowe reported that IRD still focused most of its resources on countering international communism. The reconceptualisation of the department as IRD Mark II had sought to dispel the department's outdated preoccupation with communism, an aim Crowe himself agreed with. Yet communism remained a threat and Crowe anticipated further criticism of the necessity of IRD's anti-communist work, therefore, he was determined to present a robust defence of it. He noted that there was an argument 'on the international scene that the cold war is now irrelevant, that it has been replaced with the whole network of détente, the Helsinki agreements and the process of dialogue with the communist states.' Open dialogue and economic cooperation, he argued, 'needs to be developed' and good relations with the Soviet Union and the rest of the communist world should be fostered.<sup>29</sup>

However, for Crowe, the thawing of relations between East and West did not negate 'the case that the ideological struggle still goes on'. Crowe pointed to an upsurge in Soviet propaganda since the Helsinki Accords which 'have indeed demonstrated that the ideological war is by no means over.' He cautioned against weakening Western counter-propaganda capacity as the Soviet propaganda machine had shown no signs of abating in either output or expenditure. Furthermore, Crowe was doubtful that the Soviet Union intended to 'fully' observe the Helsinki Accords 'in the spirit in which it was conceived by the West'. Therefore, it was important to prevent Western opinion from being 'hoodwinked' by Soviet propagandists extolling Soviet cooperation through the Helsinki agreements. Crowe felt it was necessary to employ counter

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<sup>27</sup> TNA: FCO 168/5396, memo from T. C. Barker, 29 October 1974.

<sup>28</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

propaganda to expose Soviet transgressions with the Helsinki Accords as a weapon to enforce their compliance. 'Only by keeping after them', he argued, 'may they be induced to live up to their obligations.'<sup>30</sup>

Crowe's report rejected the notion that Britain's poor economic performance in the mid-1970s should necessitate a withdrawal from the ideological war and reduce Britain's role in international affairs. In fact, Britain's economic weakness necessitated a maintained propaganda capacity, he argued, and 'to be more rather than less active in defending ourselves'. Crowe asserted that Ministers were themselves reluctant to withdrawal from the international stage. This was a position which appeared to be supported by the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan who recently argued that 'I do not believe that our voice in foreign affairs need be or should be unduly muted during our period of difficulty even though it is likely to continue for some time yet.' In addition, Callaghan argued against merely defending against Soviet attacks or taking 'the "Soviet threat" as our starting point, we should put our own objectives first', he contended.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Black Propaganda***

Thus, overt propaganda in defence of British interests and the promotion of British influence abroad was seen as a necessary component of state bureaucracy. But what of the dark side of the coin, the unattributable work undertaken by IRD? Crowe undoubtedly saw the value in IRD's clandestine work. While official sources of information such as the Central Office of Information and BBC were important avenues for 'selling' the government's foreign policy to the British public, there was a limit to this type of information work. 'After a certain point', Crowe noted, 'obvious Government propaganda becomes counter-productive'. It was at this point that IRD's value to the state became essential. Disseminating the government's line through seemingly independent sources fed into the public's 'state of mind' and appetite for objectivity. As Crowe put it, '[p]eople like to feel they are getting something objective, the facts'. It was his opinion that IRD's unattributable work 'should be directed' at this state of mind and that it was 'a capacity' which would be 'very unwise to throw away'.

IRD's highly secretive nature had made it vulnerable to the government's cost cutters during the 1970's. As the FCO's information budgets were slashed, the department was often targeted as an area where the FCO could make significant savings. This was due to two factors, firstly,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

officials in Whitehall and even some within the FCO were ignorant of IRD's activities and could not appreciate the importance of its work. The fact that the department was shrouded in mystery was not helped by its innocuous title. Crowe felt that in particular, the use of the term 'research' gave a 'misleading impression of the Department's work'. This had been recognised as a problem during the reorganisation of IRD in 1972 'but no one apparently could think of a better name for the Department'.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, Crowe noted that within Whitehall, IRD 'has been regarded with deep suspicion as a law unto itself, allegedly pursuing its own foreign policy without too much reference to higher authority'. Whilst compiling his report, Crowe had 'encountered' this suspicion in all departments, 'the more intense the higher one goes'. However, in relation to IRD's overt work he rejected the accusation as 'quite baseless'. IRD was 'fully responsive to direction from political departments', Crowe argued, if political direction was compromised, it had been 'more often than not' the fault of the political departments. With IRD's clandestine operations and the activities of the Special Editorial Unit, Crowe conceded that there was 'naturally not the same degree of day to day contact' with other departments. Moreover, the nature of the Special Editorial Unit's black operations necessitated concealing the origin of the material to avoid detection as government propaganda by its readers. This meant that 'it will not follow the departmental guidelines as closely as the unattributable material'. Nevertheless, IRD's clandestine work did follow 'general policy guidelines' formulated in Planning Staff papers and intelligence and departmental analyses.<sup>33</sup>

Crowe emphasised the degree of oversight of IRD's black operations. In the first instance, operations were supervised by the Planning Group for Special Operations. Chaired by the Special Editorial Unit, the group met monthly with various members of the intelligence agencies, including foreign agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). However, planning for Special Editorial Unit's operations had hitherto been seemingly separated from the rest of IRD. Crowe conceded that the former head of IRD 'for various reasons' did not attend meetings. Ray Whitney who headed IRD from 1976 recognised the error of this practice and assured Crowe he would regularly attend meetings to 'exercise an immediate control'.<sup>34</sup>

More independent oversight was provided by the Interdepartmental Review Committee which met twice a year under the chairmanship of Mr Sykes. The committee could also meet outside

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.6

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

of the standard biannual meetings if required to provide immediate advice to the head of IRD. The final point of oversight of IRD's black and grey activities was the process of receiving 'individual clearance' of each operation by at least the Permanent Under-Secretary. For Crowe, the present level of oversight was 'adequate to ensure that covert operations do not get out of hand'. He warned against creating more machinery in order to exercise greater control of black operations, arguing that 'there is already a danger that decisions take too long because the existing machine is overloaded'.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Perception of IRD within the FCO*

Crowe was satisfied that the level of supervision of IRD's operations was adequate and that 'IRD is doing a job that needs to be done, that no one else has the skills to do and is doing it competently'. Yet despite this, he expressed that 'a certain unease persists'. This unease was partly an 'emotional' response to the mysterious aura of IRD and 'the suggestion of dirty tricks'. Ultimately, the department's activities sat uncomfortably with the rest of the FCO. IRD's propaganda work was viewed as the antithesis of 'truth' which many FCO officials believed 'must be the basis of British foreign policy'.<sup>36</sup>

This unease had recently come to a head following Callaghan's decree to diplomats that foreign policy should not only respond defensively to Soviet attacks but 'put our own objectives first'.<sup>37</sup> Such a policy suggested that propaganda was a requirement, but this 'was repulsed by horror' amongst diplomats who 'claimed' '[o]ur campaign... would be based on the truth'. Yet again Crowe came to IRD's defence. He argued that whilst the promotion of 'our truth' was an admirable goal and that Britain's truth was 'generally more accurate than other peoples', the issue with such a pious position was that 'other people do not always accept' Britain's truth. Hence the necessity of propaganda. 'Our objective', Crowe asserted, 'must be that third parties should accept our version rather than our opponents' and official British Government pronouncements will not always do the trick'.<sup>38</sup>

The anxiety around IRD's work within the rest of the FCO was understandable owing to recent events in the United States with the report of the Church Committee investigation in April 1976. The Senate investigations had been prompted by press revelations of covert action, subversion of foreign governments and assassination attempts on foreign leaders pursued by

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Letter from R. Farrar to Mr Laurence (Chief Inspector), 18 January 1977.

<sup>38</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

the CIA and the surveillance of US citizens by the National Security Agency. The tension around IRD's activities had already been sparked by the earlier Ramparts revelations of CIA cultural fronts in 1967.<sup>39</sup> Diplomats had almost anticipated similar revelations of IRD's work in the British press, the Church Committee had compounded these fears.

Crowe posited an alternate theory that the unease with IRD's work originated within the liberal mindset. The Cold War had become a 'pejorative term' and the Soviets 'had very skilfully attributed the blame for the cold war to the Americans'. As such, 'any department... that can be regarded as perpetuating the cold war by exposing the USSR and communism tends to be frowned on by liberal opinion – "reds under the bed".' This view, Crowe argued, had negatively affected opinion on IRD's work which included anti-nationalist as well as anti-communist work. Despite the department further branching out into other areas of foreign policy following its reconceptualisation, the perception of communist paranoia within its ranks persisted. 'People', Crowe noted, 'get impatient with what they see as its one tune'.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The coordination of Information Work***

Crowe unequivocally supported propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy and argued that the IRD was 'reasonably organised and effective' and 'on the whole the operation could be left unchanged'. Although he suggested minor changes to reduce costs, such the closure of some overseas offices and abolishment of some publishing activities. Alongside this an alteration to its terms of reference 'to say what the job is... in less mealy mouthed and trendy terms' would be 'desirable' to avoid the misperception of the department which had added to the mistrust by other departments.<sup>41</sup>

Yet when assessed within the context of Britain's whole 'information/propaganda policy', Crowe found that IRD's activities were isolated from those of the other information departments. Despite the relocation of IRD's offices from Riverwalk to the central location of the FCO's information offices, IRD's work remained a separate operation. Rather than maintain IRD as a separate unit, Crowe argued senior diplomats to enact a complete integration of the department with the rest of FCO's information departments. This was a position which IRD inspectors in recent years and even 'the department itself' supported. All had 'reached the general conclusion that there should be greater combination of functions in the information

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<sup>39</sup> TNA: FCO 79/182, 'Information Research Department (IRD)', 29 July 1970.

<sup>40</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

departments... to permit a more integrated and focused projection of Britain and HMG's policies'.<sup>42</sup>

The present uncoordinated information machinery was inefficient and often resulted in a crossover of efforts. A report on information activities in March 1976 had highlighted that Guidance and Information Policy Department and the Central Office of Information's output to missions abroad contained background information for the posts which could also 'be put before selected local "multipliers" or decision takers'. But as Crowe pointed out, these were 'precisely the targets that IRD is aiming for'. He was incredulous 'that material should go out uncoordinated from two or three sources through the same channels to the same audiences about the same subjects'.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, Crowe recommended a complete integration of IRD into the rest of the information service to create a 'unified Information Division' in the FCO. Crowe's scheme would see the 'running together of [Guidance and Information Policy Department]GIPD and IRD', which would see the integration of the two departments into a newly created Information Department, saving staff and getting 'rid of the name of IRD' which Crowe had taken a personal dislike to. However, such a scheme was not straightforward. Whilst a new Information Department could easily absorb IRD's overt activities, subversion, anti-communist activities and the secretive sections of IRD, in particular the Special Editorial Unit, could not easily be absorbed or moved elsewhere. One possible solution was to keep Special Editorial Unit attached to the research section of the new Information Department, yet as IRD dwarfed Guidance and Information Policy Department, Crowe noted that within the FCO there were concerns that 'the defensive and operational role of IRD would tend to distort the straight information effort' of the new department. Crowe posited an alternative argument that 'by being closely associated with overt guidance IRD's work would tend to cover over its "Commie bashing" aspects which is what it has been trying to achieve since Mark II'.<sup>44</sup>

Another solution was to relocate IRD's clandestine activities 'to some secret part of HMG or section of the FCO'. Crowe opposed moving IRD's secret sections outside of the FCO. He argued that there 'was no suitable slot for them outside the FCO'. He was even less enamoured with the idea of moving them to a dark corner of the FCO unattached to an overt department. To ensure accountability, he argued the Special Editorial Unit must remain attached to an

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

official department. 'If they go underground', Crowe contended, 'they will tend to lose contact with reality, lose political touch and will become more difficult to control'. He used the case of IRD's recent involvement in anti-IRA propaganda to elucidate the point. In Northern Ireland 'they had a sort of psy-war outfit to which indeed two IRD people were seconded. It was very secret, full of enthusiastic young officers, got out of hand and did some very foolish things'. The out of control unit was eventually abolished and replaced with 'a kind of central information unit' to control the information war against the IRA.<sup>45</sup>

Crowe argued that the only possible department which could locate the secret sections of IRD was the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department. The sections would have to remain within IRD control as they 'were integral parts of IRD in that they depend on IRD's research capability'. The only solution that Crowe envisaged as a suitable alternative was to list the secret sections 'purely for cover purposes under PUSD(b)'. Derek Tonkin from the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department was 'attracted by the idea since it would confuse the opposition!' and not involve additional workload, just a change in the 'surface appearance'. Crowe acknowledged that such an arrangement would be 'rather messy' but similar arrangements had worked previously. He implored the Permanent Under-Secretary to consider the arrangement if it was indeed decided that IRD's secret sections could not remain situated within the research side of the new Information Department.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the issues with relocating IRD's secret sections, Crowe was adamant that their work should continue. Although it was difficult to appraise the specific effectiveness of IRD's covert and overt operations, Crowe was impressed by the effectiveness of the department's covert operations, demonstrated by the global reproduction of IRD's material. 'To discontinue them', he argued, 'would suggest we were losing heart ourselves and would discourage our friends and allies'. Besides the alternative path would end up leaving these operations in the sole hands of the Americans which Crowe argued would be a grave error. The Americans could not suitably replicate IRD's efforts 'as they are peculiarly ours and they are after all aimed at defending ourselves, an exercise we should be ready to pay for'.<sup>47</sup>

During the height of the Cold War in the late 1940's and 1950's, the Foreign Office had accepted propaganda as an instrument to fight global communist domination. But in the era of détente, many diplomats within the FCO actively opposed subversion. It was within this

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

changing climate, increasingly hostile to state sanctioned covert operations, that IRD and its supporters fought to maintain propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy. The Crowe report offered a staunch defence for a continued propaganda capacity within the FCO, but Crowe was not sentimentally attached to the continued existence of IRD as a separate entity. In fact, the Crowe report provided the final nail in the coffin for IRD.<sup>48</sup>

### *The End of IRD as a Separate Department*

Crowe's report and recommendations were received favourably by senior diplomats in the FCO. The Deputy Under-Secretary, Hugh Cortazzi, the Assistant Under-Secretary of Information, Ronald Scrivener, and the head of IRD, Ray Whitney, supported Crowe's proposal to foster 'closer harmonisation of our attributable and non-attributable information efforts'. They argued it should lead to 'greater efficiency and economies' and 'should also bring about the welcome disappearance of the name "IRD" and the aura of mystery which continues to surround the Department and to have a deleterious effect on its relations with FCO and other Whitehall Departments'.<sup>49</sup>

Shortly after the Crowe report was delivered to the Permanent Under Secretary, Michael Palliser, Whitney sent a circular to all of IRD's staff informing them of the conclusions of the review. He informed them that Crowe's recommendation to reorganise the information departments into a unified information division would be examined by the CPRS in their forthcoming review in autumn 1976. In the meantime, pending reorganisation of IRD, the department's terms of reference would be rewritten on the lines suggested by Crowe. The guidance was a more transparent description of the two aspects of IRD's work. Firstly, the positive role influencing overseas and domestic opinion in favour of British foreign policy initiatives. And secondly, the defensive work undertaken by the department to counter and expose threats to the UK and its allies and alliances, in particular NATO and the European Economic Community.<sup>50</sup>

Implementation of the recommendations of the Crowe necessitated further inspection of IRD. Whitney attempted to assuage IRD staffs' concerns over yet another inspection of their work. He acknowledged that a second inspection in the space of two years 'may be unsettling' but it was 'a logical extension of the Crowe review' which had already painted IRD's work in a 'highly favourable light'. Whitney argued that he was 'confident that restructuring on the lines

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Letter from Scrivener to PUS, 19 July 1976.

<sup>50</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Memo from Ray Whitney to all members of IRD, undated.

envisaged will result in an organisation which ensures that the work we do, the value of which has been so clearly recognised by Sir C. Crowe and endorsed by the PUS, will be more effectively integrated with the wider information effort'. Yet Whitney failed to inform IRD staff that such a reorganisation would be dramatic for IRD, seeing the department stripped of its name and potentially its secret sections, and absorbed into the rest of the FCO's information departments.<sup>51</sup>

Whitney was concerned that a second inspection of IRD in the space of two years, alongside the Crowe and CPRS reviews presented 'dangers for the morale, and hence, for the efficiency of the Department'. The Chief Inspector responsible for implementing the Crowe recommendations had also expressed concern 'that members of IRD will form the impression that they are being "over-inspected"'. Whitney's circular attempted soothe these concerns but IRD staff were clearly attuned to a sense of foreboding doom for the future of the department.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, such concerns were well placed particularly as some influential people had already campaigned to have the department shut down.

One of these agitators was Jenny Little, the International Secretary of the Labour Party. In March 1976, the Foreign Secretary's Private Secretary, John Weston, wrote to Palliser informing him that Little, who had herself been an FCO official until 1972, had expressed her distaste for IRD. She argued that it 'served no useful function and ought long ago to have been wound up', apart from perhaps one or two sections which Little thought would be better served in the FCO's Research Department. Little told Weston that 'since she felt strongly about the matter she intended to do what she could to see that her views were fed into the CPRS review'. One diplomat dryly remarked that Little's opinion on IRD was 'well-known and famously held' and indeed the Planning Staff who liaised with Transport House had 'heard them on several occasions'. Nevertheless, he thought the Permanent Under-Secretary should be aware that she had planned to set out her views to the CPRS in order to influence the outcome in some way. Transport House had always enjoyed a close working relationship with IRD, sharing its ethos on countering international communist influence. Little had herself worked for the department during her last two years at the FCO from 1970-72. The fact that a former staff and current head of Transport House now sought to flex their influence to help abolish the department perhaps reflected the growing antipathy towards the department across Whitehall.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> TNA: FCO 79/468, Memo from Ray Whitney: 'Inspection of IRD following the Crowe report', 28 July 1976.

<sup>53</sup> TNA: FCO 79/468, Memo from John Weston, 23 March 1976.

On 22 July 1976, Palliser presented the Crowe report to the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Crosland, alongside his own opinion on the report. Palliser informed Crosland that following his appointment as Permanent Under-Secretary he had ordered a review into IRD, partly in support of the forthcoming CPRS review, but also as a means to re-examine certain aspects of IRD's activities. Palliser was impressed by the 'continuing need for a department to carry out the role fulfilled by IRD in defence of HMG's interests'. He was also adamant that such a department should remain part of the FCO infrastructure despite the fact other departments within Whitehall were also connected with IRD's work. Rather than maintain the status quo, however, Palliser agreed with Crowe's assertion that IRD's work as the unattributable arm of British foreign policy should be integrated into the rest of the information structure of the FCO.<sup>54</sup>

For Palliser, the integration of IRD into an information division was necessary to provide coherence and coordination between unattributable and attributable forms of information work, but he stressed the integration should not be perceived as a green light make further swingeing cuts to propaganda expenditure. Instead he sought to ringfence the money spent on unattributable work and hoped to persuade Crosland. The CPRS inspectors, Palliser argued, should recognise 'the difficulty of judging the effectiveness of any information operation in financial terms' and, therefore, 'must take account of the use of resources involved'. IRD's total budget just shy of £1 million, with £458,314 funded by the Diplomatic Service, was relatively small, he contended, compared to the overall budget of £150 million.<sup>55</sup>

Evan Luard, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, also agreed that IRD's unattributable work should continue and remain within the FCO. Writing to Crosland, he endorsed Palliser's view that the question of whether unattributable propaganda should be maintained in a separate department or be incorporated into a unified information structure should be left to the CPRS inspection. Yet Palliser was already leaning towards the view that IRD should be closed down. This was due to the practical implications of staffing the department. IRD recruitment had not been subjected to the usual recruitment procedures of the Diplomatic Service. The IRD cadre was a separate entity composed of specialists who were 'not required to take on the obligations of the DS [Diplomatic Service] as a whole'. Crowe found this set up 'undesirable' as it was likely to 'create anomalies and special groups; and make administration much less flexible'. Crowe recommended the eventual incorporation of

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<sup>54</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Letter from Palliser to Foreign Secretary, 22 July 1976.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

the IRD cadre into the Diplomatic Service, but he was aware of the obstacles to this. As IRD staff were specialists and ‘continuity is necessary in their work’ it was impracticable for IRD staff to be as flexible as Diplomatic Service staff.<sup>56</sup>

Writing to Luard, Palliser argued it was ‘difficult to see how, without some kind of special recruitment, the work of IRD – which we both agree should be continued – could effectively be done, since there would be real problems about trying to staff IRD, however it may be organised, simply from the Diplomatic Service’. The Permanent Under-Secretary and Luard agreed that the staff issues were a matter for the CPRS team, who should consider ‘the case for and against the existence of a separate IRD cadre’.<sup>57</sup>

The Permanent Under-Secretary also forwarded a copy of the Crowe Report to Berrill, but asked him to restrict access on a strictly “need to know” basis due to the sensitive parts detailing IRD’s secret sections.<sup>58</sup> Whilst senior diplomats in the FCO were clear on their support for a continued unattributable propaganda effort, it was unclear how much support there was for the continued existence of IRD’s secret sections. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary did not at all appear supportive of the secretive aspect of IRD’s work. Luard alerted Crosland to IRD’s black propaganda operations. Crosland had only been in the position of Foreign Secretary for six months and was seemingly unaware of the subversive work IRD undertook alongside unattributable propaganda. Luard forwarded details of this work to Crosland and surmised that ‘it is perhaps right that you should at least know of, and consent to, this type of activity’.<sup>59</sup> Crosland’s predecessor as Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, had been fully apprised of IRD’s work and ‘terms of reference’. Moreover, Callaghan and the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, had ‘seen and approved the ground rules for IRD’s home activities’ with Callaghan ‘shown specific examples of these’. Contrary to Luard’s suspicions of IRD, the previous Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord Goronwy-Roberts supported the department’s work. On visiting IRD and being briefed about its work, he enthusiastically ‘suggested names of additional recipients’ of IRD material in both the House of Commons and Lords.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the existence of sceptics like Luard and Crosland, IRD retained the backing of Prime Ministers in the 1970s. Ted Heath had heavily relied on IRD’s skills influencing public opinion

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<sup>56</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>57</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Palliser to Luard, 18 October 1976.

<sup>58</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Letter from Palliser to Foreign Secretary, 22 July 1976.

<sup>59</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Luard to Crosland, 19 October 1976.

<sup>60</sup> TNA: FCO 79/468, ‘IRD brief for CPRS’, 13 February 1976.

to support his campaign to join the EEC. The head of IRD at the time, Norman Reddaway, played a significant role planting pro-EEC propaganda pieces in the press.<sup>61</sup> Whilst Wilson and Callaghan were both eager to maintain the surveillance of communists within British industry. Both of these areas of interest held distinctive political interest for the parties themselves. The Conservatives and Labour's use of unattributable information to meet policy objectives at times appeared dangerously close to the boundary between national and party politics. Indeed, as Home Secretary, Callaghan appealed to MI5 to aid his campaign to root out communist influence in the unions by unseating Hugh Scanlon, the hard left leader of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Callaghan also requested information on the misappropriation of funds from the London Cooperative Society which had been taken over by communists with one official suspected of channelling funds meant for the Labour Party either into his own pocket or into the communist newspaper the Morning Star. The request alarmed the Director General, Furnival Jones, who felt the issue of Labour's funding gap 'was getting perilously near the field of party politics'.<sup>62</sup>

Following Crowe's review of IRD, the FCO launched an internal inspection of its information departments to investigate the feasibility of Crowe's recommendation to reorganise the separate information departments into a unified information division. The Inspectors examined News Department, Information Administration Department, Guidance and Information Policy Department, and IRD. The inspectors recommended integration of the latter three into two new departments. The recommendation, 'although far-reaching and complex', was considered a logical conclusion following the Crowe Report.<sup>63</sup>

On 26 January 1977, the Permanent Under-Secretary wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, John Hunt, to inform him of the outcome of the inspector's reports which were being considered by the FCO but had not yet been approved at official level or seen by the Foreign Secretary. The report recommended the dissolution of the three FCO information departments – Guidance and Information Policy Department, Information Administration Department and IRD – and integrate their activities into two new departments. The first was named Overseas Information Department and, as the name suggested, it was responsible for all overseas information work 'whether attributable, non-attributable or (in special cases) deniable'. The second department,

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office and Domestic Propaganda on the European Community, 1960–72,' *Contemporary British History* 23.2 (2009): 155-180, p.159, 164.

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5*, (Penguin reprint, 2010), pp.534-5.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Letter from R. Farrar to Mr Laurence (Chief Inspector), 18 January 1977.

called the Information Policy Department, was responsible for administration and liaison with other departments and agencies. Its duties included responsibility ‘for the information vote, information staffs overseas and our relations with COI and the BBC on questions of policy’. The inspection also recommended integration of News Department into ‘the Information Division to ensure closer coordination between our handling of the press’ both in the UK and abroad ‘and our information effort overseas’.<sup>64</sup>

Whilst this meant the official end to IRD as a separate department it did not signal the end of IRD’s work in unattributable information. The IRD cadre was instead split either between the two new departments or absorbed into other areas of the civil service. Palliser noted that about half of the IRD cadre ‘would remain in the new Overseas Information Department, but would lose their separate identity’. Another group of staff ‘would continue to do research work, but as part of, or allied to, our Research Department’. The remainder would be placed elsewhere within the civil service. Palliser was enthused by the reorganisation and he was satisfied that a new streamlined information division would ensure a more coordinated overseas information effort. He also felt that the new infrastructure would ‘lead to a greater awareness and better use of’ the information machinery by both the FCO and other departments in Whitehall.<sup>65</sup>

The abolition of IRD was predominantly motivated by the FCO to streamline attributable and unattributable information to create a more efficient publicity infrastructure. But the reorganisation also presented an opportunity for a renewed reconceptualisation of IRD which IRD Mark II had failed to achieve. This can be seen in the terms of reference for the new Overseas Information Department. The guidelines were based on Crowe’s suggested terms of reference ones for a reorganised IRD. The description of IRD’s dual approach producing positive and defensive propaganda had been replaced by a vaguer outline of the new department’s responsibility for producing information in support of Government policy:

‘The provision of guidance and background briefing on matters of general concern affecting government policy. This includes the preparation of attributable and non-attributable information material in support of British policies, including, as appropriate, material to expose and counter activities which damage the interests of Britain and her allies’.

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<sup>64</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

The defensive element which countered threats to the UK domestically and which had been described by Crowe as IRD's 'major role' had been muted in the new terms of reference. This was perhaps an attempt to reign in IRD's penchant for subversion which had focused too keenly on communism and consumed too much of the department's resources in both money and manpower.<sup>66</sup> Akin to IRD, the department's unattributable work would be concealed, with Palliser noting that 'only the first sentence' of the guidelines would 'be suitable for public use' and would be published in the Diplomatic Service List.<sup>67</sup>

The notion of recasting IRD as a new department more in line with the rest of the government's information effort (and removing the anti-communist obsession) whilst maintaining its expertise in unattributable propaganda held sway among senior diplomats. The head of IRD was firmly in favour of the move yet he acknowledged that such a momentous cultural shift could not be achieved overnight. Whitney noted that the reconceptualisation of IRD as Overseas Information Department would require former IRD staff 'to refocus and broaden the scope of their work'. Although 'confident' in their ability to do so and convinced 'that their skills and experience will be utilised to better effect in the new organisation', he urged colleagues to allow for a period of 'readjustment'.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Hugh Cortazzi was aware of the danger to IRD staff morale that the department's closure would likely evoke. Writing to the Chief Inspector, he argued 'I think the current IRD cadre do need some reassurance that their individual interests will be looked after in the new organisation'.<sup>69</sup>

Whitney, however, was more concerned that the new department was stripped too harshly of IRD's former functions and chronically understaffed. The inspectors report had recommended moving IRD's Press Distribution Section to the new research department, a move which Whitney strongly objected to. He argued that 'a large amount of press reading will be essential' to the new Overseas Information Department and therefore the function should be retained there.<sup>70</sup>

On staffing levels, Whitney was even more critical. He appealed to the Chief Inspector that 'the staffing levels you have proposed are very tight and seem to us to represent the barest minimum if the job is to be done properly'. Hugh Cortazzi had suggested a review of the two new

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<sup>66</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Whitney to Laurence, 14 January 1977; Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977; FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

<sup>67</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977.

<sup>68</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Whitney to Laurence, 14 January 1977.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Cortazzi to Laurence, 4 January 1977.

<sup>70</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Whitney to Laurence, 14 January 1977.

departments functioning after a year which had been welcomed by Whitney as it also presented ‘an opportunity for a reconsideration if experience shows that some of the staff cuts have gone too far for efficiency’.<sup>71</sup>

The proposed staff levels of the new Overseas Information Department would lead to a dramatic overall reduction in the level of staff focused on economic matters. Whitney argued that level was ‘inadequate’ and ‘inadvisable’ considering the growing need for such work. IRD had only recently become involved in economic information work with its notable campaigns on the EEC, yet its economic output had already inspired criticism from around Whitehall.<sup>72</sup>

Yet Colin Crowe had roundly criticised this area of IRD’s work. IRD’s claim that it could help promote Britain as a reliable country which was safe to lend to, alarmed some in Whitehall. The move had caused ‘flutters in the Treasury’ and the department had contributed nothing of substance to promote the image of ‘creditworthiness’. Crowe dismissed it as ‘misguided attempt to be trendy’. Yet he was impressed by the department’s output on general economic issues across the globe such as the New International Economic Order and the fourth session of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Emphasising that such issues were integral to Britain, Crowe argued that ‘[w]e need to make our views widely known in the Third World whose opinion moulders are very ignorant, subject to a great deal of Communist propaganda but in many cases are open to reasoned argument’. Demand for IRD’s economic material was highest from posts in the Third World. Crowe argued economic propaganda was extremely valuable and of a high standard which invoked an impression of creditability. If anything, the material was ‘too objective’ and not slanted enough in Britain’s favour.<sup>73</sup>

John Hunt and Douglas Wass, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, had also previously expressed ‘doubts’ over the value of IRD’s economic material. The Foreign Office, however, did see the value in the work and were determined to maintain IRD’s capacity for economic propaganda. Attempting to persuade Hunt, Palliser noted that Crowe had also been ‘sceptical’ of IRD’s economic material, but as his review progressed he ‘came to accept the value of the work’. The Permanent Under-Secretary argued that non-attributable information on economic affairs was as necessary as attributable material and overseas posts found IRD’s product useful. There was ‘a steadily increasing demand from them’, Palliser argued, ‘for more such ammunition to use in their exchanges with other governments’. Recent IRD work on EEC

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<sup>71</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Whitney to Laurence, 14 January 1977; Cortazzi to Laurence, 4 January 1977.

<sup>72</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Whitney to Laurence, 14 January 1977.

<sup>73</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

fisheries issues which diplomats based in Brussels had found particularly useful, demonstrated the ongoing role non-attributable information could have on economic matters. Although representing a small aspect of IRD's overall output, economic information work had been a larger part of Guidance and Information Policy Department, therefore, the expertise was already available in the new Overseas Information Department. Palliser argued that it 'should certainly be a priority task for the new combined Department'.<sup>74</sup>

### ***Overseas Information Department***

The Permanent Under-Secretary argued that the reorganisation made economic sense for the FCO as it presented 'an opportunity to rationalise our accounting procedures'. IRD's expenditure had always been split between the open and secret votes, yet if the reorganisation of information departments was approved, Palliser argued 'there would in future be no identifiable "IRD" as such'. The Overseas Information Department would be funded by the information vote. The research side responsible for meeting the 'special requirements' of Overseas Information Department and located within Research Department would be funded from the main Diplomatic Service vote. Thus, the new department would be mainly funded by more traditional means apart from the Special Producer Unit of Overseas Information Department which would require funds from the secret vote for its running costs and operational activities.<sup>75</sup>

Whilst most of the FCO's top brass supported the proposals for the new information division, Nicholas Barrington, head of Guidance and Information Policy Department, strongly objected to what he perceived as the prioritisation of non-attributable over attributable information in the inspectors' report. Barrington was concerned that this prejudice would come to shape the culture and output of the new Overseas Information Department which his department was to be amalgamated into. Barrington had taken umbrage with how the inspector's report had considered non-attributable and attributable work, with a slant towards prioritising the former. Writing to the Chief Inspector, he remarked that whilst he was 'sure' that 'you did not intend that the attributable guidance operation should be given a lower priority than the continuation of IRD's unattributable information work', the report had indeed given such an impression. He argued that readers of the report would wrongly ascertain that attributable work was merely limited to a small section of Guidance and Information Policy Department which could be

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<sup>74</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977.

<sup>75</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977; Farrar to Smith, 12 January 1977.

‘assimilated easily into one of the units of IRD, rather than that Department as a whole must be organised to give due and major importance to attributable information work’.<sup>76</sup>

Barrington’s argument was ‘not only that the new department should give due importance to attributable information work but that it must be seen to be a department which does this’. His concern was that a noticeable prioritisation of non-attributable work would give the impression that Overseas Information Department was merely a duplicate of IRD ‘with sections of the old GIPD added’. To counter this, he ‘strongly’ suggested blocking former IRD staff from holding too many positions of influence within the new organisation. This included ensuring some regional advisors ‘are non-IRD’ and that ‘at least one of the three Assistants of the new department should be a regular DS5 officer, not from an IRD background’. The latter move would ‘in effect’ mean that one of the Assistants in charge of Overseas Information Department would be the successor of the current Deputy Head of Guidance and Information Policy Department. Barrington argued that such hiring practices would help ‘achieve the desired result of an integration’ and engender parity between the two types of information work, attributable and non-attributable, whereby ‘the origins of officers eventually became irrelevant’.<sup>77</sup>

Barrington’s objections were perhaps merely a result of interdepartmental rivalries and an attempt to avoid losing ground to non-attributable information work. As the head of the department principally concerned with attributable information it is unsurprising the he wanted officials to recognise the importance of attributable information in the reorganisation. His concerns, however, did not gain traction with his FCO colleagues. Following his earlier comments that the inspectors’ reports gave precedence to non-attributable over attributable information work, Barrington again pressed for changes to the report on IRD. He was concerned that the report was ‘going as it is to CPRS without any qualification’ and would give the impression ‘that it is weighted somewhat towards the unattributable side of the work’. Barrington suggested including a paragraph explaining that ‘the proposed internal scheme’ of the new department ‘may have to be altered to give more weight to the attributable side of the operations’ and would at least involve a revision to the terms of reference to take this ‘into account’.<sup>78</sup>

The head of IRD was against the move. Whitney had ‘serious doubts about any such remarks’ which would likely ‘draw the CPRS’s attention to the problem’. He was reluctant to give the

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<sup>76</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Barrington to Laurence, 17 January 1977.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Weston to Barrington, 18 January 1977.

CPRS any hint of tensions in the proposed restructure. It was a sentiment shared by senior diplomats. Barrington agreed that it was ‘difficult to judge how much to say to the CPRS when sending them the inspection reports’. If disagreements between heads of departments were brushed over the CPRS may assume there was an agreed consensus, yet if disagreements were relayed it risked drawing attention to these areas of dispute and therefore ‘giving the CPRS ammunition with which they could attack us in a very damaging way’.<sup>79</sup>

Barrington had already come face to face with the CPRS team and his suspicion of them was likely stirred by that meeting. On 15 December 1976, Marrack Goulding, Dr Tessa Blackstone and John Odling-Smee of the CPRS met with Barrington following his request for a meeting to put across his own views of the information effort and also ‘to solicit the views which they had formed following their visits’. During the meeting Barrington got the sense that the CPRS were in full cost cutting mode. In a bruising exchange on the value of overseas information work, Goulding and Blackstone ‘were generally somewhat sceptical, particularly about whether the effort was worthwhile in countries where the press was government-controlled’. Barrington argued that information work in such countries required ‘very little’ expenditure, to which Goulding countered ‘that the cost was substantial’ in terms of staff whether in London or based locally, and in the Central Office of Information. The information effort in Afghanistan was singled out for criticism. Barrington argued that it was important to keep ‘alive the idea of democracy and freedom’, yet Blackstone considered the effort was not worthwhile and better left to the BBC.<sup>80</sup>

Following the meeting, Barrington reported that he had been ‘at pains to stress to the CPRS... that we were constantly on the lookout for waste and unnecessary expenditure on information work abroad’. He had also argued that ‘major savings can only be achieved by eliminating services at the London end’ and it was ‘misleading’ to ‘attribute notional costs’ to the information effort in various countries which could then ‘be “saved” if information work there was reduced’.<sup>81</sup> Barrington’s attempt to influence the CPRS had failed to have any impact. As he ruefully noted, ‘[o]ne of the conclusions the CPRS appeared to have reached’ following their preliminary investigations ‘was that the only information work worth doing could be done

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, ‘CPRS Review: Information Work, 16 December 1976.

<sup>81</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Barrington to Ray Fleming, 31 December 1976.

in London'.<sup>82</sup> One diplomat dismissed Barrington's attempts at persuasion, it had been '[n]ot a very useful conversation', he noted.<sup>83</sup>

### *IRD's Exposure in the British Press*

IRD had been wound up before the CPRS delivered their review of overseas representation in August 1977. The FCO, who had anticipated the CPRS would press for substantial cuts to the information budget, took the opportunity to complete the integration of unattributable information into the rest of the FCO information machinery. The reorganisation of IRD into Overseas Information Department not only meant improved economies and reduction in staff numbers which would placate the CPRS but allowed the FCO to create a unified attributable and non-attributable information division which would meet all of Britain's foreign policy objectives, not just those related to the communist world. IRD was dissolved before the British public knew of its existence, yet the department was about to cause a headache for the government when investigative journalists broke the story of IRD in the British media merely months after its closure.

In January 1978, journalists finally exposed IRD's existence to the British public. On 27 January, David Leigh in *The Guardian* broke the story of IRD and its anti-communist propaganda work, presented in the article as increasingly outdated as the 1970s progressed. Leigh argued IRD 'had failed to change with the times' and was 'purged' by Foreign Secretaries Anthony Crosland and David Owen and 'radically reorganised into a smaller still secret' department. Overseas Information Department, IRD's successor, had apparently been cleansed of IRD's anti-communist bias and given an expanded brief by Ministers 'to support British interests in general'.<sup>84</sup>

In a nuanced analysis of IRD's relationship with the British press, Leigh argued that the department 'provided an often valued service to journalists and writers in this country'. That these journalists received material from IRD was not a poor reflection of their character and professionalism, Leigh argued, indeed amongst them was 'some of the best known writers on foreign affairs'.<sup>85</sup> John Jenks, who has examined the interdependent relationship between the British press and the FCO's propagandists, has offered a more critical view: 'Journalists had a wary relationship with propagandists', he argued. In the climate of the Cold War information

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<sup>82</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, 'CPRS Review: Information Departments, 6 January 1977.

<sup>83</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, 'CPRS Review: Information Work, 16 December 1976.

<sup>84</sup> David Leigh, 'Death of the department that never was', *The Guardian*, 27 January 1978.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

on the Soviet Union could be hard to find and government propagandists provided crucial information that was often impossible to obtain elsewhere. Yet journalists ‘resented the manipulation that accompanied it’. Journalists ‘at their best’ gathered the facts and worked towards an objective truth, but ‘at their worst or at their most desperate or corrupt they gravitate toward propaganda’. Despite ‘many well-documented lapses’, Jenks argued that most journalists in Britain and the United States viewed themselves as upholding the professional standards of their craft.<sup>86</sup>

IRD’s future, Leigh contended, was put into jeopardy in 1976 when the newly installed Permanent Under-Secretary and ‘reforming bureaucrat’, Michael Palliser, ‘ordered a hard look to be taken at it’. The Crowe Report had seemingly exposed all of IRD’s secrets to Whitehall and Labour Ministers. The most controversial of these was IRD’s list of approved British contacts which included Brian Crozier, director of the Institute for the Study of Conflict. Crozier was among a ‘handful’ of IRD’s associates whose involvement with a government department had ‘alarmed’ Ministers due to the nature of his ‘political complexion’. Crozier’s association with IRD went beyond merely receiving the department’s material, Leigh reported that he had staged ‘interchanges’ with IRD’s head Ray Whitney, suggestive of a deeper association. According to Leigh, figures such as Crozier were ‘pruned’ from the list by Crosland. His successor Owen was ‘apprised of the situation’ upon taking office and soon closed IRD down.<sup>87</sup>

Despite IRD’s closure, Leigh reported that ‘Government propaganda has not stopped’. This propaganda effort was now apparently strictly limited to overseas initiatives. Whilst IRD’s unattributable propaganda work had indeed been transferred to Overseas Information Department, the article suggested that IRD’s domestic component had been abolished. Senior government officials stressed to Leigh ‘that no domestic propagandising as such goes on since Owen’s arrival’.<sup>88</sup>

Press coverage of a scandalous secretive government department had been intense among left-wing outlets. On 29 January, Richard Fletcher and a team of investigative journalists that included Paul Lashmar exposed more of IRD’s secrets in an article for the *Observer*. The report was critical of IRD’s anti-communist propaganda overseas as well as inside the UK. The journalists’ focused their ire on IRD’s domestic publishing arm Ampersand Ltd. Under

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<sup>86</sup> John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p.4.

<sup>87</sup> David Leigh, ‘Death of the department that never was’, *The Guardian*, 27 January 1978.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

Ampersand, the department secretly disseminated anti-communist material ‘into books published under highly respectable imprints’ some of which were ‘still available in public, school and university libraries’. Following 30 years of this type of activity, Fletcher argued that the department ‘finally became an embarrassment to Ministers, who feared its approach to propaganda was out of date and a threat to détente relations’.<sup>89</sup>

Ultimately the timing of IRD’s closure had been a masterstroke by the FCO. Less than three months after the department was wound up in August 1977, Carl Bernstein’s infamous and incredibly detailed expose of the extensive relationship between the CIA and the press appeared in Rolling Stone magazine. Bernstein’s article had been more damaging than the previous year’s Church Committee investigation as it uncovered the CIA’s secret recruitment of American journalists, a fact that the Church Committee had glossed over in what Bernstein alleged to have amounted to a cover up.<sup>90</sup> Diplomats in the UK had long feared similar revelations about IRD and its extensive network of contacts with British media. This had been an astute observation as British investigative journalists like Leigh and Fletcher had clearly been inspired by the revelations of the CIA’s activities by American journalists. British journalists would have suspected similar activities in the UK and revelations were to be expected.

Thus, when IRD was eventually exposed by journalists the closure of the department a year earlier made it much easier for the government to control the narrative. The fact that IRD’s activities could only be described in the past tense enabled Labour to convey the message that the government had moved on from this type of work. Whilst propaganda and subversion had been an acceptable response to Soviet aggression in the earlier Cold War context, the government could now justifiably claim to be fully committed to détente. Callaghan would have deemed it much more preferable for journalists to suggest that Ministers had become embarrassed by IRD’s work rather than witness similar Bernstein style revelations of the unattributable arm of British foreign policy.

IRD’s closure under Owen’s tenure reflected well on the Foreign Secretary. Leigh’s article in *The Guardian* presented Owen as a reformer and a champion of government transparency. Under the thirty-year rule, IRD’s early documents were due to be transferred to the Public

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Fletcher, George Brock and Phil Kelly, ‘How the FO waged secret propaganda war in Britain’, *The Observer*, 29 January 1978.

<sup>90</sup> Carl Bernstein, ‘The CIA and the Media’, *Rolling Stone*, 20 October 1977, available at: [carlbernstein.com/magazine\\_cia\\_and\\_media.php](http://carlbernstein.com/magazine_cia_and_media.php)

Record Office and opened up to journalists and the general public. According to reliable sources in Whitehall, Leigh reported that Owen was 'considering' allowing the declassification of IRD's background briefs to go ahead. Such a move, Leigh argued, 'would be an extraordinary departure' as 'IRD died as it lived for 30 years, a secret kept from the British public'.<sup>91</sup>

The Foreign Secretary had indeed considered declassifying IRD material. In December 1978, almost a year after the department's existence was first exposed, Owen reported to Callaghan that IRD's early records were due to be made publicly available from 2 January 1979. If no IRD material was released, Owen argued that this would raise 'questions and criticism' and he was therefore considering what material could be released.<sup>92</sup>

Owen's objective was to enhance the perception of government transparency and avoid criticism from the left-wing press if Labour failed to open the records. By declassifying carefully selected material the government could also control the narrative of IRD, emphasising that the department belonged to a bygone era of communist paranoia and was no longer fit for purpose. This could potentially prevent further revelations of IRD's dubious domestic activities which had previously sparked the press interest.

The Foreign Secretary told Callaghan that he believed Bevin's white paper which created IRD should be amongst the papers released to the PRO. The memorandum, Owen argued, was 'of great historical interest' and 'eloquently' set out the danger posed by Soviet propaganda in the early Cold War era. As the paper fully articulated the need for Britain to counter Soviet attacks on British socialism and 'oppose the inroads of communism' the paper also helpfully 'provided a convincing explanation of why IRD came into being'. Owen suggested that Bevin's memorandum and the Cabinet conclusions which detailed its discussion amongst Ministers among some other file releases would satisfy journalists' curiosity of IRD without 'compromising the secret activities of IRD or the Secret Vote itself'.<sup>93</sup>

Alongside the official memorandum which created IRD, Owen argued that 'there would be merit' in releasing as many as possible of IRD's overt output such as its pamphlets and briefing notes which were produced annually. Whilst the Foreign Secretary conceded that much of this

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<sup>91</sup> David Leigh, 'Death of the department that never was'.

<sup>92</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1669, Owen to Callaghan, 20 December 1978.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

material was highly critical of communist countries this was not controversial in the context of the period during which the material was published.<sup>94</sup>

The Labour Party had clearly been bruised by the revelation of IRD in the left-wing press. The Foreign Secretary scrambled to redirect the narrative. Owen thought the release of some IRD files would reflect favourably on the Labour government, evoking an image of transparency. Whilst the government should not directly publicise the release of files, he argued, a controlled release of files could be used to suitably counter challenges from journalists. If the press were critical, the government would ‘make the point that in releasing the Cabinet Paper we have shown that we have no wish to hide what IRD was and why it was set up, but, as can be inferred from the paper, the nature of IRD’s work was not such that we could release details of how it went about it’.<sup>95</sup>

Owen also suggested the wording for a background note on IRD to serve as a rebuke to challenges from journalists about withholding the department’s files. The briefing described IRD rather innocuously as an information department producing reports for Missions abroad. The note referenced IRD’s propaganda capacity, but Owen stressed that such activity was largely confined to the department’s early years. Furthermore, he emphasised that ‘[t]here is no question of IRD papers being destroyed’. The Foreign Secretary also wanted to use the brief for journalists to distance the new Overseas Information Department from its predecessor. The new department was ‘not a duplicate of IRD’, he claimed. It was merely an information department which produced guidance and briefing reports to overseas posts. Copies of its background briefs were ‘made freely available in Britain’.<sup>96</sup> This was despite the fact that Overseas Information Department had absorbed IRD’s unattributable information capacity and included the secret section, the Special Producer Unit, funded by the secret vote.

Owen’s support for the release of IRD documents was a rather isolated position. The Cabinet Secretary, John Hunt, and the Permanent Under-Secretary, Michael Palliser, opposed the release of IRD files. In a letter to Callaghan’s private secretary for overseas affairs, Bryan Cartledge, Hunt expressed displeasure that Owen had asked the Prime Minister to preside over the issue at the eleventh hour. It was ‘very unsatisfactory’, he asserted, that Callaghan was forced to make the decision ‘virtually overnight’ as the papers were due to be available in the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Public Record Office in less than two weeks. Hunt was dismayed that following detailed discussions on the matter with Palliser ‘some weeks ago...it then got stuck with Dr. Owen’.<sup>97</sup>

Palliser and Hunt objected for fear that greater transparency invited further questions of IRD which would reveal the department’s domestic work. Although the material related to this work was of course not in any way under consideration for declassification, even the release of the department’s fairly uncontroversial overseas activities presented risk. Indeed, any information released on IRD no matter how harmless it appeared, was likely to incite further probing from journalists.

Release of IRD’s documents invited further scrutiny to fall on the abolished department. Furthermore, over the years IRD had established an impressive array of British contacts in the media, political parties and trade unions. As Hunt argued, ‘a large number’ of these ‘carefully selected people’ were aware of IRD’s domestic activities. If details of IRD’s overseas operations were released it could create a snowball effect leading to IRD contacts discussing their association with the department ‘more freely’ and potentially revealing IRD’s domestic work. Whilst these operations were apparently no longer active since IRD’s demise, with Hunt conceding that IRD’s ‘home operations are now virtually in suspense’, even in the historical sense such news could be, as Hunt put it, ‘politically very sensitive’.<sup>98</sup>

Owen’s enthusiasm for some level of declassification forced the Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary to relent. As Owen was ‘very keen that some [papers] should go’ to the Public Records Office, Palliser and Hunt were ‘both just persuaded that what is now proposed is all right’. But Hunt added the caveat that the Prime Minister should at least be aware that the release of the overseas material carried the risk of an IRD contact saying: “But this is not all that IRD did”.<sup>99</sup>

The final decision on IRD’s records rested with Callaghan. On 21 December, Nick Sanders, another of Callaghan’s private secretaries, informed the Prime Minister that the Foreign Secretary wanted to release the January 1948 Cabinet documentation detailing the creation of IRD and publish some selected IRD publications. Callaghan was also informed that Palliser and Hunt tentatively supported the move.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1669, Hunt to Cartledge, 21 December 1978.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1669, Sanders to Callaghan, 21 December 1978.

Following Owen's recommendation for declassification, Cabinet officials had subjected the IRD papers in question to greater scrutiny. Further to Hunt's concerns that former IRD contacts would be looser lipped following the document releases, Sanders had spotted a reference to the BBC overseas service in Bevin's memorandum that risked opening a new can of worms for the government. The memorandum made apparent that during the period there was a direct link between the Foreign Office and the BBC Overseas Service. Sanders argued that such a revelation was bound to be picked up by the press and perhaps 'raise questions about Government influence over the BBC External Services today'.<sup>101</sup>

The reference to the BBC Overseas Service had been 'specifically raised' with Owen but the Foreign Secretary dismissed the revelation as not in any way an 'obstacle' to the memorandum's publication. Owen wanted to press ahead with the document releases regardless of such revelations which could be defended by the government as relative to the early Cold War climate.<sup>102</sup>

Callaghan had 'doubts' over the release of any IRD files. The Prime Minister had been supportive of IRD's work and thoroughly apprised of the nature of this work during his time as Foreign Secretary. He was aware that aspects of IRD were controversial, certainly its domestic work, and the release of files could expediate the revelation of such work in the public domain. Yet the Prime Minister was also aware that withholding all information on IRD would do little, if not actively encourage interest in the department. If IRD files were not released, Callaghan argued that journalists would ask "why not" and it would only 'draw attention' to IRD. Thus, 'with reluctance', Callaghan agreed to release the files that Owen had put forward.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The exposure of IRD in the left-wing press soon after the department's closure helped propagate a long-standing narrative that IRD had been abolished due to its fervent anti-communist bias which had the potential to bestow serious political embarrassment to the Labour government. To an extent, this perception was accurate. As early as 1970, diplomats concluded that IRD's anti-communist direction needed significant realignment with more pressing concerns of the government. As a result, IRD Mark II was established to move IRD away from communist to non-communist operations. Of more concern to diplomats was the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1669, Sanders to Callaghan, 21 December 1978; Sanders to Walden, 28 December 1978.

nature of IRD's domestic operations which held greater potential for political damage than its overseas efforts. In the domestic space, such propaganda was highly contentious when used in sensitive disputes like Northern Ireland and partisan issues such as membership of the EEC.

The reconceptualisation of IRD in 1972 operated on the premise that the department would become part of a unified division of FCO information departments, creating an effective coordination of attributable and unattributable information work. Before integration could be achieved diplomats deemed it necessary to alter the culture of IRD, rid it of its overly anti-communist composition and open up a department to coexistence with an information division it had been long isolated from. The first step to such integration was the relocation of IRD from the isolated premises of Riverwalk House to a central location amongst the rest of the information division in Great George Street. This had been achieved in 1972 when IRD Mark II was established.

Yet as the CPRS began its review of overseas representation in 1976, some four years had passed since the reconceptualisation of IRD and there was still no unified information division. Colin Crowe argued the integration was necessary to achieve the desired coordination of attributable and unattributable information and he recommended that integration should be prioritised as part of the effort to reorganise the information infrastructure in order to reduce expenditure. The search for savings on information work had become a priority for the FCO since the CPRS were likely to demand significant savings in this area as part of their recommendations on overseas representation.

Crowe argued the name of IRD itself had become a barrier to an effective integration of the department. As the name conjured up unflattering images of the department's propensity for mystery which had sowed mistrust within the FCO. Hence IRD became Overseas Information Department, at least on the surface.

The closure of IRD was a bureaucratic decision. With the CPRS poised to scrutinise the information departments, diplomats decided to get their house in order and finally implement plans for the integration of attributable and unattributable information which had been in the pipeline since at least the early 1970s, although arguments for integration had been posited even before the turn of the decade. IRD's demise was in no way pursued for ideological reasons. Over the course of its existence, IRD's propensity for secrecy and radical composition as a quasi-independent body had attracted criticism from some quarters. The department had enemies within the FCO who had advocated for its closure when IRD's future composition was

examined in 1970. The department was eventually saved by the Cabinet who saw the potential in unattributable information, particularly in the domestic sphere. As a result, IRD Mark II was born with a remit to engage more with domestic non-communist issues.

The real story is not of IRD itself but the concept of unattributable information. With the birth of an information division and creation of Overseas Information Department it is evident that whilst attributable and unattributable information work on overseas affairs had been integrated, the end of IRD marked the separation of overseas and domestic unattributable information. Owen asserted Overseas Information Department was 'not a duplicate of IRD'.<sup>104</sup> This was accurate to an extent as the department was not a direct copy of IRD in that it had taken over only one aspect of IRD's legacy, that of overseas unattributable information.

The senior government officials who stressed to Leigh 'that no domestic propagandising as such goes on since Owen's arrival' was also truthful. The English Section's operations against communist subversion in the unions had of course ceased when Labour negotiated the Social Contract with the TUC. Although, surveillance of British communists had continued and the section remained within IRD, despite the illogical notion of domestic activities conducted by an FCO department. Despite the fact IRD's domestic operations had ceased for political purposes, Hunt argued that the risk of exposure of these operations and subsequent political damage, necessitated Prime Ministerial approval for the declassification.<sup>105</sup> Owen's wish for transparency was eventually blocked, however, and the documents were not released until 1995.<sup>106</sup>

The most intriguing outcome of the closure of IRD is the question of what happened to domestic unattributable information. Did domestic propaganda simply die with IRD? This was very unlikely. With the reconceptualisation of IRD into its Mark II format, the government had instigated a new direction for IRD which was predominately domestically focused. The subsequent closure of IRD was for bureaucratic reasons and part of a concerted effort by the FCO to integrate the overt and covert forms of information work. Overseas Information Department was created to produce overseas unattributable information following on from IRD and staffed by the former IRD cadre. The sensitive parts of IRD, specifically its domestic unattributable information work, were either separated from IRD and perhaps even from the

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<sup>104</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1699, Owen to Callaghan, 20 December 1978.

<sup>105</sup> David Leigh, 'Death of the department that never was'; TNA: PREM 16/1669, Hunt to Cartledge, 21 December 1978.

<sup>106</sup> Hugh Wilford, 'The Information Research Department: Britain's secret Cold War weapon revealed', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998), pp.353-369.

FCO itself, located in the Special Producer Unit - Overseas Information Department's covertly funded section, or completely hidden in the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department, as favoured by Colin Crowe.

It is unlikely that Callaghan opted to abolish the government's capacity for domestic unattributable information. Domestic propaganda in the period of industrial strife of the 1960's and 1970's had become an important weapon of the state. In 1969, the Home Secretary expressed his desire to supplant 'politically motivated' union leaders with more 'orthodox' figures. Alongside an appeal to the head of MI5 to unseat the head of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Hugh Scanlon, Callaghan asked the then Cabinet Secretary Sir Burke Trend what action could be taken against Jack Jones of the Transport and General Workers Union, as well as Scanlon. Plans were mooted for an IRD campaign of press leakages designed to smear Jones and Scanlon. Although it remains unclear what became of these plans as the related files remain closed, what is clear is that usage of IRD for domestic work against troublesome union figures was attractive to the Labour government and personally favoured by Callaghan.<sup>107</sup>

Communist subversion of industry continued to be an explicit concern for successive British governments throughout the Cold War into the détente era of the 1970s. Indeed, the 1970s saw a renewed appetite for domestic subversion which was reflected in the periodic creation of new domestic committees. 1962 saw the end of the Committee on Communism (Home) and whilst Wilson had refused to replace it in 1975, choosing to retain plausible deniability of the English Section's activities, numerous committees had been created across Whitehall. Firstly, in 1972 Ted Heath's government established an interdepartmental working body called the Subversion in Public Life (SPL) committee 'to supervise and direct the collection of intelligence about threats to the internal security of Great Britain arising from subversive activities, particularly in industry and to make regular reports to the Ministers concerned'.<sup>108</sup>

The working group comprised representatives from the Home Office, FCO, and MI5. The group's reports considered a broad range of intelligence collated across Whitehall departments including from IRD. Domestic operations were further reinvigorated when the Committee on Communism (Home) was 'reactivated' by Callaghan in 1976. Renamed, the Subversion at Home Committee, the interdepartmental planning body provided oversight for the Subversion

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, pp.534-5; Ian Cobain, 'Wilson government used secret unit to smear union leaders', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p.664.

of Public Life's activities at the policy level. The committee's membership included departmental permanent under-secretaries from the Home Office and FCO alongside the Director General of MI5.<sup>109</sup>

The academic literature on this renewed 1970's domestic offensive is limited owing to a lack of available archival documentation. The Subversion of Public Life's files were classified until July 2018 and only a small number of files have been released to the National Archives so far. Furthermore, the files of the Subversion at Home Committee are still completely retained. The retention of these files long after their expected release under the thirty-year rule may be due to the fact that both the Subversion of Public Life and Subversion at Home (renamed the Subversion (Home) Committee) were revived in 1985 by the Thatcher government. The Subversion of Public Life's blacklisting of potentially subversive persons within the civil service, trade unions, and councils amongst others, was an ongoing operation until at least the 1990s. The potentially dubious nature of the work was acknowledged by those in charge of such operations and who often expressed the need for high-level secrecy. In June 1988, the then head of the Subversion of Public Life and later chairman of the Iraq War Inquiry, Sir John Chilcot, wrote '[i]t is right on balance to continue with this exercise, despite its acute sensitivity and the high risk of embarrassment in the event of any leak'. According to one newspaper report 'the government appeared unable to rule out such activity today'.<sup>110</sup>

The limited archival documentation available suggests that the 1970's oversaw a renewed government effort to counter communist subversion within British society. This domestic offensive was again redoubled under the Thatcher government by the mid-1980s. This would tie in with the Thatcher Cabinet's obsession with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament successful attempt to foster anti-Trident sentiment in British public opinion. Domestic propaganda also complimented Thatcher's renewed political warfare offensive against the Soviet Union in the early 1980's.<sup>111</sup>

The limited publicly available evidence points to the conclusion that from the 1970's to the end of the Cold War, domestic subversion was a serious concern for successive British governments of both main political parties. Yet during this period, the main Whitehall department responsible for the creation and dissemination of domestic propaganda, IRD, was

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ian Cobain and Ewen MacAskill, 'Labour: government must say if blacklists are still in place', *The Guardian*, 25 July 2018; see also Ian Cobain, "'Subversive' civil servants secretly blacklisted under Thatcher', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2018.

<sup>111</sup> See the Post-script: Political Warfare post-IRD for analysis of this renewed effort.

subjected to staff and budget cuts and was eventually abolished in 1977. The orthodox story of IRD's demise presented an interesting paradox to the narrative of a revived British domestic counter-offensive which had been stimulated long before the onset of the Second Cold War in the Thatcher period. Therefore, as this chapter has demonstrated, bureaucratic necessities in the form of budget cuts and streamlined services, do not always point to a simplistic narrative. IRD was certainly trimmed in 1977 and officially closed, but unattributable information work lived on.

## *Chapter Four: The Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation*

### *Introduction*

The Duncan Committee set the tone for British diplomacy for the seventies era. Yet as the 1980's approached, the changes that it had imposed on the Diplomatic Service were no longer enough. In the mid-1970s, the FCO was yet again under pressure to make cuts to its overall expenditure. In late 1975, the Cabinet Office's Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) initiated a review into the cost of embassies and consulates abroad. The CPRS suggested to Callaghan that 'another look should be taken at the UK's overseas representation' after insufficient cuts following the Duncan Review. 'There seemed to be a prima facie case for believing', the CPRS team argued, 'that in spite of the Duncan Report and subsequent economies the UK's overseas representation had not been adjusted enough to take account of the very considerable change in our circumstances since the war'.<sup>1</sup> The inquiry was supported by the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan who asked the CPRS to extend their scope to include the BBC external services and the British Council.<sup>2</sup>

Nicknamed the 'Think-Tank', the CPRS was a small multi-disciplinary independent body housed within the Cabinet Office. It was created in 1971 by the Prime Minister, Ted Heath, 'to advise the Cabinet on strategy and policy'. Heath had devised this long-term planning unit as a counter-balance to the tendency of political parties toward prioritising immediate issues in the governance of the country and 'to lose sight of the main objectives which they had set themselves in their manifestos'.<sup>3</sup> Its first director, Lord Rothschild, decided how it should be composed and what it should do, as it had no real terms of reference. Rothschild largely determined the style and content of its activities during his period of office and for some time after. Rothschild chose all the initial CPRS staff himself - about half from within the civil service, the others from the commercial sector, academia and from consultancy - at various times the staff has included a sociologist, a political scientist, a demographer and a biologist.

The review, named the Berrill Report after its then director Sir Kenneth Berrill, was as extensive as it was controversial. Beginning in late 1975, the CPRS did not publish its findings until August 1977. Having approached the review already convinced of the position that overseas representation work vastly exceeded the requirement of a country of Britain's size,

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, draft chapter of CPRS review of overseas representation, Chapter 1: Why a review?, April 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Joe Haines, *The Politics of Power*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), p.37.

<sup>3</sup> Simon James, 'The Central Policy Review Staff, 1970-1983', *Political Studies*, 34:3 (1986), 423-440, p.423.

the CPRS team made the kind of radical recommendations one would expect from a team of outsiders looking to slay an elderly giant in the guise of the FCO. According to Anthony Adamthwaite, the Berrill Report marked a significant departure from previous cost cutting exercises. The recommendations of the Berrill Report ‘were wider and more radical’ than the earlier Plowden and Duncan reforms and ignited ‘a storm of protest’ upon publication. Among the more controversial recommendations was a proposal to abolish the British Council and incorporate the Diplomatic Service into the Home Civil Service. As well as the imposition of ‘severe reductions’ in overseas representation work and the BBC’s external services.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Plowden and Duncan, the CPRS review of overseas representation was not motivated by a search for economies. The CPRS team acknowledged their review was a departure from the previous inquiries in that cost-savings were not the principal purpose of the review and the think tank had no specific remit to recommend any. Instead, it was the relevance, effectiveness (especially in terms of cost), and importance of exercises undertaken in the name of overseas representation which were under scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> As the CPRS team began its review of information work, senior officials in charge of the information departments argued that their activities had already been subjected to substantial cuts following the Duncan Report and any further sizeable cuts would hinder Britain’s capacity to influence opinion overseas. Yet this attempted deflection held no sway with the CPRS team who were more concerned with the perceived benefit of a service rather than overall cost. If information work cost relatively little and had already been reduced following the Duncan Report, this would not exempt it from further reductions.

Although the more radical changes were eventually rejected by the Cabinet, the Berrill Report did reveal a cultural shift in British diplomacy. As Adamthwaite noted, the Berrill inquiry was carried out in a period where the conception of Britain had diminished to that of ‘essentially a trading nation, concerned with the promotion of its economic welfare and of the international conditions best suited to the promotion of that welfare’. The perception of Britain as ‘major power of the second order’ which had underpinned the direction of the Duncan Committee’s review was now ‘clearly redundant’. This notion of Britain as a trading nation rather than an

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<sup>4</sup> Antony Adamthwaite, ‘The British Foreign Office since 1945’. In: *Opinion publique et politique extérieure en Europe. III. 1940-1981*. École Française de Rome, (1985), 201-211, p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, draft chapter of CPRS review of overseas representation, Chapter 1: Why a review?, April 1977.

influential global power was not limited to Whitehall's cost cutting officials; it was a view which held traction with many officials in the FCO.<sup>6</sup>

### *The CPRS Review of Information Work*

Even before the Berrill report, the concept of Britain as a trading nation had guided official information policy in the FCO. By 1975, Britain's overseas information work had become preoccupied with the country's economic health. The Overseas Information Services, which included the Central Office of Information and the information departments in the FCO, was given three objectives in order of priority to guide operations. The primary objective was focused on supporting 'Britain's position as a nation dependent upon trade'. This objective was to be achieved on three fronts. Firstly, to project an image of Britain as a 'commercially sound trading partner', inspiring overseas confidence in our ability and determination to overcome present economic ills'. Secondly, to project 'British industries and services (including financial services and tourism'. And thirdly, to help 'British exporters to sell their goods and services locally through the use of highly selective publicity'.

The second objective of overseas information work was the promotion of British foreign and domestic policies 'in such a way as to engender better understanding and support for Britain's most important overseas relationships and policies'. This included membership of the EEC, the alliance with the United States and membership of NATO, together with membership of the United Nations and Commonwealth. The third objective was the promotion of the British way of life, of British ideas and values through cultural and educational exchanges. Significantly, the desire to maintain British influence in the cultural sphere which had been a long-standing tradition of the FCO's information output but had been superseded by a pressing need to present the nation as a reliable trading partner.<sup>7</sup>

From the outset of the review, senior officials in charge of information work were concerned that the CPRS would go in hard on information work. This accurate foreshadowing was borne out by the CPRS's recommendations for drastic cuts to overseas expenditure. Indeed, the CPRS team agreed amongst themselves to push for 'radical changes' in their final report. The CPRS planned to advocate drastic changes to the MOG, FSC and the complete abolition of the British Council but they conceded that 'we had to be realistic' about the chances of the recommendations being accepted by government and the civil service. The proposals were

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<sup>6</sup> Adamthwaite, 'The British Foreign Office since 1945', p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, 'Overseas Information Objectives', 1975.

deemed so radical that the team also agreed to set forth a set of ‘second-preference proposals’ in case, they observed, ‘our radical solutions prove to be too lumpy for Ministers to swallow’.<sup>8</sup>

Berrill was particularly critical of the British Council. Writing to John Hunt, the Cabinet Secretary, he argued ‘we find it hard to believe that if we were starting from scratch anyone would propose setting up something like the British Council’. The team perceived it as outdated in an era where Britain could no longer afford such a grandiose monument to public diplomacy. Berrill argued that ‘in theory’ parts of its work that was worth keeping ‘could be performed more efficiently and economically by other agencies’. He recognised that proposing its abolition was ‘controversial’ and conceded that ‘we are not yet convinced that what would be gained thereby would be enough to justify the upheaval’. The CPRS eventually decided to maintain their conviction and the proposal for abolishing the British Council did make the final report.<sup>9</sup>

A similarly dismissive appreciation was bestowed on information work. Appraising Hunt of the CPRS’s preliminary findings on 15 March 1977, Berrill argued that while Britain should maintain a capacity for overseas information it was unnecessary to maintain this effort at current levels. He stressed that expenditure and direction of funds should reflect the perceived effectiveness of information work in influencing public opinion and decision-making. While it was ‘desirable’ for overseas populations to have ‘favourable attitudes towards the UK and that overseas opinion should favour our view on international issues’, Berrill argued that the effectiveness of information work had been ‘exaggerated’ and the effort mostly ‘misdirected’. Therefore, the CPRS would propose that ‘resources devoted to it should be reduced’.<sup>10</sup>

In February 1977, the CPRS finally began their review of IRD. By this point the question of IRD’s future had yet to be settled. The FCO inspectorate, in agreement with Colin Crowe’s review, had recommended the amalgamation of IRD into an information division, but this had not yet been approved by Ministers. As such, the CPRS team focused cast a critical eye on the role of unattributable information work, rather than IRD itself. Afterall, if the inspector’s recommendation was accepted, this type of work would continue under new machinery.

On the 15 February, Marrack Goulding of the CPRS wrote to Michael Weston from the review unit of the FCO’s Personnel Policy Department asking him to plan for CPRS inspectors to visit

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<sup>8</sup> TNA: CAB 184/347, ‘Minutes of team meeting 15 March 1977.’

<sup>9</sup> TNA: CAB 184/347, Berrill to Hunt, 15 March 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

IRD. CPRS's review was scheduled following the Crowe report and subsequent inspection of IRD and both reviews had, Goulding noted, 'done much of our work for us'. The CPRS review focused on the perceived value that unattributable information added to the government's overall information effort. The CPRS wanted to establish whether this contribution was not already in effect being undertaken by other departments across Whitehall. In particular, the review sought to ascertain the extent to which IRD's efforts duplicated the work of other agencies working in similar roles, notably Research Department in the FCO, and MI5 and MI6. The CPRS wanted to also explore how IRD's work complemented the work of other agencies.<sup>11</sup>

The CPRS were specifically interested in the unique contribution of unattributable information work and whether 'it enable[s] us get across messages that attributable publicity does not?' If unattributable propaganda was indeed considered necessary, the CPRS team would examine 'what should be the balance between it and open information work'.<sup>12</sup>

By April 1977, the CPRS let senior FCO officials view their draft chapter on information work. By this stage the Inspector's and Crowe's recommendations on creating an information division had been accepted and the three information departments (IRD, Information Administration Department and Guidance and Information Policy Department) were already being reorganised into Overseas Information Department and Information Policy Department.

As senior officials in charge of information work feared, the CPRS did indeed go hard on information expenditure. Noting that their objective was to investigate 'whether the resources spent [on information work] are justified by the contribution they make to our first-order objectives', the CPRS team judged that 'present expenditure' was indeed 'too high'. Whilst the CPRS viewed the information effort as too large and wasteful and in need of substantial reduction (the team eventually suggested a two thirds reduction), they did single out unattributable information as a useful policy weapon. In rich industrialised countries, which the CPRS designated as category A countries, the team considered a large information effort aimed at such countries to be inconsequential. These areas of the world had a richly developed media which, although at times 'biased or inaccurate', reported a fairly accurate picture of Britain overall which was 'unlikely to differ widely from reality'. As such, it was very difficult to present a picture of Britain which differed from the reality. If Britain's 'performance was

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<sup>11</sup> TNA: FCO 79/468, Goulding to Weston, 15 February 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

bad', the CPRS team argued, 'there is little that information work can do to pretend otherwise'.<sup>13</sup>

The CPRS argued that if much of the UK's information work in these rich industrialised countries were to cease entirely (apart from briefings to leading media figures on current British policies) it was 'unlikely that British interests would suffer'. They recommended future work should be limited to the distribution of 'little or no material' besides that which promoted Britain's economic interests such as 'highly-targeted commercial publicity' and films and television productions which presented 'a favourable commercial/economic impression'. Alongside this, the CPRS noted that in these industrialised nations where the potential for propagating falsified perceptions of Britain was difficult, there was a role for unattributable information work. The team recommended distribution of a small amount of propaganda material to promote certain British policies and correct any 'specific falsehoods' and to disseminate 'information about the UK and British views to those who are denied them by their own media'.

Yet the think tank did perceive a benefit for a continued information effort in influential third world countries. In particular, such countries were prime for unattributable information efforts. The CPRS considered the role of unattributable information to be most effective in so-called category B countries. In these mainly Third World countries the media was of a lower quality and more beholden to government control. As such the environment was more amenable to unattributable information work designed to create 'helpful political attitudes'. The CPRS noted that IRD had previously worked in this area supplying covert material to 'opinion-moulders', originally to promote anti-communist opposition but more recently extended to other issues such as North/South relations, Rhodesia and Northern Ireland. The CPRS argued that this type of work should continue to have 'some priority in influential category B countries' and a low priority in category A countries. In this area, unattributable work was most 'useful as a means of putting across point which it would be embarrassing for HMG to have attributed to it'.<sup>14</sup>

Following IRD's reconceptualisation as IRD Mark II, the department had been allocated a budget equivalent to roughly ten percent of the total expenditure on attributable information

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<sup>13</sup> FCO 79/465, to CPRS draft chapter on information work, April 1977.

<sup>14</sup> FCO 79/465, 'Effectiveness of Information Work' annex to CPRS draft chapter on information work, April 1977.

work. This amounted to an £0.85 million expenditure on unattributable information.<sup>15</sup> The CPRS did not press for any change to this ratio or a specific reduction on unattributable work. Having deemed that unattributable information would continue to have an effective role in certain areas, the CPRS recommended that this type of work should be maintained at the level of ten per cent of the overall cost of the FCO's overt information services. Although the CPRS warned diplomats that they would press Ministers for reductions on information work as a whole which would hit unattributable information proportionally.<sup>16</sup>

The final version of the review of overseas representation sent to Ministers argued heavily in favour of major reductions to information work. The CPRS noted that the total cost of information work in 1975/76 was £32 million and 11% of the total expenditure on overseas representation. The information effort was focused on two main areas. Firstly, through services supplied by the Central Office of Information whose products such as films, television and UK press cuttings amounted to 25% of the total expenditure on information work. The other main arm of the information effort was through information staff in overseas posts.<sup>17</sup>

The Central Office of Information was already committed to a 12% reduction of service prior to the CPRS publishing their recommendations, yet Berrill and his colleagues asserted that 'considerably larger savings than this' could be made if Ministers accepted the CPRS's drive for major reductions to the amount of material produced by the Central Office of Information. The CPRS argued that 'there should be less emphasis' on the creation and dissemination of material to overseas media and more effort devoted to forging relationships with local media. This was particularly important in the non-communist developed world which was more immune to the effects of propaganda. In these countries, the CPRS deemed only a minimal amount of information work for export promotion and some unattributable 'political material' where there was 'demand for it' was necessary. In the Third World, the CPRS argued that 'information work on the present pattern should be discontinued'. This meant the complete 'elimination' of information work entirely apart from in 'rich and influential' Third World nations.<sup>18</sup>

Only in the 'closed societies' of the communist world did the CPRS perceive any merit in maintaining present information efforts. Although this effort was already at a 'limited level'.

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<sup>15</sup> TNA: FCO 79/465, Goulding to Weston, 18 April 1977.

<sup>16</sup> FCO 79/465, to CPRS draft chapter on information work, April 1977.

<sup>17</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, CPRS Review of Overseas Representation.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The only other area that escaped the CPRS axe was briefing materials sent to overseas posts informing these missions of current UK policies. The CPRS saw the value of such briefing materials and encouraged Ministers to maintain present levels. Moreover, the only aspect of information work that the CPRS advocated for more effort was in the cultivation of the foreign press in London. Here the CPRS were highly critical of the poor level of engagement between information officers in the Home Departments and overseas journalists. The report argued that the cultural practices of these information officers was to ignore the requirements of foreign media in favour of promoting 'their Minister and his policies to the electorate; what is said in the overseas press matters much less to them'. On the infrequent occasions where foreign journalists were catered for, it was normally in the form of general briefing materials which was an inadequate response to journalists who desired access to Ministers and senior officials or confidential briefings in order to understand 'the thinking behind major government policies. On the whole, the facilities for foreign journalists and engagement with them was 'poor in comparison with many capitals'.

For the CPRS, the poor engagement with the foreign press was a pressing omission in Britain's overseas representation. The posts that the team visited during the research for the review 'were unanimous' in their opinion that overseas journalists had 'an important influence on what overseas media say about the UK'. Part of the neglect of the foreign press, they asserted, owed itself to a particularly British culture of being less open with the media than other countries. The CPRS conceded that only some 'of these difficulties' could be 'overcome as a result of a change in the attitude of British governments to the media generally'. In the meantime, the report urged the Foreign Secretary to 'regularly remind his colleagues of the importance of paying attention to the overseas media' and for departments to end 'the petty discrimination against overseas journalists' who were often denied the confidential material made available to their UK counterparts. The report also pressed for a specific study to address the poor facilities for overseas media either by development of the Foreign Press Association or creation of a new overseas press centre.<sup>19</sup>

The CPRS declined to offer an estimate of 'precise' savings for the reduction of Central Office of Information services, arguing that the task was difficult owing to the current 12% target. Precise figures for overseas posts, however, was considerably easier for the team to arrive at. Here the CPRS advocated for savings of around two-thirds of staff engaged in overseas

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

information work. This would result in a cut of approximately 50 UK-based and 475 locally based staff. As the CPRS pressed for major reductions in the amount of material the Central Office of Information distributed globally, there was no requirement to maintain the present levels of staff in overseas posts. Instead of distributing material to influential figures in the media, the CPRS argued that overseas posts should focus on 'establishing working relationships with the media'. Information work should be 'the responsibility of the whole post ... rather than of a single specialised section'. Each officer in small posts would be required to have sound knowledge of the local media. It was only in the large posts that the CPRS deemed it necessary to nominate an officer as "Press Attache" on a part-time basis to act as spokesman and deal with media enquiries. The CPRS argued that only 'a handful of posts' required a dedicated full-time information officer.<sup>20</sup>

### *The FCO's Counter-Offensive Against the CPRS*

By April 1977, the CPRS had almost completed their review, with the report now in the final drafting stages. The report was delivered to Owen the following month. The Foreign Secretary pressed for publication of the review 'as soon as possible' following initial examination by the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary and himself. This was so the Cabinet could take into consideration the views of Parliament and other influential voices when reaching its conclusion on the review. Callaghan urged caution as he expected early publication improbable due to the 'bowdlerisation... necessary in the printed version' together with input from other Ministers whose departments would be affected by the recommendations.<sup>21</sup>

Early publication was threatened by Owen's own department who refused to cooperate with the CPRS once they had seen the recommendations. Relations between the FCO and CPRS had soured considerably by this point, to the extent that the FCO refused to aid the CPRS in preparing a bowdlerised version suitable for publication. The CPRS had requested the FCO's help redact parts of the text which constituted sensitive material, yet the Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary, Andrew Stark, argued that as the CPRS were aware of 'the necessary criteria' they could work it out for themselves. David Young at CPRS thought this 'pretty silly' and urged Berrill to have 'a go at him either on the telephone or by letter'.<sup>22</sup>

The open animosity between the CPRS and FCO would have come as no surprise to Ministers who had been aware that the FCO had been staging an anti-CPRS propaganda campaign in the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, P.R.H. Wright to E.A.J. Fergusson, 21 April 1977; Owen to Callaghan, 20 May 1977.

<sup>22</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, Young to Berrill, 26 April 1977.

press for some months. In order to undermine the review, officials in the FCO, including some at the highest levels, had been leaking stories to journalists which had resulted in numerous unflattering press articles of the CPRS over the preceding months.<sup>23</sup> The campaign was officiated by the FCO's Planning Staff who had seemingly taken a hiatus from long-term strategic planning for the year in order to kill off the CPRS review.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually Stark was brought to heel and together with Hunt, went through the typescript to propose 'excisions only on grounds of security or sensitivity vis-a-vis other countries'. Callaghan specifically requested the Cabinet Secretary be involved with bowdlerising the review and the Prime Minister wanted to be personally consulted over what material was omitted prior to publication. This process considerably held up publication of the report. During this period the CPRS, Ministers and Whitehall maintained the pretence that the report had still yet to be received by Owen in order to avoid drawing attention to the current purging of sensitive material from the report by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. Whilst the report was held up by Callaghan and Owen deliberating over 'disputed passages', interest over the status of the review was growing in Parliament. In May, the Prime Minister was forced to answer questions over the status of the review's publication from backbench Labour and Conservative MPs. The issue was also expected to crop up in Prime Minister's Questions.<sup>25</sup>

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By late June 1977, the bowdlerised version was finally printed and distributed to a select number of Ministers who had a major interest in the review. Alongside Callaghan and Owen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Secretary of State for Defence, Secretary of State for Trade, Lord Privy Seal, and Minister for Overseas Development received copies of the report.<sup>26</sup> Callaghan desired an interdepartmental approach to the CPRS report. He proposed a GEN group series of Cabinet subcommittee meetings with the aforementioned Ministers to discuss the report's recommendations and to establish the government's response to the recommendations, including the statement which was to accompany the report's disclosure in Parliament.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Little and Mark Wickham-Jones (eds), *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?*, p.122.

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, Christopher, *Getting Our Way: 500 Years of Adventure and Intrigue: The Inside Story of British Diplomacy* (Phoenix reprint, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, memo from Goulding, 25 May 1977; PREM 16/1190, Stowe to Callaghan, 27 May 1977.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, Hunt to Stowe, 8 June 1977.

<sup>27</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Stowe to Hunt, 2 June 1977.

In June 1977, the Ministerial Committee, GEN 89, chaired by Callaghan convened with Kenneth Berrill to thrash out the official government course of action in response to the recommendations. The pressing issue at hand for Ministers was how soon could the report be published. Sir John Hunt endorsed Owen's desire for early publication. This was 'highly desirable', he argued, 'given the amount of speculation and semi-leaks'.<sup>28</sup> Yet it was not until August 1977 that the review was finally published.

One of the points of issue related to which Minister had jurisdiction over the review. As, Callaghan, the then Foreign Secretary had agreed to the CPRS's suggestion of an in-depth look at overseas representation, the review was delivered to office of the Foreign Secretary. Yet the CPRS had been bruised by the FCO's propaganda campaign against them and trust with diplomats and their Cabinet Minister was now at an all-time low. The CPRS team were deeply unhappy with Owen taking the lead and preferred Callaghan to take over formal discussion of the review in Parliament. The CPRS had seen Owen's draft statement to Parliament and taken major issue with it being read out to MPs. David Young of the CPRS objected to the Foreign Secretary announcing publication of the review because 'Dr Owen cannot be trusted not to make snide comments during supplementaries even if his colleagues straighten the original statement out'.<sup>29</sup>

Young was backed by the rest of the CPRS team and Berrill pressed the Cabinet Secretary, John Hunt, to float the idea of giving the task to the Prime Minister. Berrill argued that as the report was not confined to the FCO and covered various departments, Callaghan was more suitable for 'constitutional' requirements as well as that he 'might deal with questions in a rather different manner to the Foreign Secretary'.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the CPRS team were concerned that Owen was going to jettison the whole review.

The Cabinet Secretary considered 'a fairly short and non-committal' statement necessary 'since clearly Ministers will want to consider very carefully, and possibly to test public reaction to, some of the recommendations in the Report'.<sup>31</sup> Yet Owen's draft statement which had angered the CPRS was anything but non-committal of the government's reaction to the review. A major source of contention between the FCO and CPRS had been the latter's recommendation to abolish the Diplomatic Service as a separate entity and instead create a Foreign Service Group

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<sup>28</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Hunt to Stowe, 8 June 1977.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, David Young to Kenneth Berrill, 28 June 1977.

<sup>30</sup> TNA: CAB 184/348, Berrill to Hunt, 29 June 1977.

<sup>31</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Hunt t Stowe, 8 June 1977.

within the Home Civil Service to undertake the work the of the Diplomatic Service and other staff in the Departments of Trade and Overseas Development. The proposal was designed to enable 'the fullest possible interchangeability between those working overseas on a particular function and those working on it in the UK'. Owen wanted to inform Parliament that the CPRS had conceded that 'such an arrangement should logically be accompanied by the creation of a Department of Overseas Affairs' which would be 'much larger than the present Foreign and Commonwealth Office'. Yet the CPRS, Owen noted, had 'decided not to recommend this'.<sup>32</sup>

The point was likely to invite criticism that the government would be replacing a bloated institution with even more bureaucracy in an era where Britain was striving to scale down the size of its operations. Owen further laboured the point by highlighting that the Home Civil Service had increased by 7% overall since 1968 and with a 35% increase of senior officials. Meanwhile, during the same period, the Diplomatic Service's 'mainstream grades' had decreased by 9% with the number of senior grades remaining unchanged. Owen cautioned that the CPRS recommendations if adopted entirely would 'fundamentally alter the arrangements for our overseas representation' which had 'gradually evolved' since the Second World War 'with the help of the Plowden and Duncan Reports'. The radical CPRS report marked a striking change from the gradual process of a change that the government had adopted since the earlier reviews. Owen argued that it was important that the government ensured 'that any further changes will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness in promoting British interests abroad, and not a swelling bureaucracy'.<sup>33</sup>

The substance of the CPRS's review was an overriding perception that overseas representation was too large for the diminished post-war role that Britain now occupied in the world. Owen agreed that the scale of British diplomacy had to reflect Britain's current status. 'Nothing is gained', he argued, 'by fostering illusions of grandeur, clinging to our imperial past and dabbling in matters that do not concern us or by attempting to exercise more influence abroad than the realities of international life permit'. But for Owen, this did not mean that Britain should withdraw from the world. The world of the seventies was a much smaller place and 'more and more questions affecting our national well-being have become matters of international concern and can be solved only in an international context'. If Ministers accepted the report's recommendation to close diplomatic missions in around 20 smaller countries, it would likely signal that Britain was 'on the retreat' and confining itself to matters that only

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<sup>32</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Draft Commons statement attached to letter from Owen to Denis Healy, 20 June 1977.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

affected Europe. Owen argued that ‘it is as dangerous to under-estimate our involvement with the world around us as it is to over-estimate our power to change it’. Striking the balance was an issue that required careful judgement and ‘not prejudice’.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst the Foreign Secretary argued that ‘[m]any of the CPRS’s recommendations can and should be accepted’, he asserted that ‘some are very far-reaching and concern the machinery of Government, which is the responsibility of the Prime Minister’. Owen agreed with the substance of the CPRS’s search for greater interchangeability between the Diplomatic Service and Home Civil Service but argued that the complete dissolution of the former was not an appropriate means of achieving it. ‘The issues are altogether more complex’, he argued, ‘than the simple choice put by the CPRS over what they term “the abolition of a separate Diplomatic Service”.’ Taking the opportunity to throw his support behind his own department, Owen criticised the CPRS’s argument that the quality of the Diplomatic Service was ‘too high’ for the tasks at hand. He stressed that the Service had adapted ‘remarkably well’ to Britain’s changing role in the post-war years. Moreover, in his short time as Foreign Secretary he had been ‘greatly impressed by its efficiency, flexibility and dedication’. Owen had a ‘clear conviction’ in the ‘high value’ of the Service’s work for Britain, ‘often in unpleasant places, and in difficult circumstances’.<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Foreign Secretary’s draft statement aroused hostility with the CPRS. Kenneth Berrill laid out his issues with Owen’s ‘unusual draft’ to the Cabinet Secretary. The draft had been prepared for Owen by his senior officials in the FCO. Much of Berrill’s anger was directed at Owen’s advisors as the arguments and refutations against the CPRS were very much the line of thought that senior diplomats propagated to undermine the review, although Owen’s willingness to circulate the statement to his Ministerial colleagues and read it in Parliament gives a clear indicator on where the Foreign Secretary’s thoughts on the review lay. Owen was clearly on the side of the Diplomatic Service in this war with the CPRS.

Berrill was clearly angry that his team’s report that had taken eighteen months to prepare was now being openly undermined by the FCO. One area of contention with the statement was the framing of the report’s recommendations as predominantly affecting the Diplomatic

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Service and FCO as a whole. Berrill argued that '[v]ery few do', the majority of the recommendations affected a range of departments and Ministers.<sup>36</sup>

Berrill criticised the inconsistency of the statement. On the one hand, it noted that none of the recommendations had yet been decided on, but on the other hand the statement later 'declares... firmly against the proposed closure of posts'. The head of the CPRS was also unhappy with the 'tone in which the review is received, with fulsome defence of the Diplomatic Service and denigration of the CPRS'. It gave the impression that conclusions had already been reached by Ministers who were now looking to dismiss the report entirely. In a remarkable defence of the veracity of the review, Berrill argued that it had taken 'courage' for the established civil servants in the CPRS to go against the grain and deliver such an honest assessment of Britain's overseas diplomatic requirements. This was no 'inhouse "whitewash"', he contended. While the recommendations 'may be right or may be wrong... they were the results of a more detailed and complete review of overseas representation than ever conducted before'.

The CPRS team were clearly unsettled by the reception to their review. Whilst Berrill noted that he and his colleagues 'were not unaware that our recommendations would be unwelcome to many in Whitehall', they had not considered that this hostility extended to the Cabinet. Owen's declaration that decisions on Britain's role in the world needed to be borne from judgement not prejudice had personally antagonised Berrill. He argued that if Ministers publicly condoned 'unwelcome conclusions' in this manner then this would spell the end of the kind of honest review the CPRS had laboured over. Junior civil servants would 'get the message' that their role was 'to judge what one's seniors want to hear and then tell it to them'.<sup>37</sup>

The CPRS was most disturbed by the FCO's openly hostile reaction to the report and its recommendations. Berrill argued that his team had prior experience of putting across 'some pretty unwelcome things' to the private sector and had worked with trade unionists and shop stewards 'whose members' livelihoods were much more under threat by our recommendations than any part of the Diplomatic Service'. And yet senior diplomats in the FCO were the CPRS's most adversarial opponents. For Berrill, their reaction to the review of overseas representation was 'itself an argument for a unified civil service'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Berrill to Hunt, 24 June 1977.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Berrill noted that it was specifically the more senior diplomats who were the issue. The more junior members of the Diplomatic Service had been ‘helpful’ and ‘open-minded’. But as diplomats aged and advanced in the Service ‘they lose touch and develop a separateness of outlook’ which led to moments of ill-judgement such as the anti-CPRS press campaign. Berrill lamented that the main target of the campaign had been the female members of the CPRS team and that once the report was finished, the FCO refused to acknowledge the report or communicate with the CPRS and instead focused on preparing the ‘remarkably revealing draft statement’.<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, Owen’s statement drew criticism from his Ministerial colleagues and the Cabinet Secretary. Hunt advised the Prime Minister to reign in Owen’s draft statement ‘which in effect defends the status quo’ and ‘makes some pretty loaded remarks about the CPRS’. Instead, he argued, the government’s initial response should be ‘non-committal’ and Ministers open to discussing the recommendation to abolish the Diplomatic Service and come to an ‘informed decision’. To immediately reject the proposal ‘would savour too much of the FCO sabotaging the Report without proper consideration of it’. A non-committal response was also favoured by the Secretary of State for Trade, Edmund Dell, and Minister for Overseas Development, Judith Hart. Hart was cautious about making any rushed decisions and failing to subject the recommendations to detailed discussion as she thought it might draw a public ‘outcry if we are not seen to be taking it very seriously indeed’. Serious consideration of the recommendations ‘on their merits’ was a sentiment that Hunt urged Callaghan to adhere to. ‘[I]t would be a great pity’, he argued, if the CPRS’s meticulous work over eighteen months ‘were now to be lost in a wordy battle between those who want to knock the Diplomatic Service and those who want to defend it irrespective of the arguments on merits’.<sup>40</sup>

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, also took issue with the ‘pejorative language’ of Owen’s draft statement. He urged the Foreign Secretary to adopt an ‘impartial and objective... tone and context’ and refrain from addressing the recommendations in such a manner that may ‘appear to pre-empt or prejudice Ministerial consideration’.<sup>41</sup> Reservations were also raised by the Prime Minister’s personal advisers. Tom McNally, head of the Number 10 Political Office, shared Owen’s ‘irritation at CPRS pessimism and their “stop the world, I want to get off” approach’. But he warned Callaghan not to dismiss the report entirely ‘as they

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Hunt to Callaghan, 30 June 1977; Hart to Callaghan, 29 June 1977.

<sup>41</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Healy to Owen, July 1977.

do seem to be on the target in a number of fields'. In particular, the CPRS's recommendation to redirect the efforts of the BBC External Services which to McNally was still stuck in a 'post-fascist Europe and Cold War politics' framework.<sup>42</sup>

Callaghan's press secretary, Tom McCaffrey, also raised issues with the statement which he suspected would merely 'create the impression that the government, or at least the FCO, is determined to resist many of the recommendations included in the review'. He pressed Callaghan to refrain from announcing the review via Owen's draft statement in favour of a short written answer from Owen on the day the Report was published and 'strict instructions' to the FCO and CPRS barring them from briefing the press, either officially or unofficially, until Ministers had reached their own conclusions on the recommendations.<sup>43</sup> Eventually Ministers at GEN 89 opted for an oral answer to an arranged question to announce publication of the review in Parliament. The answer was to be short and non-committal and make apparent that the government had not yet reached any decisions on the recommendation. Although, 'a short tribute to the Diplomatic Service' was deemed permissible as well as comments affirming the government's commitment to overseas representation.<sup>44</sup>

With various ministers urging an impartial consideration of the review and objecting to Owen's hostile statement, Callaghan's Principal Private Secretary, Kenneth Stowe, suggested that the Prime Minister step in. Noting the 'fair amount of acrimony in all this' he advised Callaghan to consider Berrill's suspicions that the FCO were 'mounting a campaign to denigrate and effectively destroy the CPRS Report'. Stowe thought Berrill was possibly right about this as the FCO had already tried to bar Berrill from attending the GEN 89 meeting. The plot was foiled by Hunt who invited the head of the CPRS to attend as it was 'customary' when a CPRS review was presided over. Owen's involvement in this was unclear to Stowe but suspicions were being aroused that the Foreign Secretary was now colluding with his senior advisors in jettisoning the report.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Ministerial Views on the CPRS Report***

At the first meeting of GEN 89 on 4 July 1977, Berrill disputed the perceived 'pessimistic' tone of the review, asserting that the team had strived for a 'realistic' approach that considered how resources could be most effectively allocated to Britain's overseas representation. Despite

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<sup>42</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, McNally to Callaghan, 4 July 1977.

<sup>43</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, McCaffrey to Callaghan, 4 July 1977.

<sup>44</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation, 4 July 1977.

<sup>45</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1190, Stowe to Callaghan, 1 July 1977.

this, Owen argued that the report's pessimism was regrettable and unjustified 'at a time when the national mood of confidence was fragile'. The report would be received both in the UK and overseas 'as another exercise in defeatism and the balance needed to be corrected by a more confident statement of the United Kingdom's position and role on publication'. The government, he argued, should immediately address the CPRS's recommended post closures and confirm that Britain 'would continue to be represented in all Commonwealth countries'. Owen's GEN 89 colleagues supported this notion but were reluctant to comment on only one aspect of the review. It was considered 'far better to adopt an open-minded approach' to the whole review.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst Owen was critical of the review, Callaghan praised the CPRS for producing 'a Report which deliberately and properly challenged a number of strongly held assumptions'. 'It was stimulating and valuable', he argued, and 'whatever view Ministers might later take on some of its recommendations; it would undoubtedly provoke intense reactions'. Thus, the Prime Minister had indeed adopted an open-minded approach to the review and encouraged the government's position to be reached only after full consideration of the report. He insisted that processing the report 'would need to be done by Ministers or under a clear Ministerial remit' rather than handed over to Departments to deal with themselves.<sup>47</sup>

It was not until October 1977 that GEN 89 next met for discussion of the CPRS report. By this stage Ministers had had three months to mull over the radical recommendations of the CPRS review and their open-minded consideration of the review was now replaced with concrete decisions. Fortunately for the FCO, Ministers opposed the abolition of the Diplomatic Service. Owen had come prepared for the meeting armed with a memo admonishing the CPRS's structural recommendations to increase specialisation in Britain's overseas representation. The CPRS had proposed three options to increase specialisation. Firstly, establishing separate services for export promotion and aid administration within the Home Civil Service, a proposal which the CPRS had now rejected themselves. Secondly, the creation of a Foreign Service Group within a unified Home Civil Service and Diplomatic Service. And thirdly, a much higher interchange of staff between these two services.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation, 4 July 1977.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation, 31 October 1977.

Owen argued that whilst the first proposal would indeed increase specialisation in export promotion and aid services, it would nevertheless do so 'at the cost of divorcing this work from the rest of overseas representation'. Similarly, the second proposal which advocated the creation of a Foreign Service Group would lead to a separation of export promotion and aid administration, thus ensuring increased specialisation and some level of integration, but to the detriment of developing specialisation 'more generally and on other important functions of overseas representation'. It would also 'cause major disruption and give rise to serious difficulties with the Diplomatic Staff Side'. Owen deemed the third proposal for increased staff interchange between the Home Civil Service and Diplomatic Service a 'feasible' solution to meeting the objective of increased specialisation with the additional benefit of 'avoiding the more serious problems of the other two options'. The issue for Owen was judging his fellow Ministers' appetite for major organisational changes. The Foreign Secretary vehemently opposed both the dissolution of a separate Diplomatic Service and creation of separate export promotion and aid services. He questioned whether the radical structural change that the CPRS advocated was in fact necessary. The 'case for such a change and the benefits it might provide had been far from conclusively demonstrated' by the CPRS, he argued. If structural change was favoured by Ministers, Owen considered that the creation of a Department of Overseas Affairs 'probably provided the best answer'.<sup>49</sup>

Owen needn't have been concerned, since the Ministerial Group's appetite for major structural changes was as limited as the Foreign Secretary's. GEN 89 dismissed the notion of separate services for export promotion and aid administration, agreeing with Owen's assertion that it would inhibit the development of specialisation more generally. Fortunately for the FCO, Ministers also dismissed the abolition of a separate Diplomatic Service. Ministers deemed the proposal for a unified domestic and overseas effort via establishment of a Foreign Service Group in the Home Civil Service 'inevitable in time' as Home Department's became more involved in overseas representation. Yet Ministers argued that such a 'fundamental change should only be contemplated if the conceived benefits strongly outweighed the additional costs and disruption it would cause'.

The Ministerial Group were concerned that by abolishing the separate Diplomatic Service, morale would plummet, and the notion of a diplomatic career would lose its lustre. Diplomatic Service staff accepted postings anywhere in the world 'because that was the career they sought'

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

but if morale in the Service was lost then it could become difficult to convince staff to serve in less desirable locations and it was likely to affect the eminence of staff recruited. Ministers were also considerably swayed by the powerful industrial lobby. Industry leaders, alarmed by the effects on industry and export promotion that the CPRS's recommendations were likely to cause, had implored Ministers to retain the status quo. Compounded by these industry fears, Ministers concluded that retaining the Diplomatic Service, which had evolved its post-war role to accommodate the needs of industry, was important both for British industry and retaining the high level of diplomatic work afforded by a separate Service.<sup>50</sup>

The Ministerial Group opted in favour of Owen's preferred choice for greater interchange between the Home Civil Service and Diplomatic Service. Ministers agreed that an increased interchange of staff between the two services would increase specialisation without having to merge the two services. Interchange would also 'provide a valuable corrective' to the CPRS's assertion that Diplomatic Service staff 'could become out of touch with developments in the United Kingdom'. A criticism that Ministers deemed 'valid'. Moreover, the goal of greater interchange, though desirable, was difficult practically. They acknowledged 'that interchange on anything like the scale necessary to meet the objectives suggested in the CPRS Report had so far proved unattainable in practice'. Only 'a strong Ministerial directive' and 'a clear and detailed plan for its attainment' was likely to prove effective. The plan would need to mandate 'specific targets for all important functions', establish 'career patterns' for staff who would likely spend significant parts of their career seconded to other departments, and set up a centralised assessment capacity for interchanged staff to ensure high standards.<sup>51</sup>

Another area of contention within the CPRS review, and a significant point of consternation for Owen and the FCO, was the mooted closure of around 20 independent missions and 'at least 35 subordinate posts'. The Foreign Secretary urged caution on this suggestion. He argued that whilst 'some Missions are staffed too generously', withdrawal from countries entirely, particularly in Commonwealth countries where representation provided 'very considerable, if intangible, benefits' required careful study. He conceded that merging some posts and closure of a few subordinate posts 'might prove possible' but also 'likely to prompt criticism'. Owen suggested that scaling down the size of missions overall rather than full closure was a more

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<sup>50</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation, 31 October 1977; see also TNA: INF 12/1406, W.P Howard to Owen, 4 August 1977, for an example of industry lobbying from the manufacturing group Turner & Newall Limited.

<sup>51</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Representation, 31 October 1977.

appropriate alternative for Ministers. Smaller missions ‘might provide a means of maintaining necessary representation’, he argued, ‘whilst providing some economies’.

This was viewed favourably by the rest of the Ministerial Group. Ministers supported the idea of smaller missions rather than complete withdrawal of services. Reductions in staff were seen as a more efficient and preferable way of achieving economies. Callaghan argued that British representation via small missions ‘possibly in some cases manned by a single official, could be the answer in some places and should be explored’. If any missions were to be closed this would require careful consideration on a ‘case by case’ basis.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Ministers Response to Information Cuts***

The Foreign Secretary had successfully steered the initial ministerial response to the CPRS recommendations in a direction which heavily favoured the FCO. With the proposal for the abolition of the Diplomatic Service defeated and closure of missions on ice, the FCO turned its attention to battling the CPRS’s recommendations for information work. This was likely to be a much harder fight for Britain’s senior diplomats. The controversial recommendations of the CPRS, such as the abolition of a separate Diplomatic Service, were always unlikely to gain much traction with Ministers inclined to favour the status quo. The appeal to reduce Britain’s expenditure on information work, however, was more likely to attract Ministerial approval due to the uncontroversial economic advantage that straightforward cuts to services offered. Reducing information expenditure was unlikely to provoke the level of industry backlash that abolishing the British Council would likely incite, but also have the advantage of demonstrating the government’s commitment to considering the CPRS recommendations.

Before the next meeting of GEN 89, Owen and other Ministers whose departments were subject to the recommendations of the review, were asked to circulate papers to GEN 89 reflecting their views of the report. From the FCO, this entailed analysis of the recommendations on overseas information work, cultural work, and the BBC External Services. Jeffrey Ling of the Personnel Policy Department asked departments to submit draft papers by the end of August. As Ministers were ‘unlikely to read lengthy documents’, the papers should be ‘as brief as possible’ and ‘well argued’ to help influence Ministers in favour of the FCO’s own line. ‘Our aim’, Ling argued, ‘should be to extract the main useful ideas... and to discourage further considerations of the less sensible recommendations’. This started with the Foreign Secretary,

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<sup>52</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff’s Review of Overseas Representation, 31 October 1977.

for whom the FCO had to ‘convince... of the line he should take in discussing each of these issues with his Ministerial colleagues in GEN 89’.<sup>53</sup>

The FCO’s response to the CPRS recommendations on information work was completed by November 1977. Following minor revisions, the paper was agreed by Owen and circulated to GEN 89 in December 1977. The paper set out the overall picture of the current information infrastructure which had previously faced significant cuts required by the Duncan Committee in 1969. The FCO began by outlining the impact of the Duncan Committee reforms to emphasise the fact that information work was an area in which the FCO had previously made substantial savings. Despite the cuts required by the Duncan Committee, the CPRS believed information, alongside educational and cultural work and external broadcasting, accounted ‘for too high a proportion of expenditure on overseas representation’. The paper did not directly disagree with the CPRS’s position but stated that ‘[w]hether we accept that or not, it is also the area where we have made the biggest efforts to reduce our activities during past years’.<sup>54</sup>

This narrative of years of cuts to information services was the main line of defence the FCO staged against the CPRS’s recommendations on information work. Diplomats presented an image of an information machine which had already been restrained by the cuts mandated by the Duncan Committee. It was an image which was largely accurate. Since 1969, information staff overseas had been cut by more than half and provision for overseas information work on the COI and HMSO votes had decreased by over eight percent since 1974. The message senior diplomats hoped to put across to senior Ministers was that information work had already been subjected to substantial cuts and it was difficult to maintain the level of publicity ‘necessary for the support of our commercial, economic, and political objectives overseas’ if further significant cuts were imposed. Diplomats argued that Britain ‘must retain the capacity to present our case effectively on both political and economic issues’. This was considered a long-term commitment by the FCO, the ‘creation of a positive and favourable understanding abroad of Britain and British policies will remain a real British interest both now and in the foreseeable future’.<sup>55</sup>

Senior officials acknowledged that this effort required cost-effectiveness and conceded that many of the CPRS’s proposals were ‘sensible’. The FCO agreed that information expenditure could be reduced ‘even though present spending appears to have been overestimated by the

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<sup>53</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1817, Memorandum from Ling to heads of department, 10 August 1977.

<sup>54</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1817, ‘CPRS: Chapter 14: Information’, 9 December 1977.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

CPRS'. But they stressed that any cuts to services 'should... be decided on their merits on a pragmatic case by case basis'.<sup>56</sup>

One of the CPRS's recommendations a reduction of information work aimed at influencing locally based journalists overseas in favour of London based foreign journalists. This was based on what Nicholas Barrington referred to as the CPRS's prejudice that the only information work worth doing was in London. The FCO agreed that foreign journalists in London were an important target and stressed to Owen that efforts had already been made towards improving the service to London-based journalists. They acknowledged that the service could be further improved and suggested a study for this endeavour. However, officials argued that, even with an improved service, there were 'limits to how much we can influence foreign journalists' and some countries did not have a media presence in the UK. The FCO's position was that the influencing of London-based foreign journalists must be 'complemented by action with editors and other opinion-formers overseas'.<sup>57</sup>

One area where the FCO was vehemently opposed to cuts was the reduction of information work supporting Britain's commercial and economic image in the developed world. Senior diplomats argued that such a reduction in areas of most commercial importance to the UK was inconsistent with the CPRS's own stated objective that 'everything possible should be done that effectively improves the economic and commercial image of the UK'. This was an area the FCO had the most ammunition to resist the CPRS's recommendation for cuts as the export side of the Department of Trade were against reductions in this area. The FCO also had the support of the British Overseas Trade Board and British businessmen who had 'strongly emphasised how essential it is to create a climate of opinion overseas about the British economy in which they can successfully sell exports (and encourage inward investment)'. The FCO argued that information work was crucial towards this endeavour. Whilst information work could not conceal Britain's bad performance, it could 'correct distortions' and promote positive examples of Britain's performance which was likely to be drowned out by negative press. To do nothing was detrimental. 'Even one damaging press report not properly countered', the paper argued, 'has been able, in the past, to affect the position of sterling'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1817, 'CPRS: Chapter 14: Information', 9 December 1977; Barrington to Leahy, 22 November 1977.

The CPRS's contention that information work had no impact on the image of Britain's economic performance was deemed 'too sweeping' and not in accordance with the FCO's own experience and those of external experts. If Britain decided to retract from economic information work, it would leave British business vulnerable 'to the active information operations of commercial competitors such as the Germans and Japanese'.<sup>59</sup>

The implications for information work in Third World countries was even graver. The CPRS recommended a total retraction of information work in all but the richest Third World countries. The FCO were alarmed at this proposal. They argued that present and future British foreign policy considerations such as in Rhodesia, Belize, and the Falklands required Britain 'to present our case particularly well to Third World countries'. Moreover, this was an area of the world in which communist countries exerted influence and maintained a significant level of information activity and therefore Britain 'should not leave the field entirely open to them especially in countries where we have historic ties'.<sup>60</sup>

Alongside a reduction in the amount of overseas information activity, the CPRS had recommended a blanket two-thirds reduction in overseas information staff. The FCO argued that the CPRS had made 'no attempt to... to justify or explain' the proposal. They argued that if senior Ministers accepted this recommendation and it was 'implemented across the board this would virtually eliminate the public relations capacity of many posts'. It would also mean that the objectives the CPRS envisaged for the restructured information machinery could not be met as such a cut in staffs would make the machinery ineffective. This would also have negative impact for British trade. Some seventy per cent of information activity abroad was 'devoted to commercial and economic publicity in support of export promotion'. The drastic cuts to information staffs 'would severely restrict our capacity to support the export drive'.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the FCO's aversion to large cuts across the board, they did accept that 'further economies could and should be made'. Following a meeting with Owen on 26 October, the FCO incorporated changes which attempted to reflect the more conciliatory tone of Owen and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Evan Luard, in that concessions could be made towards meeting the CPRS's recommendations.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1817, 'CPRS: Chapter 14: Information', 9 December 1977

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Whilst the Permanent Under-Secretary was satisfied with the FCO's response to the CPRS's proposals, the Foreign Secretary found that the paper was 'negative in tone' and contained 'too many generalised expressions of opinion'. Owen was particularly unhappy with diplomats' justifications for maintaining current levels of overseas information work and only considering making cuts which the FCO, rather than the CPRS, deemed necessary. Before circulating to senior Ministers, he insisted that the paper should 'contain more concrete recommendations'. Owen felt that diplomats did not go far enough in its attempts to meet the CPRS's proposals. He was also unimpressed that the FCO had not already undertaken an official study on the treatment of foreign journalists in the four months that had elapsed since publication of the CPRS review.<sup>63</sup>

Following Owen's criticisms, the FCO set to work on shaping a more positive response which put forward 'more concrete recommendations'. Although Barrington stressed that Missions were already 'near the bone' and thus the FCO should 'avoid change for change's sake' and resist 'major cuts' apart from in those areas the FCO had identified for potential reductions in staff and activities in overseas posts. Leahy was concerned that discussion of information work by GEN 89 was not seen as a priority by Ministers who were instead focusing on the proposals for the British Council and BBC external services. Information work was likely to be relegated down the agenda for discussion at a later point.<sup>64</sup>

Diplomats were worried that Ministers were not as concerned as themselves as to the implications for the CPRS's recommendations on the overall information infrastructure. Barrington argued that further major cuts would lead to such a shortfall that other Whitehall departments would be forced to undertake from their own information campaigns. The result was likely to be 'uncontrolled and uncoordinated' efforts at greater costs to the government.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst the FCO resisted major information cuts, Owen and Luard agreed with the CPRS that major economies could and should be made. Luard was in 'considerable agreement' with the proposed cuts and told Owen that 'for a considerable time' he had 'doubted whether the results really justify the costs'. Information work was an area, in his opinion, where there was 'probably room for considerable cuts'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1817, Memo from E.A.J. Fergusson, 15 December 1977.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1820, Luard to Owen, 27 July 1977.

The main issue between the FCO and the CPRS was a disagreement over the estimated information expenditure. The CPRS used the Treasury's estimation which included overheads from other department budgets, a measure which the FCO disputed. Whilst diplomats conceded that the information budget 'should bear an attribution of general overheads', the FCO costing was £12 million less than what the CPRS had estimated for 1975/76. The FCO also vehemently disputed the £1.2 million cost of relay stations which the CPRS had 'wrongly attributed' to information expenditure. 'The exaggerated costs quoted by the CPRS', diplomats argued, 'depend on a number of unsupported financial assumptions which are now badly out of date'.<sup>67</sup>

The FCO struggled to gain support from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. Luard told Owen that the Treasury and CPRS were 'almost certainly right' that information work benefitted 'considerably' from the hidden expenditure on general overheads. Luard suggested trying to find some middle ground. The difference between the CPRS and FCO estimations was 'so enormous', he asserted, that it required further investigation by an 'impartial investigator'. Luard suggested that a 'firm of management consultants' should examine 'the objectives of our present information effort, methods, organisation and possible economies' as well as the issue of exact expenditure. Luard advised Owen that this should be one of their responses to the CPRS recommendations.<sup>68</sup>

Yet Luard was not satisfied leaving the whole question of where cuts could and should be made to outside observers. He urged Owen to consider immediate cuts in areas which to Luard appeared excessive. In particular, Luard was highly critical of the 'totally inflated' number of information staff in Embassies abroad. The 86 people employed in information activities in the US, for example, was in Luard's opinion 'totally disproportionate to the benefit we obtain'. Despite significant cuts to the number of information staff overseas in recent years, Luard argued that he saw 'little reason' to prevent 'further substantial reductions in these staffs now'.<sup>69</sup>

Luard supported the CPRS recommendations to foster better relations with foreign correspondents in London and agreed that 'more effort should be devoted to influencing' these journalists 'whose picture of Britain is what mainly affects the attitudes of populations overseas'. Conversely Luard wanted to see a reduction in the pamphlets and distribution of British press summaries that the FCO relied on more so than London-based foreign press to

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<sup>67</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1820, 'CPRS: Information Costs', undated.

<sup>68</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1820, Luard to Owen, 27 July 1977.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

influence overseas opinion. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary believed that the cost of producing this material in both production and manpower was wholly unjustified.<sup>70</sup>

One area Luard disagreed with the CPRS was a reduction in the number of foreign visitors. This was an activity which Luard felt provided 'fairly good value for money'. Likewise, the information effort in developed countries. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary supported the diplomatic argument that such a reduction was 'contrary' to the CPRS stated aim that information work should enhance British commercial interests. Moreover, Luard argued that any withdrawal from activities in the developed world contradicted the CPRS's view that British diplomacy should focus on richer countries, although this was a view Luard found 'questionable'. He welcomed the opportunity the CPRS review had afforded to make substantial cuts to the overseas information effort. He told Owen that 'we could accept a considerable proportion of the specific recommendations made by the CPRS'. Yet even Luard was opposed to the 'sweeping proposal... to cut manpower overseas by two-thirds'.<sup>71</sup>

Luard's suggestion that there be an investigation on information expenditure by management consultants was rejected by Owen. On 26 October 1977, senior diplomats met with Owen to discuss the FCO's response to the CPRS review. The Foreign Secretary told the meeting that he was 'sceptical about management consultants' and did not want the suggestion of an investigation by them to go before GEN 89. Instead of opening up the issue of budget disputes to further investigation, Owen wanted to present Ministers with a more positive response to the CPRS review in the form of concrete proposals which attempted to meet the CPRS objectives. Leahy suggested that Heads of Mission and the Inspectorate could investigate the potential for further reductions in overseas posts. Owen welcomed the suggestion, arguing that Heads of Missions should have 'more responsibility for controlling staff' now and in the future. He suggested Luard oversee the review and report to him through Lord Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.<sup>72</sup>

Whilst Owen was content for heads of posts to identify where suitable cuts could be made, it was for senior officials and himself to decide on an overall desired figure. The Permanent Under-Secretary noted that the CPRS's recommended two-thirds reduction was 'an arbitrary figure' but a suggestion by Luard for a ten per cent reduction 'was no less arbitrary and it might

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1820, Memo from E.A.J. Fergusson to Barrington, 27 October 1977.

be possible to achieve a higher figure'. Owen agreed that savings of more than ten per cent should be aimed for. 'Would 25-30%', he posited, 'be achievable?'<sup>73</sup>

Owen and his advisors wanted to find a reasonable figure that went some way towards meeting the CPRS proposals without decimating the capacity for information work. It was better to present Ministers with a positive suggestion rather than dispute the arbitrary two-thirds figure and challenge the CPRS's information budget estimate. As Palliser argued, the FCO's submission to GEN 89 could 'indicate that while we could not envisage savings as much as those suggested by the CPRS', the proposed cost-saving exercise by Missions abroad might 'identify savings of X per cent which, for instance could well be as much as 25%'.<sup>74</sup>

Owen informed his advisors 'that he was not prepared to reject the CPRS recommendation that there might be staff savings of the order of two thirds unless he could put forward his own quantified proposals'. He sanctioned the review by Heads of Missions to identify reductions with senior officials indicating to Heads 'our major priorities' so that efforts could be directed to these areas. The FCO had two major objectives. Firstly, economic and commercial information work to support export promotion worldwide but particularly in developed countries. The second priority was information work in aid of 'British national foreign policy and other objectives which are relevant to the country concerned'. North/South issues, Rhodesia, and the Falklands were specifically highlighted for concern. Owen wanted Heads of Posts proposals to be included in the submission to GEN 89 but due to the tight deadline, if the reviews were not complete in time Ministers should be informed of the review which would eventually be put to them 'for final decisions'.<sup>75</sup>

The responses from Heads of Missions – except Washington and Mexico City who were yet to report - were all received by the middle of January 1978. The posts had offered savings which, when added to the cuts prompted by the reorganisation of the information departments, came to a combined saving of 24.1% on the 1976/77 expenditure. This represented a saving just shy of £4.5 million and a staff reduction of 163 UK-based and locally based staff. The information effort was reduced to 66 UK based staff, down from 85 in 1976, and 569 locally engaged, previously 713. Whilst some diplomats were satisfied with the responses and happy to put the results of Post's cost saving exercise to GEN 89, Leahy was reluctant to merely accept the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1820, Memo from E.A.J. Fergusson to Barrington, 27 October 1977; Memo to Heads of Missions, 28 October 1977.

Heads' first offer of savings. He felt that diplomats should instead identify posts where further savings could be made and thus press those Heads to concede to more cuts. After all, the 24.1% was shy of Owen's desired 25-30 per cent reduction and it was possible to press for more. The Foreign Secretary, Leahy argued, 'will certainly expect us to pursue the search for economies vigorously'.<sup>76</sup>

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The question of overseas information work was not considered by GEN 89 until March 1978. The delay was a concern for the FCO, who determined that such a delay signified that the recommendations for information work were a low priority for Ministers. However, the CPRS report was a considerably large document with numerous proposals that Ministers had to puzzle over. There was also not a unanimous consensus on how the Ministerial Group should approach these recommendations. At the fourth meeting of GEN 89 on 8 February 1978, Judith Hart, Minister for Overseas Development, argued that Ministers should first tackle the "fundamental questions" that had arisen from the CPRS report before considering the report's proposals in any detail.<sup>77</sup>

These fundamental questions owed to what Minister's perceived to be Britain's place in the world. Hart noted that the CPRS had deemed Britain's membership of the EEC as a central component of the country's ability to project its influence overseas. As a member of the EEC, the CPRS had concluded that British influence 'would more and more depend on the influence we could bring to bear on the policies pursued by the European Community as a whole'. But as Hart argued, this conclusion presided on the belief that Britain's relative economic decline 'would remain broadly unchanged'. It also seriously overlooked the significance of the Commonwealth; an argument Owen had expressed since the first GEN 89 meeting. Hart argued that 'an unduly pessimistic view' of 'the economic prospects' and 'influence that the United Kingdom could still exert' was likely to be the conclusion that readers would draw from the CPRS report.<sup>78</sup>

The CPRS's view on the potential for Britain to exert its influence was clearly a despondent take. For the CPRS, Britain now relied on the EEC to exert any meaningful influence on the international stage. This view, as Hart stressed to her colleagues, had 'provided the basis for

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<sup>76</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1920, Memo from A.J Cambridge, 13 January 1977.

<sup>77</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, Minutes of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Information, 6 February 1978.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

many of the Report's recommendations'. But was it a view that Ministers agreed with? And as such, should this pessimistic take that had informed the recommendations be challenged or accepted by Ministers before any real consideration of the report could proceed?<sup>79</sup>

Whilst 'there was some support' for Hart's proposal, Ministers were reluctant to address the fundamental questions of Britain's role in the world. On the one hand, despite Britain's 'undeniable' economic decline, the projection of British influence overseas via alliances and educational and cultural exchanges 'was important and justified the resources devoted to overseas representation'. But on the other hand, British membership of the EEC 'undoubtedly put limits on the United Kingdom's independent role' and also opened up the question of whether expenditure on 'the political and defence aspects of overseas representation could be justified at their present level'. That Ministers recognised this dichotomy but chose to avoid defining which side would now take precedence, suggested that Ministers were quite unwilling to examine bigger questions such as the extent to which membership of the EEC had impacted Britain's independent role in the world.<sup>80</sup>

Callaghan noted that 'different views had been expressed about the CPRS's fundamental analysis', which suggested that at least some members of GEN 89 rejected their pessimistic view of Britain's capacity to exert its influence internationally. Yet the Prime Minister argued that due to the sheer scale of overseas representation it was 'difficult to judge in the abstract'. Rather than examining the picture as a whole, he argued, the individual components of overseas representation required separate examination to consider their objectives and then examine whether the service should be reduced, maintained, or increased. Callaghan noted that the deployment of resources depended 'to some extent on relative economic performance' but stressed that 'there were other factors' at play.<sup>81</sup>

With no fundamental analytical framework to guide their response to the CPRS's recommendations, Ministers proceeded to examine the proposals on a case by case basis. Unsurprisingly, following on from the defeated proposal for the abolition of the Diplomatic Service, the rest of the CPRS's controversial recommendations for major organisational restructuring were rejected. The next British institution saved by Ministers was the British Council. Similarly, to the Diplomatic Service, the British Council had remodelled itself in the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, Minutes of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Information, 6 February 1978.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

post-war years. It had become an organisation which was primarily devoted to administering parts of the UK's overseas aid programme. Yet also in a similar fashion to the Diplomatic Service, the CPRS found that despite the development of the organisation in the post-war period, the British Council was 'still wedded to its traditional role'. Berrill told Ministers that the British Council 'devoted too great an effort on cultural activities, particularly in Western Europe' and was 'administratively top heavy' and duplicated the work of other organisations, such as recruiting staff for overseas work. Thus, the CPRS determined that such an organisation was no longer necessary and the CPRS preferred to abolish the institution, transfer its responsibility for the administration of educational aid to the Ministry of Overseas Development and create a new agency to oversee recruitment. Such a move, Berrill argued, would improve efficiency and offer cost savings.<sup>82</sup>

However, the proposal was unpopular with Ministers. Abolishing the British Council 'would be difficult politically' the Ministerial Group cautioned, and Ministers doubted that it would provide any objective advantage. Berrill's assessment that abolishing the institution could free up resources was disputed by Ministers. Separating the Council's various functions, the committee contested, 'could result in more costly arrangements without producing commensurate benefits'. The recommendation was unanimously rejected, although Ministers did accept the CPRS's view that there were inefficiencies in the British Council's services, in particular, accepting the contention that the institution was too administratively top-heavy. To streamline some of this administrative excess, Owen proposed an investigation into the feasibility of merging overseas British Council posts with British Missions. Ministers agreed to this on a case by case basis, with mergers proceeding 'unless there were good reasons to the contrary'.<sup>83</sup>

Trimming the administrative burden was a soft reform that Ministers were happy to accept, but any of the more substantial reforms of the British Council proposed by Berrill and his team were wholly unpopular. GEN 89 were reluctant to impose a reduction of the Council's cultural activities, arguing that 'the analogue countries' spent more on cultural and education work overseas than current British expenditure. Ministers suggested that this fact, rather than the CPRS's own analysis, was perhaps 'indicative that no major reduction in effort should be

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

contemplated'. The only alteration to the British Council's services that Ministers accepted was dispensing with some of the Council's functions if they were duplicated by another agency.<sup>84</sup>

With Ministers rejecting rather than accepting many of the CPRS's recommendations, the official response to the think tank's proposals on information work boded well for the FCO. The FCO's evaluation of the recommendations on information work was finally discussed at GEN 89's fifth meeting on 2 March 1978. The Prime Minister was absent for this meeting, instead the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey sat in the chair. It is unlikely that many around the table were aware of Healey's own close association with IRD at an earlier stage of his career. Owen opened the discussion with a rebuttal of the CPRS's diminution of the importance of information work. 'Contrary to the view expressed in the Report', he argued, 'information work was important in developed countries in support of economic, commercial and political objectives and of particular political importance in the Third World'. He emphasised that the reasoning behind the proposed two-thirds reduction of information staff 'had not been explained' and that even by their own admission, the CPRS's opinion on the effectiveness of information work was 'necessarily subjective'. The Foreign Secretary also deployed the FCO's by now standard defence that overseas information staff had already 'been reduced by more than 40% between 1969 and 1975'.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, Owen had asked his advisors to provide him with a more positive response to the recommendations as the best means to avoid the near dismantling of the information services advocated by the CPRS. The Foreign Secretary told his ministerial colleagues that he had personally written to Ambassadors to ask them to propose further reductions in the number of information staff. Although a two-thirds reduction was the CPRS's subjective figure, the experts on the ground had shown that a 22% overall reduction was 'possible'. In some cases, Owen stressed, the reductions would be much higher. For example, the Ambassador in the United States had proposed a 50% reduction of information staff employed at the British Information Services in New York. The mooted cuts so soon after the Duncan Committee had 'prompted strong reactions', particularly from those engaged on information work. However, Owen's 'own view was that savings of this order could be accepted'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> TNA: CAB 184/350, Minutes of the Ministerial Group on the Central Policy Review Staff's Review of Overseas Information, 2 March 1978.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

The rest of Owen's ministerial colleagues agreed that information work both in developed countries and the Third World was important and necessitated a continued service. However, Ministers accepted that 'significant cuts' to overseas information staff 'could be contemplated' alongside substantial cuts to the services provided by the Central Office of Information. Yet GEN 89 also shared the Foreign Secretary's unwillingness to impose the two-thirds reduction on information work suggested by the CPRS. Such a large reduction on information work would wreak havoc on Britain's capacity to project its influence overseas. This was not lost on senior Ministers who agreed with Owen's 'reservations about the Report's conclusions on the value of information work'. Although the CPRS had failed to see the intrinsic value of information work on a broad scale, Ministers accepted that a suitably staffed and efficient information machine was a necessity for promoting the idea of Britain as an industrial power. As such, the two-thirds reduction 'could not be accepted in principle', they argued, only through a thorough case by case assessment could the extent of cost-savings be properly explored.<sup>87</sup>

The effect of radical information cuts on British trade was a particular concern for senior Ministers. Indeed, remarkably, the Foreign Secretary was more inclined to accept significant reductions in information work than his ministerial colleagues. Owen's suggestion of a 50% reduction of staff employed at the British Information Services in New York was considered 'much too severe' by the rest of the committee. Most of the staff there were engaged on industrial, commercial, research and library work which would continue in some capacity even if the staff working on it were cut. Any savings extracted were 'likely to be small', Ministers argued, but the impact on export promotion hadn't been sufficiently examined. A 50% reduction of staff was rejected outright, although Ministers were open to accepting a 20% reduction.<sup>88</sup>

With the two-thirds reduction off the table, Ministers appeared more predisposed towards Owen's preferred 22% cut to information work. GEN 89 instructed the Foreign Secretary to re-examine the 'the deployment of resources' via 'a detailed review post-by-post' in consultation with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Parliamentary Secretary for the Privy Council. Whilst a two-thirds reduction was deemed too severe, Ministers declined to back Owen's proposal until further study had been undertaken.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

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In August 1978, over a year since the CPRS had delivered its review of overseas representation, the government finally published its response to the review. The preparation of the government's White Paper had been beset with issues, much as Owen's draft statement to Parliament on the publication of the review had ruffled feathers. The White paper, mainly written by Owen, had been rejected by the Prime Minister for its 'ill-timed and largely pessimistic essay about Britain's place in the world'. The draft opened with an elucidation of international relations in the post war period which, in Callaghan's view, focused too much 'on the decline of the UK's role in the world'. Only after all this pessimism did the paper offer any positive points, although these were, the Prime Minister argued, devoid of 'substance'. Callaghan ordered a significant rewrite taking a 'more optimistic tone'.<sup>90</sup>

The White Paper was revised on more positive lines. Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister, it set out the government's official response to the CPRS review of overseas representation. Callaghan's inner circle had poured over the review in the previous year since its publication, yet the proposed radical shift in the direction and resources devoted to overseas representation that the CPRS had advocated had not sufficiently moved senior Ministers. The government instead favoured maintaining the status quo, with only minor changes to the deployment of resources deemed admissible.<sup>91</sup>

The published White Paper dealt with what the Minister for Overseas Development had termed the fundamental questions around Britain's continuing role in the world. Although Ministers had dealt with the CPRS's recommendations on a case by case basis and had initially refrained from addressing these fundamental questions, ultimately the CPRS's view that Britain's relative economic decline necessitated withdrawal from its overseas cultural commitments could not be accepted by the Callaghan government. Indeed, the government's position stood in direct opposition to the CPRS's analysis that Britain's role overseas should diminish, effecting a withdrawal from certain areas of the world no longer deemed of upmost significance for British foreign policy. Contrary to the CPRS's proposed policy of retreat from the international arena, the government argued that 'British interests should extend round the world'. Despite the CPRS's glum analysis of the UK's economic outlook, the government's

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<sup>90</sup> TNA: PREM 16/1989, Stowe to Callaghan, 20 July 1978; 'White Paper on overseas representation', 10 July 1978.

<sup>91</sup> TNA: FCO 26/1932, 'The United Kingdom's Overseas Representation', August 1978.

position was that Britain still had ‘the assets to defend her interests and effectively to promote her objectives’.<sup>92</sup>

The Callaghan government argued that Britain occupied an advantageous position in international affairs which provided ‘a more than adequate springboard for an imaginative and effective foreign policy’. British foreign policy, the government argued, was ‘inextricably’ linked with the country’s economic affairs. As Britain imported ‘half our food and more than half of our raw materials’ promotion of the exports ‘which go to pay for these’ was a significant component of overseas representation. Projecting the image of Britain as a reliable trading nation and promoting export and commercial interests would ‘continue to be a decisive influence on our foreign policy’.<sup>93</sup>

The government set out Britain’s overseas objectives as follows: ‘(a) to safeguard the security of our country; (b) to promote its prosperity; (c) to uphold and extend the basic values and freedoms of our democracy; (d) to honour our commitments and obligations; (e) to work for a peaceful and just world; (f) to contribute to the above objectives by providing assistance to developing countries’. These objectives broadly covered the economic, political, security, and cultural aspects of foreign policy but for Labour the priority was economic matters. The government argued that only from a position of economic strength could Britain pursue its foreign policy objectives. Safeguarding British security and maintaining its commitments to NATO, the EEC and the Commonwealth alongside the overseas aid programme all required an economically prosperous Britain. For a Labour government long troubled by economic decline and about to enter a period of ruinous industrial strife known as the Winter of Discontent, the economic situation held a particular party-political interest.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst the CPRS expressed the pessimistic view that Britain’s economic woes meant it could not afford to sustain anywhere near current levels of overseas representation, Labour argued that the perilous economic situation meant Britain could ill afford *not* to maintain this commitment. A reversal of economic decline relied on overseas investment in British exports. Thus, a major reduction to Britain’s overseas representation effort was detrimental to trade and export promotion, potentially damaging to the British economy and therefore in contradiction with government policy objectives.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

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Labour did, however, acknowledge that structural and organisational reforms were required in Britain's overseas representation due to excessive bureaucracy. The growth of bureaucracy in all government departments, not just those involved in international affairs, presented a 'central challenge to government'. Moreover, the government argued that 'the growth of impersonal and distant government machines is a challenge to democracy itself'. Callaghan wanted more open, democratic and accessible government machinery and a pursuit of foreign policy that, where 'humanly possible', reflected British society and its 'values, interests and concerns'.<sup>95</sup>

In an effort to limit unnecessary bureaucracy and ensure foreign policy reflected the needs of British society, Callaghan's government set out the major areas where reforms would focus: '(i) to increase specialised knowledge in our overseas representation; (ii) to build a closer working relationship between the Diplomatic Service and the Home Civil Service; (iii) to improve the co-ordination of our overseas representation, and of the resources devoted to it, both in Whitehall and abroad; (iv) to have a Diplomatic Service fully responsive to government and British society; (v) to maintain a wide but cost-effective system of residential representation overseas'. These organisational changes were likely to be modest in comparison to the radical recommendations the CPRS had suggested and which Labour had rejected. Moreover, any changes would only be enacted after consultation with civil servants whose views would 'be taken into account'.<sup>96</sup>

The cuts to information work were a testament to Labour's moderation of the CPRS review. The think tank's suggested two-thirds reduction of information work, viewed as an arbitrary figure by Owen and the FCO, was successfully countered by the Foreign Secretary's more moderate proposal of a 22% reduction. The Cabinet settled for a 27% overall reduction to information activities, with 16.5% cut from the Diplomatic Service and a 10.5% decrease in locally-engaged staff. 'Significant' reductions to the services provided by the Central Office of Information since the CPRS delivered its report were also noted in the White Paper, although no figures were provided. The government acknowledged that further savings from the FCO information departments 'may follow' alongside 'further streamlining' of the Central Office of Information. Yet, the level of cuts was modest in comparison to the 40% extracted by the Duncan Committee.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

The CPRS review, like its predecessors the Plowden and Duncan Committee reports, came at a time wherein Britain needed to ‘rapidly and radically adjust to the new and hitherto constantly evolving demands of the post-War world’. Post-war British foreign policy had gone through notable ‘re-orientations’, from the creation of NATO, the end of Empire, and the withdrawal from east of Suez. Britain’s entry into the EEC, the government argued, was possibly the most ‘far-reaching’ of these re-orientations and thus the re-examination of overseas information by the CPRS had become integral for policy going forward. From the government’s perspective Britain’s membership of the EEC had, ‘[m]ore than any single factor... altered the international framework within which British foreign policy operates’. This perspective had guided the CPRS’s investigation and persuaded the team to advise Ministers to withdrawal altogether from some areas of the world and concentrate on Europe itself as this was where Britain’s interests truly lay.<sup>98</sup>

Whilst Labour accepted that the expenditure on overseas representation should be in line with the country’s stature, it did not share the CPRS’s contention that the British diplomatic machine was a bureaucratic behemoth that dwarfed the actual needs of the country. ‘None of our main industrial partners’, the government stressed, ‘spend less than we do on overseas representation’. British expenditure was not exorbitant with comparable countries. Moreover, Labour did not accept that EEC membership meant British interests were confined within the parameters of European affairs. As a permanent member of the United Nations and with a ‘special commitment to the Commonwealth’, Labour argued that Britain needed to maintain its influence on a global scale, even in areas of the world ‘where our economic interests seem negligible’.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, Labour agreed that cuts to services and manpower were necessary to ensure that overseas representation provided good value for money and efficiency. Yet the economic argument extended both ways. Labour needed a high-quality information effort to encourage investment into the struggling UK economy. It was the economic draw of an effective overseas representation effort which proved the main priority for Labour’s moderation of the CPRS review. ‘The Government’, the White Paper asserted, ‘are determined to maintain the effectiveness of our information effort, especially in priority areas such as trade’.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

## ***Conclusion***

The CPRS Review of Overseas Representation was the last in a long line of inquiries in the 1960s and 1970s into what Christopher Meyer, the former Ambassador to the United States, deemed an examination of ‘the purpose and nature of British diplomacy’. The CPRS report followed the Plowden review of 1964, the 1969 Duncan Committee Report and the formation of the House of Commons Defence and External Affairs Sub-Committee in 1971 which had itself looked into the issue of overseas representation and published a number of reports on the matter.<sup>101</sup>

By 1975, Foreign Office expenditure had come in for some criticism from the press with newspaper articles detailing ‘excessive costs in overseas missions’. These newspaper reports inspired the CPRS to take a long hard look at the situation. The CPRS’s head, Kenneth Berrill, hoped an extensive review of overseas representation would provide the necessary impetus to create a more streamlined and coordinated service ‘in an age of interdependence and EEC membership’.<sup>102</sup>

The Foreign Office’s opposition to the CPRS’s proposals was not surprising. Senior FCO officials had resisted earlier interference in the form of the Duncan Committee in 1969. The Duncan Report’s insistence that diplomacy should prioritise commercial work and export promotion over more traditional diplomatic activities was met with derision. One opponent remarked ‘that the committee believed a diplomat was a man who goes abroad to sell washing machines for his country’. Diplomats also rejected the committee’s proposal that the green light for proposed diplomatic initiatives should be determined by whether the action fell into the ‘area of concentration’ or the ‘outer area’. Operations planned for the former were to be prioritised. On this area of contention diplomats were supported by the Cabinet including the Prime Minister Harold Wilson who criticised Duncan’s division of the world ‘literally into black and white’.<sup>103</sup>

The Wilson government generally supported the proposals of the Duncan Committee but opposed the establishment of a two-tier system for diplomatic work. By 1970, Labour had lost power and the Duncan Report was ‘quietly shelved’, but not before extracting substantial cuts to information work which resulted in IRD’s reconceptualisation in 1972. The 400-page CPRS

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Roger Murphy, *Challenges from Within*, (Ashgate, 2001), p.170.

<sup>103</sup> Richard Little and Mark Wickham-Jones (eds), *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?*, (Manchester University Press, 2000), p.121-122.

Review of Overseas Representation was to suffer a similar fate when it reached the Cabinet. Predictably, the FCO objected to its negative presentation in a report which ‘criticised its social tone, complained about over-staffing, extravagance and unnecessary perfectionism [and] urged the need for greater specialisation’. The language of the report was often ‘provocative’. Suggestions that even basic work was ‘being done to an unjustifiably high standard’ and that the ‘potent ethos’ of the FCO ‘tends to encourage conservatism’ and ‘a sort of “middle-classness” in the prevailing values’ were certain to rile up diplomats.<sup>104</sup>

The report recommended the closure of more than fifty overseas missions or posts and the end of a separate Diplomatic Service which was to instead be merged with the Home Civil Service. Whilst these were all radical proposals, it was the recommendation to abolish the British Council and BBC External Service which prompted the backlash from outside critics. The CPRS had seemingly overreached itself. Its proposals to abolish two significant British intuitions inspired ‘a devastating “establishment” counter-attack’.<sup>105</sup>

The CPRS review had been undertaken in ‘an already heated atmosphere’. The FCO had been left reeling from the series of newspaper stories detailing diplomats’ extravagance in overseas Embassies, particularly in Washington and Bonn. A front-page expose in the Daily Mail reported the existence of an internal CPRS report which apparently accused ‘the Foreign Office mandarins of perpetuating an elitist cadre, lavishing perks and privileges on its staff on a scale unknown elsewhere’. Thus, the FCO was ‘already feeling itself to be under unjustified attack’.<sup>106</sup>

Ultimately, the CPRS was a questionable choice for the review on overseas representation. Leaving aside previous animosity between the unit and the Diplomatic Service, the CPRS was a body which usually dealt with questions of long-term strategy rather than organisational structure. Moreover, the unit ‘had little experience in questions of foreign policy’. According to the international affairs scholar, William Wallace, the CPRS team ‘operated under a veil of secrecy more appropriate to the preparation of the budget than to an investigation of administrative change.’ The level of secrecy meant that unauthorised leaks to the press were the only snippets of information the public were given on the progress of the review. As

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.221.

<sup>105</sup> Little and Wickham-Jones (eds), *New Labour's Foreign Policy*, p.122.

<sup>106</sup> William Wallace, ‘After Berrill: Whitehall and British Diplomacy’, *International Affairs*, 54:2 (April, 1978), 220-239, p.221.

Wallace noted, the cloak of secrecy left the CPRS ‘wide open to scandal-mongering from the popular press’ and also vulnerable to criticism before the report was even published.<sup>107</sup>

The CPRS’s secret pursuit of the review gave the FCO the edge in controlling the narrative in the public discourse. Whilst the CPRS was covertly compiling its report, diplomats were leaking stories with a sympathetic slant to an eager press. The counter-attack was led by officials at the highest levels in the FCO and the press storm was known by the government to have originated within Whitehall. Labour ministers were apparently ‘well aware that senior diplomats were behind the anti-CPRS propaganda campaign and press leaks’. Yet the dirty tactics from the FCO did not sufficiently hinder their cause and the Prime Minister ‘opted for a quiet life and ditched the CPRS’s main recommendations’. Whilst the FCO ‘was spared the think-tank’s axe’ on larger questions of the institution’s existence, Ministers did accept the need for smaller-scale organisational restructuring. Recommendations for staff cuts, post closures and the addition of ‘mini-missions’ among other small structural changes were implemented in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. The shelving of the Duncan Committee’s and CPRS’s attempts to affect significant cultural change in the FCO was demonstrative of, as one scholar has pointed out, Labour’s support ‘of the Whitehall status quo’.<sup>108</sup>

The Callaghan government’s refusal to support the CPRS’s attempt to instigate a cultural shift in the nature of British diplomacy is curious. Callaghan had personally supported a review of overseas representation during his time as Foreign Secretary. The Prime Minister was seemingly aware of the issues within British diplomacy and sought an objective examination to offer recommendations for reform. Labour was also apparently aware that the sheer magnitude of British diplomacy was excessive in relation to its size on the global stage. The earlier Plowden and Duncan reviews had highlighted that Britain’s global diplomatic reach vastly overextended its importance as a post-empire second tier world power. This view was readily accepted by the Labour government in their response to the CPRS review:

The frequency of all these reviews has been a clear reflection of Britain’s need... to adjust... to the post-war world... to the dismantling of the Empire, to the withdrawal from East of Suez... More than any other single factor [entry into the European Community] has altered the international framework within which British foreign policy operates.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Little and Wickham-Jones (eds), *New Labour's Foreign Policy*, p.122.

<sup>109</sup> Meyer, *Getting Our Way*.

The Planning Staff within the Foreign Office were charged with staging the FCO's counter-attack. Usually more preoccupied with writing long-term strategic planning papers, in '1977-78', Meyer who was part of the staff noted that the unit instead focused most of its energy on the immediate impact of the CPRS proposals. The report, he argued, 'represented an existential threat to the Foreign Office' and 'the key task for the Planning Staff was to destroy the CPRS report'. He had been personally responsible for 'drafting the counter-blast'. Fortunately for the FCO, the 'tough, talented and ambitious' Foreign Secretary 'was having none of a report that would have shot his job from under him'. Thus, 'the CPRS boarders were repelled' and the government's response to the report was to endorse 'the primacy of the Foreign Office in the conduct of foreign affairs'. Britain's entry into the EEC had complicated this primacy as membership had meshed foreign and domestic affairs. Whilst the government acknowledged this 'meshing', the government had rejected the CPRS proposal to integrate the Diplomatic Service into the Home Civil Service. Instead, '[r]esponsibility for the overall conduct of overseas relations in the broadest sense of the term will continue to be vested in a single Cabinet minister', the Foreign Secretary.<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, Sir Michael Franklin of the Cabinet Office concluded that 'the FCO did a hatchet job on the report's recommendations'. According to Franklin, the FCO utilised government hearings and the Royal Institute of International Affairs to disparage the notion of a Cabinet think tank comprised of academics and businessmen as any sort of authority on the conduct of foreign affairs. Such was the veracity of the FCO's counter-attack to the CPRS report that the department 'had to defend itself against allegations that it had set up a special anti-think tank unit to lie in wait for the CPRS'. The CPRS 'was so badly mauled' over the report 'that its very survival was placed in doubt'. Following Thatcher's ascent to power in 1979, the unit did not last much longer. A 'non-partisan think tank' comprised of 'neutral experts' eventually lost out to Thatcher's preference for 'policy ideologues', paving the way for a Prime Minister's policy unit. As Roger Murphy noted, during its relatively brief existence the CPRS had to 'balance' itself between the interests of politicians seeking external expertise and the bureaucrats who viewed them suspiciously as 'potential rivals'. In trying to find such a balance, the CPRS 'failed to satisfy and win the support of either'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Murphy, *Challenges from Within*, p.170.

## *Post-Script: Political Warfare Post-IRD*

### *The Demise of IRD: An Alternative Interpretation*

The main objective of conducting this research on IRD was to add to the rich scholarship by providing an academic evaluation of the department's latter years and eventual demise. The main contribution of the thesis is not only an archivally rich appreciation of the bureaucratic politics of IRD from the late 1940's until its closure in 1977, but to put forward an alternative narrative of why the department closed in which the bureaucratic politics within Whitehall and Downing Street played a decisive role. This thesis challenges the received orthodoxy around IRD's closure through a thorough investigation of the documentary record.

It was not IRD's staunch anti-communist rhetoric that precipitated its demise but its newly acquired domestic agenda working on non-communist political objectives. This necessitated the abolition of the name IRD which had become intrinsically associated with secret state operations such as black propaganda and special political action. The brand of IRD held these negative connotations and, as the department moved further into areas of partisan domestic politics, potential press revelations of a secret government propaganda unit coordinating publicity in support of domestic objectives became a grave concern. Particularly as senior diplomats feared a similar expose of British Cold War activities to that of the deeply damaging Ramparts revelations of the CIA's cultural warfare activities and black operations.

IRD's domestic agenda was controversial but fully supported by the British government. Ted Heath, Harold Wilson and James Callaghan enthusiastically exploited IRD's expertise advancing overseas objectives and turning the attention to the domestic sphere instead. The capacity to influence the British public toward supporting government objectives was attractive in a time of economic strife for the government who faced union agitation and left-wing subversion in industry. The Labour Party's embrace of political warfare in both overseas and domestic settings evidences the party's acceptance of the secret state from the first Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, through to the Wilson and Callaghan governments. Wilson's acceptance of IRD's work runs contrary to the established narrative of the Prime Minister as deeply suspicious of Britain's intelligence agencies. Like the existence of an MI5 plot to oust Wilson has been effectively challenged by academics (the evidence points to a loose band of right-wing fanatics within MI5 agitating against Wilson rather than a high-level organised coup), the perception of Wilson as inherently suspicious of intelligence bodies can also be

questioned.<sup>1</sup> As this account of IRD throughout successive Labour governments shows, Labour preserved the establishment whilst in power, including the preservation of the secret state.

Successive Labour governments did little to challenge the huge growth of the secret state in the post-war era. Indeed, all of Labour's Cold War Prime Ministers supported IRD's work and the use of the department's political warfare techniques in domestic British politics. The employment of political warfare in the EEC campaign set a precedent which legitimised the use of techniques normally designed to influence enemy populations but now targeted an unsuspecting British public. Whilst IRD's earlier propaganda work in the domestic realm at least had the justification of securing the UK against communist subversion, no such justifications could be drawn for the department's involvement in the Troubles in Northern Ireland or the EEC campaign.

Political warfare was certainly not just a weapon of the Labour Party, Conservative governments maintained IRD and the department's turn to non-communist work happened under the Conservative Prime Minister Ted Heath. Yet the department's continued role in the domestic space was never challenged by senior Labour figures. Nor did they consider the implications of IRD's operations on the voice of the non-communist left who had legitimate grievances against government policies but were in no way stooges of the Soviet Union. Hugh Gaitskell's rebuttal of multilateralists as agents of Moscow emphasised this delegitimisation of the non-communist left and was a tactic that even IRD criticised. The ethical considerations of IRD's non-communist work did not appear to trouble the Labour Cabinet. It was the potential political fallout of an exposure of these operations which concerned Ministers and forced them to close IRD and disperse its expertise around Whitehall.

IRD's refusal to attack the multilateralist movement demonstrated that the department did attempt to navigate the fine line between the security of the British state and individual subjects' civil liberties. The department's English Section recognised that organisations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had a genuine political right to critique government defence policy. The department's measured approach to the non-communist left would also suggest that IRD's anti-communist *raison d'être* was not so ingrained that it blurred it to the nuances of left-wing British politics. The non-communist left was not seen as a threat but a potential bulwark against communist subversion.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Moran, 'Conspiracy and contemporary history: revisiting MI5 and the Wilson plot[s]', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 13:2 (2014), pp. 161–175, p. 162.

This sensitivity to the right of free association for the non-communist left did not, however, extend to British communists. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and its supporters were viewed as legitimate targets by both IRD and the British Cabinet. Yet Whitehall, in particular the Home Office, recognised the inherent contradiction of a state-sanctioned propaganda campaign against the CPGB, then an official political party. As a result, operations against the CPGB were delayed until 1951 following the intensification of the Cold War. As the CPGB gave up on the parliamentary process in the early 1950s and reverted to more indirect means of acquiring political power through the trade unions, IRD gained justification for a more robust attack on the organisation and operations intensified. Therefore, the CPGB's political status had at least initially offered it a level of protection against IRD operations.

Whilst IRD viewed its own operations as a perfectly justified response to homegrown communist subversion, the question of the overall worth of these operations remains. IRD was an expensive department and as any observer of propaganda operations will know all too well, the tangible success of such operations is often unknown. This was a paradox that haunted IRD through the numerous reviews of its operations in the 1960s and 1970s. Such an expensive outlay required results, but propaganda rarely produced quantifiable results. The main indicator of IRD's success lies in the longevity of the department far beyond the fever of the early Cold War. As Foreign Office departments suffered funding cuts as the burden of Britain's post-war economic recovery began to bite in the 1950s, IRD's funding increased. The government clearly saw some benefit of the department's work in order to justify the increasing cost of it.

Even during the economic hardship of the early 1970s, IRD was saved from closure and instead reconceptualised. This reconceptualisation is key to our understanding of just how important the government perceived political warfare. Evidently, British policy-makers and senior Ministers viewed political warfare as an effective instrument of the state which was essential to maintain even beyond the Cold War. IRD's involvement in the broader domestic politics of the seventies reveals the central importance of the tactics of persuasion and agenda-setting in the bureaucratic machinery that grew out of the West's response to the Cold War, an infrastructure which largely still exists today.

### ***Political Warfare Post-IRD***

The story of political warfare following IRD's demise is certainly intriguing. Following IRD's closure, the capacity for international propaganda operations transferred to the Overseas

Information Department, created in 1977 as part of the Foreign Office's new information division. Whilst the direction of the international capacity is officially documented following IRD's closure, little is known of what became of the department's domestic work. Following the Labour government's Social Contract with the unions in 1974, domestic operations were deemed too risky and the activities of the English Section were immediately shut down by then Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Only the section's research work collating information on British communists was deemed safe to continue.<sup>2</sup> Three years later IRD was closed entirely due to the Foreign Office's desire to streamline the various uncoordinated and costly information departments into one closely entwined Information Division.

IRD was closed due to a bureaucratic reorganisation of the Foreign Office's information departments, and the earlier the ban on the English Section's domestic operations was driven entirely by political pragmatism. Neither IRD as a whole or its domestic work troubled James Callaghan's government. Prior to the Social Contract, as Home Secretary in the late 1960s, Callaghan had been eager to deploy IRD's domestic machinery against troublesome left-wing union leaders who were perceived as an obstruction to the government's attempts to stabilise the economic downturn through a strategic deal with the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The future Prime Minister wanted to use IRD to replace the 'politically motivated' troublesome union leaders with more amenable figures.<sup>3</sup> Once a deal between the state and the unions had been struck, an exposé of the English Section's operations would have very likely undermined the whole arrangement. The English Section was an integral weapon of the state and had enjoyed successes in its campaign against communist penetration of the unions, particularly with its exposure of the communist controlled Electrical Trades Union. Although its operations were mothballed in 1974 to protect the deal with the TUC, the unit's expertise and surveillance of communist union members was maintained.<sup>4</sup>

After IRD's closure in 1977, the English Section had most likely moved to MI5 or been buried in a dark corner of the Foreign Office. Senior officials in the Foreign Office fought to keep domestic propaganda within IRD in 1974 when the desirability of such work in the light of the Social Contract had become an issue for the government. Diplomats argued that the English Section's 'continuation within IRD would attract less attention than any change' yet remarkably, three years later, IRD had been disbanded and thus the argument had become a

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<sup>2</sup> TNA: FCO 168/5396, Hunt to Brimelow, 7 November 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Cobain, 'Wilson government used secret unit to smear union leaders', *The Guardian*, 24 July 2018

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (John Murray, London 2001), p.546.

moot point.<sup>5</sup> Following IRD's closure, officials in the Foreign Office told the journalist David Leigh that 'that no domestic propagandising as such goes on since Owen's arrival'.<sup>6</sup> The statement was truthful as domestic operations had indeed ceased in 1974 - well before David Owen became Foreign Secretary. But the statement also hinted at the possibility that domestic operations had by this point transferred to MI5 and thus fell under the remit of the Home Secretary.

Thus, IRD's covert domestic operations likely transferred to the Security Service but what became of covert overseas work? In its international operations, IRD's involvement with Special Political Action and black propaganda had led to an overlap with similar activities conducted by MI6. In the 1950s and 1960s it appeared that IRD and MI6 worked closely on these efforts rather than competed for control of operations.<sup>7</sup> Yet by the 1970s, a Foreign Office department involved in such sensitive work was deemed no longer politically desirable. Owen had determined that overseas clandestine operations should be the sole discretion of MI6.<sup>8</sup> The Foreign Secretary's unease around IRD's covert work in foreign lands no doubt extended to domestic operations and both were transferred out of the diplomatic machine to MI6 and MI5 respectively. The alternative path would have seen the FCO retaining the capacity for covert operations and buried these secret sections within the hidden sections of the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department, as per Colin Crowe's suggestion.<sup>9</sup> However, as we have seen, a significant section of diplomatic personnel found these activities distasteful, even perhaps incompatible with diplomacy and were happy to see them moved away to secret departments. Others saw them as a secret tax on overt Foreign Office activities and, in simple cost accounting terms, felt they belonged elsewhere.

With the closure of IRD, the link between overseas and domestic operations as part of a wide-ranging anti-communist campaign had been broken. The Foreign Office no longer maintained a dedicated central machine for anti-communist political warfare, instead this expertise had been dispersed within the new information division. Most of the IRD cadre formed the new Overseas Information Department tasked with disseminating unattributable information overseas, whilst its expert researchers had been absorbed into the Research Department. Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> TNA: FCO 168/5396, Hunt to Brimelow, 7 November 1974.

<sup>6</sup> David Leigh, 'Death of the department that never was', *The Guardian*, 27 January 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Paul M. McGarr, 'The Information Research Department, British covert propaganda, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962: combating communism and courting failure?.' *The International History Review* 41:1 (2019), 130-156.

<sup>8</sup> Rory Cormac, 'Techniques of covert propaganda: the British approach in the mid-1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:7 (2019), 1064-1069, p.1064.

<sup>9</sup> TNA: FCO 84/52, Colin Crowe review of IRD, July 1976.

the retention of domestic work within the Foreign Office had become something that senior managers no longer saw as reasonably justified. Rather than dissolve such an effective instrument, however, the English Section's four staff had most likely become the responsibility of the Home Secretary and possibly housed within MI5. This would have been the more sensible approach for Callaghan who had been an ardent advocate of domestic political warfare. With Labour's ongoing battle with the unions over the policy of wage restraint to stem inflation, it would have been inconceivable that Callaghan would abolish such a useful weapon. Britain's capacity for domestic propaganda had become an integral weapon of the state since the early 1950's, it almost certainly continued post-IRD and dramatic political change in the late 1970's ensured that it would have an intriguing after-life.

### *Political Warfare under Thatcher*

The separation of domestic and overseas propaganda had potentially been a short-lived enterprise. By the early 1980's, domestic activities within the FCO appeared to have resumed. Moreover, the soft propaganda work of the Cultural Relations Department, always singing a descant to covert information warfare, remained in place. More importantly, the Overseas Information Department, renamed Information Department in 1980, continued IRD's work monitoring communist affiliated organisations and societies in the UK. The department also kept a close eye on non-communist peace movements such as CND and prepared unattributable briefs on such movements. CND, which had seen a decline in membership in the 1970s, had been reinvigorated in the early 1980s with an increased membership and another successful repositioning of the Labour Party's defence policy towards unilateralism. Like IRD's English Section in the 1960's, Information Department had been unconcerned by communist influence within CND and insisted that the movement had 'never been a Communist front organisation'. However, the revival of CND in the 1980s alongside the revival or creation of various 'anti-nuclear weapon (and usually anti-NATO)' peace movements in the UK, Western Europe and United States posed concern for not just the Parliamentary Labour Party but the Conservative government too. The strengthened CND had the potential for the government to lose the public's support for defence policy.<sup>10</sup>

In 1981, the Minister of Defence, John Nott, warned Thatcher that the revival of CND presented 'difficult public relations problems' for the government. Alongside the strengthened position of CND, Nott warned that 'there is growing scepticism among a wider and thinking section of

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<sup>10</sup> TNA: FCO 95/2132, "'Peace Movements" based in the UK', undated.

the population about the correctness of the Trident decision'. Furthermore, Nott reported that Thatcher's decision to upgrade the UK's nuclear deterrent to Trident had not been unanimously backed in Whitehall. Whilst the Minister of Defence had supported the move, he admitted that support for Trident had not been the general position of the Cabinet nor his own Ministry. Even the Chiefs of Staff worried about the implications of the exotic spend on Trident for the shape of Britain's conventional forces.<sup>11</sup> Nott stressed that the government required cross Whitehall support for Trident in order to convince the general public yet warned that at present 'we are losing the defence/deterrent argument'. An assessment shared by his predecessor Francis Pym.<sup>12</sup>

Thatcher rebuked the pair, asserting that 'it really should be possible for two Defence Ministers to master the strategic options and the philosophical arguments affecting Trident'.<sup>13</sup> Nott, who had been spearheading the government's publicity campaign 'to turn back the criticism from the CND movement', proposed a briefing for the Cabinet on the Trident programme so that Ministers could engage in pro-Trident publicity. The move was blocked by Thatcher as such a briefing, which was deemed certain to become public knowledge, constituted an information risk in that 'critics might suggest that it implied that Cabinet is not fully behind the original decision to acquire Trident'. The briefing potentially exposed the Prime Minister to the more damaging assessment that on Trident 'the vital decisions were not taken by Cabinet as a whole.'<sup>14</sup>

Thatcher's vigorous defence policy had been a boon for CND and gave the government a public relations headache. The revival of CND in the early 1980s had clearly been targeted and resisted in some capacity by the government, with some suspecting Soviet support and subsidy. This was not an entirely paranoid hypothesis, given that we now know that the National Union of Mineworkers was receiving money from Moscow during the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> By 1983, the Secretary of Defence, Michael Heseltine, reported to the Cabinet that CND 'had been successfully thrown on to the defensive by the action taken to identify the left wing affiliations of so many of its leading members'. This statement is remarkable and warrants some reflection. Although

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<sup>11</sup> John Baylis, "'Greenwoodery' and British Defence Policy,' *International Affairs*, 62:3 (1986), 443-457.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: PREM 19/555, Nott minute to Thatcher: 'Trident: Public Attitudes', 2 February 1981. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/126746>.

<sup>13</sup> TNA: PREM 19/555, Clive Whitmore to Brian Norbury, 5 February 1981. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/126748>

<sup>14</sup> TNA: PREM 19/556, Whitmore to Thatcher, 21 May 1981. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/126765>

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (Penguin, 2009), p.664-80.

Heseltine echoed the earlier assessments by IRD and Information Department that ‘many of the rank and file supporters... were not left wing in their political orientation’. Clearly the movement’s message on nuclear disarmament had resonated more widely with the public as the government pushed through with the acquisition of Trident. The ‘action’ to expose left-wing CND leaders hinted by Heseltine would suggest some level of unattributable propaganda work had been taken against CND.<sup>16</sup>

Whether this work had been conducted by the Foreign Office or elsewhere in Whitehall certainly warrants further investigation. Clearly much of this work was carried out by an independent organisation called the Coalition for Peace through Security headed by Dr Julian Lewis. His associate, Paul Mercer, published a well-documented expose of CND entitled *The Peace of the Dead*, that offered a forensic MI5-style dissection of CND’s support base in 1986.<sup>17</sup> After absorbing much of IRD’s cadre and responsibilities, Information Department had the expertise required to support such a campaign. Official documentation which, although at present very much limited, does reveal that Information Department had not strictly confined itself to overseas information work due to its surveillance of CND. Even the renaming of the department – the “Overseas” designation had been dropped by 1980, merely two years into the department’s existence – could perhaps suggest that the department had expanded into domestic as well as overseas unattributable propaganda in the Foreign Office. The secret Special Producer Unit housed within Overseas Information Department and funded by the secret vote would have also provided operational cover for a campaign against CND.

### ***The Revival of Anti-Soviet Political Warfare***

The considerable domestic pressure on Thatcher’s defence policy had the potential to undermine her commitment to a renewed offensive against the Soviet Union. During the Second Cold War a strong British deterrent though the continued membership of NATO and the Trident programme were non-negotiable positions for the Prime Minister. Even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Thatcher had prioritised ‘the UK’s defence posture’ through increased expenditure and the Prime Minister had taken an ‘active role’ in the modernisation of NATO’s long-range nuclear arsenal. Thatcher had prioritised defence spending as an integral deterrent against the Soviet Union, but it was not until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that the Prime Minister considered a political warfare offensive the

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<sup>16</sup> TNA: CAB 128/76, CC(83) 14<sup>th</sup> Conclusions, 28 April 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Mercer, *Peace of the Dead: Truth Behind the Nuclear Disarmers* (London: Policy Research Publications, 1986).

Soviet monolith. Ironically, although Thatcher has been much feted for her strong anti-Communism, it was the FCO who instigated the political warfare offensive.<sup>18</sup>

Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, détente between the two rival power blocs had already been near breaking point; Afghanistan proved to be the final nail in the coffin.<sup>19</sup> The invasion prompted swift action in the FCO. Deeply alarmed, the Planning Staff set out a wide-ranging programme of counter-measures to the Prime Minister. In the eyes of the FCO's long term policy planners, the invasion had exposed the West's inadequate response to earlier Soviet provocations in the Third World, such as the Communist coup of Angola in 1975. It was apparent to them that the Soviets had not heeded Western expectations of détente.<sup>20</sup>

Afghanistan amounted to business as usual. The counter-measures suggested by the Planning Staff followed the normal pattern of political warfare relied on so often by the FCO to counter the Soviet Union. The strategy focused on 'projecting Western influence in vulnerable developing countries' and encompassed a variety of instruments. Defensive instruments such as propaganda, political visits, cultural exchanges, military and police training, and aid were recommended alongside the more offensive measures of subversion and direct military intervention. The proposed strategy was rather akin to the Attlee government's earlier defensive/offensive anti-communist strategy launched in 1948. For the 1980's revival of this strategy, the destabilisation of Soviet satellite states was considered, a measure which had not been attempted by the British government since the failed operation to overthrow the Albanian regime in 1949.<sup>21</sup>

Thatcher, often critical of diplomats, found the FCO's proposals 'fascinating' and told officials that the diplomats' assessment of the Soviet threat and efforts to deal with it matched those of her 'academic advisers', an allusion to her semi-privatisation of information warfare. Although she conceded that the personal advisers she had consulted over the Afghanistan crisis 'could not put as much flesh on their ideas' as could the experts in the FCO. The Prime Minister instructed officials to produce a 'sanitised' version of their ideas for the Foreign Secretary,

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<sup>18</sup> Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 222-36.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas K. Robb, *Jimmy Carter and the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p.114

<sup>20</sup> TNA: FCO 49/894, 'The prevention of Soviet Expansion in the Developing World', April 1980.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: FCO 49/894, 'The prevention of Soviet Expansion in the Developing World', April 1980; PREM 19/238, Alexander to Thatcher, 2 May 1980. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/120130>. On Attlee's anti-communist strategy and the Albanian operation see Giselle Gwinnett, 'Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare: Labour's Secret Anti-communist Campaign in Europe, 1948-51', *The International History Review*, 39:3 (2017), 426-449.

Lord Carrington, to present to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, an interdepartmental ministerial committee. Thatcher wanted a milder version of the recommendations to go to her Ministers, presumably because some of the ‘wets’ may have objected to plans to subvert countries within the Soviet Orbit. The FCO were instructed to remove references to the ‘destabilisation’ of Soviet satellites, whilst ‘the other references to propaganda would be recast, to avoid the word “propaganda” (the Prime Minister’s point)’. Thatcher instead suggested officials set out the case ‘to disseminate the truth about Western countries as well as about the USSR, Cuba, etc’.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst the invasion of Afghanistan had revived anti-communist sentiment within the FCO and impelled officials to act, it was apparent that Thatcher’s Cabinet had already entered office with long-standing concerns over the disparity in East-West power relations. The desire to correct the power imbalance was not reactionary but a long-held conviction of Thatcher’s; however post-Afghanistan most of the FCO now shared this view, taking this event as a litmus test of East-West relations. The Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, alarmed by the rise of Soviet power over the previous decade, attributed the power imbalance predominately to Jimmy Carter and ‘weak United States leadership’, and also French posturing for an independent position and increased West German economic interdependence with Eastern Europe. Although Britain had ‘limited economic resources’ the Committee considered it imperative that it ‘should continue to contribute a strong political and ideological lead’.<sup>23</sup>

Robust action was now actioned. The Defence and Overseas Policy Committee approved the FCO’s counter-measures against the Soviet Union in June 1980, thus evoking the revival of anti-communist political warfare against the Soviet Union. The new strategy was interdepartmental with Thatcher planning to pool financial resources into something similar to the Defence and Foreign Affairs Budget. The fund would be a flexible resource ‘directed towards meeting the requirements of national security in the broadest sense’.<sup>24</sup>

The revival of anti-communist political warfare demonstrated that Ministers had been keen to reengage with the ideological struggle with the Soviet Union. As in 1948, propaganda would play a significant role in the renewed political warfare offensive but the FCO reported that ‘our machinery for doing so has been run down’. Yet diplomats did not press for a revival of IRD

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<sup>22</sup> TNA: FCO 49/895, ‘Meeting with the Prime Minister on East-West relations’, 20 May 1980.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: CAB 148/189, Minutes of Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 5 June 1980. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/116769>

<sup>24</sup> TNA: FCO 49/895, Armstrong to Wass, 10 June 1980.

and did not favour the ‘elaborate or extensive arrangements of the kind we had in the past. In any case’, officials lamented, ‘we do not have the money’. However, the Planning Staff contended that even with Britain’s more limited resources, the country could still create and disseminate overt and covert propaganda effectively. They also reported that a level of ‘[m]odest work’ had already been undertaken by the Special Producer Unit of Overseas Information Department, MI6, and the FCO ‘especially following the Afghanistan invasion’. Overseas Information Department had been well positioned for the task with its expertise from former IRD officers. Although money would be limited owing to Britain’s diminished economic status, the Planning Staff suggested a review of the arrangements to examine ways to scale up efforts and decide whether more funding was required and if coordinating machinery was needed to streamline the various departments across Whitehall involved in propaganda.<sup>25</sup>

As Thatcher’s anti-communist crusade did not result in a revival of IRD this could lead to claims that the Iron Lady’s efforts to defeat the Soviet Union were much more modest and reserved than Attlee and Bevin’s earlier campaign. As the FCO’s Planning Staff argued, the Britain of the 1980s could not afford a lavish department the size of IRD, which at its peak cost the government over a million pounds per annum. And whilst the economic situation certainly imposed limits, the fact of the matter was that a dedicated anti-communist department was not necessary, no matter how ambitious Thatcher’s anti-communist offensive would turn out to be. Following IRD’s closure, the Overseas Information Department had absorbed around half of the IRD cadre and the responsibility for unattributable information work.<sup>26</sup> Hence an adequate alternative to a new IRD style department had already been in place when Thatcher revived anti-communist propaganda. One of the major criticisms IRD received, and which ultimately resulted in its closure, was that the department had been extremely inefficient and produced poor results in relation to its size and budget. As Colin Crowe’s report revealed, IRD had been much too broad and inefficient to be a truly effective instrument of the British state.

Yet Crowe’s analysis had been sympathetic towards IRD and he had been very much convinced that even in the era of détente the Soviet Union continued to pose a significant threat to British interests and that unattributable information should continue as the important component of foreign policy which it had become since IRD had been created. Therefore, despite IRD’s

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<sup>25</sup> TNA: PREM 19/238, Alexander to Thatcher, 2 May 1980. Available at the Margaret Thatcher Foundation: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/120130>

<sup>26</sup> TNA: FCO 79/467, Michael Palliser to John Hunt, 26 January 1977.

closure Britain had retained its capacity for unattributable information work through the streamlined information division in the FCO and other hidden pockets of Whitehall, notably MI6. Thatcher's campaign did not necessarily require new machinery but certainly necessitated a level of coordinating infrastructure.

The revival of anti-communist political warfare and the questions surrounding the infrastructure, operations, and guiding objectives of this strategy present an exciting research opportunity for scholars. The Second Cold War coincided with a renewed Western offensive in the ideological battle of the Cold War. This renewed offensive draws fascinating parallels with Attlee's Labour government who led the West into the ideological struggle with Soviet Communism. As with Attlee at the onset of the Cold War, did Thatcher lead the renewed Western response which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of decades of conflict? Was the Thatcher Cabinet united in its campaign against the Soviet Union or did the 'wets' push back against more offensive action in Soviet satellites? And like Attlee, did Thatcher's offensive involve domestic as well as overseas operations?

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