The combined intelligence budget of the UK, the USA and their immediate English speaking allies is now approaching 100 billion dollars a year. These countries, often referred to as the “Five Eyes” alliance, are almost unique in their complex approach to the making of intelligence-led national security policy. They not only privilege the ability to access remarkable volumes of secret information but also prioritise the abilities to store, analyse and process it a sophisticated way that aids decision-making. Moreover, the premiers, politicians and policy-makers who enjoy this unique high-grade support are, in turn, involved in a constant process of tasking and improving the intelligence machine.

In short, Western intelligence has a central brain. The UK and the USA in particular have been unusual in devoting so much resource to the collection and elaborate processing of
information about its foreign adversaries. This represents the application of a particular type of information to leverage their economic, military and diplomatic power: indeed some intelligence theorists have argued that intelligence actually constitutes an additional form of state power.² In many other states around the world, the orientation of intelligence has often been inward facing, with a high priority given to regime security. Indeed with “intelligence elsewhere”, it is not uncommon for the secret services conceive of themselves as the enforcement arm of the ruling party rather than as a branch of government. Some would argue that what really gives the UK and the USA the edge is complex management and analytical functions associated with the core executive that have evolved over the best part of a century. Others would argue that this process has been over-expensive and has under-delivered, not least in the last decade. Either way, the debates about development of the central brain of Western security policy are of the first importance and fortunately this discussion is advanced by several important new studies.

The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)

Michael Goodman’s study of the origins of the Joint Intelligence Committee is part of new wave of official history. In recent years we have not only enjoyed excellent histories of the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) but also official accounts of Desmond Morton, Churchill’s intelligence éminence grise and the Defence Advisory Notice Committee.³ In addition there have been new official histories of the Special Operations Executive, focused mostly on Italy, documenting, amongst other things, a British plot to assassinate Mussolini and plans to arm the Mafia.⁴ As a general phenomenon, and balanced by unofficial accounts, official history contributes significantly to the public understanding of intelligence.⁵ Many more people read these narratives than peruse the asterisk-ridden reports of Sir Malcolm Rifkind’s Intelligence and Security Committee. Opening up secret archives to independently-minded historians is not just an afterthought; it is an important part of accountability, even oversight, albeit security considerations sometimes require this final audit to take place long after the fact.⁶

Nevertheless, official accounts should be approached with some circumspection. Sir Herbert Butterfield, one of the most distinguished philosophers of history, reflected that: ‘governments try to press upon the historian the key to all the drawers but one, and are very anxious to spread the belief that this single one contains no secrets of importance’. Butterfield
was almost certainly reflecting on Britain’s elaborate and successful efforts to hide the Bletchley Park from the public gaze for a quarter of century. Goodman himself concedes that historically speaking, academics have treated official accounts with a degree of scepticism. But he counters that one of the advantages of official historians is the ‘unparalleled and unlimited access’ to files which have not yet been declassified and may quite possibly remain closed forever. When we cannot check a historian’s source we fall back on questions such as how reliable is his historical method? And how sound is his judgment?’

Goodman is spared some of the ear-scratching that has accompanied other official histories of secret service, since a significant volume of the papers that he consulted are open to public inspection at the National Archives in Kew. Instead, he has faced other problems. The Joint Intelligence Committee or “JIC” suffered a degree of mission creep. Initially created with an analytical function, it gradually acquired a management role for the whole community, debating national collection requirements and priorities. Later it extended its remit to address security matters, even the clearance of books and relationships with liaison partners, jostling with other Whitehall entities the meanwhile. Moreover, there was more than one JIC, since the full Committee presided over numerous sub-committees and spawned regional JICs that only nominally reported back to London and were mostly embedded in regional government and command centres. Meanwhile the chair of the JIC enjoyed a wardrobe full of other hats, including some responsibility for covert action and black propaganda. Fathoming the exact limits of the JIC has not been an easy task.

Not all the JIC files have survived and even if they had, problems would remain. Twenty years ago, Michael Heseltine penned one of the dullest political memoirs ever produced by a Cabinet Minister. However, his account contained one fascinating passage relating to the Falklands. Shortly after the controversial sinking of the Argentinean cruiser the Belgrano, there was an attempt by the Cabinet Office to reconstruct the exact chain of decision-making in order to respond to parliamentary questions. Because this was an exercise in very contemporary history, every scrap of paper had survived and all the witnesses could be re-assembled. Even so, no-one could agree on exactly what had happened or in what order. How much harder, Heseltine reflected, must it be for historians thirty years hence to reconstruct events from a less than complete record? Goodman done an excellent job, working hard to reconstruct areas of the JIC’s work that are not well documented and intervening survivors about the social history of the JIC with the context of a Whitehall
village. Goodman himself has a particular view of national memory as a collective resource from which intelligence agencies and tier managers can learn. For this reason, if for no other, he argues, it is important to keep history as free from the distortions of biased recollection and of prejudice as possible. He has in very large measure achieved this.

The British story is partly about the early absence of a central intelligence brain. Indeed, prior to 1916, organised Cabinet Government did not exist in Britain. Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister for much of the First World War presided over mayhem. He expended little energy running the war, but had plenty of time for bridge, lavish dinner parties and country weekends. Two or three times a day he wrote long and elaborate love letters to his mistress, who was thirty year’s his junior. Cabinet Meetings of a sort occurred but these were long rambling conversations with no agenda, no minutes and no action points. Lloyd George finally brought order in 1916 in the form of Maurice Hankey, the first Cabinet Secretary, who together with his assistant Thomas Jones, literally created the machinery of Cabinet Government. Oddly, despite conjuring into existence almost every aspect of the modern Cabinet Office machine, the missing element was any central mechanism for assessing of controlling intelligence on a regular basis. A Cabinet Secret Service Committee existed but, beyond this, Hankey declared himself to be adverse to creating such machinery at the centre.

Therefore, while the body of modern British intelligence developed fast during the First World War, with path-breaking work on imagery and interception, the creation of Britain’s central control mechanisms had to wait two decades. Emerging in the mid-1930s as part of the debate over industrial production and airpower, it still remained weak and under-valued at the outbreak of the Second World War. Churchill’s effervescent enthusiasm for intelligence is well known, but Goodman shows us how the JIC developed and grew in importance partly as an anti-Churchill phenomenon. Precisely because Churchill was addicted to his daily diet of decrypts from Bletchley Park, the Chiefs of Staff found themselves out-gunned in arguments over strategy by his constant reference to the latest intelligence. They needed better intelligence support to counter his strategic eccentricities and accordingly the improved and expanded JIC emerged as a subcommittee of the Chiefs of Staff, remaining there until 1957.

Goodman also reveals that the development of the central intelligence machine during the 1940s was actually the work of an improbable duo: Churchill and his deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee. In July 1945, when he succeeded Churchill, no peacetime prime
minster was better equipped to manage the secret state. Between 1945 and 1951 Attlee rationalised the expanded machine that Churchill had built, with the chair of the JIC now doubling as head of the Permanent Under Secretary’s Department in the Foreign Office or PUSD. This was, in effect the new nexus between MI6, GCHQ, the Foreign Office and the Cabinet Office for both intelligence and covert action. Attlee also presided over major review of intelligence, the most important of which was conducted by his Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook in 1951. Brook’s review was especially important, creating another key control mechanism known as “PSIS” or the Permanent Secretaries Committee on the Intelligence Services. No mechanism has been more obscure, secret and yet important to the design of the British intelligence community. In 1951, no-one knew how much was being spent on intelligence or to what effect. PSIS, a committee of permanent secretaries together with the Cabinet Secretary and the Chair of the JIC gripped this area and related spending to intelligence priorities in a programmatic way for the first time.

What was Goodman allowed to see, but not allowed to tell? Sigint has been heavily airbrushed, typically in discussion of JIC daily summaries which were in effect high-level summaries of communications intercepts. Surprisingly however, Goodman’s account discusses covert action at some length. By the 1960s, one of the more recondite functions of the Chair of the JIC was also the chair something called the Joint Action Committee which superintended covert action and included the Director of Special Forces from the Ministry of Defence. One of the important conclusions of a range of recent work is that the central intelligence machine was also designed to coordinate covert action (or special political operations), ensuring that they were part of high-level policy and not, for the most part, “rogue elephant activities”.

Yet there were some rogue elephants about and one of them, as Goodman shows us in his excellent account of Suez, one of them was called Anthony Eden. During the Suez Crisis he deliberately disregarded the central planning and intelligence processes, instead choosing to work only with the JIC chair and the Permanent Secretary. Hence the JIC was not informed of his real plans for the region and was thus unable to forewarn him of likely American reactions. Eden clearly hoped that some way would be found to liquidate Nasser and debated this with the Americans in October 1956, but Washington was unhappy about putting the word “assassination” on paper. Thereafter the Prime Minister pursued his objectives through a range of odd processes that evaded the normal procedures for intelligence and covert action. When the next volume appears, it will be fascinating to see
how Goodman will deal with Harold Macmillan. Frustrated in his attempt to use MI6 for covert action in the Yemen, Macmillan turned to friends and relatives to muster a happy band of mercenaries to do his bidding.\textsuperscript{18} When intelligence is privatised where do the limits official history lie? One wonders if we will we eventually need an official history of Aegis, Detica and Booze-Allen?

**Two Intelligence Communities Compared**

Michael Herman, one of the most seasoned observers of intelligence, argues that despite their marked differences of size, intelligence in Whitehall has more in common with Washington than any cognate continental European mechanism. The magisterial two volume account recently offered by Philip Davies takes this as its starting point, offering a fascinating parallel exploration of the British and American central machines in comparative perspective. The benefits of comparison are immediately apparent and his organisation is commendable, offering us two comprehensible single-country studies set in a comparative framework. Indeed, Davies has effectively offered us no less than three studies, providing what could be read as two free-standing accounts of complex national intelligence communities, together with an extended essay that considers the fascinating question of “compare and contrast”.\textsuperscript{19}

The choice of an Anglo-American subject has a certain irony here, since Davies is one of number academics that have urged us to make an effort to look beyond the “Anglosphere”.\textsuperscript{20} On the one hand, one might yearn for a book that compares say, the intelligence wiring of advancing countries like India, China and Brazil. On the other hand, one has to concede that the comparison of the entire systems of two countries is a complex business and this study works well precisely because most readers will be specialists who bring a certain amounts of prior knowledge of Western national security architectures to the subject. There is another sense in which these two case studies are appropriate: both countries have been challenged by significant intelligence failure in the last decade, not least round the notorious the issue of the missing WMD. Whitehall and Washington have been required to mount simultaneous and searching enquiries followed by extensive reform and this strengthens the rational for comparison.\textsuperscript{21}

The time span is colossal, tracing the respective stories from their modern origins in 1909 and 1941 to the present day. Much of the information is new. Davies has spent a decade trawling the archives on both sides of the Atlantic and so has given us the best comparative
account of the organisation of the vast Western secret apparatus that we are likely to have for a long time. Indeed, this is not so much an account of the central brain of intelligence, it is more an account of the whole nervous system, since Davies sets out to capture the wider wiring of both communities, with its myriad of co-ordinating bodies, together with its intelligence culture. His focus is therefore rather different to Goodman, charting instead the intricate linking machinery well beyond that of the JIC and its equivalent mechanisms in the USA. As such the respective volumes produced by these two authors are quite different in character and stand as complementary texts rather than obvious competitors.

Davies utilises classic social science in the sense that he wishes to look at two systems that are quite similar and then seeks to explain the differences. Although these two intelligence communities share similar roles within government and have similar break-points in terms of major international challenges, they have operated rather differently. Davies tackles the fascinating question of why there is much more conflict and rivalry inside the US system, arguing that it is only partly a function of size: certainly the larger something is the more entropy and the less collegiality one might reasonably expect. Issues of size and staffing have traditionally been used to explain the famous “Beltway Battles” of the US intelligence system. Other notable American characteristics include a generous budget that has allowed the US to indulge in phenomenal duplication. Typically, the CIA has often had its own soldiers in the form of units like Special Activities Division, while the Pentagon has its own spies, boasting units such as the Intelligence Support Activity and the Defence Humint Service. Each of the service cryptanalytical arms working under the NSA has duplicated the functions of the other to some degree. Exacerbating all this, American intelligence agencies have often been headed by political or military figures whose time in the intelligence community is likely to be brief and are therefore ready and willing to cut their competitors off at the knees. By contrast, the Whitehall community is more civilianised and mostly consists of those with a lifelong career invested the business and who have a stronger interest in promoting collegiality.22

For UK readers, the more contemporary sections will be especially compelling. The UK and the Iraq War is dealt with in masterly way in a chapter entitled “Deaf captains Pick Cherries”. Prime Minister Tony Blair does not emerge from this analysis particularly well and it is likely that we will have to wait sometime yet for signs of Blair revisionism, at least in the intelligence sphere.23 The post-Blair analysis is even more fascinating since it amounts almost to a narrative of the death of the JIC. This is remarkable and Davies himself says, all
the more remarkable for the fact that so few people have remarked on it, since the UK’s central intelligence machinery has enjoyed a certain amount of veneration and overseas it has been envied and emulated. However both Gordon Brown and David Cameron consciously sought to distance themselves from the Blair era and so opted for radical change. Accordingly, during 2009, the various functions associated with the Joint Intelligence Organisation were redistributed around the Cabinet Office and Downing Street, meanwhile the JIC met less frequently. In late 2009, Brown also abolished the long-standing Permanent Secretaries Committee on the Intelligence Services (PSIS), which oversaw the dialogue between intelligence priorities and budgets, transferring its remit to the National Security machinery. This was all the more surprisingly given that it was done by a prime minister famed for his indecision.24

In 2010, David Cameron established a new National Security Council (NSC). This was clearly a priority for him, since it was created less than fortnight after he assumed office. The NSC has taken the revolution a step further, mixing defence with foreign policy, cabinet ministers with officials and intelligence with operations. The JIC still exists in spectral form and its chair attends these meeting along with Chief of Defence Staff. No less important is an official-level committee, known as the National Security Council (Official) which has also taken on some of the functions of PSIS as the strategic point of direction for intelligence spending. The elderly JIC is not dead but is visibly fading away, meanwhile young and vigorous fusion centres such as JTAC and Joint Forces Intelligence Group have emerged. Cameron’s changes may have seriously challenged the centrality of the JIC, but intelligence has never been more important to the core executive. Indeed, David Cameron has described himself as ‘the Minister for the Intelligence Services’ and is vigorously and publicly committed to defend their effectiveness.25

**Defence Intelligence**

In 2005, Lord Butler conducted one of the most important reviews of UK intelligence for many years. One of his more intriguing observations was that the main cohort of professional analysts in Britain is not located in the Cabinet Office and instead lies elsewhere. For decades the true long-term analysts were to be found in Defence Intelligence Staff of the Ministry of
Defence and not in the Joint Intelligence Organisation. This reflects that fact that the Ministry of Defence has been, for decades, the largest consumer of intelligence, especially from GCHQ, which is in turn its largest bulk producer. Butler thought this was rather odd and indeed considered it nothing short of remarkable that DIS analysts enjoyed a professional career, developing their analytical skills, while in contrast most of those working for the Joint Intelligence Organisation were temporary secondees. As a result, the recommendations of the Butler Review spawned the role of Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis to address this problem, with Jane Knight as the first incumbent. Her personal acronym of ‘PHIA’ (pronounced ‘Fear’) was surely the most enviable job-title ever created in Whitehall.

Accordingly, for almost half a century, the British intelligence system had not one brain but two, rather as palaeontologists used to imagine a Diplodocus. Huw Dylan has now given us a much-needed study of the way in which the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) transformed itself into the Defence Intelligence Staff, Whitehall’s largest and most professional intelligence machine. The JIB was immensely important, playing an essential part in British economic intelligence during the Cold War and supporting the CoCom regime that limited the trade of strategic goods to the Communist World. The JIB was also the main centre of topographical intelligence, underpinning the nuclear targeting effort in support of the British independent deterrent. Most importantly, it acted as an evangelist of inter-agency or “purple” intelligence activity and was the intellectual pioneer not only of DIS but also of other entities such as the intelligence cell at the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood and even Joint Forces Intelligence Group.

Dylan also gives us the first biographical picture of Major General Kenneth Strong, General Eisenhower's wartime intelligence chief. Having served in Europe as Eisenhower’s G2, he enjoyed the very best links with Washington. Indeed, Ike liked him so much that when he became supreme commander in 1944 he appealed directly to Churchill to have him continue as his intelligence man. Even as President in the mid-1950s, Ike never found the replacement for General Strong he was looking for and reportedly toyed with the idea of appointing this British Army officer as Director of the CIA. Strong was unconventional and a zealous advocate of inter-agency and inter-service co-operation in the field of intelligence. He created a machine that was central to the mission to spy on and understand the Soviet Union, and the broader Communist world. Meanwhile the intelligence officers of the JIB waged a secret war not only against their Eastern Bloc adversaries but also against Whitehall silos and stovepipes. In doing so, Strong became embroiled in a bitter battle to erode single
service ownership of topographical intelligence and scientific intelligence, eventually placing subjects such as missiles and radar into an inter-service context. In 1964, Mountbatten as Chief of the Defence Staff, took the final step, creating the new Defence Intelligence Staff which was the embodiment of Strong’s radical ideas.

Dylan’s research is outstanding. The records of the JIB are scattered and this volume has been an extensive exercise in detective work. Like Davies, his study is an unofficial one and not everything is open. The important interface between GCHQ and the JIB’s nuclear targeting work therefore remain partly obscured for some time to come. But patient investigation though parallel files and extensive research in Washington DC has nevertheless revealed hitherto hidden aspects of Britain’s mission to map the Soviet Union for nuclear war, the struggle to understand and contain the economies of the USSR, China, and North Korea in peace and during the Korean War, and the urgent challenge to understand the nature and scale of the Soviet bomber and missile threat in the 1950s and 1960s. The detailed and dedicated work of the JIB’s in these complex and technical fields won it the admiration of policy-makers and military leaders, but the hatred of others who saw his inter-service ideas as a danger to the empires of service primacy. Traditionalists clearly believed that only Army experts could do intelligence on artillery, equally that the RAF should own the analysis of enemy radar.

Nuclear issues were always at the heart of JIB business. In August 1949, the Soviets surprised the West by detonating their first atomic weapon. From that point onwards the scale and nature of the Soviet bomber programme and its attendant nuclear arsenal was central to British debates over national security. The extreme sense of the vulnerability of Britain underpinned much of Britain’s strategic thinking during the 1950s and the determination to acquire a sizeable independent deterrent. First, and most obviously, the development of the Soviet bomber force constituted the immediate threat Britain would face in first few days of war. Second, the arrival of Soviet intercontinental bombers or intermediate range missiles located on submarines denoted nuclear equivalence with the United States. Mutual assured destruction between Washington and Moscow introduced complex calculations for Britain since some postulated that once Washington was vulnerable, the USA would not use her sown atomic arsenals to defend London.27

Estimates of the Soviet intercontinental bomber force were politically sensitive. It was clear that if the Soviets deployed a large ICBM force there was the possibility that US retaliatory capacity could be nullified and a substantial number of its cities could be struck,
forcing the United States to concede. The divergent British and American estimates of the Soviet missile threat traced out by Dylan are therefore of great interest, since they speak to complex inter-allied calculations about of each others likely future behaviour during potential crisis. Crucially, in 1955, the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence asserted that Soviet ICBMs would not be operational until 1965, basing this directly on JIB assessments. JIB conferences, which continued throughout the 1950s, were often an arena where subjects of transatlantic discord where explored in detail and with some vituperation. These disagreements on missile estimates offered each ally a shadowy inkling into underlying thinking about how Whitehall and Washington might behave in a crisis, insights that were not always reassuring.

The JIB was markedly optimistic about the development of the Soviet missile threat, compared with American estimates. Kenneth Strong boldly told the Chiefs of Staff in 1958 that the Americans were simply wrong and that a range of logistical factors would slow the arrival of the Soviet missile threat. British analysts predicted a time-lag between missile testing and deployment, while Americans expected none. In short Britain saw no ‘Missile Gap’ in the late 1950s. Solly Zuckerman, Chief Scientist to the Ministry of Defence, clearly felt the issue had been politicised in America. In February 1961, during a visit to Washington, he realised that President Kennedy had backed away from his electoral campaign claims of Soviet missile supremacy. The President asked him, ‘what do you think of my missile gap?’ Zuckerman recalled that he could only answer, ‘What missile Gap, Mr President?’ Kennedy laughed as though the whole thing had been a vast joke.²⁸

Clearly there has been more than one moment when the smaller British intelligence machine has outperformed the larger American one. Arguably, one of the most crucial functions of the central machinery in London is to offer a robust challenge to their opposite numbers in Washington, or vice versa. Sadly, in 2003 this did not happen and many intelligence officers from the “Five Eyes” alliance became victims of “Groupthink”. Oddly, the only part of the West’s 100 billion dollar brain that functioned well was the Canadian intelligence community. Its stalwart rejection of the WMD analysis of its allies was perhaps the Canadian intelligence community’s finest hour.²⁹ Subsequent to the painful events of 2003, Whitehall and Washington have both felt the need to undertake significant intelligence reform but have taken divergent approaches. London has integrated its intelligence machinery with other aspects of national security affairs, while Washington has created a vast new edifice in the form of an Office of the Director of National Intelligence. These changes are in
some ways symbolic of divergent national styles. Which approach to intelligence reform will prove the more effective? We can be certain that around the corner lie further substantial challenges for intelligence and we will soon find out.

1 US Intelligence spends about $75 billion, excluding counter-intelligence work by the FBI, see Richard McGregor, 'Size of CIA’s budget slice revealed in Edward Snowden leak', Financial Times, 29 August 2013.
5 The United States has tended to go down the road of approved, or even officially assisted memoirs by former Directors of Central Intelligence, see Christopher R. Moran, ‘From Confession to Corporate Memory: the Memoirs of CIA Director Richard M. Helms’, The International History Review, 36:1, 2014, pp.70-88.
6 Of the three agencies, only Government Communications Headquarters has failed to undertake significant post-war official history and instead seems content to allow Alan Rusbridger to dominate its public narrative.


29 J. Cretien, *My Years as Prime Minister* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 207), pp.306-13