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## Historical Amnesia: British and U.S. Intelligence, Past and Present

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### Abstract

Many intelligence scandals in the news today seem unprecedented - from Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, to British and U.S. intelligence agencies monitoring activities of their citizens. They seem new largely because, traditionally, intelligence agencies on both sides of the Atlantic were excessively secretive about their past activities: even the names "GCHQ" and "NSA" were airbrushed from declassified records, and thus missing from major historical works and scholarship on post-war international relations. The resulting secrecy about British and U.S. intelligence has led to misunderstandings and conspiracy theories in societies about them. Newly opened secret records now reveal the long history of many subjects seen in today's news-cycle: Anglo-American intelligence cooperation, interference by countries in foreign elections, disinformation, and the use and abuse of intelligence by governments. Newly declassified records also add to our understanding of major chapters of international history, like Britain's post-war end of empire. Without overcoming our historical amnesia disorder about U.S. and British intelligence, citizens, scholars and policy-makers cannot hope to understand the proper context for what secret agencies are doing today.

### Keywords

Britain, declassification, espionage, intelligence, international relations, research methods, secrecy, security services, U.S. Intelligence Community, warfare

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Many intelligence scandals in the news today seem unprecedented - from Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, to British and U.S. intelligence agencies monitoring activities of their citizens. They seem new largely because, traditionally, intelligence agencies on both sides of the Atlantic were excessively secretive about their past activities: even the names "GCHQ" and "NSA" were airbrushed from declassified records, and thus missing from major historical works and scholarship on post-war international relations. The resulting secrecy about British and U.S. intelligence has led to misunderstandings and conspiracy theories in societies about them. Newly opened secret records now reveal the long history of many subjects seen in today's news-cycle: Anglo-American intelligence cooperation, interference by countries in foreign elections, disinformation, and the use and abuse of intelligence by governments. Newly declassified records also add to our understanding of major chapters of international history, like Britain's post-war end of empire. Without overcoming our historical amnesia disorder about U.S. and British intelligence, citizens, scholars and policy-makers cannot hope to understand the proper context for what secret agencies are doing today.

### **Keywords**

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Societies on both sides of the Atlantic have an insatiable appetite for secrets: Stories about the unauthorized disclosure of secrets-leaks-continually attract news and broadcast media attention, as do news stories

about intelligence agencies, whose job is to provide governments with secret information. Since September 11, 2001, intelligence agencies and their secrets have hardly been out of the news headlines—from fairy-tale intelligence assessments made by Britain and America about Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq to disclosures about U.S. and British "mass surveillance" made by a former NSA contractor, Edward Snowden. Donald Trump's election as U.S. president in November 2016 has only increased public concern about secrets, leaks, and intelligence matters, particularly about Trump's alleged election connections with Russian intelligence.

Despite a rolling news commentary on intelligence matters today, which seem to crash onto social media almost every minute, when it comes to historical studies of foreign policies and international relations, intelligence is either wholly missing or treated as an aberration, even in the best and most recently published accounts. For a curious student of history, for example, taking an undergraduate course on modern history, or simply reading history in his or her spare time, there is an inexplicable historical amnesia when it comes to intelligence. For example, George Herring's otherwise magisterial 1000-page volume of the Oxford History of U.S. Foreign Relations, *From Colony to Superpower*, published in a revised edition in 2011, only once mentions the President's Daily Brief (PDB), the CIA's flagship top-secret briefing, which it does in relation to 9/11.<sup>2</sup> In reality, PDBs (and their predecessors) were given to all post-war U.S. presidents.

Some presidents, like Richard Nixon, ignored them, while others, like George H. W. Bush, a former U.S. Director of Central Intelligence, were avid consumers of them. We are supposed to believe that, although governments use and abuse intelligence in our own times, in relation to 9/11, they did not do so in the past. The result is that our understanding of key historical periods is at best incomplete, and at worst, may be fundamentally distorted.

Filling in missing pieces of an historical jigsaw is not just something of academic interest, however; it also has an important public policy value. Continuing neglect of intelligence in major historical works actually poses a security threat in its own right: It throws the subject of intelligence into disrepute and, worse, provides space for conspiracy theories about it to grow. Those studying history, even at the world's best universities, are given little or no chance to understand what intelligence agencies are supposed to do-what they can and cannot do-and are therefore ill equipped to argue against intelligence conspiracy theories on the basis of facts they know. At a time when intelligence matters are highly charged issues, and when even the existence of facts is being questioned-with Orwellian "alternative facts"-it is arguably more important than ever to provide facts about intelligence in the past. They may also provide insights about the future.<sup>3</sup>

The doyen of British spy fiction literature, John Le Carré, has suggested that traditionally there was something peculiar about British society, steeped in a strict class system and social structure, which made it

amenable to secrecy. Another respected writer on intelligence history, Ben Macintyre (2017), has suggested that Britain's traditional social fascination with secrecy may be derived from British private school education, which cultivated privacy, secrecy, and putting on a public brave face—in other words, lies and deception.<sup>4</sup> Wherever it derived from, historically the British government had a peculiar attitude towards intelligence not dissimilar to the Victorian attitude towards sex: Although it took place, it was not appropriate to discuss in public.

British Prime Minister Harold Wilson was typical in this regard. In his chapter on "The Prime Minister and National Security," in his book *The Governance of Britain*, published in 1976, Wilson gave probably the shortest book chapter ever written by a British politician. It quotes approvingly Harold Macmillan's dictum that it is "dangerous and bad for our general national interest" to discuss security and intelligence matters at all, and concludes after less than a page: "The prime minister is occasionally questioned on (security) matters...His answers may be regarded as uniformly uninformative. There is no further information that can usefully or properly be added before bringing this chapter to an end" (quoted in Andrew and Dilks 1984, 14).<sup>5</sup>

Although Britain's intelligence services, MI5 and SIS (MI6), were established in 1909, and GCHQ (then known as GC&CS) in 1919, like Wilson, most British prime ministers in the twentieth century did not publicly discuss

intelligence, refusing even to avow publicly the *existence* of Britain's intelligence services. As late as the 1980s, the British government was still trying to maintain what by then was an open secret about the existence of its secret services-even though London buses routinely stopped outside MI5's headquarters saying, "All off here for MI5".<sup>6</sup> The esteemed British military historian, Sir Michael Howard, who wrote one of the volumes of the official history of British intelligence in the Second World War, complained in 1985: "So far as official government policy is concerned, enemy agents are found under gooseberry bushes and intelligence is brought by the storks."<sup>7</sup>

In the mid-1980s, the world's leading intelligence historian, Christopher Andrew, decried the "silent censorship" of British archives, asserting that scholars dealing with British foreign policy in the twentieth century were dealing with "an archive laundered by honourable men in what they believed to be the national interest."<sup>8</sup> It was only in the 1990s when the British government finally gave up the pretence of secrecy and placed its intelligence services on a statutory footing. Soon afterwards it also stopped its silent censorship of official records, declassifying huge volumes of its historical intelligence records.

MI5's Director-General, Sir Stephen Lander, who holds a Cambridge doctorate in History, pioneered MI5's release of historical records in the 1990s, turning the tables on Britain's traditional approach to secrecy and intelligence. As he put it, MI5 would thereafter release as many of its

historical records as possible, while only retaining those that could not be released on grounds of national security (Lander 2002, 7–20).<sup>9</sup> From then on, enemy agents were no longer found under gooseberry bushes and intelligence was no longer brought by storks.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike in Britain, the post-war U.S. intelligence community was placed on a statutory footing from the outset when it was established in 1947. Despite being legally recognized, U.S. intelligence agencies fared little better than their British counterparts at finding their way into history books. Similarly to their British colleagues, historians of U.S. foreign policy also appeared to suffer from amnesia about intelligence. Sometimes this had dire consequences for U.S. foreign policy. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961, when the CIA launched a failed invasion of Cuba to overthrow its leader, Fidel Castro, president John F. Kennedy, who authorized the operation, said that much of the problem was because he had relied on CIA "experts" who told him what covert action could achieve, but he did not understand its limits. Kennedy was unable to argue against the exaggerated beliefs about covert action in Cuba emerging from CIA's Directorate of Operations because, unlike other areas of foreign policy, he lacked a conceptual framework-and knowledge-about how covert action worked. How could JFK have known, when the history books he was devouring while in office were silent about intelligence? (Andrew 1995, 257).<sup>11</sup>

Since JFK's time, the situation has not got much better. Students at



Harvard's Kennedy School in the 1990s were able to read a 20-page condensed history on "The CIA to 1961."<sup>12</sup> Those who digested these 20 pages knew more about the CIA than Kennedy did when he became president. However, the overwhelming majority of studies on U.S. foreign policy continue to neglect the role of U.S. intelligence, just as they did in Kennedy's time. At the time of writing this article, a full-text search on the online scholarly database *JSTOR*, reveals there are 29,303 results (articles, primary sources, and books) containing the words "U.S. foreign policy." However, when these are combined with the words "National Security Agency," the results plummet to just 303 listed results-approximately one percent of the larger total. This means that ninety-nine percent of articles, primary sources, and books on "U.S. foreign policy" presently listed on *JSTOR* do not expressly acknowledge that the NSA, the U.S. code-breaking agency founded in 1952, played any role whatsoever in U.S. foreign policy. It does not take an advanced history degree to appreciate that something is missing from the existing academic literature.<sup>13</sup>

### **Studying the British and American "Missing Dimension"**

It has become a cliché that intelligence is the missing dimension of the history of diplomacy and international relations in the twentieth century. However, like many clichés, it is based on an element of fact. Although intelligence may still be missing from historical scholarship, it is definitely not

missing from national archives on both sides of the Atlantic. There are now so many declassified British and U.S. intelligence records revealing previously highly sensitive state secrets-with many digitized and available to download from archives' websites, thus even sparing researchers travel costs-that it is sometimes difficult to know where to begin researching them.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the British government began to declassify its historic intelligence records. Unsurprisingly, it was revealed that Britain's intelligence services had a history and, just as they do today, played a role in British government decision making in the past, for both good and bad. At the National Archives in London, there are now over 5,000 declassified records of Britain's Security Service (MI5), a treasure-trove of historical secrets, as well as historical records from Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), Britain's highest intelligence assessment body, as well as records from Britain's wartime sabotage agency, SOE, and from the British code-breaking agency at Bletchley Park, GC&CS.<sup>14</sup>

One methodological problem facing anyone wanting to study the history of intelligence and secrets is that, like conducting any kind of historical enquiry, we are dependent upon the sources available to us; however, unlike other areas of historical research, with intelligence history we have to rely on the subjects under examination-intelligence services, whose business is to deal in secrets-to reveal their own history. This inevitably leads to a question about the extent to which we can trust "the

hand that feeds us,” or whether we are being presented merely with a version of the past as intelligence services want us to see it.<sup>15</sup>

One way to alleviate the problem of relying solely on intelligence services to declassify their own records, but also give their activities the historical place they deserve, is to combine intelligence records with those of other government departments. After all, it is the job of intelligence services to *service* other government departments with secret information, or intelligence, and it is therefore only natural that records from the intelligence services should be found in the files of other departments. Large tranches of intelligence material can be found in records of the British Foreign Office, the Prime Minister’s Office, and the War Office at the National Archives in London. Another way to obtain historical British intelligence records is to use the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA 2000). Unfortunately, FOIA 2000 does not apply to Britain’s intelligence services themselves, but it does apply to other government departments.

A further way in which we can place Britain’s intelligence services in their proper historical context is to use records from private collections of papers, which have sometimes managed to avoid Whitehall record “weeders,” whose job it is to extract sensitive information from records being declassified. I have found valuable intelligence material held in papers at the Imperial War Museum in London, or tucked away in libraries in Oxford and Cambridge. In addition to these sources, studying contemporary newspapers

can also reveal historical activities of the British secret state when they bubble up into the public domain. Sometimes old newspaper reports contain new revelations. *The Times* digital archive, which is word searchable, has been particularly useful in this regard.

In a move that would have astonished previous guardians of the British secret state, beginning in the early 2000s, Britain's intelligence services commissioned official histories for publication, researched and written by outside, academic historians. Christopher Andrew's authorized centenary history of MI5 was published in 2009, which the present author helped to research and write, over the course of six years. Keith Jeffery's centenary official history of SIS (popularly known as MI6) was also published in 2009. Meanwhile, the official history of Britain's intelligence assessment body, the JIC, is being written by Michael Goodman in several volumes, and John Ferris has recently been appointed to write the authorized history of Britain's GCHQ, which will be published on its centenary anniversary, in 2019. In a short period of just ten years, from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, the British government moved from being one of the most secretive about the history of its intelligence services to being one of the most transparent in the world.<sup>16</sup>

The same methodological approach can be taken with regard to studying U.S. intelligence history. There is a much longer tradition of declassifying intelligence records in the United States than in Britain, derived

from the statutory basis of U.S. intelligence, and also efforts of successive Congressional intelligence oversight bodies throughout the Cold War. In fact, as the intelligence historian Richard Aldrich showed, in the 1990s it was often possible to obtain British intelligence records at U.S. archives when they were not even available in British National Archives. The U.S. National Archives at College Park contains enough declassified U.S. intelligence material to keep researchers busy for a lifetime—from records of America’s wartime intelligence agency, the OSS, to U.S. intelligence assessments made about the Soviet Union in the closing stages of the Cold War. Each post-war U.S. presidential library also contains shelves worth (literally) of declassified records about how the White House used, abused, or overlooked intelligence.

For those who take intelligence seriously, there are also tranches of intelligence records held at university libraries—some Ivy League professors quietly worked for OSS during the war, and continued to work for the CIA during the Cold War, as revealed by the papers they left to universities. Stanford’s Hoover Institute has significant historical intelligence holdings—American, British, and Russian—for researchers. U.S. intelligence agencies have also opened their archives to the public in a way that would have shocked their Cold War predecessors. This year, the CIA placed its entire declassified electronic historical “reading room” online: a database containing 12 million pages of declassified records, called “CREST,” previously only available at an awkward corner at the National Archives at College Park. The

FBI also has an historical “Vault” containing some of its past case files publicly available on its website. Equally valuable for studying previous U.S. government secrets are two online databases, the *Declassified Documents Reference System* and the *Digital National Security Archive*. In addition to all these archival resources, the published *Foreign Relations of the United States* series contains intelligence records that its editors have selected from various archives (Aldrich 2001).<sup>17</sup>

Rarely, entire secret archives emerge into the public domain. This happened when I was researching my first book, which concerned British intelligence, the Cold War, and Britain’s post-war end of empire. Thanks to a case brought to the English High Court by a group of elderly Kenyans, in which they claimed the British government was liable for abuses they suffered under British colonial rule in Kenya, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office was forced to reveal the existence of 8,800 files on Kenya that it has previously “lost.” In fact, from the court case, it emerged that in the last days of empire, British colonial officials had secretly spirited away vast tranches of records from 37 different British colonies across the world, including Kenya, Cyprus, Aden, Palestine, Nigeria, and Malaya.

The official explanation for why these records were removed from British colonies, as the sun set on the empire, was that they might “embarrass” His (and then Her) Majesty’s Government. In reality, the records were deliberately removed because they contained some of the darkest

secrets in the last days of Britain's empire. The first cache of the previously "lost" records in the so-called "migrated archive," only made available in May 2012, reveals that the British government deliberately set out destroying, culling, and then removing incriminating records in colonies as they approached independence from Britain, in order to prevent them falling into the hands of post-independence governments.<sup>18</sup> By destroying and removing records, the British government was then able to inculcate a fictional history of its colonial benevolence, in which, it claimed, occasional abuses and violence were inflicted on local populations. But these instances of unpleasantness were the exception, not the rule. The "lost" colonial office records now reveal such a claim as nonsense. Burying the British empire was a far more bloody affair than previously acknowledged or supposed.

Records that were not deliberately destroyed by colonial officials in the last days of the British empire were transferred back to Britain, where they were housed at a top-secret Foreign Office facility outside London, at Hanslope Park in Buckinghamshire, where they remained hidden for 50 years, until the High Court forced their release. Hanslope Park's official title is curiously neutral-sounding: "Her Majesty's Communications Centre." To local inhabitants around Hanslope Park, however, it is known as "spook central." Thanks to the Kenyan court case before the High Court, the secrets of Hanslope Park have now finally been laid bare. The suggestion that the

British government could have “misplaced” or “lost” this archive is as shameful as it is preposterous. The records at Hanslope Park are stored on 15 miles of shelving, in a facility longer than the length of St. Paul’s cathedral in London. We can now see that, essentially, Hanslope Park acted as a depository for records detailing the most shameful acts and crimes committed in the last days of the British empire.<sup>19</sup>

### **Origins of Anglo-American Intelligence Alliance**

The avalanche of previously secret British and American intelligence records that recently has come crashing into archives has forced scholars to revise our understanding of important historical events. This is the case with the origins of intelligence relations between Britain and America-the closest intelligence relationship between two countries in history. Much ink has been devoted to the so-called “special” Anglo-American relationship, with secret intelligence often correctly described as the closest part of the relationship between the two countries throughout the Cold War, to the present day. Britain’s GCHQ and America’s NSA are today so closely connected that some of their operating systems are, for practical purposes, interconnected. In the event of a catastrophic system failure, NSA would rely on GCHQ to take over its operations-something unique among even close intelligence allies. One former NSA Director, Michael Hayden (2016), has described that the origins of this unique intelligence relationship stretches back to Anglo-American



wartime code-breaking cooperation at Britain's famous Bletchley Park (41-2).<sup>20</sup>

Churchill played a significant role in fostering British and American intelligence cooperation at Bletchley Park, and then, in his various writings after the Second World War, popularized the idea of the "special relationship" between the two countries. Churchill's writings have coloured much of the subsequent literature on Anglo-American relations, which is often infused with sentimentality rather than grounded in historical facts. When we examine recently declassified British intelligence records, the picture that emerges about the origins of Anglo-American intelligence relations is far less rosy than Churchill's (1956) later description. In fact, intelligence sharing between the two countries was not derived from shared lofty ideals-a civilising mission by the "English-speaking peoples," as Churchill later described it (Churchill 1956)-but instead driven by cold-hearted pragmatism in which one ally, Britain, was even prepared to deceive the other to get it into the war.<sup>21</sup>

The rest of this article is the first analysis, based on newly declassified British intelligence records, to study the uneasy early history of Anglo-American intelligence relations. Understanding this period has implications for appreciating later Anglo-American intelligence, during both the Second World War and the Cold War. As we shall see, studying British-U.S. intelligence also changes our understanding about major chapters of post-

war international history, such as the demise of Britain's empire. Although it remains a missing dimension from almost all existing historiography, in reality it is impossible to understand post-war British "decolonisation," as Britain's end of empire is known, without appreciating the role of British intelligence-and, in turn, that of U.S. intelligence.

For over two years after the outbreak of the Second World War, Britain fought for its survival against what appeared to be Nazi Germany's unstoppable "lighting war," *Blitzkrieg*, across Europe. American isolationist groups, such as the "America First" movement, championed by the charismatic American aviator and Nazi-sympathiser, Charles Lindbergh, objected to American involvement in a war of the "Old World." Under pressure from isolationists in Congress, while Britain (supported by its empire) fought a war against Hitler, America officially remained neutral.

We can now see that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was secretly communicating with Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, soon to be British Prime Minister, about America assisting Britain's war effort. However, their secret discussions about Britain and America's secret wartime cooperation were nearly destroyed by a Nazi sympathiser working at the U.S. embassy in London, Tyler Kent. Kent was a cypher clerk at the U.S. embassy, who strongly believed in U.S. isolationism, and was determined to reveal secret communications he had seen and helped to transmit between Roosevelt and Churchill, which, Kent believed, threatened American

neutrality. To expose what he believed was a plot being hatched between Roosevelt and Churchill to bring the United States into the war, in the Spring of 1940 he amassed about 1,500 U.S. diplomatic documents, including cables between Roosevelt and Churchill, which Kent hid in his London apartment and planned to give to German sympathisers in Britain for publication.<sup>22</sup>

MI5 discovered Kent's activities from undercover agents it was running in a far right-wing, pro-German, anti-Semitic group in Britain, the Right Club. One of MI5's agents inside the Right Club, a certain Anna Wolkoff, reported that Kent had been passing classified U.S. information to the head of the Right Club, a maverick Conservative Member of the British Parliament, Captain Archibald Ramsay. Wolkoff reported that she had seen Ramsay with correspondence between a senior MI5 officer, Guy Liddell, and the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, concerning secret Anglo-American cooperation on matters like Britain's purchase of U.S. radio direction-finding equipment.<sup>23</sup>

In May 1940, after Churchill became Prime Minister, MI5 informed him about Kent's activities. It brought the same message to the U.S. ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy. By no means an Anglophile, Kennedy in fact believed that Britain would lose the war. However, when MI5 presented him with evidence of Kent's treachery, Kennedy immediately grasped the political repercussions caused by the disclosure of Churchill and Roosevelt's secret communications, which ran contrary to official U.S. policy of neutrality. The

issue was particularly charged considering that Roosevelt was running for re-election as president and faced criticism for being too friendly with Britain. Kennedy was so alarmed that he took the remarkable decision to remove Kent's U.S. diplomatic immunity so he could be arrested and tried in Britain, which was done in a specially convened court, closed to the public. Kent was prosecuted for breaking the British Official Secrets Act and sentenced to seven years imprisonment.<sup>24</sup>

The Tyler Kent case revealed how fragile Anglo-American secret wartime cooperation was. If Kent had done what he intended, and revealed the secret dealings between Roosevelt and Churchill, it would have strengthened the hand of American isolationists, whose influence Churchill was struggling to contain. It may even have cost Roosevelt his re-election as president. After searching Kent's apartment and finding his amassed collection of U.S. diplomatic documents, MI5 reported to Churchill, with probably a little exaggeration: "It is quite clear that some of the information relating to the military position of the Allies was so vital that in the event of its being passed to Germany, the most disastrous consequences would ensue." U.S. diplomats in Washington's Foggy Bottom were even more shocked: "Nothing like this has ever happened in American history," wrote U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Breckinridge Long (Andrew 2009). "It means not only that our codes are cracked... but that our every diplomatic

manoeuvre was exposed to Germany and Russia [at the time allies]... It is a terrible blow-almost a major catastrophe" (226).<sup>25</sup>

### **British Fake News and Deception Against America**

In 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt's secret communications came to fruition when the United States, still not in the war, began to provide Britain with vitally needed supplies. America became the "arsenal of democracy," as Roosevelt phrased it, providing Britain with war materiel through a program known as "Lend-Lease." American warships and planes patrolled Atlantic convoys, guarding ships packed with millions of tons of American products-a tenuous lifeline for Britain fighting on its own in Europe.

British intelligence played an important role in secret backchannel communications between the two governments before the United States entered the war. Britain's intelligence liaison with the Roosevelt administration was run by a deliberately blandly named outfit, British Security Coordination (BSC), based on the forty-fourth floor of New York's Rockefeller Center. In fact, BSC was home to Britain's spies in the United States: It housed the SIS (MI6) station in America. BSC was run by a wealthy Canadian businessman with long-standing connections with SIS, Sir William Stephenson. He soon became close friends with Roosevelt's decorated wartime intelligence chief, William J. Donovan, who at the time was Roosevelt's Coordinator of Information and, after America's entry into

the war, would become head of Roosevelt's Office of Strategic Services, which itself laid the basis for the Central Intelligence Agency, established in 1947.

Donovan and Stephenson were kindred spirits. Self-made wealthy men, internationalist in outlook, and both combat heroes of the First World War. Stephenson referred to the larger-than-life Donovan as "Big Bill," and Donovan affectionately labeled the smaller and trimmer Stephenson as "Little Bill." Despite the goodwill between the two men, Stephenson was less forthcoming about some matters with Donovan-and the Roosevelt administration-than he appeared. Later, a senior OSS officer posted in London to liaise with British intelligence correctly remarked: "The British taught us everything we knew but not everything they knew" (Walton 2013, 121).<sup>26</sup>

Churchill believed that America would inevitably join the war but needed prodding to do so. To help prod America in the direction of the war, from its BSC headquarters in New York, SIS orchestrated a secret propaganda campaign to promote pro-British war stories in the U.S. press and blacken the public reputation of American isolationists. Britain deployed some of the same black arts of covert propaganda against America as it used against the Axis Powers. BSC employed a number of British authors to write pro-British press stories in America, as well as leak pro-British news. BSC's authors included a young Roald Dahl. The most striking piece of

disinformation-what we may legitimately term fake news-that William Stevenson's BSC passed to Roosevelt's administration concerned alleged Nazi plans for South America.

BSC forged documents purportedly from the Bolivian military attaché in Berlin about Nazi plans for establishing a Nazi dictatorship in South America. Stephenson gave this forged letter-including a map vividly showing Nazi hegemony there-to Roosevelt, who used it in one of his famous "fireside chat" radio broadcasts on September 11, 1941, to denounce Nazi plans for Latin America.<sup>27</sup> Some officials in Roosevelt's administration seem to have smelled a British rat, guessing that they were been deceived by British intelligence over this letter. They did not convince the president, however. Even if he suspected he was being deceived, Roosevelt apparently did not care: The British documents suited Roosevelt's own political purposes against American isolationists.<sup>28</sup> This episode confirms an old adage in intelligence work: There is no such thing as a friendly secret service, only the secret service of a friendly country.

### **Secrets of Britain's End of Empire**

After America's entry into the war, Britain and America went on to share more secrets than any two independent states in history. As is now commonly known, the centerpiece of Britain and America's unprecedented wartime intelligence sharing was signals intelligence (SIGINT). Almost every

history of the Second World War now acknowledges the astonishing work of British and American code-breakers at Bletchley Park, who successfully broke the German ENIGMA code. However, when we look at the history of the post-war years-the Cold War-the vast majority of history books fail to mention British and U.S. SIGINT efforts. John Gaddis' otherwise outstanding study, *The Cold War* (2005), does not mention GCHQ once. We are supposed to believe that British and U.S. codebreakers stopped work in 1945. In fact, they continued to work together in the post-war years just as they had during the war.

We can now see that the British and U.S. governments signed a SIGINT-sharing alliance in March 1946, known as the UKUSA agreement. The agreement was not a single document, as previously thought, but a series of agreements, with revisions made in 1948 and then periodically in the early 1950s. It codified the close SIGINT collaboration established between the British and U.S. governments during the war, which had been organised through a previous treaty known as BRUSA.

The post-war UKUSA agreement became the fulcrum for the intelligence "special relationship" between Britain and America throughout the Cold War. The text of the first UKUSA agreement, which was only declassified in 2010 because it was considered too sensitive to release before then, makes clear that the British empire and Commonwealth played a key role in the treaty between London and Washington. A GCHQ outfit known as



the London Signals Intelligence Board, representing the British government at the negotiations in March 1947, bargained hard for Britain to have responsibility for SIGINT collection everywhere within the British empire, while the U.S. government would be responsible for all other countries. The British delegation argued that countries gaining independence from Britain but remaining within the Commonwealth as “Dominions” should not be considered “third parties” and therefore outside Britain’s SIGINT realm. The subtext for this was Britain’s looming transfer of power in India.<sup>29</sup>

By reserving for itself the right to collect SIGINT in colonies gaining Dominion status, the British government managed to solidify its intelligence position in the post-war world, throughout the Cold War, and punch far above its weight as far as Washington was concerned. When India and Pakistan achieved independence in 1947, they both gained what the authors of the UKUSA agreement called “Dominion status,” though this was soon rechristened “Commonwealth status” in a bid to make it sound less antiquated and patronising. The UKUSA agreement meant that Britain and its colonies were too important for Washington to ignore. An important role in brokering the agreement for the British government was played by Harry Hinsley, then a young cryptanalyst who had worked at Bletchley Park, and who would later write the official history of British intelligence in the Second World War.

With GCHQ having secured the right to collect SIGINT in countries entering the Commonwealth, it thereafter became a recurrent theme in the special relationship between London and Washington that the U.S. government needed the vestiges of Britain's empire for intelligence collection, despite Washington's obvious long history of anti-colonialism. The UKUSA agreement guaranteed London's special status in the eyes of Washington, even as Britain's formal imperial power and military "hard power" influence decreased. In the 1950s and 1960s, in the pre-satellite era, when a great deal of communications were passed over long distances using high-frequency radio, Britain's remnants of empire performed an essential role by providing ground stations to collect those signals. In fact, in order to collect SIGINT, we can now see that Washington actually took over and bankrolled Britain's continued presence in some of its former colonial outposts, well after they gained independence. This confirms a thesis put forward by two influential historians of the British empire, Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, in an article in 1994: As Washington took over parts of Britain's declining empire during the Cold War, there was effectively an "imperialism of decolonization" (Louis and Robinson 462–511). On the basis of the UKUSA agreement, Britain's outposts of empire thus became as important to Washington for SIGINT collection as they had been for the British government itself.<sup>30</sup>

The UKUSA agreement was revised in 1948 and the early 1950s to incorporate Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which divided the world into different SIGINT collection spheres, as covered by each signatory's listening posts, presided over by Washington and London. This SIGINT collection and sharing agreement became known as the "Five Eyes" agreement, persisting to the present day. As Britain's formal empire began to break up, it made huge efforts to secure strategic treaties allowing for a lasting British (and by extension, American) presence in newly independent countries.

Britain's old imperial bases, dotting the globe from Cyprus to Singapore, became new homes to enormous SIGINT collection centres. In the 1950s, Cyprus became a massive British SIGINT collection camp, with airdials and antennae springing up across the small island, many of them directly funded by the U.S. government's new SIGINT agency, the NSA. In December 1963, when British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home asked whether Britain really needed to retain bases in Cyprus, the Defence Secretary, Peter Thorneycroft, replied with an emphatic "yes," stating that the island "houses the most important SIGINT stations and it also provided a base from which special reconnaissance flights are carried out" (Walton 2013, 315).<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Despite an historical amnesia shown by the overwhelming majority of

British and U.S. foreign policy historians about intelligence, recently declassified British and U.S. intelligence records are changing our understanding about major historical events. As I have shown elsewhere, this is the case with the end of the British empire-the largest empire in world history (Walton 2013 xxi).<sup>32</sup> This is also the case with the origins of the Anglo-American intelligence alliance, which was far less comfortable than the image of the “special relationship” later popularized by Churchill would suggest. More than just correcting historical amnesia, however, declassified British and U.S. intelligence records also reveal subjects with striking overtones for the secret world today.

The wartime documents forged by British intelligence and given to President Roosevelt show there is nothing new about intelligence services-even those of friendly states-peddling fake news. Given the volume of British and U.S. intelligence material now publicly available, with much of it accessible by just a few clicks of a mouse from anywhere in the world, historians of British and U.S. foreign policies who have previously ignored intelligence now have two choices: either to start to incorporate intelligence into their work, or to explain why they have chosen not to do so. The latter is not a tenable option.<sup>33</sup>



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