

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE  
**JOINT  
INTELLIGENCE  
COMMITTEE**

VOLUME I:  
FROM THE APPROACH OF THE SECOND  
WORLD WAR TO THE SUEZ CRISIS

TOP SECRET

CABINET



JOINT INTELLIGENCE  
COMMITTEE

MICHAEL S. GOODMAN

ROUTLEDGE

# The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee

Volume I of *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee* draws upon a range of released and classified papers to produce the first, authoritative account of the way in which intelligence was used to inform policy.

For almost 80 years the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) has been a central player in the secret machinery of the British Government, providing a co-ordinated intelligence service to policy makers and drawing upon the work of the intelligence agencies and Whitehall departments. Since its creation, reports from the JIC have contributed to almost every key foreign policy decision taken by the British Government. This volume covers the evolution of the JIC since 1936 and culminates with its role in the events of Suez in 1956.

This book will be of much interest to students of intelligence studies, British politics, international diplomacy, security studies and international relations in general.

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**The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee**

Volume I: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis

*Michael S. Goodman*

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# **The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee**

Volume I: From the Approach  
of the Second World War to  
the Suez Crisis

**Michael S. Goodman**

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**This book is dedicated to my lovely family.**

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# Foreword by the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee

As the current Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) I have been invited to provide a few words about this book, which is the first in the series of Official Histories to address post-war intelligence history.

In recent years several books have appeared which tell the story of British Intelligence, notably Christopher Andrew's work on the Security Service and Keith Jeffrey's book on the Secret Intelligence Service. It is hoped that this volume on the history of the JIC will go some way towards completing the picture as the Committee sits at the centre of the intelligence community, acting as the interface between the worlds of intelligence and policy.

The genesis of this book lies in the Butler report, which examined the intelligence effort prior to the start of the Iraq War of 2003. Before it, little had been published or was known outside Whitehall and a few academic institutions about the workings of the JIC, although the publication of *Know Your Enemy*, by one of my esteemed predecessors, Sir Percy Cradock, is a notable exception. Public interest in this organisation emerged following the publication of the Butler report and in a time of greater transparency over public activity it is hoped that this history will provide a record of the contribution made by the Committee to the formulation of foreign policy since its inception in 1936.

Another reason for writing this history is to provide the academic world and independent researchers with a sound basis upon which to draw, from records available in The National Archives (TNA) and those yet to be released. In particular, this account draws upon a range of retained files and offers an authoritative account of the evolution of the JIC.

It is also intended to help present day practitioners working within the intelligence community to understand something of their own history and the tradition within which they work and the lessons which can be learned from past experience.

Dr Michael Goodman, a Reader in the Department of War Studies, King's College London, has had the advantage of being able to interview a significant number of former civil servants who worked on the Committee. In addition to the papers in TNA, he has had unrestricted access to the closed files of the Cabinet Office and those of several other departments, including the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence. Dr Goodman has formed his views on the performance

of the JIC on the basis of his extensive researches. The present volume covers the period to the end of the 1950s, and a second volume is in preparation which will take the story up to the end of the Cold War. For those historians who have long awaited a definitive history of the JIC, this volume should fill that gap.

Jon Day, CBE  
Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee

# List of abbreviations

ACAS(I)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Intelligence)
AEIC	Atomic Energy Intelligence Committee
AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
APS	Axis Planning Section
AUS	Assistant Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office
BIOS	British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee
BJSM	British Joint Services Mission
'C'	Chief of SIS
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CBW	Chemical and Biological (Bacteriological) Warfare
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIG	Central Intelligence Group, US
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CIOS	Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee
CNS	Chief of the Naval Staff
COS	Chiefs of Staff
COSSAC	Chief of Staff to Supreme Allied Commander
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
CX	SIS Reporting
DCOS	Deputy Chiefs of Staff
D-G	Director-General
DIS	Defence Intelligence Staff
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DMO&I	Director of Military Operations and Intelligence
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DUS	Deputy Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office
FCI	Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries Sub-Committee
FO	Foreign Office
FO(E)S	Future Operations (Enemy) Section
GC&CS	Government Code and Cypher School
GCHQ	Government Communication Headquarters
GSO	General Staff Officer

ICBM	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile
IIC	Industrial Intelligence Centre
IRD	Information Research Department
IS(O)	Intelligence Section (Operations)
ISIC	Inter-Service Intelligence Committee
ISSB	Inter-Service Security Board
ISTD	Inter-Service Topographical Department
JCS	US Joint Chiefs of Staff
JIB	Joint Intelligence Bureau
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JIC(ACA)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Allied Commission for Austria)
JIC(AF)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Allied Force)
JIC(CCG)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Control Commission Germany)
JIC(FE)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East)
JIC(G)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Germany)
JIC(ME)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Middle East)
JIC(SEAC)	Joint Intelligence Committee (South East Asia Command)
JIC(W)	Joint Intelligence Committee (Washington)
JIS	Joint Intelligence Staff
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
JPS	Joint Planning Staff
JSIC	Joint Scientific Intelligence Committee
JSTIC	Joint Scientific and Technical Intelligence Committee
JTIC	Joint Technical Intelligence Committee
JSM	Joint Staff Mission
LIC	Local Intelligence Committee
LSIB	London Signals Intelligence Board
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
MI5	Security Service
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MSC	Military Sub-Committee
NARA II	US National Archives and Records Administration II Archive, College Park, MD, USA.
NSC	National Security Council, US
ONE	Office of National Estimates
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PHP	Post-Hostilities Planning
PHPS	Post-Hostilities Planning Staff
PIG	Political Intelligence Group
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSIS	Committee of Permanent Secretaries on Intelligence Services
PUS	Permanent Under Secretary
PUSC	Permanent Under Secretary's Committee
PUSD	Permanent Under Secretary's Department

SAC	Strategical Appreciation Committee
SAF	Soviet Air Force
SCUA	Suez Canal User's Association
SEAC	South-East Asia Command
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SRC	Situation Report Centre
SSB	Secret Service Bureau
SSU	Strategic Services Unit
STIB	Scientific and Technical Intelligence Branch (Germany)
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UKUSA	UK-US Sigint agreement
USAF	United States Air Force
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WRCI	Weekly Review of Current Intelligence
WSI	Weekly Survey of Intelligence

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# Introduction

*I think all my colleagues would agree that it will be in the future quite impossible for anybody to unravel with any accuracy from the archives the detailed history of events . . .*

Lord Greenhill of Harrow  
Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1966–8<sup>1</sup>

The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) has often been regarded as a secret organisation on a par with the other intelligence agencies, yet in many ways it has acquired a greater mystique because it is less well known or understood. Indeed, until members of the JIC were called to account for their 2002 dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, prepared for the Blair government, the JIC was one of the less talked about and least understood of Whitehall committees. This volume, in charting the JIC's first twenty years, from its origins in 1936 to the events at Suez in 1956, seeks to throw some light on this enigmatic Whitehall organisation and to assess how effective it was. In doing so it sets out how successful the JIC system has been in providing a coherent voice on intelligence for policymakers and in becoming an indispensable element of central government.

Created in 1936 to remedy the lack of co-ordination in the British intelligence community, the JIC has since then been involved in every single defining moment of British diplomatic and military history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A 1944 paper nicely summarised its wartime functions:

The Joint Intelligence Committee in addition to its responsibility for co-ordinating the product of the various collectors of intelligence into the form of agreed advice on enemy intentions, has the additional responsibility of watching, directing and to some extent controlling the British intelligence organisation throughout the world, so as to ensure that intelligence is received at the most economical cost in time, effort and manpower, so as to prevent overlapping.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee had nine Chairmen during the period covered in this volume.<sup>3</sup> After a slow start, the JIC rapidly rose to prominence during the Second World War, firmly establishing itself as a central and integral component of the British governmental machinery. Towards the end of the war its Chairman and Secretary

## 2 Introduction

produced a forward looking report on the 'Intelligence Machine', and in a notable phrase they captured the precise ethos of the JIC: 'we believe that no Department, however experienced and well staffed, has anything to lose by bringing the intelligence directly available to it to the *anvil of discussion*.'<sup>4</sup> The JIC has worked best when it has been used as a forum for debate and where its assessments have been relevant to decision making.

Throughout its first two decades the JIC was a sub-committee of the Chiefs of Staff but its remit extended far beyond simple military boundaries: in that twenty-year period the JIC had to deal with the rise and fall of several dictatorships, the onset of the Cold War, the start of Britain's retreat from Empire, and the peaks and troughs of the Anglo-American relationship.

The chapters in this volume have been arranged largely chronologically, and there are four key issues that are central to the history:

- 1) how the JIC has developed (in terms of organisation and membership)
- 2) how the process of all-source assessment supports the JIC's work (by examining, in detail, certain significant episodes)
- 3) the impact of JIC assessments on policy (by examining the use made of the JIC's products in these case-studies; here I have taken 'policy' in its widest sense)
- 4) the management by the JIC of the intelligence community (i.e. the setting of requirements and priorities, agency co-ordination).

The volume is arranged into three chronological sections. The first covers the origins of the JIC, 1936–9, when the JIC was established and needed to prove its value. The second focuses on the wartime years, when the JIC was able to demonstrate to military planners and policymakers the advantages of having an integrated intelligence assessment process. The third looks at the post-war years, up to the aftermath of the Suez affair. During this time the JIC faced a series of new threats, in particular from the Soviet Union with the onset of the Cold War, but also with more diverse threats elsewhere, including the rise of nationalism and challenges to the West in the Middle and Far East. Along the way the JIC had to be flexible to adapt to the new threats and the several crises that they posed; it also had to handle the changing intelligence relationship with the United States; and come to terms with the growing technological threat from atomic warfare. In addition, thematic chapters cover the JIC's post-war reorganisation and its relations with other intelligence communities, principally those of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Reviewing the preparation of a publication on special operations in 1949 the JIC concluded by 'maintaining their view that they were always averse to the publication of secret matters'.<sup>5</sup> A similar discussion had taken place a year earlier on the thorny issue of whether historians working on the vast Official History series for the Second World War should be indoctrinated into 'special intelligence', or ULTRA, as it was called. The solution was to allow historians access to the material, but the writing was to be done in such a way that 'it will be impossible

for anyone to deduce from reading the nature and value of intelligence obtained from this source'.<sup>6</sup> For the JIC, secret intelligence was just that. It was privileged information that should remain forever hidden. The idea of an Official History of the JIC would have been anathema to many of its illustrious members. Yet, seventy years after its first meeting that is precisely what happened, when the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, announced my appointment as Official Historian of the JIC.<sup>7</sup>

An Official Historian is perhaps one of the strangest of academic creatures. On the one hand he can be the envy of colleagues, being provided with an historian's Valhalla: high level clearances, access to sensitive documents, and a free run in the archives. On the other hand the sword of Damocles is constantly hanging overhead: papers have to be reviewed for sensitivity and cleared in advance and, particularly, having to abide by official guidelines on what can be disclosed as authoritative regardless of what non-official papers (such as memoirs) might say. Clearly, given such a dichotomous position, the Official Historian needs to be sure that what is published is not only what he or she had in mind, but that the historical judgment has been reached objectively and free from governmental interference. This is a serious concern and some academics have regarded officialdom with scepticism. The nineteenth century Regius Professor of Modern History, Lord Acton, famously declared that 'there is an enmity between the truth of history and the reason of state, between sincere quest and official secrecy'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Sir Herbert Butterfield, another Cambridge historian, stated that 'we must never lose sight of the separate interests of officialdom on the one hand and the academic historian on the other; never allow the situation to be blurred or the tension and conflict between the two to be quietened'.<sup>9</sup>

The issue is mainly one of sources: Official Historians have unparalleled and unlimited access to files which have not yet been released. The problem was eloquently summarised by Hugh Trevor-Roper (later Lord Dacre), who said 'when a historian relies mainly on primary sources, which we cannot easily check, he challenges our confidence and forces us to ask critical questions. How reliable is his historical method? How sound is his judgment?'<sup>10</sup> Unlike the archives on which the recent MI5 and SIS authorised histories were based, most JIC records are routinely transferred to The National Archives (TNA) at their 30-year point, and are therefore far more accessible and well-organised in TNA.

The JIC records that are now released cover the Committee's various roles:

**Assessments:** The majority of the minutes and memoranda for the period covered by this volume have been released, and these provide a very good overview of how assessments changed over time. Some of the JIC Secretariat files have been released, though a great number have not. None of the Confidential Annex volumes have been released. Some of the Weekly Reviews of Current Intelligence have been released, but none of the more sensitive Weekly Surveys of Intelligence. A comparison of released and retained material reveals that the conclusions of the assessments generally are not affected, but there is, unsurprisingly, more specific information in the retained volumes. Furthermore there are some topics which are covered by retained files which are not revealed in the released files.

The result is that whilst the JIC's more strategic role is clear from the released record, its rather more tactical role in supporting decision making in operations and in crises has remained hidden. This conclusion is especially borne out by the Second World War records, where the JIC's memoranda have been preserved but, apart from a small handful of examples, none of the various daily summaries survive.

**Management:** From the released files the management function of the JIC remains virtually invisible. This role, historically, has been three-fold: setting requirements and priorities for the intelligence community; assessing the performance of the agencies themselves; and looking at methods of improving Britain's intelligence capability. It is in these areas, in addition to the JIC's tactical role, that this Official History hopes in particular to shed new light.

Any historical account would not be complete without accessing other governmental departments' files. It is perhaps in this category – access to sources – that this account differs from Sir Percy Cradock's book *Know Your Enemy*.<sup>11</sup> Not only is this history longer and broader, but the position of Official Historian permits access to a wider range of sources. Furthermore, it builds upon the important precedent set by the Sir Harry Hinsley volumes covering the Official History of *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, but includes far more detail on the role of personalities.<sup>12</sup>

There is a wealth of relevant papers in the PREM (Prime Ministerial) and CAB (Cabinet Office) group of records, as well as FO (Foreign Office), but above all else it is the records of the Foreign Office's Permanent Under Secretary's Department (PUSD) that often hold the key to understanding the JIC's successes and failures. Following Lord Franks' report on the Falklands War, the chairmanship of the JIC became a Cabinet Office appointment, having been historically a role reserved for a FO diplomat. Yet chairing the JIC was never a full-time position, and from 1939 onwards it was routinely combined with heading PUSD – the department in the FO responsible for liaising with the intelligence community, particularly SIS and GCHQ, but also the COS and the JIC. This ensured that during this period the JIC Chairman not only was the highest placed individual in the intelligence machine involved in the process of assessment, but was also centrally located and involved in operational and policy matters within the FO and, at times, 10 Downing Street. Today we might be concerned over the danger of politicisation of intelligence assessment by policy considerations, but in this period this was a crucial combination. PUSD records provide a wealth of JIC material and include papers which are often missing from the regular Cabinet Office series. So, typically, drafts of JIC reports can be found in PUSD records, whereas only the final version is preserved in the JIC series. Similarly, and often of the most value, are the notes and memoranda sent from the JIC Chairman, wearing his FO hat, to the Permanent Under Secretary (PUS). These invaluable records are slowly being reviewed and released in the FO 1093 series.

Another value of having an Official Historian's status is that former civil servants, diplomats and military personnel are prepared to be interviewed, usually

without the restrictions of classification. I have had the great fortune to interview a fascinating mix of people. The great value of interviews, as many contemporary historians will attest, is that they fill in the gaps left in the official, documented record. For the JIC this is crucial for three reasons: oral history provides something of the colour and atmosphere of the JIC; as this is a history of a committee personalities are absolutely crucial, yet their contribution is all but missing from the archival record; and JIC records alone do not tell the whole story. This latter point needs some explanation.

Brian Stewart, the Secretary in the late 1960s, wrote about the science of minute writing. He noted that the minutes produced would not necessarily reflect the discussions in the Committee: ‘. . . it was an interesting challenge requiring us to invent an introduction and summing up to put in the mouth of the Chairman, to catch the sense of the meeting. Sometimes after particularly turbulent debate, we were forced to minute what we thought the members intended to say, rather than what they actually said’.<sup>13</sup> One of Stewart’s predecessors in the early 1950s had a similar tale to tell:

After a week in the job I got called into Searight’s [Colonel Eric Searight, JIC Secretary] office and who said [discussing Alldis’ draft minutes of a JIC meeting] “you can’t make so and so say that”. I said “but he did say it” and Searight said “but it’s absolute tripe. You can’t send that around Whitehall over his name”. I said “well, what can I do about it?” “Oh no”, he said, “your job is to make the minutes readable and correct and not to send out absolute nonsense”. We didn’t alter them factually, we just made them sound like they were uttered by intelligent and gifted and knowledgeable people. Sometimes you had to change them if they said something against the policies of their Department. Very rarely did Committee members want them [the resulting minutes] changing.<sup>14</sup>

Admiral John Godfrey, the DNI in the early part of the war, recorded that ‘the personality of Secretary is very important. He must avoid the pitfalls of being entirely objective, merely recording the words of members and trying not to project his own views into the JIC papers’.<sup>15</sup> Thus it is clear that records alone cannot tell the whole story. They are incomplete so it is essential to fill the gaps through a combination of interviews with the few surviving participants and research in other departments’ files.

Of the JIC members themselves, many of the FO Chairmen produced memoirs. It is interesting to compare what they say about their time serving on the JIC. The amount of material covering the activities of the JIC varies. Some were clearly disinclined to write about their experience, including Sir William Hayter (Chairman, 1946–9) and Sir Bernard Burrows (Chairman, 1963–6).<sup>16</sup> Burrows justifies the decision to omit four years of FO work on the basis that ‘a good deal has been written . . . about the functioning of the Intelligence Services. I do not propose to add to this.’<sup>17</sup> Some former Chairmen, however, have written about their experiences, but these are often lacking in any great detail about the work or

the nature of the Committee itself. Thus, for instance, Lord Greenhill (Chairman, 1966–8) does mention the JIC, as does Sir Percy Cradock (Chairman, 1985–92) in his quasi-memoir, devoting a whole chapter on its relationship to policy; while Sir Edward Peck, (Chairman, 1968–70) mentions that one of the most rewarding aspects was the regular lunch he had with ‘C’ atop Century House.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the nature of the records themselves, there have been other difficulties and problems to overcome, and four other complicating factors are worth mentioning here:

The **first** is the range of topics. Anyone who has studied the JIC’s records will have noted just how broad its remit has been. The Committee has produced assessments, both long term and immediate; has had a management function; has set collection requirements and priorities; has dealt with security matters; the clearance of books; allocation of codewords, and many more related subjects. Even considering the assessment side of the JIC’s task alone, the range of topics covered is vast. The difficulty has been in conveying this worldwide coverage by the JIC in chapters that, generally speaking, focus on specific topics. By concentrating solely on assessments of Suez in 1956, for instance, the JIC’s performance on that topic alone cannot be divorced from the fact that it was also involved in providing daily updates on events in Hungary at the same time. This is a problem which recurs throughout. Although for most of this period the Cold War was the JIC’s main concern, it was not its only one. Statistically it is impossible to categorise JIC papers which often covered several subjects and from a variety of angles. Even where a paper focussed on a Third World country, for example, the role of Moscow was an important aspect to be assessed. A glimpse of any of the Committee’s minutes reveals the global remit it was designed to fill.

A **second** difficulty is to know what exactly to include under the JIC umbrella. The full Committee had, at various points, a large number of sub-committees that were subordinate to it; furthermore, there were a number of regional and local JIC’s that reported back to London. In addition, the role of the JIC Secretary sometimes took him beyond strictly-JIC work: Brian Stewart, for instance, also served as an investigator for the Intelligence Co-ordinator, a senior central official who was also a member of the JIC. How should the FO Chairman’s role be considered when not strictly related to the JIC and how relevant were his other tasks to his JIC work? Suez is a classic example of this.

A **third** issue, and perhaps the most crucial, is demonstrating where intelligence made an impact on policy or a military decision. For the period covered by this volume it is somewhat easier than post-1957, when the JIC moved to the Cabinet Office, for the simple reason that many of the JIC papers were discussed, commented upon and approved by members of the COS Committee; they were therefore clearly read, if not necessarily acted on, by them. More difficult is trying to quantify the difference that the JIC made: we can examine events that happened and check whether the JIC was correct in its predictions; but when a JIC report relates to an event or circumstance when nothing happened, it is impossible to know the JIC’s impact. Another of the JIC’s more useful roles was the provision

of regular updates on an evolving situation. The function, after all, was to keep readers as informed as possible, to reduce ignorance, and to provide context for decision making to take place. For the sake of space, this volume is largely restricted to coverage of those events that have been selected for their historical significance. However, there is a wide range of JIC assessments in the archives that pertain to regular updating on issues which never developed into a serious policy matter. The JIC provided justified reassurance at times as well as sounding the alarm.

A **fourth** and final problem has been trying to gauge who exactly this book is for. Official Histories are ‘intended to provide authoritative histories in their own right; a reliable secondary source for historians until all the records are available in The National Archives’.<sup>19</sup> Balancing the level of historical context with the specific JIC content has not been an easy task, and this intentionally varies slightly from chapter to chapter, depending on the JIC’s precise role and involvement. I hope it will satisfy a wide readership of academics, practitioners, and the general public alike.

Writing the Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee has been and is an honour and a privilege. There are a great number of people to thank, without whom this book would not have been possible, including: the team in the Cabinet Office, my advisory board, the reviewers and archivists across HMG, archivists in other repositories, and those with whom I have corresponded and interviewed. In particular I would like to thank Ian Beesley, John Gray, Matthew Jones, Ron Lawrence and Nick Weekes. I am especially indebted to the tireless work of my ‘research assistant’, Jane Knight, who has spent countless days, weeks and months of her life to improve the quality of this work. Despite the thousands of pages of redrafting, all errors (regretfully) are mine.

Has it been possible to maintain objectivity in the face of constraints? I believe so. The Cabinet Office contracts for Official Historians make it explicit that the interpretation is the historian’s alone, and that control is limited to matters of security. Furthermore, a frighteningly well-read advisory board has ensured that objectivity and analytical rigour are maintained throughout. The views of the JIC in 1947 when discussing ULTRA are equally as relevant today, and underline the rationale in allowing Official Historians unrestricted access to archives: ‘It would be impracticable to expect Historians to complete their work realistically without giving them the necessary information to appreciate the implications of signal [or any] intelligence . . . the danger to security would occur where historians had insufficient information to enable them to recognise the dangers involved’.<sup>20</sup>

In 1962 President Kennedy, commenting on the Foreign Relations of the United States series, said that ‘The effectiveness of democracy as a form of government depends on an informed and intelligent citizenry.’<sup>21</sup> The Official History series is part of this tradition. To conclude, Professor D.C.Watt, writing almost fifty years ago, noted that ‘the [official] historian is among things the custodian of the national memory. It is his responsibility to see that memory is kept as free as possible from the distortions of distance in time from the events

remembered, of imperfect biased recollection, and of prejudice or ignorance.<sup>22</sup> I could not agree more and I hope that this book is testimony to that fact.

## Notes

- 1 D Greenhill, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (7 May 1977).
- 2 JIC(44)86(0), 'The British Intelligence Organisation', 3 March 1944. CAB 81/121.
- 3 A list, with dates, is in the Appendices.
- 4 'The Intelligence Machine', 10 January 1945. CAB 163/6. Emphasis added.
- 5 JIC(49)123rd Meeting, 25 November 1949. CAB 163/256.
- 6 JIC(48)14(0), 'General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', 11 February 1948. CAB 163/288.
- 7 HC Deb, 26 April 2007, c27WS.
- 8 Cited in O Chadwick, *Action and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.29.
- 9 H Butterfield, 'Official History: Its Pitfalls and Criteria', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 38:150 (1949), pp.129–44.
- 10 H Trevor-Roper, 'Hitler: Does History Offer a Defence?', *Sunday Times* (12 June 1977).
- 11 P Cradock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray, 2002).
- 12 F H Hinsley et al, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1979–94).
- 13 B Stewart, *Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander: 80 Years Round Asia and Back* (Newark: Acorn Publications, 2002). p.260.
- 14 Interview with Cecil Alldis, 21 September 2009.
- 15 'Joint Intelligence Committee', Note by J.H.Godfrey, n.d. ADM 223/465.
- 16 Hayter does, however, mention heading the Services Liaison Department, the forerunner to PUSD, which brought 'closer acquaintance with the Intelligence organizations'. W G Hayter, *A Double Life: The Memoirs of Sir William Hayter* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974). pp.82–3; B Burrows, *Diplomat in a Changing World* (County Durham: The Memoir Club, 2001).
- 17 Burrows, *Diplomat in a Changing World*. p.150.
- 18 D Greenhill, *More by Accident* (York: Wilton, 1992); P Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London: John Murray, 1997); E H Peck, *Recollections, 1915–2005* (New Delhi: Paul's Press, 2005). p.232.
- 19 *The UK Government's Official History Programme* (Cabinet Office booklet, 2010).
- 20 JIC/1345/47, 'Use of Special Intelligence by Official Histories', 21 November 1947. CAB 163/288.
- 21 Cited in D P Myers, 'Publication and Declassification of Records', *The American Journal of International Law* 56:1 (1962), p.158.
- 22 D C Watt, 'Foreign Affairs, the Public Interest and the Right to Know', *Political Quarterly* 34 (1963), p.123.

**Part One**

**Origins, 1936–1939**

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# 1 Why Joint Intelligence?

## **The Need for Central Intelligence**

On Tuesday 7 July 1936, a few weeks before the spectacular opening by Adolf Hitler of the Berlin Olympics, seven men sat around a large ornate table in a four storey building just opposite the entrance to Downing Street to discuss what was known of the growing military challenge that Germany posed for the British Empire. Six of the men were officers representing the intelligence staffs of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. The seventh was a shadowy civilian whose background was in an organisation that had then no official existence, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) or MI6. The building in which the meeting was taking place, No. 2 Whitehall Gardens, had made history before when an earlier occupant, Benjamin Disraeli, had held meetings of his Cabinet there.<sup>1</sup> Outside the front entrance the trees were the last remaining remnant of the Privy Garden of the Old Palace of Westminster.<sup>2</sup> Now the large ornate rooms, modelled in the French style similar to the interior of the Palace at Versailles, housed the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) and the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee and it was at their direction that the key figures in British intelligence were meeting formally in committee for the first time. Outside the storm clouds gathered overhead and as the clock chimed 11 o'clock in the Secretary's Room on the first floor the chairman, a Brigadier in the East Yorkshire Regiment, opened proceedings.<sup>3</sup> The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) had come into being.

No. 2 Whitehall Gardens has long been demolished and the present Ministry of Defence stands on its site; the CID disappeared with the end of Empire and decolonisation. While the military threat from Germany and the Axis was eventually defeated, followed by the demise of the Soviet Union after the long Cold War, threats to the UK and its interests remain but now come from diverse sources, including terrorists, proliferators and international criminal gangs. Throughout each of the last 78 years the JIC has, however, continued to meet in Whitehall, within a stone's throw of its original meeting place, to provide Ministers and other policymakers, diplomats, and military commanders with the best assessment of the intelligence available to the British authorities.

The machinery of British intelligence has one of the longest histories of any modern intelligence system. William Burghley and Francis Walsingham set up the

first intelligence gathering machinery in Elizabethan times but it was not until 1909 that the modern British intelligence establishment was founded. In October of that year the Secret Service Bureau (SSB) was formed. This quickly developed into a home branch – what would become the Security Service (MI5) – and a foreign branch – the forerunner to SIS.

In 1936 a decision was made to create a central clearing house for intelligence: the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIC).<sup>4</sup> Its creation owed something to the origins of the modern British secret service. The rationale in creating the SSB in 1909 was driven by the emergence of an external threat. Though there had existed similar fears before, the perceived German menace was new in the sense that it directly threatened the British mainland itself. Spy fever, fuelled publicly by the novels of William Le Queux, was at its height. The belief that there were upwards of 80,000 German agents secretly working in the British Isles created the need for a two-pronged approach: an internal organisation to guard against such a threat, and an external organisation to watch for an indication of any war which might awaken the agents into action.<sup>5</sup> In the 1930s a new version of this threat was causing concern but in a different way, with fears over German re-armament confusing views about Hitler's intentions.

An appreciation of the international situation and the means of dealing with it helps explain why a centralised structure for intelligence was not initiated before 1936. Sir Harry Hinsley, author of the *Official History of British Intelligence in the Second World War*, suggests that the decision to create the JIC stemmed from the belief that while centralisation was not key, further collaboration between the various Service departments was. In this way, 'most of the pressures for change in the inter-war years resulted from the fact that increasing professionalisation tended to separate these functions and to call for new, specialised inter-departmental bodies to undertake them.'<sup>6</sup> Yet the JIC was essentially ineffective in the build-up to the outbreak of war, and the reason for this lies in the nature of British intelligence in the mid-1930s.<sup>7</sup>

Within the British government there were several types of intelligence. Vice Admiral William James, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, referred to them as 'service' and 'special' intelligence.<sup>8</sup> Of the 'service' variant there existed within the military three different intelligence organisations: one for the Admiralty, another for the War Office, and one for the Air Ministry. These organisations were affected by the perception of an increased German threat. Following Germany's occupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the post of a separate Director of Military Intelligence was re-established in the War Office. In the Air Ministry, concerns about the expanding German Air Force led to the creation of a Deputy Director of Intelligence.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in the Admiralty, an Operational Intelligence Centre was resurrected.<sup>10</sup> There was remarkably little discussion or collaboration between them. At a higher level, the CID provided a forum whereby military and civilian personnel met to discuss policy options, but it appears that such discussions only rarely involved intelligence matters. The product of these three Service intelligence organisations was, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly military in content: it reflected analyses of enemy capabilities with little or no attempt to

gauge intentions. Furthermore, each was concerned almost exclusively with the remit of its parent Service, be it the Royal Navy, the Army or the Royal Air Force.

Alongside the military organisations were the civilian or 'special' intelligence agencies. Following the investigations into the nature and scope of civilian intelligence in the early 1920s by the Secret Service Committee of the Cabinet, the various agencies had become central components – if undeclared – of government with more clearly defined roles.<sup>11</sup> SIS, under its Foreign Office (FO) supervision, was responsible for collecting information outside the British Empire. It was to remain separate from the FO itself, and as such some of its officers were stationed under the guise of 'Passport Control Officers', others under business cover.<sup>12</sup> The three Service intelligence branches seconded a number of staff to SIS yet, crucially, SIS was not solely concerned with military matters and could, if required, report on political topics. In addition to its overseas human intelligence operations, SIS had assumed responsibility for the Government Code & Cypher School (GC&CS), which itself had been formed in 1919 from the relevant single-Service Sigint organisations and been organised on an inter-departmental level. The Security Service retained a military intelligence designation – MI5 – though it too had a remit extending far beyond military concerns.<sup>13</sup>

The third strand of intelligence, though not explicitly recognised as such, was the political element residing within the FO. Through a mixture of diplomatic reporting and information gathering through private networks the FO had, since the late nineteenth century, collected what would today be described as political intelligence. Up to the end of the First World War this had been mainly ad hoc in nature, and the extent to which 'intelligence' was amassed largely reflected the current Permanent Under Secretary's (PUS) views towards its utility and value.<sup>14</sup> The system became more permanent but it was not until Sir Robert Vansittart's appointment as PUS in 1930 that it really developed into a sophisticated network. Vansittart was a consummate devourer and user of intelligence and his network was known within Whitehall as his 'private detective agency'.<sup>15</sup> It was out of this confusion – a disparate number of organisations dealing with intelligence and a resurgent German threat – that the JIC was created.

## **The First Tentative Steps to Joint Intelligence**

The first steps towards an integrated governmental approach to intelligence assessment occurred in December 1923 with industrial and economic intelligence. Although in its early incarnation this was not a truly effective system it would, by 1929, become the model for the subsequent Joint Intelligence Committee. In 1931 the CID's 'Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries Sub-Committee' (FCI) had created within it a research body called the 'Industrial Intelligence Centre' (IIC). Although the IIC initially had no official terms of reference, its purposes were defined in 1934 as being twofold: firstly, to ensure the best economic intelligence was utilised by the FCI; and secondly, to ensure that all relevant information was amassed and effectively distributed to the consumers – thereby producing the first effective attempt at all-source analysis within the British

intelligence machinery. Despite such an important role, the IIC system did not convince all the various departments that it should be the central clearing-house for economic intelligence: the main problem was that the IIC reports were still submitted to the various Service's intelligence departments before they went higher up the Whitehall hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> This should not, however, detract from its importance as a first step towards a centralised intelligence machinery.

The realisation that a wider-reaching interdepartmental intelligence assessment system was needed came from the military but was channelled through Sir Maurice Hankey. Hankey was born in 1877 and joined the Royal Marines, later serving in naval intelligence. He joined the Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1908, and from 1912 until 1938 served as its Secretary. He also assumed the position of Secretary of the Cabinet in 1916, the first in a long line of distinguished incumbents. Hankey is remembered for revolutionising the system of Cabinet government, but his importance to intelligence history lies in the creation of the Chiefs of Staff Committee: for bringing the disparate elements of the military into one common body. Described variously as 'brisk, businesslike and ultra conservative', Hankey was central to the development of the British government prior to the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> General Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) at the conclusion of World War One, said of Hankey, 'If you once lose hold of Hanky-Panky, you are done, absolutely done'.<sup>18</sup>

While it might have been Hankey who converted the concept of centralised intelligence assessment into practice, the stimulus for change came from military quarters. On 22 July 1935 the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMO&I) in the War Office, Major General John Dill, wrote to Hankey about the need for a better system of co-ordinating intelligence:

... we find an increasing tendency for certain specific aspects of intelligence to develop, in which two or more separate Departments are equally interested, with the result that the danger of uneconomical duplication in the collection and recording of such intelligence is tending to increase. Again, the preparation of plans which depend on these forms of intelligence is unduly delayed by the necessity for a laborious process of co-ordination between Departments which are geographically widely separated.

As an example of how such an effective system might work, Dill extolled the virtues of the IIC. The issue, in Dill's mind, was that intelligence for the purpose of planning was missing. He continued, 'I feel very strongly that something is wanted', and put forward as a tentative suggestion that the scope of the FCI might be enlarged to 'embrace all the subjects of intelligence on which joint plans by different Departments might depend. The title would presumably be changed and might become the "Joint Intelligence Committee" or "Intelligence Co-ordination Committee".'<sup>19</sup>

Hankey's response on 29 July 1935 noted how he had 'felt myself, for some time, that the existing arrangements could be improved'. Although he did not

want a 'super intelligence centre', Hankey did feel that better 'arrangements [could be made] for facilitating touch between all the departments who obtain information on any particular subject'.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly by referring to the 'obtaining' of information, neither Hankey nor Dill meant the 'civilian' collection agencies MI5 or SIS – instead, this was to be a purely military matter and designed solely to fulfil the needs of the military planners.

From their correspondence it is evident that the topic re-emerged just three months later and in various different fora. One aspect stemmed from an Air Ministry intelligence paper on 'bomb targets'. The problem was this: the First World War and the intervening years had revealed the importance of precise target selection for bombing. In 1935, and with discussions already underway as to the nature of British military strategy in any future European war, the Air Ministry had studied the subject. Its conclusion was that some sort of a 'Joint Co-ordinating Committee' be created to select targets. The issue lay not with obtaining information – it was felt that relevant expertise already existed – instead it was the problem of arranging contact with the experts and co-ordinating their information that was taxing the Air Ministry.<sup>21</sup> At this time the only central mechanism for co-ordinating intelligence effort was the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC). Its Director, a one time SIS officer called Desmond Morton, referred to the possible 'pending formation of a Joint Intelligence Committee', as being one available solution, though he felt that the IIC should be the natural home for it in the meantime. Clearly, Morton recognised that the answer to the problems of collating information was a central co-ordinating body.<sup>22</sup>

Morton's reference to a Joint Intelligence Committee suggests that concrete proposals had been made. The JIC was designed to serve various committees of which the most senior was the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID). This was chaired by the Prime Minister and included a large number of Secretaries of State, including those for the three Services. Its Secretary was Sir Maurice Hankey, the common link between the various committees. Below this was the CID's Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee (COS), which was chaired by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence (Sir Thomas Inskip) and included the three Chiefs of Staff, with Hankey as Secretary. Lowest in the hierarchy was the Sub-Committee of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff (DCOS) which, in addition to the three Deputy Chiefs, had Hankey as Chairman.

Following Dill's original letter Hankey, through his position as Secretary of the CID, discussed the idea with the COS. Their recommendation, in early October 1935, was that the matter should be debated by the DCOS Committee first, who should then send a proposal back to the Chiefs to discuss.<sup>23</sup> This decision caused much exasperation amongst Air Ministry officials, who felt it would take too long for a decision to be reached and any practical measures to be put in place.<sup>24</sup>

Despite strong support from the War Office, the Air Ministry, and the Industrial Intelligence Centre, not every department thought a central mechanism was such a good idea. Following initial discussions in late October, Vice-Admiral William James, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, informed Hankey that although he 'approached the matter with an open mind', the problem was not just that the

papers 'were not very illuminating', but that the discussion 'did not materially alter an earlier impression that we might be embarking on a large and perhaps expensive organisation as the result of finding weakness in our Intelligence system with regard to one specific point'.<sup>25</sup> In reply Hankey thanked James for his thoughts and reassured him that discussions were at a 'preliminary' stage, but ended by saying that 'personally I feel strongly that there is a good deal which could be done to put our intelligence on a better footing'.<sup>26</sup>

The 'specific point' raised by James was the Air Ministry's 'bomb target' report. There is some evidence of internal competition between the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Although not immediately evident from the records pertaining to the JIC itself, there are hints from Admiralty and Air Ministry files. The debate between the Navy and the RAF over control of naval aviation has been well documented.<sup>27</sup> One of the central issues was the procurement of funds, over which the Admiralty and Air Ministry views were poles apart. Though this debate would continue up until the start of the Second World War, it is entirely possible that the effects were felt in the discussions about setting up the JIC; certainly it would have been present in the minds of senior naval figures.<sup>28</sup> One relevant clue comes from some notes produced by Admiral John Godfrey, wartime Director of Naval Intelligence who, referring to the origins of the JIC, commented that naval intelligence had been 'unhindered' by 'a desire to produce over-optimistic results (in terms of bomb success and enemy damage) which cramped the truth of air intelligence'.<sup>29</sup> These debates would resurface in the context of the Spanish civil war.<sup>30</sup>

Vice-Admiral James' concerns, first expressed at the end of October 1935, had, by the end of November, mellowed somewhat. He was now content that a change was necessary, but suggested that it be a revision to the procedures of the FCI rather than a whole new structure.<sup>31</sup> By late October 1935, the notion that something had to be done had reached a general consensus, despite the Admiralty's lukewarm response. As Hankey had foreseen, the topic was passed from the COS's hands to the DCOS Committee. The latter discussed Dill's original paper and, in true British committee style, instructed the Secretary to prepare a review. In addition it created an 'ad-hoc sub-committee' composed of the three Service intelligence directors to consider the question of a separate intelligence centre.<sup>32</sup> At the following meeting it was proposed that such a system was necessary, and that in the first place the FCI should be expanded. Such an enlarged FCI would include a provision to 'co-opt additional members' as and when needed in order to 'deal with specific problems'. Furthermore, the envisaged additional focus of the FCI was to be confined to the consideration of 'bombing targets intelligence'; it therefore had a somewhat limited scope.<sup>33</sup>

In structural terms nothing changed since representatives of the Services' intelligence departments had been attending the FCI since its first meeting in 1930.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps as recognition that these alterations did not go far enough, the 'ad-hoc sub-committee' of the DCOS, which had been tasked with preparing a report, went much further in its proposals. In defining the subject matter it concluded that 'service intelligence' referred to 'information which can be

obtained through the Intelligence Staffs of the three Fighting Services; together with matters which are the principal concern of those Staffs'. The 'special' intelligence agencies of MI5 and SIS (including GC&CS) were never co-opted into the proposals as they lay outside the concerns of the military intelligence directorates.

The ad-hoc sub-committee also identified a list of topics of mutual interest to all three Services and on which co-ordination was vital. The final suggestion was that the new structure, to be called the 'Inter-Service Intelligence Committee', should solely include the intelligence representatives from the three Services.<sup>35</sup> This proposal was subsequently incorporated into a lengthier document – paper number DCOS 4. Much like the 1909 decision to create a Secret Service Bureau, the major cause for change was defined as the need to be 'properly prepared for the eventuality of war.' The three Services' intelligence directors concluded in the paper that 'our intelligence organisation requires some modification to cope with modern conditions.' The 'modern conditions' referred to the duplication that was becoming increasingly problematic and common. As such it was proposed that 'direct and permanent liaison between the many departments' was needed. The proposition to deal with these problems was two-fold: that the FCI be expanded further to include provision for bombing targets intelligence; and that a separate 'inter-service intelligence committee' be created to meet on an ad-hoc basis, at the 'request of one of the members', to achieve co-ordination across the three Services.<sup>36</sup>

The COS Committee met on 13 January 1936 and approved the report without reservation.<sup>37</sup> It was then passed upwards and the matter was considered at the meeting of the CID on 30 January 1936. The CID agreed with the recommendations as set out in DCOS 4, namely that the FCI be expanded and that a new Services' intelligence committee be established. This decision by the CID in January 1936 was a momentous one, something which would change the face of British intelligence and define its structure.<sup>38</sup>

Following the January 1936 decision, the FCI did not meet again until March. At its nineteenth meeting bomb targeting was discussed for the first time and, following a lengthy discussion, general consensus was reached: a new sub-committee of the FCI was to be created to concentrate specifically on this topic. Interestingly its composition was to be the same as the new JIC, to be created in the summer of 1936, and it was to consider topics which would subsequently preoccupy much of the JIC's time.<sup>39</sup> At the following meeting of the FCI in May, the new Sub-Committee reported back. Its Chairman, Wing Commander Charles Medhurst from the Air Ministry's intelligence directorate, stated that it should concentrate in the first instance on identifying targets in Germany, though subsequent ones should be identified by the CID itself. The precursor to the JIC – a committee of intelligence officials, tasked from above, and designed to assess information for the purposes of military planning – had been created.<sup>40</sup>

Far trickier to trace is the fate of the Inter-Service Intelligence Committee (ISIC). As it was, this proved to be a short-lived organisation. There do not seem to be any records of actual meetings. Although it did meet in its brief six-month

lifespan, there is no evidence to indicate how often or what topics were discussed. The original proposal for the Committee reveals something of its remit:

- (a) Preparation of Intelligence Reports and provision of maps and plans for such publications.
- (b) Joint appreciations on possible enemy operations from the Intelligence point of view, e.g. Japanese operations against Hong Kong and Singapore.
- (c) Press liaison and security in combined exercises.
- (d) A.A. [anti-aircraft] defences of foreign countries.
- (e) Coastal defences of foreign countries.
- (f) Intelligence from Procedure Y. [signals intelligence]
- (g) Signal communications and developments.
- (h) Co-ordination of the work of the Intelligence Staffs of the three Services in special circumstances.
- (i) Questions involving the Defence Security Service where the three Defence Departments are concerned.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee could be convened only by one of the constituent members and only when they saw fit. Its range of functions was quite broad, but given the lack of records it is impossible to know what was discussed. What is clear is that one of the major problems the ISIC faced was that it had no established means of disseminating its product.

### **The Creation of the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee**

Less than five months after its creation, it had become clear that the ISIC was not capable of meeting the challenges it faced. As the military increasingly concerned themselves with a possible war with Germany, questions were raised about the role of intelligence in military planning. The DMO&I in the War Office, the newly promoted Lieutenant General John Dill, wrote to Hankey and the directors of intelligence in the Air Ministry and Admiralty in late May 1936, detailing the failings of the present system.

As with bombing targets, it was becoming increasingly clear that the work of civilian intelligence and military planning needed to be dovetailed together. Dill's suggestion was to expand the existing size of the ISIC to include Morton, and extend its remit to provide a specific responsibility for assisting the Joint Planning Committee (JPC), the military body designed to put policy into action.<sup>42</sup> Hankey concurred with Dill's suggestion: an expanded ISIC would provide the JPC with 'information necessary for the preparation of their papers direct from a co-ordinated source.'<sup>43</sup> All three Service intelligence chiefs approved of Hankey's suggestion. The reaction was so positive that it was felt that the DCOS did not need to approve the matter, not least because speed was of the essence in altering the present structure. The overall objective was no longer to find a way to co-ordinate intelligence as a means in itself, but rather as a way to increase the speed with which the JPC could produce its own reports.

The proposal went straight to the COS Committee on 16 June 1936. At that meeting, Hankey proposed to 'extend the functions of the Inter-Service Intelligence Committee in order to enable that body to assist the Joint Planning Committee when the latter required co-ordinated intelligence.' The COS wholeheartedly approved.<sup>44</sup> The title accorded this new body was the 'Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee', it being a sub-committee of the COS. In its first meeting, a few weeks later, the JIC re-iterated the conclusions of the COS.<sup>45</sup>

There were some similarities between the ISIC and the JIC. For example, the composition of both bodies was the same (though the JIC could ask the IIC for assistance as required). The major difference between the two, however, was structural. The JIC became a sub-committee of the COS, thereby increasing its importance and positioning it firmly at the centre of government, where it was drawn into the orbit of the COS planning machinery. The JIC thus had a wider scope, not only absorbing the roles and remit of the ISIC, but also acting in an advisory capacity to the JPC and the Joint Planning Staff (JPS).<sup>46</sup> Initially it had been decided that the best means of achieving cooperation was for both the JIC and the JPC to share a Secretary, but by its third meeting the JIC felt that this would jeopardise his JPC role (which was primary) and so a separate JIC Secretary had to be appointed. Furthermore, until this happened 'we cannot view with any confidence a successful inauguration of the new Joint Intelligence Committee'.<sup>47</sup> Be that as it may, the result was not quite as hoped, as both Committees continued to share a central secretariat.

There are two standard critiques of the pre-war JIC's organisation: that it did not use the expertise of MI5, SIS and GC&CS; and that it suffered because the FO did not want to be involved. But these misunderstand the role and nature of the JIC: the JIC was a military body, comprising a military membership, designed to assess military subjects, and pass recommendations to a military planning body. It was not established to consider the kind of subjects that the FO would have been involved with; the JIC was concerned solely with military capabilities and excluded the topic of intentions. This also explains why the 'civilian' intelligence agencies were not full members. At the same time, however, it is clear that the FO kept a keen eye on proceedings. Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, the FO representative on the FCI, sent a note at the outset, commenting on how the 'Foreign Office would be considerably interested', especially in the Committee's expanded remit, concluding that it 'will require watching'.<sup>48</sup>

It is surprising that the decision had not been taken earlier to create a joint intelligence body, given that there had been previous arguments for, and experience with, 'joint' intelligence. In 1925 the Secret Service Committee had been reconvened to consider the structure of British intelligence and evaluate its worth. In taking statements from leading figures, the Secret Service Committee heard the Chief of SIS, Admiral Hugh Sinclair, complain that the present organisation was 'fundamentally wrong'. Furthermore, he pointed out, there was 'no central control of policy, [and] a serious lack of coordination and cooperation which resulted in overlapping and waste of time'. While such words were prophetic, Sinclair's remedy was not a co-ordinating body, but instead a plea that all

the various intelligence agencies be amalgamated into one big directorate – his.<sup>49</sup> Although the idea of working together was therefore not new, Sinclair’s vision had been concerned primarily with intelligence collection and not assessment.

The idea of the military working together was also not new. A Joint Naval and Military Committee had been established in the 1890s to produce combined reports on topics of common interest, and it had been an unquestioned success.<sup>50</sup> Discussions in the early 1920s about the creation of a unified Ministry of Defence revealed that the Services could co-operate. Indeed, the 1922 Weir Committee, which had been created to look into such matters, had outlined recommendations on the ‘amalgamation of Services’, and several reviews had been conducted from that point on, outlining how this could and did work in practice.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, following Weir’s report, the JPC was created as a tri-Service gathering with representatives from naval and air intelligence as standing members.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the 1924 creation of the ‘Cryptography and Interception’ committee, comprising personnel from the three Services and civilian intelligence staff; and the 1928 formation of the committee on Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries, had shown that a joint, centralised approach to intelligence was extremely successful.<sup>53</sup>

The growing German threat ensured that British intelligence had to adapt: the intelligence community itself had to become more unified, and intelligence had to be brought closer to military planning. Both factors are evident in the JIC’s role, as defined by the COS on its creation:

- a. to extend its functions to include work in connection with papers under preparation by the Joint Planning Committee;
- b. that the Joint Planning Committee would, as necessary, give terms of reference to the Joint Intelligence Committee asking for information required for the preparation of Joint Planning Reports;
- c. that the Joint Intelligence Committee was empowered to co-opt the services of Major Morton in any enquiries which they undertook in this connection;
- d. that the Secretary to the Joint Planning Committee would assist the Joint Intelligence Committee in an organising and liaison capacity only, his duties with the Joint Planning Committee not being interfered with.<sup>54</sup>

### **From Birth to War**

Taking the chair at the very first meeting of the Joint Intelligence Committee on 7 July 1936 was Brigadier Desmond Anderson. Anderson was the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence in the War Office and would be promoted to Lieutenant General, having served as Assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff and as Commander of various Corps during the war. He is the only JIC Chairman to have a school named after him.<sup>55</sup> He was joined by his counterparts from the Admiralty, Captain Claude Hermon-Hodge (later a Rear Admiral and the son of Conservative politician Baron Wyfold), and the Air Ministry, Wing Commander Charles Medhurst (later an Air Chief Marshal). All three were senior figures from

their respective intelligence directorates, though they held different ranks. Also in attendance were Colonel Bernard Paget (War Office – later to become General Sir Bernard), Commander Eric Bush (Admiralty – later the author of many military books), and Major Desmond Morton (Industrial Intelligence Centre – later Churchill’s adviser on intelligence matters). The Secretary, Major Leslie Hollis (Royal Marines – later General Sir Leslie and the senior Assistant Secretary of the War Cabinet), was also the Secretary of the JPC.<sup>56</sup>

At its first meeting the Committee wholeheartedly approved the COS recommendations on its role. However, four days prior to the meeting, on 3 July, Hollis questioned how the JIC would work vis-à-vis the ISIC. To most other observers, and indeed to secondary commentators, the JIC had subsumed the ISIC. The difference, Hollis felt, was that the ISIC should deal with problems common to all three Service intelligence directorates, whereas the JIC should address itself solely to problems identified by the JPC.<sup>57</sup> It was accepted that the Committee should help the JPC when it needed intelligence, but when no targets were identified by the JPC the role of the Committee was unclear. This never became a problem as the amount of work quickly grew. The consequence, though, was that the JIC did not adopt any formal terms of reference at this time.

By the time of its second meeting, almost three months later on 29 September 1936, this organisational debate had been partially resolved. The JIC would not only work on papers requested by the JPC, but would also take over the ISIC’s responsibilities. Therefore almost from the outset the Committee had a remit to provide assistance to military planning, but also to act as the central forum for any tri-Service intelligence issues.<sup>58</sup> In order to make this process work efficiently, it was decided at the same time that the JIC Secretary should also be the JPC Secretary, a procedure already in place but one which had been called into question by the JIC’s expanded workload.<sup>59</sup> And so the Committee set to work.<sup>60</sup>

The pace of the Committee’s work increased, although there remained procedural doubts, in particular regarding the dissemination of its product. In an important letter in September 1936, Leslie Hollis, the JIC Secretary, wrote to Colonel Hastings Ismay, the Deputy Secretary of the COS, to emphasise that the JIC’s work would only be useful if there existed a direct channel into the COS discussions. That channel, Hollis argued, should be through him, as he was already an Assistant Secretary to the COS committee in addition to his JIC role.<sup>61</sup> Two days later this request was forwarded to the chiefs of the three Services and was subsequently approved.<sup>62</sup>

At this time there were several tri-Service intelligence committees in addition to the JIC: the FCI and the FCI’s Air Targets Bombing Committee. The IIC had been absorbed into the Department of Overseas Trade. The most important relationship was that between the JIC and FCI. In late 1937 the original and long-established Chairman of the FCI, Sir Edward Crowe, retired. His replacement as Chairman (and concurrently Comptroller-General, Department of Overseas Trade) was Thomas St. Quintin Hill. In assuming his post Hill questioned the rationale behind having separate JIC and FCI gatherings. Instead he proposed that they be amalgamated or, if that would result in too large a committee, have

separate committees for military and civilian issues. Hill's proposal met with universal 'dislike', but perhaps his most important comment was on the value of the FCI's work, recognising the virtues of having a forum whereby 'officers of the Defence Services and the Civil Service have met round a table to discuss common problems'.<sup>63</sup>

One of Hill's other proposals was that any such committee should be chaired by someone from the Treasury. This idea, of having a civilian chairman of an essentially military committee, would re-appear several times in the build-up to the Second World War. In commenting on the proposals, Leslie Hollis, the JIC Secretary, noted the 'inappropriateness' of having a civilian chairman.<sup>64</sup> Upon receiving a critique of his plan from Hankey, Hill decided not to push for any changes.<sup>65</sup>

The two committees continued as before. By 1939 it had become clear, however, that the work of the FCI was no longer as crucial as it had been originally. A proposal was suggested through the new JIC Secretary, Captain Andrew N. Barnard, that the FCI should be subsumed within the JIC, particularly as Desmond Morton (the head of the IIC) attended JIC meetings on a regular basis.<sup>66</sup> The idea was supported by Ismay, now a Major General and Hankey's replacement as Secretary to the CID.<sup>67</sup> This was almost certainly a reflection of the increasing status of the JIC which, by 1939, especially with the involvement of the FO, had become a serious player within Whitehall.<sup>68</sup>

## **Foreign Office Involvement**

The FO's inclusion was the catalyst for the JIC to start realising its potential. Once again it was external circumstances that prompted an internal change. It was generally recognised that during the Committee's first two years of existence it was producing 'good work'. The original Chairman, Brigadier Anderson, was briefly replaced in February 1938 by Brigadier Roger Evans, the Deputy Director of Military Intelligence (who would go on to command the 1st Armoured Division in France in 1940). His appointment was short lived though, and in September 1938 Brigadier Frederick Beaumont-Nesbitt, the new Deputy-Director of Military Intelligence, became the War Office representative on the JIC, FCI, and FCI (Air Targets Bombing) committees.

On the departure of Brigadier Evans the question arose as to who should now chair the JIC meetings. With the exception of one meeting when the Admiralty had taken charge, the War Office had consistently taken the chair from the outset. Hollis, the outgoing secretary, proposed that the War Office continue to lead. Almost certainly this was due to the ongoing disputes between the Admiralty and Air Ministry at this time.

Though initially reluctant, Beaumont-Nesbitt agreed to become the JIC's third Chairman. Beaumont-Nesbitt had been born in 1893 and after joining the Grenadier Guards in 1912 had a varied and fascinating career, including: the Military Attaché in Paris; Deputy, and then Director, of Military Intelligence; Military Attaché in Washington at the time that the Americans joined the war;

and, for over twenty years, various posts in the Royal Household.<sup>69</sup> In reminiscing about his early years in the army, Beaumont-Nesbitt recalled that as a 'callow youth' it was a 'miracle' that he survived. Indeed, his memoirs reveal a litany of pranks whilst a young officer, including memories of a champagne-infused stag party and how his appendix almost burst upon being told he was to be sent to fight in the First World War.<sup>70</sup> His son recalls him 'using a wooden door in the garden, as a target against which he could practise firing a handgun (Browning automatic)'. Beaumont-Nesbitt was certainly a colourful character, remaining known throughout his military career as 'Paddy', on account of his Irish ancestry.<sup>71</sup>

On taking the chair, Beaumont-Nesbitt conducted a review of the existing intelligence arrangements, resulting in a twelve-page report which he submitted to Hollis in December 1938. His proposal, considered 'interesting and, indeed, revolutionary' by the FO, was perhaps the first major step in making the JIC a truly inter-departmental committee.<sup>72</sup> Beaumont-Nesbitt began by distinguishing between 'military intelligence' and 'political intelligence'. Just this small step was, in itself, novel, though it revealed a growing recognition of the importance of political intelligence; it also marked something of an intellectual turning point in defining what 'intelligence' was.

The Services had traditionally seen intelligence as being a purely military matter, concerned almost entirely with capabilities and neglecting any mention of intent. This view had slowly begun to change as the possibility of a European War increased. In such an event it would be important to know not only the capabilities of the other side's forces, but also when or whether a decision might be taken to commence hostilities. As a result, in March 1938 Hankey had asked the FO to prepare an appreciation of the political situation in the event of war with Germany. On the occupation of the Sudetenland by Germany, the JIC had requested the FO to revise its paper, taking into account the JIC's comments and views.<sup>73</sup> It was at the JIC meeting on 16 November 1938 that the FO was in attendance for the first time and thereafter this became the norm. In informing the JIC of Beaumont-Nesbitt's chairmanship, Hollis stated that the Committee would be 'in for a rather busy time in the future', having to work with the FO to produce various political assessments.<sup>74</sup> This was a crucial suggestion, for as Edward Thomas, one of Hinsley's co-authors, has written, 'the really urgent problems of the late 30s called for weighing of both military and political factors.'<sup>75</sup> It was in this atmosphere that Beaumont-Nesbitt presented his report.

In essence the problem, as the JIC Chairman saw it, was that although FO reporting was sent to the Services, they did not know how best to assess it. Furthermore, the lack of integration between the Service departments in day-to-day affairs meant that the material was not being passed to those who needed it most. The situation was particularly acute because the Services needed to keep themselves abreast of the 'international political situation', but were not equipped to do so. The solution was to incorporate such work into the JIC's remit, which was still at this time 'somewhat ill-defined'. As Beaumont-Nesbitt concluded, 'here surely is a deficiency which could and should be made good'. He recommended the existing Committee be enlarged, with the 'inclusion of a

senior FO representative, who would also be asked to act as Chairman'. This proposal was reinforced not only by the increasingly political content of deliberations, but also because it would stop any 'vested interests' from becoming 'too powerful'.<sup>76</sup>

Equally important was Beaumont-Nesbitt's proposal for dealing with the large amount of incoming information. Three different 'sections' should be created, dealing with 1) Europe, Africa and the Middle East; 2) India, Far East, North and South America; and 3) Economics and Propaganda. These sections would comprise representatives from the range of government departments involved in the collection of intelligence: the FO, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Colonial Office, India Office, Department of Overseas Trade, Home Office, and SIS. This, then, would signal the creation of a 'joint staff' to analyse and assess the incoming information.

Up to then SIS had not been involved with the JIC, attending a meeting for the first time in November 1938: the same meeting in which the FO came for the first time. The presence of both was a coincidence: SIS only attended for a specific item; the FO for the whole meeting. In commenting on the proposal, Colonel Stewart Menzies, the Head of the Military Section in SIS and a future Chief, emphasised the importance of the proposed structure: 'our own constantly recurring experience of being called upon for ad hoc notes on various aspects . . . is our strongest proof that such machinery is badly needed'. In addition, Menzies requested that SIS become a member of the JIC, but only at a point when 'inter-departmental discussions' were commonplace. Perhaps for this reason full SIS membership of the JIC would not happen until 1940.<sup>77</sup>

From the records alone there is no evidence as to whether Beaumont-Nesbitt's colleagues on the JIC approved of the idea of the FO taking the chair. The COS argued strongly that a committee that reported to them should not have an FO chairman.<sup>78</sup> The general reaction to Beaumont-Nesbitt's proposal was supportive. Hollis called it 'most attractive' and highlighted the extreme importance of creating a central intelligence authority within the government:

I suggest that in an emergency, we shall find our existing intelligence arrangements would let us down. The government will be receiving disjointed reports from varying sources with no machinery for linking them up with other reports received from other sources on the same subject. Whereas on the Planning side we can, I think, adapt our planning organisation to meet emergency requirements, the weak link in the chain might be the lack of some authoritative body who could give us, at very short notice, co-ordinated intelligence.<sup>79</sup>

Before any decision was taken the paper was circulated to the FO. Sir Lancelot Oliphant, the Deputy Under-Secretary of State in the FO, commented on the necessity to do something about the duplication of effort. He mentioned that FO reporting had been insufficiently used by the Services in the past and approved of the FO being represented on the JIC.<sup>80</sup> Other parts of the FO, however, were

not so keen; with one official writing that it would 'be a duplicate Foreign Office in miniature'.<sup>81</sup> The consensus was that a member of the FO should be made responsible for liaising with the Service departments and for ensuring that they 'accept the political appreciations of the FO'.<sup>82</sup> This idea, that the FO was still the only place in which political intelligence could be interpreted, meant that there had to be an FO involvement, and it seems to have persuaded any doubters.

Despite some initial reluctance the FO agreed to provide a representative. In replying to Oliphant, Beaumont-Nesbitt attempted to resolve the divergence of opinion on the role of the FO. Instead of either of the Services trying to assess political situations, or the FO doing it independently of Service requirements, Beaumont-Nesbitt suggested that 'what we want to do is to devise some organisation whereby all forms of intelligence can be fused into a properly co-ordinated picture. To do this, representatives of the Foreign Office and Service Departments . . . must work together.'<sup>83</sup>

This was not quite as novel as it sounded. In mid-1937 the FO discovered that the intelligence directorate in the War Office was preparing a report on the USSR. The problem was that the FO was also preparing one as was, it appears, the Admiralty.<sup>84</sup> The reaction in the FO was that not only should something be done to co-ordinate matters, but also that Service reports should include an FO summary on the political situation.<sup>85</sup> The Admiralty agreed.<sup>86</sup> Such moves were further crystallised in May 1938, when it was decided that FO political reporting should be incorporated into Service intelligence summaries.<sup>87</sup>

In practice the members of the FO, War Office, Admiralty and Air Ministry would represent the needs and requirements of their home departments. Once a topic had been passed to the JIC, each member would be responsible for liaising with his parent department in order to gather all relevant information. However, the problem of drafting the actual assessments remained and a joint staff was needed to prepare the reports, which would then be discussed at the JIC, and once approved, be passed up to the CID. These developments were recognition that the existing JIC structure could no longer cope with the demands placed upon it. 'Intelligence' now encompassed not only military information but political and economic appreciations too. Now that intelligence was recognised as being central to planning and to Britain's war effort, further change was needed.

### **The Situation Report Centre**

While the discussions of Brigadier Beaumont-Nesbitt's proposals continued, outside events meant that plans had to be expedited. In March 1939 the German Army marched into Prague and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain promised support to Poland in the event of German aggression. The following month, in April, the 'Situation Report Centre' (SRC) was created. It would prove to be a crucial body in improving the standing of the JIC in the run up to war.<sup>88</sup> One of the problems with the JIC's work up to this point was that it was long-term in focus. In March 1939 several events suggested that not only was war becoming

imminent, but that short-term assessments were needed. In addition to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, reports were received from the FO (through Vansittart's networks) that German submarines were purportedly on patrol near Plymouth, and a telex from the Minister in Berlin warning that German bombers would soon attack the Home Fleet. In essence, it was felt that an organisation was needed to look at these 'rumours' and assess their veracity.<sup>89</sup>

The SRC, though initiated by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Lord Chatfield, was originally conceived in response to comments by the Prime Minister. Neville Chamberlain had two concerns: firstly, that before any 'action' should be taken it should be based on the best possible intelligence; and secondly, that something had to be done to further co-ordinate the Service departments.<sup>90</sup> In response, the SRC was tasked with collating intelligence and issuing 'daily situation reports in order that any emergency measures which might have to be taken should be based only on the most reliable and carefully co-ordinated intelligence.'<sup>91</sup> In May the remit was expanded to include, in addition to the daily reports, the production of weekly commentaries on general trends.<sup>92</sup> This crucially filled the void left by the JIC, which was concentrating on much longer term targets.

The SRC assessments were distributed to twenty four recipients, including the Prime Minister, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, the CID, Admiralty, Air Ministry, War Office, FO and SIS.<sup>93</sup> The SRC included the three Service members of the JIC as permanent members, together with Major General Ismay, the Secretary of the CID. Successive JIC Secretaries also serviced the SRC.<sup>94</sup> Despite being separate from the JIC, in circulating the reports the SRC/JIC Secretary, Barnard, informed recipients that the 'Reports should be referred to simply as "Joint Intelligence Committee Reports".'<sup>95</sup>

The SRC was chaired by a FO diplomat, Ralph Skrine Stevenson. Skrine Stevenson was born in India in 1895 and, following commissioned service in the First World War in the Rifle Brigade, joined the Diplomatic Service. Having served in Copenhagen, Berlin, Sofia, the Hague, Barcelona and Cairo, Skrine Stevenson returned to Whitehall in 1937 with the rank of an FO Counsellor, the equivalent grade to a Brigadier. In 1938 he was briefly appointed Minister [or Major General in military terms] in Madrid, the number two in the Embassy, and a key position given the civil war raging at the time. He subsequently returned to the United Kingdom, serving as Private Secretary to Foreign Secretaries Lord Halifax and Anthony Eden, and later as Ambassador in China and then Egypt.<sup>96</sup> Admiral John Godfrey, the wartime DNI, recalled that Skrine Stevenson was 'excellent, and he and his Foreign Office Assistant worked extremely hard to make the show a success'.<sup>97</sup>

At its first meeting on 25 April 1939, Skrine Stevenson outlined why the SRC had been created: 'for the purpose of sifting and disseminating day-to-day secret intelligence in a summarised form which would be available for a very restricted circulation'. It was agreed that there would be daily meetings at 4pm and that 'representatives should bring, in quadruplicate, summaries of the intelligence received in their respective departments up to 3pm on that day.'<sup>98</sup> Reports were

divided into countries, and combined political, military, naval and air intelligence. All weekly reports began with a note that 'this commentary has been prepared jointly by the Foreign Office and the Directors of Intelligence of the Three Service Departments.'<sup>99</sup> It was, then, a truly inter-departmental product.

It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the SRC but it is possible to infer something from how its reports were received. Skrine Stevenson reported that 'the first report was circulated last night and a very useful one it was, on right lines'.<sup>100</sup> A few weeks later in mid-May, Skrine Stevenson wrote how the military information was not very reassuring, but that all available information was being utilised by the Service departments. 'C', the chief of SIS, was recorded as being 'entirely happy' with the process. However, another comment, referred to 'seemingly reliable information' having been ignored.<sup>101</sup>

In mid-May the War Office wrote to the Treasury to inform them that it was having staffing difficulties in filling its spot on the SRC.<sup>102</sup> The recipient of the letter, taking ten days to consider it, passed the request on to the FO because he could not 'recollect having heard of this [organisation]'.<sup>103</sup> The reply explained that 'the whole thing is kept as secret as possible', and that 'the extra work entailed by it is very considerable and is growing'.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, within the FO debates were underway about the future of its various intelligence and co-ordinating sections. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the PUS, commented on how the 'Dominions Intelligence' outfit should be combined with the SRC to provide a forum for 'liaison with the CID', and that a separate economic and co-ordinating section should be created.<sup>105</sup>

If the requests for copies of the daily Situation Reports are anything to go by, then the SRC was doing an extremely good job. Several prominent ambassadors asked to see copies of the daily reports, yet the SRC was reluctant to grant wider distribution because of the information contained within them. Indeed, from the outset a 'Note Regarding Secret Sources of Obtaining Information' was produced, detailing how important it was that the SRC reports were not circulated so that sources and methods would not be compromised. It was even felt that to send the reports outside London could pose a security breach.<sup>106</sup> Discussions at this time reveal the substantial SIS input to the reports. In fact, Admiral Sinclair, the Chief of SIS, requested that Ismay send him copies of the daily report 'so that I can be sure that our information has been correctly interpreted'.<sup>107</sup>

In mid-June Skrine Stevenson, through the auspices of the SRC, produced a paper on the co-ordination of intelligence in time of war. The report echoed Beaumont-Nesbitt's proposals of late 1938 in arguing that the present arrangements were not suitable for wartime. The difference between the two was that whereas Beaumont-Nesbitt's original proposal related to the JIC (at this time still concerned with long term threats), Skrine Stevenson's SRC report mentioned that short term threats were not being dealt with efficiently and in a co-ordinated manner. The two reports should be seen as complementary, essentially labouring the same point for the strategic JIC and the tactical SRC. In commenting on Skrine Stevenson's paper, Beaumont-Nesbitt, now Director of Military Intelligence, suggested that he look at his own proposal of six months earlier.<sup>108</sup>

Beaumont-Nesbitt's original proposal, despite the initial enthusiasm, had come to nothing. The primary reason seems to have been a desire to avoid changing the existing structure given the threat of war: any re-organisation would inevitably lead to upheaval and would take time – which might not be available – to settle down. The FO was, at this point, not attending the JIC regularly, though it was generally recognised that its attendance would be beneficial.<sup>109</sup>

The draft of the 'Co-ordination of Intelligence' memorandum, prepared by the SRC, includes a fascinating section on the 'need for the co-ordination of intelligence', which was omitted from the final version.<sup>110</sup> The draft outlined how the JIC was not able to adequately fulfil the central co-ordinating role between the FO and the Services because it lacked an FO representative. It is worth re-emphasising here that the original rationale for the JIC was as a military co-ordinating body, therefore an FO presence was almost a reversal of what it had been created to do. That FO attendance was now needed was a reflection of the changing times. The central issue, as Skrine Stevenson explained to Cadogan, was that to ensure effective co-ordination of intelligence, a permanent liaison relationship between the FO and the Services needed to be created. The solution was to 're-constitute the JIC' as the forum for this.<sup>111</sup> Although expressing some concern that the JIC was the 'handmaiden' of the COS, Cadogan supported the idea.<sup>112</sup>

The central obstacle to the proposition – which everyone agreed was, in theory, a good idea – was whether an FO representative should and could be allowed to chair a COS sub-committee. Skrine Stevenson noted that 'in principle it was doubtless quite wrong that an FO representative should serve on a Committee controlled by other Departments of State but, our aim being to increase efficiency in the coordination and presentation of intelligence, I would be in favour of accepting the situation and re-constituting the Joint Intelligence Committee, leaving it as an offshoot of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee.'<sup>113</sup> The JIC met formally to discuss the matter on 29 June 1939 and approved it. In informing Ismay, Leslie Hollis called it a 'rather peculiar business', but at the same time said that it was 'quite unobjectionable'.<sup>114</sup>

The proposal then had to be ratified throughout the Whitehall chain before anything could actually be done. The DCOS Committee gave approval on 14 July 1939. Although the DCOS was happy for a FO member to attend the meeting, it initially rejected the proposal that the FO representative should take the chair, though the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff then informed his counterparts that he wanted to give the matter 'further consideration'.<sup>115</sup> The DCOS re-considered the matter a fortnight later, with the Air Ministry and Admiralty representatives still expressing discomfort over having a non-military chairman. The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff tried to reassure his colleagues by re-iterating the FO position that their representative had to be of a Counsellor rank, equating to what would now be known as a 1-star military officer, therefore on a par with the Service representatives, but if such a person was to be subordinate to the Services it would be difficult to find someone willing to fill the post.<sup>116</sup> Admiral John Godfrey, on the other hand, recalled that 'this

seemed rather a good scheme as it would ensure that the Foreign Office took a lively interest in the proceedings of the JIC'.<sup>117</sup>

After some careful manoeuvring behind the scenes – Skrine Stevenson observed that this was ‘privately’ pointed out to the DCOS – the DCOS subsequently ruled that the JIC should make its own decision. The account that he provided for the FO file is the only surviving version of how it assumed the chairmanship, and clearly suggests that it was FO support for the idea that made it possible:

[referring to JIC 130] . . . it will be observed that the Deputy Chiefs of Staff have omitted the recommendation dealing with the Chairmanship of the re-constituted JIC. I understand that at their first meeting to consider this matter the Deputy Chiefs of Staff desired to lay down the principle that as the handmaiden of the Chiefs of Staff the JIC could not have a Foreign Office Chairman. It was, however, pointed out to them privately that if they laid down any such rule the rank and responsibility of the Foreign Office representative would have to be re-considered. The Deputy Chiefs of Staff then had second thoughts and at a subsequent meeting decided to leave the question of Chairman to the JIC itself (as is the case with other Sub-Committees of the CID); and have contented themselves with deleting the relevant recommendations. As, however, the JIC have already decided the question, the Chairman will in fact be the FO representative except when questions of the internal organisation of the intelligence systems of the Fighting Services are under consideration. I think that we can leave the matter at that. The main point, i.e. the constitution of the JIC to include a FO representative, has been gained and it is well understood by the Directors of Intelligence that from every point of view it is more convenient that the FO representative should be Chairman.<sup>118</sup>

The matter was concluded on 3 August 1939 when the FO chair was formally accepted by the JIC. It was also on this date that, for the first time, the JIC was chaired by the FO, with Ralph Skrine Stevenson taking the role, something that it would do for the next forty-four years.<sup>119</sup> The JIC’s composition and responsibilities were expanded and re-iterated:

- (a) that this Committee should consist of a Counsellor from the Foreign Office and the Directors of Intelligence of the three Service Departments, or their Deputies, assisted or represented as might be necessary by the junior officers whose employment with the Situation Report Centre has already been sanctioned.
- (b) That this Committee should continue to issue the Daily Reports and Weekly Commentaries at present produced by the Situation Report Centre and should also be charged with the following duties:
  - (i) The assessment and co-ordination of intelligence received from abroad with the object of ensuring that any Government action which might