Thinking about Defence Intelligence: Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, Denis Capel-Dunn, Kenneth Strong and the Joint Intelligence Bureau as foundation for the Defence Intelligence Staff.

Abstract

The Defence Intelligence Staff’s closest relative was the Joint intelligence Bureau. The Bureau was created in 1946 as part of the post war reorganisation of the intelligence machinery, consolidating a number of wartime organisations. It was a centralised organisation, providing defence intelligence to customers in the armed forces and government. The Bureau was founded with the objective of implementing several lessons that had been identified in the Second World War concerning the organisation and management of intelligence. This paper examines the particular lessons the Bureau’s founders and its leader had learned, and the ideas they sought to ingrain in the organisation. It asks what kind of foundation the Bureau provided for the DIS, when it merged with the service intelligence directorates in 1964.

‘To sum up, I think that all DMI’s suggestions are a result of the old, and to my mind indefensible error, that is frequently to be found in the War Office, and sometimes to be found in the other Service Ministries to-day, namely that a distinction can be drawn between military and other intelligence. Now that we are dealing with total war, there are very few aspects of intelligence that can be so neatly pigeon-holed.’

Denis Capel-Dunn, 20 February 1945

Since 1964 the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS), renamed Defence Intelligence (DI) in 2009, has provided all source ‘intelligence assessments, advice and strategic warning’ to the government and armed forces. It is not the first British organisation to fulfil this role. The history of British intelligence is littered with organisations that were established to provide the military and policy makers with various manifestations of what we now consider defence intelligence. The need for intelligence came with fighting imperial wars and maintaining imperial peace. There was a tradition of officers on ‘shooting leave’ gathering economic, topographic, and military intelligence for the defence of India, and of enterprising officers establishing intelligence sections in response to military failures, partly attributable to poor intelligence. But there is an equally long tradition of running down developed intelligence capability. Six departments, whose primary function was to supply the Army and War Office with topographical and statistical intelligence about foreign countries, rose and fell between 1803 and 1906. Time and again it was forgotten that intelligence, as much as any other part of the national defence machinery, needs to prepare for war during peace. Britain established its secret services in 1909, but consistently failed to establish a permanent all-source defence intelligence capability for the age of empire or for the age of the two World Wars.
Owing to the slow, stuttering pace of establishing a British defence intelligence organisation, neither DIS nor DI traces its lineage back to the pioneers of British military intelligence and their organisations, men like Thomas Jervis, who established the Topographical and Statistical Department in 1854, or Henry Brackenbury who, in 1887, headed the Intelligence Branch as the first Director of Military Intelligence. Instead, DI’s website and the various editions of ‘National Intelligence Machinery’, the British government’s concise guide to the intelligence bureaucracy, trace its ancestry to 1946 and the creation of the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB). The JIB consolidated several intelligence organisations that had been established for the Second World War. It was a centralised organisation, supplying military and civilian customers with national intelligence assessments on subjects of inter-service and defence policy relevance. It became the national authority on topographic, economic, scientific, and, eventually, atomic intelligence. It was also an all-source agency, processing the product of the secret intelligence machinery and gathering its own osint. Before it merged with the service intelligence directorates to form the DIS in 1964, it was, as one Ministry of Defence (MoD) official described it, a ‘factory for churning out intelligence’. The JIB was established under Major General Kenneth Strong, who became the first Director General of Intelligence in 1964. So it was the DIS’s most immediate ancestor, both in terms of function and management. It was a significant break with the past, and its establishment was the result of the dedication of a small number of officers. This paper explores the philosophy of the Bureau’s founders and its leader, Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) Chairman Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, Secretary to the JIC Denis Capel-Dunn, and Kenneth Strong. It examines the effect these men’s ideas about the management of national intelligence had on the development of the Bureau. And it asks what kind of foundation the JIB provided for the DIS?

**From World War to Cold War: The JIB’s founders, their ideas, objectives and achievements**

Kenneth Strong noted in his autobiography that the JIB was the ‘first attempt at the unified handling and objective analysis of intelligence need by more than one government department.’ It was, he argued, ‘a tacit acknowledgement that the military strength of a potential opponent cannot be calculated only on the basis of such obvious factors as numbers of divisions, aircraft or ships. We had learned from bitter experience that military strength depends on economic, geographic, psychological and other factors’. This was a clear truth in the age of total war, and in several respects it is surprising that it had not been institutionalised before the Second World War. It is equally surprising that even after the war the concept of unified intelligence, embodied in the nascent JIB, faced determined opposition from sections of the military and intelligence establishment.

Two men, in particular, can be credited with recognising the need for such an organisation in peacetime, for overcoming objections, and for driving its creation: JIC Chairman Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, and Secretary to the JIC Denis Capel-Dunn. Both men cut their teeth in the wartime intelligence bureaucracy. Their concept for the post war intelligence machinery was the foundation for British defence intelligence. Their ideas are examined below.

The wartime intelligence establishment had grown in rather an ad-hoc manner, and, despite the growing prominence and authority of the JIC, it lacked a single, central controlling body. Sigint and deception, for example, lay outside the JIC’s remit. By the summer of 1943 it was clear that the machinery would need reorganising for peace. Eventually, there were several investigations into the
post war role of Britain’s various intelligence agencies. But the most significant with regards defence intelligence was the report commissioned by the JIC in 1943, penned over the course of 1944, and presented to the Committee in January 1945. It was titled ‘The Intelligence Machine’.

The main author of ‘The Intelligence Machine’ was Denis Capel-Dunn. He remains something of a mysterious figure. Before the war he enjoyed a brief career in the diplomatic service, was commissioned in the Territorial Army, and in 1938 departed government service for the Bar. He was drawn into the world of intelligence assessment ‘because of his drafting abilities’, according to former JIC chairman Percy Cradock. As well as acting as the JIC’s secretary he headed the Cabinet Office’s Joint Staff Secretariat, which placed him at allied conferences in Moscow and Yalta, and occasionally as secretary for Churchill. He died on the return journey from the United Nations’ inauguration. Those who remember him portray an energetic administrator, and an ambitious man. He devoted considerable energy to improving coordination between civilian and military intelligence staffs.

Working at the JIC, with its focus on collegiality and all-source assessment, clearly influenced Capel-Dunn’s ideas about the principles that should govern British intelligence in peacetime. His time at the heart of British intelligence coincided with a profound development in the power and authority of the Committee, and a clear demonstration of the merits of centralised organisations, staffed on an inter-service and civilian basis. The Committee itself, after an uncertain beginning, developed into a respected authority on enemy capabilities and intentions, supporting the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet with strategic intelligence assessments. Below the Committee, several other organisations demonstrated the merits of centralisation. Capel-Dunn underlined two in a briefing note on the developments in inter-service cooperation during the war, the Joint Intelligence Staff and the Intelligence Section Operations. Both organisations reported to the JIC; the former drafting reports on enemy intentions for the approval of the Committee, and the latter a ‘clearing house for factual intelligence of all kinds.’ Both had good wars; both they and the JIC embodied principles worth preserving and, if possible, expanding.

Therefore, for Capel-Dunn and several others, the war had underlined the importance of ‘jointery’, and, indeed, of a national intelligence machine rather than disparate departments. With the support of Cavendish-Bentinck he went on to examine the problem for the future, and as early as April 1943 was prepared to make recommendations for the future of British intelligence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, centralisation was a clear theme. ‘At present’, he noted, ‘the information thus collected [by the services intelligence agencies and the secret services] is collated separately by “country sections” in the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, the War Office, the Air Ministry, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, Special Operations Executive, and the Political Warfare Executive.’ He went on to note that each of these departments believed it required information ‘for its own special purposes and, therefore, employs its own separate staff to study and interpret it’. And how, if the matter was not sufficiently important to be brought to the attention of the national analysts in the JIS, it was entirely possible for different departments to proceed with different assessments of the same topic. This would not do for peace. He stated ‘I can see no reason why in future a central organisation both for the collection and collation of all intelligence should not be established.’ This would be all-source, and the raw intelligence would be processed by an inter-service staff. The benefits would be manifest in terms of economy, manpower, and efficiency.
Capel-Dunn’s idea was in line with his general ideas regarding the management of British defence. He was firmly set against reverting to the 1930s and the Committee on Imperial Defence system, which lacked permanent coordinating and management structures. After the war, Britain needed what he termed ‘a living organisation’, reporting to the Minister of Defence. This needed to be unified to prevent a ‘situation in which the Services speak with different tongues and responsibility for Imperial Defence in divided both politically and administratively’. The model he had in mind was, he noted, ‘something on the lines of the German high command’.

Judging by the disquiet caused by the creation of the JIC and the services’ doubts over motives and effectiveness of the Ministry of Defence there can be little doubt that Capel-Dunn’s 1943 ideas were too revolutionary to be implemented. However, he pursued the principles ruthlessly, countering proposals for post war systems that reinforced service departments rather than the central machinery.

This included countering the early ideas of Geoffrey Vickers, Deputy Director of economic intelligence at the Ministry of Economic Warfare. Vickers, like Capel-Dunn, was considering the future of British intelligence and the role of his own department. He circulated his ideas on the subject in May 1943. He argued that there was a clear need to maintain and develop Britain’s economic intelligence capability. He believed the principal strategic target of modern weapons of war, the bomber and the guided missile, was ‘inevitably’ the war economy. And these weapons would continue to be used in conjunction with the more conventional weapons of economic war, the blockade and the embargo. Britain would be subject to such campaigns, and would also wage them. To be effective, they had to be based on sound economic intelligence.

Capel-Dunn concurred with the requirement, but disagreed with Vickers’ proposed solution, which he characterised as ‘a small body of perpetually changing officials’ reporting either to the Foreign Secretary or the Minister of Defence. ‘The fact is’, he noted, ‘that the future of economic intelligence after the war cannot possibly be considered apart from the future of the intelligence organisation as a whole.’

He urged the JIC Chairman, Cavendish-Bentinck, to discourage Vickers from circulating his ideas any further. A move in any direction from the central machinery would have constituted a retreat.

Capel-Dunn could have been in little doubt that his recommendations to Cavendish-Bentinck would be received sympathetically. Perhaps owing to their years together on the JIC, driving its development, they were bound to absorb and then espouse similar principles. Like Capel-Dunn, Cavendish-Bentinck was not as an intelligence man by training. He had served with the Army during the First World War, but this was only an interruption to a career in the diplomatic service. He chose to Chair the JIC instead of a posting as head of the Egyptian and African Department of the Foreign Office; ‘he felt it was likely to give him more scope and to be more interesting.’

His management of the JIC during the war demonstrated the deft touch of a career diplomat and a talent for resolution with the military members, who were generally his senior, often prickly, and characterised as ‘a group of individuals’ rather than collegiate. His most significant achievement was persisting with the Committee through its dysfunctional days and ensuring its maturation into an authoritative body that was respected by the Chiefs of Staff and Prime Minister. This has been described by his contemporaries as his ‘greatest contribution to British intelligence in particular, and to the war effort in general.’

But Cavendish-Bentinck’s Chairmanship also exposed him to the strife and inefficiency of a system where individual services and departments would often pursue their own interests regardless of the overall cost in economic or efficiency terms. His biographer notes the Chairman’s disapproval of a wartime episode where he happened upon ‘junior officers in the intelligence
divisions of the Air Ministry, War Office, and the Admiralty all doing the same job, writing the same things, gathering the same information, most of it not secret in any way.  

Capel-Dunn has been characterised as the ‘ideas man’ behind the post war central intelligence machinery and the JIB. He drafted ‘the Intelligence Machine’, as well as several other memoranda on centralising intelligence that later bore Cavendish-Bentinck’s signature. Former JIC secretary Michael Herman notes that the JIC Chairman ‘added authority and common sense.’ But there is ample evidence that Cavendish-Bentinck was a man of his own mind, a powerful advocate for maintaining the principles embodied in the Cabinet Office intelligence machinery and expanding them after the war in pursuit of efficiency, economies, and effectiveness. Those who admired his management of the JIC consider his views on intelligence to have been ‘ahead of their time’ in at least three respects. First, his observations of the relative inefficiency of the service intelligence staffs persuaded him that a centralised system was necessary. This belief was, no doubt, the source of his support for enhancing the role of the JIC as Britain’s senior intelligence body, and for the establishment of the JIB. Second, and perhaps owing to his background in the diplomatic service rather than the secret services, he appears not to have been overawed by spies and excessive secrecy. There was no question that secret work should continue – the well placed agent and the work of Britain’s code-breakers were often invaluable – but lower grade agents were less useful, often providing what could be gathered by normal research. Cavendish-Bentinck believed that straightforward research from non-secret sources should be encouraged. It was more efficient and, crucially, easier to disseminate. He had realised that the extremely high level of secrecy that some seemed determined to apply to all intelligence products often undermined the consumers’ confidence in those very products. Third, he realised that Britain would be equalled, and inevitably overtaken, as an intelligence and military power by the United States. After Pearl Harbor he ‘had put his experience in British intelligence unreservedly at the disposal of the Americans’, and later urged them to develop a central system to bypass inter-service rivalry in intelligence. International cooperation, particularly with the US, would have to be a hallmark of British intelligence practice after the war. His subordinates on the JIC did the early running on the future shape of the intelligence machinery. But, as is demonstrated by his correspondence with Capel-Dunn, he was drawn into discussions on the post war machinery soon after they started. As victory neared and the tempo of the war dictated that intelligence departments, like the intelligence branch of the MEW, dwindled in terms of their wartime usefulness and could be absorbed by other departments of state, it was inevitable that his influence in the debate grew, both to give it some order and help shape it according to his own ideas.

The principle that the JIC should consider and discuss the post war intelligence organisation was agreed in 1943. In August, Cavendish-Bentinck noted to the Committee that his principal concern was that the intelligence machinery survive the war, and suggested some ideas for its future form. Thereafter, a good number of reports were requested of the various agency heads who sat on the JIC; some were produced, some apparently not. But there is no mention in JIC minutes of an agreement to commission a comprehensive report into the central intelligence machinery. The reference in the introduction to the ‘Intelligence Machine’ to the JIC’s ‘invitation’ to produce a report may refer in reality to a self-invitation. The investigation seems very much to have been a two man affair. (In explaining to David Petrie, MI5 Director General, the purpose of their investigation, Cavendish-Bentinck referred to the ‘investigation that he [Capel-Dunn] and I are carrying out at the request of the Joint Intelligence sub-Committee’.) They did, however, have the support of the
powerful Cabinet Secretary, Sir Edward Bridges. This may be a reflection of the JIC Chairman and Secretary’s desire to present their ideas and plans in an undiluted manner to the Chiefs of Staff, bypassing individual service interests. By late 1943 the service representatives on the JIC were broadly supportive of the principle of joint and centralised intelligence assessment in the JIC, the Director of Military Intelligence, Major-General F. H. N. Davidson, for example, noted that ‘no other sort of intelligence can fit the bill’. But they also pursued their own services’ interests, and their ideas were sometimes at odds with Cavendish-Bentinck’s objective. For example, he noted his doubts that the transfer of Vickers’ MEW economic intelligence arm to the Foreign Office was a satisfactory permanent solution. Collection of economic intelligence was of inter-departmental relevance and should therefore be centralised. And some on the Committee were undoubtedly wary of too influential and general a centralised organisation. They suggested that it would be far easier to construct a bespoke, efficient central structure at the outbreak of the next war, rather than endure an imposed central system, find it unworkable, do away with it, and begin again. This was as unacceptable to the JIC Chairman as it was to Capel-Dunn. If they only took one lesson away from the experience of the Second World War it was that they needed to prepare for war in peace.

The report Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn presented to the JIC in January 1945 was a clear statement of the principles they believed should govern the management of British intelligence. It began with a clear indictment of the services’ attitude to intelligence in the 1930s: ‘In the War Office in peace time there was no separate Directorate of Intelligence, and in the Air Ministry the peace-time intelligence organisation was, frankly, not impressive’; ‘In the Army, at any rate, intelligence was a dangerous branch of the Staff for an ambitious officer to join.’ To their concern, other than at the Admiralty, there was no guarantee that this situation had fundamentally changed. ‘Indeed’, they noted, ‘it would be foolish to pretend that even now, in the sixth year of the war, intelligence had not many critics.’ Therefore, the most fundamental principle they stated was that intelligence had to be valued and prioritised as a national asset in peace as well as war: ‘it cannot win battles, but if it is absent or faulty, battles may easily be lost.’

The questions naturally arising from the core principle of preparation in peacetime were how this intelligence should be produced and delivered, and which principles should govern this process? The wartime machine had produced intelligence of great value, but it tolerated duplication and inefficiencies. Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn noted ‘there were, no doubt, excellent reasons for the decisions that led to this state of affairs’, and continued, ‘it may well have been right under the pressure of war to avoid any dislocation that any attempt at rationalisation would have caused.’ However, only ‘goodwill and the national genius for making the best of anomalies, has produced remarkably good results from this strange machine.’ Something simpler and more economical was needed for peace. The second set of principles for the post war machinery were, therefore, set as rationalisation and economy. These would best be maintained in a centralised structure. Few, the report argued, would question the benefits of the inter-service cooperation that had developed over the war: ‘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 and appreciation among other workers in the same field’.

To best embody these principles the post war intelligence machinery required certain characteristics: the agency best suited for the collection of a particular type of intelligence should do so; if possible, no two agencies should collect the same intelligence from the same source; material
collected should be collated with other material bearing on the same subject; information should be disseminated to those with an interest in it. The machine should be controlled by a strong inter-service and inter-departmental body, representing the needs of producers and consumers of intelligence.  

Bearing these points in mind, Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck proposed a ‘certain amalgamation of existing inter-service and inter-departmental bodies so as to provide a central intelligence agency.’ Departmental individualism was a problem; centralisation, economy, and inter-service cooperation were the solutions.

In terms of the overall management of the community they, predictably, recommended the maintenance of the JIC. More innovative was their solution for the problem of inter-service intelligence. Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck proposed the ‘Central Intelligence Bureau’. Somewhat underdeveloped in January 1945 – the question of the future of economic intelligence remained unanswered – it nonetheless bore the key hallmarks of their experience and ideas with regards intelligence, in particular an emphasis on gathering and processing open source intelligence. The Bureau was discussed at the JIC in March 1945; its creation was approved in principle, with details to be debated by a sub-committee. By June ‘Central’ had given way to ‘Joint’, and the Chiefs of Staff were informed that this was a major component of the post war plan for the intelligence machine. This idea, and the concepts it embodied, was the foundation for the Joint Intelligence Bureau and British Cold War defence intelligence.

The Bureau was responsible for absorbing and continuing the work of the pre-war Industrial Intelligence Centre and the wartime intelligence functions of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, the Inter Service Topographic Department, and the Intelligence Section (Operations). This made it responsible for collecting, assessing, and appreciating intelligence material of inter-departmental relevance. In keeping with Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck’s goals, it was an economising and rationalising organisation. Without it, they argued, ‘additional staffs would be needed in the Service and other Ministries, to do the same work less efficiently’. JIB implemented several lessons the JIC had identified in its review of wartime intelligence. The primary lesson being that before the war Britain before the war lacked ‘an adequate machine, on an inter-service basis, for collating and appreciating intelligence for defence purposes’. Its architects intended the JIB to remedy this by studying a broad range of subjects in peace, both in preparation for future war and to support the national intelligence machinery. It would utilise the product of the secret intelligence services, but would not be limited by secret sources. It was given the responsibility for collecting, processing, and integrating open source intelligence with secretive materials. It was a national agency, not be beholden to the services; its Director would sit on the JIC with service intelligence directors. It would be funded through the Ministry of Defence vote. The JIC would set its priorities.

The JIB was somewhat dilute when compared to Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck’s original proposal. The structure could not be too centralised, nor could the individual service directorates be dissolved. The services retained their intelligence staffs, and retained responsibility over intelligence for subjects of primary interest of their department. JIB also retained more of a service flavor than its founders would probably have wished, judging by their analysis of the questionable record of the services during the war. The approved JIB design was staffed mainly by civilians. But it could not be too civilianised, lest the civilians fail to satisfy the services’ requirements. This was to be ensured, the JIC noted, by having a director or deputy-director ‘on the active or retired list’ and ensuring that a healthy cohort of the staff were former officers. This, indeed, transpired with the initial cohort of
JIB employees. It was directed by Major-General Kenneth Strong, Eisenhower’s former intelligence man. His deputy was Martin Watson, a MEW veteran. Below them, the senior staff had ample military pedigree: Allan Crick had served with Strong at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force; Arthur Fawsett, who headed the JIB’s Central Division, dealing with the USSR, was once described by Marshal of the Royal Air force, Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris as ‘the best intelligence officer he had ever known’; and Peter Earle had worked on Field-Marshal Montgomery’s staff.

Nevertheless Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck had achieved a considerable measure of success in integrating their core principles of efficiency, economy, centralisation, preparation, and national intelligence into the post war machine. It was, as Herman succinctly notes, ‘a brave step in the right direction’. They had inspired an organisation that would collect and collate intelligence bearing on defence for all interested departments. Its Director sat on the JIC with the service intelligence directors, ensuring that the national intelligence body received an input on a wide variety of subjects from a body concerned with defence interests, rather than individual service considerations. And it was an organisation that attempted to do away with an unhealthy obsession with secrecy. Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck had noted in ‘the Intelligence Machine’ how a great deal of relevant material had been ‘mined from unofficial intelligence’, and how they regretted seeing this go to waste in peace. JIB was designed to remedy this. This openness was reflected in the organisation’s public profile after it set to work on 12 June 1946. Its founding was noted in the newspaper of record, The Times.

Carrying the Torch: Kenneth Strong, Intelligence and Government

Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck may have lay the foundation for the JIB but they did not play a significant role in its development. Cavendish-Bentinck was replaced as JIC Chairman in 1945 and was posted as British ambassador to Poland; Capel-Dunn died in a plane crash in July of the same year. The man generally associated with the Bureau is its first and only Director, Major-General Sir Kenneth Strong. A redoubtable figure, and respected intelligence talent, he nurtured the nascent JIB from a minnow into a capable and useful component of the British intelligence machine. By the time his organisation was merged with the service intelligence staffs to form the DIS in 1964, he had worked tirelessly to maintain the founding principles of the organisation, and apply his own. This section introduces Strong’s ideas on intelligence, illustrates their similarity to Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn’s, and how they became ingrained in the organisation.

Unlike Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck, Kenneth Strong was an intelligence man before the war. He was an Army Officer, commissioned in the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1920. His first intelligence role was in Ireland. He had no formal training, but developed a network of agents and stirred the IRA to a point that they threatened his assassination. This experience germinated a fascination with intelligence and Strong soon sought similar work. The first opportunity he found was in the Rhineland. He learned German to gain the posting, which he took in 1926. He went on to work at the Staff College and in the War Office at MI 14, German Intelligence. In 1937 he was posted military attaché to Berlin. His most significant wartime intelligence role was as Eisenhower’s intelligence man, heading the intelligence staff at Allied Force Headquarters. There he worked closely with the American staff, including General Walter Bedell Smith, the future Director of Central Intelligence, and General Eisenhower. At the General’s side he was privy to many crucial wartime events,
including Overlord, Marked Garden, the Ardennes offensive, and Germany’s surrender. These formative years had underlined for Strong key principles about the operation of intelligence and its relations with policy, principles he became determined to apply to his Cold War posting.

The first principle was centralisation. This grew from two lessons he had identified. The first regarded his experience of working with single service intelligence staffs in the 1930s and during the war. Their tendency to be insular and ignore information at odds with their preconceptions had led to serious difficulties. Good intelligence entered the system, but was often undermined by analysts and technicians imbued with ‘not invented here’ syndrome. Clear evidence that the Germans used one machine-gun for both light and heavy roles failed to impress technical staffs; the ‘surprise’ in 1940 that anti-aircraft guns were used in anti-tank roles was entirely needless.

This occurred because intelligence was not prioritised, not specialised, and a poor cousin to operations. The armed forces’ intelligence culture did not necessarily promote continuity or the development of deep expertise. Professionalisation was necessary to develop a new culture that respected intelligence. The second lesson related to the realities of modern warfare and defence intelligence. As Strong noted, ‘we had learned from bitter experience that military strength depends economic, geographic, psychological and other factors’. Total war required the mobilisation of nations, so intelligence had to study nations as a whole; this was best done centrally, on an inter-service basis. His philosophy on centralisation is summarised in his oft-quoted passage: ‘the speed and complexity with which military, political, economic, scientific and social factors can interact, and the rapidity of social and political chance, make completely anachronistic the type of intelligence-estimating machinery that leans heavily on elaborately insulated departments studying specialist fields of human activity. Modern conditions demand integration and professionalism.’ He accepted the JIB Directorship, against the advice of some friends and colleagues, because he believed that for increased economy, efficiency and influence further integration of the service staffs was a clear necessity. As he noted, ‘I hoped to preside over such a process of integration; the JIB was the beginning.’

The second principle was internationalisation. Working with fellow attaches in pre-war Germany, and leading an international staff during the war, had convinced Strong that managing the increased intelligence burden efficiently and economically in the age of global threat could only be accomplished through cooperation. The most obvious vector of cooperation was with the United States. He left Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe keen on retaining connections with the Americans with whom he had worked so closely. And he observed the establishment of the CIA with enthusiasm, considering it an organisation with vast resources and redoubtable leadership, ‘one of the main defensive barriers of the West.’ But he also saw great potential in the other English-speaking powers. Indeed, according to Christopher Andrew he was ‘almost obsessed with Commonwealth collaboration.’ Burden sharing was key for maintaining economical services, but also for exploiting expertise on a global scale. As the JIC underlined to the Australians, in encouraging them to establish their own Joint Intelligence Bureau reporting to JIB London, ‘considerable advantages will accrue to both you and ourselves and a further link in the commonwealth defence organisation will be forged’. In this respect, of course, Strong’s philosophy was in keeping with the general thrust of British intelligence which was focused on ensuring the continuity of advantageous wartime arrangements, especially in sigint.

The third principle concerned limiting unnecessary secrecy in intelligence work. He was convinced that the bulk of defence intelligence could be gathered more or less openly, and remained
unconvinced about the value attributed glamorous secret agents. As Eisenhower’s biographer notes of Strong, ‘Whilst training intelligence officers during the Second World War he was keen on dispelling any “Hollywood” ideas his men harboured regarding intelligence work, highlighting that it was more a scientific matter than a cloak and dagger affair.’ At the root of this principle were two observations. First, that excessive secrecy of the intelligence product often had a detrimental effect on its impact as it limited its circulation, often absurdly. ‘Intelligence’, Strong noted, ‘is meant to be used.’ Second, that intelligence needed to understand societies as a whole, and that much of the information required for this was openly available. What it required was expert analysis and a robust organisation that could deliver it to customers, not a silver bullet from a spy. Strong’s formative experience in this regard was the confused state of British intelligence at the outbreak of World War Two, and the perceived surprise at German tactics. Several aspects of the surprise were unnecessary; a huge amount of relevant information had already been gathered in London. The problems were in analysis, organisation, and communication. This belief let to his insistence that intelligence work should be the responsibility of experts and civilian professionals, not necessarily military officers on rotation; the economist had as much to offer to the defence of the realm as the soldier. In applauding Cavendish-Bentinck’s attitude towards secrecy, and the foundation in the JIB, Strong reiterated that certain aspects of operational work required great secrecy; what was ‘not so sensible is to allow this aura of secrecy to spill over into matters which are in much less need of protection.’

Strong’s Key Achievements

Strong Directed the JIB for eighteen years. There can be little doubt that he was an excellent choice to maintain and develop the organisation along similar principles to those Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck sought to ingrain in the post-war intelligence machinery. Fundamentally, he maintained similar principles. Equally important, however, was his ability to ensure the survival and growth of the JIB in the face of early opposition, and lead it whilst more senior figures in Whitehall became convinced by the merits of jointery and centralisation. His empire building, passion for Commonwealth collaboration, connections in the US, the respect for him in Whitehall and the military developed JIB into a far more heavyweight organisation than it might have been. Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck’s crowning achievement was to maintain the centralised machinery, with the JIC at its heart, and a new Bureau. Strong’s was to leave an indelible mark on the organisation, and indeed on the DIS that emerged in 1964.

It is possible to examine these achievements in line with Capel-Dunn, Cavendish-Bentinck, and Strong’s key ideas. In terms of centralisation he achieved much, although perhaps not as much as, ideally, he would have liked (after all, Richard Aldrich describes Strong as ‘a great evangelist of centralisation’). Nevertheless, the initial struggle to establish the JIB in the face of opposition from various quarters of the armed services as well as the Treasury was broadly successful. By the 1949 Douglas Evill ‘Review of Intelligence Organisations’ the Bureau, which had owing to financial pressure been established initially on a ‘skeleton and experimental basis’, had flourished into an eight-department organisation, producing national intelligence on a number of key inter-departmental areas. Friction with the services was under control. And it was established as Britain’s national authority on economic intelligence. Evill described the progress as ‘very
satisfactory’. The momentum continued throughout the 1950s as various reviews exposed inefficiencies in Britain’s scientific intelligence organisations. First, the Brundrett review led to the Bureau absorbing the Directorate of Scientific Intelligence (DSI) in 1954. Second, following the Daniel review, the Atomic Energy Intelligence Unit was transferred in the same direction. The centralisation of these subjects and organisations only reinforced the JIB’s supporters’ beliefs about the necessity of studying foreign targets in their entirety. For example, divorcing the study of Soviet atomic weapons from the study of the missiles that would deliver them was clearly inefficient and, in several senses, illogical. By 1964 the principle of centralisation had taken root among a great many senior officers and ministers, most notably Gerald Templer, Earl Mountbatten, Harold Macmillan, and Denis Healey. They sought to reform the defence and defence intelligence machinery with centralisation as a core principle. The JIB provided a valuable example of the merits of doing so.

Second, Strong and his team had developed a fine mechanism for collaboration with international partners. As Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn had realised, assessing key developments in a modern world that was increasingly founded on interconnectedness rather than insularity required cooperation. In Britain cooperation was managed by the JIC and JIB. But international cooperation was equally important. One of the most significant achievements of the JIB’s architects was the construction of a Commonwealth network of JIBs and effective liaison with the US. These relationships were of different character. The liaison with the Australian and Canadian JIBs was exceptionally close. Indeed, these organisations were created, with a significant input from London, to function as a global system. As was explained to US officials in 1949, ‘when intelligence is required on foreign countries or Commonwealth territories falling within the areas of responsibility assumed by the Commonwealth JIB’s, JIB (London) will obtain such intelligence from its Dominion counterparts’. JIB Melbourne, for instance, was responsible for observing developments in Chinese science and missiles. The relationship with the US was extremely valuable although, strictly speaking, it was not as entrenched. The JIB and the various US intelligence agencies duplicated each other’s work, but they cooperated closely on a variety of issues including the Soviet economy and Soviet missiles. With regards the latter, a JIB missile specialist noted in 1956 that ‘there had been a full exchange of raw intelligence material on this subject between the US and UK’, before going on to criticise the assumptions US analysts applied to their assessment. In several senses, the exchange summarises why the relationship was valuable for the British and the Americans: it pooled information, but gave critical perspectives on both communities’ judgements. Strong’s triumph was developing and utilising these relationships. He was most anxious to preserve them as JIB morphed into DIS.

The third achievement was the institutionalisation and maintenance of an open source capability for defence and national intelligence. Both Capel-Dunn and Strong believed that information gathered through general research could be extremely valuable. The former noted that ‘in war-time, much valuable information is drawn from this mine of unofficial intelligence. In peace-time, however, much of it is wasted as far as the Government machine is concerned.’ He believed the Bureau should rectify this situation: JIB was tasked to use ‘the existing machinery for obtaining secret intelligence and [to]... obtain through channels of its own, where existing channels are inappropriate ‘overt’ intelligence below the grade secret.’ Strong agreed, and worked to turn theory into practice. Soon after being confirmed in his position as Director he commented on the valuable wartime intelligence that had been gathered from businesses with German contacts and stressed the importance of exploiting similar sources for the Cold War. One of the JIB’s earliest activities
was to distribute an extensive questionnaire to British embassies and consulates, requesting basic information about the host country. This information was the basis for the JIB’s exceedingly detailed ‘country handbooks’. In compiling its global port surveys in 1947 its main priority was tapping the information already available in the India, Foreign, Burma, Colonial and Dominions Offices, as well as the Ministry of Transport. It absorbed from SIS the responsibility for monitoring open sources to compile and maintain an index of Soviet scientists in 1947. The volume of material at JIB’s disposal was such that Douglas Evill recommended that JIB’s Central Division receive more staff to process it. A survey of the JIB’s products in all major areas of its work from the late 1940s and early 1950s reveals a considerable input from open sources, including surveys of global ports and beaches, Soviet and Chinese airfields, the Soviet economy, and nuclear weapons programmes.

In processing this material the JIB fulfilled two vital functions: first, it gathered and collated a far broader range of intelligence related to military planning than had ever been accomplished before in peacetime. A considerable amount of its work in the early 1950s involved preparing target studies for the RAF, and analyses of the vulnerability of the Soviet economy for the JIC. A considerable amount of open source intelligence contributed to both areas of research. The JIB was implementing a crucial lesson identified from the Second World War, prepare for war in peace. Should war have occurred the services would have received better intelligence support than in 1939. Second, it ensured British policies with a bearing on defence were supported by intelligence in a more comprehensive manner than would have been possible before the war. Its support for British economic containment demonstrates that in some important senses it had transcended its role of supporting inter-service requirements and was operating as a national defence intelligence centre. Its mission, funding, and staffing prevented it from developing into a fully-fledged all-source intelligence centre, like the CIA, but the development of a culture of processing and applying osint set a strong foundation.

Strong’s fourth achievement in the JIB was to lay the foundation for a culture of professionalism and expertise in defence intelligence. Aside the Royal Navy, the services had consistently failed to create a culture that valued intelligence and intelligence officers, despite the clear demonstration of its merits in conflict. (Strong himself was, of course, an accidental intelligence officer with no formal training.) The war had illustrated that civilians were capable of generating intelligence for the services, and also generated many excellent intelligence officers. Strong was determined that this experience be retained and developed if the JIB’s goals of providing inter-service and national intelligence on such a wide variety of subjects was to be achieved. Working with Edward Bridges, the Cabinet Secretary, he gained the Prime Minister’s approval to waive the normal civil service recruiting procedure to retain as many experts as possible. As Herman notes, ‘it recruited the young civilians who later became the backbone of the defence intelligence staff.’

The development was not without difficulties. One challenge was that the opportunities for progression and progression for expert analysts remained limited. By the 1960s there was an imbalance in the ranks. The JIB’s Intelligence Officers (IOs) were divided into three categories IO (I), (II), and (III) – IO(I) being senior. In 1961, there were more IO(II)s than entry level IO(III)s. According to JIB’s Deputy Director, Martin Watson, this was because the JIB had not been designed with a ‘sound’ promotion structure and instead had evolved to meet the demand of the workload. IOs were generally specialists in a particular field and were unlikely to be promoted outside that field.
In 1961 the JIB was examining a proposal designed to solve the problem that promotion prospects differed from section to section by ensuring that an IO was automatically promoted from IO (III) after ten years of service. Strong claimed the problem of stalled progression was alleviated, partially, by his success in securing a good rate of pay for his IOs. Another challenge involved competition with the service intelligence staffs, which persisted in questioning the primarily civilian analysts’ capability and competence in assessing military developments and technologies. This became increasingly apparent with the development of Soviet ballistic missiles and the JIB’s increased involvement in assessing the threat. Nevertheless, maintaining a permanent cadre of intelligence officers and subject matter experts ensured a consistency in the JIB’s output and a base of expertise that was difficult to maintain in sections of service intelligence, where officers continued to rotate every three years. In 1960 Gerald Templer, in his study of service intelligence, was in little doubt that the professionalism of the JIB was a model to which the services should aspire. And expanding the number of professional staff and a professional ethos remained a central objective for Strong, Mountbatten, and Denis Healey when they created and developed the DIS.

A Foundation for the Future

The JIB was established to remedy several of the deficiencies of the pre-war intelligence machine for the difficult post war years. Its founders noted a requirement for a centralised, inter-service and civilian organisation supplying customers with national intelligence. The service intelligence agencies had proven themselves unable to establish a culture of valuing intelligence or intelligence offices in peace, and some doubted its value even after the experience of the war. Capel-Dunn and Cavendish-Bentinck believed that the post war organisation should function according to the principles of preparation, cooperation, and exploitation of all source intelligence – that intelligence should be considered a national asset, just like the military. The organisation that emerged in 1946 was not precisely the one they had imagined in 1945, but it was a positive development in British defence intelligence: it ensured that certain key principles were institutionalised, and then developed, and over the following eighteen years it supplied valuable support to customers across government.

JIB was probably the right organisation at the right time. Centralising military intelligence wholesale was an impractical step in 1945, despite the growing feeling in sections of the intelligence community that the machine would require further consolidation in the future. Intelligence was (and remains) a service and therefore had to remain focused on the customer. Indeed, as Strong noted it was ‘impracticable to carry the centralisation of intelligence further and faster than the centralisation of defence as a whole’. In 1950 he explained to the Minister of Defence, Emanuel Shinwell that ‘so long as the Admiralty, War Office, and Air Ministry exist in their present form . . . the intelligence organisation, must in general conform’. Judging by the resistance that the limited JIB encountered, an organisation that compromised the services’ independence further may not have survived. Even in 1964, when Strong and Mountbatten were pushing hard for functionalisation in the DIS, undermining individual service identity in the organisation, they had to compromise in the face of stiff resistance. According to Mountbatten ‘the price of quelling the “mutiny” over intelligence was not to press functionalization [sic] to its logical conclusion, and in particular to let the three Chiefs of Staff each hold on to their two-star service director’. Despite his centralising instinct, Strong advocated evolution, not revolution.
Neither Strong nor any of the Bureau’s other supporters (or, indeed, its opponents) believed the Bureau was more than a first step. The JIB could not resolve many of the fundamental problems in British defence intelligence, many of which were apparent, although managed, soon after the Bureau’s creation. First, despite achieving a degree of rationalisation, by, for example, becoming a de facto national economic intelligence centre, it did not manage to eliminate duplication. JIB and the Air Ministry fought a running battle for responsibility over assessments of the Soviet missile threat throughout the 1950s. This underlined a second problem, that one of the Bureau’s key weaknesses was its inability to establish itself as a national authority and assert that authority over the service intelligence directorates. Despite working cooperation in many areas, one of the services concerns over centralisation and conceding responsibility to JIB was that civilians lacked the necessary understanding of military issues. In 1945, at the Bureau’s founding, the Chief of Air Intelligence noted how ‘we intend to off-load into the Bureau as many subjects as possible whilst retaining complete control of what might be termed “Air” matters of purely operational importance to the Air force.’ In 1961, in response to the Templer report’s support of centralisation, Sidney Bufton claimed that that no Chief of the Air Staff would go to war ‘unless the defence which they had to penetrate had been analysed and estimated with all the technical and professional skill available to the Royal Air Force’. He doubted whether the First Sea Lord or the CIGS would go to war with forces ‘designed to meet a committee “threat” with which they disagreed’. Herman notes that some viewed the Bureau as a depository of ‘retired officers studying obscure subjects that might become useful sometime’, rather than as a real intelligence asset. Capel-Dunn had recognised the dangers of such insular mind-sets in 1945 and sought to reform them. Perhaps the key failure of his reforms was that they did not create a culture of ‘national intelligence’, other than in the JIB itself. Intelligence officers in the Service directorates’ retained loyalty to their parent service. Creating such a culture became one of Strong’s primary objectives as he managed and reformed the DIS through 1964-1966; he realised that it was vital for a truly efficient and integrated service.

These problems reflected a tension in the structure of the intelligence machinery. The JIB represented a compromise. It was an agency which the service agencies saw as a threat to their prerogatives, and one which the advocates of centralisation viewed as a stop gap. Resolving the problems was dependent on developing a stronger authority in the centralised Ministry of Defence. And achieving this required the focused intervention of determined Prime Ministers, Ministers of Defence, and the Chief of the Defence Staff in the early 1960s. In the meantime, Strong had to proceed by evolution, slowly absorbing more responsibility and gaining support. The post war intelligence machine was subject to numerous reviews and reorganisations, and the JIB was generally a bureaucratic winner. One can conclude that this was due to a number of factors: the influence of Strong, certainly, but more importantly the principles that he and the Bureau’s founders instilled and maintained in the organisation. Economy and centralisation were a sure fit for an age of financial discipline. Preparedness for the future was a virtue for those who cut their teeth in the Second World War. Perhaps most importantly, the Bureau studied its targets as total entities, linking the topographic, the economic, the industrial, and the scientific. Strong was correct: modern conditions demanded that this be done centrally and professionally.

Strong devoted few words in his autobiography to the JIB. He notes how he accepted the appointment because he wished to preside over further centralisation in service intelligence, and judges the Bureau ‘made a useful contribution to Britain’s national affairs.’ There can be little doubt that this was the case. Throughout its existence the JIB performed a function that Britain had
sorely lacked between the wars: that of an all source intelligence agency. It implemented a number of lessons identified in the war. Primary among these was preparation. JIB officers compiled an impressive library of ‘British Intelligence Surveys’, which were detailed compendia of information on various countries that planners could turn to for operational intelligence. The first country handbooks focused on the USSR, Persia, and China; they were followed by surveys of Norway and Afghanistan.\(^9\) Over its lifespan the JIB build a substantial library of such publications.\(^10\) But the Bureau’s intelligence also supported and guided British policy at key junctures. This was especially so with regards Britain’s economic relations with the USSR and its refusal to apply trade on the same scale as the US, despite significant pressure from Washington.\(^101\) It remains the case, however, that the Bureau’s most useful contribution was not in the myriad assessments it produced, but in the principles it embodied. Capel-Dunn, Cavendish-Bentinck and Strong’s insistence on joint, central and national intelligence produced on organisation that was a major step towards the JIC’s 1945 goal ‘to set our house in order’.\(^102\) The Bureau was certainly not without its problems, but provided a solid foundation for the DIS from 1964.

Notes

1 CAB 163/6, Capel-Dunn to Cavendish-Bentinck, JS 72/45, 20 February, 1945.
6 The National Archives, Kew (all subsequent documents are from Kew unless stated otherwise), DEFE 7/1900, ‘Defence re-organisation – the JSSC’, K. Moses to Air Vice Marshal Evans, 24 June, 1963.
8 Strong, *Intelligence at the Top*, p.223.
9 The future of SIS was debated by the Bland Report, see Keith Jeffery, MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) Chapter 18; for MI5 see Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) section D.
14 See Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*, Conclusion.
15 The draft report is undated and unsigned, but accompanies several of Capel-Dunn’s memoranda on the subject of inter-service cooperation. See, CAB 163/36.
16 CAB 163/36, ‘Draft Note’ untitled, undated, ‘In the Press and elsewhere...’.
17 CAB 163/6, ‘Defence Organisation after the War’, attached to Dennis Capel-Dunn to secretary, 29 April 1943.
Vickers’ paper from 1943 is not in the file, although Capel-Dunn’s comment remains. Vickers’ views on economic intelligence is stated several times though in CAB 163/6, see Vickers to Capel-Dunn et al, 28 April 1944, and ‘Economic Intelligence in War’, Geoffrey Vickers, 5 February 1945.

CAB 163/6, Capel-Dunn to Cavendish-Bentinck, 26 May 1943.


Ibid p.117.

Ibid p.116. See also the judgement on his influence in Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee* p.148.


Herman, ‘The Postwar Organization of Intelligence’ p.15.

Strong, *Men of Intelligence* p.121-123.

Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee* p.162.


CAB 163/6, Cavendish Bentinck to David Petrie, 27 October 1944.

CAB 163/6, DMI to Capel-Dunn, 24 October 1943.

FO 366/1391, Minute by Cavendish-Bentinck, 22 October 1944.

CAB 163/6, Geoffrey Vickers ‘Economic Intelligence in War’, 5 February 1945.

All quotations in the paragraph from CAB 163/6, Report to the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, ‘The Intelligence Machine’, 10 January 1945.

CAB 163/6, Report to the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, ‘The Intelligence Machine’, 10 January 1945.


CAB 81/129, JIC (45) 181 (0) Final, ‘Post War Organisation of Intelligence’, 1 June 1945.

CAB 81/130, JIC (45) 226 (Final), ‘Joint Intelligence Bureau’, 24 July 1945.

CAB 81/129, JIC (45) 181 (0) (Final), ‘Post-War Organisation of Intelligence’, 1 June 1945.

CAB 81/130, JIC (45) 226 (Final), ‘Joint Intelligence Bureau’, 24 July 1945.

Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.223.

Herman, ‘The Postwar Organization of Intelligence’ p.27.

See ‘Defence Ministry Created’, *The Times* 5 October 1946.


Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.17.

Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.223.

The observation that total war required total intelligence is prominent in a document explaining the history and the functions of the JIB to the Americans in 1946. National Archives of the United States (USNA), College Park, RG 139, Records of the Army Staff, Box 2143, ‘Origins and functions of the Joint Intelligence Bureau’.

Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.224.


64 Ibid, p.122.
70 Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War* pp.182-183.
73 CAB 163/6, Report to the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, ‘The Intelligence Machine’, 10 January 1945.
74 CAB 81/131, JIC(45) 181(0) (Final), ‘Post War Organisation of Intelligence’ 1 June 1945; See also Dylan, ‘The Joint Intelligence Bureau’ p.33.
75 CO 537/1349, Kenneth Strong to Sir George Carter, Colonial Office, 22 May 1946.
77 CAB 158/1, JIC (47)15 (0), ‘The Collection of Scientific Intelligence’, 7 March 1947.
80 The key problem for Britain was maintaining a balance between trade and security. It needed to sell various goods to the USSR and China, but had to limit this trade to non-strategic products. Defining what precisely constituted a non-strategic product rested upon a good understanding of the Soviet economy and its requirements. See Dylan, ‘Defence Intelligence and the Cold War’, chapter 3.
81 CAB 150/36, Draft Minute to Prime Minister (undated).
82 Michael Herman highlights this problem in ‘The Postwar Organization of Intelligence’ p.28; see also Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.223.
83 Herman ‘The Postwar Organization of Intelligence’, pp.27-28.
84 CAB 134/2456, RSI (CWP) (61) 5th Meeting, 14th June, 1961.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
90 University of Southampton Special Collections, The papers of Earl Mountbatten, , MB1/J109, Mountbatten to Healey (undated).
91 See Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*, Chapter 5.
92 AIR 75/92, ACAS(I) to John Slessor, 29 June 1945.
93 AIR 8/1953, S. O. Butfon to Permanent Secretary to CAS, 20 March 1961.
94 Herman, ‘The Postwar Organization of Intelligence’ p.28.
95 DEFE 24/165, Report by the Permanent Under Secretary (DS) to the Secretary of State, ‘Future of the DIS’ (undated).
96 Twigge and Scott, *Planning Armageddon* 27.
97 Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War* p.209.
98 Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* p.224.
99 CO 537/1349, Kenneth Strong to Sir George Carter, Colonial Office, 22 May 1946.
100 See file series DEFE 60 in the National Archives, Kew.
101 Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*, chapter 3.
CAB 81/130, JIC(45) 265(0), ‘Post-War Organisation of Intelligence’, 7 September 1945.