

Atkinson, C. (2015) Huw Dylan, Defence Intelligence and the Cold War: Britain's Joint Intelligence Bureau 1945–1964. Intelligence and National Security.

Copyright © 2014 The Author.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/104576/>

Deposited on: 31 March 2015

Huw Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War: Britain's Joint Intelligence Bureau 1945-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Pp.256. £60.00/\$99.00. Hb. ISBN 978-0-19-965702-5.

There is an old maxim, bordering on cliché, that one should never judge a book by its cover. Fortunately, this adage does not apply to Huw Dylan's 2014 work *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*. The magnificent sleeve for this book provides the title in an elegant font, evocative of celebrated Scottish designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. This is set above a photograph of a military parade in Moscow's Red Square in 1963; an image taken by Yevgeny Anan'evich Khaldei, who is most famous for his celebrated image of a Soviet soldier raising a flag over Berlin's Reichstag in 1945. Socialist realist banners loom large over the parade, just as the entire Soviet military and ideological vista dominated the thinking of British intelligence over the preceding 20 years, and continued to do so for the 30 years that followed. The triumph of this book is that the 256 pages that follow deliver on the exciting promise of the cover.

Defence Intelligence and the Cold War accounts for the period from the end of the Second World War until 1964, and provides the first history of a hitherto little-known organization designed to preserve and advance British capability in military and military-related intelligence during the early Cold War: the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB). Whilst *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War* is primarily concerned with the history of an organization, Dylan begins his book with a discussion of a personality: the Scottish-born Major General Sir Kenneth Strong, who was appointed as the first director of the JIB in 1946. Dylan presents Strong as an intelligence visionary. Strong believed that intelligence should be professionalised and at the heart of the decision-making process; he recognised that inter-service cooperation was a fundamental requirement for modern intelligence operations; and he understood that working internationally – especially with the Americans – was vital to maximising resources and expertise for the British. Dylan also positions Strong as a pragmatist and realist, through both Strong's disinclination for glamorous secret agents and his appreciation that useful information could instead be gathered quite openly (p.xvi). Depicted as such, many aspects of Strong's vision for intelligence have contemporary resonance; for example with the recommendations of the 9/11 commission, especially in relation to inter-service cooperation.

The discussion of Strong's career up until his appointment to the JIB in 1946 provides an intriguing introduction to the central subject matter of *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*: the JIB itself. Fortunately, Dylan clearly outlines the authorial task at the outset of his work. He aims to explore three particular topics: the creation of the JIB in 1945; its activities until 1964; and the reasons it was merged with the service intelligence agencies to form the Defence Intelligence Service (DIS). Perhaps reflecting the genesis of the book, developing from Dylan's PhD thesis, there is appropriate attention given to matters of methodology, including a discussion of the opportunities and limitations of the National Archives. Dylan extended his research methods to incorporate valuable material from foreign archives and private collections, but was also limited by the challenges of official secrecy and the poor cataloguing of JIB records. Overall, this approach allowed Dylan to collate a comprehensive record to exploit in relation to his three areas of inquiry. A useful list of all resources exploited by Dylan is provided at the end of the book. The first major task of *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*, however, is to explore the creation of the JIB.

The visionary nature of Strong's thinking on intelligence was most apparent in his appreciation of the case for the centralization of disparate military intelligence functions. Perhaps unsurprisingly there was great reticence to centralization from the individual defence intelligence services, who wished to maintain their independence. Dylan notes clearly that despite representing a move *towards* centralization, the JIB was not a central military intelligence agency (p.26). The political and military climate also dictated that the JIB be successful from the outset. Strong's leadership and pragmatism were apparent in the high value placed on experience in both retaining higher ranked officers for the JIB and selecting new, lower ranked officers for this new organization. Dylan astutely highlights how such developments were indicative of the perceived importance of the JIB and a requirement for the organization to perform immediately and effectively. This effectiveness extended beyond a narrow focus on military matters.

Much of the controversy of surrounding the recent disclosures by the NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden pertained to the collection of information by Western states that relates, ostensibly, to economic, and not strictly 'security', matters. Whilst one may be (rightly) outraged that such information is collected via means apparently created to counter terrorism and extremism, there should be little surprise at the disclosure that modern states seek to exploit their intelligence capabilities to obtain the upper hand in matters of economy and trade. Dylan's work highlights how the work of the JIB in the immediate aftermath of the Second War included not only the increasingly critical task of mapping the enemy topographically in the age of the Atomic bomb, but also with developing economic intelligence. Just as with military and topographic matters, the JIB's role in economic intelligence was focused on the Soviet Union. However, Dylan also outlines the central role of the JIB in contributing to economic containment across the Communist world; especially in relation to China and after the Korean War had begun. The JIB's developing understanding the economic interests of the Soviet Union and China – particularly in relation to trade – allowed it a significant degree of influence in, in Dylan's words, 'starving the Bear and the Dragon' (p.69). Dylan's research here draws upon an exemplary range of primary sources that disclose the granular involvement of the JIB in matters of economy and trade. However, it is his illumination of the JIB role in protecting strategic British interests – in designing a 'short list' of export controls for the 'long haul' – that demonstrates the very real effectiveness of this new organization in the early Cold War.

In relation to military intelligence Dylan highlights how the JIB was at, or very close to, the key strategic question of the time: the Soviet airborne threat, including both bombers and missiles (p.108). Dylan clearly represents the role of the JIB analysts in collating and developing disparate strands of intelligence to create an estimation of Soviet aircraft production. He also highlights how the British JIB assumed an increasingly important role for the West as it 'became a clearing house for a large proportion of missile intelligence' (p.137). The role of the JIB here was significant: as the Soviet missile threat developed in the age of Sputnik the JIB acted as a check and restraint on both American overestimation and Soviet belligerence. Domestically, however, Dylan notes the perhaps inevitable increase in bureaucratic politics and service rivalry, especially with the Air Ministry as the JIB's responsibilities in missile intelligence grew. Dylan astutely observes that this was a conflict not only over leadership, but of the very principle of intelligence centralization. Given our understanding of inter-service relations in the period since perhaps the greater surprise in the archive is the hitherto 'amicable and even productive coexistence' between the JIB and the service intelligence departments (p.152). In relation to defence intelligence in the UK the principle of centralization, so valued by Strong, would ultimately win the day.

Before Dylan approaches the last of his objectives – the creation of the DIS – the story of the JIB's international connections is necessarily explored because, as the author states, 'Cold War intelligence was a team game' (p.157). Dylan's assessment of this 'team game' may surprise the reader: while the JIB's relationship with the American's was its most important one, it was not its closest (p.182). Instead, the closest liaison was with the Dominion and regional JIBs in the British Commonwealth that existed within a system deliberately designed from London. Dylan does not downplay the significance of the American relationship – in fact he explicitly contends that it is most likely that the JIB's most valuable intelligence came from here – but he does illuminate the strategic 'need to maintain and develop cooperation with, and influence over, intelligence in the Commonwealth' (p.163). Again, with a reflexive awareness of the limitations of the archival records, Dylan develops a convincing and engaging narrative for the reader to consider. This narrative continues, and concludes, with an account of the merger of the JIB with the service intelligence agencies in the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) in 1964, which was – perhaps inevitably given his zeal for centralization – led by Kenneth Strong.

Defence Intelligence and the Cold War is exquisitely and rigorously researched, and fills an important gap in the historical record on the development of defence intelligence in Britain. Dylan's writing is comprehensive but accessible, and he brings the subject to life with a vitality and verve that can sometimes be difficult when interrogating and drawing from the historical archives. This book will be of great value to scholars interested in the history of British intelligence and to those practitioners and professionals concerned with the contemporary challenges – and opportunities – of the centralization and reform of intelligence services.

COLIN ATKINSON
Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, University of Glasgow
Colin.Atkinson@glasgow.ac.uk