Intelligence in the 20th Century

Conference of the International Intelligence History Study Group
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Conference report

At their second annual conference, the International Intelligence History Study Group discussed "Intelligence in the 20th Century - Intelligence Aspects of Political Decision Making in the Context of Trans-Atlantic Relations". The meeting took place at Haus Rissen, Institut für Politik und Wirtschaft, in Hamburg from 10 to 12 May 1996. The International Intelligence History Study Group is an interdisciplinary and internationally active Study Group in which representatives of the various academic disciplines and fields of research as well as experts from the different branches of intelligence discuss the history structures and future of military and civilian intelligence. The group cooperates with national and international institutions and academic organizations having the same terms of reference at home and abroad. As a consequence, the audience at the meeting was very international ranging from academic representatives to intelligence experts from 10 different countries who had assembled to conduct a complex and competent analysis of the work of intelligence services in the 20th century and to promote the international academic dialogue in the field of intelligence research. Discussions focused on reviewing the current status of research and on developing and discussing new fields of research.

Following the welcome and opening of the meeting by Jürgen Rohwer, Chairman of the Study Group's Board, and by Jan Heitmann, executive member of the Board and Chairman of the meeting, Michael Wala (Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) read the manuscript of a paper by Cornelia Wilhelm (Universität München), who had been taken ill shortly before the meeting, entitled "Ethnic Germans as an Instrument of the German Intelligence Services: The United States of America 1933-1945." Horst Boog (Stegen, formerly Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt), the second speaker at the meeting, read on "The American Factor from the German Air Force's Perspective 1939-1945". In his paper he discussed the erroneous perception of the German air force leaders of the American military and economic potential which he described as stemming from an ideological, geostrategic and military-operational way of thinking that became apparent as early as World War I. This way of thinking was characterized above all by an overemphasizing of the tactical-operational level and a neglect of the global strategic aspects. The dominance of the idea of an offensive war and a Blitzkrieg entailed a geographic and military narrow-mindedness among the German leadership limiting the war to the continent and giving more weight to operational aspects than to intelligence. Other important factors were a marked feeling of national and cultural superiority as well as the lack of coordination among the German intelligence services, which Hitler himself had so intended. With his paper, Boog actually went beyond the issue of air force reconnaissance thus placing his subject in the greater context of intelligence.

Jan Heitmann (Studienzentrum an der Medizinischen Universität Lübeck) and Burkhard Jähnicke (Hamburg) devoted their papers to the life of two intelligence

experts. Their stated objective, as highlighted in their joint introduction to the papers, was twofold: firstly, to set an example countering the ingrained prejudice that members of the intelligence services were specimens from outside respectable society, adventurers and gamblers, and secondly to free the members of German intelligence services from the wholesale ill-repute their trade has come under. In his biographical study "Dr. Hans-Albrecht Herzner: The Life of an Abwehr officer", Heitmann starts out by describing the youth of his protagonist as marked by his Christian upbringing and monarchist parents. He went on to outline Herzner's university studies and his work for the military resistance. His successful career in the counter-intelligence service, although in contrast with his political convictions, and his front-line duty load up to the story of his mysterious death by drowning in September 1942 with which Heitmann concluded his lecture. To his superiors, Herzner was an intelligent, loyal, highly capable and trustworthy officer whom they could entrust with politically and militarily risky missions and leadership tasks. His name is linked with two special forces missions of the Wehrmacht in particular: the coup conducted under his command at the Polish Jablunka Pass on the eve of the Second World War, and the joint, still controversial operations of parts of the Brandenburg Regiment with Ukrainian volunteers in the summer of 1941. Held in high esteem by fellow-soldiers and superiors alike for his bravery, comradeship, and professional skills, detained after the war by former enemies in the cast as mass murderer and ruthless leader of saboteurs, the circumstances of his death remain in the dark down to this day.

In his biography of "Dr. Paul Leverkuehn: Lawyer, Politician, Secret Agent in two World Wars", Burkhard Jähnicke depicts Leverkuehn's rise from a young lawyer to a member of the Bundestag and Euro politician. Since Leverkuehn had participated in the Scheubner-Richter expedition along the Turkish-Persian border during the First World War, he knew this region well and consequently was employed by the counter-intelligence service in the Istanbul counter-intelligence centre for the collection of intelligence during the Second World War, a mission which he accomplished successfully. Before the war, Leverkuehn had worked as a law expert for the German Foreign Office and the Mixed Claims Commission and headed a New York bank. Later he had a law firm in which he employed prominent members of the German resistance. After the war he set up a law office in Hamburg and took over the defence of German generals before Allied military courts. Later he was elected for the Christian Democratic Party into the German Parliament. He died in 1960 as a highly respected member of the German post-war society.

In his briefing "Ears and Eyes in Occupied Europe. The Illegal Polish Intelligence Service in World War II", Michael Foedrowitz (Hannover) described the decisive influence of the work of Polish agents on Allied war planning. He placed the human factor at the centre of his remarks. Being very familiar with the volatile history of their country in conspiratorial activities, the Poles succeeded in quickly establishing a highly efficient reporting and courier system and even gained access to supreme military and political leadership circles of the axis powers. Female agents in particular, many of whom coming from Poland's first families, made their marks here. Another source of information were the Polish forced labourers and emigrant circles who transmitted their observations through Polish information channels to London. The intelligence thus collected was considered to be very reliable and

gave the Allied leadership a detailed picture of the situation in Germany and the occupied countries. Even spectacular events, such as the activities of the "Rote Kapelle", the destruction of the German barrages, the hunting down of the battleship "Bismarck", and the bomb raids on Schweinfurt and Hamburg are closely linked with the activities of the Polish intelligence service.

The Typex cryptomachine, the British equivalent of the German Enigma, was the subject of a briefing given by Ralph Erskine (Belfast) entitled "Typex and the Admiralty". To begin with, the speaker briefly described the machine whose design is very similar to that of the Enigma but which is much more complex in its function and thus much more secure. Erskine went on to explain why this machine was not introduced by the Royal Navy. The reasons for this were much more profane than hitherto described in literature: The poor supply of the Typex machine was mainly a result of lacking industrial capacities in Great Britain and an erroneous prioritisation so that no unit in the field could be equipped with it. The few machines that were available were used as the British component of the British-American "Combined Cipher Machine". Thus Erskine's paper delivers a prime example of poor technical and industrial war preparations.

In her paper on "Sincerity of Deception: The British Decision to Exchange Intelligence with the United States During the Second World War", Phyllis Soybel-Butler (University of Illinois at Chicago) began by describing what was special about the collection of information through intelligence. She then covered both Allies' cooperation in the field of intelligence extending primarily to radio reconnaissance. This historically unique cooperation was the result of a process that had taken several years to develop and which was speeded up after the U.S. had entered the war. The reasons why the British shared their intelligence with the Americans were twofold: on the one hand they wanted to retain the top position in intelligence among the war allies to compensate for a decline of their importance in the face of military defeats, on the other hand it was in the common interest to support the warfare of the militarily and economically powerful ally with all means including intelligence.

The joint effort of OSS in Stockholm, the War Refugee Board, and the State Department in rescuing European Jews during the final stage of the Second World War was described by Meredith Hindley (The American University, Washington, D.C.) in her paper "A Humanitarian Partnership in Sweden: OSS/Stockholm, the War Refugee Board, and the State Department, 194445". At the beginning of her lecture, Hindley qualified the common judgement according to which the OSS had not used its intricate knowledge about the killing of the Jews for providing sufficient practical assistance. At the same time, she put this problem into the historical context by pointing out the analogy with the accusation that the Allies had placed the objective of winning the war unconditionally before all other objectives including humanitarian considerations. She continued to describe how OSS in Stockholm made its connections and intelligence networks in enemy occupied countries available to the War Refugee Board initiated by President Roosevelt, thus saving the lives of numerous Jews particularly from the Baltic countries.

In his paper "Radio Decoding in the Pacific During World War II", Gerhard Krebs

(Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam) reported on the Allies' efforts to break the Japanese radio codes. They found their task facilitated by the fact that the Japanese had used relatively simple coding procedures in the erroneous assumption that the phonetic and linguistic intricacies of the Japanese language would make decoding almost impossible. For diplomatic messages, they used the "Purple" coding machine whose code the Allies were able to break despite substantial difficulties. Later on, the Allies succeeded also in decoding military messages which was of particular importance for the course of the battle at Midway. In a similar way as "Ultra" in the European and Atlantic theatres, "Magic", its Far East equivalent, had considerable influence on the war in the Pacific. It remains controversial down to this day how well President Roosevelt was informed about the impending attack on Pearl Harbor as a result of the tapping of lines between Tokyo and the Japanese Embassy in Washington.

In his paper entitled "The Enigma Coding Machine - Enigma 95", Heinz Ulbricht (Braunschweig) briefed the audience on radio decoding in the Second World War from the point of view of mathematics and science. After describing how the machine worked, he pointed out its weaknesses and continued to illustrate with numerous tables and diagrams how the coding method of the Enigma can be enhanced by means of a personal computer. In his demonstration data were entered via a keyboard. Additional equipment included a kind of plug panel, rotors (including a reverse roll), a type of Enigma clock and visual displays (screen and printer). With his elaborate program, he managed to eliminate the deficiencies of the original Enigma machine.

In his lecture entitled "From Organisation Gehlen to the Bundesnachrichtendienst and How the USA Participated in the Establishment of the New German Foreign Intelligence Service", Matthias Molt (Stuttgart) began with an overview of the professional career of General Gehlen. He followed this up with a short description of the work of the department "Fremde Heere Ost", in which he particularly highlighted the success of the reconnaissance effort of this agency which is, however, controversial in research. He then continued to describe how Gehlen placed the personnel and material of his staff division at the disposal of the Americans and how he built up the Organisation Gehlen and the Bundesnachrichtendienst. Molt concluded by listing a few exemplary cases of espionage from the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany and its intelligence service while being partly distorted by the media nevertheless had contributed to a considerable discreditation of the Bundesnachrichtendienst. He concluded by stating that Gehlen's major personal achievements in establishing the Bundesnachrichtendienst had been to prevent the Soviet Union from seizing upon the structures of his former organization, and to put them at the disposal of the Americans.

An overview of the activities of intelligence services from the Canadian point of view was given by Wesley Wark (University of Toronto) in his lecture on "Canada and the Intelligence Revolution". Starting to report on the current situation, he then explained the connection between the Information Age and the Intelligence Revolution, listing five features of the intelligence revolution: technology, globalization, expansionism, bureaucratic politics, and popular culture. He

continued with the Canadian experience of the Intelligence Revolution and concluded with a glimpse ahead, stating that in the new Information Age the Canadian intelligence community will need a mind-reading ability in the sense of "being a short road to the mind of others" more than ever before.

In his lecture on "COCOM and its Intelligence Ramifications", Frank Cain (University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy) explained how the Western industrial nations had tried for decades to stop the export of militarily useful technologies into countries beyond the Iron Curtain. Founded by the American Administration in 1947 as the top secret Committee for the Control of East West Trade, the COCOM represented for decades an efficient trade control organization whose measures were accepted by the other industrial nations in the Western hemisphere although the United States retained the leadership and provided most of the intelligence assets to supervise export bans. Owing to the global political changes of recent years, COCOM has changed, too. The question remains to what extent this institution contributed to the demise of the Eastern bloc.

Shlomo Shpiro (University of Birmingham) treated the "Intelligence Relations between Germany and Israel and their Role within Germany's Middle-East Policy". These relations date back as far as to the year 1956 when Gehlen and the head of the Mossad as a result of common political goals agreed on a close cooperation in many fields characterised to this day by extreme secrecy and efficiency although both countries' intelligence interests differ. Following a short historical overview of the cooperation, the speaker went on to give a detailed description of Operation "Cerberus", one of many successful joint operations. This was the cover name for a successful joint effort of the Federal Intelligence Service and Israeli services to press on with the development of effective electronic shields against the Soviet rockets threatening equally the territory of the Federal Republic and Israel.

In his lecture "Denying German Scientists and Technicians to Other Powers than the United Kingdom and the United States: German Scientists as a Cold War Weapon" Manfred Herrmann (Nürnberg) first described the Allies' run on securing German research facilities and German researchers at the end of the Second World War. His paper focused on the denial, i.e. the Western powers effort to prevent an exploitation of the German potential of scientists by the Soviet Union. This was followed by a description of the attempts at putting the former enemy's technological potential to use. In space technology, this effort eventually culminated in the first landing on the moon. Herrmann made it clear that the worldwide progress in some scientific areas would have been slower without the contribution of German scientists albeit forced in the beginning.

A lecture, based mainly on personal experience, covering the development of information technology security in the Federal Republic of Germany was given by Otto Leiberich, former President of the Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik. Leiberich gave a short historical overview in which he attributed the chief merit for the development of cryptography in this century to Polish experts and went on to talk about what had been his job for decades.
The major papers at this meeting to provide a general overview of the various fields of research on intelligence services were read by Jürgen Rohwer (Bibliothek für

Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart), Gerhard L. Weinberg (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC), and David Kahn (Great Neck, NY). While Rohwer in his lecture on "The German Radio Reconnaissance Service and the Battle in the Atlantic" presented today's state of research on radio reconnaissance, Weinberg discussed "Unresolved Issues of World War II: The Records Still Closed - And the Open Records Not Used", explaining the situation with regard to sources and the deregulation of hitherto unreleased records in American archives with special emphasis on radio decoding. Using a theoretical philosophical approach, David Kahn, reading on "A New Theory of Intelligence", discussed perspectives and the outlook for intelligence and research into intelligence services. He differentiated between "physical" intelligence, i.e. reconnaissance by perception through the senses, and "verbal" intelligence, i.e. reconnaissance by using technical equipment.