



National Intelligence Machinery



NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE MACHINERY



OVERVIEW

The United Kingdom's intelligence machinery comprises:

- the central intelligence machinery based in the Cabinet Office;
- the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), often called MI6;
- Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ);
- the Security Service, often called MI5;
- Defence Intelligence (DI), part of the Ministry of Defence (MOD); and
- the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC).

Other parts of Government also contribute to intelligence collection and/or analysis and assessment: for example, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and Home Office.

SIS, Security Service and GCHQ – collectively known as the Agencies - were not publicly acknowledged for much of their existence. The SIS and Security Service originated in 1909, while there has been an official codebreaker since the 16th century. Their low profile has led to the proliferation of many rumours, myths and false impressions about their work and roles. Since the late 1980s, however, all three of the Agencies have been publicly acknowledged. They are now more open and accountable than at any previous point in their histories.

Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)




The principal function of SIS, often known as MI6, is the collection of secret foreign intelligence on issues concerning Britain's vital interests in the fields of security, defence, serious crime, foreign and economic policies.

The work of SIS is undertaken in accordance with requirements and priorities that are established by the Joint Intelligence Committee and approved by Ministers. SIS uses human and technical sources to meet these requirements, as well as liaison with a wide range of foreign intelligence and security services.

The role of SIS is governed by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, which placed SIS on a statutory basis for the first time. The Act formalised the Foreign Secretary's responsibility for the work of SIS. It defined the functions of the Service and the responsibility of its Chief as well as establishing oversight arrangements. The Act directs SIS to obtain and provide information relating to the acts and intentions of persons overseas:

- in the fields of national security and with particular reference to the Government's defence and foreign policies;
- in the interests of the economic well-being of the UK; and
- in support of the prevention or detection of serious crime.

The Act likewise directs SIS to perform other tasks, enabling the Service to conduct



operations and to act clandestinely overseas in support of British Government objectives.

The Foreign Secretary is answerable to Parliament for the work of SIS.

SIS was established in 1909 as the Foreign Section of the Secret Service Bureau under the leadership of Naval Commander (later Captain Sir) Mansfield Cumming. The Foreign Section was responsible for gathering intelligence overseas. It grew steadily and by 1920 had become a separate service increasingly referred to as SIS. Cumming signed himself 'C'. His successors have done so ever since.

The present Chief of SIS is Sir John Sawers, who took up his post in November 2009. SIS is based at Vauxhall Cross in central London.

For further details, see www.sis.gov.uk



Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)

GCHQ has two main missions: gathering intelligence through the interception of communications (known as "Signals Intelligence", or Sigint) and providing services and advice as the UK's national technical authority for Information Assurance.


GCHQ's Sigint work provides intelligence in support of Government decision-making in the fields of national security, military operations and law enforcement. It provides essential intelligence in the battle against terrorism and also contributes to the prevention of serious crime.

Information Assurance helps to keep Government communication and information systems safe. It also helps those responsible for the UK's critical national infrastructure (power, water, communications etc.) to keep their networks safe from interference and disruption. GCHQ works closely with the Security Service, other Government departments and industry to ensure that sensitive information in such systems is properly protected for the national good.

GCHQ was placed on a statutory basis by the Intelligence Services Act 1994. This Act and subsequent legislation defines the boundaries for GCHQ's activities. Within these boundaries, the choice of what to intercept and report to Government departments and military commands is, as for SIS, based on requirements and priorities established by the Joint Intelligence Committee and approved by Ministers (see page 23).

The Foreign Secretary is answerable to Parliament for the work of GCHQ.

GCHQ was established in 1919 as the Government Code and Cypher School and



adopted its present name in 1946. Its successes during the Second World War, when its headquarters were at Bletchley Park, are now well known.

GCHQ has been based in Cheltenham since 1952. The current Director is Iain Lobban, who took office in July 2008.

For further details, see www.gchq.gov.uk


The Security Service, also known as MI5, is responsible for protecting the UK against covertly organised threats to national security. These include terrorism, espionage and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It also provides security advice to a range of other organisations.

Its role is defined by the Security Service Act 1989, which put the Service onto a statutory footing for the first time. The Act formalised the Home Secretary's responsibility for the work of the Security Service, defines the Service's functions and sets out the responsibilities of its Director General. In summary, the Service's functions are:

- to protect national security, and in particular protect against threats from espionage, terrorism and sabotage, from the agents of foreign powers, and from actions intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means;
- to safeguard the economic well being of the UK against threats posed by the actions or intentions of persons outside the British Islands;
- to act in support of police and other law enforcement agencies in the prevention and protection of serious crime.

To fulfil these functions, the Security Service:

- investigates threats by gathering, analysing and assessing intelligence;
- counters the sources of threats;
- advises Government and others on the nature of the threat, and on relevant protective security measures; and

- 
- assists other agencies, organisations and Government departments in combating threats.


Since the establishment of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Service has suspended work on serious crime in order to concentrate more resources on counter terrorism.

The Home Secretary is answerable to Parliament for the work of the Security Service.

In collecting and assessing intelligence the Security Service is guided by the requirements and priorities established by the Joint Intelligence Committee and approved by Ministers (see page 23).

The Security Service was established in 1909 as the domestic arm of the Secret Service Bureau, under Army Captain (later Major General Sir) Vernon Kell, tasked with countering German espionage. It became formally known as the Security Service (and theoretically stopped being called MI5) in 1931. At the same time, it assumed wider responsibility for assessing threats to national security, which included communist and fascist subversion as well as espionage by hostile foreign powers. The Service's role changed significantly with the rise of terrorism and the end of the Cold War. Most of its resources now go into counter-terrorist work. Since 1992 it has been the lead agency for national security work in Great Britain, and took on this role fully in Northern Ireland from 2007.

Although the Security Service works very closely with law enforcement organisations, its staff has no executive powers. Cases likely to result in prosecution are co-



ordinated closely with the police, Crown Prosecution Service, or HM Immigration Service, or HM Revenue and Customs, who take any necessary action in accordance with their own responsibilities.

The present Director General of the Security Service is Jonathan Evans, who took office in 2007. The Security Service is based at Thames House in central London.

For further details, see www.mi5.gov.uk