

Briefing Memorandum

Recent Intelligence Reform in the United Kingdom

(an English translation of the original manuscript written in Japanese)

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Introduction

In October 2009, the UK Government released a proposal that detailed reforms for its central intelligence institutions. The intelligence institutions of the United Kingdom, which are respected on a global level, conducted major organizational reforms in 1949 and again in 1989. Thus, the current reforms will mark the first of their kind in 20 years. The proposed reforms are related to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and appear to reflect a long-overdue wish by those in intelligence circles in the United Kingdom.

Put simply, the proposal aims to strengthen the functions of the Cabinet Office as it works together with the UK intelligence community, including the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and the Security Service (MI5). But why did the United Kingdom present this intelligence reform at this particular time, and what are they aiming to achieve?

The year 2009 marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the British intelligence community, and commemorative events and other promotions were held in the country to celebrate this. Throughout the year researchers and professionals held symposia and debates at various universities and think tanks, and in October the first authorized history of MI5 was even published.

One could argue that the proposal for intelligence agency reform released in October 2009 was a byproduct of the hype from the 100-year anniversary, however a little further investigation reveals that behind this proposal lies the Butler Report, which was submitted to the UK Government in 2004. The year 2009 marks five years following the submission of the Butler Report and it is conceivable that the UK Government wanted to release a proposal for intelligence reform during 2009, a milestone year in terms of UK intelligence.

Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)

The JIC is an organization of the Cabinet Office that consolidates and evaluates intelligence gathered by agencies such as MI6, MI5 and the Government Communications

Headquarters (GCHQ) and advances their recommendations to the prime minister. As an organization, the JIC's roles are to: 1) analyze and evaluate intelligence pertaining to foreign intelligence, security, economy and crime, 2) issue an alert in the event that the United Kingdom's security or national interests could be threatened, and 3) establish a priority order on intelligence gathering and request the various intelligence agencies to gather intelligence. Compared to other countries, in the United Kingdom jurisdictional disputes between agencies are not such a serious problem. On the contrary, the most prevalent issue for the JIC as of recent years is number three above - establishing an order of priority for intelligence gathering. I would like to pay consideration to this issue here while looking back over the history of the JIC.

The JIC was established 27 years after MI5 and MI6 in 1936. At the time, the JIC was established due to the fact that existing intelligence agencies were not able to utilize the intelligence that they gathered effectively in policies and strategies, as well as to function as a military organization to resolve these issues in preparation for the imminent war with Germany. Therefore, until the conclusion of the Second World War, it is safe to say that the JIC was an organization that utilized intelligence in order to win the war. During the war, the JIC was mainly operated by the Foreign Office, MI6, MI5, and military intelligence sections such as Military Intelligence, Naval Intelligence and Air Intelligence, thus bearing a strong military quality.

After the start of the Cold War, and possibly reflecting their failure in the Suez Crisis, the JIC was removed from its military capacity and transferred to the control of the Cabinet Office where its nature as an intelligence agency for the Prime Minister was fostered. Furthermore, as Military, Naval and Air intelligence were integrated with the Defense Intelligence Staff (DIS), participation by the military in the JIC declined and membership from participants of intelligence agencies that joined the GCHQ began to show a relative increase. Intelligence activities during the Cold War had a clear aim and focus — the Soviet Union — and as the Cold War itself was, in a manner of speaking, a war of intelligence, the operation of the JIC by intelligence agencies bore great significance.

After the end of the Cold War, the JIC no longer had a clear enemy such as Germany or the Soviet Union and was thus forced to reconsider its ultimate purpose. A serious problem for the JIC was that it was difficult to detect where and how threats to the United Kingdom were going to come in the post-Cold War world. In order to address that problem, the JIC accepted a multitude of members from governmental policymaking backgrounds and attempted to assess the awareness of problems held by the various ministries and agencies as well as their demand for intelligence. These policymakers included people from the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office, Home Office, Cabinet Office, Department for International Development, Treasury, the Heads of the three intelligence Agencies and the Chief of the Assessments Staff, while a higher level of focus was also allotted to the intentions of the prime minister.

In this way, one of the fundamental problems for the JIC following the end of the Cold War was its sense of distance with the Prime Minister and policymakers (the customers). If the JIC gave too much consideration to “intelligence customers,” i.e., politicians and policymakers, they would only be able to provide intelligence that appealed to politicians. On the other hand, if the JIC remained concerned only in its own practice of situational analysis, politicians would at times decide that the intelligence of the JIC was not very helpful, forcing the very existence of the JIC to come under question. The JIC closed its distance with the policymaking side following the end of the Cold War, but it would be its attentiveness to the “customer” that would engender the greatest problem of all amidst the escalation of the situation in Iraq in 2003.

The 45-minute Claim and the Butler Review

In September 2002, the situation in Iraq was becoming a serious issue within the international community, and the UK Government released intelligence stating that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) within 45 minutes. The potential of a chemical war occurring within 45 minutes was overblown even by the media at the time, and this gave the world the impression that Iraq’s Hussein Administration possessed WMDs, inciting worldwide controversy. This intelligence was later determined to be dubious. However, a “Coalition of the Willing,” mainly bolstered by the United States and the United Kingdom, used this intelligence as evidence to show that Iraq was developing WMDs; the coalition invaded Iraq in March of the following year. Later, the units that invaded Iraq conducted a thorough search for evidence of WMDs but were unable to discover any trace of them. Thereupon the United States and the United Kingdom were forced to acknowledge that the intelligence on WMDs in Iraq was false.

According to an 8 December 2009 Guardian online news publication, the source of the 45-minute intelligence was a taxi driver in Iraq, which was acquired over two years prior to the release of the intelligence. The driver had acquired the information from the conversation of a high-ranking Iraqi military officer that was his customer, after which he provided the information to MI6. However, the driver’s information was extremely ambiguous, as it only stated, “45 minutes or something about missiles allegedly discussed in a high level Iraqi political meeting.” Nevertheless, local staff were under pressure from London to report some information no matter how trivial, leading them to report this uncertain intelligence to London

as testimony. After their report, the intelligence gradually lost the ambiguity that it initially posed during the inspection process at the JIC, leading it to eventually take on the form of a piece of MI6-backed intelligence with the nuance that “Iraq is able to deploy some kind of weapon within 45 minutes.” Furthermore, this intelligence would thereafter find a way to link itself to intelligence spawning from a completely different source that claimed that, “Iraq has materials for developing chemical weapons.” Finally, an aide to Prime Minister Tony Blair that had been seeking some form of tide-changing intelligence, Director of Communications and Strategy Alastair Campbell, began to put pressure on the JIC, which resulted in the content of the document being redrafted to claim that “Iraq can deploy WMDs within 45 minutes.”

In response to the “45-minute claim” blunder, the UK Government launched the Butler Review Committee in February 2004 after the Iraq War in order to conduct a thorough investigation on what caused such uncertain intelligence to be embellished as virtual fact. As a result, the review pointed out that 1) despite the fact that the information source was unclear, MI6 failed to conduct a thorough investigation on its authenticity, 2) the problem of WMDs is ultimately a political one, and functionally goes beyond the scope of intelligence, and 3) the JIC was under pressure from the current administration. The Butler Report did not point any fingers at who specifically was to blame for the 45-minute claim, but at the very least it recommended that the JIC be constructed in a way that receives as little political influence as possible so that it can analyze situations objectively.

In response to the Butler Review, in 2005 the JIC Chairman served an additional post as the Cabinet Office’s Deputy National Security Adviser, and was even granted the role of a budget examiner that would adjust the United Kingdom’s intelligence-related budget. This provided the JIC Chairman with powerful authority. However, the system did not last for long. In 2007 the Chairman was once again returned to the head of the Joint Intelligence Organization and jurisdiction over the intelligence-related budget was transferred to the Lord President of the Council (secretariat), while the Cabinet Office’s Deputy National Security Adviser for Intelligence, Security and Resilience assumed the secretariat functions for the JIC.

2009 Recommendation

Bearing these preconditions in mind we are able to shed light on the aim of the proposed reform that was announced by the UK Government in October 2009. Specifically, the government aims to develop a JIC structure that is uninfluenced by politics and ensure that intelligence is utilized by the central government (Prime Minister’s Office and Cabinet Office) in a strategic manner. The government’s proposal pays heed to the question of what

needs to be done so that the Cabinet Office can skillfully operate the central intelligence agencies. In 2007, the United Kingdom established the National Security Committee (NSC), which was modeled after the US National Security Council, in the Prime Minister's Office. It is safe to say that the NSC and the Cabinet Office's JIC have been situated as the columns that will reinforce UK national strategy in the future.

The highlight of this organizational reform is likely to be the position of Deputy National Security Adviser for Intelligence, Security and Resilience of the Cabinet Office, which will be given to the Head of Intelligence, Security and Resilience and who will take over all intelligence-related operations other than the intelligence analysis function overseen by the JIC. The duties of the Director include 1) receiving and assessing intelligence requests from politicians and policymakers, 2) providing explanations to politicians and parliament, and 3) managing the intelligence-related budget. The new proposal attempts to control the UK intelligence community via the Cabinet Office's Head of Intelligence, Security and Resilience and the JIC. Under this two-organization structure, the Head of Intelligence, Security and Resilience assumes all of the coordination with politicians and other ministries and agencies, which will allow the JIC to avoid being influenced by the demands of politicians and focus on intelligence analysis and evaluation.

Conversely, the JIC Chairman's position will be upgraded to vice ministerial level or higher, combining itself with the position of chief analyst for the JIC, while the JIC will become an organization totally dedicated to intelligence evaluation only.

Conclusion

When considering the reform of the United Kingdom's central intelligence agencies that took place following the Butler Report, one encounters the issues of reciprocal functionality of policy (strategy) and intelligence as well as the distance set between policy and intelligence.

With regard to the reciprocal functionality of policy and intelligence, there is no reason in having an intelligence institution, no matter how remarkable it may be, if there is no organization (customer) to utilize it. In particular, there needs to be an organization that communicates intelligence demands and intelligence together with the JIC. However, the United Kingdom only established their NSC in 2007, and it is apparent that it aims to use the NSC in concert with JIC in order to skillfully coordinate policy and intelligence. In the United Kingdom's case, the Committee of Imperial Defense (CID) already existed before World War I and served as the model for the US National Security Council. As the JIC was created under

the CID, the reciprocal use of intelligence and policy is not likely to become a significant problem.

Next, regarding the problem of distance between intelligence and policy, which was commented on earlier in this briefing, if intelligence and policy are situated too close together, the intelligence side can be influenced by the policy side and the intelligence side will tend to report information that is easy to accept by the policy side. A prime example of this is the politicization of information as was seen in the 45-minute claim.

This briefing has shown that the United Kingdom worked to establish a presence for its post-WWII intelligence by bringing intelligence and policy closer together, but conversely this attempt became a remote cause for failure in the Iraq War. It is highly likely that its intelligence reform is an attempt at ensuring a proper distance between intelligence and policy.

The purpose of this column is to respond to readers' interest in security issues and at the same time to promote a greater understanding of NIDS. As you know, a "briefing" means a background explanation, and we hope these columns will help everyone to better understand the complex issues involved in security affairs.

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