

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND SECURITY POLICING IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Our purpose in this first chapter is twofold: to explain the types of intelligence gathering conducted in French- and British-controlled Arab territories after World War I, and to trace the development of the security agencies that conducted it. The task looks simple, but identifying the various military, police, and intelligence agencies that comprised the imperial security services in the Arab world between 1918 and 1939 is less straightforward than one might imagine. The reason is, in large part, one of boundaries: jurisdictional, administrative, and racial. Colonial administrations were more animated by problems of internal security than were the metropolitan governments they served. Administrators outside the security services thus were integral to the process of information collection and analysis. Colonial states were intelligence states insofar as the entire bureaucratic apparatus of imperial administration in Muslim territories contributed to state surveillance of the subject population. It is therefore important to bear in mind that, while distinct security services existed in each of the territories studied here, they made use of funds, information, and personnel supplied by branches of the civil administration with no formal connection to the police or the armed forces.

The demands of wartime government between 1914 and 1918 stimulated greater bureaucratization of colonial states, especially military and police agencies, and colonial intelligence gathering against enemy powers became more institutionalized once war was declared. French and British civil and military intelligence staffs gathered information about colonial subversion sponsored by the central powers and, of course, planned subversive operations and propaganda offensives of their own.¹ Wartime administrative expansion added to the pool of qualified individuals available for colonial service in the Arab Middle East after the war. The early 1920s wit-

nessed a general retrenchment of colonial security services, however, as imperial governments tightened their budgetary belts. In common with their metropolitan equivalents, the imperial bureaucracy of the secret services shrank in the early 1920s before expanding markedly in the subsequent decade.² In the French mandates of Syria and Lebanon, the military intelligence service remained an elite organization of less than one hundred personnel.³ For much of the period studied here, colonial security services thus comprised a numerically small community of specialist police and military intelligence officers. Many of the latter were dispatched to the provinces or the desert interior, either as regional governors or as native affairs advisers. In all the colonial states investigated here, this distinct security service network was intimately linked to civil administration, feeding information to it and relying on its prompt intervention to maintain order even in the remotest locations. In the broadest sense, the entire administrative apparatus of the colonial state was an intelligence community, the colonial state an intelligence state.

Intelligence and Colonial Order

After 1918, problems of imperial authority in the Arab world stemmed above all from the gathering popular pressure for greater rights, freedoms, and cultural autonomy. Simply put, the rising force of Arab nationalism and other forms of indigenous opposition to European rule precluded the maintenance of stable imperial systems in the Middle East.⁴ Indeed, the very imposition of European political control in territories across the Middle East catalyzed the development of national identities defined in opposition to this external authority. At one extreme, Palestinian Arab identity, while linked to wider Muslim religious affiliations and the specific issue of Jewish immigration, was also shaped by the imposition of mandatory rule.⁵ With “nation building” in Palestine came oppositional Palestinian nationalism. So too in Syria, where the diffusion of nationalist ideas based on an inclusive populist nationalism gained huge momentum in the brief period of Amir Faysal’s republic from 1918 to 1920.⁶ At the other extreme, the Iraq mandate welded together former Ottoman *vilayets* and governed in conjunction with a Sunni elite posited a form of nationalism acceptable to the British and the Hashemite authorities in Baghdad.⁷ In Toby Dodge’s words, Iraq was a nation “invented” by the mandate.⁸ Not surprisingly, this artificial Iraqi nationhood sharpened the communal loyalties of its principal victims: the Shi’ite majority of the south and the Kurds of the north. In these circumstances, security intelligence assumed critical importance in preventing, curbing, or suppressing explosions of public discontent.

Protectorates and mandates may not have been colonies properly defined in constitutional terms, but the security service activity within them



Figure 1 Inventing a British Iraq I: British imperial troops commemorating the armistice at the Baghdad war memorial. TNA, AIR 23/7386. Crown copyright, reproduced courtesy of the National Archives, London.

was assuredly colonial in its fundamental purpose: to solidify imperial rule. Colonial intelligence gathering thus straddled the boundaries of conventional military intelligence, which focused on gathering and analyzing information about foreign powers, and internal security intelligence, which was devoted to political policing of the domestic population. First and foremost, surveillance of colonial populations targeted internal subversion. Clearly, *subversion* was a loaded term. As understood by colonial security agencies, it

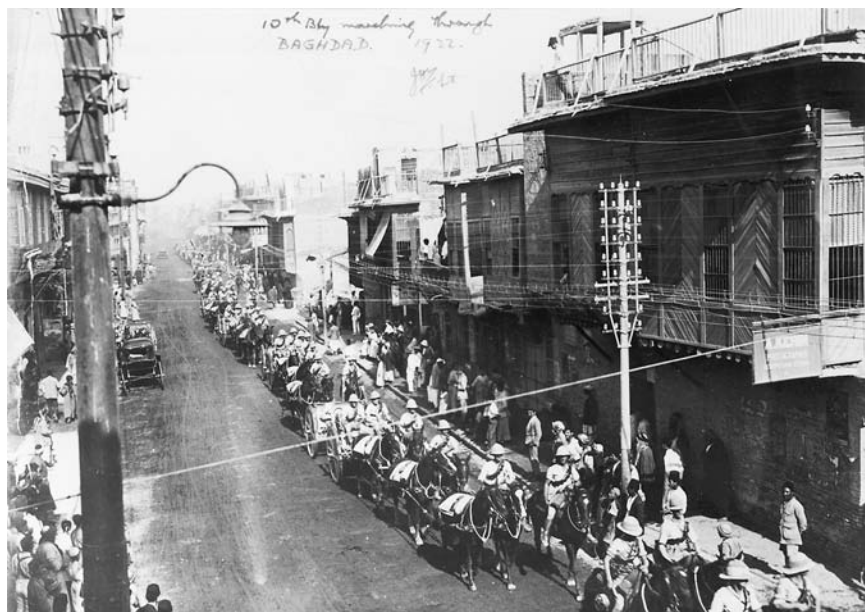


Figure 2 Inventing a British Iraq II: British army column staging a march-past through central Baghdad, 1922. TNA, WO 305/1933. Crown copyright, reproduced courtesy of the National Archives, London.

embraced every manner of political activity deemed a potential focal point for organized opposition to colonial authority.

That said, we *can* afford to be somewhat more reductive. Emergent anti-colonial nationalist groups dominated security policing in the two decades after 1919. Paradoxically, this preoccupation with internal subversion led to the retention of a certain foreign focus, more akin to the concerns of military intelligence.⁹ As we shall see in chapter 3, colonial security service surveillance of German and Ottoman efforts to foment dissent in British- and French-ruled Muslim territories in the First World War persisted into the 1920s with only a slight change of focus to foreign support for pan-Islamism, the caliphate movement, and even anticolonialism itself.¹⁰ And the persistent tendency among police and military intelligence agencies to exaggerate the connections between Communist egalitarianism and anti-colonial nationalism underlined the fact that colonial intelligence gathering was as much about foreign threats as domestic ones.¹¹

Another distinctive feature of security services was that their knowledge about the dependent population was primarily acquired for the purpose of social control by an endogenous ruling elite, and only secondarily for the

improvement of indigenous people's lives. Little systematic effort was made in the colonial setting to persuade dependent populations that state authorities acquired information about them for their ultimate benefit.

This state of affairs was not surprising. For one thing, there was less direct correlation in the colonies between the information acquired and the benefits conferred by the state than in Britain or France. Colonial tax collection, identity checks, military obligation, and police record keeping were tailored to the requirements of the imperial power, not those of the subject population. Colonial fiscal regimes were designed to meet the costs of administration itself, not to fund social spending beyond the requirements of administrators and settlers themselves. Additionally, colonial budget surpluses were generally the product of export trade in primary goods rather than taxation revenue, making it still less probable that state expenditure would be devoted to the welfare of colonial subjects.¹²

Identity cards restricted internal and external economic migration according to the wider interests of the colonial authorities rather than the local needs of the migrants themselves. The cataloguing of personnel records contributed to the criminalization of the colonial poor, the principal target of these measures. Armed with these records, security forces often worked from the presumption that vagrants, the unemployed, and economic migrants were most likely to transgress European and customary law and to become repeat offenders.¹³ By 1918, colonial military service meant, first and foremost, defense of the metropolitan power or of the empire, not the immediate local protection of kith and kin. Police intelligence gathering, whether undertaken for the retrospective punishment of rule breakers or as a preventive measure to enforce control, was racially framed and applied. In sum, the colonial state amassed information about subject populations to guarantee its monopoly over the use of force and to impose its authority on a subject population designated to play arduous but subordinate parts in a European-dominated economic system.

As we can see, because colonial rule was not rooted in consent, self-determination, or popular will (indeed, it stood in complete opposition to them), colonial security intelligence was intrinsically different from the security intelligence practiced "at home" by the imperial powers. By the start of World War I, the centralized accumulation of information about British subjects was not only integral to state intervention but popularly accepted as such. This data collection process had, of course, begun much earlier, even though the Treasury proved consistently reluctant to fund it. Home Office and Board of Trade officials were quicker to see the utility of such statistical information gathering.¹⁴ As Edward Higgs puts it in relation to late Victorian England, "The creation of a more centralized and pluralist state, the need to increase national efficiency, and the relative eclipse of moralism, can be seen as leading to the increased generation of data to inform central

intervention in local government and society.”¹⁵ In France, resistance to such state information gathering lasted longer, and a comprehensive fiscal system also developed more slowly.¹⁶ Nonetheless, by 1914 in France, as in Britain, taxation, military obligation, welfare provision, and civil and criminal law were all informed by data systematically acquired by the state through census records, income data, identity registration schemes, criminal profiling, and social surveys.¹⁷

The Great War therefore accelerated changes already underway. Societal mobilization in 1914–18 proved beyond doubt that the very survival of the nation-state demanded an unprecedented level of administrative control.¹⁸ The concept of state bureaucracy as a rationalized information-gathering system became more deeply embedded as a feature of modern industrial society.¹⁹ Indeed, social scientists have gone further, suggesting that state efforts to categorize, stratify, or remold the citizenry to meet ideological objectives or defined policy criteria are a benchmark of modernity itself.²⁰ Widening spheres of state intervention, whether for positive motives of improved living standards and welfare provision, or more negative ones of repression and coercive control, are thus indicative of this shift toward greater bureaucratic domination over society.²¹ Greater regulation of public behavior, economic activity, internal population movement, and fiscal exaction may not be inherently new, but such regulatory power is inescapably modern.²²

Types of Intelligence

Throughout the territories investigated here the boundaries between overtly political or criminal intelligence and more generic government information about a subject population were always blurred. Security intelligence was not entirely a matter of reporting seditious behavior and political activity. As suggested earlier, colonial government also required less contentious information about local demography, economic activity, and the institutions of civil society in town and countryside. The success of this colonial “information order” rested, in turn, on the degree of economic development in individual territories. The quality of infrastructure and internal communications systems determined the speed with which all intelligence could be transmitted to the central power.²³ Road systems and postal and telegraph networks augmented the scale and speed of governmental activity, enabling politicians and officials to take a welter of diverse up-to-date information into account as part of the daily cycle of decision making and policy planning.²⁴

Environmental Intelligence

The importance of infrastructure to intelligence transmission reminds us that an understanding of the physical environment was critical to the impo-

sition and maintenance of colonial rule. This may be more readily appreciated if one thinks in terms of maps—both cartographic and cognitive. British and French mapmakers, many of them employed by their military intelligence departments, traversed African and Arab territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁵ Some produced the first cartographic information available to Western officials charting the topography of colonial territories.²⁶ Roads, railways, harbors, cables, and telegraphs followed, their lines of advance revealing the progress of colonial expansion in general, and the advice of military intelligence experts, surveyors, and crown agents in particular.²⁷ Some focused on human geography and social anthropology, compiling ethnographic surveys of tribal concentrations and migratory patterns.²⁸ Others produced revised intelligence assessments that updated or corrected previously available information about water sources and rainfall, tribal migrations and agricultural activity, topography and communications.²⁹ Some updated previously available environmental intelligence as threat perceptions of the strategic value of particular ports, bases, and other key locations altered.³⁰ Still others tried to learn from local populations how best to adapt to physical conditions, and placed social behaviors as diverse as childrearing, marriage codes, and funeral rites in their environmental context. Whether maps, anthropological surveys, or sociological studies, these assessments were pivotal to military strategy in the Middle East and East African campaigns of the First World War and the frontier delimitations that followed in the 1920s.³¹ In perhaps the clearest example of the application of specialist ethnographic data to assist the implantation of external rule, French native affairs administrators in the Middle Atlas region of the Moroccan protectorate were assigned to compile a database of information on the composition, distribution, and customs of the region's Berber tribes. This was what one analyst has dubbed "strategic knowledge in the service of the colonial system."³²

The gathering and recording of ethnographic information was subjective, loaded with the values and presumptions of its practitioners. Factors such as education, racial prejudice, a scientific understanding of the natural world, political outlook, or religious affiliation informed the ways in which ostensibly empirical evidence was recorded. Mental maps were never simply about geography. They also represented the cognitive recognition of what was deemed important in any particular environment.³³ It was through this accumulation of written record and personal experience that colonial policymakers built up their mental maps of the territory and society under their authority.

This brings us back to the role of environmental intelligence. Taken together, this material represented a constantly updated archive of colonial geography—physical, human, political, and economic—intended to facilitate governmental decision making and promote inward commercial invest-

ment.³⁴ Information about climate, meteorology, river systems and water sources, demographic distribution, farming, and livestock conditions helped officials to construct a cognitive map of the local economy. Public spending priorities reflected this environmental intelligence, as did the development of taxation systems that focused on the subject population's most valuable assets, typically livestock, land, and labor rather than wage income or capital savings.³⁵ There were, for example, at least four distinct agricultural taxes in rural Algeria before the First World War, and local variations in taxation were commonly applied to reflect the predominant crops grown in a particular region.³⁶ Knowledge about scarce natural resources was essential to measure human and livestock pressure on land and likely competition for access to grazing or water. Communal rivalry over land possession added complexity to the problem.³⁷ Only with reliable intelligence about recurrent epidemics, famine, or other medical crises could a viable public health strategy be devised and "foreign bodies," whether human or bacterial, be contained.³⁸ In colonial societies that retained strong ties to the land, and whose economies were linked to the agricultural cycle, environmental intelligence was therefore integral to colonial governance.

The well-known role of geographical societies and anthropological survey groups as agents of popular imperialism in Britain and France make more sense in light of this. Georges Hardy, the one-time director of education in Senegal and Morocco who was appointed head of the *École Coloniale* in 1926, was, for example, quick to see the link between geographical research and successful colonization. In 1933 he penned a book on the subject in which he noted, "Whether it is a matter of European settlements or the simple indigenous environment [*encadrement*], the occupation of a populated country, or taking possession of a deserted land, colonization would essentially seem to rely upon the transformation of a region that has been retarded or neglected in the development of human potential. It therefore requires above all, a perfect knowledge of the regions to be transformed."³⁹ Historians have considered the connections between colonial expansion and the development of geography, ethnology, and anthropology as academic disciplines in Europe.⁴⁰ Taking environmental information seriously as part of the intelligence apparatus of colonial states, however, is something that few scholars have yet addressed.

Human Intelligence (Humint)

An essential feature of the modern nation-state is its capacity to integrate incoming information quickly into its decision-making processes. Distillation and exploitation of information about local conditions, physical as well as political—not to mention intelligence of perceived internal or external threats to authority—enhances the state's capacity to make reasoned policy

choices about how best to use the security forces at its disposal. Modern forms of information transfer are one part of this equation. Another is the growth in administrative personnel. Greater bureaucratization of government and a system of record keeping for rapid data retrieval were essential to enable senior officials to act on a manageable volume of all information reported. In this sense the increasing sophistication of intelligence gathering fit a broader pattern of technological advance that underpinned imperial conquest and consolidation.⁴¹ Much of this information fits the conventional demarcation between differing types of intelligence. But it is also important to remember the predominance of human intelligence (humint) sources in the array of information available to colonial security services. Typically gathered from controlled sources, often agents, informants, or local officials in the pay of the security services, humint enabled colonial governments to evaluate indigenous responses to state action.⁴²

Signals Intelligence (Sigint)

Colonial intelligence agencies before 1939 generally derived more information from humint than the more technologically advanced panoply of signals intelligence (sigint). Information derived from the interception and cryptanalysis (code breaking) of electronically transmitted messages was rare outside the realm of interstate relations. Anticolonial groups did not often communicate with one another electronically or in code. That is by no means to suggest that sigint was irrelevant. After 1920, mandate and protectorate governments were increasingly equipped with the means to send and receive electronic messages. Comintern agents also communicated in telegraphic cipher. Foreign missions, including those hostile to Britain and France, did so too. And local politicians sent and received telegrams that were subject to interception. So, before discussing the broader role of humint in colonial security policy, it seems sensible to comment on the extent of sigint received.

Colonial policymakers were privy to large quantities of signals intelligence. After 1919, the bulk of sigint material either acquired by or relayed to the French and British authorities in the Arab world derived from intercepts of diplomatic and military correspondence from Kemalist Turkey. Some of these intercepts were en clair dispatches, but most were transmitted as coded ciphers that required dedicated code-breaking staffs to decode them. Where telegraphic or cable facilities were made available to local, indigenous governments, as in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, the issuing imperial authorities ensured that they could listen in to the resultant messages transmitted. From time to time, the imperial authorities even supplied personnel to encode sigint traffic on behalf of the local governments, and thus monitor outgoing material. In addition, French and British imperial officials

made efforts to intercept one another's cipher traffic. Ironically, sigint was also sometimes shared between them, notably when it related to German or Soviet penetration of Arab territories or the activities of pan-Islamist groups that spanned French and British overseas possessions.⁴³

Signals intelligence was therefore pivotal to attitude formation among the policymaking elites in these territories. It commanded respect because it represented information gathered direct "from the horse's mouth." But decoded signals rarely determined short-term policy decisions. There were several reasons for this. Much intercepted cipher traffic was not fed into the policymaking process swiftly enough to affect the courses of action adopted. Even *en clair* sigint required translation, reprint, and circulation, a bureaucratic process that took time and required specialist personnel. Taken alone, sigint was insufficiently comprehensive to allow informed policy choices to be made. Sigint's importance to the colonial states studied here lay in what it revealed about longer-term trends in policy and opinion, potential flash points, and organized opposition to imperial rule.

Signals intelligence was also integrated into threat assessments compiled by intelligence staffs, diplomats, and senior colonial advisers. It helped intelligence analysts measure the intentions of political opponents, but it was less useful as an indicator of these opponents' capacity to mobilize support in opposition to colonial rule at any given moment. Only the patient accumulation of humint among indigenous communities could fill this gap. Taken in combination with such humint, signals intelligence helped shape the threat perceptions of imperial policymakers. If sigint's impact on colonial security policy may be registered in these deeper, more intangible terms of attitude and "the official mind," the fact remains that, in peacetime conditions, colonial governments did not develop bureaucracies capable of exploiting incoming sigint on a day-to-day basis.

Image Intelligence (Imint)

Much the same could be said of image intelligence (*imint*), which refers primarily to two types of visual information: aerial photography by military reconnaissance flights and the production of accurate topographical intelligence for use by officials.

Developed before the First World War, the use of *imint* after 1919 became closely tied to strategies of rural policing, frontier surveillance, and tribal control. Aerial photography provided essential intelligence about tribal raids and deployments of hostile forces in otherwise inaccessible terrain such as the Moroccan Rif, Syria's Jabal Druze, the hill country of Kurdistan, or the vast interior of Sudan. It also provided valuable evidence about movements of people and animals, everything from hajj traffic, cross-border infiltration, and nomadic migration to livestock grazing, water

sources, and locust infestations. In addition to this imint, pilots and their observers typically submitted written summaries of reconnaissance flights that either supplemented aerial photography or rendered it superfluous.⁴⁴ Use of aircraft thus extended the range of situational intelligence gathering, literally providing a view of events in the rural interior sometimes simultaneously, or even in advance, of intelligence information relayed at ground level by telegraph, land line, or courier by district officers, Arab affairs specialists, or police outposts. Imint also affected long-term policy formulation, not least because aerial photography intersected the ongoing work of colonial mapmakers, geologists, and archaeologists. By the 1920s, aerial surveys had revolutionized the working practices of military staffs and civilian specialists whose decisions demanded accurate information about topography and climate, agriculture and water distribution, or sites of archaeological interest.⁴⁵

The Supremacy of Humint

The exploitation of human intelligence was altogether different. Among Western European states in the early twentieth century, the balance between the generation of sigint and humint gradually tilted in favor of the former.⁴⁶ In colonial states, however, the opposite applied. Acquiring information about the dependent population was always fundamental to colonial rule, as much for the purposes of fiscal calculation, social policy, and resource allocation as for the needs of political surveillance. The administrative apparatus of social control was an admixture of European regulation, customary law, and long-established practices of commerce, social exchange, and intercommunal relations only slowly affected by changes in central government. Colonial legal systems, for example, varied from territory to territory, but often developed from the interaction of European administrators and local elites anxious to circumscribe the imposition of Western regulation of civil law, land ownership, and criminality.⁴⁷ In this administrative field, as in others, the state's accumulation of information about dependent societies was a gargantuan intelligence-gathering exercise.

Here we confront a problem. To treat humint as any information derived from contact with a subject population is to render the term meaningless. But, in the colonial settings analyzed here, humint comprised far more than specifically political intelligence drawn from local informants. Covert surveillance of political meetings and religious gatherings, and the monitoring of protonationalist secret societies and illicit contacts between anticolonial organizations, inevitably attracted most comment among security service analysts. But more prosaic, open-source intelligence about popular behavior was more important in the long term. Amassing information about the daily lives of the local population enabled colonial security services to eval-

uate more sensational intelligence about subversion and disorder. Only by amassing such low-grade intelligence about social conditions could security services assess the significance of higher-grade humint on oppositional activity.

Put simply, human intelligence represented both specific information about threats to the colonial order drawn from native milieus and a more diffuse range of evidence about social structure, customs, and beliefs. The weight attached to the former was measured by reference to knowledge of the latter. Demographic surveys, economic data, and sociological analyses of tribal organization not only assisted government in determining taxation levels, commercial priorities, and communal policy, they influenced the intelligence culture—denoting the shared outlook and operating assumptions—of the imperial security services. Seen in this light, humint pervaded all facets of security service policy.

Information and Colonial Rule

Those same agencies of the colonial state that amassed information about indigenous populations also sought to control the movement of knowledge within local society. Their aim was to mold popular opinion, or, at the very least, shape the views of influential elites. Colonial security required a measure of control over the ebb and flow of political debate. It was just as essential to know what was being discussed in mosques, bazaars, communal wash-houses, tribal conferences, and village meetings as it was to uncover the plans of nationalist organizations operating at the margins of legality. Only then could local authorities set about influencing these differing forums of opinion to European advantage. Legislative proscription of subversive groups was too blunt a weapon. If used indiscriminately it was likely to undermine those institutions of civil society—tribal and village councils, debating clubs and meeting houses, professional associations, trade guilds, and business networks—that Western rule claimed to promote. Governments required information from within such forums in order to anticipate the causes of dissent.

Intelligence of this kind informed the daily actions and executive decisions of colonial states in North Africa and the Middle East. There is an analogy here with the British experience in colonial India, as revealed in C. A. Bayly's pioneering work. Good colonial government in the British Raj, in the sense of unchallenged imperial authority, relied in large part on what Bayly terms an "information order." This represented the exploitation of state intelligence gathering to regulate indigenous means of social communication, or, to use Bayly's terminology, "an empire of information" to control a distinct "empire of opinion." The maintenance of colonial order exploited the formal, increasingly bureaucratized information systems of the

colonial state to exert influence over autonomous networks of social communication in Indian society—local language media, religious forums and mass social gatherings, indigenous marketplaces, and meeting places of the indigenous elite.⁴⁸

By the same token, bad colonial government, evinced by disorder and rebellion, signified a breakdown in the state's intelligence about indigenous society. When this occurred, colonial officials and settler communities frequently succumbed to "information panics," filling the void left by intelligence gathering with unsubstantiated rumor.⁴⁹ The credence attached to these rumors reflected racial or class prejudice, compounded by varying degrees of paranoia born of the closed, undemocratic structure of colonial society.⁵⁰ As previously discussed, in all contexts in which European intelligence providers formulated threat assessments about non-European colonial subjects or regional rivals, prevailing racial attitudes inevitably affected intelligence analysis. The operating assumption of "threat" in intelligence analysis implies that an individual or group exhibit both the intention to act and the capacity to do so in ways prejudicial to state security. Yet intelligence analysts had little truck with detailed consideration of changing levels of support for hostile political groups. More sweeping generalizations took precedence instead. British and French colonial threat assessments assumed that political disorders were likely to begin in urban or tribal settings. It was further calculated that the peasant majority in the countryside was easily led into dissent by their own community leaders or, more simply, by a sense of having little to lose. Furthermore, a common security service belief that Muslim subjects were predisposed to religious fanaticism or political extremism obviated the need for careful evaluation of their grievances. Since these complaints were typically a product of colonialism itself—racial exclusion, economic marginalization, and affronts to culture—it was perhaps inevitable that colonial intelligence analysts were, on occasion, deaf to them. Put simply, intelligence assessments characterized colonial subjects as putty in the hands of shrewd political manipulators, whether European or indigenous.

The result was that alarmist colonial threat assessments could gain credibility without much corroborative evidence. In French Africa, for instance, the return of tens of thousands of ex-servicemen from the Western Front after 1918 generated widespread concern among colonial authorities.⁵¹ It was widely feared that resentful Africans with direct experience of life in France would upset the colonial state's cultural construction of France as unquestionably superior to and different from African society.⁵² Fear of disorders linked to colonial demobilization stimulated employment schemes for Algerian veterans based on the allocation of low-grade public sector jobs to returning servicemen.⁵³ Meanwhile, ethnographers worked in conjunction with French West African administrations in the 1920s to reinforce concepts of difference between French culture and the ingrained traditional-

ism of African society.⁵⁴ Colonial control over social communication began from the proposition that indigenous subjects could be persuaded to believe what officials chose to tell them about their rulers.⁵⁵

In the Asian context, official fears of pan-Asianism, Islamic “fanaticism,” multinational support for the caliphate movement, and memories of the “yellow peril” literature of the early twentieth century all colored evaluations of anticolonial movements.⁵⁶ Ironically, however, a paucity of intelligence—even crudely racist intelligence—compounded the tendency among European populations to paint subject races in lurid colors. As Bayly puts it, “The basic fear of the colonial official or settler was, consequently, his lack of indigenous knowledge and ignorance of the ‘wiles of the natives.’ He feared their secret letters, their drumming and ‘bush telegraphy’ and the nightly passage of seditious agents masquerading as priests or holy men.”⁵⁷ Information panics in nineteenth-century India over *thuggi* armed gangs and, most significantly, the spread of mutiny in 1857, illustrated how momentous the disruption in the empire of information system could be. These intelligence failures were often described as vital precedents from which the colonial state had to learn if it was to survive.⁵⁸

Such information panics highlight the dilemmas confronted by all colonial security services striving to assure imperial authority over subject populations denied basic rights and freedoms. In societies where verbal communication among the illiterate majority remained the principal means for the transmission of political ideas, colonial security forces had to find ways to learn what was being whispered about them or planned against them. The fundamental iniquity of colonial rule, however, made it especially hard for agents of the colonial state to penetrate indigenous society in order to anticipate rebellion or unrest. Not surprisingly, policemen, political and military intelligence analysts, and district officers found it easier to gather useful intelligence about the literate, urban indigenous elites close to the centers of imperial power than to take account of the opinions of the illiterate masses in town and countryside. On those occasions when the authorities did learn of planned sedition, demonstrations, or strike actions, the propensity to use force made it harder still to acquire such information in the future. Colonial officials, afraid that their tenuous control over a resentful population might collapse, applied disproportionate force to contain unrest in the short term, which only heightened the likelihood of more widespread dissent in the long term.⁵⁹

It was no coincidence that the writ of imperial authority was weakest in distinct theaters in which accurate information about social behavior and public attitudes was hardest to obtain. Colonial frontier regions stood out in this respect. Whether the frontier in question was administrative, ethnic, or international, regions at the furthest margins of colonial conquest and settlement were policed in a distinct frontier style. The military played a leading

role in local administration, the transition to civil policing was usually slower than in urban centers, and in many cases such a transition never occurred at all.⁶⁰ Obvious examples include the Moroccan Rif, Syria's Jabal Druze, Iraqi Kurdistan, the land frontier of the Aden protectorate, the southern desert of the Fertile Crescent, and the upper Nile reaches of southern Sudan. In these instances, geographical inaccessibility combined with strong communal affiliation either to frustrate the accumulation of accurate human intelligence or to prevent its rapid transmission to central government.⁶¹ Comparisons may be drawn between these "unruly" regions and similarly remote areas of British South Asia, such as Waziristan and Burma, in which imperial government proved unable to use intelligence to prevent disorder.⁶²

In urban settings, too, the colonial authorities often struggled to acquire reliable, usable information about discrete sections of the community. Mosques were increasingly monitored by informants and regulated by restrictive legislation on the content of religious ceremony. Market centers and ports were also subject to close surveillance because these were primary points of contact between a local community and the wider world. Industrial workplaces were another key site of state surveillance as urbanization and the emergence of an organized colonial proletariat gathered pace. Surveillance alone did not constrain the political processes being observed. Sometimes the objects of state interest were not aware they were being watched. More often they were, and adjusted their behavior accordingly. Whichever the case, religious, commercial, and industrial gathering points remained forcing grounds for organized opposition. Moreover, entire arenas of indigenous society were beyond the reach of state surveillance. British and French colonial authorities singularly failed to amass information about the social lives and political opinions of Muslim women. The colonial authorities appreciated that public segregation of the sexes in Islamic society was no barrier to the politicization of women. The widespread emergence of women's movements and the strong presence of women protesters in public disturbances from food riots to nationalist demonstrations after 1918 only confirmed the point. But at no stage did the colonial states of North Africa and the Middle East develop viable channels of communication with leaders of female opinion. Households, women's bathhouses, the reserved spaces of mosque prayer halls, even the first classrooms for trainee women professionals, remained outside the intelligence-gathering system. Political surveillance was an overwhelmingly male occupation in terms of both the watchers and the watched.

Civil Administration and Intelligence Specialists

Much of the day-to-day work for those gathering information about dependent populations was routine, a cycle of clerical record keeping and statis-

tical returns, provincial tours, meetings with local dignitaries, and the arbitration of minor disputes. These accumulated tasks were typically registered in summary reports of past activity. Details of public works inspections, meetings with settlers, traders, and mission staff, discussions with lowly village headmen or chiefly rulers: all were distilled into written records.⁶³ Individual events, discussions, or observations of particular importance might justify a letter, telegram, or telegraphic dispatch to the governor's office or the local military headquarters. But this was the exception, not the rule. In general, the more prosaic records of local administration were the stuff of intelligence assessment. The paper chain of regional bureaucracy passed up the line of imperial authority was the raw material of the colonial information order.

Across colonial territories this summary information was codified in similar ways. District commissioners' monthly or weekly reports, regional governors' summaries of local conditions, or more specialist departmental surveys of policy options typically divided their analyses of the colonial situation into what could be classified as administrative intelligence, environmental intelligence, and political intelligence.⁶⁴

Administrative intelligence related to matters such as taxation systems, judicial proceedings, public health, economic migration, and tribal affairs. Environmental intelligence was primarily a matter of communications and agronomy. It described the state of the internal infrastructure, soil conditions, the crop cycle and pests, market prices and foodstuff shortages, meteorological data and water resources, and the size and condition of national livestock herds. Political intelligence reported local disputes, the reaction of community leaders to policy changes or significant political developments, and the activities of organized political groups, whether parties, tribal confederations, or labor organizations. Where comments on public opinion were made, they were typically deduced by reference to issues of the day in the vernacular press and any major public gatherings whether oppositional, ceremonial, or commercial.⁶⁵

The proportion of incoming reportage devoted to administrative matters remained broadly constant, a reflection of the perennial nature of the issues discussed. Taxes, criminal proceedings, and variable public health were permanent preoccupations of colonial government. By contrast, the volume of reportage on environmental topics and political affairs varied in response to the most pressing concerns of the colonial authorities at the time. District officials and garrison commanders paid closer attention to severe agricultural problems such as harvest failure, drought, labor shortages, or crop infestations because of their adverse impact on the local economy and society. And political intelligence was most fulsome when dominated by "bad news" of local violence or mounting threats to the colonial state.⁶⁶

The obverse was that in more tranquil political conditions, district commissioners, police captains, and even regional governors were content to pass over the local political scene with little comment. Prevailing assumptions about the corruptive potential of urban politics on otherwise compliant peasant cultivators and tribal populations compounded this tendency to report on rural political developments in terms of the disruptive presence of external elements from the towns, whether politicians, absentee landlords, ‘ulamā, or effendi administrators.⁶⁷ It was a stock feature of British political intelligence especially to write extensively on political issues only in response to tangible evidence of local instability provoked by such “outsiders.” In more placid conditions, political officers simply noted that there had been no important developments in the period under review.

In the French case, too, the native affairs officers who collated incoming local and regional intelligence reports often interpreted political developments in a reductive fashion. In the first few months following the First World War, the native affairs division (*direction des affaires indigènes*) in the Algiers government-general made a sharp distinction between the colony’s urban centers, where Muslim civil society merited close analysis, and rural Algeria, where oppositional politics was still viewed as a by-product of prevailing economic conditions rather than as an indicator of emergent popular nationalism.⁶⁸ As we shall see in chapter 7, this rigid distinction between town and countryside would continue throughout the interwar years. It is thus incumbent on the researcher to stress that, for all the intelligence reports filed on colonial dissent, there is also an abundance of more mundane evidence regarding places and periods in which, according to the officials involved, nothing much seems to have happened—or at least nothing much thought to be worth reporting.

Reportage of administrative, environmental, and political intelligence was ultimately reflected in the policy advice of more senior colonial administrators, too. In August 1917, Sir Percy Cox took office as Britain’s civil commissioner for Mesopotamia. Once in the post, he filed a series of periodic reports on British prospects in what was by then known as Iraq to the India Office Political Department and the interministerial Eastern Committee in Whitehall. Throughout Cox’s tenure in Baghdad the nature and extent of British political control over the three Iraqi *vilayets* remained uncertain. Faced with the challenges of reconstruction, Cox’s early reports were inevitably dominated by administrative matters: the role of Arab notables and former Ottoman officials in government and judicial affairs, the establishment of an Iraqi police force, and the distribution of food supplies to the major towns. Environmental intelligence from army political officers in the Iraqi interior also figured large. It was clear, for example, that repair of roads and communications networks, and extensive irrigation projects

along the Tigris and Euphrates were essential if social order were to be maintained after the war ended.

Another concern was the regulation of Bedouin migration. Large-scale population movements complicated British efforts to ensure adequate food distribution to the major population centers in and around Baghdad, Kerbala, and Basra.⁶⁹ The accent on state building lent extra weight to information gathering about infrastructure, economy, and demography to the virtual exclusion of purely political intelligence.⁷⁰ During 1918–19, Curzon's Foreign Office and the British administration in Iraq also monitored the army officers that dominated the Arab political clubs, which were so influential in articulating the demands of the Sunni elite grouped around Amir Faysal's administrations, first in Damascus and then in Baghdad.⁷¹

Cox's disdain for the installation of a Sherifian ruler in Iraq was widely known, but the information he received from political officers, technical advisers, and Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force officers during 1917–19 was dominated by the short-term requirements of civil administration. Cox's reports to London and Delhi duly reflected this information flow. What, in hindsight, was portrayed by Cox's admirers, Gertrude Bell prominent among them, as dispassionate British pragmatism at its best, was little more than the hand-to-mouth existence of a tenuous imperial administration reliant on the advice of its intelligence community to determine its immediate policy choices.⁷² These initial surveys acquired additional importance because the government of India had shelved plans, put forward by Cox himself in May 1917, to establish a Mesopotamia study commission to advise on political conditions in the Iraq *vilayets*.⁷³

There are a number of parallels between the priorities in intelligence reportage in the Iraq mandate and those in the first phase of French control in the Levant. High Commissioner General Henri Gouraud and his principal government ally, Prime Minister Alexandre Millerand, conceded that intelligence gathering had to fill the gaps left by the weakness of overstretched imperial forces in Syria, Lebanon, and Cilicia.⁷⁴ Much like the Baghdad High Commission, French officials in Beirut also amassed information on the Levant's ethnic and religious communities, Bedouin migratory cycles, and tribal allegiances in order to consolidate French authority.⁷⁵ The ethnic composition of Syria and Lebanon was every bit as complex as that of Iraq, but in contrast with the construction of the Iraqi state, which rested on the enforced unification of previously disparate regions, the partition of Ottoman Greater Syria was shaped by the French determination to consolidate a separate, Christian-dominated Lebanese state and by the creation of the neighboring British mandates in Palestine and Transjordan. It is simplistic to argue that French administration amounted to a system of divide and rule. Gouraud's staff, regional commanders, and the urban governments of Syria's four main towns—Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and

Hama—did exploit information on communal politics to entrench French authority at the expense of the Sunni Arab majority, however. Gouraud was quite explicit about this in the months preceding the French confrontation with Faysal's Damascus regime in July 1920:

The objective is to restore regional order, calm and confidence, protecting the population against troublemakers [*fauteurs de troubles*]; and, to that end, pursuing political ends while limiting the use of force to cases of absolute necessity. . . . In order to dissociate elements of the Muslim population that tend to unite over religious matters, we will need to favor particular minorities, different nationality groups such as Kurds, Assyrians, Circassians, etc., that are all amenable to constituting a defense against external threat, provided that we know how to attract them to us.⁷⁶

Intelligence gathering thus fulfilled two pressing administrative needs at the outset of French mandatory control. First, it identified potential flash points of political violence, enabling the Beirut high commission to allocate limited military and police resources to greatest effect. Second, it accumulated data on the ethnic, confessional, and economic composition of Syria and Lebanon that laid the foundations for regional policymaking for the next twenty years. The pattern of information collection set in the first years of the French mandate remained remarkably consistent throughout the interwar years. In November 1935, the Levant Army's military intelligence service (Service de Renseignements—SR) defined its work in the following terms:

Foreign military intelligence services in Syria and Lebanon, as in general throughout the Near East, gather less purely military intelligence than they do political and economic information. Detailed knowledge of the country, its communications and access routes, the diversity of its social and religious composition as well as the reasons that pit one group against another (tribal organization and rivalry, [ethnic] minorities, pan-Arab movements, etc.), may, in effect, seem both more important and more difficult to acquire than knowledge of military organization, [which is] often a matter of numbers and strengths.⁷⁷

The Levant SR was not alone in seeing itself as integral to the machinery of government. Civilian police agencies and the army officers of the Muslim affairs bureau conceptualized their role in broader terms than criminal investigation, rural administration, or military security. Each recognized that the information order of which they were a part was the bedrock of governance. After all, French mandate administration was not the product of a long gestation, but the abrupt creation of an externally imposed peace settlement and the crushing military defeat of an Arab regime. Detailed knowledge of potential sources of opposition to mandatory control remained critical throughout the quarter century of French rule.

The Sûreté and the Service de Renseignements

In the Syrian mandate, much like the Moroccan protectorate, the combination of a well-developed urban civil society and coherent tribal communities hostile to European control ensured the security services' pivotal role in French efforts to impose their imperial power.⁷⁸ We shall be considering these cases at length in chapter 5, but at this stage it is worth dwelling on the organizational structures of the security agencies concerned: the Sûreté and the Service de Renseignements. The French secret police acquired greater importance during World War I. By 1914, it was subdivided into the Renseignements Généraux linked to the Paris Prefecture of Police and a dedicated special branch, the police spéciale of the Sûreté Générale (SG), which tracked seditious activity in France. Both worked under Interior Ministry control.

The wartime activities of the French civil and military security services were highly politicized, something that fit a longer tradition of politically motivated intelligence operations. In common with secret police forces across Europe, by 1900 covert policing in France was synonymous with dirty tricks, secret blacklists, agents provocateurs, and the interception of mail, variously employed to weaken groups or individuals considered threatening to the state.⁷⁹ After war broke out, the SG, in particular, increasingly pursued a political agenda of its own, at variance with the conciliatory, *Union sacrée*—inspired ideals of its ministerial chief, Louis Malvy. During 1917 the SG and army intelligence staff worked in unison to foment a conspiracy theory linking foreign espionage, antimilitarism, and senior politicians willing to contemplate a negotiated peace. Their aim was to divert public and press attention from the flawed military strategy that precipitated the 1917 mutinies. This meshed with a longer SG campaign to oust Malvy from his post as interior minister, thereby lending support to Georges Clemenceau as leader of a more resolute right-wing coalition. By tracing the development of this conspiracy theory, David Parry has shown that the French intelligence community could unseat certain ministers and ruin the reputations of others in pursuit of its preferred policies. We need to bear in mind that the politicization of security service surveillance was an accomplished fact long before the armistice.⁸⁰

In 1915, the SR, the principal intelligence-gathering agency of the French general staff, was tied more closely to the Sûreté Générale. (The latter was renamed the Sûreté Nationale in 1934.) The military intelligence analysts of the service ministry *deuxième bureaux*, who processed and assessed incoming SR material, were also privy to increasing quantities of SG reports. On 28 May 1915, a research center was established by ministerial order within the Paris Prefecture of Police, which was paralleled by a military Section de Centralisation du Renseignement (SCR) attached to the

army's deuxième bureau within the War Ministry. This SCR received reports from—and coordinated the activities of—the local military intelligence centers (Bureaux centraux de renseignement—BCR) within each French military region. BCR staff worked in liaison with their civilian partners in provincial Sûreté offices and functioned independent of the municipal police forces across France.

From December 1915, the intelligence-gathering functions of the SR and SCR were linked to a newly established War Ministry cinquième bureau that was also responsible for the dissemination of propaganda, postal control, and liaison with Allied military intelligence services. This wartime demarcation between the activities of the SR and the SCR persisted in the interwar period. The former collected intelligence on foreign powers and formulated policy advice on the basis of the information gathered. The latter devoted itself to counterespionage and surveillance of seditious threats within metropolitan and imperial territory.⁸¹

By the war's end the SR had become a core element of French military planning. Its survival—if not its budget—assured, the SR was again tied to the deuxième bureau rather than to the wartime expedient of the cinquième. Henceforth, the central bureaucracy of the “deuxième bureau SR-SCR” became embedded in a number of War Ministry properties in Paris. Senior military intelligence analysts worked in the suitably academic surroundings of the rue de l'Université, just off the boulevard Saint Germain. This was also the location of the army staff's deuxième bureau headquarters. From the rue de l'Université, raw SR intelligence was passed on to the deuxième bureau offices around the corner, where it was collated with incoming reports from military attachés and synthesized into assessments distributed to staff officers and the service ministers concerned.

Meanwhile, in its counterespionage activities, the SCR had closer ties to the police spéciale and to individual Prefectures of Police, which, as civil policing agencies, remained attached to the Ministry of the Interior. For the Paris prefecture, in particular, this surveillance work became integral to the growing workload of the capital's police immigration service.⁸² Since 1899, the War Ministry had focused its intelligence gathering on foreign army activities abroad. Civil authorities retained responsibility for counterespionage in France, in Algeria, and throughout the empire. Counterespionage work was initially added piecemeal to the caseload of the Sûreté and the gendarmerie nationale, but army involvement was inevitable because effective counterespionage served the military interest. The intelligence amassed about potential enemies assisted general staff planning, mobilization preparations, and military deployments. Hence the importance attached to the SCR.⁸³

Counterespionage work was laborious, time-consuming, and highly specialized. Reorganized by decree a year before World War I began, counter-

espionage operations in France were brought under the overall jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry by a decree of 24 November 1924. The Sûreté's role as coordinating agency for counterespionage was replicated in imperial territories, meaning, in practice, that military intelligence officers were required to liaise with the Sûreté in all matters affecting state security against foreign subversion. In several colonial capitals the central Sûreté office was the main repository for the files routinely used in counterespionage work: criminal data, travel and visa documentation, and the personnel records of all public sector employees, both civil and military.⁸⁴ Among the tasks included in this ordinance were the monitoring of frontiers and any militarily sensitive areas such as bases, munitions stores, armaments factories, and testing ranges. Despite their close cooperation, the SCR and the Sûreté retained their distinct military and civilian identities and neither formally took precedence over the other. The autonomy and parity that each enjoyed was thus intended to encourage cooperation without jurisdictional rivalry.⁸⁵

Inevitably, there was some duplication of effort between the military intelligence analysts of the SR/SCR and the detectives of the Sûreté, but French colonial authorities accepted this as a minor inconvenience next to the benefits of shared expertise and information exchange. Moreover, the theoretically rigid distinctions between military intelligence and civilian policing blurred in colonial societies where political violence typically required the combined efforts of army and police to contain it. Time and again, SR and Sûreté personnel extended their inquiries into one another's domain, with military intelligence interesting itself in subversive political groups and the Sûreté monitoring any signs of seditious attitudes among colonial garrisons.

In colonial towns and cities during the interwar years, most Sûreté surveillance operations sought out four main targets: local Communist activists, strike organizers among colonial workers, nationalist groups, and colonial student bodies. Although the relative emphasis on these targets differed markedly among territories, the cycle of police transfers between colonies and metropolitan France encouraged homogeneity in Sûreté operations across the empire as a whole. From the Interior Ministry, the Direction de la Sûreté Générale maintained overall responsibility for its subordinate units across the empire and further ensured a certain uniformity of practice. One instance of this was the surveillance of Maghrebi immigrant workers in the Paris region coordinated from the capital's main police headquarters, a practice emulated in provincial cities such as Lille, Marseilles, Strasbourg, and Toulouse, and similarly copied in French North Africa.⁸⁶ As we shall see in chapter 7, immigrant workers from Kabylia, the densely populated Berber heartland of Algeria, were therefore monitored by police agencies during their stay in France, and by equivalent police units once they returned home.⁸⁷

Within France and its empire, police officers still held the leading role in monitoring urban sedition, typically sending monthly or even weekly reports to local prefects. The prefectures, in turn, prepared intelligence summaries, which were then transmitted to the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Colonies as appropriate. As the scale of security policing increased, so too did reliance on indigenous personnel. During the 1920s, larger numbers of local Muslim applicants were taken on as *Sûreté* agents as central government pressed colonial police services to make additional posts available to ex-servicemen. In Algeria, the posts of *inspecteur de la police mobile* and *agent de la police départementale* were also sometimes reserved for Muslim ex-servicemen after 1918. In rural communes, army experience, rather than police training, determined the recruitment of local auxiliaries. Greater numbers of Muslim ex-servicemen, most of them long-service professionals, joined rural police forces during the 1920s and were typically assigned more low-grade positions than their settler counterparts as village policemen or farm guards.⁸⁸ The predominance in postwar *Sûreté* reports of humint gathered by indigenous agent informants could be read as a sign of strength or weakness. On the one hand, local informants with close ties to their local community were best placed to provide reliable information about Muslim opinion. On the other hand, colonial security services were, at best, dependent on the quality of the information provided by their indigenous intelligence providers and, at worse, open to manipulation by them.

New Intelligence Developments: Sigint and the British Example

There was no British security service in the Arab world with quite the same esprit de corps as the French SR, or quite the same numerical strength as the *Sûreté*, but Britain's imperial intelligence providers were every bit as important to imperial rule. The use of signals intelligence (sigint) in Britain's Middle Eastern territories underlines the point.

Before 1914, the employment of sigint in colonial conflicts and imperial policing was still in its infancy. Yet, as John Ferris has clarified, the use of such intelligence for the surveillance of regional rivals and movements of hostile, or potentially hostile, military forces at the margins of imperial territory was becoming widely established before the war in Europe spread to the Ottoman Middle East.⁸⁹ The usefulness of sigint was a function of the speed with which it could be translated, analyzed, and exploited. Hence the development of dedicated cryptographic departments, of which the Admiralty's Room 40 has drawn the greatest historical attention. Code breaking, deciphered wireless transmissions, intercepted letters and cable communications, as well as diplomatic and commercial correspondence were all facets of the security apparatus of the British imperial state prior to the expansion of Britain's power into the heart of the Arab world after 1914.

On the eve of World War I, humint from diplomats, businessmen, tourist travelers, and agents was the main source of covert information on the Ottoman Middle East available to the British authorities in Egypt. By the time Ottoman Turkey entered the conflict, however, sigint was fast catching up with more traditional forms of humint as a source of strategic information. Unprecedented access to Ottoman prisoners of war (POWs) and defectors in the first years of the conflict meant that the relative importance of humint grew next to the more modern forms of technical intelligence available—from aerial reconnaissance to the interception and decryption of enemy wireless transmissions.⁹⁰ This did not, however, alter the fact that sigint was becoming a vital element of strategic planning and tactical decision making.⁹¹ Yigal Sheffy's meticulous evaluation of the use of intelligence in the Palestine campaign concludes that humint made only a marginal contribution to British military success. Reconnaissance and, above all, wireless intelligence were more central in key theaters, particularly in the Hijaz, where Ottoman military reliance on wireless transmissions was greatest.⁹²

Furthermore, one of the less well advertised facets of the *entente cordiale* in action was the liaison between British imperial cryptanalysts and their more experienced French military counterparts in the army's commission of military cryptography. Ferris points out that George MacDonogh, the head of the War Office Intelligence Department, sought close ties with his French colleagues from 1912, a development emulated by the British Secret Service, which shared MacDonogh's respect for French intelligence expertise.⁹³ In the eastern Mediterranean theater, the regional naval commands spearheaded Anglo-French intelligence cooperation. Information was exchanged and joint operations planned between French intelligence staff attached to their naval squadron in Egypt and the British Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau. Both organizations placed agents in the Levant from 1915 onward and shared the intelligence gathered on Ottoman troop movements and strategic intentions.⁹⁴

The government of India's Political Service, staffed largely by Indian Army officers, also maintained a watching brief on the Arab territories of the Ottoman Middle East and the Persian Gulf area.⁹⁵ In 1906, the Indian general staff created a Special Section of its Intelligence Branch devoted to cryptographic work against the czarist regime and Russian commanders in territories from Persia to Manchuria. In 1907, a dedicated code-breaking bureau supplanted the Special Section entirely. Understaffed and sometimes overlooked by policymakers, these code breakers nonetheless exploited the Indian government's control of the international communications cables passing through India's soil. Control of this communications network offered unprecedented access to the military telegram traffic of foreign states, Russia and China especially.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, between 1914 and

1918 Indian police intelligence focused on disaffected Hindu leaders in Bengal, Har Dayal's revolutionary Ghadr party, and India's Muslim population. The government of India watched for signs of sedition among these groups, fired by German and Ottoman propaganda calling for pan-Islamic solidarity with the Turkish caliph. In fact, Ottoman propaganda in India and among British imperial forces in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia was singularly ineffective. The subversive activities of the German Foreign Ministry's Intelligence Bureau for the East headed by Baron Max von Oppenheim posed a more tangible threat. But Oppenheim's efforts always foundered on the lack of credible Indian leaders with whom to cooperate. German sedition among the tribes of southern Persia proved a more dangerous menace to British interests than Berlin's support for Indian revolutionaries.⁹⁷

By the end of World War I, the focus of British imperial, and indeed metropolitan, sigint surveillance of rival powers had shifted from Germany to Soviet Russia, a less familiar and therefore a less well understood intelligence target. It bears emphasis that much of the confusion and persistent exaggeration surrounding alleged Communist intrigue and support for pan-Islamism in the British Empire mirrored similar uncertainties at home.⁹⁸ The British secret services were reorganized between 1919 and 1923 to focus primarily on Soviet sedition. In January 1919, the Cabinet established a Secret Service Committee (SSC) dedicated to surveillance of Communist sedition in Britain. This was the harbinger of a more thoroughgoing reorganization of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) marked by greater centralization of incoming information—both sigint and humint, covert and open-source—regarding revolutionary sedition sponsored by the Soviet Union. By the end of that year the Government Code and Cipher School was providing both the SSC and the SIS with decrypts of Bolshevik communications decoded by a former czarist cryptographer, Ernst Fetterlein. As ever, British colonial interest in Russian subversion centered on India, and many in the British intelligence community seemed inclined to view Soviet activities there as just the latest stage in the endless "Great Game" of Anglo-Russian imperial rivalry in South-Central Asia.⁹⁹

British Security Policing and Administration

They may have made use of the same developments in intelligence techniques, but the security agencies in British imperial territory during and after World War I nonetheless differed from their metropolitan counterparts in other key respects. Differences between homeland and empire become more apparent when one considers the issue of security policing.

Britain's colonial police forces typically were armed and upheld internal security alongside locally garrisoned troops. The distinctions between the

two sometimes became blurred. By the late 1930s, colonial police units from Palestine to Kenya bore more resemblance to an army—an alien presence in a local community, equipped with rifles, battle dress, and armored cars—than to the unarmed officer on the beat more familiar in Britain. Existing police stations acquired reinforced doors and windows; new police buildings were designed as barrack-style accommodations, deliberately isolated from the surrounding population to be policed.¹⁰⁰ Even rural police outposts resembled fortified installations. The militarization of police forces in Egypt and Britain's Middle East mandates highlighted another key facet of colonial policing: the absence of public consensus about the proper role of police agencies. This, in turn, nurtured the official assumption of popular hostility to a local police presence. The involvement of colonial police in tax collection and the movement of people and goods within states and across frontiers, and their accumulation of records on the dependent population distanced them from the community as a whole.¹⁰¹ At the same time, the security services' centrality to the administrative life of the colonial state helped ensure that military and police bodies would be among the foremost "national" institutions forged by colonial powers, particularly in those territories, such as Transjordan, with no recent history of independent national existence and markedly different patterns of settlement from province to province.¹⁰²

The British Residency in Cairo was acutely conscious of the growing public mistrust of the police after the March 1919 uprising led by Sa'd Zaghlul (discussed in chapter 4). The problem was compounded by officials' inability—or reluctance—to disaggregate criminal behavior from political protest. Year-on-year increases in murder and robbery in 1919, 1920, and 1921 were ascribed to the tense political situation rather than to the diversion of more police resources to political repression at the expense of the prevention and detection of capital offenses and crimes against property. The strength of the main city police forces was much augmented after the 1919 disorders. Residency statistics for 1921 revealed thirty-one European officers in Cairo and twenty-nine in Alexandria, with a further 131 and 199 European constables working in the two cities. Taking into account the additional 162 Egyptian police officers and 4,263 Egyptian constables in Cairo and Alexandria, the police presence in Egypt's two main urban centers was considerable. Most were assigned to crowd control, policing demonstrations, and combating "mob violence," to the exclusion of more "normal" police work.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the backbone of Egypt's provincial police, a locally recruited *ghaffir* (village police) force some fifty thousand strong, was entirely supported by the hated *ghaffir cess*: an arbitrary tax levied on each village, which hit the poorest in the community especially hard. In these circumstances, the most visible expressions of public animosity toward the police were attempts to evade tax payment and refusal to divulge any

information to *ghaffirs*. Compelled to operate without “the slightest assistance” from the general public, the Egyptian police in the aftermath of the 1919 uprising increasingly represented an alien occupation force, not the community protectors they claimed to be.¹⁰⁴

In several colonial states, police efforts to maintain public order superseded criminal detection as official fears of disorder grew. As a result, the covert aspects of police operations developed apace. Special Branch officers and even senior Criminal Investigation Department personnel increasingly devoted themselves to political—rather than criminal—intelligence gathering, often working alongside military intelligence staff. Use of native informants and undercover agents to provide information on political gatherings, industrial disputes, student politics, and urban opinion became commonplace. In those colonies such as Aden where a “native police” auxiliary existed, its activities were typically confined to rural policing and detection of minor criminal misdemeanors. In other colonial settings, such as India, reliance on native auxiliaries hastened the slide toward violent suppression of nationalist protest. Public revulsion at “police excesses” intensified in response.¹⁰⁵

The British experience in Arab territories was slightly different. High commissions in Cairo, Jerusalem, and Baghdad did not create separate indigenous police forces, but instead recruited local personnel to fill the junior ranks of the Egyptian, Palestinian, and Iraqi police under the supervision of European officers and sergeants. But the ethnic composition of security forces in Britain’s Arab territories was highly controversial and tightly regulated. The failure of colonial-style paramilitary policing to contain Irish insurgency from 1917 to 1921, and the prevalence of former Royal Irish Constabulary officers among colonial police forces thereafter, led to more systematic official consideration of colonial police training and operations, as well as the ethnic composition of police cadres.¹⁰⁶

Iraq was a case in point. The progressive reduction of British influence over policing and, with it, intelligence gathering remained a critical issue for all sides in mandatory Iraq as the British edged toward withdrawal with the signature of two Anglo-Iraq treaties in January 1926 and December 1927.¹⁰⁷ These two accords prefigured the confirmation of Iraqi independence under a further treaty agreement signed on 30 June 1930, whose terms were to come into effect only with Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations in October 1932. In the period intervening between the initial treaties and eventual Iraqi independence, the retention of British police inspectors and security advisers attached to the Baghdad Interior Ministry came to symbolize Britain’s continuing hegemony.¹⁰⁸ Covert information gathering did not cease with Iraq’s accession to independence. In December 1932, the Foreign Office decided to continue channeling security intelligence through the senior British adviser to the Iraqi Interior

Ministry, the long-serving Sir Kinahan Cornwallis.¹⁰⁹ The training and organization of the Iraqi Army, a force increasingly stratified along communal lines, was another focal point of contested sovereignty, particularly as army levies were largely assigned to the repression of internal dissent.¹¹⁰

But it was British reliance on Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons to enforce order throughout Iraq through coercive bombardment of recalcitrant tribes, disaffected communities, and even urban strikers that remained the most salient feature of imperial policing in the mandate on either side of the 1926 treaty watershed.¹¹¹ Convinced that the air force had proven its capacity for economical colonial control in the “splendid training ground” of Iraq,¹¹² as late as January 1930 British commanders insisted that only imperial air policing could keep the peace:

The view is held—not only by the Air Staff but by practically all competent authorities with personal experience of Iraq—that for a very considerable period the maintenance of law and order in that country cannot safely be entrusted to the Government in Baghdad. The area is too vast, the racial feuds are too bitter, the temper of the tribesmen is too truculent, to permit of adequate control by a local and largely sectional administration disposing of the police and military forces now available, or likely to be available within a reasonable time.¹¹³

The concession of RAF base rights in Iraq after independence, and the use of the hated Assyrian levies to guard them, compounded the suspicions of the Iraqi opposition.¹¹⁴ Little wonder that the Baghdad government attached such importance to the concession of sovereign control over internal security policy at independence.¹¹⁵ It was no coincidence that the British military mission created under the terms of the June 1930 treaty to help train Iraqi security forces was specifically prohibited from engaging in any intelligence-related activity.¹¹⁶

In some respects, British intransigence over imperial policing, as well as the choices made about the personnel employed, amounted to little more than an affirmation of long-established martial race theories and recruiting procedures for indigenous police and army personnel. These had long favored ethnic minorities and rural communities deemed to have a vested interest in an imperial presence to prevent oppression by a Sunni Muslim elite.¹¹⁷ But colonial dissent rarely conformed to neat ethno-geographical lines. The spread of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic sentiment after 1918, the enduring appeal of radical leftist ideas, and the development of industrial proletariats in Middle East cities created new poles of political attraction that transcended ethnic or tribal identity. The growth in refugee populations in mandatory territory stimulated both by the disruption of World War I and by the hostile Turkish attitude to Armenian, Circassian, and Assyrian communities, added another layer of complexity to the policing of local

insurgencies. After the shock of the Egyptian uprising in 1919, doubts persisted among senior officials about the political allegiance and reliability of indigenous police and administrative personnel. These anxieties led to greater reliance on troops and European-officered native levies to crack down on political dissent and public disorder, a process that culminated in the deployment of regular army forces to contain the Arab revolt in Palestine between 1936 and 1939.¹¹⁸

From 1918 to the mid-1930s, French employment of Circassian irregulars to crush Druze resistance and British reliance on Assyrian Christian levies to suppress Kurdish separatism and Arab disorder in Iraq undermined the supposed impartiality of imperial policing.¹¹⁹ Irregular force involvement in punitive operations against entire tribes or settlements, usually ordered on the basis of humint gathered by political officers in the field, stored up profound resentments. In the Assyrian case, these exploded into horrendous intercommunal violence and Iraqi Army retribution over the summer of 1933, events that underscored the failure of protracted efforts to settle the Assyrian refugee community in northern Iraq.¹²⁰

Greater recourse to special powers and extraordinary legislation to curtail public expressions of opposition to the colonial state meant in practice that Egypt and Palestine in particular were, on occasion, subject to legal regulation virtually indistinguishable from martial law. In these extreme circumstances, the jurisdictional boundaries between police and armed forces in matters of internal security became even more fluid and ill-defined, much to the annoyance of those involved. Army commands were typically reluctant to become immersed in civil policing; police officers resented military interference in police matters, fearing an irreversible loss of public support for the forces of law and order. And disorder always exposed the extent of colonial reliance on locally recruited auxiliaries to do much of the dirty work of intelligence collection and counterinsurgency operations.

Fears about the trustworthiness of indigenous junior police recruits helps explain why political authority over colonial police forces was highly centralized. Governors, resident ministers, or high commissioners took a close interest in policing and habitually intervened in matters of manifest political importance such as the proscription of political parties, the detention of nationalist or religious leaders, strike breaking, and the policing of demonstrations. During the 1920s, police repression of labor unrest and nationalist organizations in Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq did more than anything else to politicize the security forces, both at the level of individual police personnel and in the eyes of the wider public.¹²¹

A similar process was at work in British India, where police "success" in containing civil disobedience in 1930–33 only heightened public hostility to the Indian police as an institution.¹²² In the British Middle East, as in the Indian Raj, suppression of well-publicized dissent made police forces appear

more ubiquitous than their limited numbers would otherwise suggest, encouraging popular identification of colonial rule as a “police state” reliant on the coercive power of security forces and intrusive regulation of social interaction to survive. Police personnel and their families became targets of anticolonial opposition and faced intimidation, violent assaults, and assassination. Even in these stressful conditions, money remained a more severe constraint on police activity than public antagonism. Throughout the inter-war period, financial pressures imposed manpower limits and budgetary restrictions on the scope of police operations in Britain’s Middle East territories. Not until the late 1930s did the British government create a supervisory body to regulate the activities of police forces throughout the dependent empire.¹²³

Conclusion

Many of the officials who supplied intelligence to higher authorities in the imperial territories of North Africa and the Middle East did not regard themselves as part of a colonial security service establishment. Most were regional administrators, preoccupied with the daily tasks of local government. These tasks tied them, nevertheless, to the bureaucracy of colonial state surveillance. As Muslim opposition to imperial rule intensified, police forces became more identifiable with the colonial order, more an occupying force patrolling a hostile environment, and more an instrument of state coercion and intelligence gathering than a partner in the fight against crime. Much as the extension of British imperial control in World War I prompted the creation of new informational structures that reported back to the central government, so the greater demands for military information in war catalyzed the refinement of British cryptanalysis, a trend exemplified by the establishment of government cryptographic bureaus. Ironically, after campaigning began, Allied access to large numbers of captured POWs tipped the scales in favor of human intelligence once more.

Within French North Africa, sophisticated French counterintelligence operations and competition for the loyalty of tribal leaders, urban notables, and the general population was integral to state efforts to maintain control. The growing administrative obsession with Muslim opinion was driven by the emergence of mass political action in the imperial territories of North Africa and the Middle East. Imperial authorities always considered early indications of any shifts in public opinion fundamental to their capacity to maintain control. In one key respect, however, the surveillance of dependent populations in the Arab world was always less ambitious than its metropolitan equivalent. Within imperial territory, information on popular mood was generally used to uphold colonial power rather than to adjust policies to meet the demands of the indigenous population. The rigid

confinement of indigenous staff to junior positions makes it difficult to speak of genuine Anglo-Arab or Franco-Muslim intelligence communities rather than European-controlled intelligence systems employing local subordinates. Greater reliance on these junior functionaries in the provision of agents' reports and in the maintenance of public order, however, altered the nature of intelligence gathering and assessment. The intelligence states of the interwar Arab world were thus in constant flux, reliant on indigenous intermediaries to sustain imperial control, but also looking to past precedents to help inform current decision making. It is to this more backward-looking aspect of empire surveillance that we now turn.