Spies and Their Masters. Intelligence-Policy Relations in Democratic Countries

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

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November 2015
Abstract

For democratic countries, intelligence agencies are a threat and a necessity. They often provide vital information for national security, but they can also engage in unauthorized activities, like attempting to remove their own government, i.e. subversion, and/or manipulating intelligence for political purposes, i.e. politicization.

I develop and test a typological theory of the relationship between intelligence agencies and policy-makers in democratic countries. I answer three questions: how can intelligence agencies be controlled? When will politicization occur? When will intelligence agencies engage in subversion?

Intelligence agencies will differ depending on who their main enemies are. An agency will be political if it has a strong domestic subversive movement as one of its main enemies. These agencies will not be politically neutral and the divide between foreign and domestic intelligence will be blurred. Because of these characteristics, it will be harder for policymakers to control them. They will routinely engage in politicization and they will engage in subversion when they perceive their own government as insufficiently dedicated to the anti-subversive fight and when an upcoming close election or divisions among the agency’s principals give them an opportunity to install a stronger government. Instead, if an agency does not have a strong subversive movement as one of its main enemies, it can afford to be non-political: politically neutral and with a sharp divide between foreign and domestic intelligence. Non-political agencies will be strongly controlled by policymakers. They will not engage in subversion and will only occasionally engage in politicization.

I test this theory on four case studies: British intelligence from 1909 to 1924; the FBI from 1908 to 1948; the CIA under the Truman administration and Italian military intelligence from 1943 to 1964.

I find that intelligence agencies shift from being non-political to being political when a strong subversive movement is included among their main enemies. Political intelligence agencies have attempted to remove governments even in rich democracies normally considered immune from coups-like phenomena, like the US in 1948 and the UK in 1920 and 1924. Lastly, the political neutrality of an intelligence agency is a more effective tool of policymakers’ control than preferences alignment.
Acknowledgments

I’ve incurred many debts of gratitude in writing this project. I would first of all like to thank Aaron Friedberg, Keren Yarhi-Milo and Joshua Rovner for their help and suggestions throughout all three years as members of the dissertation committee. My friends and colleagues in the Politics Department, among them Richard Jordan and Kevin Mazur, engaged me in long discussions about this project, always with a clever suggestion and a word of encouragement. Special thanks to Maria Gabriella Pasqualini and Virgilio Ilari, who helped me navigate through the intricacies of the Italian case, and to Michael Goodman, Keith Jeffery, Lindsay Colley and David Cannadine for their useful suggestions on the British case.

My wife, Domitilla Gacci, read multiple versions of this project with endless patience and dedication. The project would have been considerably worse without her, and my life unbearably miserable. I would also like to thank my mother, Laura, and my brothers, Enrico and Marco, for understanding how absorbing a PhD can be, and for taking care of all the things I should have taken care of in the meantime. Lastly, thanks to little Niccolò, who came along when all that was left to write was the conclusion. He made that task a lot harder but also a lot more joyful. He redefined the meaning and purpose of sleepless nights and lovingly burped and fell asleep on my shoulder as I was reading the dissertation out loud to him. I’ve since switched to children’s books, with better results.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Riccardo, and to his smile.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Democracies, Intelligence Agencies and the Neglected Problem of Subversion, p.1

2. A Theory of Intelligence-Policy Relations, p.22

3. British Intelligence and Subversion in the 1920s, p.44

4. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1948. From a law enforcement bureau to a political intelligence agency, p.83

5. The Establishment and Evolution of the Central Intelligence Agency, p.146

6. Italian Military Intelligence and Subversion from World War II to 1964, p.169

7. Conclusion, p.246

8. Bibliography, p.255
Tables and Figures

A. Table 1. Political and Non-Political Intelligence Agencies, p.29

B. Figure 1. From an intelligence agency’s priority to policymakers’ degree of control, p.33

C. Figure 2. Causal Framework, p.38

D. Figure 3. The British Intelligence Community, 1909-1924, p.46

E. Figure 4. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1948, p.86

F. Figure 5. The Central Intelligence Agency, p.147

G. Figure 6. Italian Military Intelligence, 1943-1964, p.172
Ch.1. Introduction: Democracies, Intelligence Agencies and the Neglected Problem of Subversion

In the Western world we tend to think of coups d’états as events which happen in lands and eras far away from us. Places such as Thailand, Pakistan and Egypt are likely to come to mind, as well as the less recent events in Greece in 1967 or Chile in 1973. We think of coups as blatant events with tanks on the streets and military announcements on the radio, leading to an autocratic government. This perception is not misplaced. The vast majority of coups occur in poor and autocratic countries\(^1\). The golden rule of democratic stability and development still holds: no democracy richer than Argentina in 1978 has ever turned into an autocracy\(^2\).

Nonetheless, democratic governments in developed Western countries have been removed by their own intelligence agencies using means which fall outside regular democratic procedures. These means are generally more subtle than tanks surrounding the presidential palace. A leaked letter, a whispered threat, or a reserved information passed at the right time to the right person, are sometimes all it takes for an intelligence agency to remove a government and to replace it with another one apparently just as democratic. These events fall short of full-fledged coups. They fall instead into the broader category of what I call subversion, defined as attempts, plots or threats to remove a sitting government by its own intelligence agencies.

Of course, leaks, private information and threatening allusions are the bread and butter of virtually every worthy politician, and they are de facto accepted tools in the political struggle. What is generally not seen as normatively acceptable is the involvement of a country’s

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\(^1\) See Powell [2010].
\(^2\) See Przeworski and Limongi [1997].
intelligence agencies. These agencies are supposed to remain neutral in the domestic political struggle, but they have engaged in subversion even in countries which we would never associate with coups, such as twentieth century Britain and the US.

Cases of subversion have so far largely escaped scholars’ attention, for several reasons. First, they occur in secrecy and the intelligence agencies involved will do their utmost to make sure that they remain secret. Second, when these episodes come to light they generally do so incompletely, years after the facts and shrouded in a fog of mysteries and often implausible conspiracy theories. More often than not, they probably do not come to light at all. Lastly, they generally do not lead to a change in the nature of the regime that would be captured by a large dataset.

Even though subversion is the main focus of this work, its reach is broader. I develop a theory of the relationship between intelligence agencies and policymakers in modern democratic countries. The theory identifies the conditions under which intelligence agencies will be strongly or weakly controlled by their principals, where control is defined as the principals’ capacity to prevent an agency from engaging in unauthorized activities and have it obey their orders and instructions\(^3\). It then explains why and when the two most prominent pathologies of intelligence-policy relations in modern democracies occur. The first pathology is subversion. The second pathology is politicization, defined as the manipulation of intelligence so that it reflects policy preferences.

\(^3\) Not every intelligence activity requires an explicit authorization by the principals. Some activities are not important enough to be approved by busy policymakers and others are deliberately not explicitly authorized to ensure that policymakers can plausibly deny knowing about them. When I speak of unauthorized activities I do not refer to these type of activities, but to those that policymakers would disapprove of if they knew about them.
Among the many unauthorized activities that intelligence agencies can engage in, subversion is at the far end in terms of gravity. Intelligence agencies can, for instance, leak information to deliberately undermine a policy, spy on their own superiors and blackmail them. An agency that does not subvert its own government is not necessarily strongly controlled by the government then⁴. Yet, as we will see, intelligence agencies that engage in one kind of unauthorized activity also tend to engage in others. Trying to explain every single type of unauthorized activity would have made for a cumbersome theory. Instead, I explain when and why policymakers are more or less likely to strongly control intelligence agencies, thus preventing them from engaging in all forms of unauthorized activities.

This first chapter is organized as follows. The second section reviews the literature on intelligence-policy relations, focusing on policymakers’ control and on the pathological aspects of the relationship. The third section summarizes my argument. The fourth section points out how it contributes to the literature. The fifth section discusses its policy relevance. The last section lays out the plan of the book.

A review of the literature

The literature on intelligence-policy relations has paid scant attention to control and virtually none to subversion. Instead, it has focused almost exclusively on politicization. This is easily explained. The literature is overwhelmingly American and focused on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)⁵. As I will show, weak control and, even more, subversion, have not

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⁴ On the other hand, an agency that engages in subversion cannot be strongly controlled by the government.
⁵ See the survey in Johnson and Shelton [2013] that laments the parochial focus on the US and Britain. Some edited volumes have begun to move beyond the Anglo-American world. See especially Bruneau and Boraz [2007] and Davies and Gustafson [2013].
been significant problems throughout the CIA’s history, whereas politicization has occurred repeatedly.

The ideal relationship and politicization

Using the CIA as its often implicit model, the literature generally begins by describing the ideal relationship between intelligence and policy in democratic countries. There is a consensus on what this ideal relationship looks like⁶. Intelligence agencies are meant to serve policy-makers, providing them with relevant, timely and objective information related to national security. Intelligence agencies don’t take sides in the domestic political struggle, they don’t formulate policy, nor, unless they are asked to do so, do they recommend policy. They can directly implement a policy, generally a covert one, but always under policy-makers’ instructions⁷.

This ideal relationship is seldom found in practice. Scholars agree that the fundamental reason which makes the ideal relationship hard to attain is the tradeoff between relevance and objectivity⁸. In order to be relevant intelligence must meet policymakers’ needs, capture their attention and inform their decisions, but this biases intelligence in a number of ways.

To better understand policymakers’ needs, intelligence officials will have to work in close proximity with them, but this may tempt them to sugar-coat their analyses and tell their

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⁶ See Lowenthal [2010], pp.437-438; Jervis [2010], ch.4; Betts [2007], ch.4, especially pp.66-67; Davis [2006]; and Rovner [2011] especially p.4.

⁷ I find this ideal to be normatively appealing, but misleading as a baseline to understand intelligence-policy relations beyond the CIA. Some view this model as inadequate even when explaining the CIA: see Marrin [2013b] pp.39-47.

bosses what they want to hear\(^9\). Intelligence officials may try to resist this temptation, but their careers and budgets usually depend on policymakers’ decisions, making them vulnerable to manipulation. Policymakers may ask intelligence officials to focus excessively on issues that support their policies, while ignoring others that would undermine them or that are not on their agendas. They will prefer short products that make unequivocal, and often overly confident, predictions, rather than longer analytic pieces that convey the analyst’s degree of uncertainty.

The tradeoff between relevance and objectivity has led to a long-standing debate on the optimal distance between intelligence and policy. Intelligence needs to be close enough to policymakers in order to be relevant, but not too close that it stops being objective. Those who emphasize the need to be relevant fall under the name of the Gates School, from former Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates. Those who emphasize the need to remain objective are generally referred to as members of the Kent School, from the founding father of the CIA’s analytical branch Sherman Kent\(^10\).

The differences between the two schools are more a matter of emphasis than substance. Kent agreed that intelligence detached from policy was useless and argued that “of the two dangers - that of intelligence being too far from the users and that of being too close- the greatest danger is the one of being too far.”\(^11\) Similarly, Gates argued that “in no instance should we alter our judgment to make a product more palatable to policymakers” and that “the absolute integrity of our analysis is the most important of the core values of the Central Intelligence Agency.”\(^12\)

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\(^9\) This is what is referred to as the proximity hypothesis. See, for instance, Marrin [2013a] p.2.


Both sides agree that intelligence risks compromising part of its objectivity as it strives to be relevant in the world of politics and policymaking. This is what some scholars broadly define as politicization: bringing intelligence within the realm of politics\textsuperscript{13}, or compromising “the objectivity of intelligence, or of how it is used, to serve political aims”\textsuperscript{14}. Because the tradeoff between relevance and objectivity is unescapable, the logical conclusion is that some degree of politicization is inevitable. Richard Betts, for instance, argued that “if intelligence is to be useful, its politicization will be a continuum from more to less, with the least being unattainable without denuding an analysis of all connection with political reality.”\textsuperscript{15}

Other scholars have used a narrower definition of politicization and tried to identify the conditions under which it is more or less likely to occur. Harry Howe Ransom, for instance, argued that politicization is more likely when there is no consensus over foreign policy and when the national security debate spills into the open\textsuperscript{16}. In the latest and most important work on the subject, Joshua Rovner defined politicization as “the attempt to manipulate intelligence so that it reflects policy preferences” and argued that it occurs under two necessary conditions\textsuperscript{17}. First, policymakers have publicly committed to a given policy. Second, they are facing a critical constituency, i.e. a domestic group whose support is necessary for the success of that policy but which is initially skeptical of the policy itself. At this point policymakers turn to intelligence for help. Intelligence is secret and, in the US at least, it has “cultivated professional norms of

\textsuperscript{13} Betts [2007] p.74.
\textsuperscript{14} Pillar [2010] p.473.
\textsuperscript{16} Ransom [2008] p.193. See also Wirtz [1991], who studies the debate between the CIA and the Army on the North Vietnamese and Vietcong order of battle. Wirtz argued, somewhat contradictorily, that there had been no high-level orders to manipulate the estimates, but that Army leaders in Vietnam were unwilling to accept an estimate that would have shown they were not making progress. He acknowledged that there had been low-level manipulation of intelligence, due to the Army’s desire to show that its policy was succeeding.
\textsuperscript{17} Rovner [2011] p.5
objectivity and a public image of separation from domestic politics”\textsuperscript{18}. These traits, secrecy, objectivity and an apolitical image, make intelligence’s judgment valuable for policymakers engaged in a public dispute. Policymakers will thus pressure the intelligence community to support the policy, even manipulating the evidence if necessary\textsuperscript{19}. Given what Rovner calls “policymakers’ disproportionate influence over intelligence-policy relations”\textsuperscript{20}, attempts at politicization usually succeed\textsuperscript{21}.

As I will show, my theory does not directly challenge Rovner’s causal mechanisms. Rather, it accepts their validity but argues that they operate under highly restrictive conditions, making them applicable only to a relatively small subset of cases of intelligence-policy relations\textsuperscript{22}. In all of Rovner’s cases, five of them American and one of them British, two conditions were present. First, the intelligence agencies had cultivated professional norms of objectivity and political neutrality. As Rovner recognized, his causal mechanism is valid as long as there is the “perception that intelligence is politically unbiased”\textsuperscript{23}. Second, policymakers strongly controlled their intelligence services, justifying Rovner’s belief in “policymakers’ disproportionate influence over intelligence-policy relations”. If intelligence agencies are not perceived as politically neutral or if policymakers do not strongly control them, Rovner’s theoretical framework does not apply. This is the case for many intelligence agencies outside the US and Britain, and as we will see at times even within these two countries.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibidem p.47.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem pp.43-44.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibidem p.30.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibidem p.19.
\textsuperscript{22} For a similar critique, see the H-Diplo Roundtable, Vol.3, No.17, 2012, especially the review by Bar Joseph.
\textsuperscript{23} Rovner [2011] p.47. Rovner acknowledged that this perception is sometimes misplaced and that intelligence officers can allow their own political sympathies to color their judgments. This is generally referred to as bottom-up politicization, to distinguish it from top-down politicization which occurs when policymakers pressure intelligence agencies to reach a certain conclusion.
Based on the current literature, politicization thus appears to be mainly an American phenomenon. I will challenge this proposition, but it is still important to see how the literature explains American intelligence’s apparently peculiar vulnerability to politicization. Uri Bar Joseph argued that what distinguishes the American case is the combination of three variables. First, there is an executive leader in charge of national security who is strong enough to manipulate intelligence\textsuperscript{24}. Second, intelligence is generally trusted by public opinion and its estimates play an important role in resolving public debates, making politicization a valuable strategy for political leaders. Lastly, the competition between intelligence agencies to gain the President’s ear makes them “less reluctant to provide ‘intelligence to please’”\textsuperscript{25}.

Control and subversion

The current literature has thus identified the causal mechanisms behind politicization and explained why it is, or appears to be, mainly an American phenomenon. If this is the case, what do intelligence-policy relations in other democratic countries look like? What pathologies will they suffer from? When will policymakers strongly control their intelligence agencies?

The social scientific literature has little to say about these questions. Despite the resonance enjoyed by Senator Church’s misplaced accusation that the CIA was a “rogue elephant rampaging out of control”, scholars have paid little attention to the issue of control. In a rare edited volume on controlling intelligence, Glenn Hastedt noted in passing that intelligence agencies that focus on internal threats tend to be more controversial than those with an external

\textsuperscript{24} A leader that is strong enough to politicize intelligence can also exist in a Parliamentary system, but this happens less frequently than in a Presidential system, according to Bar Joseph. He discusses Tony Blair in Britain and Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel as two cases of strong leaders in a Parliamentary democracy who tried to politicize intelligence.

focus and that those who view the threat as an absolute priority, rather than one to be balanced against other broader societal goals, are generally harder to control. Hastedt bemoaned that too much attention had been given to “formal-legalistic” control mechanisms, whereas meaningful control required attention to the values and norms of intelligence officers\(^{26}\). Unfortunately Hastedt’s volume focused almost exclusively on the CIA, except for one chapter on Canada, did not develop a theory of policymakers’ ability to control intelligence and did not test the interesting insights it contained.

More recent volumes have studied numerous other countries, but have focused mainly on oversight rather than on control\(^ {27}\), and have similarly failed to reach generalizable conclusions. These volumes list the challenges of oversight and control and survey different solutions, describe intelligence agencies of which often little is known, but do not provide a social scientific explanation as to when control will be weak or strong\(^ {28}\). Some, like Hastedt, hint at the link between internal threats and weak principals’ control, but these observations remain theoretically undeveloped, little more than plausible guesses based on anecdotal evidence\(^ {29}\).

The only typology of domestic security services was developed by William Keller in a study of the FBI. Keller distinguished between three types of internal security organizations: the

\(^{26}\) Hastedt [1991] pp.9-10, 18 and ch.5.

\(^{27}\) By control I mean principals’ capacity to get an agency to obey their orders and instructions and to prevent it from engaging in unauthorized activities. By oversight I mean the activity of those who check that the agency is performing effectively and/or that it is not engaging in improper and illegal activities, whether in pursuit of principals’ orders or without their consent. Controllers give orders, overseers do not. Control belongs to the principals, generally in the executive branch, whereas oversight is in the hands of numerous actors such as Parliamentary committees, the courts, the media, watchdog groups and at times even figures within the executive such as inspector generals. The distinction is often overlooked in the literature, but those that draw it, such as Gill [1994] p.217, use similar definitions.

\(^{28}\) See Gill [1994], Born and Caparini [2007], Bruneau and Boraz [2007], Baldino [2010].

\(^{29}\) Some of these guesses can nonetheless be quite insightful. See Bruneau and Boraz [2007] pp.11-12 and especially Jervis [2007] pp.x-xi. Jervis notes: “great threats [either internal or external] are likely to lead to intrusive security organizations. (…) These organizations will seek to justify their existence by exaggerating if not actually generating threats and, like other organizations, will seek to expand their power and autonomy. (…) High-threat environments will call up intrusive security services and make democracy more difficult”. 
bureau of domestic intelligence, the political police and the internal security state. Keller argued that the FBI was initially a bureau of domestic intelligence: limited to collecting and analyzing intelligence and under the control of the executive. After Roosevelt’s request in 1936 to investigate domestic subversion, it switched in the direction of a political police, adopting more aggressive intelligence techniques and acquiring greater autonomy to formulate policy, even though its policies were still in line with those preferred by the political leaders. In the 1950s and 1960s, the FBI transformed itself into an internal security state. With no outside control over its activities, the FBI launched aggressive counterintelligence programs, unauthorized by elected officials.

As we will see, my interpretation of the FBI is broadly similar to Keller’s: an intelligence agency that progressively became more political and less controlled by policymakers. However, Keller’s typology was not backed by a causal explanation as to when an intelligence agency will evolve from one type to another. Instead, Keller focused on the support for Hoover’s Bureau from the liberal side of the spectrum, identifying it as a permissive cause of the FBI’s transformation. There was no attempt to generalize this explanation to other cases nor to identify the efficient causes of the Bureau’s transformation

Pathologies other than politicization have similarly received scant attention by intelligence scholars. Rovner identified three other pathologies of intelligence-policy relations, but he explicitly chose not to explain them. Excessive harmony occurs when policymakers do

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30 Gill [1994], especially pp.79-82, applied Keller’s typology to MI5, again with no explanation.
31 Rovner [2011], p.34. “While this book does not explain all these outcomes [the pathologies of intelligence-policy relations], this typology establishes terms of reference for students of intelligence and foreign policy.” It can thus be said that this work picks up where Rovner left off, subsuming his theory in a broader framework. See also appendix A, p.205.
not question what intelligence are saying or doing, leading to tunnel vision. Neglect occurs when policymakers ignore intelligence. Subversion, which he included in the broader category of politicization, occurs “when intelligence agencies produce estimates that are specifically designed to undermine policy decisions.” Rovner did not mention the possibility that an intelligence agency may subvert its own government, and not just one of its policies, and in any case he chose not to explain it.

Bar Joseph conducted the only study of a phenomenon which comes close to what I intend as subversion. He studied intelligence interventions in the politics of democratic states, defined as “any deliberate action taken by intelligence that derives from at least some parochial political motivations”. These actions can have two different goals: either in support of government policy, called intelligence to please, or in opposition to the policy of the elected government, called “alteration of policy”.

Alteration of policy includes instances of what I would refer to as subversion, but is much broader. Everything from removing a government to pushing it to adopt an undesired policy is included, as long as the intelligence agency acts in opposition to the government and has “at least some parochial motivations.” Bar-Joseph argued that alteration of policy is more likely when intelligence and policy are not kept sufficiently separate one from the other and when policymakers exercise only a weak form of control over intelligence. What guarantees a

33 Ibidem pp.26-29.
34 Ibidem pp.32-34.
36 I find this definition to be lacking in coherence and operationalization. It is hard to find instances in which “some parochial political motivations” played absolutely no role and it is possibly even harder to distinguish parochial political motivations from other kinds of motivations. The concept of alteration of policy could thus be extended to cover a potentially endless number of cases, hampering attempts at generalization. On operationalization and coherence, see Gerring [2001] pp.40-48.
sufficient degree of separation between intelligence and policy is the degree of professionalism within the intelligence agencies\(^\text{37}\). Following Huntington’s classic work on civil-military relations, Bar-Joseph argues that professionalism renders the intelligence agency politically sterile and neutral, by making it ready to obey any civilian group with legitimate authority\(^\text{38}\).

The biggest problem with using professionalism to explain intelligence interventions in politics is that cause and effect are too proximate and nearly undistinguishable. A professional intelligence agency is one that is politically neutral and that does not intervene in politics. Once we have identified a professional intelligence agency we have also implied that it does not intervene in politics. A more fruitful approach would be to ask instead when intelligence agencies are more or less likely to be professional. In other words, when will an intelligence agency be politically neutral and when will it not be?

**The argument**

I distinguish two ideal types of intelligence agencies, which I call political and non-political. The non-political intelligence agency is the one assumed by most of the literature. It is politically neutral and there is a sharp divide between domestic and foreign intelligence. Instead, the political intelligence agency is on one side of the political spectrum and the divide between foreign and domestic intelligence is blurred.

My argument, in brief, is that an intelligence agency will resemble a non-political intelligence agency when it does not have as one of its main priorities a domestic political group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government and radically changing the

\(^{38}\) Huntington’s notion of professionalism is briefly discussed below and in the next chapter.
constitutional and/or economic order. If such a group is one of the agency’s main priorities, the agency will resemble a political intelligence agency.

Principals will exercise a strong control over a non-political intelligence agency and a fragile one over a political one. Principals control political intelligence agencies by selecting intelligence officers who share their political preferences. Preferences, however, are not fixed. Once preferences diverge, principals will be hard pressed to control an agency with a different political agenda from their own and with no reluctance to engage in politics. Instead, non-political intelligence agencies are controlled by making them politically neutral and thus reluctant to engage in politics. Further, the sharp divide between domestic and foreign intelligence makes it easier for principals to detect unauthorized activities.

Because it is politically neutral and strongly controlled by its principals, a non-political intelligence agency will not engage in subversion. It and will occasionally suffer from politicization, under the conditions identified by the existing literature.

Instead, a political intelligence agency will be prone to engage in subversion. It will do so when they perceive that the government is unwilling or incapable of adequately fighting the subversive threat and when an upcoming close election or divisions amongst the agency’s principals give them the opportunity to push for an alternative government. It will also routinely manipulate intelligence to support policy goals, i.e. engage in politicization. Rovner’s causal argument only applies to non-political intelligence agencies, but politicization occurs in political intelligence agencies as well, albeit for different reasons. This is what social scientists call equifinality, i.e. the presence of multiple causal paths to the same outcome. In order to reduce the confusion that is often associated with equifinality, I call structural politicization the one which
routinely occurs in political intelligence agencies and contingent politicization the one which occasionally occurs in non-political intelligence agencies.

Most individual steps in my causal argument will seem intuitive. For instance, readers are unlikely to be surprised that an intelligence agency that is strongly controlled by policymakers will not engage in subversion. Nonetheless, if we look at the first and last steps of my causal chain a more counterintuitive and ironic argument emerges. Policymakers that ask an intelligence agency to fight against a perceived strong subversive movement increase the chances of being removed by their own intelligence agency. In other words, intelligence agencies designed to fight against a subversive movement are likely to engage in subversion themselves.39

**Contribution to the literature**

This project addresses the three main problems currently affecting the intelligence literature: the lack of comparative studies, the parochial focus on the American and British experience and the lack of a typology of intelligence agencies40. I develop a typological theory of intelligence agencies and test it by comparing Italian military intelligence from 1943 to 1964, Britain from 1909 to the mid-1920s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from 1908 to 1948 and the establishment and the first formative years of the CIA.

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39 A subversive movement is one that seeks to overthrow the government and to radically change the economic and/or constitutional order. A political movement that merely seeks to remove the government is not defined as subversive, since this is normal behavior for political movements in the opposition. This may generate some confusion, as the word subversion and its derivatives are used with slightly different meanings. An intelligence agency engages in subversion if it attempts, plots or threatens to remove the government, even though it may not seek to change the economic and/or constitutional order as well.

40 These are the three main problems identified by a recent survey among intelligence specialists. See Johnson and Shelton [2013].
This case selection has several advantages. First, I study two extreme cases closely resembling my ideal types: Italian intelligence was an extreme case of a political intelligence agency and the CIA was an extreme case of a non-political intelligence agency. Second, I compare the FBI and the CIA, different types of agencies within the same country over partially overlapping time-periods. Third, the study of the FBI and British intelligence before and after a change in my independent variable offers useful within-case temporal variation. Fourth, by analyzing intelligence agencies primarily dedicated to domestic intelligence, such as the FBI and MI6, as well as those primarily dedicated to foreign and military intelligence, such as SIS and Italian military intelligence, I show that both engaged in subversion under the same circumstances. Lastly, I show that the prevailing model of intelligence-policy relations does not even explain important historical aspects of intelligence-policy relations in Britain and in the US.

None of my case studies focus on what I call contingent politicization. Given the attention which has been dedicated to these cases, investigating them here would have been repetitious. Instead, by studying the establishment of the CIA I aim to explain why it became vulnerable to contingent politicization and invulnerable to subversion.

This project’s contributions are not limited to the subfield of intelligence studies, but extend to comparative politics, public administration, international relations and civil-military relations. The comparative politics literature on coups has mostly focused on large-N studies, with most cases regarding authoritarian countries in the developing world. I show that by focusing on more subtle episodes of subversion I can capture important political dynamics even in highly developed democratic countries.

41 Powell [2011]. See also the dataset on coups and coups attempts of the Polity IV project at http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html. None of the episodes of subversion I study are included in these datasets.
The public administration literature barely discusses the problem of bureaucratic subversion, despite the prominence which bureaucrat-to-policymaker relations have in Max Weber’s classic works\textsuperscript{42}. Much like intelligence scholars, public administration scholars have focused mainly on politicization, generally intended as the penetration of the bureaucracy by party-affiliated personnel\textsuperscript{43}. Although limited to the field of intelligence, my research project contributes to this literature by establishing the causal link between the political nature of a bureaucracy and its tendency to subvert.

Coming to the international relations literature, ever since Graham Allison’s pioneering work, we have known that states’ behavior is affected by how bureaucracies are structured and how they relate to policymakers\textsuperscript{44}. We know that this can lead to suboptimal decisions, but it is less clear why bureaucracies are structured the way they are in the first place and why it is hard to control them\textsuperscript{45}. This project explains certain aspects of the institutional design of intelligence agencies, and then investigates how the different agencies relate themselves to policymakers.

Finally, my project contributes to the development of an intelligence counterpart to the literature on civil-military relations. First, I qualify the strongly and widely held belief that coups are simply not an issue when dealing with the American government\textsuperscript{46}. I agree that a coup is a remote and implausible possibility, but show that the absence of coups does not mean that the US government has remained immune from more subtle forms of subversion, as my chapter on

\textsuperscript{42} A partial exception is Gaimard [2002]. Gaimard studies subversion of policy, i.e. the undermining by a bureaucracy of a government’s policy, not subversion of an entire government. He argues that it is most likely when the preferences of bureaucrats and those of the government diverge and when the bureaucrat’s task is complex, hindering the government's eventual attempt to investigate bureaucrats' behavior. The first condition is hardly insightful, whereas the second one does not help us distinguish between intelligence agencies of different countries, whose tasks tend to be similar.

\textsuperscript{43} See, for instance, Lewis [2008].

\textsuperscript{44} Allison [1971].

\textsuperscript{45} For the organizational design of intelligence agencies, see Zegart [2000] and [2007].

\textsuperscript{46} See, for instance, Feaver [2003] pp.11, 285 and Desch [1999] pp.2-3. A partial exception is Ackermann [2010], who not coincidentally argues that the American military has been increasingly politicized.
the FBI will show. Second, I address a long-standing debate on the relative merits of the tools of civilian control. Some, like the late Samuel Huntington, emphasized the importance of norms and values held by military officers, first and foremost their degree of professionalism and their belief in the political neutrality of the military. Others, like Peter Feaver, emphasized civilians’ capacity to monitor military activities on a day to day basis, rewarding those who comply with civilians’ orders and punishing those who don’t. I argue that within the intelligence field political neutrality and intrusive monitoring mechanisms tend to go together, as both depend on the agency’s main priorities. The absence of a strong domestic subversive priority is a necessary cause for an agency to be politically neutral and for it to have other features, like a sharp divide between foreign and domestic intelligence and strong parliamentary oversight, that favor intrusive monitoring.

Why does this project matter for policy?

With the demise of international communism at the end of the Cold War, Western societies do not seem to face a plausible subversive threat. This may make my theory sound passé: subversive movements are a problem of the past and with them subversion by intelligence agencies. Nonetheless, the problem I study is of more than historical significance.

First, numerous non-Western societies face significant subversive threats. Whether it’s the threat of radical Islamist movements in the Middle East or rival ethnic factions in Sub-Saharan Africa, or a combination of the two, numerous governments throughout the world feel that their hold on power is threatened by a strong subversive movement. Few of these

47 Huntington [1957] especially pp.80-84.
governments are democratic, but those that have experienced democratic rule have frequently reversed to authoritarianism after a subversive attempt with the participation of their intelligence agencies. For instance, Egyptian intelligence contributed to the removal of the country’s first democratically elected president in 2013. Pakistani intelligence has become notorious for its repeated attempts to remove governments it dislikes. Policymakers in newly established democracies will find here an explanation of when they are more likely to control their intelligence agencies and a number of suggestions on how best to do so.

Second, understanding how to control intelligence agencies and how to prevent them from subverting their own government are prominent issues on policymakers’ agendas even in well-consolidated democracies. South Korean intelligence spread propaganda against an incumbent President in the most recent presidential elections. French lawmakers recently approved a considerable increase in the power of their intelligence services, despite the fact that, in the words of the foremost historian of French intelligence, “virtually every serving president of the Fifth Republic was the target of a scandal or ‘dirty trick’ with origins deep in secret service conspiracies”. Even where subversion is ruled out as implausible, policymakers struggle to prevent their intelligence agencies from engaging in other unauthorized activities. German intelligence was recently found to have been passing sensitive information on European defense companies to its American counterparts, possibly without the knowledge of its political principals. The former Prime Minister of tiny and wealthy Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, had to resign due to the unauthorized activities of his intelligence agency and recently

50 Porch [2007] p.132. See also Porch [1995].
complained that secret services “are very hard to keep under control”\textsuperscript{52}. In the US, the National Security Agency and the CIA have been accused of, respectively, engaging in “out-of-control spying on private communications”\textsuperscript{53} and running an “out of control” drone strikes program\textsuperscript{54}, even though no evidence has emerged to suggest that policymakers in the executive branch have been unaware or have not approved what the NSA and the CIA have been doing. More relevant to the issue of control is the contention made by the Senate’s Committee on Intelligence that the CIA repeatedly misled policymakers concerning the value and the severity of its interrogation and detention program\textsuperscript{55}.

Third, even though communism no longer poses a plausible threat, radical populist movements on the right and the left may be construed by the sitting governments as subversive. These governments may ask their intelligence agencies to target movements such as the Front National in France, the UK Independence Party in Britain or the Five Stars Movement and the Northern League in Italy. If they do so, they will not only engage in an immensely controversial policy, but they will also reduce the control they exercise over their intelligence agencies.

This book does not address any of these cases specifically. As it often happens with intelligence studies, I had to go back in time several decades in order to have access to the necessary documents. My case studies deal with historically important events, from the opening of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Soviet Union to the FBI’s role in the second Red Scare, but these may seem irrelevant to policymakers’ current concerns. Policymakers are unlikely to be interested in the intricacies of the Italian political system during the Cold War, yet


\textsuperscript{54} Micah Zenko, “The United States Does Not Know Who It’s Killing”, \textit{Foreign Policy}, 23 April 2015.

\textsuperscript{55} Senate Select Committee on Intelligence “Committee’s Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program”, released on 3 December 2014.
by studying this and other cases I can provide a generalizable explanation as to when policymakers’ control over intelligence agencies will be high or low and when these agencies will subvert. Policymakers who want to prevent their intelligence agencies from engaging in unauthorized activities and from attempting to remove them from power should find this useful. The conclusion draws from this explanation a series of policy recommendations on how to do so.

Plan of the book

The rest of this book is structured as follows. The next chapter presents my theoretical framework and my methodological approach. The following four chapters are my case studies, arranged in a rough chronological order.

The third chapter studies the British intelligence community from 1909 to 1924. First established to fight against German espionage, British intelligence agencies shifted towards the ideal type of the political intelligence agency after 1917, when fighting leftist subversives at home and abroad became their priority. Soon enough they attempted to remove governments they perceived as perilously soft on communism. In 1920 military and intelligence officials tried to force Prime Minister Lloyd George to resign and in 1924 MI5 and MI6 officers leaked a forged letter to the conservative press just days before the elections, intending to cause the defeat of the incumbent Labour Party.

The fourth chapter studies the FBI from its establishment until 1948. Initially a law enforcement agency with no intelligence powers, the Bureau of Investigation became a political intelligence agency once it began to fight domestic subversives. After several scandals in the early 1920s, one of its principals attempted to change the Bureau’s priorities away from
subversion and back towards law enforcement. This attempt was only partially successful and was reversed in 1936, when President Roosevelt asked the FBI to fight subversion once again. Harry Truman paid the price of his predecessor’s decision when in 1948 the FBI attempted to remove him by assisting his political foes in Congress and in the polls.

The fifth chapter analyzes the establishment and early years of the CIA, explaining why the CIA resembled the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency and thus became invulnerable to subversion.

The sixth chapter studies Italian military intelligence from 1943 to 1964. Being an agency largely dedicated to the fight against domestic leftist subversives, Italian military intelligence strongly resembled the ideal type of the political intelligence agency. In 1960 it helped subvert a center-right government that was unintentionally contributing to the strengthening of the Italian Community Party. In 1964 it threatened to remove a center-left government it perceived as dragging the country into a Communist-like economic abyss with its radical reform programs.

The last chapter concludes, drawing policy implications and pointing avenues for further research.
Ch. 2. A Theory of Intelligence-Policy Relations

This is a theory about the relationship between intelligence agencies and their principals in democratic countries. The next section defines the actors and states what I assume to be their goals. I then develop my causal argument in three separate steps. First, I causally link an agency’s main enemies with its type. An agency’s type is then linked with the degree of control exercised by its principals. Finally, I explain when and why an agency will engage in politicization and subversion. Each step is one or more falsifiable hypotheses.

The actors and their goals

Intelligence agencies are organizations tasked with the collection and analysis of information related to national security and, in most cases, with the implementation of covert action\(^56\). The single intelligence agency is my unit of analysis. I refer to the set of intelligence agencies within a given country as the intelligence community. By principals I mean the set of institutional actors who create, reform and are in charge of an intelligence agency\(^57\). Amongst the principals I include the government, the political parties that form the government, heads of State with substantial powers to nominate the government\(^58\) and, in some cases, foreign governments. The inclusion of foreign governments and the exclusion of Parliaments may seem surprising, but is justified by the empirical evidence. Governments have repeatedly created hierarchical relationships with intelligence agencies of foreign countries, influencing their budgets, their

\(^{56}\) By covert action I mean the conduct of secret activities meant to influence the behavior or perceptions of another actor, and/or the social, economic or political conditions within this actor’s environment. The activity itself is usually not secret, but the actor implementing it is. Covert action should be distinguished from espionage, which is instead the clandestine and secret collection of information. For a similar definition, see Shulsky and Schmitt [2002] p.75.

\(^{57}\) I do not use an explicit principal-agent framework, even though I derive a series of intuitions from principal-agent literature. I nonetheless use the word principals because it is the one which captures better than any other alternative the varying set of actors which I refer to in this theory.

\(^{58}\) I thus exclude those heads of State whose powers are only nominal, such as the British monarch.
personnel selection and, more or less successfully, their conduct\textsuperscript{59}. As I will show in the Italian case, intelligence agencies have been created or restructured by foreign governments, with the latter playing a more important role than the national government\textsuperscript{60}. Instead, Parliaments have generally played a minor role in intelligence affairs. Even their powers are stronger, their role is largely limited to oversight, rather than control.

I assume that the principals have two goals with respect to the agency. First, they want the agency to fight effectively against the main enemies, or priorities, which they have identified\textsuperscript{61}. Second, they want to control the agency, preventing it from engaging in unauthorized activities\textsuperscript{62}.

Both goals are simplifying assumptions. Principals may simply not care about intelligence, or they may prefer not to be informed about what their intelligence agencies are doing. Furthermore, principals are a collective body ripe with disagreements. I make the simplifying assumption that the principals, in their entirety, want to be in control. This does not mean that my theory leaves no place for disagreements amongst the principals. As I will show, these disagreements play an important role in the last step of my theoretical framework.

Once an agency is created, I assume that its first goal will be to fight effectively against its main enemies. The agency has three tools at its disposal to do so: the collection of information, the analysis of this information and covert action. Next to this basic goal, I assume that the agency has a preference for larger budgets and for the control of its bureaucratic turf.

\textsuperscript{59} Walsh [2010] similarly applies the concept of hierarchy to some relationships between intelligence agencies of different countries. See especially ch.1.

\textsuperscript{60} The Italian case is not unique. German intelligence was similarly restructured under Allied control after its defeat in World War II. See the documents in Ruffner [2006].

\textsuperscript{61} I use the terms “main enemies” and “main priorities” interchangeably.

\textsuperscript{62} The same goals are discussed in Born and Caparini [2007] p.163 and in Bruneau and Boraz [2007]. As I will show, several tradeoffs exist in the simultaneous pursuit of these two goals.
Step 1: the agency’s main enemies and its type

When the principals create or reform an intelligence agency, they have to decide what its priorities will be. In other words, who are the main enemies against which the intelligence agency will fight? Not everyone amongst the principals need to be part of this decision or agree with it. In many cases the principals will not make an explicit decision and the list of intelligence priorities will remain more or less the same of what it used to be. Regardless of how this decision came about, the important point for my theory is the answer to the following question: is one of the intelligence agency’s main enemies a domestic subversive group which poses a perceived plausible threat of overthrowing the government? I speak of a threat as plausible if the principals, at the moment of the agency’s creation, or, after that, the agency itself, believe that there is a non-negligible chance that the subversive threat will succeed in overthrowing the government. I measure the plausibility of this threat by looking at the principals’ and later at the agency’s public and private statements to check whether or not they express concern about the possible overthrow of the government.

The answer to the above question is my independent variable. If the answer is positive, I hypothesize that the intelligence agency will resemble the ideal type of the political intelligence agency. If the agency does not have such a strong subversive enemy as one of its priorities, I hypothesize that it will likely resemble the ideal type of the non-political intelligence agency. Political and non-political intelligence agencies are two opposite ideal types. They are never found in practice in their pure form, but they help me identify causal relationships in an otherwise confusing world.

63 For brevity, I sometimes refer to this as a strong subversive threat.
Whether or not an agency is designed to fight against a strong subversive threat will largely depend on whether or not the principals believe that such a threat exists. Nonetheless, it would be inappropriate to use the principals’ belief in the existence of this threat as my independent variable, for three reasons. First, the principals may choose to design multiple agencies, assigning to only some of them the fight against the strong subversive threat. Second, the principals may disagree as to whether such a threat exists. Third, after the agency has been created, the principals and the agency’s officials may disagree as to whether or not a plausible threat of subversion still exists. If I were to use the principals’ belief as my independent variable, I would not be able to explain the interesting dynamics which stem from these disagreements.

I define the ideal types of political and non-political intelligence agencies along two dimensions, which correspond to the key decisions the principals have to make when designing or reforming an intelligence agency. These decisions are, in order of importance, whether or not an agency will be politically neutral and whether the dividing line between foreign and domestic activities will be strong or blurred.

1. **Political Neutrality**

   I measure the political neutrality of an agency by looking at its behavior and bureaucratic culture. I will classify as politically neutral an agency that repeatedly and internally states its political neutrality, eschews political controversies and strives to inculcate in its members an ethos of political neutrality. Internal statements are more indicative than public ones or those directed at figures outside the agency. As I will show, even brazenly political officers often pay lip service to the mantra of bureaucratic neutrality. An agency will be instead political if there is
no cultural stigma against intervening in domestic politics and/or if it repeatedly and deliberately acts against or in favor of one side of the political spectrum$^{64}$.

When the principals choose to create an agency which is designed to fight a strong domestic subversive group, they are also implicitly choosing to create an agency which is not politically neutral. The fight against a domestic subversive group which is strong enough to plausibly threaten to overthrow the government places an intelligence agency against one side of the political spectrum. To plausibly threaten the overthrow of the government, a political group has to enjoy some support among the population. In a democracy, this support will generally, but not always$^{65}$, translate into some form of political representation. The political intelligence agency will fight against such a group, its eventual elected representatives and its sympathizers.

Knowing that the agency will engage in such a fight, the principals will strive to keep the agency’s operations hidden from Parliament. Having as one of its main enemies a domestic subversive group, the agency cannot reveal to Parliament what it is doing if representatives or sympathizers of such a group have a seat in Parliament. Even if no representatives or sympathizers exist, the agency’s operations against subversive groups are likely to trouble those members of Parliament most concerned with the protection of civil liberties, providing another reason to keep Parliament in the dark.

Of course, subversive groups exist in virtually every country and intelligence agencies, especially domestic ones, are generally intended to fight against them. This does not mean that

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$^{64}$ Recruitment patterns should also be a useful indicator of political neutrality, although it is likely to be hard to find public statements on the criteria that were used. Excluding a large section of the population based on its political leanings is indicative of the political nature of the agency.

$^{65}$ Whether or not a subversive group will obtain political representation depends on three interrelated factors. First, does the group seek to obtain political representation via the ballot box or does it eschew the democratic process? Second, is the group allowed to participate in the democratic process? Third, are the votes counted in such a way that the group can win seats in Parliament or in other elected assemblies? Proportional electoral systems generally more favorable than majoritarian systems on this last point.
all domestic intelligence agencies will be politicized. If the subversive groups are not strong enough to pose a perceived plausible threat of overthrowing the government, the intelligence agency can afford to be politically neutral. The fight against its main enemies does not place the intelligence agency against a political faction that is credibly seeking to gain power. The agency’s main enemies are unlikely to have sympathizers in Parliament, and the fight against them should arouse fewer concerns in terms of civil liberties.

The absence of a strong subversive domestic movement among an agency’s priorities is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an agency to be non-political. The principals could still choose to staff an agency with no subversive priority with party loyalists, for instance. This seems to happen rarely in modern democratic settings, but cannot be excluded. In these cases, I expect the intelligence agency to be a hybrid between the two ideal types of political and non-political intelligence agencies.

2. *Sharpness of the Foreign-Domestic Divide*

I speak of a sharp dividing line between domestic and foreign intelligence if there is a rule prohibiting an agency from operating either at home or abroad and if this rule is generally respected in practice. If no such regulation exists or if the rule is frequently violated, the dividing line is blurred.

Most democratic countries have different intelligence agencies operating domestically and abroad. In the eyes of the government, having only one intelligence agency would give too much power to an institution which largely operates in secrecy. Such an agency may become too

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66 The logical flip side of this argument is that the presence of a strong subversive threat among an agency’s main enemies is sufficient but not necessary for the agency to be political.
67 The rule can be formal or informal, even though it will generally be formalized.
powerful to be effectively controlled, and there would be good reasons to fear that it would employ at home the illegal techniques which it necessarily uses to gather information abroad.

All governments thus have incentives to separate domestic and foreign intelligence agencies. However, such a dividing line can be marked sharply depending on which enemies the agency is designed to fight. Throughout the twentieth century, the strongest subversive groups have been transnational in character. For instance, most communist groups received political, ideological and financial support from abroad. No sharp line between domestic and foreign intelligence can be drawn in these cases. To effectively fight against these subversive groups, an intelligence agency will have to track and disrupt its sources of support, its movements and its operations both at home and abroad.

If instead the agency’s main enemies do not include transnational groups which are strong enough to pose a plausible threat of subversion at home, the principals can draw a sharp dividing line between foreign and domestic intelligence. I expect the principals to draw such a dividing line in these cases, by banning domestic operations by the agency tasked with foreign affairs and banning foreign operations by the agency tasked with domestic affairs.

The table below summarizes the differences between political and non-political intelligence agencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political intelligence agency</th>
<th>Non-political intelligence agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not politically neutral</td>
<td>Politically neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blurred foreign/domestic divide</td>
<td>Sharp foreign/domestic divide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
The priorities of an intelligence agency can change, but the principals’ capacity to change them will depend on their degree of control over the agency itself. If the priorities change to include or exclude a strong domestic subversive group, I expect that there will be a shift towards a political or non-political intelligence agency, respectively. It would be unrealistic to expect a complete shift from one ideal type to the other, for two reasons. First, political and non-political intelligence agencies are two opposite ideal types located at the extreme of a continuum, and all real cases will fall somewhere in between. Second, as students of public administration have long acknowledged, bureaucracies are very hard to change and the founding characteristics of an agency are likely to persist long after their original raison d’être has ceased to exist\textsuperscript{68}. Any significant change, such as changing the boundaries between agencies operating at home and abroad, is likely to encounter fierce resistance by the bureaucracy which stands to lose. My theory does not predict who will win the bureaucratic fight between promoters of change and custodians of the status quo, but it predicts the direction in which the pressure for change will go.

\textbf{Step 2: From the Agency’s Type to the Principals’ Degree of Control}

I define principals’ control over an intelligence agency as their capacity to get the agency to obey their orders and instructions and to prevent it from engaging in unauthorized activities. In other words, principals control the agency when the agency does what they want it to do and does not do what they do not want it to do\textsuperscript{69}.

\textsuperscript{68} For this argument applied to intelligence, see Zegart [2000], especially ch.1, Zegart [2007], especially ch.3 and Bruneau and Boraz [2007] p.3.
\textsuperscript{69} Few will dispute that from a normative point of view a strong principals’ control over an intelligence agency is desirable. Yet there can be such a thing as too much control. If principals order intelligence agencies to do what they are not supposed to do, such as spying on the principals’ legitimate domestic political opponents, most will agree that it is desirable for intelligence agencies to resist those orders.
I use two indicators to measure the degree of control exercised by the principals over an intelligence agency. Control will be high if we never or rarely see the agency engaging in unauthorized activities and/or refusing to obey a request from its principals. If this happens often or regularly control will be low. Of course, many of the unauthorized activities are likely to remain secret. I then use a second indicator of control, namely what principals themselves are saying about the control they exercise. Do we see them stating that they do not control the agency? If so, how frequently? Private statements will be more valuable than public ones. In public, principals have stronger incentives to lie. They may say they are in control even though they are not, in order not to appear powerless, or they may say they are not in control even though they are, in order to deny their own responsibility.

I hypothesize that principals’ degree of control will be high over a non-political intelligence agency and fragile over a political one. Both traits of a non-political intelligence agency should make it easier for principals to control it.

The political neutrality of an intelligence agency is a powerful form of control. The intelligence officers of a non-political intelligence agency are imbued with an ethos of non-involvement in politics and recognize that it is not their job to make policy decisions, much less to undermine their principals’ decisions. When their preferences differ from those of their principals, this ethos should kick in, preventing them from intervening in politics. This form of control parallels what in the field of civil-military relations Samuel Huntington called objective civilian control, defined as the maximization of military professionalism. Objective civilian
control minimizes military power by rendering the military politically neutral and ready to obey any civilian group with legitimate power. Its antithesis is military participation in politics\textsuperscript{70}.

Objective civilian control is not an option when dealing with an intelligence agency that is not politically neutral. Instead, principals will try to control the agency by selecting personnel that shares their own political preferences and ideological inclinations. Control is not achieved by rendering the agency politically neutral, but by making it politically similar to the government. This parallels what Huntington called subjective civilian control. Like Huntington, I argue that it is likely to be less effective in the long run than its objective counterpart. This occurs because political preferences are never perfectly aligned. Principals will try to select agents that share their preferences, but agents will have an incentive to misrepresent their preferences as being more aligned with their principals’ than what they really are. Further, principals themselves may have divergent preferences. Even though the principals of a political intelligence agency are all likely to share the broad goal of fighting against the subversive threat, they may differ on the best means of doing so as well as on other activities the intelligence agency is engaged in. Lastly, preferences and ideologies are not fixed. If the preferences of the principals diverge significantly from those of the agents, subjective civilian control, unlike objective civilian control, loses its efficacy. I thus expect principals’ control over political intelligence agencies to be fragile. It will be strong only as long as there is a sufficient convergence of preferences between principals and agents, and weak otherwise\textsuperscript{71}.

Coming to the second trait of my ideal types of intelligence agencies, a strong divide between domestic and foreign operation is also a powerful instrument of control. Any evidence


\textsuperscript{71} I do not explain when and why preferences will converge or diverge. Instead, I argue that significant preference divergences will be frequent enough that control based on preferences will be fragile.
of domestic operations by the foreign intelligence agency or of foreign operations by the
domestic intelligence agency will in and of itself be evidence of unauthorized activities. If no ban
on domestic operations exists, the government will have to know the content of the operations
before being able to detect unauthorized activities. The ban on domestic operations by the
foreign intelligence agency is likely to be especially effective against subversion by the agency
itself. To remove the existing government, an agency has to operate domestically. It will be
much easier to uncover the agency’s eventual unauthorized domestic activities if the agency is
not supposed to operate domestically in the first place.

Figure 1 below describes my causal argument thus far. The presence or absence of a
strong subversive group as one of the agency’s priorities determines whether an intelligence
agency will resemble the ideal type of the political or non-political agency. In turn, the
characteristics of these ideal types determine the degree of control exercised by the principals,
with political intelligence agencies harder to control than non-political ones. The last step is to
explain when subversion and politicization will occur.
Step 3: Explaining politicization and subversion

I hypothesize that only a political intelligence agency will engage in subversion. Such an agency will also routinely manipulate intelligence to support policy preferences, in what I refer to as structural politicization. A non-political intelligence agency, on the other hand, will not engage in subversion and will occasionally suffer from contingent politicization.

As I’ve shown, the current literature has identified the circumstances under which politicization will occur as being a public commitment by policymakers to a given policy and the emergence of a critical constituency. As Rovner argues, policymakers have an incentive to
politicize intelligence because it is secret and, more importantly for my theory, because it is perceived as objective and neutral. This perceived objectivity gives intelligence judgments an added political value, which policy-makers can then use in the public arena.\footnote{Rovner [2011] p.48 notes: “intelligence is useful because it carries an air of detached objectivity, but this image cannot last if policymakers regularly use public intelligence to advocate for policy choices.”}

The premises which lead to politicization under the circumstances Rovner identifies exist almost exclusively for a non-political intelligence agency. It is only when intelligence is perceived as neutral that politicization becomes a valuable strategy for policy-makers wanting to promote their policies in public. This is overwhelmingly more likely to be the case for a non-political intelligence agency, which actually is politically neutral, than for its political counterpart, which is not politically neutral but may be wrongly perceived as such.\footnote{The FBI under Hoover is the only case I could find of a political intelligence agency that was publicly perceived as politically neutral.} The scope of existing explanations of politicization is thus largely limited to non-political intelligence agencies, and indeed all studies of politicization are focused on them.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that politicization is a problem that only affects non-political intelligence agencies. To the contrary, a political intelligence agency will regularly construct and use intelligence according to its political goals. The agency is not politically neutral and its products reflect that. Intelligence is manipulated not to build the authoritative impression of consensus within the national security apparatus, but to be used as a weapon within the political arena, generally as a source of blackmail. The manipulation of intelligence is not a temporary aberration, but a routine occurrence, hence the name structural politicization.\footnote{The manipulation of the evidence, including of the public’s perception of the subversive threat, poses a problem for my theory, but hardly an insurmountable one. My independent variable, the existence of a perceived strong subversive threat among the agency’s main enemies, looks at the perception of the principals at the moment of the agency’s creation and of the agency after that. I thus need to identify what the agency really perceives in terms of threats and risks.}

\footnote{Rovner [2011] p.48 notes: “intelligence is useful because it carries an air of detached objectivity, but this image cannot last if policymakers regularly use public intelligence to advocate for policy choices.”}

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This use of intelligence devalues the role of analysis. The analyst’s role is not to provide objective and neutral analysis. Instead, analysts are asked to piece together what clandestine operators have gathered into material that is suitable to be used politically.

Whereas both types of agencies should suffer from politicization, albeit with different frequencies, I expect only political intelligence agencies to engage in subversion. Let’s first see why I do not expect a non-political intelligence agency to engage in subversion.

First, and most importantly, a non-political intelligence agency should be strongly controlled by its principals. If the principals, which include the government, control what the agency is doing, the agency will not be able to remove the government itself. Second, the agency sees its role as politically neutral, and should thus be very reluctant to engage in politics, especially with the forcefulness which a successful subversive attempt would require. Lastly, if the agency is a foreign intelligence agency, it should not have the authority nor the power required to operate domestically, which would be necessary to launch a subversive attempt.

A political intelligence agency, on the other hand, should be inclined to engage in subversion. This is so for two reasons. First, as I argued above, the principals’ control over such agencies should be low. Second, the motivation to subvert should be stronger. This motivation stems from the potential conflict between the fight against the subversive threat, one of the agency’s main goals, and the behavior of the government. If the government is incapable or unwilling to fight the subversive threat, intelligence finds itself in a dilemma. It can do nothing and risk compromising its fight against the subversive enemy; or it can remove the government itself and replace it with one more willing and/or more capable of fighting. On one side stands

of the severity of the threat, regardless of the manipulation of public’s perception of the threat by the agency itself.
the failure to accomplish the intelligence agency’s goal. On the other side there is the subversion of the government intelligence is supposed to be loyal to.

It is not enough to say that intelligence subverts when it perceives the government to be incapable or unwilling to adequately fight the subversive threat. Not every weak or unwilling government gets subverted by its own intelligence agencies, and in any case the explanation would hardly be insightful. The agency must also believe that its subversive attempt has a high chance of succeeding. For this to be the case, there has to be a feasible political alternative to the current government. In other words, can the intelligence agency bring to power a new, more effective government?

I hypothesize that this happens under one of two additional conditions. First, the agency can tilt an upcoming close election one way or another, by leaking compromising and at times false material against the sitting government. Having no clear boundaries between domestic and foreign intelligence, a political intelligence agency gathers information both at home and abroad. The domestic information gathering efforts will be mainly targeted at the subversive political movements, but other political actors are unlikely to be spared. The agency has no hesitation to intervene in domestic politics and knows that its main source of power is the information it possesses. Being weakly controlled by its principals, the agency is thus likely to amass vast amounts of compromising materials on politicians of all tendencies. This material can then be leaked to the sympathetic news media during an electoral campaign, in order to cause the defeat of a disliked government.

Second, the agency can find sufficient political support amongst its principals for the removal of the current government and for the support of a new one. In other words, fractures

75 For a similar argument concerning coups, see Powell [2012] pp.1019-1021.
amongst the principals give the agency the opportunity to seek a new, stronger government, supported by an alternative, but partially overlapping, coalition of its principals. This does not mean that the principals are in control of the intelligence agency. The agency in fact chooses which actors amongst its principals it will support, and these actors may well be those which have only a weak or nonexistent legal authority over the agency.

This subversive attempt will rarely lead to an authoritarian government, although this has happened in the past\textsuperscript{76}. In democratic and generally highly developed countries, anything other than a democratic regime is likely to be considered politically unsustainable\textsuperscript{77}. More often, subversion will lead to a partial reshuffling of those in government. Still, I show that even in highly democratic and developed countries governments change via undemocratic procedures and that these countries continue to remain democratic nonetheless.

Figure 2 below summarizes my causal framework, followed by a list of my hypotheses:

\textsuperscript{76} For instance, in Brazil in 1964, in Greece in 1967 and in Chile in 1973. For a complete list of coups and coup attempts since 1960, see Powell [2010].

\textsuperscript{77} One of the well-established facts in comparative politics about rich and democratic countries is that they do not reverse to authoritarianism. This point, made most famously by Prezworski and Limongi [1997], still holds true.
Figure 2. Causal Framework

- **Independent Variable:** Main Priority
  - Is one of the agency’s main enemies a strong domestic subversive threat?
  - **Yes:** Political Intelligence Agency
    - Fragile Control
    - Agency perceives govt. as unwilling/incapable to fight subversive threat + sees an alternative govt. as feasible
    - Pathology: Subversion
  - No: Non-political Intelligence Agency
    - Strong Control
    - Govt. publicly committed to a policy faces a critical constituency
    - Pathology: Structural Politicization
    - Contingent Politicization

- **Type of Agency**
- **Policymakers’ Control**
- **Mechanism**
Hypotheses:

1. If an intelligence agency’s main enemies include a domestic subversive group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, intelligence will resemble the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. If they do not, the intelligence agency will likely resemble the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency.

2. The principals will exercise a strong control over a non-political intelligence agency. Their control over a political intelligence agency will be fragile: it will be strong as long as preferences converge and weak when they diverge.

3. Non-political intelligence agencies will occasionally suffer from politicization and will not engage in subversion.

4. Political intelligence agencies will routinely manipulate intelligence for political goals. They will also engage in subversion when they perceive that the government is unwilling and/or incapable of adequately fighting intelligence’s subversive enemy and when they perceive an opportunity to install an alternative government.

Alternative Explanations

Subversion by intelligence agencies within democratic countries has received very little attention in the literature. There are no ready-to-use alternative explanations, thus I derived four from the literature on military coups, possibly the phenomenon which comes closest to intelligence subversion.
1. **Vital and imminent threat**: the most recurring justification for a subversive attempt is a vital and imminent threat of chaos, defeat and/or subversion by the enemies of the state. In other words, when a fickle government faces a vital and imminent threat, the intelligence agency intervenes to replace the government with a more capable and decisive one. This explanation is plausible, but self-serving and theoretically problematic. First, it is unclear if the high level of the threat is necessary for the intelligence agency to intervene with its own subversive attempt. Secondly, the agency estimating the threat is also acting on it. The agency thus has an incentive to exaggerate the threat it faces to justify its own actions. It should not be surprising to find that political intelligence agencies manipulate the public’s perception of the subversive threat for their own political goals.

2. **Grievance motive**: under this explanation an agency should be more likely to subvert when it is starved for funds and/or when a reform threatens to restrict its turf.

3. **Coup-proofing**: subversion should be less likely if multiple intelligence agencies exist. These agencies are likely to oppose each other and they make it harder to achieve the coordination between them which they would need to successfully subvert.

4. **Economic crisis**: the consensus in the literature is that the probability of coups increases significantly if economic growth has been lackluster or negative and if per capita income is low. The destabilizing political effects of economic crises should increase the probability of subversion, which in turn is higher the poorer a country is to begin with.

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78 See Collier and Hoeffler [2005].
79 See Quinlivan [1999] and Powell [2012].
80 See Powell (2012).
These explanations and my own are clearly not mutually exclusive, yet it should be useful to compare how well they explain each one of my case studies.

A note on methods and sources

Although no one has studied the universe of cases, the number of known episodes of subversion appears to be too small for statistical analysis. Further, all of these episodes require too detailed a knowledge to be picked up by large N datasets. Indeed, the existing datasets on coups and coups attempts do not include any of the episodes I study.\(^81\)

I instead employ comparative historical analysis to test my theory of intelligence-policy relations. Several arguments justify this choice. First, this research is exploratory. It does not test preexisting theories, but it develops a new theory to explain a phenomenon that has until now been ignored. As John Gerring argues, case studies enjoy a natural advantage in exploratory research, because “lightbulb” moments are more likely when closely engaging with a particular case.\(^82\) Second, the hypotheses I am about to test are mainly deterministic, not probabilistic, making the comparative historical method more appropriate than regression analysis.\(^83\) Third, it would be difficult to use correlation analysis to test a theory that is largely about a causal mechanism. I could not test this theory relying solely on data-set observations, i.e. on scores on variables. More important are causal process observations, namely observations about the

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\(^81\) One of the most recent and comprehensive datasets on coups explicitly excludes coup plots as unfit for reliable coding. Most of the episodes I study would be considered coup plots. See Powell and Thyne (2011), pp.251-252. The Polity IV dataset which includes coup attempts does not include any of the episodes I study. The dataset is available at [http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html](http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html).

\(^82\) Gerring [2004] distinguishes between exploratory research, which first generates a theory and tests it, and confirmatory research, whose primary task is to verify or falsify a preexisting set of hypotheses. See pp.349-350.

context, process and mechanisms linking the variables\textsuperscript{84}, and these are best obtained conducting case studies. Lastly, the core goal of this research is to explain outcomes in individual cases. I start with the cases and their generally known outcomes\textsuperscript{85} and then work backward using a causes-of-effects approach, the approach associated with qualitative research\textsuperscript{86}.

Give the secrecy of the episodes I study and in order to avoid being labeled a conspiracy theorist, I have been particularly careful in the use of sources. The historical literature on intelligence is littered with works which have little documentary support and make a selective use of the evidence. It is also a common practice to cite what other authors have said without saying where those authors found their information and how it is supported by primary evidence, making the replicability of one’s analysis a daunting and at times impossible task\textsuperscript{87}.

To avoid these pitfalls, I have relied as much as possible on primary sources, especially those which Andrew Moravcsik calls hard primary sources. These are the documents which give “direct evidence of decision-making”\textsuperscript{88} or, in my case, of the activities of intelligence agencies. These sources are precious, but also rare and often not accessible. Soft primary sources are thus a necessary complement. These are the sources produced by the direct participants in the events, but in circumstances in which they had an incentive to give a biased account of the events, such as memoirs and testimonies in front of investigative commissions.

\textsuperscript{84} For the distinction between data-set observations and causal process observations see Brady, Collier and Seawright [2010], p.24.
\textsuperscript{85} I actually only had a limited knowledge of the outcomes of my cases when I picked them. For instance, even for the Italian case, which I knew best, I was not sure whether the events of 1964 could be classified as subversion and I did not know that subversion had also occurred in 1960 and arguably in 1946-1947.
\textsuperscript{86} The distinction is between the causes-of-effects approach, in which the researcher starts with an outcome and then moves backward toward the causes, and the effects-of-causes approach, in which the researcher does not know the outcome in advance and applies the treatment to then measure its effects. See Mahoney and Goertz [2006], pp.230-232.
\textsuperscript{87} For a discussion of the problems of imprecise citations in political science, see Moravcsik [2010], especially pp.29-30. The problem applies to historical works as well, at least in the intelligence literature.
\textsuperscript{88} Moravcsik [1998] p.10. See also pp.81-83. For a summary of Moravcsik’s methodological claims, see Lieshout et al. [2004] pp.92-94.
In some cases, I could not access the primary sources which were available to another scholar, either because the scholar in question had privileged access to the sources or because of mere lack of time and resources on my behalf. I thus either used the direct citations of the documents, what Moravcsik calls hard secondary sources\textsuperscript{89}, or I made sure that the scholar’s interpretation is widely accepted. This is what Ian Lustick calls quasi-triangulation, namely finding the overlap between the interpretations of scholars of different schools and with different sympathies\textsuperscript{90}. When no overlap existed I either left the question open or explicitly argued why I preferred one interpretation over the other, what Lustick calls explicit triage\textsuperscript{91}.

\textsuperscript{90} Lustick [1996], p. 616.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibidem.
Ch.3 British Intelligence and Subversion in the 1920s

Introduction

“Wild Bill” Donovan was impressed. During the two trips Donovan made to Britain in the second half of 1940 on behalf of President Roosevelt, his British hosts, from Prime Minister Churchill to the head of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) Sir Stewart Menzies, had done all they could to convince him of Britain’s resolve to resist Hitler’s advance. Donovan, in Menzies’ words, had “more influence with the President than Colonel House had with Mr. Wilson” and he was Britain’s chance to counter the pessimistic reports of the US Ambassador Joseph Kennedy.92

Britain’s resolve was not the only lesson which Donovan brought back to Washington. In a letter in May 1941 to the Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, a Republican in a Democratic administration, Donovan expressed his conviction that “intelligence operations should not be controlled by party exigencies”93. He drew that lesson from what he believed to be the political neutrality of the British intelligence services, a lesson which he then put in practice as head of the Office of Strategic Services and which decisively shaped the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The idea that intelligence should be politically neutral would have been greeted with a smile by some of Donovan’s colleagues across the Atlantic. Menzies himself, as well as Churchill’s special adviser on intelligence, Desmond Morton, had leaked a forged letter to remove the Labour government in 1924. Others would have probably remembered that the

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recently deceased chief of SIS, Hugh Sinclair, had plotted with other intelligence and military chiefs to force Lloyd George’s resignation in the summer of 1920.

As summarized by Figure 3 on the next page, this chapter explains why the non-political British intelligence community created in 1909 transformed itself into a political intelligence community that tried twice to remove a sitting government. Unlike the other chapters, the focus here is on the entire intelligence community rather than just one agency. As we will see, the shift in priority affected the entire intelligence community, and all the agencies changed accordingly. The chapter is divided into five parts. I first illustrate the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau in 1909 following one of the frequent German spy scares of Edwardian Britain and show how the Bureau’s organizational features corresponded to the ideal type of the non-political intelligence agency. I then analyze how, after the shift in priorities from Germany to Bolshevik subversion, the intelligence community was transformed in the direction of the ideal type of political intelligence. The third part reconstructs the so-called Henry Wilson plot of 1920, when the Chief of the Imperial General Staff conspired with the heads of several intelligence services to force the resignation of Prime Minister Lloyd George, and then analyzes the second round of intelligence reform in 1921. The fourth part analyzes the Zinoviev letter affair of 1924. The fifth part concludes assessing my theory’s performance.
The British intelligence community obtained a firm institutional footing with the establishment in 1909 of the Secret Service Bureau, the institutional forefather of SIS and MI5. The Bureau was established following a recommendation by a sub-committee of the Committee
on Imperial Defence (CID), which was then approved by the cabinet led by the Liberal Prime Minister Asquith. The sub-committee was chaired by the Secretary of State for War, Viscount Haldane, and it included, among others, senior members of the armed forces, the permanent under-secretaries of the Treasury and of the Foreign Office and the Home Secretary. The principals of the Secret Service Bureau were thus a combination of apolitical military officers and civil servants and high-ranking politicians who were part of a political system in which alternation in power was common.

The Bureau’s main enemy was Wilhelmine Germany. The sub-committee of the CID which recommended its creation “was formed at the request of the General Staff, who regard with apprehension the increasing amount of German espionage that is taking place in this country.” The Sub-Committee concluded in July 1909 that there was “no doubt (...) that an extensive system of German espionage exists in this country and that we have no organization for keeping touch with that espionage and for accurately determining its extent or objectives.” In Churchill’s words from a decade later, the Secret Service Bureau’s “restricted energies were almost entirely directed against Germany.”

The Secret Service Bureau was designed to fight this system of German espionage in Britain and to create a British espionage network in continental Europe. Before that, Britain’s attempts to gather intelligence, especially on the German fleet, had been amateurish and largely

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94 The members of the sub-committee of the CID are listed in CAB16/8, at the British National Archives in Kew (henceforth, BNA) and explained in Andrew [1987] p.53.
96 See the “Reports and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to consider the question of foreign espionage in the United Kingdom, 1909”, in CAB16/8, BNA.
98 “Reduction of Estimates for Secret Services. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War”, March 19, 1920, KV4/151. See also the statement by the head of MI5 in 1925: “before the war (...) Germany was alone in the field [of espionage in the UK], in FO1093/68, minutes of the 4th meeting.
unsuccessful\textsuperscript{99}. The German espionage system turned out to be much less extensive than what many too excitable writers believed. The figures publicized in open hearings and in the press ranged from 50,000 to 350,000 German spies, but with the arrest of a mere twenty-two German agents, MI5 almost entirely destroyed the German spy network at the outbreak of war\textsuperscript{100}.

The military was the natural locus for an agency designed to fight against the supposed invasion plans and espionage rings of a foreign power. The Secret Service Bureau was in fact established as a military intelligence agency. The first chiefs of what will then become SIS and MI5 were at first the representatives of the Admiralty and of the War Office, respectively\textsuperscript{101}. These representatives initially worked from the same office, one concerned with espionage abroad and the other with counterespionage in the British Isles. This was soon seen as impracticable, and in 1910 the two different branches became two different organizations\textsuperscript{102}. The first branch was known as MI1c. It later became the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and passed under the control of the Foreign Office. It was tasked with obtaining secret information abroad, under the leadership of Commander Mansfield-Cumming. The second was generally referred to as MI5: controlled by the War Office, it concerned itself with counter-espionage within Britain, under the leadership of Colonel Vernon Kell\textsuperscript{103}.

During their first decade, MI5 and SIS resembled the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency. First, there is no evidence of them having a political inclination nor of them

\textsuperscript{99} See CAB16/8: “it was represented to the Sub-Committee that our organization for acquiring information of what is taking place in foreign ports and dockyards is defective, and that this is particularly the case with regard to Germany”. See also CAB16/232 and Judd [1999] p.70, who cites a note written in May 1907 by Col Count Gleichen of the War Office stating that “as it at present stands, we have no Secret Service agents whatever in Europe”.

\textsuperscript{100} At least according to MI5’s official history, Andrew [2009] pp.51-2. The effectiveness of the MI5’s operation is strongly challenged by Hilley [2006] and [2010].

\textsuperscript{101} See the “Memorandum re Formation S.S. Bureau”, August 1909, KV1/3.

\textsuperscript{102} See KV1/3, as well as Andrew [1987] p.59.

\textsuperscript{103} A brief description of the organizational set up of the secret services is in the “Report of the Secret Service Committee”, February 1919, KV4/151, paragraph 4.
engaging in any political activity. Second, the divide between domestic and foreign intelligence was sharp\textsuperscript{104}. A meeting on 21 October sorted out the workings of the newly created Bureau, formally establishing that Kell “should undertake the whole of the Home work- both Naval and Military” and that Cumming “should have charge of all the foreign –both N & M”\textsuperscript{105}.

Reforming intelligence to fight domestic subversion: the 1919 Secret Service Committee

By 1917 German spy scares had given way to the fear of pacifists and domestic unrest\textsuperscript{106}. The Bolshevik Revolution in November heightened these fears even further, prompting a flurry of proposals to reform the entire British intelligence community to fight this new, transnational subversive threat. Only some of these proposals were implemented, but they all pushed in the direction of a more political intelligence community.

At the center of most of these proposals was Sir Basil Thomson, the ambitious head of the Special Branch at Scotland Yard and the man responsible for tracking and fighting subversion in Britain. In early 1917 the chief constable of Sheffield, Major Hall-Dalwood, had grown increasingly concerned about what he referred to as “undermining movements”, whether internal, external or a combination of the two, and wrote to Thomson proposing a centralized National Intelligence Service covering the whole country\textsuperscript{107}. Thomson initially thought that such


\textsuperscript{106} There is a consensus in the literature on this point. See Madeira [2003] p.3 and Madeira [2014] ch.1, Jeffery [2010] ch.6 “From Boche to Bolshevism” and Andrew [2009] pp.94-5.

\textsuperscript{107} Hall-Dallwood’s proposal is cited in Andrew [1987] p.229.
a proposal was too grandiose, but less than a year later he was thinking in even bigger terms, encouraged by the support of a number of powerful figures within Whitehall.

In October 1918 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Walter Long, sent Thomson a memorandum warning that there was “in this country a very strong Bolshevik agency which succeeds, owing to the want of efficient Secret Service”\(^{108}\). British intelligence was “in a wholly unsatisfactory condition” to fight the menace of subversion, which instead required a unified Civil Secret Service, capable of dealing with “the Bolshevik, Syndicalist and the German spy”\(^{109}\). Thomson enthusiastically embraced Long’s proposal and went even further. With the Director of Naval Intelligence “Blinker” Hall, Thomson devised a plan for a single civilian head (presumably himself) of the entire intelligence community, comprising naval, military, foreign and home intelligence.

Thomson and Hall were aware that the labor movement and the Labour Party would have seen the intelligence community as inimical, especially the home intelligence agency whose task was to deal with labor unrest and revolutionary matters. They thus proposed to finance it with the interests of a secret War Loan investment, rather than via the Secret Service Vote in Parliament. The motivation for taking away from Parliament this form of oversight over the secret services was eminently political: “It is very doubtful”, they wrote, “whether Parliament will continue to vote an adequate sum for Secret Services after the War, especially if a Labour Government comes into power”\(^{110}\).

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\(^{110}\) Cited in Andrew [1987] p.231. The same reasoning was repeated in a note from Long to Curzon on February 8, 1919 in KV4/151. Long wrote that “a capital sum should be placed at the disposal of the new [Secret Service] department –the interest to be available for the Secret Service. The open and avowed object of this last proposal is to avoid Parliamentary discussion”.
Long accepted Thomson’s scheme as his own and sent it to Prime Minister Lloyd George as the war was coming to an end. Following Long’s memorandum, the Cabinet established the Secret Service Committee (SSC) in January 1919\textsuperscript{111}.

The proposals which led to the establishment of the SSC are in line with my theoretical expectations. As the main enemy shifted from Germany to Bolshevism, the proposals to reform intelligence pushed for an agency that was more politically controversial, hence the need to reduce parliamentary oversight, and with a blurred distinction between domestic and foreign intelligence.

The SSC focused its attention on the civilian side of intelligence, preferring to maintain the distinction between civilian and military intelligence and thus implicitly rejecting Thomson’s more ambitious proposal of having one civilian head of the whole intelligence community\textsuperscript{112}. With the Armistice less than four months old, the Committee decided that “although the future of [the military and naval branches of the secret service] will have to be considered”, it cannot “be decided at the present moment, when many of the responsible officers are engaged in more urgent duties”\textsuperscript{113}.

The minutes of the meetings of the SSC reveal that the tension between a political and a non-political intelligence agency marked the process of intelligence reform\textsuperscript{114}. At the SSC’s first

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{111} The SSC was chaired by the acting Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon and it comprised Edward Shortt (Home Secretary), Long (who had just been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty), Winston Churchill (War Secretary) and Ian Macpherson (Chief Secretary for Ireland). See Jeffery [2010] p.146. Madeira [2003] p.4 erroneously lists Hamar Greenwood as the Chief Secretary for Ireland, a post to which Greenwood was appointed only in April 1920.

\textsuperscript{112} Report of the Secret Service Committee, February 1919, KV4/151, see paragraphs 4 and 9. The term “civilian intelligence”, used by the SSC, is misleading, as it implies that all other intelligence agencies were military. SIS, for instance, was led by a military officer, but it was under the Foreign Office and many of its agents were not military officers.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibidem, paragraph 9.

\textsuperscript{114} What follows is based on the minutes of the three meetings of the SSC on 3 February, 7 February and 4 April, in KV4/151.
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meeting on 3 February, the Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) at the Foreign Office, Lord Hardinge, quickly reminded everyone of the distance which separated its secret service, SIS, from anything having to do with domestic affairs: “the Secret Service run by the Foreign Office deals with foreign countries alone. It has nothing to do with information to be obtained in Great Britain, Ireland or the Colonies”. Long’s proposed agency, dealing with revolutionary movements, challenged this sharp distinction between domestic and foreign intelligence. Long’s representative in the first meeting, Lord Lytton, clarified that “Mr. Long’s view was that Mr. Thomson’s and Captain Cumming’s work should be combined and that one man should be at the head of it”.

The disagreements over Long’s proposal continued in the second meeting on 7 February. Lord Curzon clarified at the outset that “the Committee were concerned mainly with that part of secret service which deals with revolutionary propaganda at home”. Thomson, who attended this second meeting together with Cumming and Kell, replied that “one great evil of the present system was the duplication of agents. Very often the same agent was paid by the two different employers”. To avoid this overlapping, Thomson again proposed to have “some person in complete charge of political information”.

Faced with the opposition of the Foreign Office, Thomson and the Home Office were forced to give up on their attempt to take control of SIS. Nonetheless, the reform that was ultimately implemented still went in the direction of a more political intelligence agency.

In its third meeting on 4 April the SSC adopted the proposal contained in a memo written by Thomson, creating the Directorate of Intelligence –Home Office (DIHO). It was clear to Thomson himself that DIHO was not politically neutral. In his memo, Thomson wrote of the importance of having DIHO within Scotland Yard and of keeping executive and information
gathering powers under one person. In part this was because “the power to take quick action on
the receipt of information would be seriously curtailed if there were not a body of Police Officers
under the immediate orders of the Director of Intelligence”. However, “an even stronger reason
why (...) the Director should be connected with New Scotland Yard” was that by doing so the
new domestic intelligence agency could avoid public criticism from the labor movement. It was
generally understood, Thomson argued, that it was Scotland Yard’s duty to deal with labor unrest
and revolutionary activities. Only by providing DIHO with “an effective cover” within Scotland
Yard could “labour agitators” in the House of Commons be put to rest\textsuperscript{115}.

The SSC felt uneasy about the increasingly political nature of its intelligence community.
One of the most controversial issues was anti-Bolshevik propaganda. At the SSC’s third meeting,
“Lord Curzon informed the Committee that the Foreign Office had decided to form a News
Department (...) whose object was to conduct propaganda in foreign countries”. In a private
letter written shortly before, Curzon had explained that the Foreign Office was “doing what [it]
can, as unostentatiously as possible, since the connection of the Foreign Office with such work
[anti-Bolshevik propaganda] would at once render it suspect in the eyes of labour”\textsuperscript{116}.

On the domestic side, “Thomson informed the Committee of private organisations which
had been formed to counteract the spread of Bolshevist ideas. The Committee thought that Mr.
Thomson ought to have a suitable man under his control who would organize propaganda and
keep in touch with these private efforts \textit{provided they are not in any degree of a political
character}. (...) [I]t was not desirable that the person selected should be located in the Home

\textsuperscript{115} Reorganisation of Intelligence (Circulated by the Home Secretary), March 31, 1919, KV4/151.
\textsuperscript{116} KV4/151. See the letter by First Commissioner of Works Alfred on 4 March 1919 and Curzon’s reply on 7 March.
Office or at Scotland Yard “117. The Committee was trying to find an impossible compromise between the need to fight Bolshevism and the desire to preserve intelligence’s political neutrality. Although the documents do not explicitly reveal the motivation behind the decision to have the person in charge of propaganda outside of the Home Office or Scotland Yard, it was most likely intended to preserve the political neutrality of these two institutions. The idea that organizations designed to fight Bolshevist ideas could be “not in any degree of a political character” soon proved to be a losing battle118.

The Secret Service Committee also tried to set a strong boundary between domestic and foreign intelligence. DIHO was meant to deal solely with domestic civil matters, without encroaching on the territory of MI5, which dealt with counterespionage and with subversion in the armed forces, and of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), which dealt with foreign intelligence119. Drawing such sharp lines when the main threat was foreign inspired subversion turned out to be unfeasible. Thomson’s list of DIHO’s targets should have made this clear. DIHO was to focus on “the progress of Bolshevism abroad”, “labour unrest organisation”, “Indian anarchist matters”, “Irish matters” and “revolutionary matters at home”120.

117 Ibidem. Emphasis added. The rise of private intelligence organizations which worked alongside the official intelligence agencies was also a sign of an increasingly political intelligence community. These organizations were mostly organized and funded by right-wing businessmen and, as we will see, some of them later played an important role in the Zinoviev letter affair. See Jeffery [2010] p.215 and Madeira [2014] pp.56-57 and p.88.

118 Madeira [2014] p.26 similarly notes the oddity of the request.

119 See the Report of the Secret Service Committee, February 1919, KV4/151, see paragraph 6. The division was reaffirmed in two documents now in KV4/128, “Division of duties between Home Office Director of Intelligence Scotland House and the Security Service”. See especially the letter of 2 May 1919 from Home Secretary Shortt to Kell, clearly intended to reassure Kell that Thomson was not going to encroach on MI5’s competences.

120 See the Reorganisation of Intelligence (Circulated by the Home Secretary), 31 March 1919, KV4/151. See also Madeira [2014] p.26, who similarly argues that “from the start, Thomson exceeded his mandate to assess domestic revolutionary unrest, examining issues like the impact of subversion on other countries’ morale, encroaching on SIS’s mandate. More upsetting was his insistence on tackling subversion in the British military, the preserve of MI5.”
Although the Secret Service Committee decided to deal with civilian intelligence only, there were several proposals for the reform of the military side of the intelligence community as well. The Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) Lt. General William Thwaites tried repeatedly to merge MI5 and SIS into one organization controlled by the War Office. His first proposal, just three days after the Armistice, was rejected by the SIS Chief Cumming as infeasible, because “the methods, personnel and venue for the two services are entirely different”: counter-espionage “is done in England (…) espionage is conducted abroad”. Furthermore, Cumming restated that the Foreign Office had to remain the only department responsible for espionage abroad\textsuperscript{121}. Thwaites tried once more in February 1919, again proposing to merge MI5 and SIS. This time Cumming added another revealing reason to his opposition: given “the prospect of a Labour government in the near future”, it was “necessary that the S[ecretary] of S[ttate] for Foreign Affairs, with his hand on his heart, should be able to declare that the Secret Service has no connection with the control of labour unrest”. Since it had “clearly been proved that money from these strikes” had been “supplied by Bolsheviks”, MI5 would inevitably “be connected with labour and Bolshevik troubles”\textsuperscript{122}. Undeterred, Thwaites, supported by the Director of Naval Intelligence Hugh Sinclair, tried at least two more times to merge SIS and MI5. In the end departmental interests, especially the Foreign Office’s insistence on keeping control of SIS, and the difficulties of reorganization prevented a reform of military intelligence\textsuperscript{123}.

Both on the civilian and military side of the intelligence community, the pressure for change pushed the agencies towards the ideal type of the political intelligence agency, blurring

\textsuperscript{121} Cited in Jeffery [2010] p.143. No reference is cited for the original document, possibly because Jeffery had exclusive access to it.
\textsuperscript{123} Jeffery [2010] pp.149-150.
the boundaries between domestic and foreign operations and involving intelligence in the
domestic political struggle.

These more political agencies soon proved to be harder to control\textsuperscript{124}. In 1920, DIHO and several military intelligence leaders tried to force Lloyd George’s government to resign. In 1924, MI5 and SIS tried to cause the electoral defeat of a Labour government they perceived as perilously soft on communism.

The Anglo-Soviet Trade Negotiations, the Henry Wilson Plot and the Role of Intelligence

\textit{The motive behind the plot: “Is L.G. a traitor?”}\textsuperscript{125}

On 16 January 1920 the Allied Supreme Council formally ended the blockade of Soviet Russia, proposing a policy of peaceful exchange of goods. The British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, a Liberal governing in an increasingly tense coalition with the Conservative Party, was one of the first Western leaders to seek to rebuild trade relations with Russia. Lloyd George expressed his faith in the sobering influence of commerce, to the point of stating that “the moment trade was established in Russia, Communism would go”. Bolsheviks, in Lloyd George’s view, were barbarians, but like other barbarians they could be civilized, and would be as long as the rest of the world did not permit them to remain in their harmful isolation\textsuperscript{126}. Four months later an official Russian trade delegation arrived in London. This was the first step

\textsuperscript{124}There is no evidence of principals’ weak control before the first subversive episode in 1920, possibly because the time between the change in the agencies’ priorities and their subversive attempt is too short.

\textsuperscript{125}From Henry Wilson’s diary, 23 July 1920, now at the Imperial War Museum in London. See also Ullman [1972] p.275.

\textsuperscript{126}Cited in Ullman [1972] p.467.
towards recognition of the revolutionary Soviet regime by a major Western government. Many
British military and intelligence officers saw it with incredulous discomfort and suspicion,
viewing trade as an opportunity given to the Bolshevik barbarians to spread subversion, rather
than as an opportunity for Britain to civilize them\textsuperscript{127}.

Among high ranking British officers, the most troubled by Lloyd George’s
accommodating policy towards the Soviets was probably the Chief of the Imperial General Staff,
Sir Henry Wilson. Already in early 1919, Wilson had written in his diary of Lloyd George’s
“tacit agreement with Bolshevism”\textsuperscript{128}. On 15 January 1920, Wilson went even further,
“wondering if L.G. is a traitor & a Bolshevist” and promising to “watch him very carefully”.
Wilson raised this question repeatedly in his diary throughout 1920, convincing himself that
Lloyd George was indeed a Bolshevist traitor\textsuperscript{129}.

It seems reasonable to think that few, if any, high ranking officers shared Wilson’s beliefs
early in 1920, although we lack the evidence to say this conclusively. By August 1920 this was
no longer the case. Lloyd George kept refusing to expel the Russian Trade Delegation, despite an
increasingly explosive social situation and intercepted telegrams showing the delegation’s
attempts to spread subversion. The highest intelligence and military officers now convinced
themselves that Lloyd George was unwilling to fight the Bolshevik threat, if he was not
altogether complicit with it. At a meeting on 18 August, DIHO Director Thomson told Wilson,

\textsuperscript{127} Andrew [1987] p.244. Basil Thomson is explicitly mentioned as holding this belief.
\textsuperscript{128} What follows is largely based on Henry Wilson’s diary, now at the Imperial War Museum in London, and on
Ullman [1972] pp.275-283 (the quote is on p.275). The first and only edition of Wilson’s diary appeared in a heavily
censored form, which excludes some of the most interesting (and compromising) passages, as the editor himself
recognizes (see Calwell [1927] p.vi). Similarly, Keith Jeffery’s [2006] biography of Wilson omits any reference to the
subversive episode in the summer of 1920. Jeffery personally told me that he had done so because he had
discussed the episode elsewhere.
\textsuperscript{129} See also Wilson’s diary entries for 27 May and 23 July and Ullman [1972] p.275.
the Director of Military Intelligence Lt. General Thwaites and Wilson’s deputy General Sir Charles Harington, “that he was seriously beginning to think L.G. was a traitor”\(^\text{130}\).

Several leading intelligence and military officers were thus motivated to subvert. Adding to their motivation was a widespread perception that in August and September of 1920 Britain was perilously close to a revolution\(^\text{131}\). In a retrospective judgment, Thomson argued that “labour opposition to the Government reached its zenith during August. The causes were two-fold; genuine fear of conscription and artificial agitation directly controlled from Moscow by means of the Russian Trading Delegation.\(^\text{132}\)” The fear of conscription was linked to the ongoing Russo-Polish war. In early August, with Soviet troops at the gates of Warsaw, Poland seemed on the verge of total defeat, and many in the labor movement were convinced that Lloyd George’s government would have intervened to prevent that\(^\text{133}\). On 9 August, the labor movement had formed the Council of Action, whose immediate goal was to oppose British intervention against Russia, even using extra-parliamentary means. For the following weeks, the revolutionary spirit seemed to permeate “the great mass of the workers which is usually apathetic”\(^\text{134}\).

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\(^{130}\) From Wilson’s Diary, 18 August. My emphasis. See also Ullman [1972] pp.277-278 and Wilson’s diary entry on 24 August, where Thomson’s belief is restated. It could be that Wilson was engaging in a form of mirror imaging, assuming that others saw Lloyd George the way he did. Yet Thomson’s behavior throughout the crisis and his reaction when Lloyd George forced him to resign, lead me to think that he really believed that Lloyd George was a traitor.

\(^{131}\) I can closely track this perception thanks to the reports on revolutionary movements in the UK which Thomson’s Directorate of Intelligence was writing and distributing to the Cabinet on a weekly basis.

\(^{132}\) Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), “A Survey of Revolutionary Movements in Great Britain in the year 1920”, January 1921, CAB/24/118, p.31.

\(^{133}\) Ibidem. See also Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), ”Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom”, Report No.67, August 12, 1920, CAB24/110.

\(^{134}\) Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), “Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom”, Report No.69, August 26, 1920, CAB24/111.
“moderate trade unionists [were] in a surprising mode of excitement”\textsuperscript{135}. The “spirit of revolt [was] growing every day”\textsuperscript{136}.

However, this perception of an imminent revolutionary danger was not a decisive factor in the subsequent plot, for two reasons. First, Thomson was likely exaggerating the revolutionary danger to increase his power within the intelligence community and to provide arguments to those who opposed the trade negotiations. In Victor Madeira’s words, Thomson’s “own preconceptions tainted Special Branch assessments around this time. He therefore failed to make his organization conform to its role of evaluating information objectively.”\textsuperscript{137} The evidence is too thin to reach a conclusive judgment, but it still indicates that, in accordance with my theory’s predictions, DIHO engaged in structural politicization\textsuperscript{138}.

Second, albeit not always consistently, Thomson himself argued that the summer of 1920 wasn’t the worst unrest which Britain had seen. Thomson later described early 1919 as the “high watermark” of social unrest. He believed the period was the closest Britain had come to a revolution since the Bristol Riots of 1831\textsuperscript{139}. Even though early 1919 may have been more dangerous, it was when he perceived the government to be unwilling to fight the revolutionary threat that he subverted.

\textsuperscript{135} Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), “A Survey of Revolutionary Movements in Great Britain in the year 1920”, January 1921, CAB/24/118, p.31.
\textsuperscript{136} Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), “Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom”, Report No.67, August 26, 1920, CAB24/111.
\textsuperscript{137} Madeira [2014], p.20. See also pp.86-87.
\textsuperscript{138} Thomson had not always been an alarmist. He had repeatedly argued throughout his career against those who believed that a revolution was imminent. In August 1920, however, he shifted abruptly from speaking of a “lull” in revolutionary activity to describing an “amazing outburst of [revolutionary] feeling” caused by the possibility of war with Russia. This abrupt shift was in part justified by events on the ground, but there seems to have been an element of manipulation as well. See Directorate of Intelligence (Home Office), “Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom”, Reports No.66 and 67, 5 August and 12 August, 1920, CAB24/110. See also Ullman [1972] pp.221-222 and p.267.
\textsuperscript{139} Andrew [1987] p.233.
A fractured Cabinet and a higher loyalty

The anti-Lloyd George conspirators\(^\text{140}\) in the military and intelligence services tried to exploit the fractures within the Cabinet to force Lloyd George to resign. The Cabinet was divided over whether or not the Soviet delegates should be expelled and whether their misdeeds should be exposed in full by publishing the intercepted telegrams between them and Moscow. Since their arrival in May, the Soviet delegates Kamenev and Krassin had tried to promote subversion by, among other things, providing funds to the Communist *Daily Herald* and to the “Hands off Russia” Committee, which campaigned against a British intervention in the Russo-Polish conflict\(^\text{141}\). Thanks to Thomson’s network of informers and to the Soviet telegrams intercepted by the Government Code & Cypher School, the Cabinet and high ranking officials knew what the Soviet delegates were up to. Kamenev and Krassin had pledged not to undertake hostile action and not to conduct propaganda against Britain, giving the government ample reasons to justify their expulsion\(^\text{142}\).

Frustrated by the government’s inaction, Henry Wilson decided it was time to act. On 17 and 18 August he met with his own staff and with the chiefs of staff of all home Army Commands to plan for “a possible war with the Council of Action”. In the evening of 17 August he received a set of intercepted telegrams showing the connection between the Russian Trade Delegation and the Council of Action, yet another proof of Soviet attempts to subvert the British government. On 18 August, as Lloyd George was leaving London for a vacation, Wilson discussed the telegrams with his deputy, General Sir Charles Harington, and the Director of


\(^{141}\) Andrew [1987] p.245 and p.262.

\(^{142}\) In an official response to the Soviet government on 30 June 1920, the British government restated that trade negotiations could continue under the condition that “each party refrains from hostile action or undertakings against the other and from conducting any official propaganda direct or indirect against the institutions of the other party”. Now in the UK Parliamentary Archives, Davidson Files.
Military Intelligence, Lt. General Thwaites. They decided to call Thomson, who told them that the Cabinet had discussed the Soviet delegation’s behavior the day before. It had agreed that the delegation had violated the pledges under which they had been allowed to enter, but it nonetheless chose to take no action and wait for further developments in Poland, where the Polish army had obtained what turned out to be a decisive victory the day before. The Cabinet also decided to release to the press a selection of intercepts showing Moscow’s subsidies to the Daily Herald. The intercepts given to the press were only those which had been written in a relatively simple code, in the hope that the Soviets would not realize that their other telegrams were also being read. Finally, Lord Curzon was instructed to write a protest note to the head of the Trade Delegation, Kamenev, but Lloyd George had posed so many conditions on the protest note that Curzon concluded he could not send it. It was at this meeting that Thomson told Wilson that he was “beginning to think Lloyd George was a traitor”.

The same day Wilson reached out to the members of the Cabinet who opposed Lloyd George’s policy. The extraordinary nature of the British government at this time, a coalition government initially formed in wartime with a Prime Minister without a strong party behind him, probably convinced him that removing the government was feasible. Wilson contacted Churchill and, according to his diary, told him that he “found it difficult to understand the attitude of LG & of the Cabinet, that telegrams of this sort put a severe strain on our (Soldiers) loyalty to the Cabinet as though we wished to be loyal to the government we had a higher loyalty still to our King & to England.” Winston was much excited. He said it was quite true that LG was dragging

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143 On this, see also Andrew [1987] pp.266-7.
the Cabinet step by step towards Bolshevism (…). He asked to write a note on the subject” 146. Churchill could have hardly missed the meaning of Wilson’s words. Speaking of the higher loyalty that he and his soldiers owed to the King and to England, Wilson was threatening to overthrow the government 147.

Wilson again used menacing language in the memorandum which Churchill asked him to write. He stated that “the authority of the Government, its right and its power to govern, has been rudely challenged by the Council of Action. (...) These [intercepted Russian] telegrams establish beyond all possibility of dispute (...) that Kameneff and Krassin while enjoying the hospitality of England are engaged, with the Soviet government, in a plot to create red revolution and ruin in this country [and] that the ‘Council of Action’ is in the closest touch and collaboration with the Russian Soviet for the downfall and ruin of England. (...) [I]t is a military necessity to expose the whole of this traitorous combination (...). I await the decision of the government” 148.

Wilson did not specify what he would have done had “the decision of the government” proved unsatisfactory. He knew that the memorandum could have forced him to resign. When he said this to his deputy Harington and to the DMI Thwaites, both of whom agreed with what he had written, they said that in that case they would have also resigned, and so would have the Director of Military Operations, Major General Sir Percy de Blaquiere Radcliffe 149.

146 Wilson’s diary entry, 18 August 1920. See also Ullman [1972] p.278.
147 Wilson’s invocation of Crown and country sounds ironic today. Present day British officials are distinguished between Crown servants, most of whom work with secret information, and civil servants. The formers’ denomination is intended to signal their political neutrality as servants of Crown and country, rather than of the government. Wilson used instead his allegiance to the Crown and to his country to engage in a blatantly political act.
149 Wilson’s diary entry, 19 August.
A collective resignation by the highest ranking military and intelligence officers would have likely brought down the government. To increase the chances of doing so, Wilson sought to enlist more high ranking officers. He did so with great success, obtaining the support of the First Sea Lord Admiral Betty; the Director of Naval Intelligence (and future SIS Chief), Rear Admiral Sinclair; the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard and DIHO director Sir Basil Thomson\textsuperscript{150}. The heads of the armed services and of both military and civilian intelligence (with the exclusion of MI5 and SIS, whom do not appear to have been contacted\textsuperscript{151}), were thus on Wilson’s side.

The next step, and the one which proved fatal to the subversive attempt, was to obtain enough support within the Cabinet to install an alternative government. The political principals of intelligence and military officers were divided, but those who wanted to expel the Russian Trade Delegation still had not agreed to try to remove Lloyd George’s government and form a new one. Wilson again turned to Churchill. The Secretary of State for War had just written a memo demanding the expulsion of the Russian Delegation and lamenting the “perturbation” that their continued presence was causing among British officers. The memo was supposed to accompany Wilson’s own memorandum and be distributed to the Cabinet, but Churchill hesitated to send it. On 24 August, Wilson once again resorted to threats to convince him: “I warned him that we Soldiers might have to take action if he did not & that in that case his position would be impossible”\textsuperscript{152}. Churchill sent the letter the next day, but accompanied it with a much more conciliatory letter addressed to Lloyd George, of which Wilson was unaware.

\textsuperscript{150} See Wilson’s diary, 24 August, where he adds: “Trenchard with whom I discussed this matter lately and to whom I showed the 2 notes + the intercepts thinks, like Basil Thomson, that LG is a traitor.” Underlined in original.

\textsuperscript{151} The lack of evidence of SIS and MI5’s involvement was personally confirmed to me by Keith Jeffery, Wilson’s biographer and SIS’ official historian.

\textsuperscript{152} See Wilson’s diary entry for 24 August and Ullman [1972] p.281.
On the 26th, after receiving estimates that 100,000 former soldiers were among the revolutionaries, Wilson decided to stockpile rifles, machine guns and tanks at infantry depots throughout Britain “to start off Loyalists when they join up”. Wilson tried to strengthen his case by adding papers by Thomson and Sinclair showing the connection between the Trade Delegation and the subversive attempts in the labor movement and in the Navy. The three were meeting almost daily “to fulminate the Prime Minister” and considering leaking to the press the intercepted telegrams. On 1 September, they wrote to Churchill arguing that “the presence of the Russian Trading Delegation has become in our opinion the gravest danger which this country has had to face since the Armistice. Thus being so, we think that the publication of the de-cyphered cables has become so imperative that we must face the risks that will be entailed.” They anticipated that by expelling the Soviet delegates “the movement for establishing Councils of Action all over the country may break up”.153

Although Wilson’s position was supported by Churchill, the Foreign Secretary Curzon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Austen Chamberlain and the Secretary of State for the Colonies Milner, no one was willing to break with the Prime Minister. This proved to be the fatal weakness of Wilson’s plot. The plotters, motivated by Lloyd George’s perceived treacherous behavior, believed that the divisions within the Cabinet would have allowed them to install an alternative government, but these divisions turned out to be insufficient to force Lloyd George to resign.

When Lloyd George reconvened the Cabinet on 10 September, those who, like Churchill and Curzon, had taken the hardest line on the expulsion of the delegates and the publication of

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153 The memorandum by Thomson, Wilson and Sinclair is now among the Davidson papers at the UK Parliamentary Archives. See also Ullman [1972] pp.287-289 and Andrew [1977] p.686. In a memorandum on 9 September, also among the Davidson papers, Sinclair went as far to say that “even if the publication of the telegrams was to result in not another message being decoded, then the present situation would fully justify it.”
the intercepts, were strikingly absent. The Cabinet decided that Lloyd George would have warned Kamenev that he had violated his terms of entrance, without specifying the nature of the evidence, and told him not to return after his planned departure for Moscow. The Cabinet also postponed the decision on whether to publish the telegrams in full. Publishing them would have delivered a blow to the most extremist elements in the labor movement by giving proof of Soviet perfidy, but it would have also alerted the Soviets that all of their messages were being intercepted, likely compromising the source.

The Cabinet’s decision on 10 September marked the failure of Wilson’s plot to remove the Prime Minister, even though Wilson continued to rail against him in his diary and to threaten to resign\(^{154}\). Nothing came of these threats, but the plotters did not abandon the scene without striking one final blow against the government. On 14 September, the anti-Bolshevik *Daily Mail* and *Morning Post* published detailed accounts of the financial transactions between the *Daily Herald* and the Soviet Trade Delegation, obtained from the intercepted telegrams. The most likely source of this leak was an intelligence officer, who shared Wilson’s outrage at the Cabinet’s decision not to publish the intercepts. The leak of intercepted Soviet documents to the *Daily Mail* is an important precedent for the leakage of the Zinoviev letter to the same newspaper in 1924\(^{155}\).

*The 1921 Committee and Thomson’s demise*

For two years after the 1919 Secret Service Committee, intelligence reform was off the agenda. The most immediate bureaucratic concern for the intelligence agencies were the deep, 

\(^{155}\) Andrew [1987] p.270.
across the board budgetary cuts imposed by Lloyd George’s government to roll back the wartime spending increases\(^\text{156}\).

These cuts spurred the Cabinet to appoint a special Committee in March 1921 “to examine the expenditure on Secret Service (…) and to report their recommendations to the Cabinet for reducing expenditure and avoiding overlapping”\(^\text{157}\). In its final report in July, the Committee stated that it had found little overlapping between the various intelligence branches and “no evidence at all” of “culpable extravagance and mismanagement” on behalf of the secret service departments\(^\text{158}\). It saw room for reform only with respect to Thomson’s DIHO, proposing its incorporation into the Metropolitan Police, reversing the decision made in 1919. The Committee unanimously concluded that Thomson’s weekly report on revolutionary activity in the UK was valuable and should be continued, but that “his monthly report on similar movements abroad, which frequently contains misleading, if not absolutely erroneous, information regarding matters by no means invariably within the purview of Sir Basil Thomson’s work, should be discontinued.” The Committee found that DIHO’s work lacked objectivity and that it overlapped with other agencies\(^\text{159}\). It confirmed that DIHO did not respect the boundary between foreign and domestic intelligence as well as its tendency to manipulate its estimates.

\(^{156}\) MI5’s budget was cut from £100,000 in the last year of the war to £35,000 in the first year of peace, see Andrew [2009] p.117. SIS’s budget was cut from £80,000 per month during the war to £125,000 per year in 1919, with insistent proposals of cutting it down to £65,000 per year, see Jeffery [2010] pp.156-158.

\(^{157}\) Report of the Committee appointed by the Cabinet on March 22\(^\text{nd}\), KV5/151, p.1. The Committee was chaired by Treasury PUS Sir Warren Fisher and comprised Sir Eyre Crowe (Foreign Office PUS) and Sir Maurice Hankey (Cabinet Secretary).

\(^{158}\) Ibidem, pp.11-14.

\(^{159}\) That there were overlaps is clear from a full reading of the Committee’s report. This interpretation is shared by Andrew [1987] p.282, who also gives an example of Thomson’s “culpable extravagance” in terms of spending. Thomson “dispatched a fifteen-man troupe to Poland (…) for a Russian anti-Bolshevik propaganda film”. The Fisher Committee may have decided to moderate its language in the report, to avoid angering Thomson’s powerful supporters in government.
Prime Minister Lloyd George forced Thomson to resign, despite protests by several of his supporters. Thomson was convinced that his resignation was due to the interference of DIHO’s anti-Bolshevik intelligence with Lloyd George’s plan to recognize the Soviet government, but his foreign adventures contributed to his demise\textsuperscript{160}. Throughout 1920 Thomson distributed to the Cabinet several inaccurate and probably politicized reports on Soviet Russia, with false evidence pointing to the fragility of the Bolshevik regime which reinforced the position of those who, like Thomson himself, argued against Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations\textsuperscript{161}. As Churchill argued in a memo to the reconvened Secret Service Committee on December 24, 1921, “it was precisely where he [Thomson] stepped outside the geographical limits proper to a Home Secret Service that mistakes were made”\textsuperscript{162}.

A newly reconvened Secret Service Committee\textsuperscript{163} adopted the recommendations of this special Committee. It decided to incorporate DIHO into the Metropolitan Police, to reaffirm a firm boundary between domestic and foreign intelligence and to divide Thomson’s former post in two: one tasked solely with collecting information and the other tasked with taking executive action based on that information\textsuperscript{164}. Having realized the drawbacks associated with political intelligence agencies, the Committee’s decisions tried to bring back British intelligence in the direction of a non-political intelligence community. These decisions were largely unsuccessful, however. British intelligence agencies continued to overlap with no clear boundaries between

\textsuperscript{160} Andrew [1987] pp.282-283
\textsuperscript{161} For instance, in October 1920 Thomson reported that the head of the Cheka Dzerzhinsky had recently demanded unlimited powers to prosecute the Red Terror fully. In another case Thomson cited an intercepted letter by Lenin in which he admitted the failure of the Soviet experiment. Both reports turned out to be based on false information. See Madeira [2003] pp.8-9
\textsuperscript{162} The Secret Service, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies Winston Churchill to the Secret Service Committee, December 24, 1921, KV4/151.
\textsuperscript{163} The 1921 SSC was once again chaired by Lord Curzon. It comprised Churchill, Sir Worthington Evans (War Secretary), Shortt (Home Secretary) and Sir Greenwood (Chief Secretary for Ireland).
\textsuperscript{164} Draft minutes of the 1st meeting of the Secret Service Committee, November 15, 1921, KV4/151.
domestic and foreign intelligence and they continued to interfere in politics, engaging once again in subversion in 1924.

The Zinoviev Letter

DIHO and Thomson were now gone, replaced by the less ambitious Wyndham Childs as head of Special Branch. Without such a strong and invasive competitor, SIS finally secured the monopoly of foreign intelligence. Not content, SIS and its new Director, former Director of Naval Intelligence Hugh Sinclair, soon started to operate at home in its fight against Bolshevism. In the words of its official historian, “SIS’s role in monitoring revolutionary activities of various sorts, especially those of international Communism, meant that no hard-and-fast rule could be consistently applied against working within the United Kingdom. If, say, a suspected Communist agent was being tracked by SIS across Continental Europe and came to Britain, it might not be feasible or, indeed, desirable suddenly to hand over the operation to MI5 or Special Branch at the moment the suspect entered the country. During the 1920s and early 1930s SIS also ran some agents exclusively within Great Britain.” Barely a year after having started to fight subversion at home under Sinclair’s new and aggressive leadership, SIS attempted to remove its own government.

The first Labour Government and the intelligence community

165 On Childs’ personality, see Andrew [1987] p.284.
167 Sinclair became SIS Director following Cumming’s death in 1923. He was also named non-operational director of the Government Code & Cypher School (GC&CS), Britain’s signals intelligence agency. See Jeffery [2010] p.170 and p. 209.
On 22 January 1924 the leader of the Labour party Ramsay MacDonald took office as Prime Minister. Although the Conservatives had gained more seats in the general election in December, they did not have a majority in the Commons. The Liberals decided to support the Labour party rather than the Conservatives, providing the necessary votes for the first Labour government in British history.

The nervousness among Whitehall officials responsible for foreign and defense policy was palpable, and MacDonald’s policy towards the Soviet Union increased it even further. Serving as both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, one of his first acts in office was to extend *de jure* recognition to the Soviet Union. Starting in April, the government negotiated a series of treaties on virtually all outstanding questions with the Soviet Union, which were then signed on 4 August. The most controversial point in the treaties was the provision of a loan by the British government to the Soviet Union, in exchange for the settlement of Russian debts dating from before the Revolution. The loan struck a chord in the right-wing press, which denounced it as “money for murderers” and accused the Labour Party of having succumbed to pressure from the extreme left. Ten days before the signing of the treaties, a Scottish Communist journalist called John Campbell had written an open letter to the armed forces, asking them to refuse to fight and to use their weapons to smash the capitalist system. Campbell was arrested for incitement to mutiny, but, on 6 August, after a hasty Cabinet discussion, the prosecution against him was withdrawn. In quick succession, the Labour government exposed itself again to the accusation of obeying the orders of the extreme left and of the Communist

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Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in particular, something which the Communist Party was eager to confirm\textsuperscript{170}.

After a summer of accusations, on 8 October the Liberal party joined the Conservatives and voted a motion of censure against the government. The government was forced to call new elections, and in the three weeks of electoral campaign which followed the Anglo-Soviet treaties and the Red Peril played a central role\textsuperscript{171}. On 9 October, the Foreign Office received a copy of a letter supposedly written by the President of the Comintern Zinoviev on 15 September, in which he instructed the CPGB to create communist cells in the armed forces and to compel the Labour Party to ratify the Anglo-Russian treaty, just as it had done when the treaty was signed\textsuperscript{172}.

The letter was a political bombshell, and it exploded just four days before the election. Although the publication of the letter did not cause Labour’s electoral defeat, many at the time believed this to be the case. More importantly, the goal of those who leaked the letter was to remove the Labour government\textsuperscript{173}.

To understand the role which intelligence played in the Zinoviev letter affair it is useful to take a step back and analyze the relationship between the Labour government and the intelligence community. From the beginning the relationship was marked by mutual suspicion.

When first given Special Branch’s weekly report on revolutionary organizations, MacDonald was dismissive, remarking that “little (…) in it was likely to be unfamiliar (…) to anyone who reads the \textit{Workers’ Weekly}” and that it could have been more “attractive and indeed entertaining if its survey were extended to cover (…) the Fascist movement in this country (…)"

\textsuperscript{170} Andrew [1977] p.700. See also the official history of the episode by Bennett [1999] pp.7-11.
\textsuperscript{172} The full text of the letter is reproduced in Bennett [1999] pp.93-5.
\textsuperscript{173} There is wide agreement on this point. See, among others, Andrew [1987] p.308, Jeffery (personal communication) and Bennett [1999] p.92.
or possibly some information as to the *Morning Post* funds”. He also asked to see his own Special Branch file. Special Branch head Wyndham Childs refused to show it to him and replied that the *Morning Post* had never tried to foment a revolution. The meeting confirmed Childs’ belief that the government was perilously soft on communism. Such belief was widely shared across the British intelligence community, leading it to withhold certain information from the government. For instance, MacDonald was probably the only member of his Cabinet informed of the activities of Britain’s signals intelligence agency, the Government Code & Cypher School, and even he was less than fully informed. Churchill discovered when he returned to power in November 1924 that MacDonald had been kept in ignorance of many of the intercepts.

MacDonald’s undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Arthur Posonsby, was refused all access to intercepts and SIS reports, despite the fact that he was in charge of negotiations with the Soviets. Posonsby accepted this, regarding all intelligence as dirty business.

Although the evidence is largely anecdotal, it seems reasonable to infer from it that the Labour government exercised only a weak control over the intelligence agencies, and that the agencies regarded the government as unwilling to fight the Communist threat with the necessary effectiveness. With a close election approaching, the premises were set for a subversive attempt.

The SIS Riga station received the Zinoviev letter on 2 October, from a source in Moscow who had in turn allegedly received it from an agent with access to Zinoviev’s files. When it arrived in London a week later, SIS senior officer Desmond Morton circulated it to the Foreign Office and other departments assuring that “the authenticity of the document is undoubted”,

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177 This account is based on Bennett [1999] ch.2, Jeffery [2010] pp.214-222, Andrew [1987] pp.304-313 and Andrew [2009] pp.148-150. The account in Chester, Fay and Young [1967] is now believed to be incorrect in several ways, although their main assertion, that the letter was a forgery, has become the consensus.
despite having made no efforts to verify this. Only on 27 October, after the letter’s publication, SIS telegraphed Riga for further information on its provenance and how it got hold of it\textsuperscript{178}.

SIS’s statement was not enough for Sir Eyre Crowe, who asked for further corroborative proofs on 10 October. The letter’s content was not surprising, as Zinoviev had been sending similar letters of truly undoubted authenticity to other Communist parties in Europe. Yet Crowe had good reasons to ask for further confirmation: SIS stations had been taken in by anti-Bolshevik forgers repeatedly before, with embarrassing consequences for the government\textsuperscript{179}.

Morton provided a seemingly impeccable confirmation the next day. An agent of Sir Magkill’s Industrial Intelligence Bureau, the biggest right-wing private intelligence organizations operating side by side with the official intelligence agencies, had infiltrated the CPGB central committee and reported that it had recently received and discussed a letter from Moscow whose content was strikingly similar to Zinoviev’s\textsuperscript{180}. Morton was running the agent jointly with Sir Magkill’s organization, despite the fact that SIS was not supposed to collect information at home. More troublingly, the report from Magkill’s agent made no mention of any letter from Moscow, and merely stated that the CPGB had discussed how to promote a revolution\textsuperscript{181}.

According to Morton himself, the agent elaborated on his report in a meeting on 10 October, providing details which fit nicely with the content of Zinoviev’s letter. Even assuming that Morton was not lying about this meeting, it seems implausible that an experienced agent had

\textsuperscript{179} For instance, in 1921 Curzon sent a note to Moscow based on information obtained by the SIS station in Berlin protesting Soviet subversion in India, but the information turned out to be a forgery; see Andrew [1987] p.280. In 1921 the information provided by the SIS station in Reval on Soviet support for Sinn Fein also turned out to be a forgery, despite SIS’s assurance that the source’s “reliability has been proved on many occasions”; see Andrew [2009] p.145.
\textsuperscript{180} Interestingly, SIS was thus running agents within Britain, without the knowledge of MI5 or Special Branch, and it was doing so with an organization that was clearly political and right-wing. See Bennett [1999] p.38.
left out of a report such an important detail as the reception of a directive from Moscow. Morton likely asked the agent loaded questions, meant to confirm the authenticity of the letter\textsuperscript{182}. Being the one who had introduced a system for evaluating the reliability of documents just three years before, it is hard to attribute his behavior to negligence and superficiality\textsuperscript{183}. Although he could have been sincerely convinced of the letter’s authenticity, he misled his superiors concerning the evidence which supported his conviction. Most likely, Morton viewed the letter as an opportunity to get rid of a government he disliked\textsuperscript{184}.

Subsequent government action was heavily influenced by Morton’s categorical confirmation. Without it, MacDonald and Crowe would have probably decided not to send a public protest note to the Soviet Union, and the whole affair would not have been disclosed to the public\textsuperscript{185}. Still, the often lengthy bureaucratic process within the Foreign Office, even longer given that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary was out of town campaigning, could have delayed the letter’s publication until after the election\textsuperscript{186}. To prevent this, someone within the intelligence community leaked the letter to the Conservative central office and to the anti-Bolshevik \textit{Daily Mail}. This leak convinced MacDonald that he had been the victim of what he called “a political plot”\textsuperscript{187}.

We do not know who exactly leaked the letter, and indeed there were probably multiple, independent leaks. On 21 October, Major Alexander of MI5 informed SIS that it was about to

\begin{itemize}
  \item[	extsuperscript{182}] Bennett [1999] p.37.
  \item[	extsuperscript{183}] See Bennett [2007] pp.81-82 and Jeffery [2010] p.188.
  \item[	extsuperscript{184}] On Morton’s role in the Zinoviev letter affair, see Bennett [2006] pp.79-85, who reaches the same judgment.
  \item[	extsuperscript{185}] When first shown the letter, MacDonald expressed himself in favor of publicizing it and sending a protest note, as long as there was certainty that it was authentic. See Andrew [1987] p.305.
  \item[	extsuperscript{186}] When the letter was published MacDonald was accused of having tried to keep it outside of the public’s view until after the election. See MacDonald’s speech in Cardiff on 27 October 1924, reproduced in \textit{The Times} of the following day and now in FO371/10479, BNA.
  \item[	extsuperscript{187}] Ibidem.
\end{itemize}
circulate the letter to each of the Commanding General Offices of the military, and that the
Admiralty was about to do the same. In circulatin the letter so widely, MI5 had to be aware that
it would have leaked\(^\text{188}\). Major Alexander had previously informed of the letter’s existence his
former MI5 colleague Donald Im Thurm, although he had not given him the actual letter. Im
Thurm, who had received the same piece of information from the SIS Chief Sinclair\(^\text{189}\), was a
man of strong conservative beliefs who worked to ensure the letter’s publication by contacting
the Conservative Central Office, negotiating a financial compensation for the coming leak. The
Conservative Central Office, however, had a copy of the letter by 22 October at the latest, while
Im Thurm was still trying to get a hold of it\(^\text{190}\). It most likely received the letter from an
intelligent agent whose allegiance was firmly Conservative. The list of suspects is large indeed:
many intelligence officers were Tory diehards who feared the Labour government’s
susceptibility to Bolshevik pressure\(^\text{191}\).

A prime suspect for the leak is Major Joseph Ball, also of MI5. He was in close contact
with both Morton and with the Conservative Central Office, which later recruited him to run “a
little intelligence service of our own”\(^\text{192}\). In Christopher Andrew’s words, Ball’s “subsequent
lack of scruples in using intelligence for party-political advantage while at Central Office in the
later 1920s strongly suggests, but does not prove, that he was willing to do so during the election
campaign of October 1924.”\(^\text{193}\) Another suspect is SIS senior officer and future chief Stewart
Menzies who, according to Morton, later admitted of having sent the letter by post to the \textit{Daily
Mail. Morton himself is also suspect, as is J. D. Gregory, a strong anti-Bolshevik responsible for Northeastern Europe at the Foreign Office, who may have sold the letter to escape a crushing financial situation.

Regardless of who exactly played which role, the scholarly consensus is that British intelligence first confirmed the authenticity of the Zinoviev letter on bogus grounds, then contributed to leaking it to the press and, once the scandal broke out, maintained that the document was authentic using arguments which were a mixture of half-truths, more or less plausible statements passed as certain and flat-out lies. Even those who most strongly argued for the letter’s authenticity have now convinced themselves that the letter was indeed a forgery and the whole affair a conspiracy, and the opening of the Soviet archives confirmed this.

The motivation for this subversive behavior is also clear. In the official history of MI5, Christopher Andrew writes: “those who conspired in October 1924 convinced themselves that they were acting in the national interest – to remove from power a government whose susceptibility to Soviet and pro-Soviet pressure made it a threat to national security.” An upcoming close election gave them the opportunity to do just that.

It would be wrong to think of this episode as a centralized plot. Unlike the Wilson plot, which was centralized and directed by the highest ranking officers of the armed services and of most intelligence agencies, in the Zinoviev letter affair there does not seem to have been a high

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196 I’ve left out a discussion of the validity of intelligence’s arguments for maintaining that the letter was genuine both because I chose to stop at the moment in which subversion occurred and because the paper is already too long as it is. For a critique of especially SIS Chief Sinclair’s arguments, see Bennett [1999] pp.81-3.
197 On this point compare Andrew [1977] with Andrew [2009].
198 In November 1924 Soviet military intelligence established that the Zinoviev Letter had been produced by a certain forger named Pokrowski, who then sold it to the MI6 head of station in Riga. See Haslam [2014] pp.18-19, who references an official collection of Politburo documents.
degree of coordination, and the main role was played by officers who were further down the hierarchy. In the words of the Zinoviev letter’s official historian, “the idea of an institutionalized international campaign, directed by SIS, to discredit both the Bolsheviks and the Labour government is not only unsubstantiated by the documentation, but seems inherently unlikely. It was just not how the intelligence services operated, and implied a degree of cohesion and control, not to mention political will, which simply did not exist.\textsuperscript{200}

Even though SIS may not have directed the conspiracy, it was fully involved in it, with its Chief Sinclair first informing Im Thurm of the existence of the letter and then defending the letter’s authenticity using specious arguments. MI5 was also involved, albeit seemingly to a lesser degree. There is no evidence that MI5’s chief Kell was aware of the subversive plot, but some of his closest collaborators, such as Ball and Alexander, participated in it.

Alternative Explanations

I argue that in 1920 and 1924 intelligence agencies attempted to subvert because they perceived policymakers to be unwilling to adequately fight the subversive threat. They saw an opportunity to do so because both governments, one a coalition government and the other a minority government, were fragile and exceptional. Without a solid parliamentary support, removing them, either via the ballot box or via behind-the-scenes maneuvers, must have seemed relatively easy.

A first alternative explanation is that the fear of revolution led the intelligence agencies to subvert. This argument is plausible in the case of 1920, even though the estimates were likely

\textsuperscript{200} Bennett [1999] p.92
manipulated and previous periods had been considered to be more dangerous. It does not explain the Zinoviev Letter affair, however, because there was no sense that a revolution was imminent in 1924\textsuperscript{201}.

In both 1920 and 1924 British intelligence agencies had strong reasons to feel aggrieved with the government. The intelligence budget had been drastically cut in 1919 and 1920. In 1924 intelligence officers feared that, if reelected, the Labour Party would have acted against the secret service’s best interest, if not altogether abolished it. In fact, a year later the Labour Party advisory committee on international questions proposed the suspension of the secret service and the revelation of its activities\textsuperscript{202}. It may very well be that these bureaucratic grievances strengthened the intelligence officers’ resolve to subvert, but the little direct evidence that we have on their motivations does not show this. In their private discussions, the 1920 plotters discussed the government’s attitude and its perceived treachery, not the threat to their budget or bureaucratic standing. To the contrary, many intelligence chiefs were willing to compromise their sources, diminishing the efficacy of their agencies and, in the long run, their bureaucratic standing, in order to expose the misdeeds of the Russian Trade Delegation and remove Lloyd George’s government.

Third, contrary to the coup-proofing hypothesis, the presence of multiple intelligence agencies did not prevent them from subverting. In 1920 the agencies were able to coalesce in a remarkably broad coalition against Lloyd George. In 1924, both SIS and senior MI5 officers plotted against the Labour government, although they probably did not coordinate their efforts.

\textsuperscript{201} I was unable to find any weekly “Report on revolutionary organisations in the United Kingdom” after January 1924. I do not know if this is because the reports were discontinued after MacDonald’s dismissive comments or because they have not been released. Nonetheless, nothing I’ve seen argues that there was a particularly high danger of revolution in 1924, unlike 1920.

Lastly, economic factors are at best a partial explanation of the subversive episodes of 1920 and 1924. The post-war demobilization was causing significant economic problems, with the British GDP declining by almost 8% in 1920 and unemployment roughly quintupling from 1920 to 1921. However, Britain remained one of the richest countries in the world at the time, and thus an unlikely candidate for subversion. Furthermore, by 1924 the British economy was growing at a nearly 5% rate, accompanied by a significant reduction in unemployment, but this did not prevent subversion from reoccurring203.

Conclusion

My theory seems to have performed rather well. Looking back at my four hypotheses, they all seem to have been confirmed, albeit in different degrees. Let’s look at each one of them in turn.

1. If an intelligence agency’s main enemies include a domestic subversive group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, intelligence will resemble the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. If they do not, the intelligence agency will likely resemble the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency.

From its creation in 1909 to the end of the First World War, the Secret Service Bureau resembled the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency. There was a sharp dividing line

between domestic and foreign intelligence and, even though the idea of intelligence’s political neutrality was not explicitly discussed, there is no evidence that intelligence ever engaged in political activities.

The change in intelligence’s main enemy from Germany to Bolshevism led to several attempts to reform the intelligence community in the direction of a political intelligence community. These attempts were only partially successful. Thomson pushed for and obtained a unified civilian intelligence agency dealing with subversion (with the exception of subversion in the armed forces, which remained an MI5 prerogative), but his more ambitious plans to have one civilian head of the entire intelligence community failed. Thomson’s DIHO was not politically neutral, as Thomson himself was aware, and it operated abroad as well as at home. DIHO lasted a mere two years, partly because of its overambitious chief. A new reform tried to restate firm boundaries between domestic and foreign intelligence, but as long as the main threat remained foreign-inspired subversion, no clear lines could be drawn.

2. The principals will exercise a strong control over a non-political intelligence agency. Their control over a political intelligence agency will be fragile: it will be strong as long as preferences converge and weak when they diverge.

The evidence is too thin to reach a firm conclusion here, yet what we have points in the expected direction. The time between the change in the intelligence agencies’ priorities in 1917 and the first episode of subversion is too short to make the case that intelligence was poorly controlled before 1920. The subversive episodes are evidence of low policymakers’ control, but it would be preferable to have evidence of low control before subversion took place. Anecdotal evidence shows that when the Labour Party was in power, the intelligence agencies eschewed the government’s control by not providing it with some of the more delicate pieces of information.
3. **Non-political intelligence agencies will occasionally suffer from politicization and will not engage in subversion.**

This hypothesis was partially confirmed. There were no episodes of contingent politicization nor of subversion before the shift in priorities from Germany to Bolshevism. For contingent politicization to occur, the existence of the intelligence agencies must not be considered a secret. MI5 and SIS were only publicly acknowledged after the Cold War, making the politicization of their product an unfeasible strategy for policymakers.

4. **Political intelligence agencies will routinely manipulate intelligence for political goals. They will also engage in subversion when they perceive that the government is unwilling and/or incapable of adequately fighting intelligence’s subversive enemy and when they see the opportunity to install an alternative government.**

This hypothesis was largely confirmed. Structural politicization arguably occurred under Thomson’s DIHO. As I have shown, Thomson was believed to have routinely exaggerated the subversive threat, in part to justify its own behavior and in part to augment his own power within the intelligence community. The evidence is stronger for the second part of the hypothesis. Intelligence subverted twice in this period, not coincidentally the period in which the threat of a revolution was most plausible. In both cases of subversion, intelligence perceived that the government was unwilling to adequately fight the subversive threat. In 1920, Henry Wilson and the intelligence chiefs attempted to subvert by exploiting the fractures amongst their principals. Ultimately, the lack of support within the Cabinet caused the failure of their subversive plot. In
1924, SIS and parts of MI5 used an upcoming close election to remove a Labour government they viewed as a security threat.
Ch. 4 The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1948. From a law enforcement bureau to a political intelligence agency

Introduction

Early in his Presidency, Richard Nixon had numerous long talks with J. Edgar Hoover. Based on his then forty-five years of experience as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Hoover told Nixon that the FBI had been conducting, without a search warrant, black-bag jobs, break-ins and bugging for every President since Franklin Roosevelt. It was now Nixon’s turn to use the FBI as its secret political arm.

Nixon did not need to be reminded of what the FBI could do. As a young Congressman on the House Un-American Activities Committee and then as vice-President in the Eisenhower administration, he had benefited from the secret cooperation of the FBI in the anti-Communist fight. Nixon also knew that Hoover was not always the faithful executor of the White House’s directives, as he had been at the receiving end of the FBI leaks intended to assist the political opponents of the Truman administration. He later testified that “Attorneys General seldom directed Mr. Hoover. It was difficult even for Presidents.” Deeply mistrustful of those around him, Nixon was probably not much reassured when Hoover told him: “more than anything, I want to see you re-elected in 1972.”

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205 Cited in Weiner [2012] p.280, from Nixon’s testimony in “U.S. v. Felt”, 29 October 1980. See also Kessler [2002] p.171, who cites Nixon as saying “I knew that if Hoover had decided not to cooperate, it would matter little what I had decided or approved”.
Hoover died in May 1972 and did not get to see Nixon’s successful reelection campaign nor his Bureau’s involvement in the Watergate scandal. The Congressional investigations which followed finally unmasked the political nature of his Bureau. After decades spent carefully cultivating its image as a professional and politically neutral agency, the FBI was revealed to have been something very different: a political agency, poorly controlled by its principals, with a Director whose obsession had long been the fight against American Communists.

The Bureau of Investigation was not created to be an intelligence agency, much less a political intelligence agency. It was meant to be a law enforcement agency, one strictly dedicated to the prosecution of violations of federal statutes. The Bureau never abandoned its law enforcement role, but it soon started gathering intelligence for purposes other than prosecution. Law enforcement and intelligence gathering coexisted uneasily throughout the history of the Bureau, but the focus here will be on the intelligence dimension.

This chapter explains how and why a law enforcement agency became a political intelligence agency. I follow the evolution of the Bureau of Investigation from its establishment in 1908 to its attempt to push President Truman out of office in the 1948 elections. I argue that after 1917 fighting Communists and other Leftist radicals became a priority for the Bureau, at a time when America faced a plausible subversive threat. The Bureau’s long-time director, J. Edgar Hoover, continued to believe that Communists posed a significant threat for the rest of his life, and he shaped the FBI accordingly.

With the partial exception of his first twelve years as director, Hoover’s FBI resembled the ideal type of the political intelligence agency: it was not politically neutral and it tried and partly succeeded in operating both at home and abroad. Its principals, the Attorney General and the President, exercised a weak control over its operations. In 1948, it engaged in subversion
when it tried to cause Truman’s electoral defeat. I argue that this relative rarity of subversion is
due to the difficulty of removing an administration in the American system and to the
understanding by Hoover that in order to remain at the head of the FBI he could not be perceived
as overly partisan.

This chapter is structured chronologically. As Figure 4 below illustrates, each
chronological cutting point coincides with a change in the independent variable, as the Bureau’s
priorities changed to either include or exclude a significant subversive threat. The next section
studies the establishment of the Bureau of Investigation and its evolution until 1917. The third
section studies the years from 1917 to 1924, when the Bureau first fought against what was
perceived as a significant subversive threat. The fourth section begins in 1924, when Attorney
General Harlan Fiske Stone tried to depoliticize the Bureau and to strictly limit it to a law
enforcement role, and ends in 1936, when Franklin Roosevelt asked Hoover to investigate
subversive activities in America. The fifth section studies the FBI from 1936 to its attempt to
remove Truman from office in the 1948 elections. The sixth section concludes by assessing my
theory’s performance.
Figure 4. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1948

1908-1917: The Establishment and Early Years of the Bureau

Until the summer of 1908, the Department of Justice had no permanent investigative force of its own. It had previously relied on private detectives and by 1908 it was constantly
loaning Secret Service agents from the Treasury Department\textsuperscript{207}. In 1907 and early 1908 Attorney General Charles Bonaparte repeatedly asked Congress to fund a permanent investigative force for his Department\textsuperscript{208}. President Theodore Roosevelt was pushing for the creation of a force capable of investigating land frauds and the often corrupt deals behind them\textsuperscript{209}, but Congress was skeptical. Many on Capitol Hill believed that they would have become the target of such a force and loathed a further expansion of federal powers in the field of law enforcement. Bonaparte argued in vain that his proposal was an economical and efficient way for the Department to fulfill its role as enforcer of the nation’s federal statutes.

Bonaparte’s attempt initially backfired. Not only did Congress refuse to establish such a permanent force, but it also banned the loan of Secret Service agents to other departments. The Attorney General thus found himself with no detective force at all. He decided to go ahead with his original plan anyway, waiting for Congress to be in recess before issuing the founding order for a permanent investigative force on 26 July 1908\textsuperscript{210}. A year later he told Congress that his action had been “involuntary”, mandated by the fact that it was “necessary for the department to organize a small force of special agents of its own”\textsuperscript{211}.

\textsuperscript{207} Attorney General Bonaparte himself recounted the creation of the Bureau in a letter to President Roosevelt on 14 January 1909, see \url{http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/brief-history/docs_lette1909}. In 1893 Congress had prohibited the Bureau from hiring private detectives.

\textsuperscript{208} See the Attorney General’s annual report to Congress for 1907 at \url{http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/brief-history/docs_ar1907} and his testimony in front of the House Appropriations Committee on 17 January 1908, at \url{http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/brief-history/docs_ag1908}.

\textsuperscript{209} Roosevelt’s role is recounted in the “Memorandum for the Director Re: Early History of the Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice” written by FBI Special Agent Findlay to Director Hoover on 19 November 1943. See \url{http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/brief-history/docs_findlay43}.


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Bonaparte still needed Congressional approval to ensure the long-term survivability of his investigative force. To obtain this approval, the Attorney General had to reassure Congress on several points. The Bureau would not be a secret police, it would not be used for “political purposes”, its agents could not make arrests nor carry firearms, its funds would only be used for the detection and prosecution of federal crimes and its agents would have been under the firm control of the Attorney General, who “knows or ought to know at all times, what they are doing and at what cost.”

At last, Bonaparte’s persuasive efforts were successful. Congress gave the Bureau its seal of approval and left the door open for its further expansion by refusing to enact legislation defining the scope of the Bureau’s investigations. Such legislative micromanagement, Bonaparte advised, would have undermined sound administration.

The Bureau’s principals were the President and the Attorney General. Congress reluctantly came along, after having been presented with a fait accompli and after having received extensive reassurances on the limits to the Bureau’s operations. As its name indicated, the Bureau of Investigation was an investigative agency more than an intelligence one. The information it gathered was meant to be used solely for the prosecution of federal crimes. Its initial investigative priorities were the fight against land frauds and, after the passage of the White Slave Traffic Act in 1910, the fight against prostitution.

In its early years, the Bureau was a small investigative force of roughly 100 agents, most of whom focused on spotting and prosecuting prostitution rings. Even though the Bureau acquired a large amount of potentially compromising information in its fight against prostitution,

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214 See Findlay’s memo to Hoover, cited above. See also Theoharis [2004] pp.18-19 and Jeffreys-Jones p.62.
there is no evidence that this information was ever used as a source of blackmail\textsuperscript{215}. At this time, the Bureau was indeed a professional investigative force, in line with Bonaparte’s reassurances to Congress.

Congress itself, generally under pressure from the executive, progressively lifted the restrictions on the Bureau’s operations. In 1910 lawmakers permitted the use of appropriated funds “for such other investigations regarding official matters under the control of the Department of Justice as may be directed by the Attorney General.”\textsuperscript{216} With the outbreak of World War I in Europe, the scope of the Bureau’s operations increased even more.

It soon became clear that an agency whose sole function was law enforcement was inadequate in the fight against German espionage and sabotage, which began well before America’s entrance in the war. The Bureau’s “arrest culture” was an ill-fit for the world of counterespionage, where tracking a foreign agent to discover his contacts is more important than putting him behind bars. Attorney General Thomas Gregory complained that his agents did not have the legal authority to arrest German spies, but his proposed bill to make espionage a federal crime was initially defeated in Congress\textsuperscript{217}.

The mood in Congress shifted rapidly after a series of suspected German sabotages. In 1916, after the most damaging of such acts at a munition dump at Black Tom Island in New Jersey, Congress amended the Appropriations Act granting funds for Bureau investigations of

\textsuperscript{215} The number of Bureau agents increased from 34 in 1908 to 158 in 1912. See Theoharis [1999] p.4. On the Bureau’s collection of sensitive information, see ibid. p.6.

\textsuperscript{216} Cited in Theoharis [2004] p.17.

\textsuperscript{217} See Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.66.
foreign-directed activities, when requested by the State Department. The Bureau was thus given the power to perform intelligence tasks, unrelated to law enforcement.\textsuperscript{218}

By 1916 the Bureau was both a law enforcement and intelligence agency. Barely a year later, it began to fight against a plausible subversive threat, leading to its transformation into a political intelligence agency.

**From 1917 to 1924: A Political Intelligence Agency**

*Anew priority: the fight against leftist subversives*

The Bureau’s intelligence activities increased with America’s declaration of war against the Central Powers in April 1917. On the same day that America entered the war, President Wilson authorized the Justice Department to arrest without trial any foreigner deemed disloyal.\textsuperscript{219} Congress then approved in quick succession a series of bills that further expanded the scope of the Bureau’s operations, even though their duration was generally limited to wartime. In May, the Selective Service Act required men from 21 to 30 years old to register to be drafted for military service. In June, the Espionage Act made stealing government secrets a federal crime and required the fingerprinting of aliens from enemy countries. In May 1918 the Sedition Act made it a federal crime to use “disloyal, profane, scurrilous or abusive language about the U.S.

\textsuperscript{218} See Theoharis [1999] p.7 and Jeffrey-Jones [2007] p.69, who notes that it was this “innovation that made possible political work”.

\textsuperscript{219} See Weiner [2012] p.5.
government, Constitution, or armed services”. In October, the Immigration Act allowed for the deportation of alien anarchists and subversives in general\textsuperscript{220}.

The Bureau was meant to be the arm of the executive government in enforcing these laws. Almost immediately, radicals and suspected subversives became its main target\textsuperscript{221}. Of the 1,055 convicted under the Espionage Act, not one was a spy. Most were political dissidents\textsuperscript{222}. The Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917 further alarmed American elites and public opinion, leading to an intensification of the Bureau’s anti-radical activities. By the end of the war, more than half of the Bureau’s investigations concerned cases of political dissent\textsuperscript{223}.

The Bureau’s principals promoted and guided this shift in the Bureau’s priorities. The Wilson administration feared that domestic opposition could undermine its foreign policy goals, and was particularly concerned with the threat posed by waves of immigrants holding subversive beliefs\textsuperscript{224}. In Wilson’s words, terrorists and anarchists posed “the gravest threats against our national peace and safety.”\textsuperscript{225}

The threat posed by leftist subversives was widely perceived as severe, both during and even more after the war. It was more than plausible to think that America could become fertile ground for a revolution\textsuperscript{226}. In January 1919, Senate hearings on the Communist threat conveyed


\textsuperscript{223} This estimate is made in Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.71.


\textsuperscript{225} Quoted in Weiner [2012] p.6.

\textsuperscript{226} Even today, most FBI historians agree on this point. See Jeffreys-Jones [2007] pp.72-73, Keller [1989] p.8, Weiner [2012] pp.17-19. For a dissenting opinion, see Theoharis and Cox [1988], p.57, who believe that there was not “even a remote possibility of a serious uprising in 1919-1920.” Regardless of the historiographical debate on how severe the threat of subversion really was, what matters for my theory is that principals and the agency perceived it as plausible at the time.
the message that Communists were trying to overthrow the US government and that they posed “the gravest menace to this country today”\textsuperscript{227}. When the country was hit by a wave of strikes in 1919, many corporate executives, newspaper editors and national leaders portrayed it as the prologue to a violent revolution\textsuperscript{228}. Further alarming public opinion, the wave of strikes was followed by a wave of bombings. In late April, anarchists sent 36 mail-bombs to prominent figures in the country. On 2 June, nine bombs went off in seven cities, including one which exploded on the doorsteps of the recently nominated Attorney General, Mitchell Palmer\textsuperscript{229}. Three months later, at least five government informers reported on the establishment of the American Communist Party. The Party, it was reported, wanted to be “an exact copy of the Russian original” and its goal was to bring Bolshevism to the biggest capitalist country in the world.

Both the Bureau and its principals agreed that Communists subversion posed a severe threat to the United States. President Wilson told Congress that “the poison of disorder, the poison of revolt, the poison of chaos” were coming to America\textsuperscript{230}. J. Edgar Hoover, then a senior Bureau official, told Congress that the country faced an insurrection unlike any since the Civil War. Communists were controlled by Moscow and their single aim was “to overthrow the Government of the United States by force and violence”\textsuperscript{231}.

\textit{The transformation of the Bureau}

\textsuperscript{227} Senate hearings are quoted in Weiner [2012] p.17.
In line with my first hypothesis, the fight against this new subversive enemy rapidly transformed the Bureau of Investigation in the direction of a political intelligence agency\textsuperscript{232}: not politically neutral and covering both foreign and domestic activities. I will recount this transformation following a chronological order.

On 1 August 1919, Bureau director William Flynn and Attorney General Palmer created the Bureau’s Radical Division. At its head, they selected a 24-years-old employee of the Department of Justice, J. Edgar Hoover. In a few weeks, the Radical Division amassed more than 60,000 file on radicals and suspected revolutionaries. Hoover sent informers to infiltrate several radical groups, including the American Socialist Party, the Union of Russian Workers, the Industrial Workers of the World and the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA)\textsuperscript{233}. Little of this information would have been useful for prosecution, but the operations that the Bureau was planning had little to do with law enforcement, and a lot more to do with political containment\textsuperscript{234}.

The political pressure to conduct operations against the radicals mounted rapidly. In October 1919, the Senate passed a resolution asking Attorney General Palmer if he had done anything to fight the forces trying to overthrow the government, and if not, why not. Palmer turned to Hoover, who three weeks later directed a raid on the Union of Russian Workers, an anarchist group of about 4,000 Russian immigrants\textsuperscript{235}. Of the 1,200 persons seized that night, less than 200 were found to be alien subversives worthy of deportation. Much of the press hailed

\textsuperscript{232}There is a consensus in the literature on the Bureau’s rapid transformation, even though it is described in different terms. See, for instance, Williams [1981a] p.561 and Kessler [2002] p.11.


the raid as a success and Hoover further amplified the enthusiasm by passing to trusted journalists several documents seized by the Bureau.\(^{236}\)

In late December, Hoover convinced the Acting Secretary of Labor, John Abercrombie, to change deportation regulations to exclude defense counsel from the preliminary hearings with immigration inspectors. He also obtained from him hundreds of blank arrest warrants, to be filled on the spot by his agents once they had captured alien radicals.\(^{237}\) Via his moles in the Communist and the Communist Labor parties, Hoover then managed to organize meetings of both parties across the country on the night of 2 January 1920. Bureau agents raided these meetings and arrested about 4,000 members of the parties, as well as 2,000 to 6,000 individuals who were either present at the meetings or had a connection to the parties. These raids are now known as the Palmer Raids, but it was Hoover who organized and directed them.\(^{238}\)

The initial reaction of the public was again euphoric. “Revolution smashed”, titled the New York Times, arguing that “questioners and doubters [of the Department of Justice’s capacity to hunt down the enemies of the United States] now have cause to approve and applaud.”\(^{239}\) Soon, however, critics of methods employed in the raids started raising their voices. A US attorney in Pennsylvania resigned in protest in January. Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis Post applied a strict interpretation of the Immigration Law to release all but a few hundreds of

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\(^{238}\) The Bureau’s documents surrounding the raids are in NARA, RG65, M1085, reels 931-932. See also Weiner [2012] pp.33-34 and Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.63.

the individuals seized by the Bureau. A judge in Boston accused the Department of Justice of acting illegally and unconstitutionally, seeking verdicts based on “guilt by association”\textsuperscript{240}.

The Bureau reacted by immediately investigating its critics, extending the surveillance techniques first developed against subversives to the Bureau’s critics and to other political figures who had nothing to do with subversive groups.

On 15 January, Hoover asked all his field offices “for information linking [Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis] Post to the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World]”\textsuperscript{241}. He then compiled a dossier on Post’s political associations with leftists and passed it on to friendly Congressmen, who opened up an investigation to impeach him. Attorney General Palmer took Hoover’s case to the White House. In a Cabinet meeting in April with an ailing President Wilson, who had never fully recovered from a stroke he suffered in October 1919, Palmer argued that the country faced the threat of revolution and demanded that Post be fired. Wilson reportedly “told Palmer not to let the country see red”, but Palmer chose to go ahead in his anti-Communist campaign anyway\textsuperscript{242}.

In front of the House Rule Committee conducting the investigation, Palmer stated that Post’s actions had aided and abetted Bolshevism. Post successfully rebutted Palmer’s charges, arguing case by case that the Department of Justice had wrongfully arrested thousands of


\textsuperscript{242} See Weiner [2012] p.41, which in turn is based on the account of the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. There is no evidence that Bureau officials knew of Wilson’s request to Palmer, perhaps because Palmer did not want to heed it and thus did not tell the Bureau.
individuals\textsuperscript{243}. The House Rules Committee ended up criticizing the original accuser, leading to the political defeat of Palmer’s and Hoover’s anti-communist campaign.

This defeat did not halt the Bureau’s transformation into a political intelligence agency. The Bureau continued the practice of politically motivated investigations, targeting the House Rules Committee Chairman, Congressman Philip Campbell\textsuperscript{244}. Campbell thus became the first one of many members of Congress to be investigated by the Bureau for having criticized it.

Hoover tried to escape Congressional criticism by implausibly denying he knew some important details of the January Raids, such as how many arrest warrants had been issued\textsuperscript{245}. Sensing that the political wind had turned against the Raids, he managed to convince Congressmen that he was not responsible for them nor for their excesses, but that he had simply carried out orders\textsuperscript{246}. Somewhat contradictorily, Hoover also tried to take credit for the January raids. In one of the first of many instances in which the Bureau manipulated the evidence for political goals, Hoover sent an exaggerated report to Congress claiming that the raids had resulted in “the total wrecking of the communist parties in this country”\textsuperscript{247}.

The Bureau’s victory was temporary though. As Hoover would later write, in 1921 the Communist and Communist Labor parties unified and “emerged with greater stability. (…) The

\textsuperscript{246}See Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.72.
\textsuperscript{247}See Weiner [2012] p.45. In another report, cited by Theoharis [2004] p.29, the Bureau claimed that the Palmer raids had led to “a marked cessation of radical activities in the United States.” See also Williams [1981a] p.577 for a similar judgment based on the Red-Scare era reports: “Even the most cursory analysis of B[ureau of] I[nvestigation] investigative reports from the early postwar years leads to the conclusion that the bureau thought of itself as a political police force whose mission was not limited to purely criminal investigations.”
time was ripe for communists to move in on American life and institutions.”^{248} He and his General Intelligence Division again started warning of the danger of a Communist revolution^{249}.

In October 1920 Hoover decided to restructure the Radical Division, blurring the divide between domestic and foreign intelligence. He renamed it the General Intelligence Division, arguing that he now wanted to cover “not only the radical activities in the United States”, but those “of an international nature as well”. He claimed a mandate that went beyond mere radical politics, to include “economic and industrial disturbances”.^{250} The transformation into a political intelligence agency—not politically neutral and with a blurred line between foreign and domestic intelligence—was now complete.

The political uses of the Bureau intensified after the election in 1920 of William Harding as President and the appointment of Harry Daugherty as Attorney General. Daugherty was a fierce anticommunist, who soon told the President that the country was threatened with civil war. To deal with this threat he nominated as Bureau director a fellow anticommunist and former head of the Secret Service, William Burns. Burns believed that the Bureau’s mission was to “drive every radical out of the country and bring the parlor Bolsheviks to their senses”.^{251}

Burns’ Bureau began hiring agents based on their partisan Republican loyalty and investigated at least five members of Congress who had criticized Harding and his Attorney General. It broke into their offices and homes, intercepted their mail and wiretapped their

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^{250} The Radical Division’s original scope and Hoover’s directive are discussed and cited in Theoharis [2004] p.29 and in Weiner [2012] p.45. That directive also marked an explicit shift away from law enforcement and in the direction of secret intelligence. Hoover in fact argued that subversives were better fought in secret, as the government could not deal with “the radical situation from a criminal prosecution standpoint”.
phones\textsuperscript{252}. The most targeted member of Congress was a newly elected Democratic senator from Montana, Burton Wheeler. In 1923 Wheeler had launched an investigation into the leases of oil fields by the Secretary of the Interior, suspecting corrupt deals and a cover up with the help of the Department of Justice. As soon as the accusation was launched, the Bureau began to investigate Wheeler, even fabricating evidence against him\textsuperscript{253}.

The Bureau’s interest in Wheeler became even stronger as he took a leading role in the movement in favor of granting diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. Attorney General Daugherty directed the Bureau against the senators favoring recognition and accused Wheeler of being “the Communist leader in the Senate” and “no more a Democrat than Stalin”. The Bureau’s recently nominated second-in-command, Edgar Hoover, leaked documents to trusted politicians and anti-Communist campaigners, ultimately leading to the defeat of the movement favoring diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union. In Tim Weiner’s words, the Bureau “was turning into an illegal weapon of political warfare”\textsuperscript{254}.

Under Attorney General Daugherty and Director Burns, the Bureau thus aligned itself with the Republican Party. However, it was not Daugherty’s and Burns’ desire to use the Bureau as an instrument of the partisan struggle that first politicized the Bureau. As we have seen, the Bureau transformed itself into a political intelligence agency under President Wilson, a Democrat, after the fight against leftist subversives became one of its main priorities. Furthermore, as we will see, it was under a Republican president that the Bureau was prohibited from fighting subversion and partially depoliticized. Not partisan loyalty, but the priorities of the Bureau caused its shifts between the ideal types of non-political and political intelligence.

Regarding my second hypothesis, there is little strong evidence that the Bureau’s principals exercised a weak control over the Bureau itself during this period. Attorney General Stone later described the Bureau in 1924 as being “lawless, maintaining many activities which were without authority in federal statutes, and engaging in many practices which are brutal and tyrannical in the extreme.”\textsuperscript{255} It is likely that some of these activities and practices had not been authorized by the Bureau’s principals, yet the principals were unscrupulous enough to condone and order many of them and they never stated that their control was weak.

The strongest evidence of a lack of control comes instead from the period after 1924, when the Bureau found itself working under directives which limited its capacity to monitor and fight subversives. It is only when the Bureau faced an Attorney General who did not want it to continue its fight against subversion, that we see the Bureau engaging in unauthorized activities and deceiving its principals. The Bureau thus followed its principals as long as they shared its anti-communist preferences, placing few restrictions on its operations. In accordance with my theory’s prediction, principals’ strong control lasted only as long as preferences converged. Once they diverged, control became weak, as the next section shows.

**1924-1936: Attempted Depoliticization and Its Limits**

*Stone’s reform and its limits: Assessing the strength of principals’ control*

It took a major scandal for the President and the Attorney General to try to rein in the Bureau and change its priorities, halting but not fully reversing its shift towards a political intelligence agency.

The Senate’s investigation into the oil lease scandal uncovered evidence of bribes paid to the Secretary of the Interior and to Attorney General Daugherty. It also discovered that the Bureau had been looking for damaging information on the senators conducting the investigation, and that it had used aggressive and unorthodox means to do so. Senator Wheeler caused a stir when he announced that he and other senators had been targeted by the Bureau, leading the Senate to decide to investigate the Department of Justice in March 1924. President Calvin Coolidge, who had succeeded Harding after the latter’s death in August 1923, decided to fire Attorney General Daugherty and to replace him with Harlan Fiske Stone, a highly respected legal scholar who had been a strong critic of the 1920 raids.\textsuperscript{256}

Attorney General Stone argued that his model for the Bureau was Scotland Yard. He wanted an investigative force that was limited to the prosecution of federal crimes, that was law-abiding and that was not involved in politics.\textsuperscript{257}

Stone immediately fired the Bureau’s director William Burns, he dissolved the General Intelligence Division and prohibited wiretapping. He then asked Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover for advice on who to choose as the new director, and Herbert Hoover recommended the Bureau’s second in command, his unrelated namesake Edgar Hoover. The day after Burns was fired, Stone summoned Edgar Hoover to his office and offered him to become the Bureau’s acting director. Sensing the changed political climate, Hoover replied that he accepted the offer,

\textsuperscript{257} The literature is unanimous on this point. See Mason [1956] pp.149, Kessler [2002] pp.18-19, Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.84, Weiner [2012] pp.58-59, Theoharis [2004] pp.32-33. Given what Sir Basil Thomson was doing at the time as head of the Department of Intelligence of the Home Office, which included Scotland Yard, Stone’s model was rather misplaced. Yet his idea on how to reform the Bureau was clear.
but on one condition: “the Bureau must be divorced from politics and not be a catch-all for political hacks.”258 The Attorney General believed he had found the right man for the job.

That same day, Stone issued a directive stating that “the activities of the Bureau are to be limited strictly to investigations of violations of [federal] law, under my direction”259. To the press, Stone repeated his concerns about the Bureau’s political surveillance, arguing that “a secret police may become a menace to a free government”260. Marking a new beginning, Stone said that “the Bureau of Investigation is not concerned with political or other opinions of individuals. It is concerned only with their conduct and then only such conduct as is forbidden by the laws of the United States.”261

Stone was thus trying to transform the Bureau into what it was originally designed to be, an apolitical law enforcement agency. By doing so, he was also trying to modify the Bureau’s priorities. Given the expiration of most war-time statutes, Stone’s guidelines meant that fighting subversion should have stopped being a priority for the Bureau.

Hoover was not willing to abandon the fight against subversion, yet he knew that in order to be confirmed as permanent director he had to convince Stone that he was faithfully executing his directives. He thus reduced the Bureau’s political and anti-subversive activities to the point where they could be hidden from the Attorney General, while implementing the most visible points of Stone’s strategy262.

262 Up until the early 1980s most historians believed that the Bureau’s political surveillance activities had ceased after 1924 and resumed in 1936. There is a consensus in the more recent literature that these political activities were scaled back, but never ceased. See Williams [1981b] especially p.6, Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.84-87, Gentry
Hoover strove to create an image of the Bureau as a professional, apolitical and effective crime-fighting institution, exactly what Stone wanted it to be. He instituted a new, strict standard of conduct for his agents. He got rid of the many political appointees who had been working for the Bureau during the Harding administration, hiring men of proven abilities with legal training instead. He testified in front of the Senate that he had just begun to curtail the scope of the Bureau’s investigations to violations of federal statutes, managing to reassure the senators on the Bureau’s future behavior.\textsuperscript{263}

Hoover understood the value of the Bureau’s image as a politically neutral law-enforcement agency and went to considerable length to preserve and strengthen it. With Democrats and Republicans sharing and alternating themselves in power, Hoover would not have survived as Director had he and his Bureau been perceived as an overly partisan political police. Hoover thus walked a fine line, simultaneously pursuing the conflicting goals of fighting subversives and of appearing politically neutral in order to preserve the Bureau’s bureaucratic standing. In public, he opposed the expansion of the Bureau’s jurisdiction beyond law enforcement, even sacrificing the opportunity to intensify the fight against subversion. Behind closed doors, he developed an elaborate filing and reporting system, meant to ensure that his unauthorized anti-subversive activities remained secret.

When a citizen would volunteer information on subversive activities and ask the Bureau to investigate, Hoover would duly inform the Attorney General that he had no power to do so.\textsuperscript{264}

In 1930, Hoover argued in front of Congress against a bill which would have required the Bureau


\textsuperscript{264} See the episodes discussed in Williams [1981b] p.9 and pp.19-21.
“to investigate communist and revolutionary activity”. If Congress did not make communist activities illegal, Hoover said, the Bureau would have merely acquired “a mass of material with which nothing could be done”. Yet Hoover was collecting such material and was using it in the diminished but continuing fight against leftist subversion. A more sincere explanation for Hoover’s opposition is thus what Hoover himself later told then Attorney General Sargent: Congressional authorization of political surveillance would have led to allegations that the Bureau was a political police, impairing its effectiveness. Hoover may have also preferred to continue to operate in secrecy, without the limitations and the publicity imposed by a Congressional bill.

Hoover sought to preserve an opening for the monitoring of subversive activities. The clearest example is a letter he wrote to the Assistant Attorney General and future head of OSS, William Donovan, in October 1924. Hoover argued that “the activities of the Communists and other ultra-radicals have not up to the present time constituted a violation of the federal statutes, and consequently, the Department of Justice, theoretically, has no right to investigate such activities”, but then suggested that continued investigation of such people might be in order, because at some future time they might be guilty of violating federal laws.

What was phrased as a mere suggestion became a recurrent practice. The Bureau continued to infiltrate and investigate radical and even liberal groups, albeit more discreetly and

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266 There is no direct evidence that this was indeed part of Hoover’s motivation. What makes this plausible is the fact that this is the position he took two decades later, when Congress debated whether to authorize an index of Communist affiliates which Hoover had already developed without Congress’s knowledge. See Theoharis [2004] pp.68-69.

using less aggressive tactics than before. The Bureau had an informer on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) throughout the second half of the 1920s and monitored the ACLU’s offices from New York to Los Angeles. It monitored radical labor organizations such as the Trade Union Educational League and the Industrial Workers of the World and single-issue groups such as the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. Using paid informers and the information gathered by local police units, it wrote a monthly report on radical activities for internal use \(^{268}\).

Scholars dismiss as unlikely that Hoover received a verbal authorization to continue investigating “Communists and other ultra-radicals” \(^{269}\). This would have negated the whole point of Stone’s reform, and Stone himself was convinced that the Bureau had really confined itself to the investigation of violations federal statutes \(^{270}\). Furthermore, as I will show, Hoover devised a sophisticated filing system to ensure that the Bureau’s political surveillance could not be uncovered, keeping important elements of it unknown to the Attorney General himself. Had the Attorney General tacitly agreed to the continuation of political surveillance, there would have been no need to keep it secret from him.

Stone thus only managed to scale back the Bureau’s political surveillance, but unbeknown to him surveillance continued. Stone accepted Hoover’s reassurances that the Bureau was no longer monitoring political activities, but, as a later Attorney General remarked, he was


\(^{270}\) For instance, on 14 April 1933, when Hoover seemed about to be replaced as Director, Stone wrote to Felix Frankfurter saying that Hoover “refused to yield to any kind of political pressure” and “withdrew it [the Bureau] wholly from its extra-legal activities”. Cited in Mason [1956] p.152. See also Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.91-92.
aware of only about 10% of what the Bureau was doing. Stone may have simply been naïve in accepting Hoover’s reassurances on faith or, given that he was nominated Supreme Court justice after roughly a year as Attorney General, he may not have had the time to check what Hoover was doing. More importantly for my theory though, Stone faced an acting director who believed that Communists and other subversives posed an existential threat to America and who had no reluctance to engage in politics. Hoover was willing to mislead his principals and to hide his activities from them in order to continue to fight leftist subversion, significantly weakening the principals’ capacity to control the Bureau, as my hypothesis on control predicts.

A prominent example of Hoover’s capacity to mislead his principals is a meeting in mid-1924 between Hoover himself, Stone and the ACLU’s head Roger Baldwin. The ACLU had just published a report on “The Nation-Wide Spy System Centering in the Department of Justice”, arguing that the Bureau had become “a secret police system of a political character” and noting that the files which Hoover had first gathered as head of the Radical Division and then of the General Intelligence Division had been at the heart of the Bureau’s political spying operations. The Attorney General read the report and invited Hoover and Baldwin to discuss it. At this meeting, Hoover stated that he had not been a willing participant in the Palmer Raids and that the Bureau would have no longer engaged in political espionage. He managed to convince both his interlocutors. Baldwin told reporters that Hoover was the right man for the Bureau and even wrote to Stone saying: “I think we were wrong.” Only decades later, would Baldwin learn that

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271 See the remarks by Ramsey Clark, discussed in Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.87.
272 For a similar interpretation of Hoover’s motivation, see Williams [1981b] p.18.
the Bureau had been infiltrating the ACLU all throughout this period. “They never stopped watching us”, Baldwin rightly remarked274.

Having convinced Stone that he was faithfully executing his directives, Hoover obtained the appointment as permanent director in December 1924. He immediately began to create a complex system of filing and reporting that eschewed the Attorney General’s control and minimized the chances of discovery of the Bureau’s unauthorized activities. One of the first steps taken by Stone was, as we have seen, the dismantlement of the General Intelligence Division. Even though the General Intelligence Division was formally abolished, its files, the core element of the Division’s power, were never destroyed but transferred without the Attorney General’s knowledge to a new record system called “Official and Confidential”. These files were kept under Hoover’s control, being what Hoover described as “items believed inadvisable to be included in the general files of the Bureau”275. Unlike the files in the central records system, Official and Confidential files could not be discovered by courts or subpoenaed by Congress, because, despite their name, they were not official Bureau files and their existence was known to only a few people within the Bureau276.

Hoover created other parallel filing systems, such as the “personal and confidential” letters via which his agents reported on “subversive activities” and the “Obscene file” which contained sexually obscene material and sexually compromising information277. Hoover took

277 On the Personal and Confidential files, see Theoharis [1991] p.3 and Theoharis [2004] pp.109-110. Hoover’s assistant Helen Gandy destroyed Personal and Confidential files immediately after Hoover’s death, following Hoover’s instructions. Official and Confidential files escaped destruction for reasons that are still unclear. On the Obscene File, which Hoover created in March 1925 just weeks after Stone had left the Department of Justice for the Supreme Court, see Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.94-96 and Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.121. Both agree that the Obscene File had a blackmail potential of which Hoover was aware from the moment it was created and that
other precautions to ensure that Bureau files either were not accessible or would not be revealing of the Bureau’s unauthorized activities, such as demanding that reports submitted by agents covering subversive activities be worded to suggest that they had not been based on the Bureau’s own investigation but had been received from a “confidential informant” or by informers working for local police departments. Hoover’s idea was to justify the continuation of the monitoring of radical activities saying that the information had been volunteered by patriotic citizens, and that the Bureau did nothing more than record this information.

The literature agrees that Stone’s successors as Attorney Generals were not more successful in controlling the Bureau. John Sargent, Attorney General for the remainder of the Coolidge Administration, was reportedly even less aware than Stone of what the Bureau was doing. He and his successor William Mitchell, Attorney General during Herbert Hoover’s presidency, never manifested any desire to resurrect the Bureau’s Radical Division. President Hoover seemed instead content with relying on the Bureau for occasional political services, without asking too many questions on the Bureau’s regular activities.

*The Bureau’s half step towards a non-political intelligence agency*

Even though Stone’s attempt to reprioritize and depoliticize the Bureau fell short in several respects, it was not inconsequential. The Bureau in the second half of the 1920s and in

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278 The order was written to the Chicago field office on the day that Stone fired Bureau director Burns, concerning an investigation of the Workers’ Party. See Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.93-94. For Hoover’s justification of why the Bureau kept collecting information on communist activities, see Williams [1981b] p.9.

279 Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.94 describe Sargent as an “amiable nonentity (...) who saw even less evil than Stone had seen before him.”

the 1930s moved in the direction of a less political crime-fighting force, but remained closer to
the ideal type of the political intelligence agency than to its non-political counterpart.

First, let’s look at the Bureau’s political neutrality, or lack of. As we have seen, the
Bureau continued to engage in political surveillance, but less so than in the past and using more
discrete and less disruptive methods. There is no evidence that the Bureau’s attempts to
monitor members of Congress continued, even though Congress was never informed of the
Bureau’s political activities.

The Bureau conducted political services for incumbent administrations, especially under
Herbert Hoover. The Bureau forwarded information to the White House on the President’s critics
and at times intimidated them. Under the White House’s directions, the Bureau launched
investigations with no law-enforcement purpose on such critics as the ACLU, the liberal Foreign
Policy Association, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Navy
League, the right-wing Sentinels of the Republic and, more prominently, the so-called Bonus
Army, a group of World War I veterans who embarrassed the President with their head-line
grabbing protest in favor of a bonus for their service.

The Bureau continued to conduct political services during the first years of the Roosevelt
Administration, investigating strikes and, once again, the ACLU. Still, these political services

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281 For a synthetic rendering of this point, see Theoharis [2004] p.36. See also O’Reilly [1983] p.21, who speaks of
the Bureau of Investigation’s covert political activities as “more restrained than the earlier GID exploits”.
282 For instance, in 1931 five Bureau agents visited the house of George Menhinick, the editor of a financial
newsletter who had criticized the President’s optimistic economic predictions, and scared him into silence. In this
case the Attorney General had asked Edgar Hoover to intervene. In other cases the Bureau would forward to the
White House unsolicited information on the President’s critics. See Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.109 and O’Reilly
were occasional, and the Bureau focused primarily on crime throughout this period. The apparent inability of the local police to contain the rise in crime which followed Prohibition and the Great Depression had led to a demand for an increased federal role in law enforcement. Congress created several new kinds of federal crimes and the Bureau’s jurisdiction expanded to include bank robberies, interstate racketeering and most cases of kidnapping. The Bureau’s highly publicized successes in the fight against gangsters and bank-robbers shaped and popularized the carefully cultivated image of the Bureau as an efficient and apolitical law enforcement agency.

The Bureau’s international dimension was curtailed. Under Stone’s directive, the Bureau could no longer justify its monitoring matters of an international nature, as they did not constitute a violation of federal laws. The Bureau still tried to continue monitoring radical American citizens travelling abroad, asking the State Department to do the job the Bureau could no longer do. The State Department monitored labor leaders, academics and critics of the Justice Department such as Felix Frankfurter. These requests could not be justified under existing laws, but the Bureau argued that an individual “who advocates Marxism-Leninism might just as well be working as an agent of a foreign power because he is aiding his cause.”

This half step towards a non-political intelligence agency was reversed in 1936, when President Roosevelt secretly assigned the Bureau the task of covering subversive activities.

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285 Even a strong critic of the Bureau’s political surveillance like Athan Theoharis agrees on this point. See Theoharis [2004] p.36.  
287 Under the 1916 amendment to the Appropriations Act, described above, the Secretary of State could request Bureau’s investigations, but the Bureau could not ask the State Department to investigate. See Williams [1981b] p.17.
1936-1948: Political Agency Once Again

Roosevelt’s 1936 instructions and the renewed fight against subversion

In May 1934, President Roosevelt instructed the Bureau to gather intelligence on the Nazi movement in the US and on its possible connections with German officials. Roosevelt’s military advisers had recommended an investigation on both the American Fascist and Communist movements, and their links to Germany and the USSR respectively, but Roosevelt decided to limit the investigation to the right-end of the spectrum. Hoover promptly issued a directive to his agents describing the investigation “as a so-called intelligence investigation” with no law-enforcement purpose.288

Two years later, what had been an occasional demand for an intelligence investigation became the norm. On 24 August 1936, Roosevelt invited Hoover to the White House to discuss “the question of subversive activities in the United States, particularly Fascism and Communism.” Hoover briefed the President only on Communism, despite the President’s 1934 demand to focus on fascism. He stated that the Communists were planning to control the shipping industry via the Longshoremen’s Union, the mining industry via the United Mine Workers and the news media via the Newspaper Guild. “By doing so they would be able at any time to paralyze the country in that they could stop all shipping in and out (…); stop the operation of industry through the Mining Union (…); and stop publication of any newspapers of the country through the Newspaper Guild.” 289

289 All quotes are from Hoover’s Confidential Memo, written on the same day of the meeting. The memo is now in NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 22, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 136, “Roosevelt, Franklin Delano”. It is also reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.180-181.
Roosevelt “had been considerably concerned about the movements of the Communists and of Fascism in the United States” and was interested in “obtaining a broad picture of the general [Communist] movement and its activities as may affect the economic and political life of the country as a whole”. Hoover replied that there was “no governmental organization which is getting any so-called ‘general intelligence information’ upon this subject”, but that the appropriation of the recently renamed Federal Bureau of Investigation allowed it to investigate “any matters referred to it by the Department of State”\textsuperscript{290}.

The next day, Roosevelt told Hoover and the Secretary of State Cordell Hull that he wanted a survey of Communist and Fascist activities in the country. Because “both of these movements were international in scope and (...) Communism particularly was directed from Moscow”, the State Department could request an inquiry. Roosevelt added that Hull’s request should not be made in writing, “since he desired the matter to be handled quite confidentially”\textsuperscript{291}. Despite Roosevelt’s desire not to have a written request, Hoover wrote memoranda for himself on both meetings, in order to have a unilateral record showing that he had not taken the FBI down an unauthorized path\textsuperscript{292}.

Roosevelt’s instructions marked a crucial turning point in the FBI’s history. Hoover now had a secret, broadly-worded presidential authorization to investigate subversive activities, with no immediate law enforcement purpose. The Bureau’s principals thus made dead letter of Stone’s directive, recognizing intelligence investigations into subversive activities as a proper activity for the Bureau. Of course, Hoover and the Bureau had never stopped investigating leftist

\textsuperscript{290} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{291} All quotes are from Hoover’s Confidential Memo, 25 August 1936, in NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 22, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 136, “Roosevelt, Franklin Delano”. It is also reproduced in Theoharis [1991] p.182.
\textsuperscript{292} For a similar judgment as to why Hoover wrote the memoranda, see Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.123.
subversion and considering it a priority. Now, however, they were free to intensify their anti-
subversive efforts without having to hide them from their principals.

Roosevelt probably thought that he was simply authorizing an investigation of foreign-
directed domestic activities. Unlike Hoover, there is no evidence that Roosevelt believed that
America faced a plausible subversive threat at the time. In Theoharis and Cox’s words, he “did
not share the Director’s obsession with the ‘subversive’ threat, especially that from the American
leftists.”293 Yet his verbal, generic and open-ended instruction allowed Hoover to shape the
authorization in the direction he preferred.

Rather than conducting one investigation, Hoover immediately ordered his senior aides to
start building the infrastructure for an enlarged surveillance program, focusing on radicals and
trade unions. The program covered virtually every activity in the country: “Maritime Industry,
Government affairs, steel industry, coal industry, newspaper field, clothing, garment and fur
industry, general strike activities, Armed Forces, educational institutions, general activities –
Communist and Affiliated Organizations, Fascisti, Anti-Fascisti movements, and activities in
Organized Labor organizations.” On 5 September, Hoover instructed all FBI field offices “to
obtain from all possible sources information concerning subversive activities being conducted in
the United States by Communists, Fascisti, and representatives or advocates of other
organizations or groups advocating the overthrow or replacement of the Government of the
United States by illegal means.”294

On 10 September Hoover belatedly and misleadingly informed Attorney General
Cummings. Hoover told him that in a meeting on 1 September the President and the Secretary of

293 Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.149-151. Several authors describe Hoover’s fight against the subversive left as an
State had instructed the FBI to investigate “subversive activities in this country, including communism and fascism”\textsuperscript{295}. Hoover thus misconstrued Roosevelt’s directive as covering all subversive activities, regardless of their origin, and untruthfully reported that the meeting with Roosevelt and Hull had occurred a week later than what it actually had, presumably to justify his delay in reporting to his nominal superior\textsuperscript{296}.

The FBI also focused on communism much more than fascism, despite the fact that since 1934 Roosevelt had given more emphasis to the fascist threat. Hoover moved slowly and cautiously against the extreme right, in one case even turning what should have been an investigation of a right-wing journal into an admiring description of the journal’s fight against leftist subversives\textsuperscript{297}. Hoover’s focus on communism at the expense of fascism did not correspond to the President’s desires, leading Roosevelt himself to complain in 1942 that the FBI “was spending too much time investigating suspected Communists in the Government and out, (…) and ignoring the Fascist minded groups both in the Government and out”\textsuperscript{298}.

The FBI’s renewed fight against subversion remained secret for the next three years. Hoover insisted that the FBI’s intelligence structure operate “with the utmost degree of secrecy in order to avoid criticism” and opposed seeking legislative authority for this reason\textsuperscript{299}.

\textsuperscript{295} See Hoover’s Confidential Memo to FBI Assistant Director Edward Tamm, 10 September 1936, in NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 22, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 136, “Roosevelt, Franklin Delano”. It is also reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.182-183.

\textsuperscript{296} Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.152 explain Hoover’s delay in the same way. It cannot be excluded that Hoover simply made a mistake, but it seems unlikely given how meticulously he recorded the meetings with Roosevelt and Hull.


\textsuperscript{298} Memo from Attorney General Biddle to Hoover, 29 May 1942. The memo is in NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 22, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 136, “Roosevelt, Franklin Delano”. See also Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.131.

Hoover partially reversed his stance in 1939, when the State Department, under whose authority the FBI was operating in the counter-subversive and counter-espionage fields, expressed the desire to create and chair an interdepartmental committee to coordinate domestic intelligence activities. Fearing an infringement on what he regarded as the FBI’s exclusive turf, Hoover recommended that all agencies forward information “relating to espionage and subversive activities” to the FBI, arguing that this would have avoided the confusion and the civil liberties violations which had occurred during World War I. Roosevelt followed Hoover’s advice and on 6 September 1939, five days after the Nazi invasion of Poland, he issued a directive instructing “all police officers, sheriffs, and all other law enforcement officers in the United States [to] promptly turn over to (…) the Federal Bureau of Investigation any information obtained by them relating to espionage, counterespionage, sabotage, subversive activities and violations of the neutrality laws.”

The FBI was now recognized as America’s dominant domestic intelligence agency and as the one charged with the fight against subversion. Even though the President most likely did not perceive the subversive enemies as posing a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, the FBI did. Accordingly, the FBI moved again in the direction of a political intelligence agency.

The FBI’s shift towards a political intelligence agency

In accordance with my first hypothesis, after 1936 the FBI moved decisively in the direction of a political intelligence agency. First, the FBI under Roosevelt was not politically neutral. In Jeffreys-Jones’s words, under the Roosevelt Administration “Hoover acted as a kind

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of political spy for the President“\textsuperscript{301}. We have seen that even before 1936 the FBI conducted political services for the White House, supplying it with information on the President’s critics. These services intensified after 1936, and even more as World War II approached\textsuperscript{302}.

For instance, the FBI tried to show that Charles Lindbergh, the aviation hero and isolationist critic of the President, had leaked American war-plans to the press. The Bureau also sought to discredit his image as a family man by trying and failing to find information on his extramarital affairs. Roosevelt asked the Attorney General to use the Bureau to inquire into the “money sources behind the America First Committee”, a powerful isolationist pressure group of which Lindbergh was a member\textsuperscript{303}.

Members of Congress who opposed the President were not spared from the Bureau’s surveillance, as in the period before 1924. The Bureau monitored the chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), Martin Dies. Hoover sympathized with Dies’ strong anticommu

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{O'Reilly1983} O’Reilly [1983] p.21 similarly argues that “the Bureau’s political activities accelerated when the Roosevelt administration offered the Bureau of Investigation an opportunity to legitimize its domestic intelligence operations. First, in early May 1934 (...) [t]hen in August 1936”.
\bibitem{Jeffreys-Jones2007-2} Jeffreys-Jones [2007] pp.126-127 and Theoharis [2004] pp.63-64. The Bureau monitored other pacifist or isolationist groups, such as the American Peace Mobilization, often supplying the White House with information on their plans. For other examples of the Bureau’s political activities, see Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.186, a memorandum by Hoover on 7 November 1938, now at NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 22, Hoover's Official and Confidential Files, File 136, “Roosevelt, Franklin Delano” and the exchanges between Hoover, Roosevelt and the President’s personal secretary in 1940, available at \url{http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/vol6/html/ChurchV6_0231b.htm}.
\end{thebibliography}
the President and defending his own turf\textsuperscript{304}. Isolationist members of Congress were also subject

to the FBI’s surveillance. Senator Wheeler was once again a Bureau’s target as were Senator

Gerald Nye and Congressman Hamilton Fish, whom the Bureau tried to smear\textsuperscript{305}. Roosevelt explicitly approved of the FBI’s surveillance of members of Congress, arguing

that “[s]enators and members of Congress are, of course, protected in a sense by the Constitution, but this must be strictly construed. There is absolutely no valid reason why any suspected

subversive activities on their part should not be investigated by the Department of Justice or any other duly constituted agency.”\textsuperscript{306} Having assigned to the Bureau the fight against subversion, Roosevelt was not going to stop at the constitutional guarantees protecting elected representatives.

Not all Congressmen were monitored in pursuit of an order from the Roosevelt Administration. The Bureau sent unsolicited reports to the White House on the alleged communist and leftist associations of Senators Thomas, Pepper and Mead, and on Congressman Marcantonio\textsuperscript{307}. In other cases, the Bureau investigated Congressmen without informing the White House\textsuperscript{308}. Monitoring of Congressmen remained ad hoc throughout this period. It was

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\textsuperscript{305} The Bureau sought evidence of Fish’s links to the Dominican dictator Trujillo and tried but failed to find him guilty of tax evasion. Against Senator Nye, the FBI investigated an unfounded allegation that he had been involved in a “shady deal” concerning the sale of stocks of a North Dakota newspaper. When the FBI agent in charge of a case argued that the allegation was politically motivated and due to Nye’s isolationist stance, Hoover insisted that the agent investigate the allegations further, “immediately” interviewing the attorney who had first denounced the Senator. See Jeffreys-Jones [2007] pp.127-129 and O’Reilly [1983] p.24.

\textsuperscript{306} Memo from Roosevelt to the Attorney General, 11 May 1942, cited in O’Reilly [1983] p.25. Roosevelt was asking the FBI to investigate Senator Robert Reynolds who, according to a periodical, had worked closely with a pro-Hitler propagandist.

\textsuperscript{307} See O’Reily [1983] p.21, 25. In the mid-1950s, the FBI systematized its previously ad hoc collection of information, largely derogatory in nature, on elected members of Congress and on Congressional candidates.

\textsuperscript{308} In 1937, for instance, the FBI briefly monitored Congressman Jerry O’Connell, who had criticized the treatment of the Socialist prisoner Tom Mooney in San Quentin prison. See O’Reilly [1983] p.21.
only in the mid-1950s that the FBI systematically began to create files, many containing derogatory information, on all Congressional candidates and members of Congress\textsuperscript{309}.

The transformation set in motion by Roosevelt’s 1936 went beyond an intensification of political surveillance. Now authorized to conduct noncriminal intelligence investigations against subversives, the Bureau increasingly relied on intrusive and illegal investigative techniques, knowing that the information it uncovered did not have to withstand judicial scrutiny because it was generally not intended for prosecution. These investigations inevitably uncovered information on a target’s political views and personal conduct. The information was rarely valuable for prosecution, but often so for dissemination to the White House or to sympathetic Congressmen and journalists. In the process, the FBI’s role of political containment extended beyond subversive activities, targeting Presidential critics and, as I will show, in some occasions the President himself\textsuperscript{310}.

Newly authorized to fight against subversives, the FBI soon acquired the second trait of a political intelligence agency, operating both at home and abroad. It was the President who pushed the FBI to operate overseas. In June 1939 Roosevelt created an Interdepartmental Intelligence Committee (IIC), formed by the FBI, Army and Navy intelligence and with a representative from the State Department, to control and handle espionage, counter-espionage and sabotage cases. The IIC decided to have the FBI take charge of covert operations in foreign countries, after the armed services refused to compromise their military attachés involving them in espionage and covert action. In June 1940 Roosevelt intervened again, ordering to divide the

foreign intelligence field\textsuperscript{311}. He stated that “the FBI should be responsible for foreign-intelligence work in the Western Hemisphere” while “the existing Military Intelligence and Naval Intelligence branches should cover the rest of the world”\textsuperscript{312}.

To take care of the unexpected responsibility for intelligence in the Western Hemisphere, the FBI established the Special Intelligence Service (SIS) on 1 July. Hoover was unenthusiastic about this expansion. Even though, as Hoover himself wrote, the emphasis of SIS’s work was on Latin American subversive groups, he did not think that the FBI had the necessary experience and competence to operate abroad\textsuperscript{313}. Between March 1941 and September 1942, Hoover repeatedly tried to divest the FBI of the SIS, arguing that he had “no desire to extend or expand the Federal Bureau of Investigation into varied and far-flung fields. The Bureau already has a full measure of responsibility within the United States and the territorial possessions which, if it discharges it fully, will more than justify the Bureau's existence and maintenance.”\textsuperscript{314}

Hoover’s remissive attitude does not seem to fit with my theoretical expectations. Rather than pushing to work abroad, where domestic subversives received much of their support, Hoover was instead eager to rid himself and the FBI from overseas work. His calculation seems to have been that it was better for the Bureau to focus on what it knew it could do, including the fight against domestic subversives, rather than risk its reputation expanding “into varied and far-
flung fields” such as foreign intelligence. Further, Latin America at the time was not an important source of support for American subversives, hence extending the Bureau’s jurisdiction would not have provided a worthwhile advantage in the anti-subversive fight.

Once Hoover saw that the Bureau was capable of operating successfully in Latin America, he pushed for further expansion. In December 1944 he proposed expanding the reach of the SIS to the entire world. On 29 August 1945, after President Truman had ordered the dismantlement of the Office of Strategic Services, Hoover wrote to the newly appointed Attorney General, Thomas Clark, arguing that given “the need for a world-wide intelligence service, it [was] most logical that the system which has worked so successfully in the Western Hemisphere should be extended to a world-wide coverage”. Clark concurred, perorating the Bureau’s cause to Truman’s closest advisers: “Foreign and domestic intelligence are inseparable and constitute one field of operation (…). In order to cope with the activities of various subversive agents in the United States with speed and dispatch it is entirely evident that their activities must be followed throughout the various countries by one intelligence agency of the United States Government.” In other words, because it had a subversive priority, the Bureau had to operate both at home and abroad.

Hoover’s attempt to expand world-wide was ultimately a failure. As I will show in greater detail in the next section, Truman did not want to have one agency operating at home and abroad.

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315 Webb [2004] advances a similar interpretation.
317 Memorandum from FBI Director Hoover to Attorney General Clark, 29 August 1945, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d5
318 Clarke to Budget Bureau’s director Harold Smith and assistant director Appleby, 21 September 1945. Cited in Rudgers [2000] p.79 and in Weiner [2012] p.470. Clark referred explicitly to Communism, saying that “the Communist movement originated in Russia but operates in the United States. To follow these organizations access must be had to their origin and headquarters in foreign countries as well as to their activities in the United States.”
abroad, fearing it would become too powerful and billed as a Gestapo. Hoover continued to try to operate overseas. Having seen that Truman was not receptive, in April 1948 he told the future Republican Presidential candidate, Thomas Dewey, “that it was most important to have a strong intelligence service but that there cannot be a so-called division between domestic and foreign intelligence because Communism is international.”

In sum, even though Hoover was initially skeptical about expanding abroad, his principals pushed him to do so. Once he realized that the Bureau could succeed in overseas work, Hoover pressed strongly to retain and expand the Bureau’s foreign intelligence capabilities, arguing that in order to fight subversion it was necessary to have an agency that crossed the divide between foreign and domestic intelligence.

**Was the FBI under its principals’ control?**

As we have seen, even before 1936 Presidents and Attorney Generals exercised only a weak form of control over the Bureau. The evidence for the period after 1936 points even more strongly in the direction of weak control, in accordance with my second hypothesis.

Several Attorneys General mistrusted Hoover and the Bureau, but did not manage to redress the situation. Robert Jackson, for instance, “had been very dubious of Mr. Hoover’s policies in operating the Bureau when he became Attorney General” in 1940. His predecessor, Frank Murphy, had told him that “the Bureau had an investigative file (…) on Mr. Jackson and

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319 See the “Memorandum from Morton Chiles of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to Director (Hoover)”, 2 October 1945, reporting on a conversation between Truman and Chiles, [https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d22](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d22). See also Jeffreys-Jones [2007] pp.141-143.

most of the government officials in Washington (…) and that the Bureau maintained taps upon
the telephone of some of the more prominent government officials.\textsuperscript{321} The Bureau had in fact
opened a file on Murphy within a month after his appointment as Attorney General in December
1938, including derogatory information on his political beliefs and on his personal life\textsuperscript{322}. There
is no evidence that Murphy and Jackson ever tried to do anything about the Bureau’s files, but if
they did they obviously failed.

Following Murphy’s indication, it was on the issue of wiretaps that Jackson first tried to
rein in the Bureau. On 15 March 1940, Jackson publicly stated that “wire tapping (…) or the use
of any other improper, illegal, or unethical tactics will not be tolerated by the Bureau.”\textsuperscript{323}
Jackson’s ban followed the Communications Act of 1934, with which Congress had forbidden
wiretaps, and two Supreme Court verdicts in 1937 and 1939\textsuperscript{324}. Nonetheless, the ban lasted only

\textsuperscript{321} Both quotes are from a memo from FBI Assistant Director Edward Tamm to Hoover, 1 March 1940, reproduced in Theoharis [1991] p.336.
\textsuperscript{322} The file is now at NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 20, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 118, “Murphy, Frank”. It includes reports of the “unfavorable reaction of the general public to Murphy’s appointment”, including allegations that he was “an out-and-out radical and probably a Communist”. Another document reports that he had “quite a reputation at the Washington Hotel” and that “he either is under the influence of some sort of dope or whisky”. The file was maintained even after Murphy became a Supreme Court Justice. See also Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.164, Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.132 and O’Reilly [1983] p.60.
\textsuperscript{323} Jackson’s statement is cited in Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.171. There is a disagreement in the literature over the origins of Jackson’s ban. Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.170-171 state that Hoover was not willing to continue wiretapping after 1939, fearing that if discovered it would have again raised cries of an uncontrolled secret police. They state, without citing sources, that Hoover recommended to Attorney General Jackson to issue his public ban. Weiner [2012] pp.84-85 argues instead that “Hoover moved to undermine the new attorney general [Jackson] and find a way around the law”, even leaking stories suggesting that Jackson was handcuffing the FBI in the war against spies and saboteurs. The evidence seems to support Weiner’s interpretation. Weiner cites a letter on 13 April that Hoover wrote to Jackson, saying that he was “greatly concerned over the present regulation which prohibits the use of telephone taps”. He deemed taps “essential” and stated that without them, “a repetition of disastrous catastrophes like the Black Tom explosion must be anticipated.” If Hoover had indeed recommended to Jackson to issue his ban, as Theoharis and Cox state, he either quickly reversed his stance or he deviously worked to immediately undermine the authority of the new Attorney General.
\textsuperscript{324} The 1934 Communications Act made it illegal for “any person” to “intercept any [wire and radio] communication and divulge or publish (...) [it] to any person”. In 1937 the Supreme Court rejected the Department of Justice’s interpretation that the term “any person” did not apply to federal agents. Two days later, Hoover told his agents: “Same rule prevails as formerly – no phone taps without my approval.” In 1939 the Court ruled that information obtained from wiretapping could not be used for prosecution. See Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.170 and Weiner [2012] p.84.
nine weeks. In an often repeated move, Hoover went around his direct superior and brought his case to the White House\textsuperscript{325}. He convinced Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau that Jackson’s ban was making it impossible for the FBI to investigate a Nazi plot to finance Roosevelt’s opponents and defeat him in the polls. Morgenthau informed the President, who in turn wrote to Jackson reasoning that the Supreme Court could not have possibly “intended [its decision] (…) to apply to grave matters involving the defense of the nation”. Roosevelt then issued a secret directive authorizing the Attorney General to approve wiretapping on a case-by-case basis\textsuperscript{326}.

Roosevelt chose to secretly supersede both Congress and the Court, relying instead on the Attorney General’s capacity to control the FBI’s use of wiretaps. Such reliance turned out to be misplaced. In Hoover’s words, the Attorney General chose to “have no detailed record kept concerning the cases in which wiretapping would be made. It was agreeable to him [Jackson] that I [Hoover] would maintain a memorandum book in my immediate office, listing the time, places, and cases in which this procedure is to be utilized.”\textsuperscript{327} Jackson did not want to have a record of his authorizations of such a controversial practice, but in so doing he could not check whom the FBI was wiretapping or for how long. Hoover could now choose whom to wiretap and renew the tap indefinitely.

In this case Jackson chose plausible deniability over effective control. His choice does not fit with my assumption that principals want to control intelligence agencies, but is indicative of the tradeoffs that principals face when dealing with agencies engaging in controversial or illegal practices. The Bureau employed more of these practices as it shifted in the direction of a political intelligence agency, increasingly tempting its principals to adopt an “I don’t want to

\textsuperscript{325}See, for instance, Sullivan [1979] p.38.


\textsuperscript{327}Quoted in Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.171.
know” attitude. The result was a vicious circle in which the Bureau employed even more illegal practices knowing that its principals would not know about them.

In other cases the Bureau eschewed the Attorney General’s control even without the President’s help. In the spring of 1941, Jackson issued a memo limiting the FBI to “the investigation of crimes and subversive activities which amount to overt acts rather than matters of opinion.” Jackson also tried to set strict limits on the FBI’s intervention in labor controversies. The Bureau could investigate “charges of communism or subversive activity” in labor relations, but only “in connection with defense production”, and “only with the knowledge and approval of the Department of Labor, the Office of Production Management, and the department for which supplies are being produced.”

Hoover fought back. In a strongly-worded memo on 1 April, he evoked the collapse of France in June 1940, arguing that it had been “brought about by the impotency of the French Government in failing to be alert to or aware of the growth and influence of the subversive groups in the labor field.” The US was in danger of facing the same fate, as “Nazi and Communist agents have deliberately endeavored to attach their tentacles to the labor groups (...) [in] the United States (...). It is consequently highly important that the Federal Bureau of Investigation be unhampered in its authority to conduct investigations into situations involving potential danger to the Government of the United States.” Jackson’s rule on FBI’s investigations on labor disputes “would practically nullify any investigative action of Communists or subversive activities.” The Bureau could not be limited to investigating violations of criminal statutes, because “much of the activity indulged in by the Communists and subversive elements

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328 Jackson’s undated Memorandum to All Departmental and Agency Heads is reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.184-187. Theoharis dates it as circa April 1941. Given that Hoover’s response to it is of 1 April, Jackson’s memo is likely of late March.
does not, in its original stage, involve an overt act or a violation of a specific statute (...) but (...) may become a very definite violation of law in the event of the declaration of war or of the declaration of a national emergency.”

Hoover was thus telling his superior that America faced a strong subversive threat, that the Bureau was there to fight it and that the proposed regulations would have hampered its capacity to do so, possibly fatally. Faced with such a catastrophic scenario, Jackson once again backed down. On 4 April he responded to Hoover arguing that he “had no thought to restrict or alter in any manner the internal operation of the FBI or the Department of Justice, or its right to proceed in all the fields in which it has been operating. It was my thought that we might be able to erect a barrier against demands by other Departments that we proceed into fields in which they wanted to use us to pull their own chestnuts out of the fire.”

Attorney General Francis Biddle, who succeeded Jackson in August 1941, was not more successful at controlling the Bureau. In September 1939, Hoover had established on his own authority a Custodial Detention Index, listing “both aliens and citizens of the United States” of “German, Italian, and Communist sympathies”, whose “presence at liberty in this country in time of war or national emergency would be dangerous to the public peace and the safety of the United States Government.” Hoover had sought Attorney General Jackson’s approval for this program only nine months later, and Jackson had granted it after months of negotiations.

Attorney General Biddle believed instead that the Custodial Detention Program “serve[d] no useful purpose”, that the “classification system [was] inherently unreliable” and that there was

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331 Hoover’s order creating the Custodial Detention Index is cited and discussed in Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.172-173.

Hoover did not comply. All he did in response to Biddle’s order was to change the name of the program. On 14 August 1943, Hoover wrote to his agents telling them that the Custodial Detention Program was henceforth called the Security Index. The Security Index and its cards, Hoover added, “should be considered as strictly confidential, and should at no time be mentioned or alluded to in investigative reports, or discussed with agencies or individuals outside the Bureau”.\footnote{333 Memo from Hoover to FBI’s Special Agents in Charge, 14 August 1943, available at \url{http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/vol6/html/ChurchV6_0212b.htm}. See also Theoharis and Cox [1988] pp.173-174 and Weiner [2012] p.122.} In the words of the FBI’s foremost historian, Hoover was “so convinced of the correctness of his own assessment of the ‘subversive’ threat”\footnote{334 I quote from the judgment of Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.173.}, that he was not going to follow the orders of the Attorney General, especially of one whom he viewed, as Biddle later wrote, as “too soft with Communists”.\footnote{335 Biddle [1962] p.258. Biddle’s memoirs offer an overwhelmingly positive judgment of Hoover (pp.258-261). Biddle mentions some of Hoover’s “weaknesses”, such as “his obsession with the Communists”, and his tendency not to be loyal to those he did not trust, but he does not seem to have realized that Hoover was disobeying many of his orders, or at least did not want to say it publicly while Hoover was still the FBI’s Director. See also Weiner [2012] p.123.}

To prevent the discovery of the Security Index and of his other unauthorized activities, Hoover refined the separate filing system he had developed in the mid-1920s.\footnote{336 The most important innovation was the creation of the “Do Not File” procedure in 1942. “Do Not File” files were sent to the Director or to his closest assistants, kept in their offices and supposedly destroyed every six months. Hoover instituted this procedure to approve, on his own authority, the use of so-called black-bag jobs, mainly break-ins to install bugs or photograph material in anti-subversive investigations. These techniques, as FBI Assistant Director William Sullivan wrote more than two decades later, were “clearly illegal” but they were also “an invaluable technique in combating subversive activities”. See Theoharis [2004] pp.58-59, Weiner [2012] p.98 and the memo from Sullivan to FBI Assistant Director Carta De Loach, 19 July 1966, reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.129-130.} As we have seen, some of these separate files were on the FBI’s direct superior, the Attorney General. Others
were on Roosevelt’s innermost circle, indicating that even the President did not have a strong control of the FBI. For instance, the Bureau had a file detailing the activities of Felix Frankfurter, a strong New Dealer who was appointed by Roosevelt to the Supreme Court. Most provocatively, Hoover had a file with derogatory information on the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. The FBI closely tracked both her political activities, especially her correspondence with civil rights and leftist youth groups, and her personal life. After an FBI agent had erroneously reported that the First Lady had been recorded having an extramarital affair, Hoover dared to brief the President about it. The President already knew that the recording was false, and was probably left questioning the purpose of Hoover’s files. That purpose was partially clarified a decade later, when Hoover used the false recording to discredit Eleanor Roosevelt vis-à-vis the new Eisenhower administration, contributing to her missed reappointment as US ambassador to the United Nations.

In sum, the President and even more the Attorney General exercised only a weak form of control over the FBI.

*Why did the FBI not subvert Roosevelt?*

Despite being a political intelligence agency weakly controlled by its principals, there is no evidence that the FBI engaged in subversion against the Roosevelt Administration. The

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338 The FBI agent’s report is reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.60-61. Jeffreys-Jones [2007] pp.132-133 discusses the background to the incident and mentions that Roosevelt’s son later explicitly called into question the purpose of Hoover’s files. It is likely that his father had done the same.
340 Of course, subversion may have occurred and remained secret to this day. As in all scientific enquiries, all I can do is I base my analysis on the evidence that is currently available and stand ready to modify it if further evidence emerges.
most likely explanation for the absence of subversion is that Hoover perceived Roosevelt and his cabinet as unwilling to adequately fight against the Communist threat, but he never found an opportunity to unseat him.

The evidence on Hoover’s perception of Roosevelt is indirect, as Hoover was careful not to criticize the Administration publicly. According to the memoirs of one of his closest assistants, William Sullivan, “Hoover didn’t like President Franklin Delano Roosevelt”, found “unacceptable” much of the President’s staff and “never passed up a chance to make a snide remark when FDR’s name was mentioned”341. As we have seen, this dislike extended to Roosevelt’s Attorneys General. Hoover perceived Attorney General Biddle as being soft on Communism and FBI agents reported the widespread belief that one of his predecessors, Frank Murphy, was “an out-and-out radical and probably a Communist”342.

Throughout his career, Hoover described the years under Roosevelt as the period in which the “mortal challenge” of Communism reached its maximum strength domestically. Communist Party members multiplied tenfold, from 7,500 members in 1930 to 30,000 in 1935 and 80,000 in 1944343. The 1930s were “the Party’s best opportunity for exploitation”, as US Communists found “fertile fields for agitation” and “hundreds of organizations sprang into existence and were either created or captured by the Communists”344.

Hoover most likely blamed Roosevelt and his Administration for this growth in Communist strength. Indeed he had numerous reasons for perceiving Roosevelt as soft on

341 Sullivan [1979] p.35 and p.37. Sullivan rose through the ranks of the FBI from World War Two until 1971, when, as Assistant to the Director, he broke with Hoover and was dismissed.
342 See Weiner [2012] p.123 and Hoover’s files at NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 20, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 118, “Murphy, Frank”.
communism. For instance, the Administration recognized the Soviet Union soon after taking office. It supported the National Labor Relations Act and the surge in unionization that followed it, giving the Communist Party the best opportunity to expand its influence. Under Roosevelt, the Party had a visible role in the American polity, turning into what Ellen Schrecker calls “the unofficial left wing of the New Deal”. Finally, US Communist leaders themselves supported Roosevelt. Hoover maintained in his own private files the record of a meeting of Communist leaders in September 1940, in which they argued that Roosevelt had to be elected “regardless of what cost or sacrifice to the Communist Party”, because “with Roosevelt in power it will be possible to keep J. Edgar Hoover’s hands tied.”

According to Sullivan’s memoirs, Hoover thought about removing Roosevelt from the White House, albeit in a democratically legitimate way. Sullivan reports that Hoover considered running for President in 1936. A popular national figure after the FBI’s successes in the war on crime, Hoover thought “he could run as a Republican and turn Roosevelt and his crew of liberals out of office.” He sent “some of his most trusted veteran agents (...) on a top-secret mission to test the political waters” but desisted because, “much to Hoover’s surprise, response to his presidential ambitions was overwhelmingly negative.”

Roosevelt was simply too strong for Hoover to remove him, for two reasons. First, removing an incumbent administration in a Presidential system is extremely hard, other than via the ballot box. Second, there was never a close election that Hoover could have swayed one way

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347 Memo from E. E. Sackett (Special Agent in Charge in New York) to Hoover, 30 September 1940, now at NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 14, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 48, “Communist Party”.
348 Sullivan [1979] pp.35-36. Sullivan wrote his memoirs eight years after breaking with Hoover and seven years after Hoover’s death. He was a disgruntled former employee, yet his account of Hoover’s behavior in the 1936 and, as I will show, in the 1948 elections, is widely accepted.
or another. Roosevelt won all his three reelection bids decisively, conquering 46 states out of 48 in 1936, 38 in 1940 and 36 in 1944. Faced with a President he mistrusted and despised, but could not remove, Hoover was forced to desist. In Sullivan’s words, Hoover “was passively anti-Roosevelt only because he couldn’t be actively anti-Roosevelt.”\textsuperscript{349} The Bureau’s subversive attempt had to wait for a weaker President that it similarly perceived as soft on Communism.

\textit{The FBI under Truman’s first term and subversion in the 1948 elections}

By the time he succeeded Roosevelt as President, Truman had already developed a negative opinion of the FBI and of its Director, for several reasons. Truman’s political mentor in Missouri, Thomas Pendergast, had been investigated by the FBI for corruption and arrested in 1939\textsuperscript{350}. Further, Truman was in good rapport and exchanged views frequently with Senator Wheeler, a critic (and target) of the FBI for more than twenty years, and with Max Lowenthal, a lawyer who went on to write a critical history of the FBI in 1950\textsuperscript{351}. Lastly, as head of the Senate’s Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, Truman had asked Hoover to have access to the Bureau’s files, but Hoover refused\textsuperscript{352}.

Less than a month into his presidency, Truman told the White House Budget Director Harold Smith that Hoover was “building up a Gestapo”. A few days later he wrote in his diary that “we want no Gestapo or Secret Police. FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in

\textsuperscript{349} Sullivan [1979] p.35.
\textsuperscript{350} See Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.140. Truman never distanced himself from Pendergast and even attended his funeral in January 1945, just days after having been sworn in as vice-president. For a relatively benign view of the Truman-Pendergast relationship, see \url{http://www.trumanlibrary.org/trivia/penderga.htm}.
\textsuperscript{351} See Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.140.
\textsuperscript{352} Carta De Loach’s interview with Susan Rosenfeld, 11 November 2005, FBI Oral History Project, p.58 and p.130, available at \url{http://www.nleomf.org/assets/pdfs/nlem/oral-histories/FBI_DeLoach_interview.pdf}. 128
sex-life scandals and plain blackmail (…). This must stop.” Truman was eager to limit the FBI’s reach. In September 1945, he told Harold Smith that he wanted to cut back the FBI’s budget at least to its prewar levels and to confine it to the United States. When Hoover presented his plan for a worldwide intelligence service later that month, Truman rejected it outright, arguing the FBI would have turned into a Gestapo. In November, Hoover sent him a report on Soviet espionage in the United States. The report named several Soviet spies working for the US government, including Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White. Truman disregarded the report, probably out of a combination of disbelief and mistrust for Hoover. For the first time, Hoover faced a President who acted against the Bureau’s interests and ignored his warnings.

Hoover and other leading Bureau officials soon reciprocated Truman’s mistrust. More importantly for my theory, they started perceiving the President as underestimating the domestic Communist threat and unwilling to decisively fight against it. Carta De Loach, then a mid-ranking Bureau agent and later Hoover’s deputy, argued that “President Truman was not a man who appreciated or understood intelligence”. Truman “disliked Mr. Hoover from the start”, “thought that Mr. Hoover was his enemy”, felt “hatred” for him and the FBI, and “refused to read files on our reports or memoranda on intelligence.” William Sullivan argued that “Hoover’s hatred of Truman knew no bounds”, both because Truman refused to grant Hoover direct access to the Oval Office and because he dismissed much of what Hoover produced.

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354 See the FRUS volume edited by Thorne and Patterson [1996], p.4.


Attorney General Clark similarly stated that he would challenge as “overexaggerated” Hoover’s “idea that the Communists were pretty strong” and that it was “in the area of security-Communist infiltration”- that the Administration and the FBI “began to fall out”. Scholars agree that that Bureau officials soon perceived the Truman administration as soft on Communism. For instance, Kenneth O’Reilly states that “FBI officials viewed the domestic communist threat as far more serious than the Truman administration. In effect, they viewed the administration itself as ‘subversive’ and sought to document Truman’s alleged ‘softness’ on communism.”

The Bureau was thus a political intelligence agency, poorly controlled by its principals, whom it perceived as unwilling to adequately fight what they viewed as a serious, indeed vital, subversive threat. All that was missing for the FBI to subvert was an opportunity to do so.

Given how hard it is to remove an administration in the American political system, the opportunity only came with the 1948 Presidential elections. In the meanwhile, the FBI decided to educate the American on the seriousness of the subversive threat and to weaken the President by secretly assisting his political foes. The FBI could not afford to publicly attack the

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359 Second Oral History Interview by Jerry Ness with Tom Clark, 8 February 1973, Truman Library Oral History Project, pp.108-112, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/clarktc.htm#oh2]. Clark confirmed the Administration’s disregard for Hoover’s intelligence saying that after the war there was “a phenomenal increase in reports that I would get from him [Hoover] with reference to alleged Communist infiltration”, but, for the most part, he “would not even see them.” He also later found out “that the F.B.I. had created a separate file; and whenever any derogatory information about me would come into the Department, why they would put it in that file.” Clark stated he believed Hoover when he told him that he did not know the file existed.
360 O’Reilly [1983] p.101. Weiner [2012] p.146 similarly argues that Hoover’s “rage at the president’s reluctance to fight a full-bore war on communism grew ferocious.” Schrecker [2002] p.28 speaks of “the FBI chief’s growing dissatisfaction with what he believed was the Truman administration’s lax attitude toward internal security.” See also idem [1998] pp.232-233: “Hoover viewed the [Truman] administration as an adversary” and “he fretted about the administration’s seeming indifference to the problem of Communists in government and its failure to act on the FBI’s information about them.” Theoharis [2004] p.71 says that FBI officials by 1951 had managed to shape the public’s understanding “of an administration indifferent to the Communist threat”.

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Administration, because doing so would have compromised its image of political neutrality and given Truman the chance to fire Hoover.

In February 1946, the FBI’s Executive Conference, comprising all of the Bureau’s highest ranking officials, decided to launch a public campaign to expose the domestic Communist threat, without revealing the FBI’s role and without informing the Attorney General. The campaign was meant to reveal “the basically Russian nature of the Communist Party in this country” and “the support which the [Communist] Party receives from ‘Liberal’ sources and from its connections in the labor unions”. The strategy was for the FBI to “prepare educational material which can be released through available channels so that in the event of an emergency we will have an informed public opinion”. These channels were largely the political foes of the Truman administration in the media, in civil society and in Congress.

For instance, the FBI gave access to its files to the Jesuit priest, Father John Cronin. Cronin published a series of fiercely anti-communist pamphlets that first circulated among the clergy and then received wider circulation thanks again to the FBI. Three new pamphlets ghost-written by Cronin were published in 400,000 copies by the Chambers of Commerce in October 1946, just before the mid-term elections.

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361 Theoharis [2004] p.89 explains the decision saying that “FBI officials had always believed that Communists posed a serious subversive threat but also that the general public was either indifferent or unaware of this threat.”


Cronin’s pamphlets showed both the power and the peril of this kind of collaborations for the Bureau. On one side, Cronin’s allegations, including the naming of Alger Hiss and other policymakers as members of the US Communist Party who had infiltrated the government, were at the heart of the campaign rhetoric of the Republican Party in the mid-terms elections and beyond. The Republicans won a majority in both houses of Congress after having called the election a choice between “Communism and Republicanism” and promised to do their utmost to “remove the Red menace from America”\(^\text{365}\). On the other side, by the time Cronin’s latest pamphlets were published, Hoover had stopped collaborating with him, because of his incapacity to keep the FBI’s assistance secret\(^\text{366}\).

The Truman administration immediately realized the political damage caused by the accusation of being soft on communism and tried to remedy it. Three weeks after losing the mid-term elections, Truman appointed a Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty\(^\text{367}\). Eliminating subversive federal employees suddenly became a presidential priority, largely to preempt a hostile Congressional investigation. Even though Attorney General Clark told the Commission that the “disloyalty problem was not as serious as it once was” and that there were few Communists in government, Hoover was able to push through both his view of the problem as “very serious” and most of his recommendations\(^\text{368}\). In March, just days after proclaiming what became known as the Truman Doctrine, the President signed an executive order establishing a Loyalty Review Board for federal employees. The program disqualified from federal employment anyone who belonged to the Communist Party, had “sympathetic

\(^{367}\) Truman reportedly described the creation of the Commission as a way “to take the ball away from [HUAC Chairman] Parnell Thomas”. Cited in O’Reilly [1983] p.112.
associations” with it or other subversive organizations\textsuperscript{369}. The Bureau was given the power to conduct name checks on all federal employees, without having to disclose its files to other departments and doubling the number of its personnel in the process\textsuperscript{370}.

Ironically, in order to fight against the image of his administration as soft on communism, Truman had to increasingly rely on the organization that had perhaps contributed the most to shaping that image. Most liberals believed that the FBI was indeed the professional and politically impartial service it claimed to be, but Truman knew the Bureau to be very different\textsuperscript{371}. Still, he found it to be politically expedient for him to cover himself with the FBI’s mantle of political neutrality and contrast it with the politicized attacks of his Republican opponents\textsuperscript{372}.

Regardless of Truman’s halfhearted agreement to strengthen the measures against domestic communism\textsuperscript{373}, Hoover’s fight against the administration intensified. In 1947 Hoover chose to reverse its stance against its old bureaucratic rival, the House Un-American Activities


\textsuperscript{370} All quotes are from Schrecker [1998] pp.210-211. The FBI obtained the concession of not having to disclose its files by making a thinly veiled threat to a reluctant Clark. Allowing outsiders to see the Bureau’s files, Hoover wrote, would have exposed “our techniques, including among others, technical surveillances which are authorized by you.”

\textsuperscript{371} On 2 May 1947 Truman had a conversation with White House counsel Clark Clifford: “Very strongly anti-FBI”, Clifford noted about his boss, “wants to be sure to hold the FBI down.” Similarly, Treasury Secretary Snyder wrote that Truman believed that Hoover led “a sort of dictatorial operation” and that he had built up “a Frankenstein in the FBI”. Cited in Weiner [2012] p.151. It is thus misleading to argue, as Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.156 does, that “misplaced liberal support for the FBI came most significantly from President Truman.”

\textsuperscript{372} See, for instance, Truman’s speech on 28 September 1948: “Republicans have impeded and made more difficult our efforts to cope with Communism in this country. (...) They have hindered the efforts of the FBI, which has been doing wonderful work in protecting the national security.” Reproduced in Merrill [1995] pp.648-653. Similarly, Attorney General Clark contrasted HUAC’s “political activity” with “the continuous but quiet watchfulness of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.” Cited in Schrecker [1998] p.220. See also Keller [1989] pp.11-13 and 23-24.

\textsuperscript{373} On Truman’s reluctance, see the interview of Stephen Spingarn Truman’s administrative assistant and the self-described “key man on loyalty and security”: “Truman and his entourage regarded [the Employee Loyalty Program] as a useless and enormous edifice which was going to do more harm than good”. See Demaris [1975] p.119.
Committee (HUAC), and started using it as the main conduit for exposing the Communist threat and attacking the Truman administration\textsuperscript{374}.

Hoover first raised the profile of HUAC by giving an unprecedented testimony on the perils of Communism in March 1947, just five days after Truman had signed the Federal Loyalty and Security Program\textsuperscript{375}. Hoover praised the Committee’s role in making the Communist threat public, arguing that “victory will be assured once Communists are identified and exposed”. He also laid down what became the dominant view of Communism on both sides of the American political spectrum. The US Communist movement stood “for the destruction of our American form of government” and gave “its allegiance (…) to Russia, not the United States”. The Party posed a vital threat. Indeed, it was “far better organized that were the Nazis in occupied countries prior to their capitulation.”\textsuperscript{376}

In May, Hoover decided “to extend every assistance to this Committee”, after being reassured by the Committee chairman Parnell Thomas that the Bureau’s assistance would have remained secret\textsuperscript{377}. Given its virtually exclusive possession of the information the Committee needed to expose Communist agents, the Bureau was able to largely determine the Committee’s


\textsuperscript{375} Weiner [2012] pp.148-149 describes Hoover’s testimony as “an act of defiance against the Truman administration, a declaration that Hoover now stood in alliance with the President’s strongest political enemies in Congress. (…) Hoover now told Congress and the American people that the Communist Party (…) was burrowing into the social and political frameworks of the United States on a mission to overthrow America – and that the Truman administration was not taking the threat seriously.”

\textsuperscript{376} Hoover’s testimony to HUAC on 26 March 1947 is reproduced in its most salient parts in Schrecker [2002] pp.126-133. Note that Hoover had already made the comparison with Nazi fifth columns in Europe in a memo to then Attorney General Jackson on 1 April 1941, discussed above.

\textsuperscript{377} Hoover’s notation on a memo from Nichols to Tolson, 13 May 1947, cited in Theoharis [2002] p.159.
agenda. Even HUAC’s Chairman Parnell Thomas recognized that “the Director more than any other person is responsible for his [Thomas’] Committee not being put out of business.”\textsuperscript{378}

HUAC’s first target was Communist penetration of the motion picture industry. The FBI had been investigating Communist infiltration of Hollywood at least since 1942, but the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had not shown interest in it. Believing that “it is long overdue for the Communist infiltration in Hollywood to be exposed, and as there is no medium at present through which this Bureau can bring that about on its own motion”, Hoover thought it was “entirely proper and desirable that we assist the Committee in Congress”\textsuperscript{379}. Thanks to the Bureau’s assistance, the Committee’s hearings first gained national attention throughout 1947\textsuperscript{380}.

Truman probably realized that the FBI was aiding his anticommunist foes in Congress and in March 1948 he ordered a ban on congressional access to FBI files. The FBI ignored him\textsuperscript{381}, continuing instead to aid HUAC’s hearings on the presence of Communist spies among the administration’s allies in government.

The FBI had been telling the Truman administration for years of the existence of a Soviet espionage ring in Washington, and had been frustrated by the administration’s lack of action. Attempts at prosecution had hardly been successful, inducing Hoover to leak part of the information on espionage to HUAC. The hearings on the espionage cases began in August,

\textsuperscript{378} Memorandum from FBI Assistant Director Nichols to FBI Associate Director Tolson, 28 October 1947, cited in Theoharis [2002] p.164. Nichols, who was HUAC’s contact within the Bureau, was reporting a conversation with Thomas.
\textsuperscript{380} Parts of the hearings are reproduced in Schrecker [2002] pp.229-236.
\textsuperscript{381} Theoharis and Cox [1988] p.262 speak of a “March 1948 executive order” that “in theory prohibited congressional access to the Bureau’s files”, but I could find no such order (see http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1948.html). O’Reilly [1983] p.81 similarly mentions that “Truman sought to prohibit congressional access (…) to FBI reports and other loyalty data”.

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timed, as HUAC Chairman Thomas said, “to put the heat on Truman”\textsuperscript{382}. The most prominent case was the one against Alger Hiss, a former high-ranking State Department official. Hiss was accused by a former Communist, Whittaker Chambers, of having been a Soviet spy and a Communist party member in the 1930s and of having worked to make the Yalta agreement more favorable to the Soviets\textsuperscript{383}. Chambers’ accusations thus contributed to shape the image of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations as having treacherously harbored communists, who then did great harm to the national interest\textsuperscript{384}. Giving substance to those accusations was Hoover’s FBI\textsuperscript{385}. One of Hoover’s closest aides later recalled that “we were giving Richard Nixon, who was in charge of the [Hiss] investigation, every possible assistance.”\textsuperscript{386} Nixon himself confirmed this. In a private conversation recorded by the FBI he stated that “he had worked very close (sic!) with the Bureau and with Nichols during the past year on [the Hiss-Chambers] matter”\textsuperscript{387}.

It is now widely accepted that many government officials accused by the Bureau and HUAC were indeed Soviet agents\textsuperscript{388}. At the same time, the FBI regularly manipulated intelligence to substantiate the “sensational charges” made by some of its anticommmunist witnesses, despite being aware that the information upon which the charges was based was “not

\textsuperscript{382} Quoted in O’Reilly [1983] p.110.
\textsuperscript{383} For reasons which are still unclear, Chambers provided concrete evidence of Hiss’s espionage only in early December 1948, after the elections. See Chambers’ statement to the FBI, reproduced in Schrecker [2002] pp.148-151. Chambers explained that he had “not previously mentioned the procuring and passing of any documents” in order “to preserve the human elements involved.”
\textsuperscript{385} Sullivan [1979] p.95. Nixon was then a freshman Republican Congressman and a member of HUAC.
\textsuperscript{386} Cited in Theocharis and Cox [1988] p.252, from a conversation between Nixon and two former FBI agents in December 1948. In his memoirs, Nixon [1978] p.58 falsely stated that “because of Truman’s executive order we were not able to get any direct help from J. Edgar Hoover or the FBI. However, we had some informal contacts with a lower level agent that proved helpful in the investigations”. In fact, Nixon was in direct contact with Assistant Director Nichols. For instance, Nichols reported a late night phone call by Nixon informing him of Chambers’ latest revelations in a memorandum on 2 December 1948, cited in Theocharis and Cox [1988] p.252.
\textsuperscript{387} On Alger Hiss, for instance, see the KGB’s telegram from Washington to Moscow on 30 March 1945, reproduced in Schrecker [2002] pp.136-137.
completely substantiated by actual facts.”389 Preserving the credibility of its witnesses was deemed to be more important than giving a fair rendering of the evidence, to the point that the discrepancies in their statements were catalogued but not made public by the FBI390.

Next to these regular instances of politicization, the FBI also engaged in subversion, directly damaging Truman’s electoral prospects. With polls and pundits predicting a Republican victory in the Presidential election in 1948391, the Bureau supported the campaign of the Republican Governor of New York Thomas Dewey.

William Sullivan described this subversive attempt in his memoirs. When Dewey entered the primaries, “Hoover and two of his closest aides, Clyde Tolson and Louis Nichols, secretly agreed to put the resources of the bureau at Dewey’s disposal. With the help of the FBI, Hoover believed Dewey couldn’t lose. He would win the nomination and defeat Truman. In exchange for his help, the director believed that when Dewey became president he would name Hoover as his attorney general and make Nichols director of the FBI. (…) Dewey was most grateful of the bureau’s support, and made use of its resources while preparing for a national radio broadcast debate with [Republican candidate Harold] Stassen on communism that was to take place in Portland, Oregon, on 17 May 1948. Many agents – I was one – worked for days culling FBI files for any fact that could be of use to Dewey. I remember that there was such a rush to get the material to him once it was collected that it was sent in a private plane to Albany, N.Y.”392

Hoover’s files confirm Sullivan’s account in every detail. On 27 April 1948, Hoover wrote two memoranda to Tolson and Nichols describing two conversations he had with

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391 Truman’s election remains to this day probably the biggest upset in the history of Presidential elections. On Truman’s upset see, for instance, Truman’s memoirs [1956] p.235 and Weiner pp.161-162.
Dewey. Hoover had given him suggestions on how to respond to a proposal by Stassen to outlaw the US Communist Party, in preparation for a debate between Dewey and Stassen in Oregon. Dewey was about to travel to Oregon and Hoover pleased Dewey by getting Nichols to fly that same night to “the [Governor’s] Mansion” in Albany to answer his questions.

Sullivan then described the Bureau’s support for Dewey in the campaign against Truman. The literature unanimously agrees that this occurred, but there is no primary evidence confirming this second part of Sullivan’s account, most likely because it was destroyed after Truman’s victory. After Dewey's victory in the primaries, Sullivan recalled, “the FBI helped Dewey during the campaign itself by giving him everything we had that could hurt Truman, thought there wasn’t much. We resurrected the president’s former association with Jim Prendergast (sic!) (...) and tried to create the impression that Truman was too ignorant to deal with the emerging Communist threat. We even prepared studies for Dewey which were released under his name, as if he and his staff had done the work. I worked on some of these projects myself. No one in the bureau gave Truman any chance of winning.”

Truman won the 1948 elections, despite the Bureau’s best efforts. Yet the failure of the FBI’s subversive attempt was neither the end of its fight against Truman nor of its existence as a political intelligence agency. After spending two weeks at home, in what his office called pneumonia, Hoover again supported Truman’s opponents, providing the backbone to what generally goes under the name of McCarthyism but would be more appropriately called

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393 Hoover’s memoranda are in NARA, RG65, UD 05-D Entry 14, Box 14, Hoover’s Official and Confidential Files, File 57, “Dewey, Governor Thomas”. They are also partially reproduced in Theoharis [1991] pp.216-218.  
395 Ibidem p.44.  
Hooverism\textsuperscript{397}. Truman considered firing Hoover for his insubordination, but decided not to, because firing such a powerful and popular figure would have damaged the Democratic Party’s prospects in the 1950 and 1952 elections\textsuperscript{398}.

\textit{Alternative Explanations}

My explanation of the FBI’s subversion in 1948 is that the Bureau was a political intelligence agency, poorly controlled by its principals, and that perceived the government as unwilling to adequately fight against the subversive threat. Once the 1948 elections offered the opportunity to remove the government, the FBI seized it promptly.

A first alternative explanation is that the perceived strength and imminence of the Communist threat led the FBI to subvert. The problem is that Hoover himself recognized that American Communists were stronger in the 1930s than in 1948\textsuperscript{399}, yet subversion occurred in 1948 but not before. Certainly the Cold War heightened the public perception of the Communist threat, yet Soviet support for US Communists was a constant in Hoover’s eyes. The strength and imminence of the Communist threat thus does not correlate with subversive attempts.

\textsuperscript{397}See Schrecker [1998] p.203: “had observers known in the 1950s what they have learned since the 1970s, when the Freedom of Information Act opened the Bureau’s files, ‘McCarthyism’ would probably have been called ‘Hooverism’.” See also Jeffreys-Jones [2007] p.155: “Ellen Schrecker has not been alone in suggesting that ‘Hooverism’ might be a better term for [McCarthyism]” and Sullivan (interviewed by Demaris [1975] p.166): “We were the ones who made the McCarthy hearings possible. We fed McCarthy all the material he was using.”

\textsuperscript{398}See the Do Not File memo from Tolson to Nichols, 13 July 1949, now in Nichols’ Official and Confidential Files, reproduced in Theoharis [1991] p.342. Other Presidents considered removing Hoover, but decided they could not. Johnson famously argued it was better to have Hoover “inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in.” Cited in The New York Times, 31 October 1971. Nixon similarly believed that Hoover “oughta resign” but wanted “to avoid the situation where he can leave with a blast (...). We may have on our hands here a man who will pull down the temple with him, including me.” From a conversation between Nixon and Attorney General John Mitchell, October 1971, cited in Summers [1993] p.9.

\textsuperscript{399}See Hoover [1969] p.28 and p.113.
Second, the logic of coup-proofing also does not explain why subversion occurred in 1948 but not in the 1930s. The FBI was the dominant domestic intelligence agency in both periods, but it faced a stronger rival in 1948, a year after the creation of the CIA, than in 1936.

Third, economic explanations also don’t explain why subversion occurred in 1948 and not during the Great Depression in the 1930s, when the economic crisis should have made subversion more likely.

The bureaucratic grievance explanation works better, but is not fully convincing. The FBI was very successful at expanding its turf and budget throughout the Roosevelt’s Administration, whereas Truman took a hostile view to the FBI’s requests from the very beginning. Bureaucratic grievances were most likely part of Hoover’s motivation for trying to remove Truman, but they cannot explain his attitude towards Roosevelt. Hoover never overcame his profound dislike for Roosevelt and even sought the opportunity to unseat him in the 1936 elections, soon after Roosevelt had allowed the FBI to fully return to the anti-subversive field. William Sullivan found Hoover’s attitude towards Roosevelt to be puzzling, precisely because Hoover continued to oppose Roosevelt despite the fact that “the FBI achieved its greatest growth during the Roosevelt years”400.

A more personal explanation, centered on Hoover’s ambitions, is more convincing. By not challenging Roosevelt and supporting Dewey, Hoover was acting opportunistically, bandwagoning with the candidate largely expected to win. If Sullivan’s account is correct, Hoover hoped to be nominated Attorney General by Dewey, while keeping the Bureau under control via his trusted aide Nichols. Hoover had had an additional reason for currying favor with Dewey. During Dewey’s previous presidential campaign in 1944, the FBI had gathered

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contradictory pieces of information on Dewey’s intent to fire Hoover if elected President. By helping Dewey get elected, Hoover was both earning his gratitude and collecting evidence, potentially usable for blackmail, of the less than orthodox means which Dewey had used to win the Presidency.

My explanation and this last one complement each other, but mine enjoys temporal and logical priority. Without the loose control exercised by the President and the Attorney General, in turn explained by the Bureau’s subversive priority, Hoover would not have been able to launch covert attacks against his principals, much less use those attacks to pursue his personal ambitions.

Conclusion

I now look at each one of my hypotheses and see how well they explained this case.

1. If an intelligence agency’s main enemies include a domestic subversive group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, intelligence will resemble the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. If they do not, the intelligence agency will likely resemble the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency. This hypothesis was confirmed. The Bureau of Investigation remained an apolitical law enforcement agency until the end of the war, when the fight against Communists and anarchists transformed it into a political intelligence agency. The attempt to turn it again into an apolitical

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law enforcement agency was only partially successful, as the Bureau’s director covertly continued to fight against subversion. With Roosevelt’s secret authorization to fight subversion in 1936, the Bureau shifted again in the direction of a political intelligence agency.

2. *The principals will exercise a high degree of control over a non-political intelligence agency. Their control over a political intelligence agency will be fragile: it will be strong as long as preferences converge and weak when they diverge.*

This hypothesis was also confirmed. Principals’ control was strong when the Bureau was an apolitical law enforcement agency from 1908 to 1917. When the Bureau became a political intelligence agency principals’ strong control lasted only as long as preferences converged. Control was weakened after 1924, when preferences diverged and principals tried to push the Bureau in an undesired direction, and it became even weaker after 1936.

3. *Non-political intelligence agencies will occasionally suffer from politicization and will not engage in subversion.*

The Bureau was an apolitical law enforcement agency for too short a time, from 1908 to 1917, for me to test this hypothesis.

4. *Political intelligence agencies will routinely manipulate intelligence for political goals. They will also engage in subversion when they perceive that the government is unwilling and/or incapable of adequately fighting intelligence’s subversive enemy and when they see the opportunity to install an alternative government.*
This hypothesis was also confirmed. The Bureau subverted in 1948, when it had both the motivation and the opportunity to do so. There is also some evidence, albeit not overwhelming, that the Bureau routinely manipulated intelligence for political goals in the early 1920s and after 1936.
Ch.5 The Establishment and Evolution of the Central Intelligence Agency

Introduction

The Central Intelligence Agency was established in the midst of the FBI’s battle against the Truman Administration. As the FBI’s political activism reached its peak with the attempt to remove Truman from the White House, the CIA was created by a bipartisan coalition as a politically neutral agency meant to operate only abroad. In the same country and roughly at the same time, a political intelligence agency engaged in subversion and a non-political intelligence agency was established. How can these radically different outcomes under the same circumstances be explained?

The short answer is that unlike the FBI, the CIA did not have, and has never had, as one of its priorities the fight against a strong domestic subversive threat. As summarized in Figure 5 at the end of this section, this chapter explains how and why the absence of such a subversive priority led the CIA to resemble the ideal type of the non-political intelligence agency.

The CIA constitutes the negative case-study in my analysis, the one in which subversion did not occur. The Agency occasionally suffered from what I call contingent politicization, but I do not study these episodes here because they have been thoroughly studied by other scholars. Instead, this chapter explains how the conditions which led to contingent politicization but not to subversion were established in the first place.

The next section offers a brief account of the origins and establishment of the CIA, recounting the vicissitudes of America’s foreign intelligence from before World War Two to
1947. The third sections explains who the CIA’s principals were and what priorities they intended the agency to have. The fourth section investigates whether the CIA embodied the two traits of a non-political intelligence agency, political neutrality and a sharp foreign-domestic divide. The fifth section looks at the degree of policymakers’ control over the CIA. The sixth section refutes Richard Nixon’s claim of having been subverted by the CIA in 1960 and then discusses alternative explanations as to why the CIA did not engage in subversion. The seventh section concludes by briefly assessing my theory’s performance.

Figure 5. The Central Intelligence Agency
The Origins of Central Intelligence

When World War Two broke out in Europe in September 1939, America did not have a foreign intelligence service to speak of. The intelligence community was a set of uncoordinated agencies, working under the State Department, the Army, the Navy and the Department of Justice\textsuperscript{402}. None of these departments viewed foreign intelligence as a priority. In 1929 Secretary of State Stimson had closed the State Department’s code-breaking Black Chamber arguing that “gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.”\textsuperscript{403} The collection of information was largely left in the hands of the regional desks, with wide lacunae and no coordination even within the Department\textsuperscript{404}. The Navy’s Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) relied on naval attachés as its chief sources of information, but instructed them to shun the use of “dubious methods” in collecting intelligence\textsuperscript{405}. Work in the Army’s Military Intelligence Division (MID, also referred to as G-2) was seen by ambitious officers as a career killer. MID itself argued that the Army failed to understand the importance of intelligence before World War II\textsuperscript{406}. As we have seen, Edgar Hoover’s Federal Bureau of Investigation viewed its primary mission in terms of the fight against domestic subversion and law enforcement rather than foreign intelligence collection.

Former Assistant Attorney General William Donovan was appalled by the state of US intelligence and pushed for the creation of a central coordinating system. Donovan, a World War I hero who had then joined the Republican Party and opposed the New Deal, was chosen by

\textsuperscript{403} The quote is from Stimson’s 1947 biography. For a full discussion, see Kruh [1988].
\textsuperscript{404} Troy [1981] pp.6-7.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibidem p.8.
\textsuperscript{406} Ibidem p.9.
Roosevelt as his envoy on two trips to Europe and the Middle East in 1940 and early in 1941, as part of Roosevelt’s strategy to open his administration to the internationalist wing of the Republican Party.

On 26 April 1941, after returning from his second trip, Donovan wrote to the Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, also a Republican working for a Democratic administration, drawing on the lessons he had learned from the British intelligence services\textsuperscript{407}. “Intelligence operations”, Donovan began, “should not be controlled by party exigencies”. America needed to set up a coordinator of all intelligence activities, “appointed by the President directly responsible to him and to no one else”, in “sole charge of intelligence work abroad”, coordinating the information collected by the military attachés and interpreting the information for the president\textsuperscript{408}.

On 18 June 1941 Roosevelt nominated Donovan Coordinator of Information, overcoming the objections of the military intelligence services\textsuperscript{409}. Donovan, with the crucial help of the British intelligence agent William Stephenson\textsuperscript{410}, quickly expanded his own organization, to the point of having more than 1,800 men less than a year later, dealing with research and analysis, intelligence collection, propaganda and sabotage operations\textsuperscript{411}.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 painfully displayed the inadequacy of US intelligence and the need for reform. America’s entrance into the war led the newly formed Joint Chiefs of Staff to demand that Donovan’s organization be placed under their control. In wartime, the Chiefs argued, it was inconceivable to have a civilian organization...
operating independently on the battlefront. Roosevelt accepted the Chiefs’ view and issued a Military Order on 13 June 1942, which transformed the Coordinator of Information into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)\textsuperscript{412}.

Now under the military, Donovan lost his previous ready access to the President but increased the pace of covert operations, from sabotage to training guerrillas, and the reach of his secret agents, who were nonetheless barred from operating in Latin America and in the Pacific theatre. Donovan’s position remained fragile, however. OSS was a wartime agency with no peacetime statutory basis. As the end of the war seemed in sight, a fierce battle over OSS’s future erupted.

On 18 November 1944 Donovan proposed a plan for a central intelligence service directly under the President, with an advisory board composed of the Secretaries of State, War and Navy. This service would have had “no police or law-enforcement functions either at home and abroad”. It would have coordinated the work of the intelligence community, collected, analyzed and disseminated information throughout the government, handled subversive operations abroad and conducted “such other functions and duties relating to intelligence as the President may from time to time direct.”\textsuperscript{413}

Donovan’s plan was very similar to what ultimately became the CIA. Initially, however, Donovan’s ideas encountered defeat. Roosevelt’s death on 12 April 1945 deprived Donovan of his most valuable asset in the bureaucratic fight\textsuperscript{414}. Opposed by the Army, the Navy, the State

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[412]{Reproduced in Troy [1981] p.427.}
\footnotetext[413]{Donovan’s plan is reproduced in Troy [1981] p.445.}
\footnotetext[414]{Roosevelt’s position on post-war intelligence remains an enigma. On one side Roosevelt gave access to Donovan and repeatedly expressed his support for OSS’s mission, to the point that Donovan himself believed that Roosevelt’s death had negatively sealed OSS’s fate. On the other side, a series of negative press reports on OSS in early 1945 were later described by the journalist who wrote them as based on leaks from Roosevelt’s personal}
Department, the FBI and the Bureau of the Budget, and with a President who understood little about intelligence and who was eager to dismantle wartime agencies, OSS was liquidated with a presidential directive on 20 September 1945. OSS’s Research and Analysis unit and its clandestine collection and counterintelligence branches, both much diminished in size, were relocated in the State Department and in the War Department respectively. OSS’s capacity to conduct subversive operations abroad was initially abandoned.

President Truman nonetheless believed that some form of coordination of the intelligence community was necessary. He first asked Secretary of State Byrnes to develop a plan. After some delay, the State Department proposed a complex coordinating-mechanism under the Secretary of State, but failed to convince Truman and his advisers. Truman preferred instead a plan developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs had now persuaded themselves of the need for a Central Intelligence Agency with a Director appointed by the President, but they put it firmly under a National Intelligence Authority composed of the Secretaries of State, War and Navy and a JCS representative.

Using the JCS plan as his blueprint, on 22 January 1946 Truman established the National Intelligence Authority. Serving this Authority was the newly created Director of Central

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419 An early version of this plan, JCS1181/5 of September 18, 1945, is reproduced in Troy [1981] p.459.
Intelligence (DCI), who in turn headed the Central Intelligence Group (CIG)\textsuperscript{420}. The DCI’s responsibilities were extensive, but the status as an independent agency of the CIG he headed was still in doubt\textsuperscript{421}. In its first meeting the National Intelligence Authority clarified that the CIG “shall be considered, organized and operated as a cooperative interdepartmental activity.”\textsuperscript{422}

The second Director of Central Intelligence, Lt. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, managed to expand his organization’s reach. Under Vandenberg’s tenure from June 1946 to May 1947, CIG gained an independent budget and workforce, absorbed the clandestine operatives which from OSS had been sent to the War Department and wrested control of Latin America away from the FBI. Vandenberg also pushed for a Congressional authorization, which transformed the Central Intelligence Group into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and gave it bureaucratic independence\textsuperscript{423}.

The CIA was established by the National Security Act of 1947\textsuperscript{424}. Intelligence was a minor portion of a bill which merged the Army and Navy Departments into the Department of Defense, created the National Security Council and established an independent Air Force. This was Congress’s first intervention in the debate over centralized intelligence, but it largely restated what had already been decided at the executive level. The intelligence portion of the

\[\textsuperscript{420}\] The directive is reproduced in Troy [1981] pp.464-465. The composition of the National Intelligence Authority was slightly different from what the JCS had proposed. The JCS representative was replaced by a personal representative of the President. See also Garthoff [2005] p.12.
\[\textsuperscript{421}\] The DCI was responsible for evaluating and disseminating national-level intelligence, for coordinating the national-level activities of the intelligence organizations within the three departments, for providing services of common concern best accomplished centrally and for fulfilling other unspecified duties as may be directed. The term “national-level” intelligence and activities was meant to exclude intelligence and activities that fell under the competence of the departments represented in the National Intelligence Authority. See especially Garthoff [2005] pp.12-13.
National Security Act merely transformed into law the presidential directive which had established CIG, spelling out that the Agency had no internal security functions (which was already stated in the original directive) and that the director could be both a civilian and a military\textsuperscript{425}.

The CIA’s functions were stated vaguely. There was no explicit mention of the CIA’s role in the clandestine collection of information nor in covert action. However, the CIA was assigned the duty “to perform such other functions and duties (…) as the National Security Council may from time to time direct”\textsuperscript{426}. Apart from some isolated cries on the creation of a Gestapo, Congressmen accepted the need for a centralized foreign intelligence service under the President, and made no formal provisions for their own oversight of the Agency, leaving it to informal agreements between Congressional leaders and the Agency itself\textsuperscript{427}.

\textbf{The CIA’s principals and their priorities}

Until 1947, the creation of a foreign intelligence service was a process confined within the executive branch. The main actors were the State Department, the Army, the Navy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Budget Bureau, the White House and, of course, William Donovan and the organizations under his command. The disputes among these organizations were fierce, yet they were bureaucratic rather than political. The creation of the CIA was in fact a remarkably

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Zegart [1999], pp.172-174 and 181-182, strongly argues that Congress’ contribution was minimal. Barrett [2005] most forcefully argues that Congress played a more important role in overseeing the early CIA than generally believed. Nonetheless, even he acknowledges that “the CIA figured little in the [Congressional] debate” in 1947, that the bill passed by Congress differed little from what the executive had already decided and that oversight was weak in the late 1940s and grew progressively stronger only in the 1950s. See pp.9-10, 22-24 and 459.
\item Reproduced in part in Troy [1981], pp.471-472.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
bipartisan process. It occurred under two Democratic Presidents, the last of which had dubious prospects for reelection. A number of Republican figures played a decisive role, and the bill establishing the CIA was approved by a Republican-controlled Congress.

William Donovan was a Republican throughout his entire life. He almost became Attorney General for the Republican Herbert Hoover in 1929, he unsuccessfully ran as the Republican candidate for governor of New York in 1932, he successfully argued a case against Roosevelt in the Supreme Court in 1937 and even after his experience as head of the OSS he considered running for a Senate seat for the Republican Party\textsuperscript{428}. His biggest supporter within Roosevelt’s cabinet was the Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who had been the Republican vice-presidential candidate in 1936.

The personnel selection was at times deliberately intended to appeal to both parties. For instance, the second Director of the Central Intelligence Group, Lt. Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, was chosen because he was the nephew of the powerful Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg, soon to be the head of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, whose support for eventual legislation to establish CIG was desired\textsuperscript{429}.

The National Security Act was passed by the first Republican-controlled Congress since 1932, the one Truman labeled as the “do-nothing Congress” in his 1948 campaign. Yet the bill establishing the CIA passed with remarkably little controversy in the summer of 1947. The Senate Armed Services Committee passed the bill unanimously, making only one minor change on the intelligence portion\textsuperscript{430}, and the Senate as whole approved it by voice vote with nearly no

\textsuperscript{430} Troy [1981] p.385. The change provided for the appointment of the DCI “from the armed services or from civilian life”, which was already implicit in the original proposal.
The CIA’s principals agreed that the Agency’s priority was going to be the fight against the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement. Indeed, this point was so obvious that it barely needed to be stated in public. Neither the National Security Act nor the Congressional debate explicitly mentioned the Soviet Union as the CIA’s main target. By the summer of 1947 it was widely acknowledged that the US and the Soviet Union had become fierce rivals. The initial hesitation of the Roosevelt Administration to target the Soviet Union was long gone. The CIA’s creation was part of the reorganization of the national security apparatus intended to shoulder America’s newly found responsibilities in what was starting to be known as the Cold War.

In secret documents, American policymakers were much more explicit concerning who their main target was. For instance, on 17 December 1947 the NSC instructed the CIA to conduct covert psychological operations because of “the vicious psychological efforts of the USSR, its satellite countries and Communist groups”. The first report which Truman asked the CIG to produce was entitled “Revised Soviet Tactics in International Affairs”, and the overwhelming

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431. Troy [1981] p.396. Only one Senator, Robertson of Wyoming, expressed his dissent from a bill which he thought was creating “a vast military empire”. He quickly realized the futility of his effort and gave up.
433. This should not surprise us. Even the Truman doctrine speech uses the word “Communism” or derivatives only once, and never mentions the Soviet Union. See the speech at http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandocument.html, accessed on 3 December 2013.
majority of the reports produced by the CIA in its early years dealt with the Soviet Union and the
international Communist movement\textsuperscript{436}.

More important for my theory is what was not included among the main enemies of the CIA and, for that matter, of its predecessors, the OSS and the CIG. Most of those who created these organizations did not believe that the US was facing a domestic subversive group which posed a significant threat of overthrowing the government. In his last years in office, Roosevelt never seems to have expressed the worry that a domestic group posed a threat of overthrowing the US government. Truman more explicitly said that he did not have such concerns. On 21 March 1947, just days after outlining his doctrine in front of Congress, Truman issued an Employee Loyalty Program against Communist infiltration in the government. Although it could have been expedient for him to inflate the Communist threat, Truman said: “I am not worried about the Communist Party taking over the government of the United States, but I am against a person, whose loyalty is not to the government of the United States, holding a government job.”\textsuperscript{437}

As we have seen in the chapter on the FBI, some in Congress and across the government’s bureaucracy, possibly even within the CIA, believed that the US Communist Party posed a significant subversive threat. Nonetheless, everyone in Washington agreed that it was not the CIA’s job to fight domestic subversion and that the CIA should not have operated domestically. In other words, regardless of whether they believed that a strong subversive threat existed, the CIA’s principals agreed that fighting domestic subversion was not part of the CIA’s tasks. As my theory predicts, having no subversive priority, the CIA resembled the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency.

\textsuperscript{436} See for instance the selection in Warren [1994] and in Monje [2008].
A non-political intelligence agency

Despite some instances of politicization, the CIA always proclaimed its political neutrality and largely acted accordingly. With one exception, it never operated domestically and has always been statutorily banned from doing so. It is an extreme case of a non-political intelligence agency.

The political neutrality of the agency was never a matter of contention and was stated from the very beginning. In his letter to Knox in April 1941, when he first expressed the desirability of a foreign intelligence service, Donovan’s first consideration was that “intelligence operations should not be controlled by party exigencies.”\(^\text{438}\) The point was taken for granted by all those who participated in the establishment of the CIA. Those who raised it, mainly but not exclusively by those few who opposed the CIA, often did so by expressing their opposition to the establishment of a Gestapo\(^\text{439}\). The Nazi secret police was seen as the embodiment of everything the CIA was not to be: it served the interests of a single party and it operated both at home and abroad.

Political neutrality has always been part of the CIA’s bureaucratic culture. To this day, the CIA’s standing rests on its political neutrality and on its capacity to objectively inform policymakers. The concept is generally expressed in terms of the preservation of the agency’s objectivity, which has to be defended from both political pressures and from bureaucratic interests. Objectivity was held in such high regard that when the CIG first had to define


\(^{439}\) The word “Gestapo” recurred frequently in the Congressional debate. Even before that, it was used by an anti-OSS press campaign, likely based on leaks from the FBI and from Army intelligence. See Troy [1981] pp.255-260, 391-395.
“strategic and national policy intelligence”, it included the specification that it “must be objective”.

The need to preserve the Agency’s objectivity led to a debate which goes on to this day on the proper distance between intelligence and policy and the proper balance between relevance and objectivity. In 1951, Sherman Kent, widely considered to be the founding father of the CIA’s analytical branch, wrote: “Intelligence must be close enough to policy, plans and operations to have the greatest amount of guidance, and must not be so close that it loses its objectivity and integrity of judgment.” To this day, analysts are instructed to “perform their work without regard to their private views and ‘call it as they see it’.” Their professional commitment must be the assessment of national security issues “without bias for or against the outcomes sought by the incumbent presidential administration.”

The same attachment to political neutrality is found among operations officers. On 7 April 1952, for instance, the deputy director for plans Frank Wisner lamented that a CIA front organization, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, wanted to take a position on McCarthyism. Wisner viewed it as a “serious mistake”, because it “injects us into an extremely hot American domestic political issue, and is sure to get us into trouble and to bring down on our heads criticism for interference in a matter that is none of our concern whatsoever.”

The CIA also embodied the second trait of the non-political intelligence agency, operating abroad but not at home. Virtually everyone agreed that the centralized intelligence

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442 Simon [2013], p.648.
443 Davis [2006] p.999.
agency was not supposed to play an internal security function. This point was often repeated in
the documents discussing a peacetime intelligence agency, becoming increasingly clear as the
war came to a close. Donovan’s letter to Knox in April 1941 proposed an agency in “charge of
intelligence work abroad”\footnote{Reproduced in Troy [1981] pp.417-418. Emphasis added.}. His plan of November 1944 specified that the agency “shall have
no police or law-enforcement functions, either at home or abroad”\footnote{Reproduced in Troy [1981] pp.445-447.}. Writing to the Director of
the Bureau of the Budget a month before OSS was liquidated, Donovan added that the agency he
proposed “should be prohibited from carrying on clandestine activities within the United States”
and that it should be authorized to conduct espionage, counterespionage and other special

Truman’s directive establishing the CIG specified that “no police, law enforcement or
internal security functions shall be exercised under this directive”, as did the JCS plan upon
which it was based\footnote{Reproduced in Troy [1981] pp.464-465 and 459-460.}. The initial version of the intelligence section of the National Security Act
merely referred to this directive, without making explicit the territorial limits on the CIA’s
operations. After several Congressmen questioned the strength of this implicit limitation, the
House thus decided to spell out what was called the anti-Gestapo provision, specifying that the
CIA had “no police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers or domestic security functions”. All but
subpoena were explicitly stated in Truman’s directive. By clarifying that the CIA was “strictly”
confined to “the field of secret foreign intelligence”, supporters of the bill were able to reassure
those who feared the creation of a Gestapo\footnote{Troy [1981] pp.393-397.}. 

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The CIA generally respected the divide between foreign and domestic operations, with a few significant exceptions. In accordance with my theory, these occurred when the Agency’s principals perceived a significant, if inflated, threat of the overthrow of the government by a domestic political group.

In 1967, President Johnson asked DCI Helms to find proof of what he believed was the connection between the anti-war protesters in America and foreign communists in Moscow and Beijing. When Helms reminded him that the CIA was barred from domestic spying, Johnson replied that he was “quite aware of that”, but, as he added later that year, he was “not going to let the Communists take this government and they’re doing it right now”\footnote{Cited in Weiner [2007] pp.285-287.}.

Complying with Johnson’s demand, but in violation of the law and of the CIA’s own charter, Helms began a domestic surveillance operation, codenamed Chaos. The CIA never found any evidence that the anti-war protesters “act[ed] under any direction other than their own”, and said this to an outraged Johnson\footnote{Ibidem.}.

Johnson’s successor, Richard Nixon, was also convinced of the existence of a world-wide communist conspiracy trying to overthrow the government. Three days into his presidency, Nixon asked the CIA to conduct a study of “communist factors in youth disturbance”. Helms struggled to convince that there was no communist conspiracy behind the anti-war movement and the student protests. Partly in a vain attempt to convince the President that there was no such conspiracy and partly under the precise instructions of Henry Kissinger, Helms extended

In accordance with my theory, the biggest violation of the ban on domestic activities occurred when two successive Presidents perceived that a domestic political subversive group with international support posed a plausible threat of overthrowing the government. The CIA reluctantly complied with the Presidents’ requests, and strived to convince its own principals that no such threat existed.

Was the CIA under its principals’ control?

Scholars and practitioners agree that the White House has exercised a high degree of control over the CIA.\footnote{See, among others, Ranelagh [1988] pp.599-600, Jeffreys-Jones [1989] p.208 and p.221, Andrew [1995] p.404, Barrett [2005] p.461, Bruneau and Boraz [2007] p.332, Weiner [2007] p.351 and Lundberg [2010] p.76.} This consensus is admittedly stronger among specialists of intelligence than among the general public. Most notoriously, in the mid-1970s the prevailing opinion was the opposite. The CIA was accused of being a subversive, out-of-control agency engaging in illegal operations. However, even in the mid-1970s those who investigated the CIA’s conduct concluded that it had been operating under the White House’s control.

In late 1974 the New York Times revealed that the CIA had been illegally engaging in large-scale domestic spying on anti-war protesters.\footnote{Hersh, Seymour “Huge C.I.A. Operation Reported in U.S. Against Antiwar Forces, Other Dissidents in Nixon Years”, \textit{The New York Times}, December 22, 1974.} As I’ve argued above, the Agency had been doing so under the instructions of two consecutive administrations. At the time, however,
the first reaction of many in Washington was to say that the CIA was out of control. The Senate and the House soon created two investigative committees, generally referred to as the Church and the Pike Committees, respectively. Before the first public hearing, the Democratic Senator Frank Church privately described the purpose of his committee in these words: “We must focus on abuses. That’s what this committee is for: to investigate wrongdoing. We need to begin hearings with something dramatic.” True to his word, during his first public hearing Church called the CIA a “rogue elephant rampaging out of control.” Church was planning to use the findings of his committee as a platform for his presidential candidacy, which he announced halfway through the investigation. He thus had all the incentives to overstate the CIA’s “out of control” behavior.

Unfortunately for his presidential aspirations, in the final report he was forced to admit that there was no such behavior: “The Committee found that in general the President has had, through the National Security Council, effective means for exerting broad policy control over at least two major clandestine activities – covert action and sensitive technical collection. (…) The Central Intelligence Agency, in broad terms, is not ‘out of control’.” The Church Committee concluded that “the CIA has not been free (…) to carry out covert action as it sees fit. (…) [O]n the whole, the Agency has been responsive to internal and external review and authorization requirements. (…) At the same time, the Committee notes that approval outside the Agency does not solve all problems since the NSC committees have approved (and in some cases initiated)
projects that involved highly improper practices or were inconsistent with declared foreign policies.\textsuperscript{460}

The Pike Committee followed a similar trajectory. Democratic Representative Otis Pike was initially convinced that the CIA was an out-of-control rogue elephant, as Church had described it, and his relationship with the CIA was rocky from the start\textsuperscript{461}. After their investigations, however, Pike and his colleagues came to the conclusion that “far from being out of control”, the CIA had been “utterly responsive to the instructions of the President and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs”\textsuperscript{462}. The Committee did not spare critiques in its judgments: it found that covert actions “were irregularly approved, sloppily implemented, and, at times, had been forced on a reluctant CIA by the President and his national security advisers.” Nonetheless, on the point of control Pike made a sharp turnaround, to the point that he publicly stated that “the CIA does not go galloping off conducting operations by itself (…). The major things which are done are not done unilaterally by the CIA without approval from higher up the line.”\textsuperscript{463}

In accordance with my theoretical expectations, the CIA was never out of control, and was instead responsive to policy-makers’ instructions.

\textbf{Did the CIA ever engage in subversion?}

All the available evidence points to the fact that the CIA has never engaged in subversion. The scholarly community, including those most critical towards the Agency, is

\textsuperscript{460} Ibidem p.447.
\textsuperscript{462} Cited in Andrew p.404 and in Haines [1998/1999].
\textsuperscript{463} Quoted in Haines [1998/1999].
unanimous in this regard. Indeed, most scholars don’t even bother addressing the question, given how obvious it seems.

Only once did a CIA’s principal accuse the Agency of having conspired against him. Richard Nixon believed throughout his political career that the CIA had been “out to get him”\(^\text{464}\). Nixon’s mistrust for what he called “those clowns out there at Langley”\(^\text{465}\) dated at least from the 1960 presidential campaign. He believed that the CIA had conspired to cause his defeat against Kennedy. Nixon’s belief was based on a briefing by DCI Allen Dulles to the then-presidential candidate Kennedy in August 1960. In this briefing, Dulles did not respond to Kennedy’s question on America’s standing “in the missile race”, arguing that the Defense Department “was the competent authority on this question.”\(^\text{466}\) Kennedy continued to speak of the missile gap on his campaign, ultimately winning the election. Nixon was informed of this briefing and viewed Dulles’ avoidance of the answer as a deliberate withholding of information aimed at causing his own defeat\(^\text{467}\).

Nixon’s accusation is universally dismissed\(^\text{468}\). Dulles’s avoidance of Kennedy’s question can be easily explained as the desire to avoid a politically controversial topic. In any case, inferring from it that the CIA was trying to cause Nixon’s defeat seems absurd. Scholars agree that Nixon’s belief was indeed absurd and some explain it as the result of his pathologically conspiratorial mindset\(^\text{469}\). A less pathological but similarly speculative explanation is that Nixon’s involvement in the FBI’s attempt to remove Truman from office in 1948 induced him to

\(^{467}\) Ibidem.
\(^{469}\) Andrew [1995] p.386.
believe that US intelligence agencies were inclined to intervene in electoral campaigns. If the FBI did so, why couldn’t the “Ivy League liberals” at CIA do the same⁴⁷⁰?

**Alternative Explanations**

My own explanation for this absence of subversion is that the CIA was a politically neutral intelligence agency, banned from operating domestically and under the control of policymakers in the White House. It is impossible to fully process-trace the lack of subversive activities by the CIA because, of course, there is no process to trace. The argument thus relies on the features of the CIA which, from its establishment, led it to be immune from the problem of subversion.

The alternative explanations I identified also predict that the CIA should not have engaged in subversion. First, the US has not faced an imminent threat of revolution since the CIA’s establishment. Second, according to the logic of coup proofing, the CIA is unlikely to subvert because it is just one of many intelligence agencies within the intelligence community. Despite its central position, the CIA has always struggled to coordinate the rest of the American intelligence community. The coordination that the CIA could not achieve over, let’s say, intelligence analysis, would have been even harder to achieve for a successful subversive attempt. Third, subversion is less likely to occur in countries with a high GDP per capita, and the US has of course been one of the wealthiest countries on Earth throughout the CIA’s existence. Fourth, the grievance model predicts that the Agency should have been more likely to subvert when its budget or turf were threatened. Although the CIA did go through some painful cuts,

especially late in the Nixon Administration and after the Cold War, the overall trend has been one of budget increases. Finally, the American presidential system makes it very hard to remove an incumbent administration, reducing the chances of subversion.

The lack of subversion by the CIA would thus seem to be overdetermined, and therefore not a probing test for my theory. However, in the same apparently overdetermined circumstances the FBI engaged in subversion. Under very similar conditions, an agency that was initially designed to fight a significant subversive threat behaved subversively, whereas its non-political counterpart did not.

**Conclusion**

I now look at each one of my hypotheses and see how well they explained this case.

5. *If an intelligence agency’s main enemies include a domestic subversive group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, intelligence will resemble the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. If they do not, the intelligence agency will likely resemble the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency.*

This hypothesis was confirmed. The CIA has never had a strong domestic subversive group as one of its priorities and it closely resembled a non-political intelligence agency.

6. *The principals will exercise a high degree of control over a non-political intelligence agency. Their control over a political intelligence agency will be*
fragile: it will be strong as long as preferences converge and weak when they diverge.

This hypothesis was also confirmed. As even the Congressional investigative committees had to recognize, the White House’s control over the CIA was strong overall and the CIA has been responsive to its principals’ orders.

7. Non-political intelligence agencies will occasionally suffer from politicization and will not engage in subversion.

This hypothesis was also confirmed in full. As shown by a rich literature, the CIA occasionally politicized intelligence, but it never attempted to remove its own government, despite Nixon’s unfounded claims to the contrary.

8. Political intelligence agencies will routinely manipulate intelligence for political goals. They will also engage in subversion when they perceive that the government is unwilling and/or incapable of adequately fighting intelligence’s subversive enemy and when they see the opportunity to install an alternative government.

Because the CIA has always been a non-political intelligence agency, this hypothesis could not be tested.
Ch. 6 Italian Military Intelligence and Subversion from World War II to 1964

Introduction

From 1943 to the 1980s the main enemy of Italy’s military intelligence agency was the Italian Communist Party. As my theory predicts and as summarized in Figure 6 at the end of this section, Italian military intelligence closely resembled the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. It was not politically neutral and it operated both at home and abroad. Its principals, both domestic and foreign, poorly controlled it, as the agency chose whom to obey and when. Lastly, Italy’s military intelligence engaged in subversion at least twice. In 1960, it helped remove the government of the Christian Democratic Fernando Tambroni, whose reliance on the Parliamentary support of the extreme right was polarizing the country and unintentionally strengthening the Communist Party. In 1964, the same officer who had removed Tambroni threatened to overthrow the first government which included the Socialist Party, inducing the government to drastically curtail its leftist reform proposals.

The period after 1964, especially from 1969 to the early 1980s, is the one that is most often characterized by out-of-control intelligence agencies, repeatedly plotting coups and planning terrorist attacks. The behavior of Italy’s intelligence agencies is generally referred to as “the strategy of tension”, in which subversive plots and terrorist attacks were intended to scare the population away from the leftist parties\textsuperscript{471}. Even though the later period would have been an

\textsuperscript{471} See, among others, De Lutiis [2010], Pacini [2010], Franzinelli [2008], Wilan [2002] and Ganser [2005]. These analyses are frequently unreliable, yet even CIA analysts in a series of papers written in 1983 on right-wing
easier and more extreme case for my theory, my analysis stops at 1964. In part this is because the
chapter is already rather long as it is. More importantly, this allows me to study the re-
establishment of the military intelligence service during and after World War Two, and thus
understand how and why the bases for a political intelligence agency were set. Lastly, the choice
was dictated by the availability of sources. To follow the history of the Italian secret services
beyond 1964 would have meant embarking on a perilous trip through hardly accessible court
documents, repeated attempts at disinformation and murky links between the intelligence
services and extremist groups on both the right and left.

My reconstruction of the events up to 1964 challenges some long standing interpretations
on both sides of the spectrum, and in doing so it sheds some light on the events which followed.
Scholars especially on the left have repeatedly argued that the Italian intelligence services were
little more than servants of their American counterparts and that American control over them was
all but total. Italian intelligence services were strongly right-wing, thinly disguising their fascist
sympathies, and they ostracized everything leftist, whether it was the Communist Party or the
entrance of the Socialist Party in the government. According to this interpretation, even when
intelligence acted against the Italian government’s wishes, it did so not because it was “deviant”
but because it followed the orders of its patrons across the Atlantic, to whom it owed its primary
loyalty.\textsuperscript{472} Although the American and, less so, the British governments exercised a strong
influence over the creation and evolution of Italy’s military intelligence agency, I argue that the
agency was not under the control of any of its principals and that it even successfully deceived

\textsuperscript{472} This interpretation, still the most frequent one in the literature, is found amongst others in De Felice [1989],
counterparts has been restated more recently by Bisignani and Madron [2013] pp.187-193 and 204-208 and by
Mazarinus [2014].
the American government over its subversive intent in 1964. Furthermore, the agency actively promoted the participation of the Socialist Party in government from roughly 1960 to late 1963. On the opposite side of the spectrum we find those who bemoan the tendency of their colleagues to see conspiracies everywhere. This literature lumps together in an undistinguished cauldron implausible conspiracy theories with well documented episodes of subversion, undermining the credibility of both. Against this strand of the literature I argue that Italy’s military intelligence engaged in subversion twice in less than twenty years.

The unfamiliar reader is likely to lose himself in the maze of Italian politics. I thus begin by providing a very brief historical account of Italian political and electoral history from 1943 to 1964. The second section follows the evolution of Italy’s military intelligence from 1943 to 1949, focusing on the role and priorities of its principals, both foreign and domestic, and on Italian intelligence’s resemblance to the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. The third section sketches the history of the agency in the 1950s and shows how the control exercised by its principals was already weak then. The fourth section studies the episode of subversion in the summer of 1960 and then tracks the agency’s support for the center-left throughout the end of 1963. The fifth section studies the most famous episode of subversion, the so-called Piano Solo in the summer of 1964. The last section concludes by assessing the theory’s performance.

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473 See Mieli [2004a and 2004b], Teodori and Bordin [2014], pp.122-131, especially p.125 and p.130, and Sabbatucci [1999], especially pp.204-206. Both Teodori and Bordin and Sabbatucci acknowledge that there was a threat in the summer of 1964, as I argue, but then call it “an imaginary coup” (Teodori and Bordin [2014] p.130) because of its supposed infeasibility.
Figure 6. Italian military intelligence, 1943-1964

Italian political history at a glance, 1943-1964

On 8 September 1943 the Italian military government of Marshall Pietro Badoglio, under the authority of the King Victor Emmanuel III, announced its surrender to the Allies. The Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini had been removed as head of the government on 25 July, and then arrested by order of the King himself. As the surrender was being communicated via radio, the King and the government fled from Rome, about to be overrun by the German troops, and found refuge in Southern Italy under British and American protection.
Italy’s war on Germany’s side ended in defeat, but a new war, on the Allies’ side, had already begun. On 29 September 1943, Marshall Badoglio and General Eisenhower signed the so-called Long Armistice, which reaffirmed Italy’s unconditional surrender and placed the entire Italian government under the control of British and American forces.474

In June 1944 the Italian government was again in the hands of a civilian, supported by a coalition of all major anti-fascist parties, including the Italian Communist and Socialist parties. This large coalition governed for two years after the war ended in April 1945, guiding the country through the establishment of the Italian Republic in June 1946. In May 1947 Prime Minister and Christian Democratic leader Alcide De Gasperi chose to form a new governing coalition, excluding the Communist and Socialist Parties. Italian voters confirmed De Gasperi’s choice in the Parliamentary elections in April 1948. The Christian Democracy won 48.5% of the votes and an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, far ahead of the 31% obtained by the Popular Front formed by the Communist and Socialist parties. Despite his absolute majority, De Gasperi chose to govern in a coalition with the small Republican, Social Democratic and Liberal parties, initiating a formula which, with minor modifications, continued for fifteen years. In 1949, De Gasperi’s government joined the Atlantic Alliance, despite the strong opposition of the leftist parties and of parts of his own coalition.

The next elections in 1953 inaugurated a period of slow but steady polarization of the electorate, which continued despite more than a decade of rapid economic growth until the mid-1960s. The Communist and Socialist parties increased their combined vote share to slightly over a third of the electorate, the right-wing monarchist and neofascist parties nearly tripled the votes

474 See article 22 of the Armistice, which established that “The Italian Government (...) will carry out promptly and efficiently all orders given by the United Nations.” The English text of the armistice is reproduced by the Avalon Project at Yale University, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/italy03.asp, accessed on 19 May 2014.
they had obtained in 1948 to approximately 13%, whereas the Christian Democracy fell from
48.5% to 40% of the votes\textsuperscript{475}. As the centrist governing parties lost ground, the possibility of
splitting the Socialist and Communist parties and enlarging the governing majority to the
Socialists became more concrete\textsuperscript{476}.

The 1958 elections strengthened the parties favorable to this strategy, referred to as “the
opening to the left”. The Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party made small gains in the
polls, the Communist Party and the small centrist parties remained at roughly the same level of
consent and the extreme right-wing parties fell below 10%. With the Socialist Party
progressively distancing itself from the Communists, especially after the latter’s support for the
suppression of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956, the time seemed ripe for the “opening to the left”.

Several attempts to form a government not opposed by the Socialist Party failed, inducing
the Christian Democrat Fernando Tambroni to seek the Parliamentary support of the extreme
right in 1960. Tambroni soon had to resign amid strong popular protests, finally enabling the
creation of a series of governments supported externally by the Socialist Party.

The 1963 elections marked another weakening of the centrist parties and a strengthening
of the extreme left. The Christian Democracy declined from 42% to 38%, whereas the Socialist
Party roughly maintained its vote share. The real winners of the election seemed to be the
opponents of the opening to the left, with the Communist Party climbing over 25% and the small
Liberal Party, the most right-wing among the governing parties, nearly doubling its votes from
3.7% to 7%. Ironically, the increase in the vote share of the parties opposed to the opening to the
left made the Socialist participation in the government nearly inevitable. As the parties on the

\textsuperscript{475} All the vote shares are taken from Nuti \cite{1999} and refer to the Chamber of Deputies.
\textsuperscript{476} See Nuti \cite{1999} p.30.
extremes opposed to the center-left kept growing, so did the need to include the Socialists in government. In December 1963, the first so-called organic center-left government took office, with the Christian Democratic leader Aldo Moro as Prime Minister and the Socialist leader Pietro Nenni as his deputy.

The Reestablishment of Italy’s Military Intelligence, 1943-1949

From 1943 to 1945

The reestablishment of Italy’s military intelligence took place in three stages from 1943 to 1949. The first stage began on 1 October 1943, when the Italian government, under the control of the Allies, established the Information Service of the Supreme Command, and ended with the Service’s disbandment at the end of 1945.

Throughout this period, which largely coincided with the end of the war, all intelligence operations required prior approval by the Allied commanders and the information the services gathered was fed into the Allied chain of command. One of the conditions of the armistice was that the Italian government agreed to provide the Allies with all the information they required, without destroying or hiding any document or archive. The archives of the Italian intelligence services, both military and civilian, were placed under British and American control. The

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477 The Service’s name was then changed in June 1944 to Servizio Informazioni Militare (SIM, Military Information Service). Despite its name, SIM’s power did not reach beyond the Army and it was never capable of coordinating the activities of the information services of the Navy and of the Air Force, which were also reestablished soon after the Armistice. See Viviani [1992] p.275 and De Lutiis [2010] p.22. Pasqualini [2007] p.240 predates the creation of the Service to mid-September.

478 This was the provision of article 10 and of article 35 of the Long Armistice.

479 British and American officials continued to access these archives even after the war was over. For the British Security Service’s access to the Italian archives in 1945-1946, see the files at the British National Archives.
British reportedly even chose the head of Italy’s Information Service, Col. Pompeo Agrifoglio. In sum, the British and the Americans must be considered amongst the principals of Italy’s military intelligence, and at least at this stage they were in a more prominent position that the Italian government itself.

The priorities of Italy’s military intelligence were twofold. The first one was the fight against Nazi Germany, its intelligence service and its remaining Fascist allies. The second one was to control the armed Resistance groups fighting against Germans and Fascists in Northern Italy. This second priority came naturally to the conservative monarchists who formed the overwhelming majority of Italy’s military intelligence officers. After the Armistice these officers had chosen to fight under the King rather than under Mussolini and his German ally. They looked warily upon the growing strength of leftist and especially Communist groups amongst the Resistance, even though they proved willing to collaborate with Communist partisans throughout the war to get rid of the common enemy.

Italian intelligence’s anti-leftist priorities thus remained roughly the same as what they had been under Fascism. Virtually all of the Italian military intelligence officers had made their careers under Fascism and had long identified Communists, and more generally leftists, as enemies. With the Communists’ strength reaching unprecedented heights in terms of military

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480 See the war memoirs of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agent Peter Tompkins [2005] p.396. Tompkins cites no source for this information, but given his role in the OSS it is plausible that he had direct knowledge of it.


482 There is a widespread consensus in the literature on what the intelligence service’s priorities were. See, for instance, Viviani [1986] p.280, Pasqualini [2007] pp.246-248 and Colonna Villasi [2013] p.70.

483 There is widespread consensus on this point. See, amongst others, Del Pero [2001] p.1328, note 56, and De Lutii p.34.
force and popular support, it was natural for many of them to engage in a renewed struggle against leftist subversives.

Despite the solid tools of control in British and American hands, the relationship between the Italian and the Allied intelligence services during the war was not free of tensions\textsuperscript{484}. British and American military officers mistrusted their Italian colleagues, against whom they had just stopped fighting\textsuperscript{485}. More importantly, the priorities and the political leanings of Italian military intelligence officers at least initially did not coincide with American policy guidelines. Whereas the British government favored the preservation of the Italian monarchy and quickly identified the Communists and their Soviet backers as a threat which needed to be contained\textsuperscript{486}, the American government was initially more concerned with maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union and was more skeptical about preserving the Italian monarchy. At times, OSS agents enthusiastically built liaisons with Italian communist partisans\textsuperscript{487}. Italian intelligence officers looked warily at this American policy and tried to convince their counterparts of the danger coming from the left, but American officers often dismissed these warnings as propaganda coming from a monarchist and anti-Soviet intelligence agency\textsuperscript{488}.

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{484} In the allusive but often ill-specified prose of Ambrogio Viviani [1986] p.276, the former head of Italian counterintelligence in the early 1970s, there were “obvious and noticeable difficulties”, especially right after the Armistice and especially with the Office of Strategic Services. Viviani does not cite any sources in his entire history of the Italian secret services, other than a bibliography at the end. His work is nonetheless generally held in high regard by intelligence specialists in Italy. Given his own career in military intelligence, it stands to reason that he had access to privileged sources, although I cannot say when he used them.


\textsuperscript{486} In May 1944, for instance, the British Foreign Office listed the need to keep Communism in check as the most important British objective in Italy, even more important than mobilizing Italy’s resources to fight the Germans. See the official history of the Special Operations Executive in Italy by Stafford [2011] p.234. Stafford takes his information from a Foreign Office document of 11 May 1944. See also p.259.

\textsuperscript{487} For a good overview of the differences between British and US policies and how they reflected on their secret services see the memoirs of OSS agent Max Corvo [2005] pp.146-150.

\textsuperscript{488} For instance, in late February 1945 the head of American counterintelligence in Italy, James Jesus Angleton, was reprimanded by his superiors in Washington for having forwarded reports from a source in the Italian naval intelligence on the threat of a Soviet-backed Communist insurgency. See Holzman [2008], ch.4 and especially

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OSS officers such as the head of counterintelligence in Italy James Jesus Angleton understood that the political biases of Italian intelligence officers regularly led them to manipulate intelligence for political purposes. On 6 November 1945 Angleton wrote to his desk chief in Washington that “[t]he [Italian intelligence] services have used every event, incident to the Italian Revolution, as propaganda material to indicate Russia’s subversive intentions of preventing the reestablishment of ‘law’, ‘order’, and democracy in Italy. At no time have the various items of intelligence (when submitted to the test) been proven to be other than consciously composed for the purposes of provocation.”

The original reports by Italian intelligence and the information on which they were based are not available in the archives, thus I cannot directly verify whether they were indeed manipulated and politicized, much less reconstruct the mechanism which led to them. If US intelligence agents were correct, as early as 1945 Italian military intelligence was engaging in what I call structural politicization, routinely manipulating intelligence to support its political goals. This corresponds to my theoretical expectations for an intelligence agency which had as one of its priorities the fight against a strong subversive movement.

*From 1945 to 1948*

Italian military intelligence was struck by a major scandal in the fall of 1944, when the former head of military counterespionage from 1936 to 1941 denounced the acts committed by

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the service during his tenure. The government, which at this point included the Communist and Socialist parties, officially disbanded the Military Information Service in October 1944, but the service continued to operate under a different name until the last day of 1945.

Thus began the second stage of the post-war reestablishment of Italian military intelligence. The information services of each armed force survived, albeit in an institutional limbo which lasted until 1949, when the services were unified and the third stage began. Some scholars speak of a vacancy of Italy’s military intelligence during this period, although it is probably more correct to speak of a continuing disarray of Italian intelligence.

During this period of disarray, American and British officers discussed what to do of Italy’s military intelligence: whether to disband it altogether and, if not, how to reform it. The documents that I was able to access concern the reorganization of Italy’s army intelligence, the most important amongst the three intelligence services of the armed forces. This debate lasted more than a year and it pitted against each other those officers who wanted to abolish Italy’s Army intelligence and those who, despite their misgivings, wanted to maintain them as a bulwark against internal unrest.

The Allied officers who favored the abolition of Italy’s military intelligence did so for two main reasons. First, Italy’s military intelligence was not politically neutral, but largely composed of right-wing conservative monarchists. Second, there was no distinction between

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491 See De Lutiis [2010] pp.25-26 and p.509 note 10. De Lutiis takes his information from an internal military document of January 1945, which I have been unable to access.
492 De Lutiis [2010] pp.23-26 speaks of a total vacancy of Italy’s information services and says that in this period Italy was in the hands of American intelligence, even more than during the war.
493 All the documents in this section are in WO204/12385, “Reorganization of the 808th CS [Italian Counter-espionage] Battalion”, BNA. These documents were first found and discussed by Pasqualini [2007] pp. 254-258 and [2011], pp.17-18.
civil and military intelligence, meaning that the Italian military had a de facto secret police in its counterintelligence service. They argued that Italian military intelligence was “simply an outgrowth of the necessity of the previous regime to perpetuate itself by spying, intimidation and force” and that it had long played “a predominant Political rather than Military role.” It had to “be abolished and replaced by an intelligence organisation to serve the State and uncontaminated by allegiance to any particular faction.” Providing further evidence of structural politicization, these officers noted that “[a] very large number of the reports and investigations into subversive activities carried out by the Italian intelligence service reveal a general right-wing bias.”

These concerns with the political nature of Italy’s Army intelligence and with its dual civil and military role were largely shared by those who opposed its abolition. They argued that the dual civil and military security function played by the counterintelligence battalion of Italy’s constabulary force, the Carabinieri, “was unsound” and that it was “contrary to American and British principles in that the Army has a secret police and informant system. However, it is consonant with the Italian system of a peacetime Carabinieri assuming a military police function during war time. The Italian system cannot be abruptly changed without a certain stoppage of coverage for a considerable time.”

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496 Memorandum by Maj. Gen. Airey, G-2 (US Army Intelligence) to the Allied Forces Head Quarters on 12 July 1945. In this memo, Airey also proposed to abolish the Carabinieri “whose unreliability and corruptibility have been amply demonstrated throughout the country”.
497 Memorandum by Lt. Col. Heard, Allied Force Headquarters, for the Deputy Chief of Staff of G-2, 4 August 1945.
internal security situation”, argued another G-2 officer, “(...)this is not the moment to disband this effective organization for such vague reasons as, ‘tainted with Fascism’, ‘Monarchist’, ‘Rightist’.”

In sum, both proponents and opponents of the abolition of Italy’s military intelligence agreed on the undesirability in principle of a military intelligence agency which was not politically neutral and which had no division between police and military intelligence. All these officers viewed as desirable to organize Italy’s military intelligence along the traits of what I call a non-political intelligence agency. The disagreement arose over whether or not it was expedient to dismantle such an intelligence agency without having a clear replacement, especially given Italy’s internal turmoil and threat of subversion from the left, which Italy’s military intelligence agency was meant to fight.

British and American officers ultimately reached a compromise solution. Operational allied control over Italy’s counterespionage units was prolonged, in the belief that by exercising “close control and supervision” the Allied could “insure that IAI [Italian Army Intelligence] continues to function in the best interests of the Allies and of Italy, rather than any political party.” At the same time, Italy’s military intelligence was prohibited from conducting espionage operations abroad and severely limited in terms of personnel.

Despite the decisive role which British and American officers played in recreating Italy’s military intelligence, they understood the limitations of the tools they could use to monitor the organization once it was no longer formally under their control. Italy’s military intelligence

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499 Undated memo by Col. Nichols for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2. The memo was most likely written in August-September 1945.
501 Memorandum by Smith on 12 June 1946.
officers were “certainly anti-Communist, and if only for this reason, favour the present occupying powers in Italy. As regards, communism, reports have been exaggerated or unfounded, and it was formerly considered that a definite attempt to involve the Allies in opposition to Left-wing politics was the reason.”\textsuperscript{502} This cooperation, however, was considered fragile. “It is generally considered that CS [Italy’s counter-espionage] is co-operating loyally because the security interests of the Italians coincide at present with those of the Allies (...) [and] because the threat of disorder comes chiefly from the extreme left (...). [It is] doubtful whether co-operation would be so satisfactory were any threat to security to develop from the extreme right.”\textsuperscript{503} American and British intelligence officers understood the fragility of control based on political and ideological inclinations, as well as the tendency of a political intelligence agency to politicize its estimates.

\textit{The establishment of a unified military intelligence service in 1949}

The period of disarray of Italy’s military intelligence ended with the creation of a unified military intelligence service in the spring of 1949. By then, the Christian Democrats had obtained an absolute majority of Parliamentary seats in the 1948 elections and formed an anti-Communist government which included the small Republican, Social Democratic and Liberal parties. Less than a year later, Italy became a founding member of the Northern Atlantic Alliance (NATO).

The new government reorganized its entire intelligence community. In October 1948 the Ministry of the Interior created the \textit{Ufficio Affari Riservati} (UAARR, Office of Reserved

\textsuperscript{502} Memorandum from an unnamed officer of XIII corps to the Assistant Chief of Staff of G-2, 12 January 1946.
\textsuperscript{503} This report has no author, no addressee and no date, other than a hand written one of 12 February 1946. It was most likely written within G-2 at the Allied Headquarters.
Affairs). UAARR’s main priority was the fight against Communists and leftist parties in general, and its personnel was mainly composed of former officers of the Fascist interior security service, OVRA\textsuperscript{504}. Although I do not deal with UAARR in any detail here, its characteristics as well as its behavior fit well with my theoretical framework\textsuperscript{505}.

The Defense Ministry soon followed suit. With two internal directives in late March and early September 1949, the Minister of Defense Randolfo Pacciardi, a leader of the small Republican Party, established the Information Service of the Armed Forces (\textit{Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate} or SIFAR\textsuperscript{506}). Pacciardi’s directive merged the intelligence branches of the military services into one organization under the control of the Defense Minister.

Scholars have long considered SIFAR to have been an American creation\textsuperscript{507}. The literature agrees that it was no coincidence that SIFAR was established at the same time as the Atlantic Alliance, of which SIFAR was from the beginning an integral part\textsuperscript{508}. Even though the

\textsuperscript{504} See Pacini [2010] pp.35-38, Pasqualini [2011] pp.26-27 and De Lutiis [2010] pp.48-50. Pacini cites a document of 23 January 1950 by the military intelligence service which mentions that the “political program [of the most important sections of UAARR] is of an anticommunist character” and that “the majority of the functionaries and officers come from the ranks of OVRA”. The document is in the acts of the judiciary proceedings 91/97, tribunal of Brescia.

\textsuperscript{505} The most recent and complete historical account of the UAARR is Pacini [2010].

\textsuperscript{506} The initial acronym, SIFA, was soon changed to SIFAR. Viviani [1986] p.328 says that the change in acronym occurred on September 1, 1949, whereas in an official publication Pasqualini [2007] says that it occurred on 9 January 1951. Pasqualini [2007] is probably correct, but the disagreement over something as basic as the name is indicative of how little we know about Italian intelligence. For simplicity, I will always use SIFAR.

\textsuperscript{507} See Flamigni [2004] p.8, De Lutiis [2010] p.xvi and p.502 note 36, Faenza [1978] p.312, Willan [2002] p.16, Coglitore and Scarso [1992] pp.15-16 and Del Pero [2001] p.1309. Del Pero mentions that the Italian intelligence services “were reorganized with the help of James Jesus Angleton” but does not cite a precise source for this information. It is more than plausible that Angleton, who had long standing ties to Italy and its intelligence services, played an important in the creation of SIFAR, but until more documents are declassified we are forced to rely on speculation.

evidence in this regard is still classified, it is highly likely that membership in NATO gave an additional reason for SIFAR to pursue its anticommunist priorities.\(^{509}\)

There are other reasons to consider the American government among SIFAR’s principals, together with the anti-Communist Italian government. The US government played an important role in the selection of Italian intelligence officers. An office staffed by NATO personnel called the *Ufficio Sicurezza Patto Atlantico* (Office for the Security of the Atlantic Pact) operated side by side with SIFAR and had the crucial task of deciding who would receive a security clearance, thus subjecting Italian intelligence agents to NATO vetting.\(^{510}\) It was also common practice for high ranking military and intelligence officers to require American approval before being nominated or removed.\(^{511}\)

Italian and American government officials did not always see eye to eye though. The evidence is scarce, yet a CIA analysis in June 1949 expressed several concerns about SIFAR’s creation. CIA analysts stated that “general apprehension is felt less control of counter-espionage by the Carabinieri could result, as under Fascism, in the subversion of the military to political power and that intelligence services played an important role in this fight. On NATO’s secret protocols and the likely consequences they had on Italy’s military intelligence, see De Lutiis [2010] pp.44-45 and 147-155, Ganser [2005] p.66, Wilan [2002] p.33-34 and, more cryptically, Viviani [1986] p.330.\(^{510}\)

\(^{509}\) I refer to the so-called NATO’s secret protocols. Most scholars agree that they exist and that they were what De Gaulle had in mind when he denounced NATO as an infringement of sovereignty and pulled France out of NATO’s integrated military command in 1966. We do not know what these protocols include, of course, but it seems plausible that they included a commitment to prevent subversive forces aligned with Moscow from coming to power and that intelligence services played an important role in this fight. On NATO’s secret protocols and the likely consequences they had on Italy’s military intelligence, see De Lutiis [2010] pp.44-45 and 147-155, Ganser [2005] p.66, Wilan [2002] p.33-34 and, more cryptically, Viviani [1986] p.330.\(^{510}\)

\(^{510}\) General Giovanni De Lorenzo testified in this regard in front of the Parliamentary inquiry commission, see the minority report reproduced in Flamigni [2005] p.84 and p.227-228.

\(^{511}\) For instance, some scholars claim that General Giovanni De Lorenzo was named head of SIFAR in 1955 under pressure from US Ambassador Claire Booth Luce, who in turn was pressured by the CIA agent Carmel Otffie. Faenza [1978] p.312 was the first to make this claim but he does not tell us where he found this information, something which he does rather frequently. This has not prevented several other scholars, such as Flamigni [2005] p.5 and De Lutiis [2010] p.61, from following his account. Still, it does seem plausible that the American ambassador had a say in the assignments of such important posts (Ilari [1994] p.91 also finds this likely). This plausibility is strengthened by how De Lorenzo’s career came to an end. Before firing him from the head of the Army in 1967, the Minister of Defense and the Joint Chief of Staff travelled to Washington to obtain the approval of US military circles. Franzinelli [2010] pp.356-360 reproduces a note by De Lorenzo himself, claiming as much.
ends, and to an undue concentration of power in the Defense Ministry.” Defense Minister Pacciardi was pushing vigorously against the opposition to unification by the armed services and by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, arousing “suspicion of the ultimate designs of the Pacciardi group.” Lastly, the CIA noted that “one purpose of the unification may be to eliminate penetration made by the UK and the US into the Italian intelligence services.”

The apprehension and suspicion discussed by the CIA’s analysis should be attributed to the CIA’s Italian interlocutors, rather than to the CIA itself. Nonetheless, the attempt to reduce American and British penetration of Italian intelligence, which had been extensive in the aftermath of the war, shows that the interpretation of SIFAR as an American creation is too simplistic. SIFAR was instead the result of the extensive collaboration but also competition between its principals, the Italian and the American governments. The evidence is too scarce for me to reconstruct that process, but what we have is enough to identify SIFAR’s principals and their priorities.

The fight against the Italian Communist Party was, from the very beginning, SIFAR’s main priority. SIFAR’s principals perceived Communism as a significant subversive threat, both at the time of SIFAR’s creation and for decades to come. Whether via the ballot box or via an armed insurrection, the Italian and American governments viewed the threat posed by the Italian Communist Party as requiring urgent counter-subversive measures. The evidence is undisputed in this regard. For instance, the US National Security Council repeatedly referred to the threat of

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513 In 1946 James Angleton had at least 10 and possibly as many as 14 informers within the Italian Naval Intelligence service and others within the civilian police service, the Pubblica Sicurezza. He reportedly told his superiors in Washington that he had penetrated Italian intelligence so deeply that he practically ran it. See Naftali [1992] p.227 and p.236, note 11, based on Angleton’s reports in Boxes 199-274, Entry 108A, RG226, NARA. See also Weiner [2007] p.27.
a Communist takeover of Italy. Similarly, the Italian government regularly made and updated detailed plans for a legal handover of power to the military in case of a Communist insurrection, and Italian intelligence regularly compiled reports on the Communist Party’s subversive plans.

SIFAR: An Extreme Case of a Political Intelligence Agency

From its creation, SIFAR was not politically neutral and it had no clear dividing line between domestic and foreign intelligence. SIFAR’s lack of political neutrality will be clear as we go along. For now it should suffice to note that one of the first tasks that the Defense Minister Pacciardi assigned to SIFAR was the removal from the armed forces of all those who had leftist sympathies. To do so, SIFAR first had to ensure that no one from the left joined its ranks, using the granting of security clearances to do so. In the words of a 1995 report by the Parliamentary oversight commission on intelligence, “during the Cold War those citizens whose political preferences were against the Atlantic Alliance [which mainly meant those on the Left]

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514 See, among others, NSC1 of 15 October 1947 and NSC1/2 of 10 February 1948. The latter reads: “The [Italian] government is under strong and persistent Communist attack aimed ultimately at the creation of a Communist dictatorship subservient to Moscow. The political position of the Communist party is stronger in Italy than in any other country outside the Soviet orbit.” NSC1/2 also dismissed as “too remote to require consideration” the Rightist threat to the Italian democratic government. See also NSC67, of April 1950, and NSC5411 of April 1954. The latter begins with a discussion of the consequences of a Communist takeover, but still viewed it as “unlikely within the next two years”. All documents are from the NSC files at NARA.


were considered unsuitable for handling secret documents or activities”\textsuperscript{517}. Accusing others, often implausibly, of harboring leftist tendencies became a frequently used tool in the bureaucratic fights within the military and within SIFAR\textsuperscript{518}.

SIFAR operated both at home and abroad. The second directive establishing SIFAR issued by the Minister of Defense on 1 September 1949 defined SIFAR’s task as gathering and defending information (i.e. espionage and counterespionage) for the benefit of the State, with no specified limitations on the kind of information it was supposed to gather and on where it could operate\textsuperscript{519}. As Viviani notes, “SIFAR should have directed the entire informational activity of the State (military, political, economic, etc.). (…) SIFAR was assigned the same informational duties of the Carabinieri and part of the informational duties of the Ministry of Interior and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”\textsuperscript{520}

This blurred line between foreign and domestic operations followed historical precedents. Italy’s military intelligence, especially via the Carabinieri, had long operated both at home and abroad, and depriving it of its turf would have been sure to cause furious bureaucratic battles. Bureaucratic inertia thus combined with the fact that the Communist Party, SIFAR’s main priority, operated domestically, but received support and at times orders from Moscow.

**SIFAR in the 1950s: under its principals’ control?**

\textsuperscript{517} See the report by the Parliamentary oversight committee (*Relazione del Comitato parlamentare per i servizi di informazione e sicurezza, Primo rapporto sul istema di informazione e sicurezza*), completed on 6 April 1995, paragraph 22, [http://www.camera.it/_bicamerali/sis/documen/xii34_1.htm](http://www.camera.it/_bicamerali/sis/documen/xii34_1.htm).

\textsuperscript{518} For instance, before rising to become the head of SIFAR Giovanni De Lorenzo was accused of harboring leftist tendencies because his car had been seen parked in front of a section of the Communist Party. The episode is recounted in Ilari [1994] p.32.


From 1951 to 1955

Being close to the ideal type of a political intelligence agency, SIFAR was bound to be hard to control. Starting in the mid-1950s, SIFAR progressively escaped from the control of its principals, both in Rome and in Washington. I thus show that the weak control exercised by SIFAR’s principles predated the subversive episodes of the 1960s.

There is little or no evidence of principals’ weak control over SIFAR until the mid-1950s. The head of SIFAR From 1952 to the end of 1955, General Ettore Musco, would later say that the so-called deviations from SIFAR’s proper role began after he had left. Musco’s statements were obviously self-interested, yet even a senior intelligence officer with whom he did not have a good relationship recognized that under Musco’s leadership SIFAR’s political operations had been “limited to the control of the Communist Party’s activities in all of its manifestations.” I cannot exclude that unauthorized activities have remained secret, but a then classified investigation conducted in 1967 found that SIFAR’s improper activities began in 1959.

Given the lack of evidence, it is hard to explain why SIFAR under Musco did not disobey its principals. More than a strong commitment to the democratic control of the military, which

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523 Flamigni [2004] p.33. Flamigni’s edited volume reproduces in full the report and the transcripts of the Beolchini Commission of 1967. Most of the documents upon which the Commission’s report is based have been destroyed in order to eliminate their blackmail potential. Others are presumably still classified. I thus have to rely on the Commission’s own findings, even though, as I will show, some of these findings have to be taken with a grain of salt. The acts of the Beolchini Commission are also available at http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviistorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL_2_11.1.91.pdf.
cannot be excluded but sits uneasily with the history of Musco’s family\textsuperscript{524}, the most likely explanation is that Musco and other senior SIFAR officers perceived the government as sufficiently committed to the anticommunist fight, and thus saw no need to disobey it.

\textit{SIFAR under De Lorenzo}

In December 1955 General Giovanni de Lorenzo was nominated to replace Musco as head of SIFAR. After barely fifteen days in his post, De Lorenzo told his subordinates that they depended directly on the President of the Republic, the recently elected Giovanni Gronchi\textsuperscript{525}. This communication was a first indication of lack of control. Under the Italian Constitution the President of the Republic is the Chief of the Armed Forces, but constitutional scholars agree today as they did back then that this does not give the President direction of the Armed Forces or of their intelligence services. SIFAR’s chain of command ran through the Joint Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense, and via the Minister of Defense to the entire government. In fact, under Gronchi’s predecessor, Luigi Einaudi, the relationship between SIFAR and the President

\textsuperscript{524} In the late 1940s, Ettore Musco’s brother, Colonel Ugo Musco, had headed a secret association of military officers, the \textit{Armata Italiana di Liberazione}, which plotted to overthrow the newborn Italian Republic. It is likely that Ettore Musco knew of what his brother was doing, but there is no evidence to show this. On the \textit{Armata Italiana di Liberazione}, see the documents of the Ministry of the Interior cited by Giannuli [2013] pp.29-33; the State Department documents in RG59 Decimal File 1945-1949, Box 6913, document 865.00/12-1146 and Box 6914B, document 865.00/11-1747; and the Central Intelligence Group’s Intelligence Report on the “Esercito Clandestino Anticomunista”, 10 September 1947, accessed via CREST at NARA. Faenza and Fini [1976] pp.264-265 do not specify which Musco was the head of the \textit{Armata Italiana di Liberazione}.

of the Republic had been almost nonexistent, with extremely rare written requests for information and a few encounters in official occasions only\textsuperscript{526}.

Both De Lorenzo and Gronchi wanted to change this. Gronchi was motivated by his desire to play a more prominent role in the country’s foreign and security policy, going beyond the letter of the Constitution. De Lorenzo wanted to obtain greater access to the President as well as his personal support. It was the President who signed on the appointments for high-ranking military posts, including the head of SIFAR, and De Lorenzo clearly stood to benefit from Gronchi’s backing. Gronchi had apparently played an important role in the removal of De Lorenzo’s predecessor and, less clearly, in De Lorenzo’s own appointment\textsuperscript{527}.

By saying he depended on the President of the Republic, De Lorenzo was not just advancing his career prospects and SIFAR’s bureaucratic standing. He was also choosing who, among his principals, he was going to give his primary loyalty to. This is and of itself is an indication of a lack of control. An agency that decides whose orders it is going to obey cannot be said to be strongly controlled by its principals, because the choice itself should not be made by the agency. Furthermore, De Lorenzo chose to obey a principal that, based on the existing regulations, could only claim a weak and indirect line of command over SIFAR.

De Lorenzo’s communication also signaled an adjustment of SIFAR’s political orientation. Gronchi came from the left-wing of the Christian Democracy and had been elected

\textsuperscript{527} The circumstances behind Musco’s removal and the appointment of De Lorenzo still haven’t been fully clarified. The most detailed account of De Lorenzo’s appointment is in Ilari [1994] p.45-46. Ilari initially does not mention Gronchi as having played a positive role in De Lorenzo’s appointment, other than signing on to it, but he later states on p.93, without citing a source, that it was “Gronchi personally who chose Musco’s successor, in order to severe that direct link with the United States that was testified by the information [provided by Musco to the CIA] on Gronchi himself”.

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with the support of the Communist and Socialist parties against the official Christian Democratic candidate, the more right-wing Giovanni Merzagora\textsuperscript{528}. As a member of Parliament, Gronchi had opposed Italy’s membership in the Atlantic Alliance. The US government thus viewed Gronchi with suspicion, to the point that the CIA reportedly asked and obtained from General Musco compromising information on Gronchi before the 1955 presidential elections\textsuperscript{529}. As President, Gronchi confirmed Washington’s suspicions, repeatedly taking foreign policy initiatives that were in contrast with the Italian government, with the prevailing interpretation of his role as President of the Republic and with the Atlantic Alliance\textsuperscript{530}.

Because he took the helms at SIFAR at a time of increasingly severe disagreements among its principals, De Lorenzo had more freedom of maneuver. He chose to depend on President Gronchi, moving SIFAR towards the left\textsuperscript{531}. While still firmly anticommunist, SIFAR was now friendlier towards the left-wing of the Christian Democracy, which it had previously

\textsuperscript{528} The President of the Republic is elected by a qualified majority in a joint session of both chambers of Parliament.

\textsuperscript{529} At least based on a journalistic account by in Tedeschi [1968] p.53. Tedeschi’s account reports no source but it was never refuted. A senior intelligence officer, Colonel Renzo Rocca, also testified to the Beolchini Commission on 21 January 1967 of contrasts between General Musco and Gronchi; reproduced in Flamigni [2004] p.132.

\textsuperscript{530} On Gronchi’s foreign policy initiatives, which are beyond the scope of this paper, see Ilari [1994] pp.59-60, Mammarella and Cacace [2006] pp.203-208, Romano [2006] pp.100-114.

\textsuperscript{531} Despite his frequent portrayal as a coup-plotter with neo-Fascist sympathies, throughout his military career Giovanni De Lorenzo was more favorably inclined towards the left than many of his colleagues. He was one of the monarchist officers who had fought with the Resistance after the Armistice in 1943, earning multiple medals and the respect of the Communist Party. As head of SIFAR he favored the opening to the left, even contributing to the overthrow of a right-wing government in 1960. As general commander of the Carabinieri, he then contained the more left-wing tendencies within the Socialist Party by threatening a military coup which forced the Socialists to give up on their more radical proposals. Later named head of the Army, De Lorenzo fought against those who were trying to align the Army with extreme right-wing positions, to the point that he was ludicrously accused of harboring Communist sympathies. After being dismissed as head of the Army in 1967, De Lorenzo contributed to the stereotype of the right-wing neo-fascist General by becoming a member of Parliament first for the Monarchist Party and then for the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano, even participating at protests in 1971 which explicitly called for a military coup similar to what the Athenian colonels had done in 1967. Recent scholars have recognized the complexity of De Lorenzo’s figure: see Ilari [1994], pp.270-272 and p.336, and Franzinelli [2010], especially p.203. The older and largely erroneous interpretation is most extensively outlined in Collin [1976]. See also the diary of the Socialist leader Nenni [1983], entry for 31 January 1967, p.21 and the testimony by Col. Taddei before the Beolchini Commission on 1 February 1967, reproduced in Flamigni [2004] pp.180-181.
opposed, more inclined to take positions which went against the wishes of its American principals and, later on, more favorable towards the opening to the left.

The CIA opposed De Lorenzo’s greater openness to the left and closeness to Gronchi, but failed to reverse it. In 1958 it sought to strengthen the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior “in order to create a service suitable for replacing the military one”\(^532\). The CIA found De Lorenzo to be too little malleable and too close to Gronchi, and it thus sought to shape an intelligence service more willing to obey its orders\(^533\). The renewed intelligence service was “born out of the necessity of strengthening anti-subversive activity”\(^534\). Its initial task was to penetrate the Italian Communist Party\(^535\), even though it soon expanded “its range of activity to the left in general, not just the PCI [Italian Communist Party], but also the PSI [Italian Socialist Party], PSDI [Italian Social-Democratic Party] and the Christian-democratic left.”\(^536\) More than a dozen cables indicate the financial and organizational support of the CIA and of its agent Robert Driscoll\(^537\), with one cable calling the new intelligence agency “an instrument of the American [intelligence] service, to the point that they have covert offices in common and that the service

\(^{532}\) See the “Annotazione sulle attività di guerra psicologica e non ortodossa (psychological and low density warfare) compiute in Italia tra il 1969 e il 1974 attraverso l’AGINTER PRESSE”, part of the penal proceedings against Giancarlo Rognoni and others, File Number 509/62, protocol “P”, 23 July 1996, Rome, Raggruppamento Operativo Speciale Carabinieri, Reparto Eversione. The file includes several summaries of cables by SIFAR’s counterespionage centers. The summaries, which is all I had access to, were made by the Carabinieri during the investigations for a trial on right-wing subversion from 1969 to 1974. The quote is from the summary of a cable by SIFAR’s counterespionage center in Trieste, on 7 September 1958, p.55. The entire file is available at: [http://www.ritaatria.it/Portals/0/Documenti/PiazzaFontana/Atti_2.pdf](http://www.ritaatria.it/Portals/0/Documenti/PiazzaFontana/Atti_2.pdf). Gatti [1990] pp.46-47 predates the strengthening of the intelligence service of the Ministry of the Interior to 1956, but does not cite any sources.

\(^{533}\) The need to contain Gronchi’s policy and the support which SIFAR gave to this policy was explicitly mentioned in a conversation between Walter Beneforti, a senior officer in the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior, and the head of the Roman Inquisition (Sant’Uffizio) Cardinal Ottaviani, who, according to Beneforti, “was also working for the Americans”. Beneforti’s recollection of the conversation is quoted in Pacini [2010] p.58.

\(^{534}\) Cable by SIFAR’s counterespionage center in Verona on 22 December 1958, as summarized by the Carabinieri in File 509/62, p.56.


\(^{536}\) Ibidem p.58, note of 10 October 1959, not protocolled.

\(^{537}\) Ibidem pp.55-61.
operates, at the Americans’ request, for goals which should have nothing to do with the security of the Italian State.”

The CIA later tried to remove De Lorenzo. It was De Lorenzo himself who complained of this attempt in a letter to the head of the Police on 8 February 1959. In the words of the summary made by the Carabinieri more than three decades later, “[CIA agent] Driscoll was saying that he had been asked by an unspecified authority within the Ministry of Interior to find a candidate for the very urgent replacement of De Lorenzo, and to transmit derogatory information to Washington on De Lorenzo himself.”

Had SIFAR been under the CIA’s control there would have been no need to reform the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior, much less to try to remove General De Lorenzo. The CIA’s attempt to do both is a strong piece of evidence against those who believe that SIFAR was firmly under the control of its American counterpart.

Further evidence of SIFAR’s principals weak control comes from a commission established by the government in 1967 to investigate SIFAR’s extrainstitutional activities from the early 1950s to 1965. This commission, led by General Beolchini, found that starting in 1959 SIFAR expanded the reach of its investigations to cover all members of Parliament, followed the next year by ecclesiastics, industrialists, members of the armed forces, intellectuals and virtually anyone who played a prominent role in the country. Personal files within SIFAR’s archives

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538 Ibidem p.58, note of 10 October 1959, not protocolled.
539 Ibidem p.60, document SR 273 of 8 Februry 1959. See also Pacini [2010] pp.57-60. Driscoll was transferred to Tunisia soon afterward, but he continued to direct political operations in Italy from there.
540 General Belochini was a long-time rival of De Lorenzo and De Lorenzo later accused him of having seized the opportunity to settle some old scores. Virtually all of the documents upon which the Commission’s report was based were either destroyed, due to their blackmail potential, or are still classified, making it very hard for scholars to assess the veracity of the report’s claims. Nonetheless, the Commission’s findings which follow are beyond dispute. The acts of the Beolchini Commission are reproduced in Flamigni [2004] and available at
increased exponentially, from a few thousands to 157,000\textsuperscript{541}. Simultaneously, the character of the files changed, focusing more and more on information suitable for compromise but which often had nothing to do with national security\textsuperscript{542}. In yet another episode of structural politicization, this information was frequently distorted to portray the subject in a more negative light\textsuperscript{543}.

If these findings are beyond dispute, less clear is why SIFAR acted in this way. The Beolchini Commission argued that SIFAR enjoyed “full and unchallenged autonomy in all fields”\textsuperscript{544}, and found the control by the Minister of Defense and the Joint Chief of Staff to be lacking\textsuperscript{545}. The Commission repeatedly “tried to understand if the highest political authorities had exercised an influence on SIFAR, inducing it to behave in such a deviant way. Every time, however, the Commission found that the heads of SIFAR acted not in obeisance to orders but for zeal and desire to be always informed about everything. (...) SIFAR did not want to be perceived as less active and less informed that the other information services.”\textsuperscript{546}

The Beolchini Commission’s explanation is plausible, but partial. It seems likely that SIFAR increased its informational activity in 1959 in order not “to be perceived as less active and less informed that the other information services.” As we have seen, the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior had just been reformed in order to supplant SIFAR, and SIFAR certainly perceived it as a threat. It is also plausible that SIFAR was acting largely

\textsuperscript{541} Reproduced in Flamigni [2004] p.19.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibidem p.19.
\textsuperscript{543} Ibidem p.23. See also pp.208-210. General Franco Picchiotti, chief of staff of the Carabinieri from 1963-1965, when De Lorenzo was the Commanding General, argued that, at times, SIFAR even created the news that it then gathered and acted on, “acting simultaneously as the arsonist and the firefighter.”
\textsuperscript{544} Ibidem p.48.
\textsuperscript{545} Ibidem pp.46-47.
\textsuperscript{546} Ibidem pp.48-49.
independently, even though it presumably received frequent requests for information unrelated to national security from its political principals. The Commission itself noted that “even those who generically mentioned orders from the political authority refused to be precise and excluded that there were orders coming from the [Defense] Minister”547. The Commission conveniently steered clear from investigating the political responsibilities behind SIFAR’s deviations548, but was probably correct in concluding that the main driver behind these deviations was internal.

Several arguments and episodes support this conclusion. First, the files were on members of the governing majority were just as much as those on members of the opposition549, and no one seems to have been spared, indicating a search for compromising information at all levels that was hardly directed by anyone within the political arena. Secondly, one officer at SIFAR testified of having seen during De Lorenzo’s tenure an envelope with the phrase “phone intercepts house of Minister [of Defense] Andreotti”. Unless Andreotti was voluntarily tapping his own phone, which cannot be excluded but which he strongly denied, it seems as if SIFAR was intercepting even the minister to whom it was supposed to be subordinated550. Lastly, the one political figure that can be more strongly linked to SIFAR’s extrainstitutional activities, albeit hardly to most of them, is President Giovanni Gronchi551. However, it was the head of

548 For instance, the Socialist leader Pietro Nenni noted in his diaries that “it is suspected that at the origins of SIFAR’s deviations there was the political influence of Gronchi and [Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister] Tambroni, but this does not result from the inquiry”. See Nenni [1983] pp.44-45, entry for 7 April 1967. Nenni was probably right about Gronchi’s influence on SIFAR, but almost certainly wrong about Tambroni. Given what was just said about the rivalry with the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior, it seems safe to exclude that SIFAR was taking orders from the Minister of Interior. Furthermore, as I will show SIFAR contributed to the overthrow of Tambroni’s government in 1960.
551 For instance, the head of SIFAR’s Economic and Industrial Research branch (REI, Ricerche Economiche e Industriali), Colonel Renzo Rocca, stated that at the beginning of his tenure De Lorenzo realized that he could not answer many of the questions of the President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi. Gronchi’s questions went
SIFAR De Lorenzo himself who chose to follow Gronchi’s orders and, as I will show, not in some of the most important circumstances.

In sum, SIFAR was only weakly controlled by its principals in the late 1950s, even before it began to act subversively. It is to these acts of subversion that I now turn.

SIFAR and the Overthrow of the Tambroni government in 1960

A brief overview

In the summer of 1960 Italy faced a major political crisis that, according to numerous observers, put Italian democracy at risk and brought the country on the brink of civil war. What precipitated the crisis was the existence of a government which obtained a majority in Parliament thanks to the support of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). Anti-fascism was a central criterion for legitimacy in post-war Italy and having a government which relied on the support of the neo-fascist party was widely seen as unacceptable.

In March 1960, President Gronchi had tasked his fellow Christian Democrat and former Minister of the Interior Fernando Tambroni with the formation of the government. Tambroni had to resign right after the confidence vote in the Chamber of Deputies, when several of his ministers refused to participate in a government dependent on neo-fascist support. While Tambroni’s government remained in office to take care of ordinary administration, Amintore beyond the activities of the Communist Party and concerned virtually all aspects of Italian politics. To answer the President’s questions, De Lorenzo reoriented SIFAR’s activities, “initiating this extranstitutional political activity”. In ibidem p.133.

See, for instance, Franzinelli [2010] p.17 and the CIA analyses from May to July 1960, accessed via CREST at NARA. CIA analysts spoke of “the most severe [crisis] in the republic’s history”, in which “anarchy and authoritarianism have again become serious threats” and where “several elements [were] propitious for a quick and violent seizure of power”, possibly via an “extralegal political adventure by Tambroni”.
Fanfani, a prominent Christian Democratic figure who had opposed Tambroni, tried but failed to form a center-left government supported by the Socialist Party. With Parliament in a stalemate, the President of the Republic had more freedom to choose his own preferred candidate\textsuperscript{553}. President Gronchi made the controversial and constitutionally dubious decision to ask Tambroni to present his caretaker government for a confidence vote in the Senate\textsuperscript{554}. The government obtained a majority in the Senate, but the political crisis moved to the streets.

In June and July political and labor unrest spread throughout the country. The Communist Party raised the antifascist banner and led the protests against the government, gaining consensus in the process. The security forces seemed unprepared, repeatedly using deadly fire against protesters to regain control\textsuperscript{555}.

SIFAR’s principals were deeply divided. President Gronchi supported the government, whereas other Christian Democratic leaders such as Amintore Fanfani and the party secretary Aldo Moro opposed it. The American government shared the concern of those who viewed Tambroni’s government as provocative and polarizing, all to the advantage of the Communists\textsuperscript{556}.

\textsuperscript{553} The President of the Republic nominates the Prime Minister after having consulted the various groups in Parliament. The designated Prime Minister forms the government and then asks for a confidence vote from Parliament. The more univocal the indications coming from Parliament, the less room for maneuver the President has in nominating the Prime Minister.
\textsuperscript{554} See the account in Radi [1990] pp.94-97. The Italian Constitution (Article 94) demands that governments face a confidence vote in both chambers of Parliament within 10 days after being nominated. Instead, Gronchi decided to send Tambroni in front of the Senate roughly a month after his nomination and three weeks after the first confidence vote in the Chamber of Deputies.
\textsuperscript{555} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{556} For instance, a CIA briefing to the National Security Council on 14 July 1960 argued that “both Communists and neo-fascists stand to gain from continuance of Tambroni government.” See also Colby [1978], p.137. On 2 July, Christian Democratic leader Fanfani wrote in his diary: ”The operation of the Tambroni government is revealing itself to be a failure, demonstrating that he who allies himself with fascism encourages and strengthens communism,” quoted in Franzinelli [2010] p.19.
As the unrest seemed to be getting out of hand, Tambroni resisted the calls from within his own party to resign, raising concerns about a possible coup\textsuperscript{557}. In a fierce speech in Parliament at the peak of the crisis in July, he accused the Communist Party of being subservient to Moscow and of being the organizer of internal subversion. A few days later, however, his internal opponents gained the upper hand and forced him to resign\textsuperscript{558}.

\textit{SIFAR’s subversive role}

It was long widely believed that the spreading unrest and the opposition within the Christian Democracy had induced Tambroni to resign. SIFAR’s role only came to light in 1990, when a batch of documents written by Aldo Moro while held captive by the Red Brigades were found together with weapons and money in a hole in a wall in an apartment that had been used by the Red Brigades years before. In 1978 the Red Brigades, a leftist terrorist group, had kidnapped Moro, imprisoned for 55 days and ultimately killed him. Moro wrote extensively while in the Red Brigades’ hands, including on the episodes which concern us here.

Moro discussed the events of the summer of 1960 only briefly, at the end of a longer piece on what he called “the attempted coup of ’64”. After discussing De Lorenzo’s role in 1964, Moro added that De Lorenzo “must also be remembered as the one who actively collaborated, as

\textsuperscript{557} For instance, the CIA Weekly Intelligence Report on 23 June 1960 spoke of a “coup atmosphere”, argued that “the current situation presents several elements propitious for a quick and violent seizure of power” and that “Tambroni’s personality would lend itself to [an extralegal political adventure]”. A briefing to the National Security Council on 13 April 1960 (accessed via CREST at NARA) noted that “former Defense Minister Pacciardi and Senate president Merzagora have also hinted at the need for extra-constitutional measures.” As we will see, Pacciardi and Merzagora will also be at the center of the subversive episode which occurred four years later, this time with SIFAR and De Lorenzo on their side.

head of SID [SIFAR]\textsuperscript{559}, with myself as Party Secretary, to push back into normalcy the red-hot situation which followed the creation of Tambroni’s government. This was, in my view, the gravest and most threatening event for the institutions in that period. In fact De Lorenzo, constantly in touch with me, gave me all the useful intercepts and other informational elements which allowed me to request the resignation of the Tambroni government and to promote the creation of the Fanfani government, the first one based on the abstention of the Socialist Party [in the confidence vote in Parliament]\textsuperscript{560}.

This is the only direct primary evidence we have of SIFAR’s subversive plot against Tambroni. Other evidence confirms SIFAR’s less than benevolent attitude towards Tambroni. In an allusive testimony in front of the Beolchini Commission, General De Lorenzo was asked about the security measures which SIFAR had taken in the summer of 1960, “in a climate of conspiracy and coup d’état”. De Lorenzo replied that “there was indeed a rebellion-scare under Tambroni’s government” and that “once Tambroni fell the scare ceased.” “What was particularly worrying” for SIFAR, De Lorenzo added, “was Tambroni’s attitude.”\textsuperscript{561}

Moro’s account of the 1960 episode has not been disputed\textsuperscript{562}, even though other parts of his writings from prison have been\textsuperscript{563}. SIFAR thus intentionally contributed to the removal of

\textsuperscript{559} SID, Servizio Informazioni Difesa, was the name of SIFAR’s successor from 1965 to 1977. Moro evidently confused the acronyms here.
\textsuperscript{560} Moro’s text is reproduced in Biscione [1993] pp.46-47. For an online reproduction see http://www.fisicamente.net/MEMORIA/index-1742.htm
\textsuperscript{561} Testimony by De Lorenzo in front of the Beolchini commission, 14 March 1967, in Flamigni [2004] p.325.
\textsuperscript{562} On two opposite sides of the political and historiographical spectrum, see Franzinelli [2010] p.17 and Ilari [1993] pp.140-142. Some accounts, such as De Lutiis [2010] and the preface by Flamigni [2005], ignore this episode altogether, possibly because it does not fit with the interpretation of a secret service implacably hostile to anything leftist.
\textsuperscript{563} From the moment in which Moro’s first writings from “prison” emerged, there has been a debate as to whether they sincerely expressed Moro’s beliefs and could be attributed to him. I am unaware of anyone having questioned the truthfulness of the passages I use here and there is an emerging consensus among recent scholars in considering what Moro wrote to generally be a genuine expression of his thought. See Biscione [1993] p.22, Flamigni [1997] p.11, Gotor in Moro [2008] pp.xviii-xix, Sabbatucci [1999] pp.204-205 fn.1, and the Parliamentary...
Tambroni’s government. We do not have enough information to fully reconstruct the process which led to this successful episode of subversion, but what we have aligns with my theoretical expectations. Both De Lorenzo and Tambroni were strongly anticommunist, but they disagreed on which tactics to employ. De Lorenzo most likely agreed with virtually all of Tambroni’s critics within the majority, who viewed Tambroni’s government as needlessly polarizing and as strengthening the Communist Party by allowing it to cover itself in the electorally rewarding mantel of antifascism. SIFAR thus had a reason to subvert, based on the need to wage a more effective and astute anticommunist campaign.

The opposite strategy would have been for SIFAR to press for an even harsher repression of the largely Communist-led popular protests. Other than De Lorenzo’s vague testimony, we have no evidence on SIFAR’s internal decision-making process that would allow us to say conclusively why SIFAR chose subversion over repression. We do know however that after 1960 both the head of the police and, once he became Commanding General of the Carabinieri, De Lorenzo were determined never to be caught again unprepared in facing widespread and violent protests. It thus seems plausible that De Lorenzo realized that a harsh repression would have been both unwise, as it would have further polarized the country, and unfeasible, as the police and the Carabinieri were not yet capable of facing the well-organized protesters.

There may have been an additional motivation for SIFAR to remove Tambroni, but without evidence of internal deliberations this should be taken as nothing more than a plausible

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564 De Lorenzo’s biographer, Ilari [1993], agrees with this interpretation. See pp.141-142.
hypothesis. Tambroni had been Minister of Interior during the reorganization of SIFAR’s rival intelligence service and he had reportedly gathered a large mass of compromising information on his political rivals. By removing Tambroni, SIFAR simultaneously removed a Prime Minister who was inadvertently strengthening the Communist Party and settled an old score with the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior\textsuperscript{566}.

\textit{The enabling condition: a split among SIFAR’s principals}

SIFAR’s subversion was made possible by the deep divisions among its principals. Tambroni was opposed by several leading figures of the Christian Democracy as well as by the other smaller parties which were usually part of the governing coalition. This widespread opposition to Tambroni’s government made it relatively easy for SIFAR to engage in subversion. We do not know precisely what information De Lorenzo passed to Moro, but whatever was passed was enough to force Tambroni to resign. De Lorenzo thus collaborated with the Secretary of the Christian Democracy, despite the fact that the latter could not claim any formal authority over SIFAR. The US Embassy also took a worried but apparently passive stance, confirming its skepticism towards Tambroni but not taking any visible steps to remove him\textsuperscript{567}.

\textsuperscript{566} Pacini [2010] p.68 makes a parallel argument. The Christian Democratic leaders were eager to get rid of Tambroni in part because they wanted to settle old scores deriving from Tambroni’s use of the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior even against his rivals within the Christian Democracy. Interestingly, the intelligence service ended up spying on Tambroni himself as well. See Pacini [2010] p.67 and the “\textit{Annotazione sulle attività di guerra psicologica e non ortodossa (psychological and low density warfare) compiute in Italia tra il 1969 e il 1974 attraverso l’AGINTER PRESSE}”, File Number 509/62, protocol “P”, Carabinieri, 23 July 1996, p.51.

\textsuperscript{567} The US ambassador Zellerbach rejected Tambroni’s demand for help in early July. Even though Zellerbach appreciated Tambroni’s firm stance against Communism, he did not believe it was convenient to support a fragile and unpopular government. See the account in Nuti [1999] p.296, who cites a telegram by Ambassador Zellerbach to the Secretary of State on 6 July 1960, in NARA 765.00/7-660.
By removing Tambroni, SIFAR acted against the wishes of Tambroni himself and, less obviously, of President Gronchi, the principal which SIFAR itself had chosen to give its primary loyalty to in 1955. Nonetheless, in 1960 SIFAR and De Lorenzo subverted a government that Gronchi had nominated and continued to support throughout the crisis, even when the majority of the other parties had turned against Tambroni and when Tambroni himself was thinking about resigning. In sum, SIFAR was not controlled even by the principal that SIFAR itself had chosen to obey.

SIFAR, De Lorenzo, the Carabinieri and the center-left from 1961 to 1964

By removing Tambroni, SIFAR contributed to the formation of the first government supported in Parliament by the Socialist Party. SIFAR continued to support the center-left until

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568 Three notes by the British Embassy in Rome on 14, 16 and 29 July 1960 confirmed as much, speaking of “the President of the Republic’s predilection and whole-hearted support for Signor Tambroni”. In FO371/153300 and FO371/153301, BNA. The most detailed and authoritative account is Radi [1990] pp.112-115 and p.123, who rarely cites sources however. His account is nonetheless undisputed in this regard. A decisive moment came after a particularly deadly episode in Reggio Emilia, when the security forces seemed to be unable to restore order without a large number of casualties. On 8 July 1960, the Presidents of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies asked for a political truce, halting the protests and bringing the security forces back in the barracks. The appeal for a truce was accepted by the leadership of the Christian Democracy and by all the political parties except those on the far right. At this point, a word from Gronchi would have been enough for Tambroni to resign, but Gronchi instead encouraged Tambroni to resist and to oppose the truce. After yet another round of deadly protests, when even Tambroni was reportedly thinking about resigning, Gronchi once again encouraged him to resist.

569 In an interview in 1973, Gronchi criticized Tambroni for having caused a very difficult situation and spoke of an “involution” in Tambroni’s thought (reproduced in Radi [1990] pp.128-129, Fn.37). Based on these remarks, Ilari [1993] p.141 argues that “to the extent that Gronchi may have really perceived Tambroni as a threat, it does not surprise that SIFAR may have had a part [in Tambroni’s overthrow]”. The evidence is strongly against the idea of an agreement between Gronchi and De Lorenzo, however. First, Gronchi was probably not fully sincere in this interview, as Ilari himself acknowledges. Secondly, had Gronchi wanted Tambroni to resign, he had simpler and less costly ways to do so than recurring to SIFAR. It would have been enough for Gronchi to signal to the public or just to some of the Christian Democrats in Parliament that he was no longer supporting his government. Lastly, Gronchi came out badly weakened by the crisis, as was widely recognized at the time (see, for instance, telegram 426 from the US Embassy in Rome to the Secretary of State, sent on 27 July 1960, in NARA, 765.00/7-2760, quoted in Nuti [1999] p.297). Had Gronchi supported Tambroni’s fall, he would have had every reason to do so publicly in order to avoid at least part of these costs.
at least late 1963, notwithstanding a now discredited historiography that claimed that SIFAR and the CIA plotted against the center-left in 1962\(^{570}\).

In November 1961, SIFAR sought to neutralize the opponents of the center-left within the small Italian Republican Party. SIFAR officer Agostino Buono and the journalist and reportedly SIFAR agent Lando Dell’Amico tried to bribe some of the delegates at the Republicans’ national congress. The goal of the operation was to convince these delegates to abandon the more right-wing faction led by the former Defense Minister Pacciardi and to support the pro-center-left faction led by Ugo La Malfa. Their bribing attempt failed, but the pro-center-left faction was still able to obtain a majority among the Republican delegates\(^{571}\). De Lorenzo later denied that the money came from SIFAR, but not the operation itself\(^{572}\). Dell’Amico

\(^{570}\) De Lutiis [2010] p.67, followed by the introduction in Flamigni [2005] pp.11-12, states that in 1962 SIFAR favored the election as President of the Republic of the right-wing Christian Democrat Antonio Segni, an opponent of the center-left. SIFAR supposedly sent a letter to all members of Parliament which spread derogatory information on the wife of Giovanni Leone, the strongest candidate running against Segni. However, Leone was a candidate in 1964, not in 1962. De Lutiis cites as his source a 1978 book by Ilari and Ilari has personally confirmed to me that his was a mistake and that the operation against Leone occurred in 1964, not in 1962. See also Ilari [1993] p.147 and the testimony by General De Lorenzo in front of the Beolchini Commission on 14 March 1967, reproduced in Flamigni [2004] p.326. Faenza [1978] p.315 synthesized a supposed joint CIA-SIFAR plan against the center-left of June 1962. Faenza provided no reference for this plan and no one since has ever found it. It is not at NARA nor at the Feltrinelli Foundation in Milan, where Faenza stated he had deposited copies of the documents he consulted. His account has nonetheless enjoyed a remarkable popularity among leftist historians. See, among others, the introduction in Flamigni [2005] p.12, Ganser [2005] p.70, Willan [2002] pp.37-38 and De Lutiis [2010] pp.68-69. Other scholars dismiss his account as wholly unreliable. See Gatti [1990] pp.63-66, Ilari [1993] p.223, Nuti [1999] pp. xi, 379, 619-620 and Mistry, personal communication. The plan was likely the result of Faenza’s imagination and may even have been part of a campaign of deliberate disinformation.

\(^{571}\) See the testimony by Lt.Col. Agostino Buono in front of the Beolchini Commission on 11 March 1967, reproduced in Flamigni [2004] pp.195-196. Agent Ted was the code name for Dell’Amico. See also De Lutiis [2010] pp.174 and Franzinelli [2010] p.32 and p.233 Fn,39. Dell’Amico’s memoirs [2013], pp.113-150, provide a different account as to why the operation failed, but confirm that SIFAR conducted the operation in support of the center-left. Dell’Amico says that ENI head Enrico Mattei and by Prime Minister Fanfani ordered the operation.

\(^{572}\) Quoted in Ilari [1993] p.144, based on De Lorenzo’s testimony in front of the Lombardi Commission. According to an interview given by Dell’Amico to Claudio Gatti, in Gatti [1990] p.64, the source of the money was Enrico Mattei, the head of the national oil company ENI (Ente Nazionale Indrocarburi).
himself stated years later that De Lorenzo had promoted similar operations in other parties, but no information is available on what these were.\footnote{Dell'Amico [2013], pp.113-150.}

In October 1962 General De Lorenzo left his post as head of SIFAR to become the Commanding General of the Carabinieri, but he continued to maintain a de facto control over SIFAR.\footnote{There is widespread agreement on this point. See the report by the Lombardi Commission p.53, the report by the Beolchini commission and the testimony by Col. Rocca in front of this Commission on 15 February 1967 (reproduced in Flamigni [2004], pp.37-44 and p.134). The majority report by the Parliamentary Commission (Alessi [1971] pp.444-449 and pp.1118-1123) and the minority report (reproduced in Flamigni [2005] pp.86-88) also agree on this point, albeit with different emphases.} He personally picked his successor at SIFAR, his trusted aide General Egidio Viggiani. Because Viggiani did not have the necessary titles to head SIFAR, De Lorenzo retroactively established the equivalence between the positions he had covered and the ones necessary to head SIFAR.\footnote{According to Faenza [1978] pp.364-365 Viggiani’s dubious grounds for promotion were used by the CIA Station Chief William Harvey as a source of blackmail. Faenza cites as his source the Parliamentary Commission Report, without specifying which one, but I did not find the information in the pages he references.} De Lorenzo also nominated SIFAR’s Administrative chief as head the Financial Office of the Carabinieri, allowing him to keep both posts simultaneously and thus controlling the financial resources of both SIFAR and the Carabinieri.\footnote{There is widespread agreement in the literature on these points. See the report of the Lombardi Commission pp.50-52, report of the Beolchini Commission (reproduced in Flamigni [2004] pp.42-44), De Lutiis [2010] p.64, Franzinelli [2010] p.44.}

The 1963 elections, with the decline of the Christian Democracy from 42% to 38% and the rise of the Communist Party from 22% to 25%, led SIFAR to intensify its anticommunist operations. On 12 September 1963 Col. Renzo Rocca, head of SIFAR’s Economic and Industrial Research section (REI, \textit{Ricerche Economiche e Industriali}), sent a programmatic document to the head of counterespionage, Gen. Giovanni Allavena.\footnote{The document was recently found by Giacomo Pacini among the ones that came to light during the last trial for the massacre in Piazza della Loggia, Brescia, in 1974. The document is in file n.1962-2-21-32, entitled “\textit{Aspetti dell’azione anticomunista in Italia e suggerimenti per attuare una politica anticomunista}” (Aspects of the anticommunist action in Italy and suggestions in order to enact an anticommunist policy). What is available is the...} After referring to the political
situation following the 1963 elections, Rocca proposed a series of “ideas and suggestions for a serious, efficient and global anti-communist activity in Italy”. Next to propaganda, which “must be continuous, total, heavy, massive, elementary, on the entire national territory and without regards for anyone”\(^{578}\), Rocca discussed the need “to create groups of activists (…) who can use every tool, even the unorthodox ones like intimidation, threat, blackmail, public street fighting, assault, sabotage, terrorism.” “The fight against communism”, Rocca continued, had to “be offensive and aggressive”, using “all the tools available, licit and illicit.”\(^{579}\) Rocca envisioned “a small group of persons, no more than three or four, who must have the supreme direction of the anti PCI initiatives”\(^{580}\) and mentioned the useful role that the organizations led by, among others, Pacciardi and then Minister of Defense Andreotti could have played\(^{581}\).

Rocca’s letter confirms that SIFAR was not a politically neutral agency, but a strongly anticommunist one. It also shows that SIFAR was planning to create a committee that would have acted in many ways as a parallel government, providing another piece of evidence of the weak control that the actual government exercised over SIFAR. However, except for the widely introductory letter and the first of ten documents. Both were written by Rocca himself who described them as “the final summary of everything”. I accessed the document from [http://www.archivioguerrapolitica.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/settembre1963.pdf](http://www.archivioguerrapolitica.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/settembre1963.pdf).

\(^{578}\) Ibidem p.6.
\(^{579}\) Ibidem p.8.
\(^{580}\) Ibidem pp.10-11. PCI stands for Partito Comunista Italiano.
\(^{581}\) Most likely related to Rocca’s plan to intensify the anticommunist fight was a “partial change in the directives” of Operation Gladio which SIFAR enacted in October and November 1963. Gladio was originally an “exclusively a Stay-Behind operation” meant to launch a guerrilla campaign in case of a Soviet or Yugoslav invasion, but in the fall of 1963 it was also tasked with “controlling and neutralizing subversive or seditious activities”. The documents are partially reproduced in Flamigni [2012], pp.272-273, with an accompanying report by Giuseppe De Lutiis written for a judicial investigation.
rumored creation by Rocca himself of teams of anticomunist activists\(^{582}\), we do not know the extent to which the other measures in Rocca’s plan were implemented, if at all\(^ {583}\).

This stepped up anticommmunist campaign did not, at least initially, reverse SIFAR’s support for the center-left. The evidence comes from SIFAR’s blackmailing of Mario Scelba, a leading right-wing Christian Democrat and former Prime Minister. In December 1963, Scelba was refusing to vote in favor of the so-called organic center-left government, the first to include the Socialist Party\(^ {584}\). A series of articles and photographs alluding to his extramarital affair had been appearing on the press since 1959, but the pressure increased as the organic center-left government was coming into being\(^ {585}\). Two Carabinieri officers reportedly showed up at Scelba’s door telling him that they had been ordered to monitor him and Scelba started receiving a series of letters and reports alluding to his poorly kept secret\(^ {586}\). Scelba ultimately decided to reverse his position and support the organic center-left government\(^ {587}\), but a few months later SIFAR’s and De Lorenzo’s position changed drastically.

\(^{582}\) This theme is extensively discussed in the reports of the Parliamentary Commission on the Events of June-July 1964. For the majority report, see Alessi [1971] pp.537-562. For the minority report by the leftist parliamentarians, see the reproduction in Flamigni [2005] pp.169-173.

\(^{583}\) A secret anti-communist committee had reportedly existed since early 1959, but it is unclear if it was related to what Rocca had in mind. The only evidence available on this committee comes from a telegram on a projected coup sent by the Commanding General, U.S. Army South European Task Force, to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Army in Europe, Verona, Italy, 28 June 1964, now in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (Country File: Italy, Vol.1, Box 196). The telegram is discussed fully below. G-2 commented the telegram mentioning the existence of “an anti-communist committee” whose goal was “to ensure that the communists would not succeed in gaining power in Italy.” The committee’s existence was first reported in February 1959. It was financed by “several well known Italian industrialists” and it was “composed of Italian parliamentarians, predominately rightist Christian Democrats and Italian Liberal party members, as well as general staff officers”. The reproduction of this document in the Foreign Relations of the United States series omits any reference to the committee.

\(^{584}\) I have seen no primary sources demonstrating SIFAR’s role in Scelba’s blackmail, but all the secondary sources that mention this episode agree that this was the case. See Pizzinelli [1982] pp.187-198, Galli [1991] pp.87-91, Franzinelli [2010] p.61.


\(^{587}\) SIFAR’s blackmail was most likely not a decisive factor. More important was instead an exhortation coming from the Vatican. The day after Scelba had made explicit his dissent, an editorial in the Vatican’s newspaper,
The crisis of the center-left and the development of the “Piano Solo”

The political context: The first center-left government and an economic crisis

In December 1963 Italy had its first organic center-left government. After 16 years, the Socialist Party was again part of the government, with its leader Pietro Nenni serving as Deputy to the Christian Democratic Prime Minister, Aldo Moro. The government’s reform program was ambitious and strongly progressive, ranging from socialized housing to agrarian reform.588

Such an ambitious program soon found strong opponents both within and outside the government, including the recently elected President of the Republic Antonio Segni, the President of the Senate Cesare Merzagora, the Governor of the Bank of Italy Guido Carli, the Minister of the Treasury Emilio Colombo and former Defense Minister Randolfo Pacciardi. The center-left’s opponents were strong enough to stop the implementation of the government’s reform program, but not to change the government altogether.

A balance of payment crisis broke out soon after the government had come to power, giving new strength to this heterogeneous but powerful group, who could now argue that the need to tame down inflation and halt an outflow of capital had to be given priority over structural reforms. The Governor of the Bank of Italy Guido Carli, in agreement with the Minister of the Treasury Colombo, restricted the money supply to reduce the inflation rate, causing a short-term crisis.

recessionary effect. On 15 May, Colombo sent a letter to Prime Minister Moro describing a potentially catastrophic economic situation unless Moro reined in the Socialists’ reform proposals. The letter elicited no satisfactory response from Moro, inducing Colombo to leak it to the press twelve days later, after having changed its tone to make it sound even more ominous. “We risk losing everything we’ve done throughout these years”, Colombo wrote, “mortally striking our democratic institutions.”

Colombo and Carli spoke frequently with Segni, and convinced him that it was imperative to postpone the most radical reforms in order to avoid having hundreds of thousands of layoffs in the near future. Faced with such a strong opposition, the Socialists’ reform proposals went nowhere and the government soon appeared to stall. After barely six months, on 25 June 1964 the government was defeated in Parliament on the relatively minor issue of public financing to private, mainly Catholic, schools. The issue had long been at the center of strong ideological disputes, but the government may have continued to operate regardless. Moro and Nenni chose instead to resign, realizing that it was necessary to reach a new agreement within a partially modified government.

The subversive attempt by SIFAR and the Carabinieri took place during this crisis, even though little emerged in public at first. The crisis was resolved after roughly three weeks of tense negotiations, when the Socialist Party agreed to strongly temper its reformist proposals. President Segni reappointed Aldo Moro as Prime Minister, who in turn formed a very similar government with the Socialist Party as the Christian Democracy’s biggest ally. Apparently little had changed.

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589 See Cavalieri [2010] p.62, who has compared the two versions of the letter.
The shift in De Lorenzo’s and SIFAR’s position towards the center-left government

As I have shown, as late as December 1963 SIFAR, in agreement with De Lorenzo, was most likely still supporting the center-left. By late February-early March 1964 SIFAR’s and De Lorenzo’s positions had radically changed. The first piece of evidence on their new position comes from a CIA cable dated 13 March 1964\(^{592}\). The cable summarized the conversations that US intelligence officers had had separately with Gen. De Lorenzo, Col. Rocca, Gen. Viggiani and another unnamed SIFAR officer in the period between 20 February and 9 March 1964.

De Lorenzo “expressed to source his concern over what he regards as progressively deteriorating political-economic situation in Italy. He stated that he had been fairly optimistic in January 1964, but he no longer felt that way. He observed that the interplay of political and economic factors, combined with what he described as a completely supine government, was leading the government toward a condition of increasing discrimination, strikes, lockouts, and mass demonstrations. Volunteering at the outset that it was not a matter of coup d’etat, De Lorenzo hastened to add that the time had come for responsible leaders of the country to make responsible decisions. The Moro government, he said, could not go on as it had been, because, if it did, the country would go Communist by default (…) Now, he said, is the time to show firmness, while the forces of public order -especially the Carabinieri- are still able to command the situation. (…) The present Moro government, according to de Lorenzo, must give way to a government headed by Giovanni Leone (former Premier) or Cesare Merzagora (President of the Senate), or Paolo Emilio Taviani (Minister of the Interior), or to a ‘Government of National Salvation’, or even to a revitalized Moro government with backbone and a definite line of action.

But it must be made clear to Moro and other leaders that this is a time for decision.” De Lorenzo said he was about to say similar things to both President Segni and Merzagora and concluded that he was “normally (…) a patient man, but (…) his own patience was wearing thin. He had had numerous contacts recently in various quarters (…) and had found considerable support for his point of view.”

An unnamed SIFAR officer similarly expressed his pessimism on the state of the economy and “felt that the present government would fall before long, perhaps within the next couple of months, and that it would be just as well for it to fall now as later.” Col. Rocca similarly “said that the situation is definitely not good, and it is not getting any better, and that certain changes (unspecified) are essential”.

Lastly, “Viggiani expressed himself as being in general agreement with De Lorenzo, but not quite to the gloomy extent of the latter. He said that the situation is actually not bad at present, but that the potential danger is great. He felt that, in order to head off the threat of serious deterioration, forceful economic and financial measures are called for; otherwise, the country would reach the point of collapse –which could benefit only the Communists who would be ready to exploit the resultant chaos to install a Communist system. He agreed with De Lorenzo that a new government was called for (…). He found Moro timorous and vacillating and charged him with playing into Communist hands in his dealings with Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL) on labor matters. He observed that Moro had given recently a pitiful performance on television and considered him much too weak for the job. (…) The most capable man was Amintore Fanfani (former Premier) whom he regards as definitely and strongly anti-Communist (…). There must be no further sliding by the government toward positions of increased strength for the Communists; (…) He agreed with De Lorenzo that the forces of order
are now able to control the situation but that, with further slippage, they might no longer be able to do so.”

US intelligence officers judged these views to be “sincere”, albeit “in line with their traditionally rightist and conservative views” and “more subjective than objective”. By February-March 1964, then, De Lorenzo and the leading SIFAR officers believed that the government was too weak when dealing with the subversive threat posed by the Communist Party, putting the country at risk of “going Communist by default”. They all agreed that the Moro government had to go, or at least that it had to be “revitalized” and given a “backbone”, but none of them specified what they intended to do.593

Based on this cable, De Lorenzo’s and SIFAR’s position towards Moro’s center-left government changed because they perceived Moro to be too weak in fighting the Communists. However, De Lorenzo and SIFAR officers probably knew that they were speaking to the CIA, and they may have overemphasized the Communist threat to touch on the issue which was more likely to solicit American support. Another explanation, not mutually exclusive, is that De Lorenzo and SIFAR realized that the center-left government was increasingly fragile, and jumped on the bandwagon of the opponents of the center-left when it seemed as if they were getting stronger.594 The correct explanation is probably a combination of these two.595

593 De Lorenzo and SIFAR were not the only ones who held such views. A heavily redacted CIA intelligence cable on 18 March 1964 reported the opinions of “influential [deleted] Italians”, whose role is still classified but who were probably senior military officials. These influential Italians believed that “the political situation had deteriorated to such an extent that consideration must be given to measures to defend the State.” Further, “the Moro government is going to collapse shortly and leave the nation in a state of chaos, at which point the Army and the Carabinieri will be called out to repress the Communists who will try to take advantage of the situation. There is no doubt that the military will succeed. (...) The Police offer very little potential for such a repressive campaign against the Communists.” The cable is now at the LBJ Library, National Security File, Country Italy, Vol.1.

594 See the testimony by Col. Cerica of SIFAR and of the Carabinieri in front of the Lombardi Commission. Cerica argued that “De Lorenzo always sides with the strongest [political figure], or at least with the one he believes can turn out useful for him”. Gen. Lombardi was sympathetic to this explanation. Now in the acts of the Parliamentary
A split among SIFAR’s principals

President Segni had long been looking for ways to get rid of the center-left and would have gladly appointed a center-right government led by Mario Scelba or by the President of the Senate Cesare Merzagora. This created the split among SIFAR’s principals which gave SIFAR and De Lorenzo the opportunity to subvert.

Segni knew that a center-right government would have led to upheavals like those under Tambroni’s government in 1960. He counted on the Carabinieri to prevent such upheavals,

Commission on Massacres, vol.4, p.306,

I rule out the explanation by Franzinelli [2010] pp.82-87, who argues that De Lorenzo’s shift followed a trip by President Segni to France on 19-22 February 1964. Segni was very impressed by the French anticommunist apparatus and asked the Minister of the Interior Paolo Taviani to imitate them. When Taviani told him that there was nothing comparable to the French plan to deport Communists to Polinesia and New Caledonia, Segni reacted harshly, refusing to meet the head of the police and expressing his confidence in De Lorenzo’s Carabinieri alone. Franzinelli argues that De Lorenzo felt “flattered by the trust that the Head of State” had in the Carabinieri and in De Lorenzo personally and abruptly changed his position, becoming “a fierce opponent of the center-left”. I see three problems with this explanation. The first is that Segni had long been an opponent of the center-left and had long expressed his confidence in the Carabinieri (see the acts of the Lombardi Commission, vol.4, pp. 284 and 289. De Lorenzo’s testimony, vol.5, p.445). It is thus unclear what changed after his trip to France in this regard. Secondly, SIFAR and De Lorenzo had acted against Segni’s preferences before. In July and September 1963, for instance, two CIA cables described Segni’s distaste for the center-left and for Fanfani in particular, as well as his desire to name Scelba as Prime Minister. Nonetheless, a few months later SIFAR and De Lorenzo had blackmailed Scelba into accepting the center-left and were expressing their admiration for Fanfani (see CIA reports of 19 July and 5 September 1963, available at
http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000864895.pdf and
http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000864900.pdf). Lastly, De Lorenzo and Segni probably did not even have the time to meet between Segni’s return from France and De Lorenzo’s conversation with the CIA. Franzinelli himself says that De Lorenzo’s conversation with the CIA occurred on 25 February, a Tuesday. Segni had come back from France on the 22nd, a Saturday. De Lorenzo thus only had one working day to meet Segni. I cannot exclude that De Lorenzo met Segni before his conversation with the CIA, but it seems unlikely given that De Lorenzo explicitly told the CIA source that he had an appointment with Segni “with whom he intended to talk in very similar terms”. It is also implausible that De Lorenzo had managed to “have numerous contacts recently in various quarters”, finding “considerable support for his point of view”, if his point of view had changed less than three days earlier.
viewing them as the only security force where Communists had been rooted out almost entirely. De Lorenzo thus developed a plan relying only on the Carabinieri.

Because their position coincided with Segni’s, De Lorenzo and SIFAR had the political support they needed to subvert. De Lorenzo was almost certainly aware of this need. In an undated and not fully developed note found among his personal papers he wrote: “With whom and for whom should one do a coup d’état? And President Segni’s directives in such a decisive moment? There is no attempt at an authoritarian pronouncement without forces, without political support or objectives.”

_De Lorenzo develops the Piano Solo_

On 25 March, a month after his discussion with the CIA, De Lorenzo held a meeting of high-ranking Carabinieri officers. He asked the commanders of the three territorial divisions (Northern, Central and Southern Italy) to develop a plan for dealing with an internal emergency using the forces of the Carabinieri alone. The overall plan was later called _Piano Solo_ (Plan Alone) precisely because it involved only the Carabinieri.

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596 On Segni’s faith in the Carabinieri alone, see the statement by Gen. Lombardi in the acts of Lombardi Commission, Vol.4, p.284, [http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviostorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL.4_11.1.91.pdf](http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviostorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL.4_11.1.91.pdf). Faenza [1978] p.364 quotes a 1963 cable by Harvey to CIA headquarters saying that “Segni has told us that the Italian army is full of Communists and that they only security force he has faith in are the Carabinieri, led by General De Lorenzo”. The source is not reliable, but in this particular case the information seems plausible.

597 This is the main argument in Franzinelli [2010], see especially pp.4 and 82-86. The Lombardi Commission report had reached the same conclusion (see p.10). There is little evidence of explicit demands from Segni, perhaps because such demands were unlikely to leave a paper trail.

598 The note is quoted by Franzinelli [2010] p.227, who first found it in De Lorenzo’s personal archive.

The Carabinieri drafted the *Piano Solo* based on the *Piano E-S Emergenza Speciale* (Special Emergency Plan), created by the head of the Police Angelo Vicari in May 1961. Piano E-S was intended to deal with an insurrection relying on both the police and the Carabinieri, in consultation with the Ministries of the Interior and of Defense and with the Armed Forces. The Plan was to rapidly arrest and transport to a safe location the most dangerous individuals, to occupy the offices of the Communist and Socialist parties and to deploy in the ten biggest urban centers a robust force with tanks and “ample and lasting firepower”.

The original *E-S Plan* required considerable modifications in order to be enacted with the forces of the Carabinieri alone, even with SIFAR’s assistance. First, the Carabinieri and SIFAR had to reduce the number of areas they intended to control. Second, they had to identify who were the extremists to be captured, how to transport them and where to. Third, they had to find additional manpower. I look at each one of these in turn.

First, the drafters of the *Piano Solo* chose to focus on a very limited set of buildings within the biggest urban centers. The guidelines distributed by the Operations Office at Carabinieri headquarters on 27 April specified the need to target the Carabinieri’s offensive action “against the probable adversary (occupation of the RAI-TV, telephone stations, party and newspaper offices, neutralization of prominent politicians etc.)”. The parties whose offices and newspapers had to be occupied were the Communist Party, the small Socialist faction which had

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601 Piano E-S is partially quoted in Franzinelli [2010] pp.20-21. Franzinelli found the plan among the papers of former Minister of the Interior Paolo Emilio Taviani.
split away from the Socialist Party in dissent with the center-left and the Socialist Party itself\(^{604}\). In other words, the Carabinieri were planning to act against a party that was in the government while the *Piano Solo* was being drafted.

Second, on 13 April SIFAR sent lists including allegedly 731 individuals\(^{605}\) to the territorial divisions of the Carabinieri. The purpose of the lists was to communicate to the local Carabinieri who they would have had to capture, if ordered by the Commanding General\(^{606}\). The individuals on the list would have been taken to designated places and then transported to a training base in Sardinia\(^{607}\). De Lorenzo himself admitted having discussed the transport of these extremists by air and by sea with the heads of the Air Force and the Navy\(^{608}\).

Who exactly was on this list has still not been resolved\(^{609}\). Overall the evidence shows that the individuals to be arrested were mainly from the organizational apparatus of the

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\(^{604}\) See for instance the plan for the control of Milan, reproduced in Franzinelli [2010] pp.305-313. The same was true for all the other plans.

\(^{605}\) This number is found in both the Lombardi Commission report, p.26, and in Alessi [1971] p.808, but is questioned by the minority report, (reproduced in Flamigni [2005] p.156) which argues that by summing up the number of individuals on lists remembered by local Carabinieri commanders, the total was more likely around 1100 to 1200.

\(^{606}\) After initially denying the existence of such a list\(^{606}\), the public line of defense of most SIFAR and Carabinieri officers was that the list had been distributed to be updated and that it did not include any sitting members of Parliament or any prominent personalities. This line of defense has long been shaky. It is now clear that the purpose of the distribution was not merely to update the list. To do so, it would have been much more convenient to consult the other lists available in the Ministry of Interior. Similarly, if updating was the goal, it is hard to explain why none of the local Carabinieri forces ever returned the lists, nor why SIFAR never asked for them to be returned. Even the majority report, generally sympathetic to the Carabinieri’s point of view, concluded that the lists were not distributed in order to be updated. See Alessi [1971] pp.1304-1308. See also the summary by the Lombardi report pp.27-29 and Flamigni [2005] pp.165-166.

\(^{607}\) The base was a training ground for Operation Gladio, a secret NATO stay-behind network that would have supported a guerrilla movement in case of an invasion. The place where the arrested individuals were to be transported was revealed only in 1990. See Franzinelli [2010] p.91 and Iliari [1993] pp.218-219.


\(^{609}\) When the government asked SIFAR’s successor to release the list in 1990, the military intelligence service replied that it had been lost (Franzinelli [2010] p.89). The Lombardi Commission was allowed to view the list and concluded that no sitting parliamentarians or prominent personalities were included (p.31). Based on the absence of prominent names in this list, Lombardi excluded that the *Piano Solo* was a coup d’état (testimony in Alessi [1971] p. 809). This conclusion has long been called into doubt. Virtually all the officers both in SIFAR and in the Carabinieri said that they had given only a quick look at the list, and didn’t remember any noticeable names.
Communist Party and of Communist-affiliated trade union. There were also several members of the Socialist Party and some leftist members of Parliament. The list thus targeted those who would have opposed a center-right government, and was meant to break the organizational backbone of the likely protesters.

Lastly, in their search for additional manpower the drafters of the Piano Solo decided to call back on duty Carabinieri veterans for an emergency situation. There were already programs in place for periodically training Carabinieri veterans, but the system was deemed too cumbersome and insufficient to deal with an emergency. Even though they had been thinking about it at least since March, De Lorenzo submitted a request to the Army Chief of Staff to institute a formal emergency procedure to call back Carabinieri veterans only on 9 July 1964, too late to affect the outcome of the political crisis. By going via the regular channels, the Carabinieri veterans could not have played a role in the Piano Solo in the summer of 1964.

Yet a parallel form of recruitment was going on simultaneously. As we have seen, Col. Rocca of SIFAR had been planning to recruit teams of activists capable of using “public street...
fighting, assault, sabotage and terrorism” since September 1963. These teams may have been what the drafters of the Piano Solo had in mind when they mentioned the utilization of “second tier forces” other than the regularly enlisted Carabinieri, but there is no evidence to prove this. Given how recently they had been recruited, it seems unlikely that Rocca’s forces would have had the discipline and training necessary to do what the Piano Solo demanded from them, even though many of them were war veterans. One possible explanation is that these teams of activists were meant to act as provocateurs, creating turmoil in the streets and participating in right-wing rallies demanding a new government. A second explanation, not mutually exclusive, is that the drafters of the Piano Solo were counting on forces that did not yet exist in an efficient form. For a plan whose implementation would have followed by only three months its first draft, this would not come as a surprise.

Was the Piano Solo an act of subversion?

The Piano Solo was not a plan to overthrow the government, even though it had several features which can be interpreted as concealing a subversive intent. The goal of the plan was instead to guarantee public order in case of significant upheavals.

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614 See Rocca’s letter to Allavena on 12 September 1963, cited above. The existence of these teams has been mentioned since the first denunciation of the Piano Solo, and no one today questions that they existed. Even the majority report agreed that these teams existed, but believed they were very limited in size and unfit for a subversive attempt. See Alessi (1971) pp.1189-1190.

615 See for instance the testimony by the former SIFAR officer and Carabinieri Colonel Guglielmo Cerica to the Lombardi Commission on 1 April 1968. Cerica spoke of recruitments in the fall of 1963 among former parachuters and members of the X MAS, a Fascist naval special operations brigade. Available at http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviistorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL.4_11.1.91.pdf, p.260.

The plan was intended to be implemented by a center-right government facing widespread protests. Segni and De Lorenzo wanted to ensure that, unlike the summer of 1960, these protests did not get out of hand. This explains why the targets of the plan were the leftist parties. These parties, including the Socialist one, would have been at the forefront of organizing these protests. To crush these protests the Piano Solo targeted their organizational backbone: it arrested the organizers of the protests, it occupied their offices and shut down their newspapers.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Piano Solo was not subversive because it did not intend to remove a government but to uphold one, for several reasons.

First, the plan was being drafted while the Socialist Party was part of the government. The plan itself would not have kicked the Socialist Party out of the government because it was intended to be implemented once the Socialists had already left the government. This does not fall under my definition of subversion, namely attempting or threatening to remove a government, but is clearly an indication of the lack of control which the government as a whole exercised over SIFAR and the Carabinieri.

Second, had the Piano Solo been implemented it would have violated several constitutional provisions, such as Parliamentary immunity, freedom to form political parties and the procedures regulating the use of emergency powers. It would have upheld the government, but violated the Constitution upon which that government ruled. This again does not fall under my strict definition of government-focused subversion, but may well be said to subvert important parts of the constitution.

Third, the Carabinieri alone would have decided when and if to implement the Piano Solo, in disregard of the constitutional procedures for an emergency situation requiring a transfer
of power to the military. For instance, the Carabinieri division for Southern Italy specified that this plan had to be implemented “before the transfer of power from civilian to military authorities. It follows that the order to implement this plan is independent from the norms included in the emergency projects and in the local plans for public order by the prefectures.”

Lastly, while they were drafting the Piano Solo De Lorenzo and SIFAR were also plotting to remove the center-left government and replace it with a center-right government. When they realized that they could not do so, they used the Piano Solo to threaten the center-left, coercing the Socialist Party into scaling back its demands. It is to this last point that I now turn.

Were De Lorenzo and SIFAR actively trying to remove the government?

In the spring and summer of 1964, De Lorenzo and SIFAR started preparing the alternative to the center-left, aiding a movement led by former Defense Minister and creator of SIFAR Randolfo Pacciardi. Pacciardi had been expelled from the Republican Party, ironically with SIFAR’s support, after refusing to support the center-left. He had then formed the Movement for a New Republic, which drew its inspiration from De Gaulle’s Fifth Republic in France and advocated a similar solution in Italy. Pacciardi’s movement remained small in terms of public opinion, but included several retired high-ranking military officers.

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617 This point is confirmed by several testimonies. See among others the testimony of General Zinza to the Lombardi Commission, now in the acts of the Commission on Massacres, Vol. IV, p.638, http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviostorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXXIII_25%20VOL.4_11.1.91.pdf.

618 Quoted in the minority report of the Parliamentary Commission, reproduced in Flamigni [2005] pp.103-104.

The first piece of evidence for SIFAR’s and De Lorenzo’s support for Pacciardi comes from a testimony by former SIFAR officer and Colonel of the Carabinieri, Guglielmo Cerica, in front of the Lombardi Commission. Cerica agreed to speak freely only because General Lombardi guaranteed that his testimony would have never become public. Early in 1964 Cerica was told by a friend of fascist sympathies of a plan to overthrow the center-left spearheaded by Gen. De Lorenzo. Cerica was skeptical because De Lorenzo had until then been a supporter of the center-left and because in the past he had been suspected of harboring leftist sympathies, but several other people came to speak to him about a similar plan, with some mentioning the role of Pacciardi’s movement. After an unspecified period of time, but probably in the early spring of 1964, Cerica spoke to the head of SIFAR, Egidio Viggiani, about this supposed plan. According to Cerica, Viggiani replied: “If I did not know your ideological inclination and if I did not know that you have been a volunteer in Spain [fighting for the Fascist regime during the Spanish Civil War], I would tell you these are all a bunch of lies, but keep in mind that things are going really badly here, (...) and that Moro and the socialists are dragging Italy into an economic abyss, hence there are those who desire an emergency government to replace the center-left. (...) You know, De Lorenzo is ready to do some things (...) and if this person [one of Cerica’s interlocutors] has told you that Pacciardi’s movement must prepare public opinion etc., I do not believe that it is dangerous to support it.”

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620 The Lombardi Commission, chaired by a former Commanding General of the Carabinieri had been established by the Ministry of Defense in January 1968 to investigate the events surrounding the Piano Solo. It produced what is probably the most accurate report on the episode. For its text and proceedings, see http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviistorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL.3_11.1.91.pdf
621 Ibidem pp.258-259 and, for Cerica’s career within SIFAR, p.277. Cerica’s testimony was declassified in 1990, with a decision that remains unique to this day.
622 Ibidem pp.261-264.
623 Ibidem pp.266-267. On another occasion Viggiani repeated to Cerica that “De Lorenzo was ready to do some things”, see p.271.
According to Cerica, after the fall of the center-left government Segni would have nominated Pacciardi to be Prime Minister, in a government supported by centrist and right-wing parties. De Lorenzo would have then implemented the Piano Solo to crush the protests of the leftist parties. SIFAR in the meanwhile continued to support Pacciardi’s movement, financially and by organizing rallies and transporting supporters.

SIFAR also encouraged sympathetic industrialists to support Pacciardi. On 15 April Col. Rocca of SIFAR spoke with Giorgio Valerio, the head of Edison, Italy’s biggest producer of electricity until the nationalization of the electric industry in 1963. Rocca wrote that Valerio had “expressed his hope for a Brazil-type solution [a military coup had taken place in Brazil just two weeks earlier]. I told him to support Pacciardi, as Pacciardi himself had asked me to say. Valerio is against it, because he thinks that Pacciardi has no chances of succeeding and he would be wasting his money. The mistake was to get started without serious preparations.”

A month later De Lorenzo expressed a very different opinion on the center-left talking to U.S. officials. In a conversation on 19 May De Lorenzo “belittled” Pacciardi’s movement. He said it “was not taken seriously by Italy’s security and military leaders. Pacciardi had some good ideas and was honest and in earnest, but his approach was totally wrong. His weakest point was to attempt to attract all kinds of people and to draw everybody in his movement who had a grudge against the present Italian Republic, from the extreme left to the extreme right. (…)

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624 Cerica’s testimony in front of the Lombardi Commission, pp.270-272 and 288-290. The Piano Solo is not explicitly mentioned, but it is clearly what Cerica and his questioner Lombardi had in mind.
625 Ibidem pp.267-269.
626 The note was first published in the Italian weekly Panorama on 18 July 1974 in an article by Luigi Bisignani and Stefano De Andreis, who claimed to have photocopied the documents directly from Rocca’s file. The authenticity of these documents are, as far as I can tell, undisputed. See Franzinelli [2010] p.91 and Flamini [1981] p.43, who cite the document but incorrectly say that De Lorenzo was also present at the meeting.
top security and military officers would very much prefer to see organized a strong rightist political party which they can support and from which they can obtain political and ideological orientation. But such a party must be democratic and ready to respect the Republican Constitution”. De Lorenzo then discussed the “the most efficient way to eliminate the internal Communist menace”, arguing it was “for the PCI to take the fatal step of staging an open revolt. The revolt would be so ruthlessly suppressed that the PCI would be eliminated for good.” Lastly, and more surprisingly, De Lorenzo said he “was not critical of Moro’s center-left government, although it was obvious he did not think much of Moro as the leader of the government. (…) De Lorenzo expressed high respect also for [Socialist leader] Nenni, who, he said, had demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility on problems dealing with labor strikes.”

Even though U.S. officials believed that De Lorenzo had “commented frankly”, he was most likely not sincere in his remarks. As I will show, a month after this conversation we again have evidence of a plot coordinated by Pacciardi and supported by De Lorenzo, the Carabinieri and SIFAR to remove the center-left government. If De Lorenzo had been sincere, he would have taken four different position towards the center-left government in less than six months -supporting it in January, fiercely opposed to it in late February, not critical of it in May and again opposed to it in June- and he would have done all this without losing the support of SIFAR and of the Carabinieri. This seems implausible. A more plausible explanation is that De Lorenzo told U.S. officials what they wanted to hear while preparing the ground for his subversive attempt. De Lorenzo knew that the American government was favorable to the center-

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628 Franzinelli [2010] p.96 considers the shift in De Lorenzo’s position to be genuine. He hypothesizes that De Lorenzo had changed his position after talking with Moro, agreeing on “reciprocal guarantees: the revelation of the Piano Solo with the pledge to avoid its implementation; the willingness of the Prime Minister to favor the general’s career.” This is just a hypothesis, as Franzinelli himself admits. There is no evidence showing that such an exchange of guarantees occurred and it is unclear why these guarantees should have been considered credible.
left and did not want Italy to veer to the right. He thus said he was not critical of the center-left formula, but he criticized Moro, hinting that he would have welcomed his ouster. He also distanced himself from Pacciardi and from other right-wing movements which “were not democratic and did not respect the Republican Constitution”, even though SIFAR was covertly supporting them. De Lorenzo portrayed himself as the American government’s best friend: a guarantor of the Constitution, not critical of the center-left, but ready to get rid of the Communist menace in case of an open revolt.

This open revolt, De Lorenzo knew, would have been more likely to occur under the center-right government which he and President Segni were working to establish, probably with Pacciardi in a prominent position. The American government would not have welcomed such a center-right government, but it would have acquiesced to it especially in the face of large Communist-led protests. At that point, the Piano Solo would have kicked in, delivering a crippling blow to the Communist Party and thus pleasing the Americans.

Further evidence supporting this interpretation comes from a conversation in late June between U.S. intelligence officials and two senior Italian officers whose affiliation and name are still classified. These are most likely senior SIFAR officers: the document is an intelligence cable, the interlocutors’ affiliation is still classified and both had great plans for General De Lorenzo. The first officer argued that “whatever center-left formula is adopted, it will inevitably fail. The only solution will be an eventual overthrow of the present coalition government. (…)

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629 On De Lorenzo’s attempt not to be perceived as associated with Pacciardi, see also Rocca’s note on 26 June 1964, the day Moro’s center-left government fell, published by Panorama on 18 July 1974: “(...) [Pacciardi] would want to meet general D.L. [De Lorenzo], but he (...) declined the invitation, and rightly so.”

630 Intelligence Information Cable, Washington, 26 June 1964, in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 Volume XII, Western Europe, Document 99, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v12/d99. The cable was sent to Washington on 26 June, the day after Moro’s government had resigned but the conversation had occurred before the government’s fall.
The only lasting solution will come when the center forces decide to take bold action by reversing the present trend and returning to a center-liberal-democratic government. Such an eventuality would probably bring the battle (…) into the streets and result in some bloodshed.”

Asked about which leader would bring about such a solution, the officer avoided giving a name saying that “one would have to be created. (…) As for the role that would fall to the security forces which would have to maintain public order [the officer] indicated that General Giovanni De Lorenzo, Commandant of the Carabinieri Corps, represented the only force around whom the Italian security forces could rally. (…) The Italian officer said that General De Lorenzo did not intend to exceed his authority, but that he intended to control the military force which would neutralize any attempt at leftist pressure on the piazza, and that he would act as ‘king maker’ in the event of a political overthrow. In this connection, [the officer] noted that De Lorenzo had developed a direct relationship with President Antonio Segni and had won the latter’s confidence.” The officer “also commented that President Segni represents the only viable figure in terms of public backing and constitutional authority” and concluded by describing “the Italian public as bewitched by the leftist influences in Italy, and particularly by the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which he branded as worse than the PCI because it projected the party as ‘social-democratic’ and was in a position to mislead non-Communist elements.”

Speaking on the same day, the other senior officer repeated in nearly identical terms the view of De Lorenzo as king-maker, or even of “the king to be elected by responsible political forces. (…) Eventually, he said, a center type government would have to be instituted and leftist reaction on the piazza would have to be met with a show of force –something which General De Lorenzo was ready to provide if necessary.”

631 The part in brackets is still classified.
De Lorenzo and, most likely, SIFAR were thus ready to take action to support a centrist, or center-right, government. There is no evidence of a shift in De Lorenzo’s position, indeed there are hints of his desire to play an even larger role, as king maker and possibly even as elected king in the situation following the fall of the center-left government.

On 26 June the Commanding General of the U.S. Army South European Task Force sent “explosive” information to the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Army in Europe, telling him of a “possible coup d’etat in Italy near future”\(^{632}\). On 23 June, a “highly reliable informant” had said that “plan being drafted for national demonstration during next few months by rightist economists and politicians, i.e. liberals, monarchists and members of Italian social movements (Movimento Social[é] Italiano) (MSI). Desired result demonstration is to bring to Rome strong groups war veterans, war-wounded, ex-prisoners of war, etc. under pretext reawakening patriotic feelings Italian people create favorable atmosphere for ending current political trend in Italy and installing new order founded on traditional moral and political values of nation. Individual selected coordinate plans for demonstration is Senator Randolfo Pacciardi (…) Appears Pacciardi could count on moral support and collaboration highly placed political rightists, armed forces, national police (Carabinieri) and leaders veterans associations. (…) If demonstration should be opposed by counterdemonstration of extreme leftists, Carabinieri would be immediately called to action [garble] by armed forces. Armed forces would then assume law and order maintenance Italy. Local police cannot be counted on because politically controlled.

President Segni aware this plan.” At the bottom of the telegram, US Army intelligence copied

and pasted De Lorenzo’s comments of a month before, in which he belittled Pacciardi and his movement, and attached the full report of De Lorenzo’s conversation.

This document confirms that in late June De Lorenzo’s Carabinieri were supporting Pacciardi and other right-wing movements and trying to get rid of the center-left by organizing large demonstrations. These demonstrations, as we have seen, received SIFAR’s support, both via organizational and logistical aid to Pacciardi’s movement and via the recruitment of teams of activists, especially among war veterans, ready for street fighting. Lastly, the document shows that at least parts of the US government had previously not been aware of De Lorenzo’s plans and that even after this cable some continued to believe that he harbored no such plans. This would have been the conclusion of those who had read the statement copied and pasted by Army intelligence at the bottom of the telegram. If De Lorenzo was indeed lying when he said he was not critical of the center-left, he seems to have done so convincingly.633

_The government crisis and the sound of rattling sabers_634

The opponents of the center-left were planning to provoke the government’s fall, or merely to wait for what seemed a likely outcome anyhow, and then to replace it with a center-right government nominated by the President of the Republic and thus lawfully in power. When it became clear that President Segni could not nominate a center-right government, as a majority

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634 The expression “the sound of rattling sabers” is frequently attributed to Nenni and is widely used to describe what happened during the summer of 1964, as in Franzinelli [2010], part 2. It does not seem, however, that Nenni ever used the expression during the crisis.
in Parliament had clearly expressed itself in favor of a new Moro government, the *Piano Solo* and the rumors which surrounded it served another purpose. Not crushing the protests which a center-right government would have faced, but threatening the Socialists to induce them to moderate their demands. As the parties in the majority negotiated over the program of a new government, they knew that if they failed to reach an agreement on a new center-left government, Segni would have tried again to nominate a government supported by the center-right, and some form of repressive measures would have been taken against the leftist parties. The Christian Democrats used this threat to extract greater concessions from the Socialists. The underwhelming result of the *Piano Solo* and of De Lorenzo’s maneuvers was thus to coerce the Socialists into giving up on most of their programmatic demands.

To understand how this result came about I chronologically reconstruct the evolution of the crisis, focusing on how the threat was sent and perceived.

### 25 June to 3 July: the failed search for an alternative to the center-left

On 25 June the government lost a vote in Parliament on private school financing. Moro and Nenni chose to resign, with the latter noting dramatically: “At a Parliamentary level, we are fully in 1922 [the year in which Mussolini came to power]"[^635]. The next day Moro formally resigned in the hands of President Segni, remaining in office to handle ordinary administration.

Segni’s preferred option would have been a government of technocrats led by the President of the Senate Merzagora and supported by a center-right coalition. This was the option supported by that heterogeneous front which had been opposing the center-left and plotting its overthrow. The morning of the first day of the Presidential consultations which precede the nomination of a government, Pacciardi sent a note to Merzagora pressing for a solution “within constitutional limits, but outside normal procedures”. Segni had to nominate the Prime Minister of his choice and “if the Communists attacked this government mobilizing the streets, the government must have a firm hand once and for all.” After his consultations with Segni, Merzagora publicly declared that the only way to get out of such a complex situation was by forming an emergency government. Merzagora’s statement was probably not intended as a threat, yet it signaled to the parties in Parliament what would have happened if they failed to reach an agreement to renew the center-left and it hinted at what Segni’s preferences were.

Segni asked two Christian Democratic leaders, Paolo Taviani and Mario Scelba, to lead a center-right government, mentioning to the former the desirability of having Pacciardi as

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636 Franzinelli [2010] p.108. Ilari [1993] p.197 states that Segni’s preferred option was a similar government but led by Paolo Emilio Taviani. Franzinelli seems right, given that Segni asked Taviani when he started doubting of Merzagora’s plan. Regardless of who exactly was going to lead the government, Segni’s preference for a center-right government and his opposition to the center-left is undisputed. As Nenni’s wrote years later, “Segni was determined to make the recreation of the center-left impossible” (from Nenni’s diaries, 17 January 1971, cited in Ilari [1993] p.197).


639 Merzagora’s plan was actually not threatening at all and very different from Segni’s, but this was not clear at first. Merzagora wanted to have a government which included all parties in Parliament, from the Communists to the neo-Fascists. This idea was both remarkably unrealistic and light years away from De Lorenzo’s plans. For instance, the Communist deputy secretary Luigi Longo, which under the Piano Solo would have been arrested and taken to a military base in Sardinia, would have become a minister in Merzagora’s government, whereas Pacciardi would have been excluded. Merzagora opposed any emergency measures in terms of public order and he was skeptical of relying on the armed forces, noting that “a leader placed at the head of a military rebellion, ends up being (...) dominated by the military”. See Franzinelli [2010] pp.112, 242 fn.83, 288 and 323.
Minister of Defense or of the Interior. Both refused to do so. In his memoirs, Scelba recalls having told Segni that such a government would have surely led to widespread protests and that he preferred for Moro’s center-left government to fall after having manifested all of its inadequacy, rather than via an external intervention “which could be interpreted as a reactionary attempt”. When Segni replied that he counted on the Carabinieri, Scelba warned him that he had to be cautious, “because the head [of the Carabinieri] was an officer whom I, as minister of the Interior, had twice rejected as Commanding General”. Segni nonetheless continued to rely on De Lorenzo and SIFAR and looked for other ways to prevent a renewed center-left government.

SIFAR’s preferred option would have been a minority government by the Christian Democracy only, a so-called mono-color government, led by former Prime Minister Giovanni Leone. In a memo to Segni on 30 June, SIFAR wrote that “the parties in the [governing] coalition intend to continue with the center-left formula (...). Instead, large parts of public opinion (...) would find more convenient (...) a mono-color government (...). Only the Head of State can say the decisive word, and to him are directed, with respectful devotion, the confident hopes of all Italians, who strongly believe that even in this occasion the best solution for the protection of the true and permanent interests of the Italian people will come from the serene and responsible position of the President of the Republic (...). For a solution of the crisis with a mono-color government, all circles, none excluded, look with sympathy to Hon. Leone.”

Segni’s and SIFAR’s search for an alternative to the center-left encountered a serious obstacle the next day, when all the representatives of the governing parties in Parliament publicly

641 See Franzinelli [2010] pp.119-120. Scelba’s citation is on p.120.
indicated that they wanted to continue with Aldo Moro as Prime Minister. Segni at this point was constitutionally obligated to nominate Moro. He complained with the Christian Democratic leader Fanfani that “the parliamentary groups of the center-left, with their public statements, had put him in a condition in which he was not free” to choose his preferred Prime Minister and he asked Fanfani to convince other leading Christian Democrats to withdraw their support from the center-left. Having realized that these maneuvers were unfeasible, on 3 July Segni met Moro and reluctantly assigned him the task of forming the government.

3 July to 17 July: threatening the center-left

The courses of action available to the opponents of the center-left were now reduced to two. First, they could try to dissuade Moro from accepting the nomination. Second, they could accept Moro’s nomination but pressure the Christian Democracy to take a harsh negotiating stance with the Socialists and the other governing parties. These pressures would have either led to the failure of the negotiations, thus dooming the center-left, or helped the Christian Democracy extract greater concessions from the Socialists.

Segni, De Lorenzo and their allies chose to do both. Segni pressured the Secretary of the Christian Democracy, the conservative Mariano Rumor, not to give ground to the Socialists in the negotiations. According to a close aide of Moro, Segni was also continually pressuring Moro to either close the negotiations quickly or give up his nomination, leading Moro to feel

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645 Based on the account by Franzinelli [2010] pp.123-124. Ilari [1993] p.197 states that Segni nominated Moro “with the intimate conviction and the secret hope that he would have failed.”
“worried and unusually anxious”⁶⁴⁷. Cesare Merzagora, on his part, spoke to Moro expressing his “condolences” to him for the nomination as Prime Minister. Merzagora told Moro that with the center-left the country was sure to face “galloping unemployment” in a few months, at which point “we would run the risk of being forced, perhaps with tens of dead on the street, to recur to an emergency government”⁶⁴⁸.

Next to the exhortations of Segni and Merzagora, the other instrument of pressure in the hands of the opponents of the center-left was the Piano Solo. With the creation of a renewed Moro government becoming the most likely scenario, the Piano Solo had lost its original function. Initially conceived as a way to prop up a center-right government facing wide-spread protests, it could now be used as a coercive tool to affect the negotiations between the center-left parties, leading them either to fail, thus paving the way for a center-right government, or to a program more tilted towards the right. In order to do so, the threat contained in the Piano Solo had to be made explicit. As I will show, this is what happened after Moro’s nomination.

There is no direct evidence that shows that Segni, De Lorenzo and the other opponents of the center-left consciously or collectively decided to use the Piano Solo as a coercive tool. Assuming this decision was a conscious one, it would have been rational for two additional reasons. First, despite the secrecy surrounding the Piano Solo, in late June rumors started to spread about possible political interventions by the armed forces and the Carabinieri in particular. On 23 June the German daily Die Welt spoke of thundering clouds gathering over Italy, among whispers of a coup d’état and the serious concerns of military officers⁶⁴⁹. Six days

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later the French newspaper *Le Monde* spoke of a “coup d’état psychosis enveloping Italy”. On the same day, the secretariat of the Communist Party “denounce[d] that overtly reactionary groups [were] exploiting the current difficulties to launch an attack against the democratic and republican institutions, thus creating the conditions for the creation of an authoritarian regime.” Leading members of the Communist Party, of the Communist-led trade union and even of the Socialist Party started sleeping outside of their own homes, for fear of being imprisoned. On 2 July the Rome correspondent of the French weekly *L’Express* wrote that “the generals of the Carabinieri nourish political ambitions”. The rumors quickly multiplied and even though some dismissed them as baseless, the element of surprise was lost. With presumably some of the targets of the *Piano Solo* sleeping outside their own homes, implementing the plan became a lot harder, if not altogether impossible.

Secondly, the implementation of the plan was made even harder when in early July the head of the Navy refused to collaborate with De Lorenzo. The preparations for the *Piano Solo* had been significantly accelerated immediately after the fall of Moro’s first government. On 27 June SIFAR sent again to the local Carabinieri divisions the list of extremists to be arrested. On 28 June, a Sunday, each division had an emergency meeting, finalizing the details of the plan.

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650 The communique was published on the Communist Party’s newspaper *L’Unitá* the next day. It is quoted in Franzinelli [2010] p.117 and in the papers of the Fondazione Nenni, envelope 126, file 2471.


653 One of the first to publicly dismiss the rumors of a coup d’état as baseless was the journalist Vittorio Gorresio in article on the daily *La Stampa* on 7 July, cited in Alessi [1971] p.382.

654 According to several accounts, such as Franzinelli [2010] p.114-115 and the Parliamentary Commission’s minority report (Flamigni [2005] pp.130-134), at this meeting the Division Commander ordered to occupy the prefectures and, if necessary, to seize the prefect at gunpoint, leading the other officers to exclaim that they were being ordered to start a coup d’état. These accounts are based on the testimony by General Aurigo to the Lombardi Commission, cited in the Parliamentary Commission’s majority report (Alessi [1971] p.743). Yet Aurigo himself later specified that the meeting had occurred on 19 June, thus before the fall of the Moro government (see Aurigo’s letter to the Parliamentary Commission in Alessi [1971] p744). Aurigo’s testimony was contested by the
On 2 July, the territorial division commanders were given the locations of where they would have had to take the arrested individuals before transporting them to Sardinia. That evening and the morning afterward, De Lorenzo spoke with the heads of the Navy and of the Air Force, asking for their logistical support in transporting the arrested individuals. The head of the Navy refused to give his full collaboration, for reasons which have never been fully clarified. Without the Navy, transporting the prisoners to Sardinia was much harder. According to one testimony, this caused the whole plan not to be implemented.

The Piano Solo was now an unworkable plan. It had been conceived for a different scenario and it faced two hardly surmountable obstacles: the loss of surprise and the refusal of the Navy to cooperate. At this point the opponents of the center-left first made their threat public. Given the difficulties facing the Piano Solo, this was probably an empty threat, a bluff. Like

Division Commander Gen. Markert and by another participating officer, Gen. Ciravegna. Other officers confirmed that there was indeed a widespread suspicion that the orders may have been illegal and subversive, but excluded that the issue of a coup d’état was ever raised explicitly. The evidence seems to weigh against Aurigo, although there is no certainty. On one side, the officers who denied having discussed the occupation of the prefecture had an obvious interest in doing so. On the other side, Aurigo’s testimony was not confirmed by any other participant, it was partially modified and the drafts of the Piano Solo speak of not informing the other security forces, not of occupying their offices and arresting them. See General General Zinza’s testimony in front of the Lombardi Commission, now in the acts of the Commission on Massacres, Vol. IV, pp.669-678, http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archiviistorico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC%20XXIII_25%20VOL.4_11.1.91.pdf.

For the same conclusion, see the testimony by General Lombardi in front of the Parliamentary Commission, in Alessi [1971] p.881. Lombardi argued that “one could attribute to De Lorenzo certain possibilities, it could lead to the idea that he had in his hands something robust, well prepared, which had substance to it. Those of us who looked inside know that it did not have any substance, but from the inside [of the political world] one could very well have thought the opposite. Question by President Alessi: do you think it was just a show? Lombardi: a show and an element of pressure. It’s a bad word: it’s a bluff.”
all successful threats, however, it did not have to be carried out so that we will never know with certainty whether it was indeed a bluff\textsuperscript{658}.

Pacciardi was the first to publicly deliver the threat. At a right-wing rally in support of an emergency government on 5 July, he declared: “the President of the Republic shall point to the country how to steer away from the abyss. Let him order and it will be executed. (…) Who would dare to rebel? The Communists? They will find a worthy opponent! Parliament? The head of State has the power to dissolve it and no one would regret its termination.”\textsuperscript{659}

Pacciardi was not fully credible. He had invoked the creation of an emergency government several times before and, to this day, he is still often dismissed as a visionary surrounded by retired and largely toothless generals\textsuperscript{660}. Nonetheless, his threat reached its destination. The leader of the Socialist Party wrote in his diary that he had been “impressed” by Pacciardi’s rally, compared it to the birth of fascism and believed that “it was a symptom that should not be ignored”. Commenting on another smaller manifesto “of the same tenor”, Nenni noted that “these may be small things, but a thousand rivulets form a river.”\textsuperscript{661}

\textsuperscript{658} The majority report of the Parliamentary Commission (Alessi [1971] pp.1152-1153) argued “that the inadequacy of the so-called Piano Solo for the realization of a subversive initiative is so radical that it becomes in and of itself an undoubtable symptom of the intention of those who developed it.”\textsuperscript{658} In other words, the Piano Solo was not subversive because it was not feasible. I do not have the technical expertise to fully ascertain whether the Piano Solo was indeed unfeasible, even though students of coups have long understood that successful coups only require a limited number of forces as long as the other armed forces remain passive. More importantly, the Piano Solo’s supposed unfeasibility says nothing about how it was used to threaten the center-left. Like all successful threats, the Piano Solo did not have to be carried out. An empty threat is still a threat and, under my definition, it is a form of subversion. On the theory of coups see Luttwak [1968] and Col. Cerica’s testimony to the Lombardi Commission, vol.IV, pp.295-296.

\textsuperscript{659} Quoted in Franzinelli [2010] p.127. The Italian original contains the expression “Troverebbero pane per i loro denti!”, literally “They would find bread for their teeth!”.

\textsuperscript{660} Franzinelli [2010] p.127 describes this rally as “bombastic expressions, pronounced by an unarmed politician surrounded by retired generals.” See the CIA briefing to the NSC of 13 April 1960, cited above.

\textsuperscript{661} Nenni [1982], diary entry for 6 July, pp.374-375.
The negotiations between the center-left parties were affected by these rumors and by the
more or less explicit threats, even though the leaders of the smaller parties probably only had a
vague idea of what Segni and De Lorenzo would have done had the negotiations failed. The
threat nonetheless changed the initial negotiating position of the Socialist Party. Three days
before the negotiations began, Nenni told the central committee of the Socialist Party that it was
necessary to postpone some of the more ambitious structural reforms. The alternative, Nenni
argued, was to face “much greater economic sacrifices” connected to “authoritarian attempts of
which the emergency governments now being discussed (…) are only a premise”662. On the day
the negotiations began, 7 July, Nenni wrote in his diary that “the union among the center-left
forces is imposed upon us by the fact that there is no other possible majority and that if within
forty-eight hours we do not reach an agreement, no one knows what can happen: maybe a
government for the ‘elections’; maybe a presidential government like Tambroni 1960; in any
case, an adventure.”663 The threats by Pacciardi and by the other opponents of the center-left
were thus weakening the Socialists’ bargaining power, by making their best alternative to a
negotiated agreement particularly worrisome664.

The negotiations nonetheless dragged on for several days, with no result in sight.
Encouraged by Segni665, the secretary of the Christian Democracy Mariano Rumor took a hard
and uncompromising stance on the new government’s program, despite the combined opposition
of his coalition partners, the Socialists, the Republicans and the Social-democrats. The opponents

662 Speech by Nenni to the Central Committee of the Socialist Party, 4 July 1964, now in Archivio Fondazione Nenni,envelope 97, file 2258, p.26 of the typewritten speech. The quoted part of the speech was printed the next day in
the Socialist newspaper Avanti!. See the reproduction in Archivio Fondazione Nenni, envelope 126, file 2471.
663 Nenni [1982], diary entry for 7 July 1964, p.375.
664 The notion of Best Alternative To a Negotiated Solution (or BATNA) has played a prominent role in the
bargaining literature since it was first developed by Fisher and Uri [1991], see especially pp.51-54, available at
665 Segni’s diary shows repeated instances in which he put pressure on Christian Democratic leaders to take a hard
of the center-left continued to send ambiguous threatening signals. On 9 July, unknown persons wrote on the walls of the regional military command in Turin “Military Government”, “De Lorenzo in Government”, “All with Pacciardi” and “New Republic”. On 12 July, Segni met Moro and tried to convince him of renouncing his nomination, thus opening the way to a monochrome emergency government. Moro resisted, thinking that an emergency government would have been a dangerous adventure. Expressing his continued preference for such a solution, Segni met later that day with Merzagora, followed two days later by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. The meaning of those meetings was recognized by SIFAR itself on the same day in a note to Segni. By meeting with “the President of the Senate first and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces later, [the President of the Republic] has wanted to reassure the Italians (...) that he will not allow the internal situation to degenerate in protests dangerous for the State’s institutions and for the liberty, welfare and security of citizens.”

The negotiations entered their decisive phase on 14 July. On that day the supporters of an intransigent negotiating position prevailed within the directorate of the Christian Democracy, leading Nenni to write that a rupture in the negotiations was probable. At the same time, and hardly coincidentally, Segni and the other opponents of the center-left further increased the pressure on Moro. On 15 July Segni wrote Moro a letter saying that the program agreed upon by the three smaller parties of the center-left alone would have been “a humiliation” for the Christian Democracy and threateningly alluded to the fact that no one could have prevented

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Catholics from forming another party if the Christian Democracy failed to defend their rights. That same day SIFAR sent Segni a note again expressing its opposition to the center-left: “Even if the negotiations reached a favorable outcome, nothing good can be expected from a [government] formula born under the signs of discord, mistrust and ambiguity, at a time when the country urgently needs an energetic, authoritative and secure leadership.”

The next day Segni and De Lorenzo delivered their threat in full force. First Segni had a meeting with De Lorenzo at the Presidential palace. Unlike the many other meetings of the past, this time the Presidency released a communique with the news of De Lorenzo’s visit. The visit made a great impression and caused widespread apprehension in the political world.

Right after speaking with Segni, De Lorenzo went to a secret meeting organized by Segni himself with Moro, the Secretary of the Christian Democracy Rumor and the heads of the Parliamentary groups of the Christian Democracy. De Lorenzo and, separately, the Chief of the Police Angelo Vicari, were asked whether or not they believed that public order could be maintained in case of an emergency government or anticipated elections. Both said that it could be done. This reassurance deprived Moro of the argument that the center-left was the only viable solution to the crisis and that an emergency government would have been a dangerous

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670 The letter from Segni to Moro is reproduced in Franzinelli [2010], pp.329-330, from Moro’s papers at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato.


672 De Lorenzo implausibly pleaded ignorance in front of the Parliamentary Commission, saying that “I visited very frequently the Head of State for reasons related to the Carabinieri nut no communiques were ever released. But this one time he [Segni] did. I do not know how nor why it was believed to be appropriate to do so.” In Alessi [1971] p.405.


674 The testimonies of the politicians who participated in this meeting are in Alessi [1971] pp.418-426. De Lorenzo later stated that he had said that he could guarantee public order only as long as the situation did not explode and the Communist Party and the Communist-led trade union did not fully mobilize their members. See De Lorenzo’s testimony in front of the Lombardi Commission, now in the acts of the Commission on Massacres, Vol. V, p.447, http://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/relazioni/archivi storico/commissioni/X%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC_ RELAZ/X_%20LEG_TERRORISMO_DOC20XXIII_25%20VOL_5_11.1.91.pdf.
adventure. When asked by Moro what the population thought of the center-left, De Lorenzo said that “there are strong tendencies who fear that the center-left is a leap in the dark”. Moro felt discouraged, remarking that Italians were all Fascists and considering to resign. According to one of Moro’s aides, the Chief of the Police warned him to do just that, whispering in Moro’s ears: “You, in any case, would be better off renouncing the nomination”.

Even though they would later leave a partially conflicting record, Moro and Nenni understood Segni’s and De Lorenzo’s threat. In Nenni’s words, “the only alternative which

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675 See Alessi [1971] pp.408-413. The reader will recall that Moro had made this argument to Segni just four days before. According to Franzinelli [2010] p.134, this is what prompted Segni to decide to organize this secret meeting, in agreement with Rumor.


677 See Franzinelli [2010] p.136, based on a letter by Moro’s spokesman to the daily Corriere della Sera, 12 February 2004. Vicari was considered to be in favor of the center-left and his was probably a genuine warning rather than a threat, presumably due to the concern for what De Lorenzo and Segni might have done if Moro had acted against their preferences. Nenni himself refused to believe that Vicari had pressured Moro to renounce his nomination. See Nenni [1982], diary entry for 16 July, p.380. For Vicari’s pro-Socialist position, see Cerica’s testimony in front of the Lombardi Commission, Vol.IV, p.293 and Franzinelli [2010] p.245, fn.149.

678 When the attempted coup d’état was first denounced by L’Espresso, Moro issued “the firmest and clearest denial” that such an attempt had ever occurred. Cited in Alessi [1971] p.24. He knew that if he had revealed what he knew about the summer of 1964, he would have compromised his relationship with the secret services and with the Carabinieri and thus remained silent until 1978.

679 When the scandal over the supposed coup d’état erupted publicly three years later, Nenni noted in his diary that in 1964 “there had been at attempt to outflank Parliament to the right, but to my knowledge there were no threats of a coup d’état and in no instance did such a threat weigh on us. This is the truth, pure and simple.” He testified to the Parliamentary Commission in similar terms, again emphasizing his lack of knowledge of military or police plans. Nenni’s recollection was only partially correct. It is most likely true that, as he wrote in January 1971, he “did not know of the action of the secret services, the Piano Solo and De Lorenzo’s initiatives.” However, it is not true that the threat of an authoritarian attempt had not weighed on him during the negotiations. He understood that if the center-left had failed, the alternative would have been an emergency government accompanied by a strong dose of repressive measures. In later years he tried to distinguish between the threat of an emergency government, with Parliament being outflanked to the right, and the threat of a full-fledged coup. However, he had rejected this distinction when speaking to the direction of the Socialist Party on 4 June 1964, when he said that “the emergency governments now being discussed (...) are only a premise (...) [of] authoritarian attempts”. Nenni was vaguely but surely aware of the consequences of a failure of the negotiations, thus he made several important concessions to ensure the negotiations’ success. Yet he was unaware of the details of the punitive element of the threat, which was also important given that his Socialist Party was one of the targets of the Piano Solo. See Nenni [1982] p.71, diary entry for 1 June 1967, Alessi [1971] pp.390-391, Nenni [1983] p.557, diary entry for 16 January 1971, and Castronovo, De Felice and Scoppola [2004] pp.415. See also the article by senior PSI member De Martino on the Avanti! on 21 July: “the common knowledge of the grave dangers included in the other possible alternatives [to the center-left], dominated on the parties’ negotiations, amidst the reawakened and blatant intentions of the right, aiming at a regime crisis, at the end of parliamentary democracy and at the
emerged in case of a power-void following the renunciation of the center-left was an emergency government (...) which would have been the government of the right-wing forces, with a fascistic-agrarian-industrial content (...) [T]here were already in place throughout the country forces ready to support such an adventure which do not belong to the ideological and political right". Moro similarly argued that “the attempted coup d’état in ’64 certainly had the characteristics of a military intervention, based on a plan of the Carabinieri, but it ended up using this military instrument essentially to conduct a heavy political interference aimed at blocking or at least strongly reducing the politics of the center-left”.

The threat succeeded. The next day the Socialist Party conceded on virtually all the main points and an agreement was reached. A renewed center-left government was ready to be formed, but its program was much diminished, in accordance with its opponents’ demands. I can thus conclude that SIFAR and De Lorenzo behaved subversively in the summer of 1964. They attempted to remove the center-left government and their threat to do so ultimately curtailed the reform program of the center-left. Picking and choosing whom to obey among their principals, SIFAR and De Lorenzo acted in accordance with President Segni’s preferences. Their destruction of parties." Reproduced and underlined at the margins in the papers Nenni gathered during and after the government crisis, now at the Fondazione Nenni, envelope 126, file 2471.

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680 Scoppola [1991] pp.348-349 is the only one to argue otherwise. He quotes the passages of Nenni’s diaries in which he declares himself unaware of the Piano Solo and of the initiatives of SIFAR and De Lorenzo, but does not consider the passages in which he declares himself impressed by Pacciardi’s statements or his declarations in front of the Socialist Party’s central committee about the consequences of a failure of the center-left. Even scholars who bemoan their colleagues’ tendency to see conspiracies everywhere, agree that there was a threat in the summer of 1964 and that Nenni perceived it. See Sabbattucci [1999] pp.204-205 and Teodori and Bordin [2014] p.125.


682 Moro added that the reduction of the center-left’s reformist program “was the political objective pursued by the President of the Republic, Hon. Segni” and that “the extraordinary meeting conceded to De Lorenzo and its announcement gave to everyone the impression of an admonitory intervention.” Moro’s text is reproduced in Biscione [1993] pp.45-47. For an online reproduction see http://www.fisicamente.net/MEMORIA/index-1742.htm

683 The literature is unanimous on this point. See especially Franzinelli [2010] p.141, who cites a note by Nenni, now in the Archivio Fondazione Nenni, linking the pressure by Segni on 16 July and the agreement reached on 17 July or, more precisely, at 3 am on 18 July.
action went against the preferences of the Italian government and of the U.S. government, but they probably managed to mislead the latter as to what their intentions were. The Piano Solo’s original purpose was to uphold a center-right government and not to remove a center-left government, but it was nonetheless used to deliver a threat, probably an empty one, to the center-left. SIFAR and De Lorenzino were simultaneously supporting Pacciardi’s movement in order to prepare the political alternative to the center-left and, together with President Segni, they tried to coerce Moro into renouncing the nomination as head of the government.

Alternative Explanations

I argue that SIFAR subverted twice in the fifteen years from 1949 to 1964 because it was a political intelligence agency, poorly controlled by its principals, which exploited the divisions among its principals to try to remove the governments it perceived as incapable or unwilling to adequately fight against the Communist threat. In 1960 SIFAR removed a government it perceived as polarizing and as unintentionally strengthening the Communist Party. In 1964 it threatened a government whose reform proposals it believed were dragging the country into an “economic abyss” and into “Communism by default”.

A first alternative explanation is that the perceived strength and imminence of the Communist threat led SIFAR to subvert. The explanation is plausible, but partial. In 1960 SIFAR was motivated to subvert in part by the political exploitation of the antifascist protests by the Communist Party. After the Communists’ success in the 1963 elections, SIFAR intensified its anticommunist operations to halt the Communists’ rise. However, the decisive factor in deciding whether or not to subvert was the government’s behavior. The 1964 subversive episode is
clearest in this regard. The 1963 elections did not lead SIFAR to reverse its support for the center-left. Instead, the center-left was seen as a way to isolate and weaken the Communists, and the Communist themselves opposed it and welcomed its fall. It was only when Moro’s government was perceived as dragging the country into an economic abyss that SIFAR plotted to remove it.

Second, bureaucratic grievances possibly played a role in 1960, when the bureaucratic threat posed by the intelligence service of the Ministry of Interior may have provided additional reasons for SIFAR to remove Tambroni, who had recently been Minister of the Interior. However, there is no evidence that there were strong grievances in 1964, much less that they played a role in SIFAR’s subversion.

Third, coup-proofing is also a poor explanation of SIFAR’s subversion. In 1960 the rivalry between SIFAR and the intelligence service of the Ministry of the Interior was probably an additional reason motivating SIFAR to subvert, not a restraining factor. Instead, the existence of multiple security forces most likely played a restraining role in 1964. The Carabinieri and SIFAR tried, but largely failed, to keep their subversive plans secret from other security forces. The Navy’s refusal to cooperate played an important role in preventing the implementation of the *Piano Solo*. Neither the Navy nor other security forces, however, could prevent SIFAR and the Carabinieri from threatening to subvert.

Lastly, economic explanations help explain why subversion occurred in 1964, when what seemed like a looming economic crisis added a sense of urgency to the negotiations among the governing parties, but not why it occurred in 1960, when the country’s GDP was growing at an
unprecedented rate of 8.3% and many observers were asking themselves why this economic prosperity did not translate into greater political stability⁶⁸⁴.

Conclusion

I can now briefly assess my theory’s performance. Looking at my six hypotheses, all the applicable ones have been confirmed.

1. If an intelligence agency’s main enemies include a domestic subversive group which poses a plausible threat of overthrowing the government, intelligence will resemble the ideal type of a political intelligence agency. If they do not, the intelligence agency will likely resemble the ideal type of a non-political intelligence agency.

Italian military intelligence had as its main enemy the Italian Communist Party. It closely resembled the ideal type of a political intelligence agency: it was not politically neutral and it operated both at home and abroad.

2. Principals will exercise a high degree of control over a non-political intelligence agency. Their control over a political intelligence agency will be fragile: it will be strong as long as preferences converge and weak when they diverge.

This hypothesis was also confirmed. After the first few years for which there was no evidence of lack of control, not one of the intelligence agency’s principals could be said to have

⁶⁸⁴ See, for instance, the American Embassy’s report on “Economic Progress and Political Alignment”, 11 August 1960, in NARA, RG59, Entry Country Decimal File 60-63, Box 2682, 865.00/8-1160.
controlled the agency’s operations. The Italian government was subverted twice. The U.S. government tried and failed to remove the head of SIFAR in 1958 and it was then misled over the attempt to subvert the center-left government which it supported. Then President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi was the biggest supporter of Tambroni’s government when SIFAR helped to remove it in 1960. When Segni became President, SIFAR continued to support the center-left until late 1963, despite Segni’s opposition. It was only when SIFAR and De Lorenzo happened to share Segni’s preferences that they started acting according to his desires.

3. Non-political intelligence agencies will occasionally suffer from politicization and will not engage in subversion.

SIFAR was never a non-political intelligence agency, hence I could not test this hypothesis.

4. Political intelligence agencies will routinely manipulate intelligence for political goals. They will also engage in subversion when they perceive that the government is unwilling and/or incapable of adequately fighting intelligence’s subversive enemy and when they see the opportunity to install an alternative government.

This hypothesis was confirmed. First, based on the scant available evidence Italy’s military intelligence routinely manipulated intelligence for political goals. Its American interlocutors were acutely aware of this problem and the few publicly available analyses by SIFAR’s officers were strongly politicized, mixing flattery and explicit political judgments. Second, SIFAR acted subversively when dealing with governments which were hampering the fight against Communism, either because they were too polarizing or because their reform
program threatened to drag the country into “Communism by default”. In 1960 SIFAR helped install a less polarizing government, removing Tambroni who was unintentionally strengthening the Communist Party by accepting the support of the extreme right. It was able to do so because the leaders of the Christian Democracy were also eager to remove Tambroni. In 1964 SIFAR and De Lorenzo failed to find an alternative to the center-left, ending up threatening the center-left itself and coercing it into drastically curtailing its reform program.
Building a healthy relationship between intelligence agencies and policymakers is a difficult but not insurmountable task. As the case of the Central Intelligence Agency shows, policymakers can create a powerful intelligence agency that is under their control and that, with some exceptions, does not meddle inappropriately in domestic politics.

Building a CIA-like agency is not always a viable or desired option, however. If a strong subversive movement exists, or is believed to exist, policymakers will presumably want an intelligence agency to fight against it. Such an agency will inevitably be political and the CIA-model will be unachievable. Even if such a movement does not exist, policymakers may still want to have at their disposal a political agency to use in the domestic struggle. They may not care much that they are unlikely to control it for more than a few years, especially if their prospects for survival in power are low and their time-horizon is short.

My theory argues that one type of agency, the non-political one, is better than the other. Yet it does more than merely pointing at a model that many policymakers will find unachievable or undesirable. This concluding chapter first evaluates my argument, pointing out how future scholars can improve upon it. It then outlines policy recommendations on how to improve intelligence-policy relations, even in cases where a strong subversive movement exists.

Evaluating the argument

Overall, my theory has performed well. In all of my cases, the inclusion of a perceived strong subversive movement among an intelligence agency’s priorities has caused a shift from
non-political to political intelligence agencies. Policymakers’ control over these political intelligence agencies was fragile, and generally weak. In two cases, the FBI and SIFAR, for the first few years in which the preferences of policymakers and of the agencies converged I found no evidence of weak control, but plenty of evidence afterwards. In the British case, control was weak from the start.

There was considerable evidence, albeit not always overwhelming, that these political agencies routinely manipulated intelligence for political purposes. SIFAR and the FBI routinely used the information they gathered in the domestic political struggle, often as a source of blackmail vis-à-vis other political figures, including their principals. Their assessments were generally tainted and rarely objective, even though SIFAR was more blatant in this regard. The evidence is weaker in the case of British intelligence, yet we saw that DIHO’s estimates on Communist strength were often considered unreliable and that SIS officers lied to policymakers to make the case for the Zinoviev letter’s authenticity.

The evidence is stronger for subversion, the pathology at the center of my theoretical framework. All of these political agencies engaged in subversion. They subverted when they perceived that the government was unwilling or incapable of adequately fighting the subversive threat and when they had the opportunity to install an alternative, more forceful government. MI5 and SIS in 1924 and the FBI in 1948 used an upcoming close election to try to subvert the government, successfully in the former case and unsuccessfully in the latter. DIHO and several branches of British military intelligence in 1920 and SIFAR in 1960 and 1964 sought to exploit divisions among their principals to install an alternative government. In 1920 in Britain and in 1964 in Italy, these divisions turned out to be insufficient for subversion to succeed, but the
threat to subvert was delivered nonetheless. In Italy in 1960 subversion worked smoothly: a new government came to power and SIFAR’s role remained secret for over three decades.

The other type of intelligence agency, the non-political one, received less attention in this book, with only one short chapter fully dedicated to the CIA and two short sections on British intelligence and on the Bureau of Investigation before 1917. This relative lack of attention is justified by the fact that virtually all of the literature focuses on this kind of agency, making an in-depth analysis redundant. Still, the cases of non-political intelligence agencies I covered have shown that these agencies respected the divide between foreign and domestic intelligence and were strongly controlled by their principals. They never engaged in subversion and there was no evidence that they routinely manipulated intelligence. To the contrary, the CIA strove to preserve its objectivity and impartiality, at times against considerable pressure from policymakers.

I was pleasantly surprised by how my theory matched the empirical record, but this is not to say that my argument is free of shortcomings, much less a definitive explanation of intelligence-policy relations. There are several points which need further analysis, pointing the way forward for future researchers.

First, mine is not a full explanation of when an intelligence agency will be political or non-political. I identify the presence of a strong subversive movement among an agency’s priority as a sufficient but not necessary condition for an agency to be political. Thus, an agency can be political even though it does not have a subversive priority. This seems to happen rarely, and in none of my cases, but we still do not know when and why. Future scholars should investigate these cases and explain what led these agencies to be political in the absence of a counter-subversive priority.
Second, my cases cover a number of transitions from a non-political to a political intelligence agency, but only one partial transition from political to non-political. The Bureau of Investigation from 1924 to 1936 moved in the direction of a non-political intelligence agency after Attorney General Stone banned it from fighting subversion. However, Hoover’s Bureau never fully abandoned the anti-subversive fight, but merely scaled it back to the point that it was not detectable by its principals. This caused a marked reduction in the Bureau’s political activities, but not their cessation. One partial case study is not enough to confidently explain what happens when a strong subversive movement stops being a priority. Will a political intelligence agency transform itself into a non-political one or will it stick to its political habits, which have likely gone beyond the mere anti-subversive fight? Possible case studies of transition from political to non-political are British intelligence in the Cold War and numerous continental European intelligence agencies after the Cold War, when leftist subversion stopped being a plausible concern, or should have stopped. These cases are too recent to conduct a well-documented case study, hence we will have to wait some more until more documents are declassified. Future scholars will have to keep in mind that it is the perception of the strength of the subversive movement that matters. Even though a modern day observer will likely conclude that subversive movements did not pose a plausible threat, intelligence officials at the time may have thought otherwise, and behaved accordingly.

Third, the three countries I studied give us an initial degree of confidence in the theory’s validity, but more cases are needed before assessing this validity conclusively. I studied the US and the UK to show that the prevailing assumptions in the literature do not even full explain the cases they are best suited to explain, and Italy to show how misleading they are when studying
other cases. More cases, especially non-Western ones, would be an especially probing test of the theory’s range and give us more confidence in its hypotheses.

Fourth, even though the scope of theory is limited to democratic countries, there are a number of interesting similarities between political intelligence agencies and intelligence agencies in authoritarian countries. The causally most important one is that both are designed to preserve the current political distribution of power, or at least to prevent the opposition from gaining power. A very similar causal argument follows. An authoritarian intelligence agency is not politically neutral and, if its internal enemy is transnational in character, the dividing lines between domestic and foreign intelligence will be blurred. As scholars of intelligence in authoritarian countries have long recognized, authoritarian intelligence agencies routinely produce highly politicized products, which pander to the worldview of their leaders. They have also repeatedly attempted to subvert their own government, but we do not know the circumstances under which they are more or less likely to do so. Of course, authoritarian countries differ widely one from the other, and these differences are likely to reflect themselves on their intelligence agencies. Future scholars should study intelligence agencies in authoritarian countries, comparing them amongst themselves and with political intelligence agencies. Transitional democracies are likely to be particularly interesting cases, and scholars have already begun to study how and to what extent intelligence agencies change as countries democratize.

685 See Andrew [2004] p.177 and p.179. Andrew describes the basic functions of intelligence communities in authoritarian regimes as, first, repression and social control and, second, to act as a mechanism for reinforcing the regime’s misconceptions of the outside world. See also, among others, Pollack [2002] pp.561-563, who applies this argument to Arab autocracies, and Bar Joseph[2013] p.348.
686 See the Polity IV dataset and the dataset by Powell and Thyne [2011].
687 See, among others, Bruneau [2001], Williams and Deletant [2001], Matei and Bruneau [2011a] and [2011b].
What policymakers can and should do

Senior policymakers rarely have much time to think about how to build a healthy relationship with their intelligence agencies and how best to control them. In the little time they have, they are likely to come up with a solution that is intuitive, appealing and, if my argument is correct, wrong and counterproductive. This solution is to try to maintain control and elicit responsiveness by making sure that their intelligence agencies share their political preferences. If they think like I do, a policymaker may think, why would they disobey me?

Historical examples that confirm this reasoning are not hard to find. Both the Bureau of Investigation between 1917 and 1924 and SIFAR between 1949 and 1955 shared policymakers’ strongly anticommunist preferences and, as far as we know, behaved largely in accordance with their wishes. However, this tool of control proved fragile and short-lived. Preferences diverged within a few years and policymakers were left dealing with an agency that had no reluctance to intervene in politics and no longer shared their political agenda. At times the same policymaker who had profited from the political services of a political intelligence agency was later damaged by it. Italian Defense Minister Randolfo Pacciardi established SIFAR in 1949 and used it to purge leftist sympathizers from the state’s bureaucracy, but twelve years later SIFAR conducted an operation against him that led to his expulsion from his party. In 1960 Christian Democratic leader Aldo Moro used SIFAR to remove a government he disliked, but in 1964 it was his turn to be the target of SIFAR’s subversive plots. Franklin Roosevelt repeatedly recurred to the FBI for compromising information on his political opponents, but similar information was collected on his closest aides as well, including his wife.

A better solution, I argue, is to create a politically neutral intelligence agency. Such an agency will likely resist attempts to politicize it and to use it for partisan purposes, but will
generally stand ready to obey all legitimate orders, including the ones it disagrees with.
Policymakers will not have at their disposal a ready-to-use tool of domestic political intrigue, but will instead have an agency that is less likely to engage in unauthorized activities. From this perspective, the CIA is a model to look up to. Policymakers should not be misled by the baseless but enduring legend of the CIA as an out-of-control rogue elephant. Instead, as we have seen, even the CIA’s fiercest critics ultimately recognized that the CIA was utterly responsive to policymakers’ orders and firmly under their control, at times too responsive given the illegitimacy of those orders. There is no tradeoff between control and responsiveness on one side and political neutrality on the other. Instead, they go together. The more politically neutral an agency is, the more it will be responsive and under policymakers’ control.

Policymakers will do well to keep in mind the importance of the political neutrality of their intelligence agencies, but do they really have the power to shape intelligence in one direction or another? My argument may seem to leave little room for policymakers’ agency. If intelligence priorities determine the type of agency and the type of agency determines the degree of control, what is left for policymakers to do to improve their relationship with their intelligence agencies? In fact, quite a lot.

First of all, policymakers choose the initial priorities of their intelligence agencies and exercise a strong influence over them afterwards. If policymakers do not think that they face a strong subversive movement, they should make sure that the priorities of their intelligence agencies reflect that. If an agency is seen as too attached to its political habits, policymakers should consider abolishing it and creating a new one.

Attorney General Stone’s partial success in modifying the Bureau of Investigation’s priorities shows that policymakers are not always able to change these priorities as they see fit.
Nonetheless, their influence will be considerable. It took a presidential request to reverse Stone’s ban on investigations unrelated to law enforcement, after over a decade in which the Bureau’s counter-subversive effort was considerably reduced, and with it its tendency to meddle in politics. Stone’s attempt to draw the Bureau away from subversion failed because he nominated Edgar Hoover as the Bureau’s head. Stone based his decision on Hoover’s stated belief in political neutrality rather than on his past behavior, reminding us that preferences and beliefs are subject to change and misrepresentation and are thus a poor source of control.

Second, in order to minimize the pernicious effects of the anti-subversive fight on intelligence-policy relations, policymakers can assign different priorities to different agencies. Policymakers facing strong subversive enemies would be well advised to identify only one agency to fight against these enemies and only these enemies. A first positive consequence would be that the other intelligence agencies could be non-political. A second positive consequence would be to limit the reach of the only political intelligence agency to counter-subversion alone, excluding other tasks such as counterintelligence or law enforcement.

It seems that most political leaders adopt a different, and ill-advised, solution. According to the logic of coup-proofing, policymakers that fear being subverted by their intelligence agencies should create multiple intelligence agencies with overlapping turfs, so that they will compete and guard one another. As we have seen, having multiple intelligence agencies has rarely been effective in preventing subversion by the agencies themselves. Furthermore, if multiple intelligence agencies are tasked with the fight against a strong subversive movement, policymakers will ensure that they will all be political and weakly controlled. The model to follow in this regard is again the US, where the CIA was not tasked with the fight against

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688 The most recent literature on coup proofing similarly finds little evidence that coup proofing is an effective solution. See Powell [2012] and Bohmelt and Pilster [2015].
domestic subversion. Even though the FBI’s competences went far beyond subversion, Truman’s decision to exclude it from the foreign intelligence field was sound, allowing US Presidents to have a foreign intelligence agency that was under their control and that did not routinely manipulate its estimates.

Lastly, we should not forget that political and non-political intelligence agencies are two idealtypical polar opposites, and all real cases will fall somewhere in between. Via, for instance, their selection of personnel and the kind of services they request from them, policymakers push intelligence agencies in one direction or another. The more they move towards the ideal type of the political intelligence agency, the less they will be able to control it, and vice versa.

Policymakers thus have a number of ways to mitigate the problem of controlling intelligence, even when they face a strong subversive enemy. Far from being an impossible task, controlling intelligence is feasible, as long as policymakers have the patience to develop solutions which at times may seem counterintuitive, but which we have seen to be more effective than apparently easier and more intuitive ones.
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260


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