



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

13 November 1979

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LPO

Dear Richard,

I was pleased to have your letter of 29 October about the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War. It was kind of you to let me have your views.

The volume has, I believe, been well received on both sides of the Atlantic as a valuable contribution to war-time history.

I am glad you found the book rewarding in the account it gives of decrypting in the first part of the war. I have noted your reservations about the manner in which it deals with the history of the Secret Intelligence Service. Of course, Professor Hinsley and his team were given a very broad brief - to "produce an account of the influence of British intelligence on strategy and operations during the Second World War"; and the history was not intended to provide a detailed account of all the major intelligence operations undertaken. I should imagine that they had to restrict what they said about some activities simply for lack of space.

I very much sympathise with your view that there must be no question of releasing information which would be harmful to gathering intelligence today, or to individual operatives or their families who may still be alive. In the case of the agent who was in touch with Ribbentrop I do not think that it would have been right to identify him, and I am advised that the provision of further details would not have added to the account

/given about

JS

given about intelligence concerning German intentions towards Russia in the summer of 1940.

You mention in your letter the withholding of the memorandum written by Dr. Goerdeler before the war. The previous Government announced earlier this year a change of the convention you refer to. Records, which are not in themselves sensitive, but which contain passing references to organisations existing more than 30 years ago, are no longer to be withheld from the Public Record Office on that account. This should enable documents like the Goerdeler memorandum to be released in due course when Departmental reviewing staff have been able to go through the backlog of records withheld.

Finally, you drew my attention to the release of the Enigma material to the Public Record Office. I am told that there have been major advances in the last eighteen months; approximately half a million wartime reports are now in the PRO and the rest will be released as soon as possible. All wartime enemy military material which no longer requires security protection will eventually reach the Public Record Office.

Yours ever
Ragland

Michael Latham, Esq., M.P.



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CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

/satt

Ref. A0628

12th November, 1979

Dear Mike

As you know, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office transferred to the Cabinet Office your request for a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Mr. Michael Latham MP about the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War. We have taken the advice of the FCO and the agencies whose interests are the subject of various points raised by Mr. Latham in his letter.

Volume I of the Intelligence History has been well received both here and in the United States. There are to be two further volumes, which will carry the intelligence history forward to the end of the war. These were covered by the former Prime Minister's announcement to Parliament on 2nd August 1978.

In his letter Mr. Latham refers to the London Controlling Sections and to the work of the XX Committee. We have not referred to these organisations in the draft reply since neither of them are properly the subject of the first three volumes of the Intelligence History. Further histories were put in hand, however, about counter-intelligence and security, and about strategic deception. The first will deal extensively with the work of the XX Committee and the second with the London Controlling Sections. No official announcements about these histories have been made and no decisions have been made about publication. Sir Robert Armstrong intends to consult the Prime Minister about them before the end of the year.

The draft reply says that the Goerdeler Memorandum will be released in due course. Although this pre-war record was not sensitive, it had been withheld because of marginal references to the then Head of the Secret Intelligence Service. The Prime Minister will recall that the previous Government decided to release to the Public Record Office after 30 years documents which were otherwise non-sensitive, where the only reason for withholding them had been that they mentioned an intelligence organisation whose existence at the material time had not been avowed. Mr. Callaghan wrote to the Prime Minister to that effect last December and later arranged for a Written Parliamentary Question to be answered. While the change of policy primarily affects immediately post-war documents, it also enables some pre-war documents to be released.

/Reviewing

N. J. Sanders, Esq.

Reviewing staffs have now had revised instructions and are beginning the substantial task of re-reviewing the backlog of documents. The Goerdeler Memorandum will be released by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office along with other non-sensitive records of its year.

I am copying this letter and the draft reply to George Walden (FCO).

*Your ever
Maurice Uth*

(M. J. Vile)
Private Secretary

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO MICHAEL LATHAM, MP

I was pleased to have your letter of 29 October about the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War. It was kind of you to let me have your views.

The volume has, I believe, been well received on both sides of the Atlantic as a valuable contribution to war-time history.

I am glad you found the book rewarding in the account it gives of decrypting in the first part of the war. I have noted your reservations about the manner in which it deals with the history of the Secret Intelligence Service. Of course, Professor Hinsley and his team were given a very broad brief - to "produce an account of the influence of British intelligence on strategy and operations during the Second World War"; and the history was not intended to provide a detailed account of all the major intelligence operations undertaken. I should imagine that they had to restrict what they said about some activities simply for lack of space.

I very much sympathise with your view that there must be no question of releasing information which would be harmful to gathering intelligence today, or to individual operatives or their families who may still be alive. In the case of the agent who was in touch with Ribbentrop I do not think that it would have been right to identify him, and I am advised that the provision of further details would not have added to the account given about intelligence concerning German intentions towards Russia in the summer of 1940.

You mention in your letter the withholding of the memorandum written by Dr Goerdeler before the war. The previous Government announced earlier this year a change of the convention you refer to. Records, which are not in themselves sensitive, but which contain passing references to organisations existing more than 30 years ago, are no longer to be withheld from the Public Record Office on that account. This should enable documents like the Goerdeler memorandum to be released in due course when Departmental reviewing staff have been able to go through the backlog of records withheld.

Finally, you drew my attention to the release of the Enigma material to the Public Record Office. I am told that there have been major advances in the last eighteen months; approximately half a million wartime reports are now in the PRO and the rest will be released as soon as possible. All wartime enemy military material which no longer requires security protection will eventually reach the Public Record Office.

Papers removed from file

Date

12/11/79

Michael Lathan MP
History of Intelligence
in World War II



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

*Chase
Cabinet Office?
On Wednesday! MS*

5 November 1979

Dear Mr. Hild, OK MS

Thank you for your letter of 30 October asking for a draft reply to Michael Latham's letter to the Prime Minister about the Official History of British Intelligence in the Second World War.

We have discussed this with Mr Theobald of the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office. He agrees that the Cabinet Office are better placed to co-ordinate work on the various points raised in Mr Latham's letter. The Cabinet Office will, therefore, be submitting a draft reply.

I am copying this letter to Martin Vile.

G G H Walden

(G G H Walden)

N Sanders Esq
10 Downing Street



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

File LB
Michael Latham MP
Intelligence in 2nd World War
30 October 1979

I attach a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Michael Latham, M.P., about miscellaneous matters arising from the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War.

I should be grateful if you would let me have a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Mr. Latham, to reach us here by Friday, 9 November.

I am copying this letter and its enclosure to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

N. J. SANDERS

G. G. H. Walden, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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file 16

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

30 October 1979

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 29 October about points arising from the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War. I will of course place your letter before the Prime Minister and you will be sent a reply as soon as possible.

N. J. SANDERS

Michael Latham, Esq., M.P.

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10 DOWNING STREET
PRIME MINISTER

This letter from
Michael Latham, M.P., is
about miscellaneous
intelligence matters. We
will let you have a draft
reply.

MS

He has obviously spent
a massive amount of
time on it.

30 October 1979

ms

FROM MICHAEL LATHAM MMP.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

29th October 1979

Dear Prime Minister,

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I wrote to you on the 4th June regarding the question of the Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War. You replied to me on the 21st June saying you looked forward to hearing my views on the 1st volume, once I had the chance to read it.

I have now carefully read through this lengthy book, which I feel deals very well with the history of the work of decrypting, particularly by the Government Code and Cypher School. Involving the "Enigma" in particular, it totally disposes of the allegations made in the book "Bodyguard of Lies" by Anthony Cave-Brown that Churchill permitted the destruction of Coventry by bombing, in order to protect the secrecy of Enigma. Manifestly, that is now totally disproved. There are other examples in the book of a similar nature but I will not weary you with them.

However, it seems to me that the book is much less satisfactory when it deals with the history of the Secret Intelligence Service. For example, the so-called Venlo incident is dealt with only in a foot-note on page 57, and then in a very limited form, whereas Cave-Brown devotes a whole chapter to it in his book. Equally, far more information (though whether it is accurate I do not know) is given by Cave-Brown regarding the German Agent described as 'Franta' in his book and as 'A-54' in the Official History. Since the man concerned is presumably long since dead, I would have thought there was no need for secrecy at all. Equally, on page 433 of the Official History there is a reference to an S.I.S. Agent who was in touch with Ribbentrop. I would have thought that was an area where more details could have been given, since Ribbentrop was of course executed in 1946.

One matter which also concerns me is that which I referred to in my earlier letter of 4th June. In the extremely controversial work 'Hitler's War' by David Irving, the allegation is made that files relating to feelers put out by Hitler and Goering for peace in October 1939 are closed until the next century. The impression is given that Churchill himself favoured making peace then.

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But in a letter to me of 4th August 1977 Lord Goronwy-Roberts confirmed to me that the relevant file is not closed at all, though there is a block on what he describes as a "lengthy and quite innocuous memorandum" by Dr. Goerdeler written before the War. I understand the reason for the closure (which is simply referred to in a foot-note on page 57 of the Official History) is not because of the contents of Dr. Goerdeler's memorandum - and I believe that Goerdeler himself died in 1944 - but because of marginal notes made upon it by the then Head of the S.I.S., Sir Hugh Sinclair who himself died before the War. I understand that, because of the convention that the S.I.S. does not exist in peace-time, all references to it in any Government Papers are automatically "weeded" and not released under the 30 Year Rule.

The Official History contains no references at all to the role of the London Controlling Section or, so far as I can see, to the XX Committee, both of which were obviously involved in very important work and both of which are described at some length in Cave-Brown's book.

It may be, of course, that forthcoming volumes of the Official History will deal with these matters. Also, as I made clear in my letter of the 4th June, there can be no question of releasing any information which would be harmful to gathering intelligence to-day, or to individual operatives or their families who may be still alive. But Mr. Cave-Brown's book is available at any book-stall, and since it has already been established that it contains serious errors on the subject of 'Enigma', you might feel that the record could be corrected, if necessary in other directions as well.

There is one other matter which I would like to raise with you which was drawn to my attention in May of last year. A lady, who formerly worked at the Government Code & Cypher School, wrote to me out of the blue making the point that the release of the Enigma material through the Public Record Office was far from satisfactory and was leading to misleading books such as Cave-Brown's. In particular, she says the original "German Books" typed out from the original de-codes and bound up daily, have not been released. All that has been released are the signals sent out by Duty Officers to Commands. There is apparently also practically no material on the Yugoslav or Russian Fronts and a great deal was never translated from the original German. It may be that now that the

Official History has been published, this situation has been improved, but plainly it would be useful to have the records in an efficient state.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Latham

The Rt.Hon.Mrs.Margaret Thatcher M.P.
10, Downing Street,
London S.W.1.