

1 Introduction

From Great Games to imperial security

Late one night in northwest India, as a newspaperman was about to call it a day, two men arrived at his office and asked if they could speak with him briefly. The tall, red-haired one introduced himself as Daniel Dravot and the other as Peachy Carnahan. In explaining their visit, Dravot said that he and Carnahan were fed up with the governing class in India and had decided to go to Kafiristan to become kings. Neither of them knew very much about Kafiristan, however, other than that it had “two and thirty idols.” Nor were they certain where it was or how to get there. They had come to the newspaper office in the hopes of gaining information on the nature of the place and its geographic location. Thereupon, the newspaperman “uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the Encyclopaedia Britannica,” brought out a file containing an address by Henry W. Bellew¹ on Kafiristan, and laid before them Wood’s *Sources of the Oxus*.² Dravot and Carnahan began their studies and soon discovered that they were familiar with at least part of the route to Kafiristan – they had campaigned with “Roberts’ Army” in the region.³

¹ Henry Bellew was a surgeon in the Bengal Army who published extensively on the tribes and races of the Northwest Frontier of India and Afghanistan. He learned Pashtu, the language of the Pathan tribes of Afghanistan and present day Pakistan, and published a grammar and dictionary of the language. His linguistic expertise led to his inclusion on a political mission to Afghanistan in 1857 and to Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan in 1873–4. The lecture in question appeared under the title “Kafiristan and the Kafirs,” *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* v. 8, no. 41 (1879).
² Probably Captain James Wood, *A Journey to the Source of the River Oxus* published by John Murray in London 1872.
³ General Frederick Roberts, who commanded the Indian Army in the Second Afghan War.

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This critical scene near the beginning of Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would be King"⁴ suggests a very intimate relationship between imperialism and certain kinds of knowledge. In this case, the knowledge in question involved what could be culled from precision maps like those produced by the Trigonometric Survey of India, from military reconnaissance, and from summaries of authoritative knowledge to be found in works like the *Britannica*, whose individual country entries were organized through nineteenth-century Europe-wide categories of the statistics of states. The technical materials the newspaperman thought essential for the two adventurers were, moreover, precisely the sort of sources that, by the 1880s when the story was written, had become crucial for planning military campaigns in little-known places like Kafirstan. More to the point, these works or ones like them could be found in the secret archive of the Intelligence Branch located at Simla, the unit responsible for providing the information required to plan the military campaigns of the Indian Army.

The Indian Army Intelligence Branch, and the forms of knowledge it produced, is the focus of this study. The records of the Branch, its library, archives and correspondence, make quite clear the scope and depth of the epistemological project at the core of British imperialism. Scholars of British colonialism in South Asia such as Bernard Cohn (1996) and Christopher Bayly (1996) have noted the close connection in the British Empire between the production of knowledge about human and natural resources and the maintenance of imperial control.⁵ At the same time, however, the works of Cohn and Bayly have tended to focus attention on the political reports of colonial administrators; army intelligence has seldom been an object of investigation in colonial studies.⁶ As a result, there has been little critical study of the forms military knowledge took. This may in part be because materials generated by British intelligence units in India are somewhat scattered through archival depositories such as the India Office and War Office records. But the fact that Indian Army records are not centralized in Britain does not wholly account for the dearth of studies on military knowledge practices. Instead, scholars who address epistemological issues of empire have, like Cohn and Bayly, tended to focus attention on the civil administration of British colonialism or on imaginative literature such as the works of Kipling.⁷

⁴ I use the version of the story to be found in Irving Howe, ed., 1982: 38–39.

⁵ See the essays in Burton, ed., 2005, and Stoler, 2009.

⁶ The organization of the India Office Records located in the British Library, London, encourage such divisions. Political administrative records are catalogued in indexes labeled "Political and Secret" or "P&S," while military indexes are labeled "MIL."

⁷ Edward Said was extremely influential in directing attention to literature; see 1994. T. Richards's study of the imperial archive is essentially literary history (1993). For his

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But perhaps of more interest is that even military historians seldom address intelligence, let alone its forms of knowledge. As Christopher Andrew has observed, if military intelligence is not completely ignored as a legitimate topic of historical investigation, it is relegated to a footnote (1992: 1). Andrew provides a number of explanations for this. First, he points out that even if intelligence was acknowledged as a “missing dimension” in diplomatic, military and institutional histories of the modern state, it is not always easy to gain access to the documentary record, partly because the declassification of sources remains a tricky business. The officials of former imperial states remain reluctant to give up secrets.⁸ A second difficulty has to do with the fact that intelligence is irreversibly linked to popular and sensational images of secret agents, spy-craft, espionage and counter-espionage and, of course, James Bond. As Andrew, in collaboration with David Dilks, put it on another occasion, “the treatment of intelligence by both mass media and publishers often seems ideally calculated to persuade the academic world that it is no subject for scholars” (1984: 3).

Nevertheless, some scholars do study intelligence. A substantial amount of attention has been given to code-breaking, signal intercepts, and the impact of the two on warfare. Much of this scholarship has focused on the twentieth century, its great wars and the Cold War.⁹ However, such research operates within a definition of intelligence that appears narrowly circumscribed. Andrew and Dilks, for example, define intelligence as information obtained by covert means. If this is the case, then the great mass of material collected in the late nineteenth century by British and continental armies would not qualify as intelligence because much of it was collected from published sources and collated into intelligence genres, some of which were printed openly as official government publications.

part, Bayly gives little attention to the military, except for the Survey of India (1996). In his work on the Trigonometric Survey of India, Edney separates mapping operations from practices involving the collection of data on populations and built environments (1997). However, as will be clarified below, officers from the Survey were often involved in intelligence operations.

⁸ Andrew makes this point in an article that begins with observations concerning how difficult it has been for scholars to convince the British government to release intelligence records; see 1987: 9. Sometimes materials that had been declassified are reclassified as state secrets. In 2006, the Bush administration ordered various sources on open shelves in the National Archives, Washington, DC, to be removed and reclassified as secret or top secret. Some of this material was already posted in the National Security Archive maintained at George Washington University. See “National Archives Pact Let C.I.A. withdraw Public Documents,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2006, and related stories found through *Factiva* on the internet.

⁹ The literature is extensive. See, for example, the articles in Andrew and Noakes, 1987 and Robertson, 1987.

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Moreover, often little attention is given in these studies to how novel it was for military intelligence units to be set up as discrete parts of armies.¹⁰ Most such units were a product of military reform and army reorganization, much of which occurred under the impact of technological change and rationalizing scientific thought. In the case of Great Britain, the intelligence units of the British and Indian armies were created after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Their emergence resulted from what Corrigan and Sayers referred to as a “cultural revolution” (1985) in Britain, one that through the collection of statistical data and the creation of new institutions by Parliamentary commissions radically altered the structure of the British state over the second half of the nineteenth century.¹¹

Two developments in particular are important for understanding what came to be called intelligence. One was the inauguration of a merit-oriented civil service system, the effect of which was to produce a cadre of professional, educated officers in the British Army by the end of the nineteenth century. These “new men” made British military intelligence. The second development had to do with the impact of empiricism and the natural sciences on modes of governance in Britain. The direct effect of the growth of the nineteenth-century applied sciences on military intelligence was to form it into a discipline believed to be governed by rational principles. Intelligence became an ordered set of practices for acquiring, classifying, managing, filing, storing and recovering military statistics. And while some of the material gathered as intelligence was acquired through military reconnaissance, vast amounts were “legible”¹² at a distance. That is, intelligence officers could draw on the great wealth of statistical information published on a regular basis by European states undergoing their own cultural revolutions.

Military statistics, a category shared by armies across the continent, made it possible for intelligence officers to compile (to use their terminology) and compare intelligence on foreign armies; to gauge as it were the relation of forces between armies. In the British and Indian armies, military statistics came to be “packaged” in standardized forms. These forms were route books, precision maps, handbooks and military reports, the central genres of intelligence well into the twentieth century.

¹⁰ One significant exception is Thomas Fergusson (1984), although his work is more of an institutional history than an inquiry into the nature of intelligence.

¹¹ As will be clear in what follows, “statistics” is here used in its nineteenth-century sense as both numerical and descriptive data.

¹² I take the term from James Scott, whose work on the forms in which the state was made legible to its administrators informs much of this study; see 1998.

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Works such as these made up a renewable and authoritative archive that was used to train intelligence officers, to inform civilian policymakers on military matters, and to provide vital information to commanders as they approached the battlefield. And when the battles were over, it was the intelligence officers, the commanders and controllers of military information, who wrote the official histories of campaigns.

Military intelligence involved something more as well. The information that accumulated in intelligence archives was employed both to evaluate the capacities of rivals, and to imagine what would happen if conflict arose. Intelligence became the site where planning for future wars was situated, where officers could practice for war and gain the necessary skills for going to war. In Great Britain, but also in European armies – at least from 1871 forward – there emerged permanent war-planning and training regimes. Intelligence provided the basic information, the raw material for such undertakings.

Thus, before code-breaking, spying and electronic surveillance came to dominate what was understood as military intelligence, these other forms of military knowledge informed the workings of imperial states. It is a central argument of this study that military intelligence was a product of the new mechanisms of state formation, the disciplinary and regulatory regimes, to use Michel Foucault's terms, that transformed European states in the second half of the nineteenth century into militarized polities.¹³ It makes little sense, I believe, to separate intelligence, to say nothing of armies and militarization in Europe, from these processes. Foucault, it will be recalled, found more than a metaphor in the practices of eighteenth-century armies. Army discipline, particularly those aspects that involved making soldiers, was one site of the emergence of a disciplinary regime that re-formed "docile" bodies, whether in schools, prisons or on the parade ground (1979: 135–69).

While Foucault's notion of the role of discipline in the transformation of European states in the nineteenth century is well known by way of *Discipline and Punish*, his theorization of regulatory regimes is less known, perhaps because he wrote no book on the subject. In lectures delivered in 1978 at the Collège de France, however, Foucault explored the notion that privileged the survival of the state (*raison d'état*) over law and conventional notions of sovereignty. *Raison d'état* emerged as a principle of political theorization with the collapse of the Holy Roman

¹³ On the militarization of Europe in the nineteenth century, see McNeill, 1982, and the articles in Gillis, ed., 1989, especially the essays by Best and Geyer. Also see Pick (1993), who argues that fears of a cross-channel invasion fueled militarization in Great Britain.

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Empire and the realization that all states were now in fierce competition with one another. The state was to be preserved, Foucault observed, by means of a “regulatory idea of governmental reason” that posited the state as a “principle for reading reality” (a principle of “intelligibility”). The application of governmental reason, a set of applied techniques, produced statistics and put various forces and resources at the disposal of the state at any given moment. From this statistical knowledge of the state, officials could then formulate “tactics” that disposed or arranged “things so that this or that end may be achieved through a certain number of means.” Foucault called the application of tactics to arrange and achieve a desirable end the “arts of governance” or “governmentality,” whose significant historical effect was the governmentalization of the state (2007: 98–109).¹⁴

In the new European order of states, the objective was to arrest or modify any internal processes that might disrupt the smooth running of an individual state and externally to strengthen it against competitors. Rather than being based on classic notions of sovereignty such as divine right, the arts of governance focused attention on the preservation of the state as a sovereign entity, as opposed to the continuation of a monarchical line (2007: 262–89). It is this notion of preservation – the idea of sustaining the integrity of the state, especially against external threats, as an end in itself – that is of concern here.

With respect to other states, the officials of any one state had to be in a position to gauge the potential threat that a rival might pose. They did this by analyzing the statistics of other states. Then, rather than drawing on a “combination of legacies through dynastic alliances,” they sought to arrange a “composition of state forces” in “provisional alliances” (through diplomacy) to offset the power of one large state or the threat of a combination of smaller states. Such alliances were expected to preserve a relation of forces, a dynamic “rationalization of forces,” producing a provisional and contingent “balance of power” (2007: 293–96).

Those responsible for evaluating the strength of others and fashioning strategic alliances made up what Foucault referred to as an assemblage

¹⁴ The term “governmentality” is well known. Less known perhaps is the cluster of expressions of which it was a part. Foucault introduced the term in a lecture on February 1, 1978, which was the fourth in a series of thirteen lectures that actually began with the one on March 17, 1976, wherein the notion of “bio-power” was introduced, and extends into at least the first three lectures of 1979. My sense is that governmentality is only sketched out in the February 1 lecture and that a full understanding of his use of the term, which would include the military-diplomatic apparatus, only comes with a reading of the sequence of lectures between 1978 and 1979; see 1997: 239–63; 2007; and 2008: 1–73.

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or a “mechanism of security” responsible for governing external relations.¹⁵ He called this assemblage the military-diplomatic apparatus. The key strategic term in this array, according to Giorgio Agamben, is apparatus, and it is worth briefly considering Agamben’s argument for its centrality in Foucault’s thought. Apparatus is the English translation of the French word *dispositif*. It is a network established between a heterogeneous set of elements such as discourses, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, buildings and institutions. Second, an apparatus always has a clear strategic purpose and is always part of a power relationship. Lastly, the apparatus appears at the “intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge” (2009: 2–3).¹⁶

Thus, the military-diplomatic apparatus was made up of a set of heterogeneous elements. This particular assemblage included theories of human behavior, rules of diplomacy, technical knowledge of ballistics and logistics, specialized forms of writing, army barracks and drill fields, protocols of behavior, maps and diagrams, and so on, all of which could be commanded to be disposed in provisional and contingent arrays. This security mechanism came to be situated at the intersection of the state’s capacity to defend itself in alliance with others and the knowledge possessed by state officials of their own strength and that of their “enemies” and “friends.”

Henceforth, warfare was no longer thought of as righting a wrong or as an expression of dynastic ambitions, but rather as interstate politics pursued by other means. War erupted, it was thought, at the point where the persuasive and rhetorical powers of the diplomat became insufficient to maintain a balance in the relations between European states. War persuaded others to alter their ways and perhaps even taught the lesson that there were consequences to disrupting an international equilibrium. But before warfare could become rhetorical or pedagogical, armies had to be prepared to go to war.

Foucault argues that preparation for war required the development of a “permanent, costly, large, scientific military apparatus within the system of peace.” What did this element of the apparatus look like? First, it was made up of professional soldiers who saw the army as their career. Second, it was made up of a permanently armed structure that in time of war could also operate to recruit more participants. Third, it comprised an infrastructure of depots, strongholds and transport networks; in other words, a supply and logistical capability. And lastly, it

¹⁵ The internal element of security was the police.

¹⁶ The source Agamben draws on is an interview to be found in Gordon, ed. 1980: 194–96.

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was made up of a form of knowledge concerning the strategy and tactics of warfare and “autonomous reflections on military matters and possible wars” (2007: 300–305). This formation produced a host of effects, the primary one of which was the condition, novel in the nineteenth century, of permanent preparation for war. The security mechanism produced, if not garrison states, then militarized states, states where there was (is) an unquestioned acceptance of the necessity for nourishing the apparatus, because only then could a balance of power be realized and the security of the state insured.

This study is about the military part of the security mechanism, especially the fourth part identified by Foucault, the part made up of the specifics of military matters and the forms of knowledge related to intelligence. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this part of the apparatus took on new dimensions from around the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe by way of techno-scientific reflections on logistics – the calculus for mobilizing, concentrating, and preserving men and materiel in motion. To dispose armies and their supplies required planning. But to plan, to organize logistics rationally, required specialized kinds of information and methods for classifying, processing, storing and retrieving such knowledge. In European armies, these functions were initially organized in the Quartermaster General’s Department. Over the course of the nineteenth century they became increasingly located under centralized command structures (general staffs). In many cases, the agency within the apparatus deputed to organize the information necessary for planning was termed the intelligence department. In units of this sort, two kinds of information were centralized – the physical geography and the “military statistics” of states. These two forms of information, one about the terrain over which a potential adversary operated, the other about the war-making potential of other states, were the things that constituted peacetime military intelligence and supported the permanent establishment for the preparation and planning for war.

Reconceptualizing military intelligence in this way has several important consequences. First, and perhaps most obviously, it provides a new set of criteria for understanding what intelligence might have meant to intelligence officers at any moment in time, and it helps avoid the teleological trap of seeing nineteenth-century military intelligence as the inferior predecessor to the fully formed twentieth-century version. Second, it directs attention to the diverse techniques and technologies available at a particular moment and explores how their presence interacted with the broad task of intelligence. In the nineteenth century, for example, armies moved on their feet (as well as on their stomachs)

and they relied on pack animals to transport their food and equipment. While telegraph was available in some instances, most communication was line of sight (heliography and signal flags) or by messengers who, if they were fortunate, might be mounted. More than anything else, terrain, often undeveloped,¹⁷ dictated the speed of armies on the march. This set of heterogeneous elements constitutes a grouping that intelligence units would have to account for if they were going to produce a rationally ordered plan of action.¹⁸

Third, exploring intelligence as part of a security mechanism essentially de-romanticizes it, and by so doing calls into question some of the most sacred tropes for discussing European activities in Asia (e.g., savage warfare, civilizing missions, development). The chief trope of concern here is the characterization of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia as a “Great Game.” Just why the game metaphor is questionable will become clearer in subsequent chapters, when the content of intelligence is discussed. Here it might be useful to rehearse this tale of adventure and competition, and note what it might obscure.

Recall the image of Daniel Dravot and Peachy Carnahan in the office of a reporter much like the author of the piece, Rudyard Kipling. I began with this scene in order to make a point about the intersections of knowledge and imperial power. But another element is also at play, one involving fantasies of empire. In this case, the fantasy lies in the notion of white men going where none had gone before, commanding the natives by sheer charismatic presence, and becoming kings. Kipling’s stories are significant precisely because they formed Asia around such fantasies. Tales like this one fixed the continent as a space for unconventional men, where romantic adventure for the bold lay just around every corner or, as in this case, over the next range of mountains. In this emergent Asia, white men could fulfill themselves, assert their masculinity, and do so for noble purposes.

The Great Game to be found in *Kim* (1901) is perhaps one of the most enduring examples of fantasy and romantic adventure in empire. As Kipling presents it there, the game was made up of intrigue, clandestine operations, disguises, double-dealing, and a good deal of fun and pleasure. Although not discussed in quite these terms, in *English Lessons* I found the Great Game a useful shorthand for dealing with the

¹⁷ By this I mean the presence and quality of roads.

¹⁸ It may well be the case that those who find nineteenth-century intelligence amateurish do so from the perspective of the expansion of railroads and paved roads, radio, telephone and mechanical transport vehicles. Taken together, this set of heterogeneous elements altered the nature of warfare, and hence, the planning regime. What constituted intelligence had to alter accordingly.

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Pan-Asian threat that the British, especially those in India, thought Russia posed to their empire. There are, however, a number of reasons to question Kipling's and my versions of the game. First, although the British were known to use game metaphors to talk about international politics, the term is notably missing from the works of prominent public figures who wrote about the Russian threat to British imperial interests in Asia. These analysts include, for example, Henry Rawlinson (1875), Armin Vambery (1885) and Archibald Colquhoun (1901). Nor was the term, as far as I have been able to ascertain, evident in the War Office or India Office records that deal with the Russian advance across Asia.

Second, as Gerald Morgan has argued, the game metaphor gives the impression that the Anglo-Russian rivalry was a "light-hearted affair," when nothing could be further from the truth (1981: 16). To this might be added that it is unclear what sort of game the Great Game was supposed to be. Certainly, given Kipling's characterization, chess comes to mind, but the one time George Curzon, the Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905 and author of *Russia in Central Asia* (1889a), seems to have used the term, he was clearly referring to a card game with a series of hands (1889a: 297). In any case, Morgan may be right to insist that it is a misplaced metaphor masking the enormous amount of violence that actually transpired, including three British invasions of Afghanistan and repeated clashes on the Northwest Frontier of India that Charles Callwell euphemistically referred to as "small wars" (1906).

A third issue has to do with the origin of the term. Kipling, as many point out, did not invent the phrase, but he is usually given credit for popularizing it. Most who write on the Great Game ascribe the origin to Arthur Conolly, an adventurous young officer in the service of the East India Company, who died in captivity in Bokhara after a failed mission to the Amir of Kokand in the early 1840s. Conolly had previously come to popular notice when he traveled overland to India through Persia and Afghanistan in 1829–30. According to his biographer, John Kaye, upon arriving in India Conolly wrote reports on his travels and they were eventually published in Britain in 1834 under the title *Journey to the North of India* (Kaye, 1867: 74). Four years later, a second edition included a long section in which Conolly speculated on how the Russians might launch an invasion across Afghanistan, but he did not use the term there. In fact, it only appears once in the two-volume book, and that is when Conolly observes the "children of nature" in a small Central Asia town whose "great game" was to throw dirt at each other (1838, v. 1: 173). Conolly did use the term in another context,