

National Security Committee kerfuffle puts the empire's insecurity on show

26 Mar.—News that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has “dumped” the heads of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) from his government’s National Security Committee (NSC) has been met with predictable howls of outrage from the political and media frontmen of Canberra’s defence and intelligence establishment. Their hysterical response to what in fact is merely a return to normal betrays once again the extreme fragility of the propaganda bubble which that establishment, led by domestic spying agency ASIO,¹ has blown up since 2017 to justify putting Australia on what is tantamount to a war footing with our most important trading partner, China, in the service of Anglo-American imperial geopolitical diktats. As we reported on 20 March,² [recent surveys](#) by mainstream polling company Essential Research shows that already, the vast majority of Australians aren’t buying it anymore, with 80 per cent of respondents viewing China in either a positive or neutral light while only 20 per cent see it as a threat that warrants staunch support for military alliance with the United States (let alone Britain). Imagine, then, how much worse things would get for the security establishment and its propagandists if the majority of Australians understood that corraling both the government and the public into supporting British and American imperialism has been ASIO’s primary purpose ever since it was founded in 1949 on the basis of British lies and American threats; and that ASIS was established three years later explicitly as an Antipodean extension of Her Majesty’s Secret Service (MI6), and continues to function as such to this day. The fact, as the *Australian Alert Service* has exposed in detail over many years, is that the real foreign interference in Australia does not come from China, Russia or any other designated enemy, but from our Anglo-American “allies”, via the institutions that ostensibly exist to protect our national interests but almost uniformly wind up trashing them instead.



Australia Intelligence chiefs at odds with Albanese government over foreign interference



The Director of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, Kerri Hartland (left), and the Director of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Mike Burgess.
© AAPIMAGE via Reuters Connect / Darren England/EPA/Newscom/MaxPPP

Australia's government has ousted both the foreign and domestic intelligence chiefs from the National Security Committee of Cabinet, just weeks after ASIO boss Mike Burgess delivered a warning about foreign interference in the country's politics.

Published on 28.03.2024 at 04:00 GMT

The spooks are not happy at the Albanese government’s decision to remove ASIO boss Mike Burgess and ASIS boss Kerri Hartnett from the National Security subcommittee of Cabinet.

On 19 March, News Corp “investigative reporter” and intelligence establishment mouthpiece Sharri Markson broke the story that the chiefs of ASIS and ASIO “have been dumped from the Albanese government’s top security body”. She complained 19 March in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, “The head of ASIO, Director-General Mike Burgess, and the head of ASIS, Director-General Kerri Hartland, have been removed from the Albanese government’s national security meeting [*sic*] of Cabinet, according to Sky News” (referring to a story that she herself had presented). The directors-general “have previously given advice on key security and sovereignty issues within the cabinet, which makes decisions on the highest risk and most urgent national security matters”, she wrote. “But it’s understood Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet secretary Glyn Davis has removed both as permanent members. The change means both will instead be invited on a case-by-case basis to provide advice to the security body.”

Markson quoted Liberal Party Home Affairs spokesman Senator James Paterson—another intelligence mouthpiece, and long-time member of the “immature, juvenile and destructive” (as the late former intelligence chief Allan Gyngell once called them) bipartisan “Wolverines” clique of China-haters in Parliament—urging the government to “reverse this reckless decision urgently”. According to Paterson, “It is very concerning to hear that the Albanese government has removed intelligence and

security agency heads from the critical committee of government considering national security matters. They should have available the best advice from our expert agencies when making decisions in the national interest, but that's pretty hard if they are not in the room. No wonder this government has been so weak and incompetent on national security." Similarly, Shadow Defence Minister (and fellow Wolverine) Andrew Hastie told Sky that "It's a very concerning data point, it's a warning sign flashing red for me when you're kicking intelligence heads out of a committee. ... It's their job to warn the government of the challenges ahead. To not have the head of ASIO or head of ASIS in the room is very concerning."

Much ado about ... not much

Where even to start with such nonsense? First, the change by all accounts has only just happened, whereas Albanese and co. have been in government almost two years; ergo their putative weakness and incompetence has occurred with ASIO and ASIS "in the room" anyway. More to the point, briefings from intelligence agencies to the NSC and its antecedents "on a case-by-case basis" is how things had been done *since before those agencies even existed*, up until PM Scott Morrison (in office Aug. 2018-May 2022) made their directors-general permanent members of the NSC as part of his program to provoke and alienate China at the USA and Britain's behest. That is because the NSC is a subcommittee of Cabinet, chaired by the PM, which otherwise comprises senior ministers whose portfolios bear most directly upon the nation's political, economic and territorial security. Under Albanese it includes ministers from the Departments of Defence; Treasury; Foreign Affairs and Trade (responsible for ASIS); Attorney-General; Energy (and Climate Change); and Home Affairs (ASIO's now parent department).

The secretaries of those departments also customarily attend; but otherwise, until Morrison the NSC had never included any non-elected official as a permanent member. In 2019 Morrison also installed his then-National Security Advisor Andrew Shearer in the role of Cabinet Secretary, an office likewise held exclusively by an elected member of Parliament theretofore. Taken together with his secret appointment of himself as co-minister of five of the aforementioned security-critical portfolios, it is hard to see Morrison's actions as anything less than preparations in earnest for a "soft coup" against what little actual democratic process still occurs within Canberra's halls of power—perhaps in preparation for the supposedly imminent US-led war on China over Taiwan that then-Defence Minister, now-Opposition Leader Peter Dutton had infamously declared in 2021 it were "inconceivable" that Australia would not join.

That question aside, it is in any case hilarious to watch Paterson, Hastie et al. lose their tiny minds over a return to the *status quo ante* of 70 years' standing—during which period ASIO in particular has rarely wanted for influence, more's the pity—after a brief aberration of barely five years. It does however suggest significant worry on the part of the Anglo-American powers-that-be as to what even so compliant a government as Albanese's might be pushed by democratic pressure to do, even if only for fear of electoral defeat, if it is allowed even briefly out from under the gaze of the empire's "Five Eyes" spying apparatus of which ASIO and ASIS are the local armatures.

Reign of terror

The "Five Eyes" moniker derives from the cooperation during World War II of the military intelligence bureaus of the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, primarily as it related to signals intelligence (i.e. the interception and decoding of enemy communications). Post-war, however, it soon enough expanded to spying on civilian populations too (including their own and each other's), both electronically, and via "human intelligence" by domestic security agencies—purportedly for the purpose of guarding against communist infiltration during the Cold War, but really intended (as was the largely British-orchestrated Cold War itself) to cement the power of the burgeoning informal Anglo-American empire over Britain and the USA's far-flung colonies and client states around the world.

In Australia, however, Prime Minister Ben Chifley determinedly pursued independence in economic and foreign policy, including by maintaining cordial diplomatic relations with WWII ally the Soviet Union. To bring their wayward (and geopolitically crucial) colony back to heel, Britain and the USA conspired to force upon Australia a national intelligence agency that would function as a branch of Britain's Security Service, MI5. Chifley saw no need for such an agency, confident that Australia's existing security intelligence agency, the Commonwealth Investigation Service (CIS), was adequate for Australia's security needs. The British therefore arranged an incident that would convince Chifley to acquiesce to their demands.

The push for ASIO had begun in 1946, when a highly classified US Army Signals Intelligence Service (forerunner of the National Security Agency, NSA) project to decode Soviet communiqués, code-named VENONA, allegedly indicated espionage—including infiltration of the Australian public service—by the Soviet embassy in Canberra. MI5 briefed Chifley on the VENONA project, but convinced him to not discuss it with his intelligence officers until the alleged source of the Soviets' intelligence was identified. Crucially, Australia's CIS had failed to identify this leak, which the British and Americans seized upon to justify not sharing classified information with the Chifley government, beginning in mid-1948.

To demonstrate the CIS's competence and that Australia didn't need an MI5-style agency, as well as to allay fears of communist infiltration, Dr John Burton, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), proposed the operation that would come to be known as "the Lapstone experiment", conducted at the 29 November 1948 conference of the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) held at the Lapstone Hotel in NSW's Blue Mountains. Under the supervision of an MI5 liaison officer, CIS and DEA personnel watched the Soviets' every move, read all their mail and, assisted by technicians from the Postmaster-General's Department, listened to every phone call, intercepted every telegram, and installed listening devices in their rooms which were monitored around the clock.



PM Ben Chifley initially opposed establishing MI5 subsidiary ASIO; PM Menzies set up MI6 subsidiary ASIS secretly.

No evidence of espionage was found; but because MI5 claimed that its VENONA intercepts (of which Burton was not aware) indicated otherwise, it was able to twist this lack of evidence into support for its own argument, that Australia's existing agencies weren't up to the job. Despite his misgivings, Chifley agreed that a new organisation was needed, and ASIO was officially formed on 16 March 1949. The US intelligence embargo continued, however—until Chifley lost that December's election to founding Liberal Party leader Robert Menzies. Menzies immediately set about purging ASIO of Chifley loyalists and independent thinkers, and cemented Britain's control over the agency by appointing the fanatically Anglophile head of military intelligence, Colonel Charles Spry, as its director-general—who went on to catch precisely zero Soviet spies, in his entire 20 years in the post. That inconvenience is best explained by the fact that shortly after the NSA declassified VENONA in 1995, Russia in turn released Soviet records showing that one Bill Weisband, a Soviet agent inside US Signals Intelligence, *had kept Moscow informed about the project since 1945*. Which would mean that the VENONA files that MI5 had claimed proved Soviet espionage in Australia, were based on ciphers that the Soviets had supposedly continued to use despite knowing that they had been compromised—an entirely ridiculous proposition. Which is to say, ASIO was born of a lie, and it has been lying to the people and governments of Australia ever since.

As for ASIS, Menzies created it in 1952 via an executive order rather than legislation in order to keep it secret not only from the public but from Parliament, a status it would retain for the next 25 years. It was established explicitly to function as the Antipodean branch of Britain's Secret



Alfred Deakin Brookes, founding boss of ASIS. Photo: Melbourne Grammar

Intelligence Service (MI6), and which like MI6 would be accountable not to the Australian government but solely to the British Crown. As Dr William Stoltz, a researcher at the Australian National University's National Security College, explained in a May 2022 address to the Robert Menzies Institute to mark ASIS's 70th anniversary, Menzies' foreign policy primarily revolved around bolstering British power in the Asia-Pacific. "ASIS was envisaged as an Empire agency that would ... support the intelligence needs not just of Australia, but of the whole [British] Commonwealth." For its first several years it operated entirely out of MI6 stations, on missions designed by Britain for its own ends; and its director-general Alfred Brookes was granted direct access on MI6's behalf to ministers in Menzies' cabinet, bypassing departmental secretaries. Researchers Des Ball and Jeffrey Richelson reported in their 1985 book *The Ties That Bind*, that "The relationship between ASIS and the SIS (MI6) is so close that there has never been any need for written agreements or a formal exchange of liaison personnel. ... ASIS officers continue to call the London headquarters of the SIS the 'Head Office' and the Melbourne headquarters of ASIS called itself the 'Main Office'."

Even as subservient as Menzies' government was, however, it soon enough became alarmed at its lack of control of an ostensibly Australian intelligence agency, especially as Brookes began to exhibit an increasingly dangerous hubris. After years of his lobbying for ASIS, rather than the DEA, to be

made (as he wrote to one minister) “the central agency for setting national security and economic policy”, the last straw came when Brookes flew to Washington, DC in early 1957, without the sanction of the Defence or External Affairs departments, to discuss with US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, Central Intelligence Agency director Allen Dulles, a plan by which Australia might become a base for the USA’s long-range nuclear missiles (!). Stoltz reported how at a meeting in May 1957 (from which Menzies was absent for surgery), Cabinet resolved to abolish ASIS—and immediately got the Chifley treatment, with the USA threatening to cut Australia off from all classified intelligence, while Britain sent MI6 Deputy Director Sir James Easton to Australia on a “five-day blitz of senior politicians and public servants” to get the decision overturned. Menzies quickly returned to Canberra and overturned the decision.

That is the level of pressure Albanese must prepare likewise to come under, if Washington and London decide that in expelling their pet spooks from the NSC (and whatever else he may be doing behind the scenes), he is threatening their interests by asserting Australia’s own. Presuming, that is, that he has any intention to do so.

Footnotes

1. [“The China narrative, part four: ASIO’s disinformation campaign”](#), AAS, 3 Sept. 2020.
2. “ASPI’s Brit import demands ADF produce official war propaganda, spruiks re-colonisation”, AAS, 20 Mar. 2024.

By Richard Bardon, *Australian Alert Service*, 3 April 2024

ASIS, the Brookes family, and the Murdoch media empire

Founding ASIS boss Alfred Deakin Brookes came from a family heavily involved in the British Empire system of private intelligence networks and secret armies that were formed to protect Establishment power after World War I, and which evolved into the Five Eyes agencies.

The grandson of Alfred Deakin, Australia’s second prime minister, Brookes was the son of Herbert Brookes (1867-1963), a fanatical anti-communist and anti-Catholic leader of the Melbourne business establishment. During WWI the senior Brookes was the first to advocate for private spies and secret armies to monitor and counter any perceived threats to the power of private banks and big business over governments, such as the growing Labor movement which, led by future prime minister John Curtin, had defeated conscription.



Herbert Brookes

As the Australian Citizens Party, then Citizens Electoral Council (CEC), documented in its 2004 *New Citizen* Special Report “Defeat the Synarchy, Fight for a national bank”, in an article titled “Herbert Brookes: Éminence Grise of the Secret Armies”:

“Brookes’ files are full of memoranda and letters by him and his associates on how to set up secret organisations to gather intelligence on ‘disloyal’ elements. He planted spies in the Melbourne Trades Hall, the Victorian Railways Union, the One Big Union, and the Victorian Police Department. “Brookes’ activities involved more than intelligence work. He made notes: ‘Propose to use men recruited from masons, loyalty leagues, soldiers and sailors ... as *vigilantes*.’ (Emphasis added.) Brookes proposed a two-tier organisational scheme, under which highly public loyalist organisations would serve as a cover for secret armies. He wrote that the proposed Australian Protective League ‘might be used when necessary to stimulate a public or semi-public organisation to do some work which might be necessary’.”

What Brookes envisioned in 1918 came to fruition in the secret armies of the 1930s, the New Guard, the Old Guard, and the League of National Security, which formed to run coups against the federal Scullin Labor government and NSW Lang Labor government, if those governments resorted to state power over the private banks. Later, personnel involved in these private armies were recruited into ASIO and ASIS.

Interestingly, Herbert Brookes’ biographer was his own nephew, Rohan Rivett, one of two early mentors of Rupert Murdoch who connected Murdoch to intelligence services. The other was British press baron Lord Beaverbrook. Murdoch’s father Sir Keith Murdoch

famously sent young Rupert to learn the ropes of running newspapers under Beaverbrook. Not just a famous press baron, Beaverbrook had in fact helped develop British intelligence and its interface with propaganda operations during the first world war, when Beaverbrook was officially in charge of “domestic” propaganda, and his fellow press baron Lord Northcliffe—Sir Keith’s mentor— was in charge of propaganda against the enemy. Rupert did his stint with propaganda expert Beaverbrook and then, when his father died, he took over the *Adelaide News*, the only asset his father left him, which was then being run by editor Rohan Rivett, Herbert Brookes’s nephew and cousin of ASIS boss Alfred Brookes.

From these beginnings, Murdoch has built one of the world’s largest media empires which also doubles as the main warmongering propaganda agency for the Five Eyes intelligence network, most evident in his media empire’s campaign for the Iraq war in 2003.