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[Founding of MI5, MI6 on Jul. 29, 1909, six days after the founding of the Empire Press Union following the Imperial Press Conference, 1909]

Committee of Imperial Defence

The **Committee of Imperial Defence** was an important *ad hoc* part of the Government of the United Kingdom and the British Empire from just after the Second Boer War until the start of the Second World War. It was responsible for research, and some co-ordination, on issues of military strategy.

Typically, a temporary sub-committee would be set up to investigate and report at length on a specific topic. A large number of such sub-committees were engendered over the decades, on topics such as foreign espionage (a committee report in 1909 led to the founding of MI5 and MI6), food rationing, and aerial defence. It is possible to argue that the Committee of Imperial Defence was an important step in the development of national security coordination in the UK, and to see the current National Security Council as one of its descendants.^[1]

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References

Further reading

[PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE RECORD:

[COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE \[Subcomms MI5,MI6\]. \(Jul. 29, 1909\).](#)

Committee Report that led to the founding of MI5 (Home Defence) and MI6 (Colonial Defence), HC Deb 29 July 1909 vol 8 cc1381-432. UK Parliament, Hansard.

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1909/jul/29/committee-of-imperial-defence>]

Referenced here

History

The committee was established in 1904 by Arthur Balfour, then British Prime Minister, following the recommendations of the Elgin Committee, chaired by Lord Elgin.^[2] It was intended as an advisory committee for the Prime Minister, one that would be small and flexible; it replaced the Cabinet's 'weak and informal' Defence Committee (set up in 1902), which had usually only met during periods of crisis.^[1]

The original concept was to create a strategic vision defining the future roles of the two military services, the Royal Navy and the British Army, after the military reductions in the wake of the Boer War. However, no arrangements were made for it to formally pass on its conclusions to those with the ability to translate them into actions. This lack soon became obvious enough that a Secretariat was appointed, under Sir George Clarke. However, far from simply acting as a communicator, Clarke expected actually to make policy and see it implemented. With the fall of the Balfour Government in 1906, and with the military services determined to control their own futures, Clarke's plans fell through, and with no support from the incoming Prime Minister, he resigned in 1907.

A small Secretariat became permanent and provided communication between members outside of Committee meetings, and with other civil servants.

Under the guidance of Maurice Hankey, the Committee slowly gained in importance. Hankey was appointed Naval Assistant Secretary to the Committee in 1908, and became Secretary to the Committee in 1912; he would hold that position for the next twenty-six years.

By 1914, the Committee had begun to act as a defence planning agency for the whole British Empire, consequently providing advice to the Dominions on occasion. It continued to perform such a role into the 1920s. It was effectively a peacetime defence planning system, one which only provided advice; formal authority remained with Ministers and service chiefs, which helped ensure the Committee's acceptability to the existing bureaucracy.

Chaired by the Prime Minister, members were usually cabinet ministers, the heads of the military services, and key civil servants; Prime Ministers from Dominion countries were *de facto* members of the Committee in peacetime as well.

The Committee became the Defence Committee in 1947.^[1]

See also

- Imperial War Cabinet
- Joint Intelligence Committee (United Kingdom), a sub-committee of the CID
- National Security Council (United Kingdom)

External links

- https://web.archive.org/web/20071211215252/http://www.sourceuk.net/article/0/562/sir_maurice_hankey_and_the_origins_of_the_cabinet_office.html

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- How Imperial was the Committee of Imperial Defence? (<https://web.archive.org/web/20041221055017/http://www.psa.ac.uk/Publications/psd/1998/catterall.htm>)
- Institute for Government/King's College London - *The National Security Council: national security at the centre of government* (<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/national-security-council>)

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1. Dr Joe Devanny & Josh Harris (4 November 2014). "The National Security Council: national security at the centre of government" (<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/national-security-council>). *The Institute for Government*. Institute for Government & King's College London. Retrieved 6 November 2014.
2. "Records of the Cabinet Committees" (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=386&j=1>). The National Archives.

Further reading

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This page was last edited on 11 May 2019, at 21:24 (UTC).

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EMPIRE PRESS UNION

A PERMANENT BUREAU

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, July 23.

The result of the post-conference deliberations of the press delegates is the formation of "The Empire Press Union" as a company limited by guarantee. The objects of the company are to promote the interests of the newspaper press throughout the Empire, the holding of conferences, and the improvement of news exchange.

Any person, firm, or company publishing a daily paper or such other newspaper as may be nominated by the committee of any section of the union shall be eligible for election as a member. The subscription, meanwhile, is fixed at £5 per annum, with an entrance fee of £5 for all papers joining after June 1, 1910.

Members may nominate as associates any person engaged or interested in the press of the Empire.

The union will be managed by the president, from six to 20 elected members, and the body of deputy members. The latter shall be nominated by groups of oversea papers to represent them in London.

To begin with, the council shall consist of:—Lord Burnham, Lord Northcliffe, Mr C. Arthur Pearson, Sir John Arnot, Mr Moberley Bell, Mr Robert Donald, Mr John R. Findlay, Mr Kennedy Jones, the Hon. Harry Lawson, Mr C. D. Long, Mr Ernest Parke, Sir George Riddell, Mr C. P. Scott, and Mr J. A. Spender. Lord Burnham is first president, and Mr Pearson first chairman.

The annual general meeting will be held in July of each year, at such time and place as the union may decide at an annual meeting, subject to alteration of date and place as may be made by the council if it thinks it desirable.

The New Zealand members of the Press Conference who were present at the final meeting held to-day, to settle the memorandum and articles of association, were Mr

G. Fenwick and Mr Gresley Lukin

EMPIRE PRESS UNION

OTAGO DAILY TIMES, ISSUE
14622, 7 SEPTEMBER 1909

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[CITATION: Correspondent. (Jul. 23, 1909).
EMPIRE PRESS UNION formed, published Sep. 07, 1909, Issue No. 14622, Dunedin, New Zealand via National Library of New Zealand, Ref. No. ODT19090907.2.6. Otago Daily Times.]

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