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The geographies of the Information Research Department: Intelligence, diplomacy and the British secret state

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Abstract

This paper develops a historical and political geographical analysis of the UK Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD). Empirically it is grounded in archival study of IRD files concerning operations in Ghana and South Africa during the Cold War and specifically the 1960s and 1970s. To date, there has been no geographical study of IRD and through this paper's critical study of the organisation I highlight where contributions can be made to existing scholarship on the geographies of intelligence and diplomacy. In examining IRD, I highlight strategies to be applied and spatialities to be investigated in relation to other organs of the British secret state. Through investigating the networks of communication, distribution and personal relations that animated IRD operations and geographers are well positioned to trace the contours of the secret state and its operations. Similarly, through interrogating IRD's relationship with the Diplomatic Service I suggest studies of the cultures and practices of diplomacy can be enriched by highlighting the role of state secrecy and subversion in these contexts. I suggest studying IRD can open up a more holistic examination of the geographies of the British secret state beyond a focus on particular figures or the impact of specific theories. Within British Geography there has been extensive study of the role that geography as a discipline and geographers as practitioners have played in the furtherance of British imperialism and militarism with covert actions and agencies central here. However, what this paper evidences and what I am proposing is the need for a determined and critical geographical analysis of the British secret state and its activities *tout court*.

KEYWORDS

Africa, Cold War, diplomacy, Information Research Department, intelligence geographies, secret state

1 | INTRODUCTION

On 12 August 1964, a top-secret message was sent to the UK High Commissioner in Accra, Ghana from the British Foreign Office. The letter discussed a covert 'mailing in' operation targeting the post-colonial Ghanaian government headed by Kwame Nkrumah:

> [this] would probably take the form of posting from a third country (i.e. not the U.K. or Ghana) a circular letter to influential Ghanaians. The line we are considering taking in the letter is that there are behind Nkrumah a number of sinister foreign advisers.[1]

Mailing in was a practice whereby propaganda materials would be posted into a targeted country, usually under the name and apparent imperative of a front group. The orchestrator of this covert psychological warfare operation was a secret Foreign Office department; the Information Research Department (IRD). Operational from 1948 to 1977, IRD was formed to counter communist propaganda and subversion in Britain and Western Europe during the early Cold War (Defty, 2004). This remit expanded with the advance of decolonisation in the British Empire, and globally, from the early 1950s. IRD waged propaganda and psychological warfare operations against various anti-colonial and nationalist movements under the logic that 'anti-British' sentiment could be a vector for communist and Soviet subversion. IRD remained a state secret until its dissolution in 1977.

IRD distributed material unattributably and hid sources to obscure any connection with the British government or state. In Lyn Smith's (1980) pioneering study, she categorised IRD productions into two main forms. The first were confidential intelligence reports designed for 'high-level consumption' (Defty, 2004, p. 6) by senior domestic and allied politicians, heads of state and security services. The second was less sensitive and more widely distributed to trusted contacts in Britain and abroad. These generally consisted of supposedly factual background material on communist states, leaders and activities. IRD also disseminated reports on nationalist or neutralist movements seen as susceptible to communist subversion and also positive propaganda on moderate tendencies and politicians that aided British strategic interests (Vaughan, 2014). Contacts supplied with these materials occupied influential roles in civil society and state institutions; journalists, lower-level politicians, university lecturers, trade union officials and so forth (Defty, 2004). IRD relied heavily upon the British Diplomatic Service to report potentially useful information to IRD in Whitehall, to identify potential contacts and distribute materials. IRD had its own information advisors who were posted to British diplomatic missions to gather information and help direct propaganda operations. IRD maintained a close working relationship with MI5 and MI6 (Defty, 2004; Lashmar & Oliver, 1998).

IRD staff and government officials in both contemporaneous accounts and in retrospect have repeatedly stated that IRD based its outputs in factual and objective information (Defty, 2004). Such claims are tempered by the fact materials were handed over unattributably to contacts who could then impart a 'spin' on this information for their own ends. This sort of activity is termed 'grey' propaganda whereby factual information, often edited to fit a particular line, is distributed by a hidden source (Cormac, 2021). IRD *did* engage in covert operations which peddled false accusations and information with this type of work termed 'black' propaganda (see Cormac, 2022). Often this involved the distribution of material from front groups and organisations that were pure fabrications. Internal documents plainly discuss this as when IRD staffer J.L. Welser suggested combatting a Russian book club in Ghana by 'sending them "black" literature in the hope that they will accept it as genuine, and send it to some of their members'.[2]

This paper calls on geographers to critically interrogate the spatialities, agents and formations that comprise the British secret state—with IRD a useful example. Writing in the late 1970s, Marxist historian E.P. Thompson (1979) outlined the characteristics of the secret state in Britain. For Thompson (1979, p. 220), while US intelligence agencies may be relatively well known, 'many people have only the haziest notion as to the character and functions of MI5, MI6 or the Special Branch of the police'. We must also add IRD. Further, when the covert arms of the state were considered in the popular imaginary, this was usually in terms of 'defensive' counter-espionage operations or as emergency forces marshalled ad hoc in response to self-evident threats such as terrorism (Thompson, 1979). The organisations and agents that comprise the British secret state were 'larger and more powerful, and less subject to, ministerial or parliamentary control than they ever have been' (Thompson, 1979, pp. 220–221). It is in this framework that we must understand IRD. Despite Thompson writing nearly 50 years ago, this analysis still holds as recent scandals and exposés highlight.[3] State secrecy and covert action remain primary mechanisms through which domestic political and social mobilisation in Britain is undermined and foreign policy interventions are conducted.

That said, it is clear that the secret state in Britain has changed significantly since IRD's dissolution in 1977. The consensus appears to be that no element of the British state conducts the types of propaganda operations that IRD did

(Coxon, 2024). We must understand IRD as a product of the early Cold War, established to counter genuine Soviet propaganda campaigns and then latterly its aims directed by anxieties around communist subversion and imperial decline. The study of IRD can provide a window onto how the secret state *can* function and also allows geographers to enrich the study of IRD that has been well underway in other disciplines.

With no geographical study to date, there is a large empirical and theoretical gap to be addressed through engagement with IRD and its operations. This paper is based empirically on a political-historical examination of IRD files held in the UK National Archives (TNA). Specifically, those covering operations in Ghana and South Africa from the early 1950s through to 1977. This intervention builds out some of these preliminary findings and suggests IRD is ripe for geographical engagement. Through a critical spatial interrogation of its structures and activities, a number of fields of geographical research can be enriched empirically and advanced theoretically. The following sections are structured around two main thematic areas. Firstly, existing scholarship on IRD will be read alongside that on the geographies of intelligence to highlight contributions to be made through studying IRD's operations in the mid-twentieth century from a specifically geographical perspective. Secondly, IRD's deep interrelationship with the British Diplomatic Service signals how scholarship on the cultures and geographies of diplomacy might be enriched through examining the secret state.

2 | IRD AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF STATE SECRECY

Within History and Intelligence Studies there has been extensive study of IRD's origins and organisational history. As noted, Smith (1980) produced the first academic article on IRD's existence and historical operations. With little official documentation available, Smith was able to present an account of IRD's founding, emphasising the role IRD had in shaping British international relations during the Cold War. Aldrich (2002) and Defty (2004) detail IRD's founding and early activities in the context of a solidifying Cold War geopolitics with Britain increasing cooperation with the US and IRD countering Soviet subversion domestically and in Europe. More recently, Rory Cormac (Cormac, 2019, 2022) highlighted the previously underestimated number of black propaganda campaigns the department conducted. The majority of these targeted Africa and this paper advances these findings through introducing a geographical analysis.

There are also a number of case-specific examinations of IRD operations covering specific conflicts such as Malaya and Cyprus (Carruthers, 1995) and Egypt and the Suez Crisis (Collier, 2014). Scholarship such as Carruthers' (1995) and Collier's (2014) reveals how IRD operations did not solely target the Soviet bloc and genuine communists, but was routinely directed against anti-colonialists, nationalists and anti-imperialists that were seen to threaten British interests. These types of histories partially respond to a limited examination of IRD operations in the Global South (McGarr, 2019). Although this lacuna is being addressed in more recent work, there is a dearth of scholarship which interrogates IRD operations in sub-Saharan Africa in a sustained manner. This paper and the broader project it emerges from represent a key intervention here.

In recent studies that do address IRD activities in the Global South there is an emergent focus on the complex reception and interpretation of IRD propaganda. LoBue (2023) assesses a long-running IRD propaganda campaign in Africa that operated through the fabricated front-group the 'Freedom for Africa Movement' (FFAM). A key takeaway from this study is that no matter how carefully produced, unattributable IRD propaganda materials represent political interventions into geographical and social contexts beyond IRD's control and therefore were interpreted and utilised in response to contingent local conditions. McGarr (2019) explores this same dynamic in the context of IRD propagandising in India. Alongside an official campaign coordinated with the Indian government, IRD conducted a second unofficial campaign that distributed anti-Soviet propaganda without Indian knowledge or approval. This covert campaign was largely unsuccessful due to a lack of cooperation with local authorities and the input of local knowledge. This speaks to the agency of local actors in shaping the socio-political conditions in post-colonial states that directly informed how successfully IRD propaganda would be received (ibid.). Finally, Vaughan's (2014, p. 142) study of IRD propagandising in Nasser's Egypt reveals how British propaganda efforts suffered from no lack of resources, technical capabilities or inventiveness, but that ultimately 'British propaganda in Egypt failed because the policies that it was required to support ran counter to the prevailing political mood of the country'. No amount of clever propagandising could change the material facts of centuries of colonial underdevelopment and British imperial occupation. These were structuring historical and material conditions and not merely Soviet smears or convenient avenues for communist subversion.

Turning now to geographical scholarship, Trevor Paglen's (2009, 2010) studies of the US secret state are a useful place to begin when trying to analyse the geographies of the secret state in Britain. Paglen (2010, p. 760) understands 'state secrecy as the production of space'. These spatialities are constructed and exposed through a central contradiction that

characterises any project of state secrecy; the relations, actors and sites that comprise secret events are also enmeshed with the 'non-secret' world (Paglen, 2010). It is through these interactions that the contours and practices of the secret state can be mapped, placed and interrogated (Paglen, 2009, 2010). This geographical reading of state secrecy also disrupts binary notions of openness and secrecy, with these instead understood as modes of governance enacted for particular goals in contingent political and spatial contexts. Such an analysis serves to de-exceptionalise state secrecy as a condition reserved for select government agencies operating in particularly sensitive contexts (Thompson, 1979). IRD operated hand-in-glove with other Foreign Office departments such as the Diplomatic Service that were ostensibly open to public oversight. The boundaries of the British secret state then do not abruptly 'end' with the official personnel of IRD or MI5, but instead are drawn through the various organs of state power and administration in the prosecution of particular covert projects. Thus, core orthodoxies of the liberal democratic state can be questioned regarding the transparent application of the rule of law and the respect of civil liberties (Horn, 2012).

This perspective resonates with Barnett's (2015) Foucauldian reading of the increasing securitisation of state and society in the twenty-first century. Barnett (2015) suggests securitisation should be understood in its specific milieu, thus locating it as something practiced through dispersed relations and technologies that are productive of contingent spatialities. This production of new relations and spatialities occurs under and operates through 'a spectrum of states of non-knowing' (Walters, 2015, p. 289). Understanding state secrecy as operating at different intensities is necessary to properly grasp the histories and geographies of IRD (Horn, 2012). At any one time there were individuals who knew of IRD's existence and maintained its secrecy, such as trusted government officials who were clued-in on IRD operations. Concurrently, however, readers of newspapers or members of organisations targeted for IRD grey and black propaganda operations had no idea the department existed but were still subject to IRD's interventions. Pozen (2010) terms the latter condition deep secrecy; wherein information is so well guarded that only a close-knit circle of insiders are aware of a particular operation. This is not a permanent status, with accidents, leaks and declassification all potential disruptions (Walters, 2015). A geographical analysis can work to expose the operations of the secret state across the spectrum of secrecy and pick out moments and places where new contingent spatialities are produced, revealing broader patterns and structures (Barnett, 2015; Paglen, 2010).

Belcher and Martin's (2013) study of openness and closure in the operations of US immigration and military institutions is useful here. The authors describe the multiple classifications and practices of secrecy that shaped access to their research subjects and sites. As with the previous authors, they understand laws and procedures governing transparency and state secrecy to be located and practiced technologies of governance. Therefore, they are open to renegotiation in response to new political and social developments, incoherence in their application and human error in their enaction (Belcher & Martin, 2013). A core takeaway of the authors' research is that there are various openings and closings of the secret state that can provide glimpses into its function. Returning to Paglen (2010), we might see these openings as moments when the secret state has to interact with the non-secret world in conducting specific operations. The following section develops these themes through empirical application.

2.1 | IRD operations in Ghana

To ground the foregoing discussion in a geographical analysis of IRD, I return to the Ghana mail-in operation signalled in this article's opening. Working under the guise of Ghanaian dissidents, IRD in cooperation with the British diplomatic mission in Ghana and the Commonwealth Relations Office mailed in hundreds of pamphlets attacking the governing Convention People's Party (CPP) and Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah. The pamphlets claimed Ghanaian independence was being undermined through development of closer relations with the USSR and the presence of Western Marxist advisors and intellectuals in the country.[4] The pamphlets continually emphasised that Ghana was being 'recolonised' by the Soviets at the expense of Nkrumah's African socialist and Pan-Africanist project.[5] This was a common attack-line across IRD's African propaganda operations, with LoBue (2023, p. 83) noting 'betrayal and undermining of African visionary leaders by unscrupulous confidantes—all inevitably shown to be communist stooges—is a recurring theme'. Nkrumah was often used as an object lesson here (ibid.).

The pamphlets were, for example, mailed from Rome and Germany to obscure their British origins and associate them with legitimate letters posted into Ghana by exiled opposition figures in Europe.[6] This tactic also observed by LoBue (2023) with FFAM leaflets posted from cities across Africa to give the appearance of an internationally networked organisation. Nkrumah denounced the mailed in pamphlets in his national day address of 5 March 1965, specifically attacking 'those with wicked intentions ... writing and circulating anonymous letters and documents with threats and

calumny to other people … We will not tolerate subversion and sabotage'.[7] Even though the IRD mail-in programme was a deep secret to the Ghanaians (Pozen, 2010), the arrival of these pamphlets was a generative event that produced new and contingent spatial relations (Barnett, 2015). This covert intervention was interpreted by Nkrumah and the CPP through anti-imperialist geopolitical imaginaries and narratives. The political journal of the Ghanaian government's Bureau of African Affairs, *The Spark*, attacked the 'scurrilous and vindictive press campaign' being waged against Ghana from abroad.[8] The European postmarks associated with the mailed in pamphlets, as IRD intended, suggested these were the products of 'plotting exiles' based in the West.[9]

The original source of the pamphlets remained hidden, but the essential thrust of the project was grasped. The characteristics of the mail-in campaign comported with the geopolitical stance of Nkrumah and the CPP, meaning it was understood as emanating from the imperialist West to undermine African socialism in Ghana and the broader project of Pan-African unity (Nkrumah, 1963). The geographical origins and the anti-communist, anti-Soviet bent of the pamphlets revealed the geopolitical and geostrategic ambitions of the pamphlet's real authors, if not their identity. Although, through IRD's own assessments, we know that Nkrumah and his allies suspected Britain was conducting propaganda and psychological warfare campaigns in Africa.[10] This example is resonant with similar IRD propaganda operations conducted in post-colonial states which overemphasised the threat of Soviet subversion (McGarr, 2019; Vaughan, 2014). A generic anti-communism and the 'exposure' of tenuous or fabricated connections to Moscow often failed to generate impact (ibid.). 'Audiences' in post-colonial states were often suspicious of anti-communist materials seen to emanate from Western imperialist powers (Vaughan, 2014). This, in combination with IRD's routine underestimation of local critical capacities, could engender doubts on the provenance of propaganda materials distributed through fronts despite sophisticated forgery and distribution techniques (LoBue, 2023).

By interrogating the material, political and imagined geographies established through the pamphlet campaign, the Ghanaians were able to decipher the broad outline of the operation and ultimately its intended goal. This *geographical* interrogation was essential for understanding the activities of the secret state even when the details of its actions are hidden. Thus evidencing Paglen's (2010) contention that the secret state necessarily shapes the non-secret world. In this historical context of deep secrecy (Pozen, 2010), removed from our present access to internal IRD documents, members of the Ghanaian government were responding to novel covert political interventions evidenced through the material circulation of the pamphlets. The British secret state's production of placed material and political relations straddling the secret and non-secret worlds allowed for a contemporaneous spatial interrogation of its reach and impacts.

3 | GEOGRAPHIES OF DIPLOMACY AND THE SECRET STATE

Recent years have seen a turn in diplomatic studies to move beyond conceptions of diplomacy as solely the domain of state-affiliated elites and the select cadres of official diplomatic corps (Dittmer & McConnell, 2016; McConnell, 2019). Instead, there has been a turn to:

> conceive of diplomacy as a translocal network of practices through which diplomacy can be seen to proliferate into many unexpected times and spaces. This relational understanding of diplomacy de-centres the practices of state diplomats and highlights the vast cultural and political infrastructure that makes state-based diplomacies meaningful
>
> Dittmer & McConnell, 2016, p. 6

Geographers have pushed forward this conception to think through the diverse spaces, places and scales shaped through diplomatic practice. This more relational approach is a means through which studies of intelligence and the secret state can be drawn upon.

The political geographer Fiona McConnell (2019) notes 'as a discipline geographers have been surprisingly slow to turn critical attention to the field of diplomacy' (McConnell, 2019, p. 48). McConnell suggests a geographical approach can widen 'the empirical lens so that a broader range of practices, actors and objects come into view when we consider "diplomacy"' (ibid.). This can expand understandings of *where* diplomacy happens, *who* conducts diplomacy and *how* diplomatic relations are enacted. Craggs' (2014, 2018) examination of diplomatic relations within the British Commonwealth during decolonisation is indicative here. Craggs (2018) highlights the multiple cosmopolitan and transnational networks that shaped diplomatic relations among Commonwealth states and leaders. These networks did not always neatly conform to the boundaries of geopolitical blocs or nation-states and could be articulated around personal

commitment to shared political aims such as ending Apartheid (Craggs, 2018). Noting the importance of the personal here, the examination of such quotidian relations has been a central concern for geographers navigating the extensive repositories of national and diplomatic archives (Harris, 2024) and the stage-management of international summits (Hodder, 2015). Focusing on the situated interpersonal practices through which diplomacy is conducted is a key contribution of political geography to diplomatic studies (Jones & Clark, 2015).

This work signals a theoretical approach that can examine the influence of IRD on British diplomatic staff and relations. Critical attention needs to be paid to the material and interpersonal technical and practice networks through which the British Diplomatic Service aided IRD in its activities. International Relations scholar Costas Constantinou (2016, p. 24) is insightful here; '[diplomacy] can sometimes be simply a means of getting one's way, presenting the case for something or promoting the interests of someone, influencing or forcing others to do what they would not otherwise do. In short, there is a more dubious side to diplomacy'. It is precisely this more 'dubious side to diplomacy' (ibid.) that necessitates further engagement to unearth the subversive secret state practices that shaped British diplomatic relations in the context of my study.

The informational and technical infrastructures of the British Diplomatic Service were essential to the functions of IRD and the British secret state. Ambassadors, diplomats and embassy staff across the globe acted as IRD's 'eyes and ears' on the ground and were tasked with actively distributing propaganda. In this way, IRD in combination with the Diplomatic Service developed networks of information gathering and application that spanned state and private spheres both domestically and internationally. Thomas Maguire (2015) highlights the importance of these state-private networks to IRD's operations. From its founding, IRD established state–private networks in order to distribute propaganda unattributably through various 'cut-outs' (ibid., p. 646). A cut-out being an agent or organisation that propaganda materials could be channelled through to provide the appearance that these originated with the cut-out and not IRD. Maguire (2015, p. 662) examines state–private networks between IRD, the Labour Party and British Trades Union Congress, but from the early 1950s 'distributor-customer relations' expanded to include universities, church groups, other political parties and crucially the press.

For British diplomatic staff cultivating potential recipients of IRD material, journalistic contacts were particularly prized. This was the means through which IRD propaganda would be unattributably placed in the media to be consumed by an unsuspecting public (Lashmar & Oliver, 1998). On 6 September 1974, W, G, E. Beckmann, a British consul in Durban, cabled IRD in response to the appointment of Richard Steyn as editor of *The Natal Witness*. Beckmann described the paper as 'the oldest and one of the most independent newspapers in South Africa'.[11] IRD responded to Beckmann's requests that they would be happy for the British consulate to pass on their material to Steyn.[12] The approving message contained the strict reminder that the usual provisos on the use of IRD materials should be given to Steyn by the diplomatic staff-member that would brief him:

> These background papers are produced primarily for the Diplomatic Service, but we are allowed to show them on a personal basis to people outside the Service who may find them useful. While the material they contain may be freely used, they are not statements of official policy and should not be attributed to Her Majesty's Government, nor should the titles themselves be quoted in discussion or in print. They should not be shown to others, and should be destroyed when no longer needed.[13]

This briefing is revealing in a number of ways. Firstly, the cover story that IRD materials were actually produced 'for the Diplomatic Service' reinforces the indispensable nature of the Service's global infrastructure and staffing to the secret state project of international informational warfare.[14] Secondly, the emphasis on the personal basis through which materials were entrusted highlights the important role of interpersonal relations in developing IRD distribution networks. The selective nature of these relations incentivised journalists to maintain their secrecy to continue getting 'scoops' from the British state (Lashmar & Oliver, 1998). Finally, this example demonstrates the range of practices through which British diplomats shaped international relations. Beyond formal contacts with other state-associated diplomats, here we see diplomatic staff contributing towards programmes which sought to covertly direct public opinion in foreign states through the establishment of transnational state–private networks (Maguire, 2015).

British embassies routinely passed information that was thought useful back to IRD and also suggested potential targets, recipients and operations for consideration. A good example can be found in an exchange between the British embassy in Pretoria and the Cairo embassy to which IRD was copied in. On 10 August 1963, a D, McD. Gordon based in Pretoria messaged Cairo to thank the British mission there for sending on copies of *South Africa Freedom News*. This was a journal published by the African National Congress (ANC), one of the leading anti-Apartheid political movements in South Africa,

which had a limited but influential presence in Cairo.[15] In Gordon's reading of *South Africa Freedom News*, he decried the 'particularly crude lies about British policy towards South Africa'. Despite his assessment that the ANC and its leadership were under communist influence, he thought they may be 'willing to listen to reasonable explanations from ourselves'.[16] He suggested the Cairo embassy might attempt to influence the ANC office in Cairo and 'put it on your distribution list for IRD and other material which stresses our good record on de-colonisation in Africa' (ibid.). IRD confirmed 'this seems sensible' and it appears that from late 1963 IRD propaganda was posted to the ANC office in Cairo.[17] As shown, British Diplomatic staff were actively shaping international relations through means of subterfuge; the anti-communist IRD material sent to the ANC would be unattributable. This case speaks to the active shaping of diplomatic and international relations by non-state and unrecognised actors (Manby, 2025; McConnell, 2016), in this instance the ANC, with this revealed through an interrogation of the networked geographies of British diplomatic communication and its interrelation with the secret state.

4 | CONCLUSION

Clearly, we cannot simply apply an analysis of the secret state based upon IRD's actions in the 1960s to our present moment. A critical appraisal however can highlight broader strategies, geographies and objectives that seemingly do inform contemporary secret state activities and geopolitical strategy. Illustrating this, the Foreign Secretary David Lammy stated in a January 2025 speech that 'we and our allies must relearn the Cold War manual', later adding 'the Kremlin has spread its tentacles across the world, spewing out disinformation on every continent' (Lammy, 2025). Furthermore, some leading UK commentators, academics and analysts working on intelligence and national security have called for a revamped IRD for the twenty-first century (Cormac, 2024; Coxon, 2024). In this context of a revived interest in a Cold War geopolitics and the informational warfare strategies of IRD, critical scholars must also interrogate these histories and practices. As I have argued, geographers have much to add here in assessing these historical legacies that inform contemporary British foreign policy and secret state activities.

In positioning my study of IRD in relation to existing work on the geographies of intelligence and secrecy, I have stressed the multiple intensities, mechanisms and materialities of state secrecy that IRD constituted and operated through. IRD and the British secret state cannot be neatly siloed off from other elements of the state, with tactics of subversion and secrecy apparently exceptional cases. Through interrogating the contingent spatial and political relations constituted through state intelligence operations, geographers are well positioned to trace the contours of secret state practices as they connect the secret and non-secret worlds (Paglen, 2010). Such work has been rather limited in a British context and is entirely absent for IRD. In addressing this lacuna, I signal further contributions to be made in developing a situated geographical study of the methods and emergent relations produced through covert intelligence work. A key interface between the secret and non-secret worlds that IRD straddled was the British Diplomatic Service. We can better understand the 'more dubious side to diplomacy' (Constantinou, 2016, p. 24) and its geographies through continued examination of IRD's intimate working relationship with the personnel and communication networks of British diplomacy. This paper and the research possibilities highlighted advance an emergent field of scholarship within studies of diplomacy and political geography that broadens the range of actors and practices studied in understanding diplomatic relations.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are publicly available in the UK National Archives, Kew, London. Reference numbers for specific files utilised are provided in citations in the article. Use the National Archives catalogue to search these: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/.

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Endnotes

[1] C. Costley-White to R. Walker (12/8/64). The National Archives (TNA): Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) 168/1265, London, UK, p. 1.

[2] J, L. Wesler to J, K. Drinkall (21/1/64). FCO 168/1262, p. 1.

[3] See Schlembach (2024) for recent revelations on the 'spycops scandal' and the Undercover Policing Inquiry. Overton (2025, 27 March) reports on the 500-plus surveillance flights conducted over Gaza by the RAF since December 2023 and the British government's refusal to disclose their specific purpose. See Anderson (2015) for details of the UK Foreign Office's illegal secret archive.

[4] J. Rayner (19/7/65). 'Ghana Leaflets' FCO 168/1860.

[5] C. Costley-White to R. Walker (1965) FCO 168/1860, p. 3.

[6] R. Thomas to M. Shea (4/8/65). FCO 168/1862; J, B. Ure (2/7/64). 'Proposed "Mailing In" Operation in Ghana' FCO 168/1265, p. 2.

[7] IRD (9/3/65). 'IRD: Nkrumah's National Day Address: broadcast excerpt' FCO 168/1860, p. 1.

[8] J, B. Ure (6/5/66). 'IRD Operations Against Nkrumah's Ghana' FCO 168/1861, p. 2.

[9] bid., p. 2.

[10] H, M. Carless to H. Smith (26/10/60). FCO 168/75.

[11] W, G, E. Beckmann (6/9/74). 'Message to IRD on Richard Steyn's appointment as editor of *The Natal Witness*'. FCO 168/6971, p. 1.

[12] D, M. Biggin to Mr. Ford (11/9/74). FCO 168/6971.

[13] D, M. Biggin to W, G, E. Beckmann (12/9/74). FCO 168/6971, p. 1.

[14] ibid., p.1.

[15] D, McD. Gordon to Chancery, Cairo (10/8/63). TNA: Foreign Office (FO) 1110/1678, London, UK, p. 1.

[16] ibid., p. 1.

[17] IRD. (21/8/63). 'Minute 21st August 1963'. FO 1110/1678, p. 1.

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