



British Security Coordination: The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940-45

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In 1940, Churchill authorized the creation of a highly secret organization in New York to supervise the activities of MI5, SOE, the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and the Political Warfare Executive in the western hemisphere. Headed by the Canadian industrialist Sir William Stephenson, its first tasks were to promote British interests in the United States, counter Nazi propaganda and protect the Atlantic convoys from enemy sabotage. Despite clashing with J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, British Security Co-ordination (BSC) soon went on to develop a vast intelligence network which stretched from Chile to Bermuda, from the Caribbean to Vancouver. Security personnel arrested Axis spies; mail censors intercepted the enemy's clandestine communications; undercover agents fomented anti-Nazi activity across Latin America; and schemes were developed to harass Vichy, Italian and Japanese diplomats. This volume reveals the BSC's ingenious attempts to undermine US isolationism and influence American public opinion. The previously classified history of the BSC has remained hidden in Whitehall vaults since the end of World War II.

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From St Ermin's Press Bibliography

- Rank: #3912560 in Books
- Published on: 1998-08-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 1.75" w x 6.25" l, 1.96 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 536 pages

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Editorial Review

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Introduced by historian and member of Parliament Nigel West (Cuban Bluff, 1992, etc.) and compiled just after WWII by Stephenson, this is little more than a government report, albeit on a stellar topic and with contributors such as Roald Dahl and Gilbert Highet. The account is in chronological order from the start of the war, when Stephenson, a Canadian businessman (who plays a central role in *A Man Called Intrepid*), arrives in New York City and moves the office for British Security Coordination from Wall Street to Rockefeller Center. It then goes on to detail a host of activities undertaken by the British in the US, both to combat the Axis and to gain the sympathies and cooperation of the American public through propaganda. In addition to aiding the FBI by identifying and maintaining surveillance on enemy spies (thus circumventing any scruples the FBI might have about spying on American citizens), the British seduced Vichy and Italian officers in order to get secrets. They also gleaned countless reams of data from outside sources, such as economic contacts in neutral countries, and harassed German nationals and German-owned businesses in the US. Most interesting are depictions of the operations undertaken in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly a plot to liberate Martinique (as well as France's gold reserves, stored on the island) from the Vichy French who controlled it and the French fleet stationed there, and the attempts to infiltrate American labor unions to ensure sympathy for the British and the security of the waterfront. Though West's introduction places the report in a context that is understandable, it's completely devoid of any narrative structure and virtually unreadable to anyone unaccustomed to curling up with a government document. --
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About the Author

Nigel West, a military historian specializing in security matters, is the author of *A Matter of Trust: MI5 1945-72* and *The Secret War for the Falklands*.

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