

*27 Jan '83*

## Security tussle

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# 'Churchill solution' to filling top post in intelligence is sought

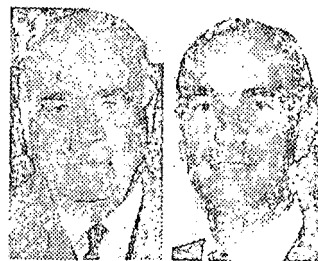
By Peter Hennessy

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is fighting a determined campaign to keep Mr Patrick Wright, its man on the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), as its chairman after the reform suggested by the Franks report and accepted by the Prime Minister on Tuesday is implemented.

If the Foreign Office wins, and Whitehall insiders think it has a chance in spite of Mrs Margaret Thatcher's legendary antipathy towards it as an institution, Mr Wright would shed his other responsibilities, chiefly as the Foreign Office's link man with the secret intelligence gathering agencies, and move into the Cabinet Office full-time. The JIC and its supporting organizations are Cabinet Office bodies.

A second possibility, which might have attractions for the Prime Minister, is to persuade a retired Whitehall "war-horse", of whose record she approves, to return and do the JIC job. In the past she has summoned Sir Anthony Parsons as her foreign affairs adviser in Downing Street, sent Sir Oliver Wright to the Washington embassy and brought back Sir Antony Duff as security and intelligence coordinator in the Cabinet Office.

Such a move would accord with advice offered her by Mr Harold Macmillan at the



'Pug' and a possible heir: Lord Ismay (left) and Mr Patrick Wright

beginning of the Falklands conflict "to find a Pug". The former prime minister had in mind a figure comparable to the late Lord Ismay (known as "Pug"), Military Secretary to the War Cabinet, 1939-45, who filleted the enormous bulk of intelligence and strategic advice proffered to Sir Winston Churchill, and generally acted as his eyes, ears and early warning device.

The field of potential Ismay is small, given a candidate's need to possess inside knowledge of both the producers and consumers of British Intelligence. The most obvious choice is Sir Frank Cooper, who retired as Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence last month and who is a great favourite of Mrs Thatcher's.

Other runners could be Sir Dick Franks, who retired as Director-General of the Secret

Intelligence Service M16, in 1981 or Sir Brooks Richards, former security and intelligence coordinator in the Cabinet Office. The present incumbent of the coordinator's post, Sir Antony Duff, is highly regarded by the Prime Minister and may be asked to transfer and run the new JIC job in, although he is planning to retire in the spring.

If Mrs Thatcher follows the prescription of the more radical internal critics of the JIC, whose complaints are longstanding and predate the Falklands crisis, the shake-up of Whitehall's central intelligence machinery could be profound.

Their job specification is for a powerful individual who would keep a close eye on the present intelligence groups, the engine rooms of the Joint Intelligence Organization, which feed the JIC, and through it, ministers, with assessments of what the mass of raw intelligence really means.

His second task would be to improve the JIC's crisis management capability, to stand back from the immediate rush of events to assess longer term significance as well as advising on the day-by-day response. The JIC for example, took quite a time to get a grip on post-Solidarity developments in Poland in 1981.

The third role the Prime Minister has already conceded: direct, personal access to her at all times.