

RUSSIA COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting held in the Foreign
Office on 25th November 1948 at 3.30 p.m.

The following were present:-

Mr. Jebb (In the Chair)

Sir I. Kirkpatrick

Mr. Makins

Mr. Bateman

Mr. C.F.A. Warner

Mr. Denning

Mr. Wright

Mr. Hayter

Mr. Roberts

Mr. Hankey

Mr. Mackenzie

Marshal of the R.A.F. Lord Tedder

(For Item III only)

Mr. Radice

Mr. Ridsdale

Mr. Passant

Mr. Gilchrist

I

MR. JEBB began by reviewing the progress of the United Nations General Assembly. He said that, apart from the speech by the Minister of State on Disarmament, there had been no outstanding denunciatory speech of late on either side. A depressing feature had, however, been the Peace offensive undertaken by Dr. Evatt, supported by the Secretary-General, Mr. Lie, and the Soviet Assistant Secretary-General, Sobolev. Dr. Evatt's intervention in the questions of Berlin, Palestine, Greece and Ireland, as well as over the admission of new members, had done much harm. With regard to the last the President was proposing to summon a meeting of the powers concerned to try to arrange a deal by which the Western Powers would agree to the admission of the Soviet sponsored nations in return for which the Russians would not oppose the admission of our nominees (including Ceylon). MR. ROBERTS made the point that Dr. Evatt felt that as a Representative of a Commonwealth country he had been badly treated by the U.K. Delegation who, he alleged, had discouraged him. There was however absolutely no truth in this suggestion.

MR. ROBERTS then informed the Committee of a talk he had had with Mr. Bohlen of the State Department. He had sounded Mr. Bohlen about the apparent uncertainty of the U.S. attitude towards the Berlin question. We understood that Mr. Marshall wanted to get a settlement of the dispute before the end of the present Assembly, and that his view was shared by Mr. Dulles and Mr. Jessup, as well as the U.S. Ambassador in London. On the other hand in

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Paris, the U.S. Delegation had seemed to indulge in delaying tactics and put difficulties in the way of further negotiation. The French papers also were carrying the story that the Americans, by insisting on being tough, were preventing an agreement which we and the French were anxious to reach. Mr. Bohlen had explained that there was, in fact, no ambivalence in American policy. The State Department, however, felt that we had over the past months been gradually pushed back from the position we had occupied at the beginning of the Berlin controversy. Even at the present Assembly we were starting from the Security Council Resolution of 26th October (embodying substantial western concessions) and not from the original position. The U.S. Delegation had merely been anxious to make sure that the Western Powers would not be jockeyed along by the Russians with no results.

MR. ROBERTS had enquired (1) whether the Americans were likely to transfer their main attention from Europe to the Far East and (2) whether the State Department thought that the Russians, in view of Communist successes in the Far East, were also tending to turn away from Europe. Mr. Bohlen said with regard to (2) that although the Communists had had "a good break" in China, the State Department felt that the Russians considered Europe still to be their major interest, and they were by no means satisfied that their defensive belt on the West was yet strong enough and could not be until some settlement of the German problem had been reached. It remained the main Russian aim to catch up with and overtake the United States and this they could only do in a short time by gaining control of the Western European industries, and skilled man-power resources. In China there was nothing which could take the place of German factories. He did not think that China constituted a positive accretion of strength to the Russians although clearly a Communist victory there weakened the west. With regard to (1) he was confident that there was not likely to be any diminution of American interest in European recovery and Western Union and that their interest in the Far East was secondary to their concern with the European situation. He said that, in his opinion and from our point of view, a far more serious danger was the constantly recurring suggestion that America should "do a deal" directly with Russia. Although the feeling that it was possible to reach a settlement with Russia was not prevalent in America at the present time, yet when the administration was reshuffled, there was bound to be a good deal of pressure to prepare the ground for American-Russian talks. Mr. Bohlen considered that many people in the States were of the opinion that it would be necessary eventually to come to terms with Russia, even at the expense of the West, and thought that we should not under-rate this trend in American opinion. With regard to France, Mr. Bohlen said that the State Department were convinced that de Gaulle provided no solution for the French situation and that it was important to keep M. Schuman and the moderates in office.

THE COMMITTEE agreed that Mr. Bohlen's views on the U.S. attitude to events in China were reassuring as far as they went and were in fact borne out by the telegrams we had received from the Embassy in Washington. SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK made the point that in those circumstances it was important to sign the Atlantic Pact as soon as possible. LORD TEDDER drew the attention of the Committee to a statement made by

the B.B.C. on the morning of November 25th to the effect that the United States and Great Britain intended to stand firm on their Ruhr proposals question without regard to French desiderata. He thought this was a poor way of portraying Western unity. The Committee thought that the attention of the B.B.C. should be drawn to the point.

MR. MAKINS said that, according to his information, the Americans were disturbed by use which was being made by the Russians and satellites of Professor Blackett's book on atomic energy and suggested that it might be desirable to arrange for the issue of a reply. He suggested that this might be arranged by a debate in the House of Lords who had in the past on occasion debated the question of atomic energy. MR. JEBB thought that it could be more effectively done by arranging the publication of a pamphlet pointing out the fallacies of Blackett's views in the form of points for speakers.

THE COMMITTEE agreed that Mr. Jebb should enquire further into the possibility of issuing a reply on those lines.

II

The meeting then considered Mr. Hankey's paper on "British policy towards the Soviet Orbit in Europe" and Mr. Jebb's comments on it.

MR. JEBB said he had received a minute from Mr. Gee stressing the importance from the point of view of labour of not increasing the tempo of the cold war at the present time to the extent indicated in Mr. Hankey's paper. It was important in his opinion to bring public opinion along gradually and by all means to avoid creating the opinion that we were preparing war against the U.S.S.R.

SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK said that, in the present state of our finances and in view of public opinion, he thought that it would be best to start any kind of offensive operations in a small area and suggested for consideration in this regard Albania. Would it not be possible to start a civil war behind the Iron Curtain and by careful assistance to produce a state of affairs in Albania similar to the state of affairs that the Russians had produced in Greece? MR. JEBB pointed out that United Nations observers in Greece would certainly come to hear of any operations we were undertaking and would complain to the United Nations with possibly unpleasant consequences. MR. BATEMAN suggested that though Albania was a very weak point in the Soviet orbit there might be some advantage in allowing the rift there to widen without our interference especially as the Russians were in Albania in some force. SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK enquired whether it would not be possible to arrange that the operations should be undertaken by the forces of resistance in Albania. We knew that there was opposition to the present régime and it should be possible to make use of it. MR. ROBERTS pointed out it was simple for the Russians to arrange for offensive operations in other countries without formally committing the Soviet Government since they worked through the local Communist parties. We had no similar instrument and the position of

H.M.G. was therefore more difficult. MR. DENING stressed the dangers of becoming involved in political commitments in Albania by using part of the population against the rest. It meant that you became beholden to the people on whom you depended. This had produced complications in the last war and might well do so again. MR. MAKINS said that in his opinion the value of underground movements was doubtful. He felt that, in the last war, if the effort expended on underground operations had been put into straight military operations the results would have paid us better.

MR. WRIGHT said that any action we undertook must be co-ordinated with the Americans. THE COMMITTEE agreed. MR. ROBERTS pointed out that the most helpful development from our point of view in the Soviet orbit had been the quarrel between Tito and the Cominform. It owed nothing to us and if we went in for too much activity on the lines suggested it would only have the effect of consolidating the orbit. Similarly all the success that we had achieved in uniting Western Europe was chiefly due to Molotov and the Cominform. We must be very careful in anything that is done not to prevent developments like the Tito/Cominform dispute.

LORD TEDDER stressed the importance of setting up a planning staff to examine the various means available to us. He said that he was sceptical of the value of SOE unless followed up by military action. He likened these operations to a barrage laid down before attack by troops; if it was laid down too far ahead your friends were simply annihilated.

MR. JEBB stressed the importance of having, firstly, a Cabinet decision on the proposal to indulge in anything like SOE operations and, secondly, of setting up the requisite organisation. It was important to decide whether we should undertake activity of this sort; if so, whether the present was the best time to do so. Generally speaking, we ought to clarify our objectives. The Committee discussed these objectives and decided that our aim should certainly be to liberate the countries within the Soviet orbit by any means short of war.

MR. WARNER stressed the importance of sapping the loyalty of the Soviet-controlled police and armed forces. He pointed out that the Communists had achieved success by the use of secret police and instanced the case of Poland where 80% of the population supported a government which was, in fact, overthrown by the 20% minority in control of the police and armed forces.

SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK pointed out the importance of the time factor. We must know how long we had at our disposal to reach the objectives. In the first place it was important to get Germany straight before devoting any attention to other countries. Events in Greece, S.E. Asia and Berlin had repercussions in Western Germany. We should first aim at settlements in places where we were already at grips with the Russians. LORD TEDDER said that he thought we should aim at winning the "cold war" (by which he meant the overthrow of the Soviet régime) in five years

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time. MR. ROBERTS said that, in his opinion, if we aimed at unseating the Soviet Government in five years by means other than war, we were undertaking an impossible task. LORD TEDDER suggested that there should, in any case, be a small permanent team which would consider plans which would subsequently be executed by ourselves and the Americans. He agreed that it was important to bring in the Americans at as early a stage as possible. Frankly he thought that unless we reformed our present machinery for conducting the "cold war", we might lose it in which case the Services would have to conduct a hot war, which was the last thing they wanted to do.

SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK pointed out that if we won the battle of Berlin we would be much nearer our goal. This was a major stage in the cold war. He made it clear that the foundation of the "cold war" was, in fact, the proper conduct of the diplomatic battles at present in dispute between ourselves and the Russians. The eventual success or failure of the "cold war" depended on their outcome. MR. JEBB said that it seemed to him essential to define what exactly any additional planning staff should plan. If we were not going to establish a P.W.E. or an S.O.E. it was not evident, to him at least, what any further machinery would do. He was however quite open to conviction and merely suggested that the question raised by Lord Tedder should be examined impartially. MR. MAKINS agreed with Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick's views; he suggested that it was important to realise that the satellites were lost to us for the time being and that we should preserve our attack for places the battle was actually joined, in Berlin, Greece, China and South East Asia. MR. HANKEY, while not dissenting from this, said that in his view, it was important to have further plans ready for use when these victories had been won. SIR IVONE KIRKPATRICK pointed out that the political warfare executive during the last war never had any influence on policy, and that their tasks were limited to putting forward a plan of propoganda to sustain policy concocted by other Departments.

Summing up, MR. JEBB suggested that a sub-committee should be set up to examine this question and report back to the Russia Committee. He read out terms of reference for the Sub-Committee with which the Committee agreed (copy attached).

III

The meeting then considered the further draft Summary of Indications regarding Soviet foreign policy and approved it subject to certain amendments. In the course of discussion

(i) MR. DENING pointed out that in China, when the Communists took over Shanghai they would become heirs to the economic ills of China. It would not therefore be possible for them to apply Marxist doctrines right away and there might be a considerable interval before China was entirely communised.

(ii) MR. ROBERTS said that M. Moch, the French Minister of the Interior, had expressed confidence in the outcome of French political difficulties. A year ago he

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had no organisation to deal with strikes; since then the number of radio posts in operation by local authorities throughout France had been increased from 100 to 3,000; the administration of the country had been re-organised into nine civil and nine military regions in charge of a civilian official, the Super Prefect, who could command the local general.

It had been Mr. Moch's policy not to intervene in disputes until he had superior forces. At the moment he had 170,000 police and military at his disposal and expressed confidence in his ability to deal with any strikes. In fact he was much less worried by the Communists than by the de Gaullists, since the Communists might still rally a majority of Frenchmen, most of whom would not be Communists, in opposition to any sign of right wing dictatorship.

TOP SECRET

ANNEX A

RUSSIA COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference for "Cold War" Sub-Committee.

Given the following objectives:

- (a) loosening the Soviet hold on the orbit countries and ultimately enabling them to regain their independence;
- (b) pending the attainment of this relatively long-term objective, we should aim at promoting civil discontent, internal confusion and possibly strife in the satellite countries so that they will be a source not of strength but of weakness to Russia and a drain on her resources of manpower and trained personnel. We must hope to make the orbit so disaffected that, in the event of war, it would be a dangerous area requiring large armies of occupation and not a source of useful manpower for Russia. This in itself will make war less likely.
- (c) seizing every opportunity of discrediting the Soviet régime or weakening its position.

should there now be a planning staff to consider means whereby these objectives can best be achieved by methods other than the present ones: and, if so, how should it be constituted and what should it plan?

24th November, 1948.