

TOP SECRET

NOT TO BE ENTERED
RETURN TO ROOM 13
Albania
9

C/1545.

LONDON.

INDEXED

4th March, 1949.

Dear William

I should like to refer you to the letter which Sir Orme Sargent sent to me on the 18th February, together with Southern Department's paper on "Communist Action in Albania".

To deal first with the covering letter: I entirely appreciate and share Sir Orme Sargent's desire to have the fullest background Intelligence before embarking on full-fledged operations. But, I take it, it is equally recognised on your side that the nature of the country and people is such that no adequate estimate of resistance potentialities can be made purely by Intelligence methods - that is to say, it would not suffice to put in a few agents solely to form opinions on public feeling or transmit verbal assurances given by tribal chiefs. The only way to see whether there is any substance behind their words is by more direct methods of probing and by testing local preparedness to take action on the smallest possible scale. If these tests provided a satisfactory reaction, we would then move on to the next stage and seek to develop them on a sufficient scale to have an appreciable effect on the course of the campaign. To this extent, the first agents, while briefed to give priority to Intelligence, would of necessity fill a dual role.

Passing on to the proposed plan of action: its lines appear to me to offer a basis for operations. Most of the points raised, in fact, we can accept outright. Thus, in order to meet the recommendation in the first paragraph of C., I would propose for the time to limit our activities to the southern area alone and to treat this as a test; in the light of experience gained there, I would then consider whether it would be worthwhile to undertake similar probing of possibilities in the North. Similarly, in conformity with D (3), I would not seek to carry out any operations across the frontier in the first phase.

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This, however, leads me on to the only serious modification which I would suggest to your present plan, turning on our relationship with the Greek authorities. We are fully conscious of the security and political disadvantages of bringing them into the scheme. Nevertheless, even in the initial stages, some degree of liaison with them would enormously facilitate our tasks; we may indeed find in practice that it is absolutely essential. The immediate point concerns the establishment of an advanced communications base in Corfu. If this could be discreetly set up, it would enable us to maintain contact with agents in the country by relatively simple wireless methods, and avoid the necessity for the highly developed wireless technique which would otherwise be required for working at longer range.

Such a base could not be established without the knowledge of the Greeks; but we have reason to believe that their agreement could be obtained without difficulty by a careful approach to a small number of selected individuals. In the event of any operation miscarrying and undesirable publicity being given to the affair at U.N.O. or elsewhere, the Greek Government would, of course, be in a position to deny all official knowledge of it. We hope that in these circumstances you will see no objection to us making a limited approach to the Greeks to try to obtain from them the minimum facilities we need for the initial phase.

I understand that the question has been raised on the Departmental level whether we should mention to the Americans the way our thoughts are moving. As I proceed with my plans, I might well discover that some American clandestine organisation is planning or carrying out similar operations. Subject to your views, I should therefore prefer to tell the Americans in broad outline what we propose to do and ask them whether they would be prepared to co-operate in a joint endeavour. If, as I anticipate, the Americans were to refuse this offer, I should thereafter not attempt to keep them informed of the progress of my operations.

The only other considerations that I would wish to re-emphasise are that it is not worth incurring the effort and possible loss of life entailed by the preliminary operations, unless we are prepared to follow them up by striking as hard as possible at any sensitive point we may find. This may, if things go well for us, involve fairly extensive supply operations at a later date, and might also necessitate an increased scale of liaison with the Greeks.

Handwritten signature
C

Sir William Strang, K.C.M.G., C.B., M.B.E.