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Air Marshal Elliot

(Copies to: Brigadier Price  
Sir Maurice Dean)

Deception in Malaya

The attached note is the result of a discussion with Brigadier Price on this subject following on the decision of the C.O.S. Committee to ask the Commanders-in-Chief for their views on Mr. Menzies' suggestion about the use of deception.<sup>+</sup>

The note is intended for circulation to the Chiefs for consideration with the reply of the Commanders. It may need amendment in the light of that reply, though I doubt if the Commanders-in-Chief will reach a very different conclusion about the use of the 'traditional' deception technique in the present campaign.

I am at your disposal if you would like to discuss the note.

(Sgd) J.A. Drew

Controlling Officer,  
London Controlling Section.

7th June, 1950.

+ C.O.S.(50) 83rd Meeting. Item 5. - Enc. 3.

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DECEPTION IN MALAYA

Note by the Controlling Officer

In his telegram of 26th May, Mr. Menzies suggested to the Prime Minister that the deception technique used so successfully in the last war might be adapted and applied in Malaya. I have examined this suggestion in the light of such information as is available in London about the nature of the campaign, and set out below my provisional conclusions.

2. Although I think that there may be scope for deception in some form or another (see para 4 et seq.) I do not feel that there is any scope for deception in the "traditional" sense in which Mr. Menzies uses the term, i.e. causing the enemy to believe that our forces and intentions are other than they are. There is, for example, no overall plan on which strategic deception can be based, nor is there, so far as can be seen, any clearly defined directing organisation behind the bandits capable of appreciating and acting on a pattern of misinformation injected through their intelligence network. Even if there were, it does not appear that we have so far succeeded in penetrating that network sufficiently to enable us to use it with the same confidence as we did during the war when we largely controlled the enemy intelligence service.

3. Doubtless deceptive methods are already in use for purely tactical purposes, dependent upon the experience and resource of local commanders. It may be, however, that there is scope for developing deception on these lower levels, not perhaps so much by penetration and the use of local bandit intelligence networks, though subject to what is said above these may be capable of some use, as by greater use of the technique developed by V. I. S. T. R. E. For example sonic devices simulating the firepower of a unit, the movement of motor vehicles and troops, may have value in jungle operations. It must however, be borne in mind that even here the inevitable lack of security in areas of operations where the local population is either hostile or terrorised, may severely limit the use of such devices.

4. A survey of recent reports from Malaya and appreciations on the situation there suggests that there may well be scope for the development of other forms of deceptive operations, using the term in a fairly broad sense, in direct support of military operations. It is impossible at this stage to draw up even an outline of what might be accomplished. For this a survey on the spot would be necessary. But the following are some illustrations of the kind of specific operation that I have in mind:-

(a) In his memorandum on "Future Anti-Bandit Policy in Malaya", General Briggs says in paragraph 13 that, "our air forces are especially valuable ..... against enemy morale". Elsewhere he points out (paragraph 8) that the task of security troops could be eased if the more

loyal elements among the Chinese could be made to feel more secure.

During the war various devices capable of being dropped by aircraft were worked out for the purpose of simulating small operations behind the enemy lines, and it may be possible to make greater use of these. Moreover, operations which might lead the bandits to infer that areas under their control are being infiltrated on a substantial scale, might assist the development of the feeling reported by Sir Henry Gurney (paragraph 3 of his telegram No. 524 of 30th May) that "if repatriation were now open, many Malay Communist Party members now in the jungle would give up and get out".

(b) A study of various situation reports suggests that there is a recurring shortage of arms and ammunition among the bandits. Thus, in the latest report from Sir Henry Gurney (telegram No. 538 of 3rd June) it is stated that a directive is being passed by word of mouth urging units to take every opportunity of attacking the enemy for the express purpose of capturing arms. We might be able to take advantage of this situation by preparing stocks of defective and dangerous arms and ammunition, and contriving (e.g. by deliberately inadequate protection) that they fall into enemy hands. At the same time it might be possible for the propaganda and intelligence services in Malaya to suggest means by which the story could be got across that the bandit leaders were so unconcerned about the safety of their forces that they were issuing arms and ammunition well knowing them to be in a dangerously defective condition.

(c) It is clear from the situation reports that the theft of identity cards is by far the most frequent type of incident. It is not clear whether these thefts are made in order to obtain identity cards for the use of the enemy's agents and couriers, or to destroy the value of the identity card system. If it is the former, something might be done by leaking suggestions that identity cards carried secret marks by which the district in which they were originally issued could be immediately determined, and that individuals using them outside their own districts would be called upon to justify their journeys. Rumours and leakages of this kind could be backed up by spot checks and interrogations. Such operations, even if they served no other purpose, might be useful for the purpose of determining how far and how quickly enemy action was influenced by their intelligence.

5. I should emphasise that these are mere illustrations and not specific proposals for action. They do however suggest that there may be scope for an integrated campaign of deception operations of various kinds against the bandits. It may well be that attempts are being made from time to time on the ground to organise this kind of activity, but such information as I have been able to obtain in London suggests that more might be done if those on the spot, who are probably working without practical experience of this kind of warfare, were alerted to the possibilities by someone with wide experience of deceptive operations and knowledge of present day resources.

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6. Success in the kind of campaign that I have in mind depends to a large extent on the development of our intelligence activities, and in particular on the extent to which we can penetrate the enemy organisation. I observe from General Briggs report previously referred to, that in his view intelligence is our Achilles heel, and it is probable that until there is some improvement in this side of our activities deceptive operations will have to be on a relatively limited and experimental scale. On the other hand, I understand that Sir William Jenkin has been appointed to re-organise our intelligence in Malaya, and if there is a demand by those responsible for operations for assistance by way of the provision of channels for deception, it should not be an impossible task to penetrate for this purpose a relatively unsophisticated organisation.

7. I have not dealt in this note with "black" propaganda. I understand that the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office is already operating in Malaya. Their activities would have to be co-ordinated with deceptive operations. For instance, channels into the bandit intelligence organisation might be developed primarily for deceptive purposes, which could with mutual benefit be used jointly for I.R.D. purposes. For example, captured documents contain instructions to particular sections of the Malayan Communist Party which would be most embarrassing to the party organisation if they were given general circulation. Thus, in a M.C.P. document entitled "Present Day Situation and Duties" there appears the following instruction:-

"The Party must provoke the rural masses to compromise themselves vis-a-vis the security forces, and provoke the security forces to attack the rural masses, or at least to impose galling restrictions on them and so alienate their sympathies."

Given the means, valuable results might be achieved by disseminating to the local population actual Communist instructions of this kind, as though they had in fact been issued by the Malayan Communist Party itself.

8. My general conclusion, therefore, is that while there is little or no scope for strategic deception of the traditional kind specifically suggested by Mr. Menzies, prima facie there appears to be scope for the development of other kinds of deceptive operation against the bandits in Malaya, but that an expert investigation on the spot would be necessary to determine the scope and practicability of such activities.

9. If these conclusions are accepted, I would suggest that a member of my staff who has operational experience in this kind of work, gained during the last war under Colonel Dudley Clarke, in the Middle East and in France, might be sent out to Malaya to investigate and advise the authorities on the spot. V.I.S.T.R.E. might also take part in any such investigation.