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C.O.S. (55)262

SPECIAL CIRCULATION

12TH OCTOBER, 1955

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

COLD WAR - COUNTERING COVERT AGGRESSION

Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff

Communist Policy

The Geneva Conference showed that the U.S.S.R., knowing that the United States had considerable quantities of thermo-nuclear weapons and was prepared to use them in war, had decided to change their tactics. Their disarmament campaign is designed to lower tension.

To the free world lowering of tension means a genuine desire to attempt to live in peace. To the U.S.S.R. it presents an ideal opportunity for the intensification of subversion, for the disintegration of countries from within so that the Soviets can achieve their aim, which has not changed in any way. Their aim is world revolution leading to international communism under Russian leadership. In Asia Communist China has a somewhat similar objective.

The Soviets refused to discuss international communism at Geneva, disassociating themselves by inference from a cold war technique of which they are past masters.

In our recent Memorandum on "United Kingdom Defence Policy" we stated that:-

"The free world continues to be menaced everywhere by the threat of communist subversion and expansion which has world domination as its ultimate aim."

We maintain that view.

There are no indications that Soviet Russia and Communist China have relaxed their efforts to undermine the Free World.

The Threat

2. Under cover of their policy of ostensible co-existence, the U.S.S.R. uses the techniques of subversion, of creating

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dissension between nations, of exploiting national and racial movements, backed if necessary by the clandestine supply of arms and by financial aid. This is not easily countered by conventional forces which tend to become involved only when administrative or diplomatic policies have failed and armed revolt broken out or when a country has been absorbed into the orbit and thus become a military threat to us or a base for one. The threat arises in three fields:-

- (a) In independent foreign countries.
- (b) In our colonial and dependent territories and in those of some of our Allies.
- (c) On the home front.

The Defence Interest.

3. The defence departments are concerned in all these fields since it is the armed forces which have to carry the burden when other efforts have failed. If the Services are to be reduced so must the threat be also.

The defence interest is the residuary legatee of any failure to cope with the threat of subversion.

Defensive Action Necessary

4. Outside the Curtains.

(a) In Independent Foreign Countries We feel we could take the offensive not only in the diplomatic sense but earlier and more vigorously than we do at present through the covert agencies. There are many means of achieving this, which can be arranged so as not to be legally or provably attributable to British influence (see Appendix). Since the communists habitually attribute anything they wish to Western machinations we are likely to be blamed whether we act or not. This fact should be exploited.

(b) In Colonial and Dependent Territories. It is here that we are liable to be involved in the most direct military commitments. Until recently no fully adequate consideration had, as far as we are aware, been given to the problem as a whole. Full implementation of the recommendations of the Report on Colonial Security in this field is an urgent necessity.

(c) At Home Vigorous action abroad can only stem from a united nation at home which is vital to the defence interest. Moreover many commonwealth and foreign students and visitors are indoctrinated into communism in this country.

We realise that much is known about the British Communist Party and its overt membership. But we do not know what measures, if any, have

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been taken against their more serious efforts in the covert field and whether any success has been achieved. This aspect we believe to be of the greatest importance. ~~In our view this Committee needs stimulation by a firm declaration of policy.~~

All fields abroad are the concern of the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas) on which we are represented. The Home field is the concern of the Official Committee on Communism (Home) on which we are not directly represented.

In our view both these committees require stimulation by a firm declaration of policy.

5. Subversion must be vigorously countered by clandestine and related means in order to reduce the need for use of military forces. But clandestine agencies can only be used effectively to prevent otherwise inevitable trouble if their efforts are part of an overall plan fully harnessing the resources of other Government departments. This does not mean necessarily that these other departments should be overtly involved but it does mean that they must provide full covert support.

It is important that our efforts should be directed not only against Communism but against subversion deriving from other sources such as racialism and nationalism, penetration and exploitation of which the communists have realised is one of the most effective ways of damaging Western interests.

6. Behind the Curtains. It may not, in the present political climate, be feasible to use in Russia, China and the satellite countries all the means which they are using so successfully themselves - that is, almost-overt subversion, disruption and encouragement of dissident factions, etc. Nonetheless, it is of the utmost importance that we should employ every means at our disposal to put across to the peoples of these countries:-

- (a) Firstly, that our way of life is infinitely preferable to Communism.
- (b) That we have not relaxed, and do not intend to relax, our efforts to counter Communism.

Failure to do this is likely to lose us the great asset represented by the existing good will towards us of a large portion of the populations under Communist domination.

The Counter-Offensive

7. The Minister of Defence in 1949 wrote these words on this subject:-

"Our defence against the new technique of aggression must be primarily counter-offensive in character ..... Whilst we should not descend to the enemy's level we should borrow some of his weapons and not hesitate to adopt measures which would not be warranted in dealing with a civilised power."

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All the measures discussed in paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 are, strategically speaking, defensive. To restrict ourselves purely to the defensive waged within the society of the free world seems to us to court eventual defeat.

The free world is very susceptible to subversive attack. Totalitarian regimes on the other hand have generically different weaknesses from ourselves which seem to make them even more susceptible to long term "corrosion" by certain newly evolved clandestine methods against which our system is immune. In particular these methods are of a kind which can be developed hand in hand with a policy of overt "co-existence". If these Communist weaknesses could be subjected to continuous pressure over a long period by such methods this might well contribute to softening the Communist regimes; or, should policy require it, encourage the development of subversive break away movements.

The whole-hearted though judicious development of such counter-offensive operations seems to be one of the fundamental requirements for our success in the cold war, since by affecting the morale of their "base", it would help to balance the strategic disadvantage from which we suffer.

Costs

8. The use of conventional forces for cold war operations imposes a great expense on the nation and instances can be quoted where comparatively small expenditure on clandestine operations or colonial security requirements could have or did save millions.

This does not mean that extensive measures of this kind may not be expensive but such expense would be insignificant compared to the military and administrative expenditure involved in restoring a deteriorating situation, quite apart from the loss of trade. If the money at present spent on covert operations and propaganda were doubled it would amount to about £6m.

The question seems to us not whether we can afford to put our money into such operations but whether we can afford not to. For example, troops had to be sent to British Guiana because of the unreliability of the Police. The cost of improving police conditions in the Colony could have been measured in tens of thousands of pounds. The cost of maintaining troops there now exceeds £3 million. ?!

Our Allies

9. It is important whenever possible that our activities in this field should be co-ordinated with our American allies and with any others capable of assisting.

The need for a Strategic Concept of Operations

10. The Communist regimes are clearly working to a world-wide strategic concept as foreshadowed in many of their writings. Our counter-action hitherto has been mainly by way of ad hoc measures aimed half-heartedly at the stopping of gaps. This is the reverse of a winning policy. We urgently need to make and maintain:-

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- (a) Expert appreciations of the enemy's strategic concept for subversion as it evolves and of his main subsidiary plans.
- (b) A strategic counter subversion concept of our own with subsidiary strategic studies to examine the adequacy of our covert and related resources and to dispose these resources in advance instead of dancing to the enemy's tune.

Summary of Requirements

11. We consider that a world-wide strategic policy against subversion should be initiated to wrest the covert initiative from the enemy. It must be both defensive and offensive making full use of the abilities, actual and potential, of the covert services.

It will need the centralised direction of our counter subversive effort, an effort which must take place not only in foreign countries, but in our colonial territories as well, where our most direct military commitments arise, and at home. It must take account of subversion deriving from sources which to begin with are not communist, such as racialism and nationalism, because such movements are penetrated and exploited by communists.

*by whom?*

We feel that there is a need for a small staff who would concentrate their minds on the problem of the strategy of the communist attack and evolve a counter-offensive plan in the light of our resources. We feel also that there is a need for regional committees in the Middle and Far East who would maintain a close association and liaison with our Committee at home, since it is only by such close association that the danger can be seen in its proper perspective. We must in fact wrest the covert initiative from the enemy.

It will mean additional expense, and the amount together with the machinery for such an effort, require urgent study by the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas).

Above all it needs the full support by the co-ordinated covert and/or overt action of all departments of H.M. Government, inspired by a small Ministerial Committee.

Recommendation

12. We recommend that it should be accepted as a major item of Government policy that we should vigorously combat and counter-attack subversion by clandestine and all other related means.

The A.C.(O) Committee should be invited to study this problem in all its aspects and to report as a matter of urgency on the machinery they suggest should be adopted to implement H.M. Government policy.

(Signed) MOUNTBATTEN OF BURMA  
G.W.R. TEMPLER  
R. IVELAW-CHAPMAN  
(V.C.A.S.)

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, S.W.1.

12TH OCTOBER, 1955.

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