

PRIME MINISTER

As background to the Foreign Secretary's minute (P.M. 55/142) of 19th October I think you should know that the Chiefs of Staff have recently submitted to the Minister of Defence a rather feverish and muddled report suggesting that the Government should embark on a more positive campaign of counter-subversion against Communism in foreign countries, in the Colonies and in the United Kingdom. I attach a copy of this, in case you should care to glance at it.

2. The Foreign Secretary naturally makes a more cautious approach to the subject. He divides it geographically into three:-

- (i) Communist-occupied countries;
- (ii) Colonial territories;
- (iii) "Intermediate" foreign countries, by which he means the smaller countries in the Middle East and South-East Asia which are seriously threatened by Communist infiltration.

He suggests that, in respect of each, we should first form a clear idea on policy before we consider questions of procedure and machinery.

3. As regards (i), the Foreign Secretary says that this is not the time for any major covert anti-Communist operations. This is clearly right. Any other policy would be inconsistent with our attitude towards increasing East/West contacts.

If it were agreed that we should for the time being suspend anti-Communist activities directed against the Communist-occupied countries, it may be necessary to revise accordingly the directive to which I.R.D. are working. It will also be necessary to make it clear to the Chiefs of Staff that this is Government policy.

4. As regards (ii), the Foreign Secretary recommends that more vigorous steps should be taken to counter Communist encroachment in the Colonies. I am sure that this is necessary. But the Foreign Secretary discusses it mainly in terms of "counter-subversion". Though this can

play its part, it would be a mistake to think of it as our principal weapon. I think we ought to look at this Colonial problem as a whole, and mobilise all our available resources for ensuring that in the Colonies Communism is held in check and nationalist movements are guided along sound lines. For this purpose the first needs are sound Colonial administration, good police organisation and an effective intelligence system. It would be a mistake to think of this problem mainly in terms of covert "counter-subversionary" activity.

5. As regards (iii), the Foreign Secretary thinks that there is scope for more covert activities to check the growth of Communism in some parts of the Middle East and South-East Asia.

6. If these recommendations on policy were endorsed, what changes in organisation and machinery would be required?

As regards group (i) - the Communist-occupied countries - there would be nothing to do; and no machinery would be needed.

As regards group (ii), our policy would be to intensify our efforts to encourage by every means good government and healthy public opinion in the Colonies. I agree with the Foreign Secretary that the new Colonial Policy Committee should be used as a means of ensuring vigorous execution of this policy. This will, in particular, ensure that "counter-subversionary" activities are kept in balance with other, and more positive, means of attaining our objectives.

As regards the "intermediate" countries under (iii), action would rest wholly with the Foreign Office and C. And, as the latter is controlled by the Foreign Office, there would be no need of any inter-departmental action. Once policy was established, the Foreign Office could be solely responsible for its execution.

7. What then is the role of the A.C.(O) Committee, to which the Foreign Secretary refers in paragraph 16 of his minute? This Committee was set up, in the time of the Labour Government, to concert anti-Communist activities (overt and covert) in countries overseas. Its writ extends over all overseas countries, but its scope is limited to propaganda and "operations". This tends to encourage a "compartmental" view; to blur

the fact that these activities are the servants of policy; and to encourage extravagant estimates of what can be achieved by these means. If, as a matter of policy, we decide to undertake this sort of activity<sup>only</sup> in the Colonies and in the "intermediate" foreign countries, there is much to be said for a "vertical" rather than a "horizontal" type of organisation. In plainer words, should we not make the Colonial Office (always under the guidance of the Colonial Policy Committee) assume responsibility for countering Communism by every means (including the clandestine) in the Colonies? And should we not ask the Foreign Office to revert to its traditional position of controlling C's activities in support of foreign policy in the "intermediate" foreign countries? I fear that Ministerial responsibility is being weakened by allowing the clandestine activities in this field to be "stimulated" by an interdepartmental Committee of officials including a representative of the Chiefs of Staff.

8. This step could not be taken without facing the real reason for the appointment, and continuance, of the A.C.(O) Committee. And this brings me back to the report by the Chiefs of Staff which I mentioned in paragraph 1 above.

One of the disadvantages of the term "cold war" is that it has tempted the Chiefs of Staff to think that it is their business. This Committee was originally appointed at a time when the Chiefs of Staff were restive about the conduct of foreign policy and thought that the Foreign Office were not doing enough to counter Communist encroachments abroad. The Committee was appointed in order to give them a forum in which they could air their views on this, and suggest ways in which more might be done. Now that the risk of "hot war" has become more remote, the Chiefs of Staff have again become restive about the conduct of the "cold war" - as is shown by the attached paper. How is this situation to be handled? Is the A.C.(O) Committee to be continued as a means of enabling the Chiefs of Staff to feel that they are playing a part in this and of persuading them that the scale of these activities cannot, or should not, be increased? Or would it be possible to make a clear declaration of policy about the limited extent to which this form of activity is to be undertaken overseas; to make it plain that, within the limited areas in which it is to be

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continued, it is the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary and Colonial Secretary respectively; to dismantle the A.C.(O) Committee; and, to put it crudely, to tell the Chiefs of Staff to mind their own business?

9. In paragraphs 7-8 above I have, as devil's advocate, put a view which ought to be taken into account. I am not sure how far I would wish to press it. The question of organisation is a difficult one, and I should be glad of a chance to talk it over with you.

Yes!  
[Handwritten signature]

What I am clear about is that -

- (i) Government policy about these anti-Communist activities should be more clearly defined;
- (ii) it should be more clearly understood, by all concerned, that these activities are not ends in themselves but are only instruments of Government policy: at the moment the tail is trying to wag the dog;
- (iii) it should be clearly re-affirmed that C's activities in support of foreign policy are subject to the sole control of the Foreign Secretary - and, of course, the Prime Minister.

Yes.

Norman Brook.

21ST OCTOBER, 1955

R22nd.

Let us have  
a word from  
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Oct 29

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