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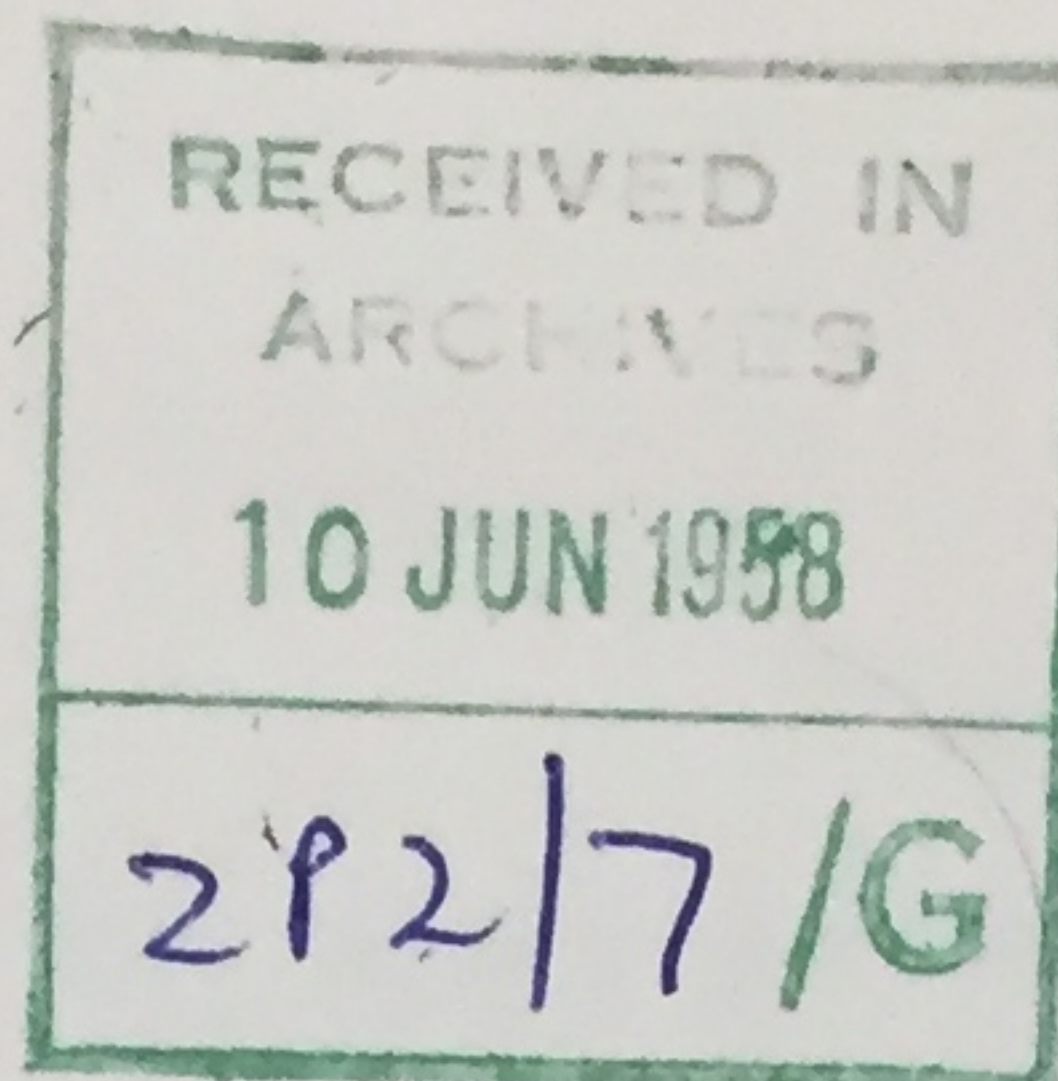
STEERING COMMITTEE

Item 3.

Overseas Planning Committee

and

Political Intelligence Group



This memorandum contains an outline of the origins and history of the Overseas Planning Committee and of the Political Intelligence Group.

Origins

2. After the Geneva Conference in 1955, when it became plain that the Russians were about to indulge in competitive co-existence, the Chiefs of Staff became increasingly restive about our prosecution of the Cold War. On October 12, they addressed a memorandum to Ministers calling for "the initiation of a world-wide strategic policy to wrest the covert initiative from the enemy". They recommended that a small staff should be set up, under the direction of a Ministerial Committee, to evolve and execute plans, and that the Anti-Communism (Overseas) Committee should be instructed to make detailed proposals on the machinery required.

3. The memorandum touched off an inter-ministerial correspondence which terminated in the production by the then Prime Minister on December 14 of a further memorandum on counter-subversion. He deprecated a major counter-subversive campaign against communist-occupied countries, while admitting that greater efforts were called for in the Middle East and South-East Asia. He proposed the abolition of the Anti-Communism (Overseas) Committee on the ground that it was competent to concern itself only with covert aspects of policy and hence could not ensure that its covert and overt aspects were properly coordinated. For counter-subversion in Colonial territories he recommended a new inter-departmental committee; but expressed doubts whether any such machinery was required for foreign countries. "It may be" however "that special steps will need to be taken to ensure that political Departments within the Foreign Office, and Missions abroad, will give more thought to the role which counter-subversion can play in supporting policy. For this purpose some internal machinery may be needed within the Foreign Office. But all this is within the Foreign Secretary's jurisdiction."

4. On January 17, 1956, Sir I. Kirkpatrick convened a meeting to consider whether any such internal machinery was required. It was agreed there was a lack of forward looking reports from posts abroad and a need for the collation within the Office of all kinds of evidence bearing on communist/extreme nationalist intentions in order to foresee and, if possible, to anticipate their plans. A Working Party of officials containing representatives of our friends and J.I.B. should be set up to examine the evidence, try to make a forecast, and to recommend the scale of counter-action. Their conclusions should be submitted to the Secretary of State through a committee of the Under-Secretaries, on which again the friends and J.I.B. should be represented.

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This Working Party became the P.I.G. and the superior committee the O.P.C.

5. On February 24, 1956, there was a meeting of Ministers to consider the Prime Minister's memorandum which was approved. The meeting were told that the O.P.C. had been brought into being and agreed that a representative of the Chiefs of Staff should be invited to attend. They also authorised the establishment of the Official Committee on Counter-subversion in the Colonies under the chairmanship of Sir N. Brock (now almost moribund). The A.C.(O) Committee was abolished.

Performance

6. Originally both the O.P.C. and P.I.G. were regarded as experimental bodies and it was left open whether they should remain in being after the completion of the review they were set up to prepare. But the decision to abolish the A.C.(O) Committee strengthened the arguments for some more or less permanent machinery for counter-subversion within the Office and, at its first meeting in March 1956, the O.P.C. decided that it should meet at intervals of two months. In the twenty-two months of its existence it has met nine times. At its second meeting, the Security Service, and at the sixth the C.O. and C.R.O. were represented for the first time.

7. In July last year the Steering Committee, at its first meeting, agreed to review the question of abolishing the O.P.C. in six months time, in the light of experience gained from the operation of the new planning machinery within the Office. It considered that the P.I.G. was doing good work.

8. In its most recent Report (the Ninth) the Political Intelligence Group examined its methods of work over the past two years and came to the conclusion that, in present circumstances, it would be wise to discontinue the practice of submitting comprehensive reviews of the threat from subversion every two or three months. Experience had shown that it was impossible for these frequent reviews to be both comprehensive and up-to-date and that the attempt to fill both desiderata had resulted in the Group's being able to fulfil neither. The system had also resulted in a tendency for the reports to repeat factual analyses, and comments, already available elsewhere, and for the Group to promote recommendations which just as well have been submitted departmentally in the normal way.

9. In order to eliminate the "redundant element" from its work and so, a fortiori, from the work of the O.P.C. the Group proposed a number of changes. They recommended that the bi-monthly reports should be discontinued and that an annual comprehensive review should be produced instead. These annual reviews should survey successes and failures in the Cold War over the past year, with particular reference to clandestine activities; should attempt a forecast of hostile subversion for the ensuing year or two; and should produce recommendations about the scale of counter-action desirable. Emphasis should be laid on areas where our resources to meet the threat seemed inadequate; and it was suggested that the reviews should be submitted in the autumn, in good time to influence the framing

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of the Estimates and the choice of Intelligence targets for the following year. In between the production of these reviews, which would be submitted to the O.P.C., the Group should meet quarterly to survey developments and, if need be, to initiate special studies about areas or topics demanding attention but not amenable to treatment by individual departments or by any other existing machinery. The resulting papers should be submitted, at the discretion of the chairman of the Group, either to the full O.P.C. or to a sub-committee of it or to the individual Under-Secretary concerned.

10. At its most recent meeting on January 2, the O.P.C. endorsed these proposals, subject to the proviso that a record of the Group's quarterly meetings should be circulated to its members.