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27TH MAY, 1945

CABINET

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

FUTURE OF S.O.E.

Copy of a letter (F.4136/166) dated 22nd May, 1945
from the Minister of Economic Warfare to the
Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee

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I have written to the Prime Minister today a memorandum on the future of S.O.E. and attached a short draft directive which I suggested should be given to cover S.O.E.'s future activities. I also instructed S.O.E. to prepare a complete paper on this question, with which I did not feel it appropriate to trouble the Prime Minister. I suggested to him, however, that if he would refer the question to the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office I would make the longer paper available to them. I accordingly enclose a copy^o.

I have also sent a copy to the Foreign Secretary,

X X X X

(Signed) SELBORNE

Offices of the Cabinet,
S.W.1.

27TH MAY, 1945

o ANNEX

ANNEX

THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

1. Object

The object of this paper is to show the need for the continuance of Special Operations after the conclusion of hostilities. The paper will show what S.O.E. has accomplished, the handicaps under which it has worked, its suggested relationship in the future to other clandestine and para-military organisations Government Departments and Service Ministries, and its suggested scope control and organisation in the post-war period, both in peace and on the outbreak of any future war.

2. Definition of S.O.E.

S.O.E. was created in July 1940 to co-ordinate all actions of sabotage and subversion against the enemy overseas. It has until now worked under the direction of the Minister of Economic Warfare, who reports to the War Cabinet, but it is otherwise quite unconnected with the Ministry of Economic Warfare, except as shown in sub-para (f) below.

S.O.E. receives:-

- (a) directives from the C.O.S. Committee regarding the strategic objectives on which it should concentrate in priority of countries and areas. This has entailed direct contact with the Service Ministries and with the Joint Planning Staff.
- (b) directives from Theatre Commanders under whose operational control S.O.E. has worked in their respective areas.
- (c) guidance from the Foreign Office regarding objectives for underground political activity in enemy-occupied countries.
- (d) control and direction from the Foreign Office as regards neutral countries.
- (e) guidance from the Dominions Office, Colonial Office and India Office regarding activities in their respective spheres of administration.
- (f) requests for certain special activities to be undertaken on behalf of Government Departments such as the Treasury, the Foreign Office, M.E.W., the Ministry of Supply, the India Office, the Dominions Office, the Colonial Office and the Admiralty.

3. S.O.E.'s part in the war to date

A. S.O.E. has been a war-time experiment which may be said to have proved successful. Of the many tasks it has been called upon to carry out, the more important may be summarised as follows:-

- (i) the creation, maintenance and operation of resistance forces in enemy-occupied countries, in accordance with directives received from the Chiefs of Staff and Theatre Commanders.
- (ii) the organisation and execution of sabotage in enemy and enemy-occupied countries in accordance with directives received from M.E.W., the Chiefs of Staff and Theatre Commanders.
- (iii) the dissemination of subversive propaganda in enemy and enemy-occupied countries as required by H.M.G. and as agents for or in co-operation with P.W.E.
- (iv) certain specialised financial operations of a clandestine character as required by H.M. Treasury.
- (v) procurement of special supplies from countries under enemy domination as required by H.M.G.
- (vi) procurement of information, passed to the interested Departments of H.M.G. through or by arrangement with S.I.S., or by direction of Theatre Commanders.

It is important to realise that the activities of S.O.E. in enemy-occupied countries cover all stages of subversive activity. It is usually necessary in the first instance to create a spirit of Resistance amongst the population and then to begin the formation of the necessary cells and groups and the establishment of firm communications between them and the base from which the work is being directed. The early stages are therefore purely clandestine but the work, as it continues, acquires more and more a para-military character until it culminates in open guerilla activity in support of Allied military operations.

B. As a war-time improvisation, S.O.E. although an operational organisation, has suffered under serious handicaps which could have been avoided had S.O.E. had a more clearly defined status within the official war-running machine.

These handicaps may be summarised as follows:-

- (i) the inherent distrust of Departments for any new organisation whose functions and composition they do not fully understand.
- (ii) overlapping with other organisations, particularly those whose work is of a clandestine nature.
- (iii) growing pains, leading to frequent re-organisation with consequent temporary loss of efficiency and duplication of effort.

- (iv) owing to the circumstances that in the past there has been nothing in the nature of 'S.O.E. Courses' which Service officers and diplomats could take as part of their professional education, S.O.E. has been handicapped by the fact that any senior officer coming into the organisation was entirely ignorant of the technique of the organisation.
- (v) a general failure in Government circles, to understand that S.O.E.'s activities are both world-wide and, in the clandestine sphere, unacknowledgeable.
- (vi) a tendency on the part of H.M. Representatives abroad, including Commanders in the field, to use S.O.E. for tasks not strictly within its charter and to some extent as their private agency.

I have noted the above mentioned handicaps in order that the lessons of the past five years should not be overlooked. In particular, the relationship of S.O.E. to other clandestine and para-military organisations and government departments, and the scope of its future activities must be clearly defined in the light of these lessons.

4. The need for Special Operations in the future

The war with Japan continues. Despite the end of the war with Germany, Europe is in a dangerously unsettled state and the British Empire must consequently be prepared for a major or minor war in any part of the world. If Germany's return to power and aggression is to be avoided over the next twenty years there are immediate and continuing commitments for S.O.E. on the continent of Europe. There are also other, and perhaps more immediate dangers in the combatting of which S.O.E. is in a position to assist. It is noteworthy that the parallel organisations in both France and Belgium have already approached S.O.E. with a view to enlisting not only its guidance and support but its active co-operation. It is important, too, to note that Sir Edward Appleton has stated that the present trend of science and technical development in all departments of modern industry and national life makes it certain that subversive operations will play an even greater part in any future war than they have in the present war.

If it is agreed that we must be prepared for war in any part of the world, we must ensure that the nucleus of the necessary organisation exists and that we do not have to resort to improvisation owing to lack of foresight. This war has shown that clandestine work cannot ever be effective without careful planning and patient preparation. There are no short cuts to success in this art. It is not surprising that Russia, the United States and France are continuing to nourish their own clandestine organisations.

The traditional policy of Great Britain is to maintain the integrity of small European powers, but it is already clear that their integrity is likely to be threatened, and

that it will be no easy task to pursue our policy with success. S.O.E. can prove a valuable instrument in furthering H.M.G.'s policy in peace, and one without which the prospects of making that policy effective would be diminished. It is no doubt a national characteristic of the British to dislike and distrust secret organisations working in peace-time, but nevertheless I believe that the existence of S.O.E. in peace is essential to the national interest and that the not uncommon comparison with the Comintern is a false one since H.M.G.'s policy is defensive and not aggressive, and since S.O.E. is merely an instrument and does not attempt to shape policy.

5. The necessity for the issue of a directive now, for all future clandestine activities.

It has been agreed that S.O.E. must remain in existence until the end of the war with Japan and that, with the disbandment of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, S.O.E. shall come under the Foreign Secretary for the present. The Foreign Secretary and I have recommended to the Prime Minister that S.O.E. should not be wound up on the cessation of hostilities. Moreover, the Chiefs of Staff, while agreeing that S.O.E. should be under the Foreign Secretary as long as the war with Japan lasts, have reserved the right to reconsider the position of S.O.E. (and of S.I.S) at the end of the war; thus implying that they are concerned in the continuance of Special Operations in some form after that date.

It is essential that a definite decision about the future of S.O.E. be reached in the very near future and that a clear directive be issued. If this is not done there is a great danger that the valuable experience of the last few years will be lost beyond hope of recovery. Already extensive cuts in man-power are being imposed and the question of the disposal of specialised equipment and personnel has arisen. Lack of a directive on which to plan a post-war organisation is already jeopardising the future efficiency of Special Operations and longer delay will have most serious effects.

6. S.O.E.'s future Directive

I suggest that a directive to S.O.E. should be issued in the following form forthwith:-

"Directive

S.O.E. is a secret organisation whose role is to further the policy of H.M.G. by unacknowledgeable action in all parts of the world.

Its functions are as follows:-

- (a) to collate, examine and assess all information bearing on future clandestine operations and to study and develop the art of underground warfare. To provide lecturers for the Imperial Defence College and the Staff Colleges, and to participate in the planning of future military operations in peace time and in the preparation for Staff talks with friendly Powers.

(b) to train persons to carry out all forms of clandestine activity, e.g. covert propaganda, rumours, influencing public persons and minorities, and the study of objectives for sabotage.

(c) to study, to devise and to maintain small reserves of all material required for sabotage and clandestine operational activities of all types, including communications.

(d) with the concurrence of the Foreign Office and under their general direction to serve the clandestine needs of H.M.G. abroad in any or all of the following ways:-

(i) to give covert support of a foreign government or organisation by counter-acting discontent and social unrest, and by subsidies, if necessary;

(ii) to maintain contact with elements of a foreign country with whom H.M.G.'s official representatives may not establish relations;

(iii) to influence prominent individuals, political, commercial, industrial, etc., and to counter the activities of recalcitrant individuals;

(iv) to give covert support to British interests and to create and foster clandestine opposition to foreign interests hostile to the British Empire;

(v) to undertake clandestine financial transactions required by H.M. Treasury;

(vi) to establish the nucleus of organisations in foreign countries capable of fostering partisan activities should the need arise and to do so in suitable cases in co-operation with the appropriate agency of the Government of the foreign country concerned. In certain cases this will involve the setting up of a net-work of clandestine communications."

Sub-para.d(vi) may require further explanation. In this war one of the chief and most widely recognised tasks of S.O.E. has been the organisation, supply and operation of guerilla forces. S.O.E. will usually be in the best position to contact potential resistance elements and foster resistance movements in their early stages, but the supply of such forces on a large scale and their control and operation should, I consider, be a service commitment. The exact moment of transference of responsibility must be decided by the Chiefs of Staff in each individual case.

7. Future Organisation of S.O.E.

In view of the scope of S.O.E's activities it should be organised on a civilian basis. It is however essential that the mistakes of the present war should be avoided and that the status of the organisation and its functions should be clearly established and recognised by both Service and Civil Ministries.

I therefore suggest that serving members of the fighting Services, the Foreign Service and Civil Service should be seconded for work within the H.Q. staff of S.O.E. This would at once present S.O.E. with the point of view of other services and make known to those services both the capabilities and the limitations of S.O.E.

8. Future control of clandestine organisations

In my view the best results from the country's clandestine services would be obtained by keeping them as separate operational entities, but merging them into a single Service under one executive head.

Under such a system S.I.S., P.W.E., M.I.5, and S.O.E. would together form a clandestine service as a fourth arm to the three fighting Services, S.O.E. being the operational Section on this fourth service. There would thus be co-ordinated effort, maintenance of close liaison, and an economy in personnel and expense by making the administrative, research and material equipment sections common to all the clandestine organisations.

I submit that this unified Secret Service could best serve the Empire if it were to come directly under the Minister of Defence. This would be the best way to ensure that the unified Secret Service would be employed to the greatest advantage and that a balance would be struck between the political and military considerations which are always present in connection with this type of work.

9. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show in outline the need for S.O.E. at the conclusion of the present hostilities, and that it is a defensive weapon for use in peace as well as an offensive weapon for use in war.

There are other matters to be considered. These include the actual organisation to be maintained in accordance with the scope of the directive, the "cover plan", terms of service for personnel and finance, but it is difficult to discuss such points until a directive on S.O.E.'s future has been issued.

10. Recommendation.

I therefore recommend that, in addition to maintaining that part of the organisation which it has been agreed must in any event carry on its work against Japan until the war is over, an immediate directive be issued defining the scope of S.O.E.'s post-war activities and authorising the retention of a nucleus organisation to provide for these activities.

This nucleus must comprise:-

- (a) a small staff charged with the study and development of subversive activities, adequately served by a training branch, a small technical research station, and a communications development branch to ensure that our equipment for this type of activity (at present the best in the world) keeps abreast of developments.

- (b) an organisation controlling small out-stations in all parts of the world which assist in counteracting elements hostile to H.M.G. in the countries in which such elements are located.

I further recommend that this organisation together with the other Secret Services should be placed under a single executive and administrative control but that each branch should retain its separate identity within the new Organisation.

In my opinion this new Organisation under a single executive head should be responsible to the Minister of Defence.

(Signed) SELBORNE.

22ND MAY, 1945