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TOP SECRET

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4th January, 1948

CABINET**THE FIRST AIM OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY****MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

IT must be recognised that the Soviet Government has formed a solid political and economic block behind a line running from the Baltic along the Oder, through Trieste to the Black Sea. There is no prospect in the immediate future that we shall be able to re-establish and maintain normal relations with European countries behind that line. As I have explained in a separate paper these countries are dominated by the Communists, although they are only a minority in each country. Indeed we shall be hard put to it to stem the further encroachment of the Soviet tide. It is not enough to reinforce the physical barriers which still guard our Western civilisation. We must also organise and consolidate the ethical and spiritual forces inherent in this Western civilisation of which we are the chief protagonists. This in my view can only be done by creating some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas and the Dominions.

The Situation.

In another paper I have attempted to give my colleagues a sober and factual account of Russian policy. It is clear that from secure entrenchments behind their line the Russians are exerting a constantly increasing pressure which threatens the whole fabric of the West. In some Western countries the danger is still latent but in Germany, France, Trieste, Italy and Greece the conflicting forces are already at grips with one another. In each country the issue is still in doubt and we must act resolutely if we are to prevail. The Soviet Government has based its policy on the expectation that Western Europe will sink into economic chaos and they may be relied upon to place every possible obstacle in the path of American aid and of Western European recovery. Our course is equally clear. I have done and will continue to do all I can to bring the Marshall Plan to fruition. But essential though it is, progress in the economic field will not in itself suffice to call a halt to the Russian threat. Political and, indeed, spiritual forces must be mobilised in our defence.

The Western Union

I believe therefore that we should seek to form with the backing of the Americas and the Dominions a Western democratic system comprising, if possible, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, France, Portugal, Italy and Greece. As soon as circumstances permit we should of course wish also to include Spain and Germany, without whom no Western system can be complete. This may seem a somewhat fanciful conception, but events are moving fast and the sense of a common danger drives countries to welcome to-morrow solutions which appear unpractical and unacceptable to-day. Almost all the countries I have listed have been nurtured on civil liberties and on the fundamental human rights. The recent proceedings of the Human Rights Commission at Geneva have shown that of the eighteen States represented, all except Russia and three satellites were in

substantial agreement with the British draft of an International Convention for the protection of these civil liberties and human rights. Moreover, most Western European countries have such recent experience of Nazi rule that they can apprehend directly what is involved in their loss. All in a greater or lesser degree sense the imminence of the Communist peril and are seeking some assurance of salvation. I believe therefore that the moment is ripe for a consolidation of Western Europe. This need not take the shape of a formal alliance, though we have an alliance with France and may conclude one with other countries. It does, however, mean close consultation with each of the Western European countries, beginning with economic questions. We in Britain can no longer stand outside Europe and insist that our problems and position are quite separate from those of our European neighbours. Our treaty relations with the various countries might differ, but between all there would be an understanding backed by power, money and resolution and bound together by the common ideals for which the Western Powers have twice in one generation shed their blood.

I am aware that the Soviet Government would react against this policy as savagely as they have done against the Marshall Plan. It would be described as an offensive alliance directed against the Soviet Union. On this point I can only say that in the situation in which we have been placed by Russian policy half measures are useless. If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time, we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy on the one side and inspire respect and caution on the other. The alternative is to acquiesce in continued Russian infiltration and helplessly to witness the piecemeal collapse of one Western bastion after another.

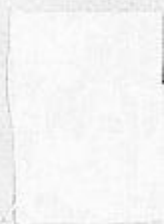
The policy I have outlined will require strong British leadership in order to secure its acceptance in Europe on one hand and in the Dominions and the Americas on the other. Material aid will have to come principally from the United States, but the countries of Western Europe which despise the spiritual values of America will look to us for political and moral guidance and for assistance in building up a counter attraction to the baleful tenets of communism within their borders and in recreating a healthy society wherever it has been shaken or shattered by the war. I believe that we have the resources with which to perform this task.

Provided we can organise a Western European system such as I have outlined above, backed by the power and resources of the Commonwealth and of the Americas, it should be possible to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the United States of America and the U.S.S.R. We have the material resources in the Colonial Empire, if we develop them, and by giving a spiritual lead now we should be able to carry out our task in a way which will show clearly that we are not subservient to the United States of America or to the Soviet Union.

I have already broached the conception of what I called a spiritual union of the West tentatively to Mr. Marshall and M. Bidault, both of whom seemed to react favourably without of course committing themselves. I now propose, if my colleagues agree, to ventilate the idea in public in my speech in the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Debate and thereafter to pursue it, as occasion demands, with the Governments concerned.

E. B.

*Foreign Office, S.W. 1,
4th January, 1948.*



N O T E

Attention is drawn to the very secret nature of the attached memorandum (C.P.(48) 7), the circulation of which has been strictly limited.

Cabinet Office, S.W.1.

5th January, 1948.