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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: How to Organize an Intelligence Service: Implications of the British Example

You asked me to look into the British intelligence set-up and see what of value there might be for our own thinking about CIA reorganization. I imagine that the Taylor Committee report will include a more definitive examination of this question; but I am forwarding a few observations as of possible interest.

I looked into the question with special attention to the thesis advanced so often since Cuba that the United States should 'follow the British example' and, in reorganizing CIA, separate the intelligence function from the special operations function. The argument is that, when intelligence and operations are combined in a single agency, then the people dedicated to an operation will invoke only the intelligence which will validate that operation. Therefore salvation lies in the establishment of two distinct services -- one devoted to the analysis of intelligence; the other to the execution of special operations. This is said to be the British model.

Examination shows that it is only partially the British model. 'Intelligence' includes two separable activities: clandestine collection or secret intelligence; and research and analysis. In England, the research and analysis function is located in the Foreign Office Research Department; but the secret intelligence function is in the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI-6); and such special operations as are conducted are also in SIS. The British, in short, have a single clandestine service, including both intelligence and special operations; the essential British distinction is, not between intelligence and operations, but between overt and covert activities.

SECRET

What is of special interest in the British experience is, not the division between intelligence and operations, but the means by which the clandestine service is kept under continuous policy control. I describe this feature of the British system below. If the Taylor Committee does not discuss this problem in its report, it might be well for someone to study further the relationship between foreign policy and clandestine activities in our own government and means of improving policy coordination between the State Department and the intelligence agency.

As for the Cuban operation, it is apparent, I think, that this operation suffered, not because intelligence and operations were combined, but precisely because they were kept separate.

I. The British Experience

1. The theory that the British Government keeps its SI and SO functions separate is based on the British clandestine structure during the Second World War. At that time, the British did have two separate agencies -- the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI-6), already set up under Foreign Office control, and the Special Operations Executive (SOE), set up in 1940 under the Ministry of Economic Warfare. SOE was itself divided into two branches -- one devoted to covert propaganda and psychological warfare; the other to the stimulation and support of resistance movements. The psychological warfare activities of SOE were soon transferred to the Political Warfare Executive. This left paramilitary operations as SOE's distinctive function.

2. While both SIS and SOE performed ably during the war, their separation meant that on a number of occasions the two agencies worked at cross-purposes -- for example, they found themselves competing for the same agent; or SIS might even lay down an intelligence network which SOE in the course of other activities might expose or blow up. Accordingly, when the British reorganized their intelligence work after the war, they abolished SOE and placed the remaining SO activities in SIS. In this way, they established a unified clandestine service. While the English have done very little in the SO field since

1946, such operational elements as exist in its secret service are securely in MI-6: [redacted] In short, SI and SO activities, far from being separate in Great Britain, have been closely integrated since the war.

3. The British model has other values for us, however. One notable feature of the British system is the determination to keep SIS under close Foreign Office control. This control is achieved in a number of ways:

a) SIS itself operates under the direction of the Joint Intelligence Committee, which has a Foreign Office chairman (until recently Sir Patrick Dean, who is now the British representative at the UN) and which includes the Service Intelligence directors and representatives of the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office as well as the Chief of SIS.

b) basic political warfare directives are originated, not by SIS, but by the Information Research Department in the Foreign Office, often in consultation with an interdepartmental Working Group on International Communist Fronts, and under the ultimate control of the Superintending Under-Secretary of the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department in the Foreign Office.

c) SIS [redacted] campaigns must not only conform to Foreign Office directives but must be cleared with the appropriate Foreign Office geographical desks.

d) working groups under IRD chairmanship govern operations in special areas, such as, for example, Sino-Soviet relations or the World Youth Festival.

e) a Foreign Office Staff Liaison Officer sits next to the SIS Chief, and Foreign Office officials serve tours of duty in SIS sections.

4. A second notable feature of the British system is the anonymity of SIS. The notion of the SIS Chief as a well-known public figure -- or of establishing SIS headquarters in a conspicuous and well-publicized public building -- would be wholly alien to the British approach. Very few people in England know the name of the Chief of SIS; he never gives speeches or writes articles; and even fewer people know where SIS is located.

II. Operations and Intelligence in the Cuban Operation

5. A current cliche is that the Cuban fiasco was a consequence of the integration of operations and intelligence, and that the fiasco could have been avoided if operations and intelligence had been kept separate.

So far as I can see, almost the exact opposite is the case. The fact appears to be that the intelligence branches of CIA and the State Department were never consulted in connection with the Cuban operation. (I should add that this non-consultation on such operations has been standard procedure in CIA.)

The intelligence branch (DDI) of CIA was never officially apprised of the existence of the Cuban operation. The Office of National Estimates was never invited to comment on the assumption, for example, that discontent had reached the point in Cuba where a successful landing operation would provoke uprisings behind the lines and defections from the Militia. In December and February, the Office of National Estimates produced general appraisals of the Cuban situation, but these were wholly independent of the Cuban operation. I gather that, if its opinion had been solicited, DDI would have given quite a different estimate of the state of opinion in Cuba from that on which the operation was based. There existed, in short, the anomalous situation that knowledge of the Cuban operation, while confided to any number of low-level agents in the operations branch of CIA, was denied to even the top officials of the intelligence branch.

The Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State knew even less about the Cuban operation.

SIS estimates of the state of opinion within Cuba were made available to the intelligence branch of CIA and were also incompatible with the premises on which the operation was conducted.

6. The lesson of this experience, in my judgment, is not that operations and intelligence should be separated; but that some means should be devised to make sure that the resources of the intelligence branch are brought to bear on all proposed clandestine operations of any size. In the future, surely all proposed major operations should be subjected to the most searching and intense scrutiny not only by appropriate political officers in the Department of State but also by intelligence officers both in State and CIA.

One further device might be considered: that is, attaching to every major operations planning group an official son-of-a-bitch -- a man charged with raising every question, forcing every objection, and picking every hole before a decision is finally made. In the Cuban discussions, the case against the operation was never fully stated. Hereafter, I would hope that, if necessary, someone should be appointed to oppose any major operation under consideration, so that those making the decision will have the benefit of an explicit and candid confrontation of the issues involved.

III. Special Operations in an Open Society

7. The current concern with paramilitary operations suggests that some consideration be given to the limits of special operations in an open society. This is all the more important because paramilitary activities demand special attention and energy, attract men of force and determination, and therefore build a momentum of their own which, unless placed in a clear framework of doctrine, will tend to overwhelm doubts from intelligence or State Department sources. Activists tend to enjoy an advantage in such debates; people who say "go slow" risk the appearance of being negative or pantywaists.

The limiting factor on SO projects, it would seem, is the question of size. If the proposed operations are small, if the US contribution is marginal, if the prospects of unattributability are good, it is probably safe for the government to undertake SO activities.

The problem begins when the proposed operations begin to acquire magnitude. If the US has to create the operation from scratch, if it must sponsor large-scale covert training, if the operation requires direct US military support, then it can hardly hope to remain secret in an open society. Efforts to enforce secrecy in such situations (as through official misrepresentation, suppression of news, etc.) will, if successful, run counter to our whole national ethos and in the long run will have a corrupting effect on the character of our society. If unsuccessful (and one can be sure that they will almost always be unsuccessful), such efforts will cause apprehension and trouble at home, draw the world's attention to the contradictions between our government's professions and performance, make it hard for us subsequently to invoke treaty obligations or international law against the Communists, and permanently shake faith in our international decency and credibility. It is no accident that so many Europeans were ready to believe in the wake of Cuba that CIA was behind the revolt in Algeria.

These considerations do not apply, of course, to the encouragement and support of rebel groups already in being, or to the training, say, of the South Vietnamese Army in guerrilla tactics. Nor do they apply to unattributable operations in general. But they do apply to large-scale paramilitary operations of the Cuban sort.

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cc: The Attorney General
Mr. Bundy

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