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December 30, 1941

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Robert Sherwood

From: Edmund Taylor

Subject: State Department Negotiations with British about Propaganda Policy.

It seems to me that if we are to be responsible for American information and propaganda abroad, it is highly improper that the State Department should be negotiating with the British Foreign Office as to the propaganda line which the two countries should take in various areas of the world. Unless we are kept better informed regarding negotiations than we appear to be so far, technically I think we would be perfectly justified in asking that an observer from this office sit in on the conversations between the State Department and the British representatives. It would probably be sufficient, however, if the State Department consulted us in advance, discussed the agenda of each meeting with us and gave us an opportunity to express our point of view before they sit down with the British.

Apart from the question of procedure, however, there is an important question of form about these negotiations. The proposals submitted by one side or the other take the form of elaborate directives stating propaganda line which should be followed. This seems to me absolutely unsound from every point of view. The correct procedure would be for the State Department and the Foreign Office to agree on the political objectives in each country and to define very carefully for us just what these objectives were. When this had been done, then a joint meeting of British and American propaganda technicians should be held to draft complete plans for implementing the political decisions reached by the two Foreign Offices. These joint plans, when agreed upon, should then be submitted to the respective Foreign Offices to make sure that the means of action proposed actually do accord with the objectives defined for us.

In accordance with the same principle, I think it is unsound that the State Department should communicate to us the actual propaganda line that we should take from day to day in given countries. They should instead communicate

Wash. D.C. 12/30/41  
715 Propaganda

- 2 -

to us the immediate and long-term objectives of American foreign policy and leave it to us to devise appropriate means for achieving them. To a large extent, this is simply a question of wording of State Department directives but such questions of wording can be extremely important.

Finally, in going over the transcripts of the daily conferences with Pell, one observation occurs to me very strongly. The whole State Department position, as voiced by Pell in these conferences, seems to me to fail completely to take into account any distinction between official policy and propaganda policy.

The problem is really not, as we sometimes believe, that State Department policy runs counter to the need for propaganda but rather that the State Department does not realize that we could have a propaganda policy entirely different from official policy but in no way conflicting with it. The results of this confusion are particularly grave and apparent in the case of France. There is no reason why we should dispute the soundness of the basic State Department policy, which is to delay complete German control of France by strengthening in every way possible the regime of Marshal Petain, so that it will be able to resist German demands. The State Department itself, however, if Pell interprets their thought correctly, is pessimistic about the final outcome of this policy, and freely admits that the disaster they are seeking to divert is very likely to occur at any time. When, and if, it does occur, we shall be caught completely unprepared from a propaganda point of view because until the very last moment the State Department will insist that our radio propaganda for which they need not accept any official responsibility, should strike exactly the same tone that, for instance, Ambassador Leahy, himself, might strike in official conversations with the French.

Common sense would seem to dictate that if, as the State Department fears, there is really a likelihood of French resistance collapsing, we should prepare an alternative policy to be applied when the disaster occurs. When this time comes, our policy will be quite different. It will be to stir up trouble against the Germans, to undermine morale in the French Army and Navy and generally to insure that French military and naval forces do no more, at the worst, than put up a token resistance against American forces whenever they meet.

A propaganda campaign having such objectives, however, could not hope to achieve any results for a long time. It

NND

UNCLASSIFIED  
877190By *McD*

DATE 9/20/90

- 3 -

is the very essence of propaganda that it anticipates or prolongs diplomatic policy to a considerable degree. If we want to achieve a given result in France two months from now, our propaganda should already begin paving the way. This is what the State Department completely fails to take into account. My view is that we should avoid taking any line which runs directly counter to present policy with regard to France but that we should start preparing our French propaganda in a discreet and unprovocative way for an entirely different kind of policy.

A given example of this is the proposal which has been put up to us that we should aim propaganda at the French Navy. This obviously runs contrary to State Department policy at the moment and we could not and should not make any direct appeals to French sailors which might compromise French naval discipline. What we should do is to prepare propaganda intended for French sailors although not directly labeled as such and this propaganda, for the time being, should carry only a message of friendship and encouragement in order to build up a contact. As the situation worsens we should mix with this message of friendship veiled suggestions that French sailors must prepare their minds to take the right course when and if the Germans attempt to seize the fleet. On the day this attempt actually occurs, our official policy is immediately scrapped and we can come into the open with a straight revolutionary which will have some chance of being effective since the minds of French sailors there have been gradually prepared for it.

If such a program were carefully executed there would be nothing in it which could in any way compromise present State Department policy toward France but it would constitute a safeguard against the day when that policy will no longer be possible. If, however, we continue to follow the State Department's shortsighted directives blindly, we shall never be able to make in time the necessary psychological preparation either in France or anywhere else.

The actual technical problem, as I see it, is to forestall or quiet any alarm the State Department may feel by showing them actual devices which would enable us to pursue a really effective propaganda policy in all countries without compromising official policy. The British have worked up many such work out. The problem is by no means a very difficult one. It simply requires a certain amount of skill, imagination and openmindedness.

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