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2 March 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Although Finland will probably conclude a mutual assistance pact with the USSR in compliance with Stalin's request, this action will not foreshadow an imminent Communist coup in Finland. Stalin's letter of 23 February does, however, represent the first overt step in a long-range campaign to reduce Finland from semi-independence to total subservience to the Soviet Union.

The recent Soviet demand on Finland was planned independently of the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia. Since November 1947, the USSR has been laying the groundwork for a mutual assistance pact with Finland as part of its overall plan for the conclusion of such pacts with all European border states. The timing of the coup in Czechoslovakia was forced upon the Kremlin when the non-Communists took action endangering Communist control of the police. A Czechoslovak Communist victory in the May elections would have been impossible without such control. In Finland, however, elections are not scheduled until July, and the non-Communists have not been actively threatening the Communist position. The coup in Czechoslovakia, however, has been useful to the Kremlin because it has created in Finland a widespread fear that failure to grant Stalin's request would precipitate similar action in Finland. The USSR will seek to capitalize upon this reaction by making maximum demands upon the Finns in the negotiations on the mutual assistance pact. In addition, therefore, to the usual provisions of a mutual defense treaty, the USSR will probably also demand the integration of the Finnish defense system with its own. Even though the Finns will probably reject this extreme request, the concessions Finland will eventually have to make will undoubtedly permit the Kremlin to gain control of the Finnish Army.

Present indications are that the Kremlin's strategy for eastern Europe now calls for an intensification of the "cold" war. Not only is the USSR faced with the probability that the European recovery program will soon be implemented, but the Soviet strategists are apparently convinced by the events preceding the Czechoslovak coup that even three-quarter control over a bordering nation is insufficient. Consequently, the USSR will now intensify its efforts to obtain eventual Soviet domination of Finland.

*By hand W. O. Webb to
Director 2 March*

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A Communist coup in Finland, however, is unlikely at present because of the relative weakness of the Communist position. Communist membership in the present Cabinet includes the Minister of Interior (who controls the state police), the Minister of Labor, and the Deputy Minister of Supply. The Premier, the Deputy Foreign Minister, and the Minister of Justice are left-wing socialists who have joined the Communist bloc but are not, from the Soviet point of view, wholly reliable. The remaining 12 Cabinet posts are held by Social Democrats and representatives of the rightist parties. The Communists exert only 35% control over the labor unions and have 25% of the seats in the Diet. Moreover, they are in the minority in all but a few of the city and village governing bodies and do not control the army or the local police.

Despite this relative weakness of the Finnish Communist Party, the USSR would be able within a matter of months to impose a Communist police state in Finland. By an intensification of economic and political pressure, the USSR can strengthen the Communist Party and weaken the non-Communists. After the mutual assistance pact has been signed, the Soviet Union can increase its control over the Finnish Army. Finally, under the terms of the Finnish peace treaty, the USSR can exercise a direct influence over the Finnish Government in both internal and external matters.

The nature and the extent of Finnish resistance to the intensified Soviet program will determine how long Finland can retain its present status. The USSR will retaliate vigorously if: (1) the Finns refuse to sign the mutual assistance pact; (2) the Communists are eliminated from the Finnish Government; or (3) the Finns appear increasingly dependent upon the western powers. Under these circumstances, the Kremlin will undoubtedly either force a Communist victory in the July elections or seize control of the Finnish Government prior to July. If the Finns do not resist in such a manner, the Kremlin will probably proceed more slowly in the hope of gaining eventual domination through parliamentary means.

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