

22 July 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

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The military coup d'etat attempted on/July 1944 by strong elements of the German High Command appears to have been the outgrowth of political preparations of at least six months' duration. For your information, I have prepared a factual presentation summarizing the data on this subject which has been cabled to us from our representative in Bern.

Since it is possible to infer from the statements of Hitler and Goering that the rebellion was not put down at once, I have also included certain possible lines of action suggested for consideration by our Bern representative in the event that the opposition may be able to maintain a stand in any region of Germany.

1. Composition and Aims:

Two emissaries of the conspiring group first approached the OSS representative in Bern in January 1944. The group was then described as composed of various intellectuals from certain military and government circles gathered into a loose organization. The membership was said to be somewhat divided as to a course of action, some holding that Hitler and his cohorts should be made to shoulder all responsibility to the bitter end; while others favored an overthrow of Hitler and the organization of a new government before the fighting stops, which might negotiate peace. The conspiring elements were united in their preference for a western rather than an eastern orientation of German policy. In general, they were characterized by their emissaries as well-educated and influential but not rightist individuals; such characterization may have been designed for Anglo-American consumption. The group as a whole apparently maintained its foreign contacts through the Canaris organization.

The following were said by the emissaries in February and April 1944 to be among the members of the group:

General Ludwig Beck, one of the two leaders of the group, former chief of the German General Staff, who retired "at his own request" in 1938. General Beck, General Fritsch, and General Fromm (mentioned later as a member of this group) dominated the Reichswehr Ministry until 1938.

Carl Friederich Goerdler, co-leader of the group, a former Mayor of Leipzig, and one-time Nazi representative to business circles in the United States.

Brigadier-General Hans Oster, former right-hand man to Canaris, who was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 and later released but kept under surveillance and was officially discharged by Keitel in early 1944.

Colonel-General Franz Ritter von Halder, a strong figure in Catholic circles, anti-Soviet, reported ousted in 1942, although thought under consideration by the Nazis for an important new post in late June 1944.

General Thomas (probably General Georg Thomas, Chief of War Economy and Armaments in the OKW).

Hans Leuschner, socialist leader and former Minister of the Interior in Hesse, a former anti-Nazi who may have made some sort of peace with the Nazis.

In early April the group's emissaries again approached the OSS representative, bearing a declaration said to represent the views of General Beck and Herr Goerdler. This message stated that, with Germany's position coming to a head and the end of the war in Europe definitely in sight, the group was willing and ready to take steps to oust the Nazis and eliminate Hitler (see report to White House Map Room, dated 12 April 1944). The group claimed to be the only one with personal access to Hitler and other Nazi chiefs, with enough arms to accomplish its purpose, and with enough power in the army to make a coup feasible. Such action, however, would be contingent upon assur-

ances from Britian and the United States that, once the Nazis had been overthrown, negotiations would then be carried out solely with the Western Powers and under no circumstances with the USSR. The essential conservatism of the group's planners was stressed, but also its willingness to cooperate with any available elements of the Left except for the Communists. The group expressed its anxiety to keep Central Europe from coming under Soviet domination. If capitulation were to be made primarily to the Soviet Union, the negotiations would have to be carried on by another group. Such Wehrmacht commanders in the West as von Rundstedt and Falkenhausen, the declaration maintained, would be ready to assist Allied landings once the Nazis were removed from power.

To these overtures the OSS representative said little beyond expressing his strong conviction that the United States would never act without previous consulataion with the USSR. He reported at that time that he had doubts as to the group's chances of success, since he said that both Beck and Goerdler had been publicly mentioned as potential leaders of a coup, and since it could be taken for granted that the Gestapo was aware of this group. The representative thought that Gestapo had not stepped in either because it planned to wait until the group's plans had been more n arly perfected, or because the Gestapo too wished to have a "an anchor in the West".

In early May the two emissaries forwarded to the OSS representa-tive a further communication from the group. Its membership was said by this time to include important new members: Generals von Rundstedt, Falkenhausen, Heusinger, Zeitzler, and Olbricht (see report to White House Map Room, dated 16 May 1944). These Generals were all reported ready to assist Anglo-American units to enter Germany provided the Western Allies would agree to allow them to continue the war on the eastern front.

A new plan of action was outlined in the May communication.

The plan called for the landing of three Allied parachute divisions in the Berlin area with the help of local Army commanders; major amphibious landings at or near Bremen and Hamburg; the isolation of Hitler and high Nazi officials in Obersalzberg by trustworthy German units posted in the Munich region; and Allied landings on the French coast, though these in their early stages were thought difficult to plan as Rommel could not be counted upon for cooperation. In the communication the group reaffirmed its belief that Germany had lost the war, that the last hope of preventing the spread of Communism in Germany would be an Anglo-American occupation of the greatest possible portion of the Reich, and that the only means of accomplishing this would be to help the Anglo-American forces to enter Germany before military collapse in the East.

The two emissaries at this time expressed the opinion that the group's proviso with regard to the exclusion of the USSR was unrealistic; they regarded the plan for speedy American and British occupation of Germany as the core of the proposal. One of the emissaries admitted a lack of confidence in the political courage of the German generals, on the basis of past experience, and remarked that the Allies might do well to ignore their propositions if an early victory and speedy occupation of Germany appeared certain. The OSS representative reported his own doubts as to ~~were~~ whether the group would possess the necessary determination to act effectively at the appropriate time.

In early July a courier arrived in Bern bearing a communication displaying new confidence in the strength of the group (see report to White House Map Room, dated 18 July 1944). This message reported that the movement had gained new vigor from the Soviet victories in the East, from the Allied landings in the West, and from certain developments in Germany. Colonel-General Fritz Fromm, Chief of the Home Command, who controlled the regular army within Germany, was

said to have joined the group. Further strength was said to have been required by the alleged transfer of OKW headquarters from East Prussia to a locality near Berlin and the resultant proximity to Berlin of General Ombrecht, Chief of the General Army Office, Colonel General Kurt Zeitzler, Chief of Staff, and other generals supposed to be in the opposition. Cooperation was also claimed from a group of anti-Hitler elements headed by Wolff Graf Helldorf, Berlin chief of police and an old time Nazi. The message said that the group's plan of action called for an ordered retreat from the West and the dispatch of all crack divisions to defend the eastern front. Efforts would be made to convince the generals to wage a final struggle against Nazism.

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On/July the OSS representative reported that a dramatic event might take place up north, if the information brought by the group's courier could be trusted, and warned that any news would be suppressed by violence, if necessary. This was the last word received before the news of the attempted coup.

2. Nazi Counter-measures.

By the first week in July it became amply clear that the National Socialist Government was aware of impending revolt in high military circles. In his funeral oration for General Dietl (2 July) Hitler extolled those who devoted themselves to the German cause with fanaticism as opposed to the lukewarm supporters of the war effort. On 7 July when the break through in the East began and the western beachhead loomed as a firmly established threat, Goebbels wrote an editorial in Das Reich pointing out that the home front was the critical area in the German war effort and that all power should be given to "the fanatics". This article constituted a marked departure from the earlier propaganda line, which emphasized the participation of all Germans in the conduct of the war.

These official statements were harbingers of the Party's intention

to seize all power in the state, including that over the military establishment. On 19 July news leaked out to Stockholm that Heinrich Himmler would shortly be named to a post of first importance in the German High Command. Himmler's powers, it was said, would include complete control over all military appointments both in the field and in the Home Command. As this report was received, telephone communications between Stockholm and Berlin were cut (1655, 19 July). The report therefore antedates the coup of 20 July.

3. The Coup d'Etat

To the Army leadership the acquisition of such powers by Himmler clearly would be regarded as the end of their political power, domestic and international, which rested on their control of the armed forces. It may be assumed that the High Command felt its international bargaining strength to lie in its armies in the field. This was weakened by enemy action and also by the removal of General von Rundstedt and the presence of Rommel on the Western front. The High Command's domestic strength, on the other hand, resided in General Fromm's home forces. As the armies in the field approached defeat the importance of the home army would increase. Only through control of the home army could Germany's military leadership ~~win~~ eliminate the Nazis without exposing itself to social revolution.

It is therefore believed that the proposed appointment of Himmler (subsequently announced in Hitler's speech after the coup) precipitated the military conspirators into premature action. The actual attempt upon Hitler's life, hastily organized as it was, had to be made before the appointment of Himmler could take place.

We have just received from the OSS representative in Bern the following dispatch, dated 21 July, containing his estimate of the situation:

"The coup d'etat appears to have been the result of the planning and organization outlined in my earlier communications. It had been intended that certain men in the inner circles of the

conspiracy, such as General Heusinger, would be at the meeting when the bomb went off because the only chance for planting the bomb was in conjunction with a conference attended by many of the chief military leaders. One of the members of the group was Stauffenberg who served as liaison ~~with~~ between the older officers on active duty at General Headquarters and the younger group, formerly headed by Helmut von Moltke. Stauffenberg, in addition, acted as councillor to Goerdler.

"The outcome of the revolt at present rests with the Reserve Army 'Heimatheer' and their willingness to follow Himmler as their chief or whether they will stick to their old commanders some of whom appear to be involved in the plot. Naturally, the blood purge will be unmerited.

"One of the disheartening facts seems to be that the participants in the revolt do not have adequate radio facilities at their command. However, it has come to our attention that a report from Reuter's states that a message dispatched by the rebels from Frankfurt-Am-Main this morning was interrupted.

"However, a thorough perusal of the Goering-Hitler statements would lead to the inference that the rebellion was not put down at once."

4. Suggested Lines of Action.

In the event that the opposition does find it possible to maintain a stand in any region of Germany, it has been suggested by our representative in Bern that the Allied Government might wish to consider the following possible lines of action:

"(1) Some word from the President to counter Goebbel's line about the Allies' plan for complete annihilation of the German people. This would encourage the anti-Nazi groups.

"(2) Air raids on the Nazi stronghold in the region of Berchtesgaden. Although the immediate military effectiveness of such action would be unimportant, it is possible that the psychological reaction would be great. Naturally, any break in the communication channels between the region of Berchtesgaden and the rest of the country would be especially valuable.

"(3) Providing the rebellion gains any momentum, some announcement to the effect that any German town which sides with the opposition would not be attacked whereas Gestapo centers and Nazi strongholds would be bombed unsparingly.

"(4) Large-scale dissemination of pamphlets from the air."

William J. Donovan
Director

P.S. Since writing the foregoing I have received a further dispatch from Bern which reads as follows:

"Up to 1:00 P.M. today (22 July 1944) the Nazi Legation had not had any news from the Foreign Office, not even the customary "sprach regelung." This is the Nazi term for instructions on how to lie. There are positive signs that if a revolt did get under way, several Nazi officers at this end would abandon the sinking ship."

W.J.D.

29 July 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The recent plot to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Nazi regime (about which I have sent you several reports) recalls an earlier approach which was made to one of our representatives in Istanbul. (You will remember that an approach was also made in Sweden, concerning which I wrote you on 20 March 1944.)

The approach in Istanbul was made at a time when it was clear that our relations with the Russians would not permit negotiation with such a contact, especially since the plan advanced involved an attempt to permit Anglo-Saxon occupation to the exclusion of Russia. However, the incident is of historical interest at this moment as it now appears that the approach which was made by a well known lawyer, then attached to the German High Command as an expert on international questions, was in all probability a manifestation of the movement described in the memorandum to you dated 23 July 1944. A despatch from our representative in Bern dated 21 July and quoted in our memorandum to you states that this man, to whom we have given the code designation Hermann, acted as the head of the younger group of officers at General Headquarters who participated in the conspiracy.

The proposal in essence set forth the willingness of this group (then known as the Hermann Group) to accept military defeat and occupation by the Allies in order to prevent a Russian invasion of Germany. As essential condition to the foregoing was the establishment of a line against the Russians based on Lemberg-Tilsit. The group expressed its readiness to undertake military cooperation with the Allies on the largest possible scale with a view toward ousting Hitler and paving the way as speedily as possible for the Anglo-American occupation of Germany. On the most important point of how this cooperation could be effected the plan was silent.

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I directed our representative in Istanbul to enter into no negotiations with Hermann but to keep open the channel of contact. The American Military Attache was apprised of this contact and of the outlines of the proposal. Although subsequent to the delivery of the group's proposal to our representative in Istanbul further overtures were made and a meeting was requested, this meeting could not take place due to the arrest of Hermann, who, so far as we know, has remained in custody.

William J. Donovan
Director