

Memoranda for the President: OSS-NKVD Liaison

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Strange bedfellows in the wartime world.

William J. Donovan's voluminous memoranda to President Roosevelt ¹ include half a dozen concerning collaboration between the U.S. and Soviet intelligence services, and these are supplemented by a few addressed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and one recording a conversation in the NKVD offices in Moscow. Originally proposed as an exchange of representatives to each other's headquarters, this liaison was reduced by political considerations to communication between heads of services through General Deane, chief of the U.S. Military Mission in Moscow. The documents are reproduced below.

Negotiations

5 November 1943

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

Would it meet with your approval if we could persuade (and obtain authorization for) Sydney Weinberg to go to Russia openly as the representative of OSS? ²

Memorandum of Conversation at the Commissariat for Internal Affairs

Moscow, December 27, 1943

Major General J. R. Dean

Brigadier General Wm. J. Donovan

Mr. Bohlen

Lt. General Fitin ³-Head of the Soviet External Intelligence Service

Col. Ossipov ⁴- Head of the Section Conducting Subversive Activities in Enemy Countries

General Donovan opened the conversation by saying that the day before yesterday he had been taken by the Ambassador to call on Mr. Molotov

to whom he had outlined the aims, scope and operation of the Office of Strategic Services and he would be glad to supplement or repeat that information to General Fitin. It would first be useful to ascertain what particular phases of the work of OSS General Fitin was interested in.

General Fitin replied that they were interested in all aspects.

General Donovan then outlined the organization, aims, scope operations, etc. of OSS, giving details of specific types of operations, means of communication, organization of groups within enemy countries, etc.

General Fitin listened with the closest attention and asked a number of questions of a technical nature, specifically regarding the methods used in introducing agents to enemy countries, type of training and equipment given these agents, and whether they were trained primarily in the United States or elsewhere.

General Donovan explained that all available methods were used to dispatch agents to enemy countries. Submarines, small boats and by parachute from airplanes. He said that by parachute was the principal means of sending agents and that special planes of the B-24 type had been assigned to his organization for the purpose. He added that experiments were being made with use of small planes of the Stimson⁵ type and also helicopters.

General Donovan explained in detail certain types of equipment used such as the suitcase radio and mentioned, without going into detail, use of new plastic explosives which had so far given good results.

Col. Ossipov appeared particularly interested in the possibilities of plastic explosives. General Donovan promised to send to General Fitin through General Deane a standard type small radio which was used by the OSS operatives.

General Donovan emphasized, in concluding his description of the functions and aims of the OSS, that he had come to Moscow to give this information to the Soviet Government and to tell them that his organization was prepared to cooperate fully with the equivalent organization in the Soviet Union if the Soviet Government considered it in the national interest to do so. He emphasized that he was not attempting to make their decision for them but merely stating his willingness to cooperate in whole or in part in any part of the world where the OSS maintained individuals or organizations.

He said that for this reason he was prepared to designate an officer to be a member of the United States Military Mission here under the orders of General Deane and would welcome the appointment of a Soviet official in Washington to maintain liaison with the OSS.

General Deane at this point said that, having been present at both the Moscow and Teheran conferences, he wished to emphasize that the American Joint Chiefs of Staff genuinely desired to establish close contact and the fullest cooperation with the Soviet Government in any field which would hasten the defeat of our common enemy, Germany.

General Fitin asked what specific lines of cooperation General Donovan had in mind.

General Donovan replied first the exchange of intelligence information. There was information which we possessed in regard to enemy countries which would be, he thought, of great value to the Soviet Government. On the other hand the Soviet Government undoubtedly had certain information which would be of real value to the United States in the conduct of the war.

Consequently, he thought it was important that in any areas where both countries had agents operating there should be some form of coordination in order to prevent these agents working at cross purposes. He said, for example, in Bulgaria his man might be dealing with an individual or group which the Soviet Government knew to be untrustworthy, and it would be of utmost value to have the benefit of their advice and counsel in the field of moral subversion.

Also in regard to physical subversion it would be most useful if each country knew what the other had in preparation. General Fitin said he thoroughly understood and agreed with General Donovan and on his own initiative gave an example where such cooperation would be most useful. He said, for example, that if Soviet agents were preparing to sabotage an important industrial undertaking or railroad in Germany it would be very desirable to have the American Government informed thereof in order to prevent any unwitting interference. Conversely, it would be helpful for the Soviet Government to know of any similar undertakings in preparation from the American side.

He then asked General Donovan if he had come to the Soviet Union for the sole purpose of giving them this information and making the

proposal for cooperation, or had he had some other intentions.

General Donovan replied that the only reason he had come to Moscow was to give them this information and make the proposals he had made.

General Fitin then said of course they heartily welcomed General Donovan's information and proposals and he wished to express their thanks. He said there were a number of points in regard to cooperation in various fields which would have to be decided by higher organizations of the Soviet Government but that one question could be considered as decided and that was the appointment of a representative of General Donovan's organization in the American Military Mission here.

General Donovan then explained that he had in mind Col. Haskell ⁶ and gave a brief sketch of Col. Haskell's past career and emphasized the fact that he was a man of fine character.

General Deane then said that in the interval between the final decision of the Soviet Government on certain aspects of this work and the return of Col. Haskell it would be necessary to establish some channel of communication for the exchange of certain types of information.

General Fitin said he agreed and that the exchange of certain information should begin right away. . . .

ADDENDUM:

General Fitin inquired whether as a measure of cooperation it would be possible for American facilities to be used to send Soviet agents to Western Germany or France or to other areas which were so far from the Soviet Union as to be inaccessible from the Soviet side.

General Donovan replied that in his opinion that would be entirely possible and they would be glad to help in any way they could.

22 February 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Averell Harriman advised you from Moscow about six weeks ago of the conversation that he and I had with Molotov concerning operations in Bulgaria. At the same time, there was an exploratory discussion as to

the possibilities of our working with the intelligence and subversive counterpart of OSS. This matter was discussed from the standpoint of the military advantages accruing to the United States in the field of intelligence, both insofar as Germany and Japan were concerned. The operational advantages of working together with subversive elements and resistance groups in South Eastern Europe and a reciprocal exchange of certain types of new devices and weapons were also discussed.

Already, although this has not yet received the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the appreciation by the Russians of the advantages to be gained by such a reciprocal undertaking are quite apparent. They have advised us that certain of their intelligence material on Bulgaria is being sent to us and in turn have asked us for information concerning the German espionage system which we may obtain from certain members of the German Embassy in Istanbul whom we, jointly with the British, have induced to come over to our side.⁷ There are particular fields of intelligence that are open to the Russians and heretofore denied us which the proposed relationship would now make available to us. This is especially true in the economic and political field.

I find the suggestion made that such a proposal would open the door to the OGPU here. I don't need to suggest to you that the OGPU came here with the coming of Amtorg and is already here under the protection of the Embassy. What we want to do is to deal with the military elements that are concerned with intelligence relating to the enemies we are fighting. If we should turn down this opportunity, it will be a great handicap in anything we may wish to do in a military or national way. This is especially true since they are prepared to give us direct access on all these matters, and it is the first opening we have had with the Russians for an insight into their foreign intelligence system. Our whole discussion was on a basis of reciprocity with a thorough understanding that we would see what we could do together in penetrating Germany and German occupied areas, and with the suggestion that, when the opportunity came, this might be extended to Japan.

It had been suggested to us that this matter should be taken up with Attorney General Biddle. I did this, and he suggested that we talk directly with you about it. I was not unmindful of someone's trying to make capital of the OGPU's coming here; but I think the complete answer is:

1. They are already here, and

2. The military people who come here are in the open and under such rules as are imposed by us and are here solely and only for military reasons and joint operations against our common enemy.

25 February 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Following my memorandum of the other day relative to the proposed exchange of representatives between the Russians and our organization, it should be called to your attention that a similar exchange exists between the British and the Russians and has been in existence for over two years. A like exchange between the Russians and ourselves was suggested by the head of the British mission in Moscow.

7 March 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR ADMIRAL WILLIAM D. LEAHY:

Subject: Interchange of Representation with Soviet Union

Since my appearance before the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the matter of OSS-Soviet representatives, there have been some developments which I feel I should report to you.

The British have informed us of the status of the N.K.V.D. representation in London, which is the counterpart of SOE's representation in Moscow. The Russian group in London consists of three N.K.V.D officers headed by a Colonel attached to the Russian Embassy. Although matters of importance are customarily handled by the British through their own representative in Moscow, SOE maintains liaison with the NXV.D. officers in London and has provided them with a radio station for direct communication with Moscow.

The State Department suggested that I confer with the Attorney General in regard to that part of the proposed reciprocal arrangement which contemplates a liaison representation from N.K.V.D. with OSS here. When I spoke to Mr. Biddle, he thought that I should take the matter up with the President, which I did in the form of a memorandum.⁸

Fruits

9 March 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Attached is a list of questions from the Russians to be asked of the former Gestapo agents now held by us in Cairo. These questions give us an index of the things the Russians look for and also of the way they work.

LIST OF QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE RUSSIANS: ⁹

1. The personal characteristics of the cadre staff operators of the below listed intelligence organizations in Turkey, to include duties, identification data, nicknames, and character on work: Naval Intelligence; Military Intelligence, including 1st, 2nd, and 3rd dept. of Abwehr; The Gestapo; SD (Security Service) ; Diplomatic Intelligence; Economic Intelligence. What is interrelationship and structure of above listed organizations?
2. In working from Turkey against USSR a description of the actual tasks and scope of work of German espionage and counter espionage. Results of German espionage work in USSR, including methods of communications and methods.
3. Detailed characteristics of agents of German Intelligence in Turkey, also those working for Germany who are of other nationalities.
4. The operating points location in Turkey of German Intelligence who try to smuggle agents into USSR.
5. For operations against Russia to what extent does German Intelligence try to use Ukrainians, Russians, Azerbaidzhan, and other nationalities who have immigrated to Turkey?
7. What contacts do the German espionage Intelligence have with the leadership of the Turkish Intelligence and espionage activities? Who of the Turkish group are connected with the Germans personally? How do they work together?
6. To Iran from Turkey what is the extent of German espionage, including

its director, methods of communication to German Intelligence Hqs in Turkey from Iran, composition and location of operational points, name of agency, and assignments given to such agencies in Iran.

9. Request any information regarding German propaganda in Turkey, including agencies, its leaders, connections with the Turkish press, and methods.

10. Hitlerite party activity and organization as well as other German Organizations in Turkey.

11. Any information regarding the activities in Istanbul of the German Teutonia Club.

12. Information regarding the personnel and structure of the central organ of the Abwehr.

13. Information regarding any differences there might be between representatives of the Nazi Party in Turkey and Von Papen.

14. Information regarding German espionage schools out as well as in Germany, including methods of planting spies in foreign countries, numbers trained, and methods of training.

27 April 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF:

There is attached as an appendix paraphrase of cable which has been sent to General Deane in response to CM-IN 17105 (23 April 1944) in which General Deane stated that Ossipov, chief of Russian subversive activities, was offended because Russian personnel had not been included among American and British agents who were being sent into Rumania. Both General Deane and Brigadier General Hill, SOE representative in Moscow, strongly recommended that the Russians be invited to participate.

8 May 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF:

With further reference to our memoranda to you of 27 April 1944 and 5 May 1944 on the above subject, we have now received an answer from

General Deane. He states that he does not intend to do anything further on the matter since he has been informed by Brigadier Hill that the Soviets refused a British offer to include the Russians in the Rumanian project.

29 September 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

On 24 September I wrote you of Marshal Tito's order restricting British and American intelligence activities. The next day we received word from our intelligence team in Bulgaria that the Russians had ordered it and the British to leave.

I immediately cabled General Deane in Moscow, and last night received word from him that he was advised by General Fitin, Chief of Russian Secret Intelligence, of the issuance of instructions to withdraw the order requiring the OSS team to leave Bulgaria. I have passed this on to the field. In order to prevent future misunderstandings, I am sending General Fitin lists of OSS personnel in Bulgaria and Rumania as requested by him.

20 October 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

On 22 September, we sent you a report of a discussion between a representative of this office and an agent of Neubacher, Ribbentrop's political and diplomatic representative in the Balkans. Previously, on 13 September, we had sent to General Deane z Moscow a report of two earlier conversations between these persons, to the following effect:

"Neubacher's agent contacted our representative on 5 September, stating that if the Allies would allow the Germans to retreat to the line of the Danube and Sava rivers, Germany would use her troops to fight the Soviets. Our representative immediately replied that he would not enter into any conversation founded on deceit and Allied discord, but that he would discuss the termination of German resistance in the Balkans and would forward any business-like German proposal. Subsequently Neubacher's agent stated that Neubacher was planning to see Hitler and

would contact our representative again, although it was out of question for him to discuss surrender. He went on to say that guerrilla fighting would continue in Germany after the surrender and that many Germans, being nihilist already, were ripe for Communism."

This information was communicated to the Russians by General Deane. You may find it significant that General Deane has notified us that General Fitin was grateful for the information and has requested more information as it becomes available.

18 November 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE JOINT U. S. CHIEFS OF STAFF

. . . The relevant portion of General Deane's dispatch is attached (Appendix A) . . .

10 November 1944

APPENDIX A

Fitin, whom I saw today, states positively that for an OSS unit to enter an occupied country approval from the Soviet Foreign Office will be necessary.

It is my opinion that wherever we have an Allied control ommission, authority for OSS units to operate should be obtained through our representative on this commission. I think in this way we can obtain approval for their presence without going through the Soviet Foreign Office in Moscow which is an endless process. Fitin suggested that possibly OSS personnel could come into occupied countries ostensibly as part of our representation on the Allied Control Commission, in which cases his organization would be prepared to cooperate with you.

1 Described in the first of this series, subtitled "Sunrise," in Studies VII 2, p. 73 ff.

2 The answer was yes, and it cost Weinberg's life when the convoy on which he sailed was attacked off the Norwegian North Cape and most of the ships sunk. The proposal that OSS send a representative to Moscow had been initiated a year earlier by the head of the British SOE mission which had been established there promptly after the German invasion of the USSR. It was first presented as an exchange of representatives in General Donovan's conversations with the Russians at the end of 1943.

3 Misspelled, apparently by phonetic error, as "Sitin" throughout the memorandum. A 30 December memorandum from Donovan was addressed to General "Setin."

4 Apparently soon promoted. Shortly after the war the two Russians were identified in the press as Lt. Gen. P.M. Fitin and Maj. Gen. Aleksandr P. Osipov. As late as 1950 they were still publicly reported to be associated with each other, as chief and deputy respectively of Section 12 (foreign intelligence services) of the MVD, successor to the NKVD.

5 Presumably "Stinson."

6 John H. F. The man designated to head the reciprocal NKVD mission in Washington was a Colonel Grauer, head of the American or perhaps the British section under Fitin. Defectors have said that he was sent to England in 1946 and died in 1953.

7 Abwehr staff members Willi Hamburger, Erich Vermehren, and Karl Alois Kleczkowski, the latter two with their wives, had defected beginning at the end of January, but on their own initiative without inducement.

8 But on 15 March Admiral Leahy recorded the "decision ... this date that an exchange ... of missions ... is not appropriate . . ." A staff had already been readied for the mission and equipment shipped to Moscow in

anticipation of approval.

9 The Soviet questions were included in the interrogations, and during the spring and summer "somewhat edited" versions of the complete interrogation reports on Hamburger and the Kleczkowskis were sent to Moscow, giving a mass of detail on the Abwehr organization, methods of operation, and individual agents in Turkey and the Middle East. By this time there had begun a considerable, if somewhat ill balanced, exchange of information with the NKVD which lasted through March of 1945. Dozens each of OSS field reports (not only on Germany and Japan but including some downgraded Top Secret cables from China and factory marking and other targeting data obtained in Rumania), R & A studies and estimates, and captured German documents were furnished the Russians. In return OSS received (in response to a rather too broad request for "everything the Soviet authorities are in a position to supply with respect to the current military, economic, and political situation in Bulgaria") a 43-page paper comparable to but less comprehensive than and adding little to the corresponding U.S. JANIS (forerunner of the National Intelligence Survey), a set of unenlightening answers to some apparently overcautious questions concerning sabotage methods, a 7G-page listing of German industrial targets evidently derived from POW interrogations and other casual sources rather than a directed intelligence effort, and data on German plants manufacturing poison gas and shells for it and the layout of a poison gas pipeline on the eastern frontier. A selection of specimen agent weapons and sabotage devices was also exchanged, and the NKVV was presented an OSS-developed outfit for agent use in microfilming documents.

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