Memorandum by General Montgomery for the Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting on the prospect of a future war and the strategy of war with Russia, dated 30 January 1948

LIMITED CIRCULATION

It is clear that in any future war which we can at present envisage, the enemy would be Russia.

We must therefore examine the problem and must set out, and agree, the broad lines of a strategy for the British Commonwealth in the event of war with Russia. Until this is done, we shall make no progress in our work.

2. The problem is urgent because the decisions we reach will affect the organisation of our national forces, now under review. They will also affect our talks with the Americans about policy towards the countries of Western Europe.

3. I consider that before this matter is handed over to the Joint Planning Staff to examine, the Chiefs of Staff should themselves consider the broad principles involved and should then give the Joint Planning Staff a general directive on the subject which will guide their work. The Joint Planning Staff would then examine the problem within the general framework laid down. To act otherwise is merely to waste time.

4. In the attached Memorandum, I give my own views on the strategy of a war with Russia. I would be glad of an opportunity to discuss the matter at our meeting on Monday 2 Feb.

M. of A.[[1]](#footnote-1)

C.I.G.S.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Ministry of Defence, S.W. 1

General Introduction

We face today a world riven by conflicting ideologies as well as full of the turmoil and anxiety produced by was and its aftermath. European civilization has been placed in danger because of a failure to hold to a common view.

It would be quite fatal to ignore these facts; indeed we must of necessity keep them constantly under review, because they contain the seeds of future war.

2. The problem is hardening into a struggle between conflicting elements. On the one side we see revealed a policy aiming at Communist control in eastern Europe, and the spread of that control westwards. On the other side we see a policy which aims to keep Communist control away from western Europe.

The continent of Europe is in deep distress, economic and political.

3. As the conflict grows and hardens it is becoming more and more a struggle for the possession of Germany. That struggle is between the East and the West; the East is represented by Russia and her satellite powers; the West is represented by the Western Allies of the late war.

It is important to be clear on this matter. The struggle may well be between two ideologies, between Communism and Democracy; but the first objective of the East is the German “soul”, as a necessary step towards world domination; the aim of the West is to prevent such domination, and an essential step is a united Germany looking westwards rather than eastwards.

This conflict, as it hardens, contains the seeds of future war.

4. Unfortunately, Germany has been split into three parts :-

(a) the western zones, occupied by Britain, America and France.

(b) the Russian zone

(c) that territory lying East of the Oder which used to be part of Germany, and which is now incorporated into Poland. This includes East Prussia, which has been divided between Russia and Poland.

The Germans will never stand for this division of their country. They will work for, and eventually fight for, a united Germany. When the Germans have found a leader, trouble will begin. This factor alone, the division of Germany, is certain to end in war in the long run.

5. Another disturbing factor is the refusal of Russia to allow her satellite Powers to take part in the “Marshall Plan.” These Powers are likely to see economic recovery in western Europe. They will become restless and are then likely to revolt. Russia’s only alternative may be to embark on war, with a promise of victory to her restless satellites.

Here again are more seeds of war.

6. Finally there is the danger that Britain herself may not recover as surely as is hoped. Unless our affairs are handled in a very able way we may find at the end of the era of “Marshall Dollars” that our markets have gone astray and we are no better off than before.

This would be disastrous for Britain and for Europe, and would be Russia’s opportunity to strike.

The only sure and certain solution to the economic problems of Europe is to develop a non-dollar economy in Africa and to link it to Europe. The continent of Africa contains everything we need, except oil, and that may well be found there in due course.

If the struggle between the East and the West leads to armed conflict, Africa goes with the West.

Its development is therefore vital; if we fail in this matter we may not survive ourselves.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that economic recovery is our first objective. But side by side with that objective must go a sound military strategy, as on this will depend the manner in which we rebuild our defence Services.

The enemy at the Gates.

7. It is now clear that in any future war which we can at present envisage, the enemy would be Russia.

In view of existing conditions in Russia it is unlikely that such a war would break out before about 1957, and possibly not before 1960.

If we are to survive such a conflict we must be prepared and ready; now, as never before, real preparedness is vital to survival.

We must therefore examine the problem and must set out, and agree, the broad lines of a strategy for the British Commonwealth in the event of a war with Russia.

In this memorandum the problem is dealt with in relation to some date between 1957 and 1960; but our preparations must take into account the possibility of an earlier outbreak.

The problem is urgent because the decisions we reach will affect the organisation of our national forces, now under review.

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[TNA, FO 800/452/26]

Keywords: great power relations, post-war Western Europe, post-war Eastern Europe, post-war order

1. Montgomery, Bernard Law, 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein (1887–1976) - British Field-Marshal. Chief of the Imperial General Staff (1946–1948), Chairman of the Commanders-in-Chief Committee of the Permanent Council of the Western European Union (1948–1951), NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (1951 - 1958). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C.I.G.S. - Chief of the Imperial General Staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)