Minutes of the meeting of the Russia Committee held on 10 May 1949

THE CHAIRMAN said that the paper on the meaning of the “peace offensive” (RC/67/49 as amended by RC/70/49) was required to help in briefing the United Kingdom delegation to the forthcoming Council of Foreign Ministers. He considered that in preparing such a paper it was essential to define the terms used and to know what was meant by a “tactical deviation” or a “change of policy”. He suggested that the fundamental long-term objective of Soviet policy was to spread world revolution and to overthrow “capitalist” governments and eventually to create a World State based on the dictatorship of the proletariat, of which the capital might well be in Moscow. The Soviet Government however worked towards this end by various means. The changes in policy introduced after 1927, 1933, and 1938 respectively were changes of means and each inaugurated a new phase. It seemed at least possible that a new phase was now beginning. The following questions therefore arose: How long would it last? What areas would it affect? What would happen if the Council of Foreign minister failed – would the Russians continue their affability or would they revert to “nastiness”? If the Russians now began to try to reach their objectives by guile rather than by forces, they might deceive certain circles in the West into supporting concessions to the Russians.

2. MR. WARNER[[1]](#footnote-1) suggested that the Russian co-operation with the West during the war had only been a temporary deviation from their fundamental uniformity of policy. Until the Council of Foreign ministers had taken place, it would be too early to say whether a new phase was beginning. For example, it seemed that the change in Russian methods was confined to Germany and the approach concerning Greece did not differ very greatly from other moves affecting Greece in the past.

3. MR. HANKEY[[2]](#footnote-2) said that there was no evidence that the Russians had given up their hope of communising Germany and a Communist Germany was one of their strategic objectives. Any apparent changes were only changes in tactics which did not affect strategic objectives.

4. MR.RADICE[[3]](#footnote-3) suggested that there were three levels or stages in the execution of Soviet plans. Firstly, there was the underlying philosophy which determined their objectives; secondly, there was the strategy for obtaining those objectives over a period of years; and thirdly, there were the short-term tactics by which the strategy was put into effect.

5. THE CHAIRMAN said that in defining its terms the paper should make clear that the long-term objectives or strategy were constant but that the mans or tactics used to attain them differed. The point should also be emphasised that the Russians had tried changes of tactics before but there was no evidence of a real change of heart. In fact, such a change of heart could only come about if the Soviet leaders repudiated their entire philosophy.

6. On the particular suggestion put forward by H.M. Ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Government might be diverting their efforts from the West to Asia, Mr. DENING said that surely Soviet foreign policy was world-wide and was capable of being active in both regions at once. The Russians were not yet very deeply committed in Asia and had in fact possibly been somewhat slow to start there. MR. WARNER said that the normal Soviet practice was to go on looking for weak spots everywhere and to increase the pressure when a weak spot appeared. THE CHAIRMAN asked what was the actual effort which was conceived of as being “diverted” from the West to Asia. Was it men, money materials or media of propaganda? There was no evidence of such transfers and it did not seem that the conception of “diversion” could be supported in concrete terms.

[TNA, FO 371/77623]

Keywords: Post-war order, Great-power relations

1. Warner, Christopher F. A., (1895 - 1957) - British diplomat. Head of the Northern Department, Foreign Office (1941 - 1946); Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Northern and Southern Europe (1946 - 1948); Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs - Information and Cultural Services (1948 - 1950); Ambassador to Belgium (1951 - 1955). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hankey, 2nd Lord Robert (1905 - 1996) - British diplomat. Counsellor in the British Embassy in Warsaw (1945 - 1946); Head of the Northern Department, Foreign Office (1946 - 1949); Minister in the British Embassy in Madrid (1949 - 1951); Minister in the British Embassy in Budapest (1951 - 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Radice, Edward (1907 - 1996) - British diplomat. Assistant Secretary, Foreign Office (1945 - 1950); Counsellor in the British Embassy in Copenhagen (1950 - 1952). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)