Conclusions of a cabinet meeting regarding defence, 25 January 1951

SECRET

In discussion of the necessity for an increased defence programme on the scale proposed, the following points were made: -

(a) The Soviet Union had never disarmed after the war and had retained their fighting Services on a war footing. They were now building up their forces still further and must also be presumed to be accumulating a stock of atomic weapons as speedily as possible. There was a secret treaty between Russia and Communist China, which would place the man-power resources of China at the disposal of the Soviet Government in certain contingencies. The satellite States in Eastern Europe had increased their defences by 30 per cent since September last; and Bulgaria, for example, was building up two additional armoured divisions. The forces at present at the disposal of the democracies in Western Europe could offer no serious resistance to a Russian attack; and, if such an attack were to be launched in the near future, it would rapidly overrun the Continent. While Russia might not possess the industrial potential for waging a long war against the democracies, she would in an early war be able to make formidable gains, including acquisitions of fresh industrial potential.

(b) It was difficult to form an estimate of Russia’s real intentions. It might be argued that her large defence preparations were actuated by fear of the free world. In fact, however, the moves she had made suggested an aggressive intent. The Berlin blockade had been an aggressive move, and the invasion of South Korea had clearly been planned with assistance of Russia. The Soviet Government had incited the North Korean Government to invade South Korea in the knowledge that this might unleash a train of events leading to general war. The Russians had now moved air and land forces into Manchuria, and this suggested that they were prepared to risk the possibility of armed conflict with the United States Forces in Korea. Even if the Korean conflict were settled, there remained other danger points – notably Persia and, possibly, Yugoslavia – where an aggressively-minded Russia might seek by armed intervention to expand her sphere of influence. In considering the manner in which incidents in Persia or elsewhere might lead to general war, regard had to be paid to the present temper of public opinion in the United States. The Soviet Government must see that the United States were now embarked upon a rearmament programme which would, within a period of two or three years, greatly lessen Russia’s prospects of surviving any world conflict without defeat.

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