



## **April 30, 1948**

# **George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare**

### **Citation:**

“George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare,” April 30, 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, Ch1 n4 – NARA release courtesy of Douglas Selvage. Redacted final draft of a memorandum dated May 4, 1948, and published with additional redactions as document 269, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>

### **Summary:**

State Department Polish Planning director George Kennan outlines, in a Policy Planning Staff document for the National Security Council, the idea of a public committee, working closely with the US government, to sponsor various émigré activities

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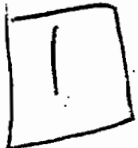
THE PROBLEM

The inauguration of organized political warfare.

ANALYSIS

1. Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz's doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives, ~~to further its influence and authority and to weaken those of its adversaries.~~ Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures (as ERP), and "white" propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of "friendly" foreign elements, "black" psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.

2. The creation, success, and survival of the British Empire has been due in part to the British understanding and application of the principles of political warfare. Lenin so synthesized the teachings of Marx and Clausewitz that the Kremlin's conduct of political warfare has become the most refined and effective of any in history. We have been handicapped however by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war, by a tendency to view war as a sort of sporting contest outside of all political context, by ~~our public's yearning~~ *a national tendency to seek* for a political cure-all, such ~~as the UN,~~ and by a reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations--the perpetual rhythm of



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3. This Government has, of course, in part consciously and in part unconsciously, been conducting political warfare. Aggressive Soviet political warfare has driven us overtly <sup>first to the</sup> from <sup>the</sup> Truman Doctrine to ERP <sup>and</sup> to sponsorship of Western Union, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This was all political warfare and should be recognized as such.

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4. Understanding the concept of political warfare, we should also recognize that there are two major types of political warfare--one overt and the other covert. Both, from their basic nature, <sup>should</sup> ~~must~~ be directed and coordinated by the Department of State. Overt operations are, of course, the traditional policy activities of any foreign office enjoying positive leadership, whether or not they are recognized as political warfare. Covert operations are traditional in many European chancelleries but <sup>relatively unfamiliar</sup> ~~are not widely~~ <sup>accepted</sup> ~~by~~ this Government.

5. Having assumed greater international responsibilities than ever before in our history and having been engaged by the full might of the Kremlin's political warfare, we cannot afford to leave unmobilized our resources for covert political warfare. We cannot afford in the future, in perhaps more serious political crises, [REDACTED]

6. It was with all of the foregoing in mind that

the Policy Planning Staff began some three months ago a consideration of specific projects in the field of covert operations, where they should be fitted into the structure of this Government, and how the Department of State should exercise direction and coordination.

7. There are listed below projects which have been or are now being suggested by the Staff:

a. Liberation Committees

Purpose: To form centers of national hope and revive a sense of purpose among political refugees from the Soviet World; to provide an inspiration for continuing popular resistance within the countries of the Soviet World; and to provide a potential nucleus for all-out liberation movements in the event of war.

Description: This is primarily an overt operation which, however, should receive covert guidance and possibly assistance from the Government. It is proposed that trusted private American citizens be encouraged to establish a public committee which would give support and guidance in U.S. interests to national freedom movements publicly led by outstanding political refugees from the Soviet World, such as Mikolajczyk and Nagy. The American Committee should be so selected and organized as to cooperate closely with this Government. The functions of the American Committee should be limited to enabling selected refugee leaders to keep alive as public figures with access to printing presses and microphones. It should not engage in underground

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What is proposed here is an operation in the traditional American form: organized public support of resistance to tyranny in foreign countries. Throughout our history, private American citizens have banded together to champion the cause of freedom for people suffering under oppression. (The Communists and Zionists have exploited this tradition to the extreme, to their own ends and to our national detriment, as witness the Abraham Lincoln brigade during the Spanish Civil War and the current illegal Zionist activities.) Our proposal is that this tradition be revived specifically to further American national interests in the present crisis.

b. Underground Activities behind the Iron Curtain

Purpose: To maintain contact with, sustain, and influence underground movements in the Soviet world resisting Kremlin domination.

Description: In contrast to CIA operations, involving the American Government directly with underground activities, this project would follow a principle which has been basic in British and Soviet political warfare: remote and deeply concealed official control of clandestine operations so that governmental responsibility cannot be shown. In brief, the project, as proposed by S/P, would operate as follows: general direction and financial support would come from the Government; guidance and funds would pass to a private American organization or organizations (perhaps "business"

approximate caliber of Allen Dulles; these organizations, through their field offices in Europe and Asia, would establish contact with the various national underground representatives in free countries and through these intermediaries pass on assistance and guidance to the resistance movements behind the iron curtain.

c. Support of Indigenous Anti-Communist Elements in Threatened Countries of the Free World.

Purpose: To strengthen indigenous forces combatting communism in countries where Soviet political warfare is a threat to our national security.

Description: This is a covert operation again utilizing private intermediaries. To insure cover, the private American organizations conducting the operation should be separate from the organizations mentioned in previous projects. With governmental guidance and financial support,

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8. It would seem that the time is now fully ripe for the creation of a covert political warfare operations directorate within the Government. If we are to engage in such operations, they must be under unified direction. One man must be boss. And he must, as those responsible

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9. While covert political warfare must be controlled by the Department, the direction should not be physically in the Department of State. This is the more true when it is realized that the considerable funds necessary for such an operation could not be concealed in the Department's budget. Therefore, this operation must find cover elsewhere.

10. The National Security Council Secretariat would seem to provide the best possible cover for such a directorate. Such cover would also permit a direct chain of command from the Secretary of State and be a natural meeting ground for close collaboration with the military establishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. There should promptly be established, under the cover of the National Security Council Secretariat, a Directorate of Political Warfare Operations.

12. The Director should be designated by the Secretary of State and should be responsible to him.

13. The Director should have initially a staff of 4 officers designated by the Department of State and 3 officers designated by the Secretary of National Defense.

14. The Directorate should have complete authority over covert political warfare operations conducted by this Government. It should have the authority to initiate new operations and to bring under its control or abolish existing covert political warfare activities.

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15. Specifically, (a) the 3 projects mentioned in paragraph 7 above should be activated by the Directorate and (b) covert political warfare now under CIA and theater commanders abroad should be brought under the authority of the Directorate.

16. The coordination of the above covert operations with the overt conduct of foreign policy should, of course, be accomplished through the offices of the Secretary and Under Secretary of State.