

2 February 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHIEF, PLANS & PROGRAMS COORDINATION STAFF

SUBJECT: Operations Against Albania

1. The rough draft staff study on Albanian operations, recently forwarded to you, contained a large volume of material on the subject but specifically refrained from making any recommendations as to courses of future action. It was felt that it would be beneficial to have this matter reviewed objectively and that recommendations should preferably be made by authorities not so closely involved as this Division has been. I have some thoughts of my own on the subject, however, that I should like to set down for the record and for such use as you may wish to make of them. It is not the intention here to argue the relative desirability or undesirability of a radical solution of the Albanian problem, if it could be brought off neatly, or to dwell upon lesser accomplishments already achieved in this area. It is rather my wish briefly to outline the history of post-war Albanian operations, and to list certain considerations which bear upon planning for operations in the future.

2. Former OPC Project BOPIEND, originally envisaging the overthrow of the Albanian Stalinist regime, was conceived in late 1948. At that time the Balkans generally were in a state of great unrest. Soviet-Satellite supported guerrilla warfare still was being waged in Greece. Tito had recently broken with the Cominform. The Bulgarian and Rumanian regimes were not well consolidated. Disaffection within Premier Enver Hoxha's Albania was growing, and his security forces and techniques were weak. The overthrow of Hoxha appeared to be feasible; it appeared to be desirable both from the standpoint of reducing the Stalinist empire and from that of eliminating an active menace to Greece; it also appeared to be an action which would tend to quiet, rather than further to disturb, the already disturbed situation in the Balkans. Moreover, it was considered at the time that a coup stood a reasonable chance of being brought about by clandestine means within the joint capacity of the Americans, the British, and Albanian refugees under U. S.-U. K. control.

3. Mounting the effort, however, proved to be a much slower business than anticipated. The first agents were not dropped until November, 1950. By that time the Balkan situation had changed significantly:

a. Hoxha, becoming aware of the move brewing against him, strenuously, with considerable success, strengthened internal security measures;

b. The Greek guerrilla war came to an end, and a form of peace settled on the Balkans.

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c. Cominformist regimes strengthened their controls in Bulgaria and Rumania;

d. Tito, successfully maintaining his defiance of the Kremlin, let it be known he did not favor any further disturbance of the Balkan scene; at the same time, he had begun building up Albanian assets of his own.

h. In consequence of this changed situation, the U. S. and British jointly agreed to suspend effort aimed at the quick overthrow of Hoxha, but did undertake political, propaganda and agent operations of considerable magnitude. The political and propaganda activities were generally successful. However, efforts at large-scale agent infiltrations during late 1950 and the first six months of 1951 met with a series of disasters. In the fall of 1951 the two services agreed to abandon that task and concentrate on smaller-scale, higher-level, more secure operations. In 1952, the U. S. effected seven agent-team penetrations of Albania without loss of a man or serious incident. The British were less successful but encountered no major flaps.

5. In the past four years CIA, in a limited working relationship with British I. S., has developed a significant body of assets in the Albanian field and has accomplished certain positive beneficial results. It has also accumulated experience from which a number of valid observations may be drawn, among them:

a. Under present circumstances, a completely clandestine overthrow of the Hoxha regime cannot be considered feasible nor can a completely internal one; any coup will require material support so extensive that supplying it would at best be semi-covert (comparable in nature, if not in extent, to that furnished the Greek Guerrillas by Russia and the Satellites);

b. Support of a coup in Albania is probably beyond the present, and presently foreseeable, joint capabilities of the U. S. and British secret services;

c. A successful coup would require the full-scale operational cooperation of Yugoslavia, and a majority of the activities involved would have to be launched from Yugoslavia; limited operational activities can be mounted from Greece, but that country's role will be limited by the fact of its unresolved territorial claims on Albania, and by the relatively few able-bodied Albanian nationalists under Greek control; Yugoslavia's biggest asset, in addition to its long border with Albania, is a pool of more than 1,000 potential Albanian activists;

d. Unless careful diplomatic arrangements were made beforehand, a coup would disturb Albania's neighbors and alter the balance of power in Southeast Europe; such a move would have to be coordinated in advance with, at a minimum, the British, Italians and Greeks (in addition to the Yugoslavs)

e. No matter how well supported and coordinated beforehand, a coup attempt would be an adventurous enterprise, by no means certain of success; the consequences of a failure would be most serious - at the least causing the West great loss of face, increasing the feeling of hopelessness among the other satellites, bringing bloody reprisals down on participating Albanians and damaging U. S. relations in Western Europe.

f. Reaction by Russia or the Balkan satellites cannot be estimated accurately; it would certainly depend in large part upon the length of time intervening between initial acts of violence and the completed overthrow; the longer such an operation dragged on, the greater likelihood of direct intervention;

g. The present situation of Albania is not a malignant one except for the anti-regime Albanians; Albania is of no present real advantage, but rather an economic liability, to Russia or the Cominformist satellites, and in the event of war could be quickly over-run by Yugoslavia and Greece.

h. The U. S. and U. K. do not now possess a sufficient volume of accurate operational information on details of the Albanian situation to permit the drafting of a precise plan for overthrow of the regime.

i. Given a successful coup, in view of the extensive collaboration which would be required from Yugoslavia, it would be most difficult to prevent the Yugoslavs from assuming (although they might not openly claim) a position amounting to hegemony over Albania, with unpleasant repercussions in Greece and Italy.

j. In view of the political and psychological climate prevailing in Europe, it is unlikely that Britain, Italy or France would now view with favor an adventure of this magnitude and risk.

k. In view of presently strained relations between Yugoslavia and Italy, it is probable that the latter would adopt a position of exaggerated alarm in the event of an Albanian coup substantially sponsored by Yugoslavia, regardless of the true nature of Yugoslav intentions.

6. In the light of these circumstances, it would appear that, while detachment of Albania from the Kremlin orbit is within the realm of possibility, an effort to do so under the circumstances now prevailing would be unwise. It would require diplomatic exposure of U. S. intentions and clandestine operations to an undesirable extent. It would require a much closer collaboration with the Tito regime than presently exists or in the foreseeable future would appear to be advisable. If successful, it would impose an economic burden (albeit a relatively small one) upon the U. S., disturb the present delicate power balance in the Balkans, reopen the question of Greek territorial claims on Northern Epirus, lead to additional frictions between Italy and Yugoslavia and invite unpredictable retaliations.

If unsuccessful, the failure would produce a major psychological victory for the Kremlin and severely strain the relationships of the Western Allies.

7. Although the foregoing argues the unwisdom of attempting an Albanian coup under present or comparable circumstances, it would appear to be equally unwise for the United States to abandon or substantially reduce its present program of covert and clandestine action toward that country. Over a period of four years in this field, the U. S. has built up a respectable store of assets in the form of tested agents, political influence, followers both within and outside the country, operational material and know-how. These factors, although not in themselves sufficient to bring about detachment of Albania from the orbit, have value in their present utilization and would form a useful contribution to a broadened effort at a proper time. At the least, they serve to dampen any ambition by another power to attempt unilateral action. At the most, it can be argued that past and present U. S.-U. R. activities have contributed significantly to preventing the Kremlin from consolidating its hold over Albania and developing it into a useful political and strategic instrument. Additionally, liaison with the Yugoslav UDB has been established and joint service level discussions of the Albanian problem have been scheduled. Although it is too early to predict the outcome of these talks, there is some reason for hope that they will prepare the ground for closer collaboration in the future.

8. Cessation or drastic reduction of the present effort would either:

a. Result in collapse of the Albanian resistance and its Western-oriented emigre representation, or, much more probably,

b. Drive both internal and emigre resistance leaders into the Yugoslav camp, opening the way for uninhibited unilateral action by the Yugoslavs at a time considered propitious by them.

9. Consequently, it would appear a reasonable course of action to continue substantially according to the pattern of 1952, maintain a spirit of resistance by carefully-keyed propaganda, retain and strengthen our Albanian political assets, endeavor to achieve a broadening area of agreement with the Yugoslavs, and play for the breaks. Within this pattern, the tempo and extent of activities could be stepped up or down according to the dictates of circumstance and our own capabilities. Such a program would retain or augment our present assets, keep our bargaining power, and put us in a position to take more drastic action if considered national policy so required. It has been argued against this course that it will be impossible to maintain internal resistance much longer in the absence of more positive action. Certainly at some future point, the resistance spirit will be broken unless directed to decisive action. Available information, however, indicates no approaching breaking-point, but rather a hardened and more durable condition of resistance. In any event, a gradual recession of Albanian morale would have far less serious consequences than would a premature and unsuccessful coup.

(Signed) []

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