



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 April 1980

Personal

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter of 3 April.

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RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

Just what its strength should be is a matter of judgement, but I am not persuaded that we need a large standing force or that we should face difficulties in building it up if we needed to expand. As you say, this is a field where we have a certain flair, and I am sure that the right people would be found. I also believe that much of our success in the past stemmed from the use of a comparatively small force of high quality.

I have not put any classification on this letter but I know that you will handle it with appropriate discretion.

Yours

Raymond

The Rt. Hon. Julian Amery, M.P.

BH



10 DOWNING STREET

Draft prepared by FCO
& cleared with 'C' - see
background letter attached.

Ant
- 16/4



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Type for PM's signature.

16 April 1980

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 3 April enclosing a letter to the Prime Minister from Mr Julian Amery about our capacity to undertake subversive operations. I am returning Mr Amery's letter, together with a draft reply from the Prime Minister.

Mr Amery's letter is similar in substance to letters from Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker, who wrote to Lord Carrington from the Special Forces Club in January, and from Lord Mais, who wrote last October.

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We do not think however that Mr Amery need be briefed on these points.

Mr Amery suggests that the 'old hands from SOE and PWE' should be consulted about building up our strength for covert operations. Our friends see no advantage in this and a number of potential disasters.

'C', who is himself a former member of SOE, has seen and agreed the proposed reply.

Yours etc

P Lever
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM: The Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT: TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO: The Right Honourable
Julian Amery MP
112 Eaton Square
LONDON SW1W 9AA

Your Reference

Top Secret

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your letter of 3 April.

CAVEAT.....

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Enclosures—flag(s).....

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SECRET

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3 April 1980

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Mr. Julian Amery about the possibility of reviving the SOE or something like it. I should be grateful if you could let me have a draft reply which the Prime Minister might send to Mr. Amery. It would be helpful if this could reach me by close of play on Tuesday 15 April.

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

SECRET

ABO

ell
GR

Many thanks for your letter of
2 April about your recent trip to the
Gulf. I have read it with considerable
interest.

I shall be replying separately to
your letter to me of 3 April on a different
subject.

The Rt. Hon. Julian Amery, M.P.

FROM: THE RT. HON. JULIAN AMERY, M.P.

112, EATON SQUARE,

SWIW 9AA

TEL: 01-235 1543
01-235 7409

Secret

3rd April, 1980.

Dear Margaret,

Under the last Government a decision was taken by the Reserve Forces Association in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence to disband their Resistance and Psychological Operations Committee. I thought this is mistake at the time partly because I was given to understand that General Haig, then SACUR, was opposed to it and partly because the RPOC seemed to keep together a nucleus of people with experience of the kind of work PWE and SOE did during the last war.

I tried to get the decision reversed; unsuccessfully. I suspect myself, though I have no evidence on the point, that this may have been partly due to a reluctance on the part of Labour Ministers to encourage what would inevitably have been anti Soviet activities.

After we came into office I reopened the matter with Francis Pym. Francis fully appreciates the importance of Resistance, psychological warfare and counter subversion operations but, after giving the matter a good deal of thought, considers that this is not an appropriate responsibility for the armed forces in peace time.

I do not dispute the conclusion. My concern is that we should have a sufficiently strong nucleus organisation to conduct Special Operations as distinct from the Intelligence and at least a register of suitable people who could be called upon in case of need.

I was associated with what later became SOE from the early days of the war when it was still called the "D" section of MI6. It had been hurriedly put together after the Munich Agreements under an enterprising Major Lawrence Grand who managed to supplement the tiny budget on which he had to operate by getting a grant from the late mining tycoon Alfred Chester Beatty. The organisation was literally run on a shoe string and was much too small to make anything like the contribution it might otherwise have made in the critical years of 1940 and 1941. It was not until well into 1941 that it was developed into a significant organisation responsible to the Minister of Economic Warfare.

We are not at war in the formal sense but, as Peter Carrington has rightly stressed, there are signs that special operations and subversion are already major elements in the east-west power struggle. I am not saying, at least for the purpose of this letter, that Britain ought to be supporting the resistance in Afghanistan or Angola; but surely we ought to be able to do so if we so wished and thought it useful. This is a type of operation for which we have many qualified people and a certain national flair. As far as I know there is not even a register kept of younger people who might be called upon for this sort of work in an emergency.



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To the best of my knowledge [redacted] and there are in any case some risks in combining operations with intelligence.

My purpose in writing is to ask whether, in an increasingly darkening international scene, the Government ought not to be taking more active steps to revive SOE or something like it. It may be that more is being done than I know about. This was certainly not the case when I was responsible for that side of things at the Foreign Office in our last Government and I should be very surprised if the Labour Government had done anything very much about it.

If you wanted to do something on these lines there are still a few old hands from SOE and PWE who might be worth consulting about how best to proceed. But the first step must be to decide whether this is a capability we need.

gr am,
Julian.

The Rt.Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.