Operations 238

Printed for the War Cabinet. January 1943.

4

MOST SECRET.

Copy No. 10

W.P. (43) 27.

January 14, 1943.

1t/43/1

TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY

It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure the secrecy of this document

WAR CABINET.

PROPOSAL RECEIVED FROM CERTAIN ANTI-FASCIST ELEMENTS IN ITALY.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

S.O.E. have for some time been in touch, through an intermediary, with Marshal Badoglio and Marshal Caviglia in Italy.

2. It now appears that Marshal Badoglio is willing at the right moment to take over and establish a military Government. He wishes to send an emissary, General Pesenti, to Cyrenaica to discuss with His Majesty's Government co-ordinated action from outside and inside Italy, aimed at the overthrow of the Fascist régime.

3. Marshal Badoglio is probably the most likely Italian personality to lead a successful anti-Fascist movement and to attract the most sympathy and support inside Italy. Marshal Caviglia, who commanded the Italian army at the battle of Vittorio Veneto, is now about 80 years old, but between them they would probably have a powerful and influential following of anti-Fascist elements in Italy. General Pesenti does not appear to have played any part in politics, which renders his choice for the present purpose suitable. He was General Officer Commanding in Somaliland from 1939 till January 1941, when he was recalled to Italy for a reason unknown.

4. Marshal Badoglio asks for no assurances regarding the future. All that he asks is (1) that General Pesenti should discuss with us co-ordinated action to take place at a given moment; and (2) that General Pesenti should be given facilities for recruiting a force from among the Italians resident abroad and prisoners of war.

5. The disadvantage in agreeing to Marshal Badoglio's suggestion would be that if General Pesenti succeeds in forming a force, we shall be committed to supporting him and the two Marshals. This might be embarrassing if subsequently it was felt that some other personality was more likely to succeed in forming an anti-Fascist movement than these two Marshals. We should also run the risk of being saddled with a nondescript force of doubtful military value, which might indulge in unwelcome political activities and try to extort undesirable political concessions from us.

6. The advantages in agreeing to allow General Pesenti to come out of Italy would be (*a*) we should obtain valuable information about conditions and the situation in Italy and the extent of underground movements; (*b*) if General Pesenti succeeded in forming an Italian force outside Italy its existence might have considerable effect on discontented elements in Italy; (*c*) it would be useful to have a force on the lines of the "Garibaldi" force if and when Allied operations take place in Italy, especially as a man of Marshal Badoglio's standing might be of value to us when the crack in the Fascist régime approaches.

7. I should not, however, be in favour of agreeing in advance to Marshal Badoglio's two points, because I think it would be unwise of us to pledge ourselves before we had been able to form an opinion as to General Pesenti's credentials in the matter of discussing co-ordinated action with him or as to his personal qualifications for rallying Italian prisoners of war and refugees.

8. Provided, however, that it is made clear that we cannot discuss any conditions with Marshal Badoglio's emissary in Switzerland, and that General Pesenti must be prepared to come out unconditionally, I consider that advantage should be taken of the approach which has been made to us and that S.O.E. should proceed with the scheme.

9. If General Pesenti does come out, special arrangements will have to be made as to how and by whom he is to be interviewed, and I would wish to stipulate that at any such interview no offers should be made or undertakings given to him without previous reference to the Foreign Office.

10. If it is decided to respond to the approach, we should no doubt inform the United States and Soviet Governments.

A. E.

Foreign Office, January 14, 1943.