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**PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGY BOARD  
WASHINGTON**

May 29, 1953

*Received too late  
for summarization.  
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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. C. E. Johnson

Through: Dr. H. S. Craig

From: Charles H. Taquey *CH*

Subject: Certain Actions Aimed at Influencing Unfavorable Foreign  
States of Mind - Suggestions and Comments.

Reference: Your request of May 27 and Mr. Morgan's draft  
memorandum.

1. Suggestions.

a) Rosenberg case: That the President reconsider the Rosenberg case, not only on the basis of its legal merits and security implications, but also on the basis of its psychological impact abroad. I understand that the Supreme Court decision to reject the third Rosenberg appeal opens a new recourse to the White House. On the other hand, I think that the build-up of the case by the Communists since the last Presidential decision reveals a clear intent on the part of the Kremlin to make some kind of martyrs out of the Rosenbergs and, in any case, to shut their mouths forever. The Rosenbergs are more useful to the Communist cause dead than alive. As a consequence, we should examine whether the very serious reasons which militate in favor of capital punishment for their crime are still strong enough to withstand the psychological advantages which would result abroad from the outcome of a clemency measure. I submit that the powers of the President in matters of clemency being discretionary, the national interest requires that such powers be exercised on the basis of a careful evaluation of all the effects of a decision on national security in its broad rather than in its narrow sense. It may well be argued that clemency would be evidence of weakness, or that capital punishment is necessary as a deterrent, or that the public revulsion at the magnitude of the crime requires the heaviest penalty. These are very valid arguments, and they might prevail. However, there is no justification for failing to explore the entire scope of the Rosenbergs' execution, particularly the impact of such a decision on foreign psychology, and its effect on U.S. prestige and U.S. leadership. The risk that a measure of clemency will be taken as a show of weakness is very farfetched at the present time. A powerfully-worded statement can present the obvious truth: namely that we do

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not yield to Communist pressure but smoke out Communist strategy. Moreover, no circumstances are more opportune for a commutation measure than those created by the execution of the alleged American spies in the Ukraine. True, the Rosenbergs are traitors, whereas these people were only supposed to be spies, but this a fortiori aspect of the problem would only enhance the psychological impact of clemency in the Rosenberg case. This is an opportunity for demonstrating vividly the contrast between a free society sure of itself, cool and discreet in wielding its power of punishment, and a slave society which can stand only on the corpses of its victims. Of course such a decision will have to be taken promptly to forestall a new clemency campaign: it would be self-defeating indeed to appear to yield to the pressure of such a renewed campaign, whereas now we can take advantage of the lull between two campaigns. The announcement of a clemency measure should be carefully worded and given the necessary balanced play by all U.S. media. Some of the arguments displayed in the attached WASHINGTON POST editorial might be useful.

How? ✓  
b) The way forward. An approach which might go a long way to restore good will among free nations would be to emphasize officially an idea expressed at a meeting of the House Un-American Activities Committee some three or four weeks ago. I do not recall the exact statement, but one of the members of the Committee said that the great problem for the United States was not only that of detecting and punishing subversion, but also that of providing the spiritual way out to misguided individuals who, sometimes under the influence of high ideals, have joined the Communist cause. By helping such individuals to find the way forward (I do not say the way back, for this phraseology might imply an idea that they are leaving something "advanced" and progressive) we would do ourselves a great service, not only in the short term, by fostering a flow of intelligence which, because of the fear of community reaction, still remains hidden, but also, from a long-term point of view, for such individuals, when the opportunity is open to them to honorably recant, can in many cases be made useful members of our society. This may require explanation. What is meant is not - or not only - the possibility of access to government employment after a kind of "probation period", and other administrative measures of this kind, but an emphasis and a generalization of the attitude of a Christian society which accepts forgiveness as one of the bases of human relations. I think that this approach would have a tremendous appeal abroad since foes of America - and some of its friends - blame it for a "legalistic" attitude, for a tendency to sacrifice the "individual" to the abstract. The best way to show them that they are wrong is to reaffirm our belief in the value of pardon. I attach some quotations on this subject from the book by Morris L. Ernst and David Loth, "Report on the American Communist".



EDITORIAL IN WASHINGTON POST, MAY 28, 1953:

### JUSTICE AND PROPAGANDA

Once again the Supreme Court has declined to hear arguments that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg should be given a new trial. The decision seems to us eminently sound and correct. The direct and circumstantial evidence that the Rosenbergs were guilty of helping to transmit vital military secrets relating to the production of the atomic bomb to Soviet Russia was powerful and convincing. Nor is there, as far as we can see, the least indication that the trial at which the Rosenbergs were convicted was anything but fair and complete.

The only valid question is one that is entirely outside the purview of the Supreme Court. The question is whether it is the part of political wisdom to permit the death sentences imposed upon the Rosenbergs to be executed. The answer can be given only by President Eisenhower, who must determine whether or not to exercise his powers of clemency by commuting the sentences.

It should be recognized that death is one of the alternative penalties prescribed by the statute; the other would have been imprisonment up to a maximum of 30 years. It is no criticism of Judge Irving R. Kaufman, who imposed the death sentences, to suggest that the value of this case to the international Communist propaganda would have been far less if the milder penalty had been imposed. There was no reason for him to have taken such an extraneous factor into account; to have done so would have been a departure from the position of objective impartiality that a judge must preserve.

Yet President Eisenhower can hardly ignore the fact that the Rosenberg case has become a powerful instrument of anti-American agitation abroad, especially in those countries where the Communist minority is powerful and vociferous. Pope Pius XII found it discreet to notify both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations through the Apostolic Delegate that he had received many appeals to intervene in behalf of mercy. The unhappy truth is that whether the Rosenbergs live or die, Communist propaganda stands to benefit. If they are electrocuted, they can be represented, after the analogy of Sacco and Vanzetti, as victims and martyrs to American capitalist tyranny and class hatred. But if the sentence is commuted, it will be taken in many quarters as another sign of the powerful pressures that international communism is able to exert even upon its enemies.

These, it seems to us, are some of the considerations President Eisenhower must take in mind when a fresh campaign for executive clemency is launched, as it will be when Judge Kaufman has set a new date for execution of the sentence. He should recognize that the efficacy of the Communist propaganda in the Rosenberg case has not been diminished by its palpable fraudulence and irrationality. But



he can take it for granted that the Communist leaders care nothing about the personal fate of the Rosenbergs. In all probability the Communists would prefer to have them die, since death would seal their mouths forever.

