

PAO 90-0152

20 April 1990

JUDGE:

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RE: Radio Free Europe and the 1956 Hungarian Uprising

During your breakfast meeting with Cord Meyer yesterday, you discussed whether Radio Free Europe (RFE) had in fact broadcast promises of Western assistance during the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Cord, who in 1954 took over responsibility within the CIA for the conduct of RFE and Radio Liberty, mentioned that he devoted a chapter of his 1980 book, Facing Reality, to this issue. In this chapter, which I have attached as Tab A, Cord makes the following points:

- "The role (of RFE in the Hungarian uprising) was and remains controversial. The first and most serious charge against RFE was that it had deliberately incited and provoked the Hungarian uprising and that it would not have occurred without the inflammatory broadcasts of RFE....In fact, it became an article of faith in certain liberal circles to believe that RFE had irresponsibly caused the Hungarian revolt and had innocent blood on its hands." (pp. 125-126)
- "After the Hungarian revolt was crushed, my office in the Agency, with the help of two Hungarian-speaking analysts, did a careful review of the taped broadcasts that had been made in the weeks before the revolution. We could not find evidence that in this period RFE had violated the standing instructions against inciting to violence or promising external assistance." (p. 126)
- "Far from having planned or directed the Hungarian uprising, both RFE and officials in Washington were taken very much by surprise when the fighting broke out." (p. 127)
- "From my own exposure to these events and from the findings of the working group within the Agency that reviewed the taped RFE broadcasts, I am satisfied that RFE did not plan, direct, or attempt to provoke the Hungarian rebellion....Two independent and objective reviews of RFE's taped broadcasts were later undertaken and reached the same conclusion. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer directed that a study of the tapes be made by the West German government in response to press criticism, and on January 25, 1957, he announced that there was no evidence that RFE had incited the revolt by promises of Western assistance. A similar review by a special committee of the Council of Europe also found RFE not guilty." (p. 127)

While Meyer points out that RFE did replay revolutionary demands on its powerful transmitters, he emphasizes: "...The radio did not act irresponsibly but as the disciplined instrument of a conscious policy decision by the Eisenhower Administration. To have refused to replay these internal broadcasts would not have altered the course of events because by the time this rebroadcasting began the revolution had already achieved an irresistible momentum." (p. 128)

Meyer adds, however, that the tone of RFE broadcast tapes was "more exuberant and optimistic than the situation warranted," and he notes that the content of one particular script "clearly violated the basic policy guidelines and should never have been broadcast." (p. 130)

Sig Mickelson, former president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Inc. and author of America's Other Voice: The Story of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, also wrote about RFE's role during the Hungarian uprising.

In Chapter 10, attached as Tab B, he makes the following points:

- "The critical question remained: did or did not the (RFE) Hungarian desk promise that Western aid was forthcoming or already on the way? Examination of the scripts broadcast reveals that no promise was ever made quite that bluntly, but there were some broadcasts that might have encouraged an excited freedom fighter to infer such a promise. There is a wide gap, of course, between implications that aid is forthcoming and an actual promise that it is on the way." (p. 99)
- "RFE's own internal analysis, stimulated largely by the request of the federal government of Germany for information for its own investigation, indicated that of some 308 separate items studied, 16 were careless enough in construction to be considered suspect even though not outright violations of policy." (p. 100)

These two authoritative works by Cord Meyer and Sig Mickelson clearly indicate that RFE did not plan, direct, or attempt to provoke the Hungarian uprising. But the perception exists -- as was charged in the Soviet media at the time -- that RFE "fomented, organized, and directed the revolution."

I have highlighted and clipped appropriate passages from these two books.

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Attachments:  
As stated

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