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11-00618/85

4 February 1985

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH: Deputy Director for Intelligence ☐  
Acting Director of Soviet Analysis

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FROM: ☐  
Senior Analyst, Office of Soviet Analysis,  
Policy Analysis DivisionSUBJECT: Results of 24 January Consultation on  
the Semantics of Disinformation

1. Action required: Attachment A to this information memorandum presents for your approval a tentative agenda for our planned conference on disinformation. At Attachment B is a similar agenda, containing a first cut at identifying possible speakers, for your comment.
2. Our consultation with outside scholars and State Department officials helped to clarify the important substantive issues for the proposed conference. The attached agenda represents what the CIA members of the consultative group distilled from the ideas raised at the meeting. We are sending this draft agenda to our consultants for their comments and suggestions on speakers for specific topics. (The group's members are listed in Attachment C.)
3. It was clear from the outset that the notions variously described as "semantic pollution," "disinformation," and "propaganda rhetoric" added up to something everyone around the table generally understood and agreed was important, but not to a single concept the group could easily define. The group decided to broaden the focus beyond "disinformation," because it failed to encompass a whole range of important and related issues: how messages impact on different target audiences and why Western audiences are so susceptible to images introduced from the outside and so inarticulate and slack in response; the linkage between language and culture (how rhetoric reflects cultural attitudes and modes of thinking); the historical dimension (how values and meanings attached to words evolve); the international relations context of propaganda; how the nature of modern communications affects the ways in which verbal warfare is waged and perceptions are created and cultivated; and the important underlying role of ideology. By the close of the meeting there was general agreement that the proposed conference should span

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both the rhetoric of political discourse and the techniques of disinformation. We also agreed that to be manageable and coherent, it should focus on the Soviet Union--the main source of the rhetoric and disinformation with which we are primarily concerned. 25X1

4. [ ] expressed the view that if the conference is to have tangible impact it should result in policy guidelines for effective counter-efforts. The consensus of the group, however, was that a prescription for counteraction should be reserved for follow-on deliberation and that the proposed conference should pursue the first-step goals of heightening awareness of the problem and elucidating its dimensions. That is a tall order in itself.

5. The group settled tentatively on a title like "Contemporary Soviet Propaganda and Disinformation" and decided that two days would be a reasonable length for the conference. As Attachment A indicates, we envisage an introductory overview, a discussion of the ideological framework, and a series of case studies that would elucidate various aspects--the historical dimension, the cultural and political contexts, the nature of the Soviet propaganda apparatus, and the rhetorical techniques that are brought into play--as well as a concluding assessment. The case-study approach seems the best way to attack a problem so resistant to precise definition. It was felt that speakers should include [ ] as well as Western scholars. 25X1

6. The audience probably should represent a range of disciplines and professions, including journalists, former negotiators, psychologists, semanticists, political scientists, public opinion and marketing people, Kremlinologists, and propaganda analysts. We recognize that more needs to be done in introducing more specialized skills (semanticists, psychologists, etc.) into the list of participants at Attachment B, and are working on this.

7. We will soon be negotiating the administrative aspects of co-sponsorship with the State Department. From a practical point of view, we should probably allow 4-5 months for organizing the composition of the conference and allowing speakers sufficient time to research and prepare papers on their topics. We also plan to put together a reading list in advance of the conference to spur some thinking and enrich the discussion. Meanwhile, we await your comments on the conference design and composition. 25X1

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## Attachments:

- A. Tentative Agenda
- B. Possible Speakers
- C. Participants in 24 January 1985 Consultation

## CONCUR:

[Redacted]

Acting Director of Soviet Analysis

2/7/85  
Date

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[Redacted]

Deputy Director for Intelligence

*(hold conference sooner rather than later)*

2/4/85  
Date

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## APPROVE:

*AM L Gray*

Director of Central Intelligence

19 APR 1985  
Date

SOVA/SA/ [Redacted] (4 February 85)

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*This looks terrific - excellent list of participants*

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