

CONFIDENTIAL

DDI - ~~07/04/85~~ / 85

DDI Chrono

12 August 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
VIA: Deputy Director for Intelligence
Director of Soviet Analysis

FROM:
Senior Analyst for National Issues
Office of Soviet Analysis

25X1

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the Airlie House
Discussion on Disinformation

1. Action required: None. This memorandum presents for your information some preliminary results on the structure of Soviet propaganda and disinformation, as gleaned from the first several hundred pages of transcripts from the Airlie House conference. We estimate that the transcription of the entire proceedings, when completed, will comprise about 800 pages. In addition, the 13 formal papers total almost 500 pages. As I believe you are aware, we intend to synopsise the conference proceedings in a conference report that will include the formal papers. The State Department will publish and disseminate the final product.

Ideology and Language

2. It was clear from the conference discussion that Marxist-Leninist theory determines the semantic structure of Soviet propaganda and disinformation. The Soviet world view relates all human activities to world revolution. In Soviet thinking, everything that promotes this process is good, right, and true, while everything that hampers it is bad, wrong, and false. The dichotomy between Soviet "socialism" and Western "capitalism" results in numerous stereotypes in Soviet discourse and rules out certain others. For example, "Soviet imperialism" is literally nonsense in terms of Marxist-Leninist ideology, inasmuch as the term "imperialism" is defined as a particular stage of capitalism. Therefore, to the extent that these terms

25X1

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the Airlie House
Discussion on Disinformation

of reference are accepted by an audience, actual Soviet imperial behavior is unthinkable, a contradiction in terms.

3. Two major campaigns in recent years illustrate how the Soviet ideology sets the terms of international discourse. The first is the so-called peace program, and the second is foreign "nonintervention." Soviet socialism is, by definition of the ideology, opposed to war and in favor of peace; only Western capitalists and imperialists are "warmongers." Thus, to be for the peace program means to be in favor of disarming the warmongering opposition. Similarly, as socialists the Soviets would never admit that they "intervene" in another country's affairs--they have no such "insidious designs." "Nonintervention" is a prescription applied to Western capitalists and means that Western countries should undertake no political or military resistance to the extension of communist revolution.

4. As the above examples show, Soviet propaganda and disinformation tend toward a stylized stereotyping, complete with required epithets. The Soviet government is never said to have "designs," which connote an insidious character and are attributed to the US and the Pentagon. The Soviet regime, on the contrary, always has "plans" which are "creative." In general, these stereotypes and epithets have evolved out of the ideology to connote an indisputable positiveness about Soviet life and an indisputable negativeness about Western life. Interestingly, the negative stereotypes applied to the West often have, in Russian, an archaic flavor--perhaps reflecting the Soviet propagandists' attempt to portray the western world as obsolete and subject to being superseded by the next stage of history.

Semantic Tactics

5. The Soviets have developed a number of conscious and consistently applied tactics in the use of language to give ideological meaning to all concepts and strategies. Because the Soviets believe that language and morality are inseparable--as moral values are dependent on language for realization--they engage in constant repetition of communist terms and constructs in order to condition people's thinking and create feelings of helplessness in the face of (what Soviets perceive and portray as) communist moral superiority.

6. A related tactic that Soviet propagandists use is to alternate individually weak arguments in rapid succession in the hope that they will be convincing cumulatively. One example of this would be the seemingly contradictory arguments about the impermissibility of nuclear war and the winnability of nuclear

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the Airlie House
Discussion on Disinformation

war. The overall effect is to suggest that the Soviets view nuclear war as morally impermissible but physically winnable--once again, putting themselves on the side of the angels.

7. Similarly, the Soviets try to occupy the high ground through an offensive tactic of occupying a position of principled extremeness (the adversary is placed at the opposite extreme). Thus, as the Soviets see themselves occupying the extreme-principled left, the political word "left" must be placed in quotation marks if it refers to an adversary of the Soviet Union.

8. Soviet propagandists try also to anticipate an opposition's objections by framing their own plans in a way to preempt the objections. For example, if greater party control over scientific research is desired but expected to lead to objections from scientists that this will deaden scientific creativity, then the propagandist will anticipate the objection and state that "tighter party control over scientific research is the way to enhance creativity."

9. Another tactic is to try to discredit an adversary in the very characteristic for which he is esteemed. Thus, Soviet propagandists attacked Alexander Ginsburg, the trustee of the Solzhensitzen Fund in the USSR, as a self-dealer and a wastrel, although he was noted for selfless devotion to his trust and a frugal way of life. The history of regime attacks on prominent dissidents in recent years for allegedly self-seeking behavior is replete with examples of this tactic. In the same way, because the US has a worldwide reputation as a rich, free, and peaceful country, Soviet propagandists try to discredit it as not rich but either poor with millions of unemployed or profligate and wasteful, not free but enthralled to this or that oppressor in its society, and not peaceful but bellicose in its international behavior.

Disinformation Ploys

10. A standard tactic in disinformation campaigns involves the language of prejudice or self-deception. As an example of prejudice, if an Asian or African politician becomes too pro-Western, the Soviets will label him as a CIA agent. Although the politician may protest the falsity of the label, a residue of suspicion may remain (so the Soviets hope). In trying to take advantage of self-deception, Soviet active measures play upon the audience's political and cultural biases, sending messages it wants to hear. An example of this might be a campaign to convince the Indians that the CIA was trying to overthrow their government. The campaign might be successful in India, although a similar ploy could not succeed in, say, Canada, because the

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the Airlie House
Discussion on Disinformation

historical experience of Canadians would tell them, "Nonsense, the Americans would not do this."

11. Most propagandistic disinformation is an act of opportunity intended to promote the long-term interests of the Soviet Union. For example, the Soviets probably were not concerned that their crude forgery of a Ku Klux Klan letter on the Olympics was exposed, because it was not designed for US audiences; rather, it would be likely to have Third World audiences in mind, and a long-term psychological aim may have been achieved.

12. Because active measures serve long-term Soviet purposes, they must be carefully considered and prepared, requiring considerable time in planning. Soviet propagandists and disinformation specialists, however, can and do avail themselves of arguments and debates that are openly aired inside an adversary's society, replaying critical views in an effort to justify Soviet positions to foreign and domestic audiences. During the first few months after they shot down the Korean airliner in 1983, for example, the Soviets collected stories from the Western press that supported their claim that the plane was on a spy mission. Then, for a few months before the first anniversary of the shootdown, anticipating that it would be the subject of renewed Western interest and attacks on the Soviet Union, the regime started a disinformation campaign to claim that the plane was destroyed by a bomb placed on the plane by the CIA in order to destroy evidence of spying and cover tracks. This follows a principle of Soviet rhetoric that parallels the Big Lie and might be called the Bigger and Bigger Lie--trying to show that what is good is growing better faster, and what is bad is growing worse faster. This has been described as the "constant crescendo."

Conclusions

13. The above highlights of the Airlie House conference, which far from exhaust its findings, reveal the organic link between Soviet ideological goals and their consistent, conscious pursuit of a complexly structured, purposeful program of propaganda and disinformation. Despite, however, the verbal attachment to Marxism-Leninism and the use of what may be perceived in the West as ludicrous stereotypes, Soviet propagandists are capable of making rather crude adjustments to the philosophy and argumentation in order to explain discrepancies between theory and practice. In fact, all participants agreed that a hallmark of Soviet propaganda and disinformation is flexibility. This, of course, complicates even more the task of analyzing an already complicated problem.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the
Discussion on Disinformation

25X1

Further work on this moving target is needed, involving more case studies.



25X1

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: Some Highlights From the Airlie House
Discussion on Disinformation

DDI/SOVA/NIG/ [redacted] (9 August 85)

25X1

Distribution:

Orig - Addressee (w/Attach)

1 - ER

1 - DDI

1 - D/SOVA

1 - NIG Chrono

CONFIDENTIAL