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KREMLIN SAID STOKING "BLACK PROPAGANDA" CAMPAIGN AGAINST U.S.
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WASHINGTON

Newspaper readers around the world have encountered some astonishing assertions about the United States in recent years. They have read, for example, that:

-- The killer disease AIDS was sparked by a CIA experiment on the immune system that got dangerously out of control. This story circulated in newspapers in India last year.

-- Over two-thirds of U.S. nuclear bomber crew members suffer from "psychoneurotic" symptoms, including irrational, violent behavior. (European newspapers, early 1980s).

-- The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was linked to the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. (Indian papers, 1984.)

-- U.S. intelligence agents were involved in poisoning Brazilian Indians and dumping poison into the Amazon River. (Latin American papers, early 1980s.)

-- The United States intended to deploy nuclear missiles in South Africa. (Black African newspapers, early 1980s.)

U.S. officials say these reports and others like them were not only false but were classic examples of Soviet "disinformation" or "black propaganda": lies or half-truths planted by the KGB spy service to discredit Washington in neutral countries or sow tensions with U.S. allies.

The officials, who monitor KGB activities, said many false stories were based on fake U.S. documents created by ever-more adept forgers in Service A of the KGB's First Directorate.

While the Americans make international deception seem like a Kremlin invention, it has a long history and the CIA itself has engaged in black propaganda over the years -- as some of its former directors have admitted in congressional testimony.

The authoritative Aviation Week magazine said in a March issue that U.S. officials had been feeding the press bogus information on "Stealth" radar-eluding technology and "Star Wars" space-defense weapons in hopes of

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confusing Soviet planners.

U.S. officials continue to warn, however, that Soviet disinformation efforts are on the upswing and the outpouring of fake documents, some with facsimiles of President Reagan's signature, are passed to journalists who often are taken in.

The U.S. Information Agency has begun a campaign to expose what it says are anti-American hoaxes cooked up by Moscow.

Washington's focus on the issue has raised these basic questions. How extensive are Kremlin black propaganda efforts? How seriously should the West take them?

And what of America's own disinformation gambits?

Soviet bloc defectors such as Service A veteran Ilya Dzhirkvelov and ex-Czechoslovak intelligence agent Ladislav Bittman have told reporters that Kremlin black propaganda efforts are large indeed, involving 15,000-20,000 full-time agents and an estimated annual budget of \$1 billion.

Dzhirkvelov, who met the press for the first time recently in Washington, said Service A handled not only forgeries but a range of "active measures" to shape foreign opinion -- bribing reporters, funding front groups, infiltrating peace campaigns.

Dzhirkvelov said he himself had worked in a campaign to discredit conservative West German politician Franz Josef Strauss in 1960, helping plant articles in Swiss, French and German publications that falsely named Strauss as a CIA spy.

The Kremlin credited the campaign with preventing Strauss, an anti-communist, from becoming chancellor, Dzhirkvelov said.

Soviet defector Stanislav Levchenko, a KGB agent in Japan in the 1970s, has said he bribed key Japanese journalists. Bittman has also described disinformation operations to tar West German officials with the Nazi brush.

Intelligence specialists such as Roy Godson of Georgetown University in Washington say disinformation must be taken very seriously. Over the long term, he said, it can corrode the U.S. image and undermine support where it is needed most.

Diplomats say disinformation is especially effective in the Third World where distrust of America already runs high.

For example a bogus U.S. Army "Field Manual 30-31B", which supposedly tells officers how to subvert foreign governments, has sparked news articles in some 20 developing countries.

The diplomats complain that many forgeries resurface long after they were first exposed as fakes and attain credibility simply by virtue of repetition -- much like the notorious turn-of-the-century "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion."

The "Protocols", a bogus blueprint for an international Jewish conspiracy, were first exposed as a fraud in 1921, but are still occasionally cited as

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