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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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PUBLIC OPINION OF RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES

AS IT RELATES TO THEIR NATIONAL STRATEGY

12 December 1958

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INTRODUCTION

Within a dictatorial power the relationship of public opinion to national strategy is, admittedly, more than likely nil. Throughout all democracies, however, and at first blush, but few citizens will challenge the significant role it plays in all facets of government both at home and abroad. Yet a closer examination of the final product of our own foreign policy may raise the doubts as to its being a true reflection of the opinions of the tritely expressed "man in the street".

The question which comes to mind is: Should our national strategy conform to the main-street version or should foreign policy be the consensus of the intellectual group which has taken the time as well as the interest to make a thorough study and scientific analysis of the long range plan? Therefore, to reach a better understanding of the effect of public opinion on Soviet or United States strategy an examination of the public information programs of the bi-polar powers will be undertaken to compare efforts, match the similarities of the state programs, point out the strengths of each, study the weakness of each and finally to draw some conclusions as to the measure of influence (if any) the general public can have on Russia's or United States' national strategy.

PUBLIC OPINION OF RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES

AS IT RELATES TO THEIR NATIONAL STRATEGY

CHAPTER I

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM OF THE SOVIETS

In the murky twilight of a cold December night in 1912 three Slavic figures gathered at a sidewalk cafe on the Champs Elysesto plot the destiny of a vast empire. Huddled tightly around a small table each of the three men--destitute and desperate--made prophetic contributions to the master plot. As conversation rose to crescendo, "Ubezhdatsaid one. "That is it -- Ubezhdats". (To persuade or to convince.) His name was Lenin. "Ubezhdats", said another man with equal enthusiasm. His name was Trotsky. "Ubezhdats" echoed the youngest of the trio whose name was Stalin. Thus, was born the core of the explosive force which was soon to envelop mother Russia.

An active policy for "influencing the mood of the masses"¹ was formulated and almost all of the work done in the USSR has been guided by the formula "who says what to whom with what effect."² Can we read into this anything but a balance of coercion and persuasion? All societies rely, to some degree, on coercion and persuasion. But, by coercion we ordinarily mean the exercise of force by constituted authorities against individuals who violate the law, and by persuasion; the effort to convince individuals through personal contact to act in accord with social values. In contrast,

¹ V. I. Lenin, Selected Works, P. 34.

² P. F. Lazarsfeld and F. Stanton, Communications Research 1948-49, PP. XIII-XIV.

Lenin used coercion to mean the application of force against whole segments or classes of the population, including the very working class on which the regime rested. And by persuasion he meant organized, systematic, concerted campaigns to change the attitudes and influence the actions of large social groups.¹

In any modern society, where there is but a drop of democracy, campaigns of mass persuasion by government, except in time of grave crisis, have been and are viewed with suspicion.

Let us take a look at the propaganda system of the Soviets or examine how their mass communication works. Since exposure to a steady flow of propaganda and agitation is a major facet of the daily life of every Soviet Citizen, no assessment of his life situation can be complete if it does not take account of that fact. Furthermore, Soviet philosophy and practice in the realm of public opinion are important indexes to the nature of the regime.² There can be no mistake that the efforts of the Soviet regime to facilitate their tasks of leadership are to mobilize the minds and efforts of the population by means of propaganda and agitation. How is this to be done? First, the Soviet leader's mind analyzes that of the many types of communication; each always has had potentialities for influencing human attitudes and actions, therefore mass communication implies mass influence. But where do you start?

"Ubezhdats" urged Lenin -- "its tool is the worker." The Russians turned to personal oral agitation. The media

¹ A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. 3.

² A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. XI.

and films are likewise "tools" of the party and supported by them. "For in the U.S.S.R. cost is largely figured in terms of the contribution the media are able to make to effective party leadership. In that sense, the propaganda and agitation carried by the Soviet media are the functional equivalent of advertising in the United States; both pay the way for the operation as a whole."¹

Since we are considering public opinion, do we not have to take in account that part which the opinions held by the general public plays in the operation of the Soviet Government? The answer in Russia, is of course, no; "Bolshevik theory does not disregard public opinion. Its emphasis, however, more or less completely rejects following public opinion and stresses the prime need to shape and mold it."² If this can not be accomplished by normal means, there are other ways. Stalin even "asserted that the prime reliance on persuasion not only does not exclude the use of compulsion when necessary, but as a matter of fact pre-supposes it."³

It is a problem which continually faces the U.S.S.R. to find the proper agitators, for only personal conviction on the part of the agitator and the essential "truth" of his message can effectively serve to convince the masses.

In the theory "who says what to whom with what effect?" the "who" is the Communist Party always, but the "what" remains that doctrine as interpreted and promulgated by the choice few currently in charge of the party. The "to whom" is all the people within the Soviet orbit and to as many

¹ A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. 24.

² Ibid, P. 24.

³ Ibid, P. 20.

outside their sphere of influence as they can reach. But the "with what effect" is not quite as delimited. As Mr. Walter Millis stated in his lecture, public opinion is filled with "Massive intangibles".

... the hallmark of the conventional wisdom is acceptability. It has the approval of those to whom it is addressed. These are the many reasons why people like to hear articulated that which they approve. It serves the ego; the individual knows that he is supported in his thoughts--that he has not been left behind and alone. Further, to hear what one approves serves the evangelizing instinct. It means that others are also hearing and are thereby in process of being persuaded.¹

The public information program within Soviet Russia is completely in the hands of the Communist Party. It is administratively controlled through the Department of Propaganda and Agitation. The Eighteenth Congress resolved that the Central Committee should have a powerful apparatus for propaganda and agitation and all phases of both the printed and oral propaganda must be centrally administered. "There is no realm of intellectual endeavor, no form of organized activity which might conceivably influence public opinion, which the party exempts from scrutiny and control."² What is the difference between propaganda and agitation? Harold D. Lasswell, probably the best-known and most quoted authority on the subject, says that, although agitation specifies a method of collective influence, there is no consensus in distinguishing the term from propaganda, non-violent coercion, and other expressions.³

Communist propaganda is the means of arming the party members with requisite theory and with knowledge of the Marxian laws governing the development of society and of

¹ J. K. Galbraith, The Affluent Society, P. 11.

² A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. 36.

³ H. D. Lasswell, Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, I, PP 487-488.

political struggles. It is therefore directed primarily toward the more advanced segments of society, the party members and the non-party intelligentsia, to leaders, directors, and responsible officials in all spheres of the national life. Communist agitation, in turn, is defined as the chief means for the political education of the broad working-class masses in the spirit of Communism. It is therefore primarily directed toward the broad masses and seeks to acquaint them with the party's slogans and decisions, to explain the policy of the party and government, and to mobilize all the workers for active and conscious participation in the building of the new social order.¹

The lower echelon of the agitators have the party line channeled down to them. In all strata of Soviet life the individual agitator is found chatting with you as your next door neighbor, as your co-worker in the shop, as your club associate, or as the occupant of the bus seat next to yours. Always the Agitation Policy, of which the Bolshevik Agitator and the primary party organization are the local executors, is passed down to them by the central authorities of the party.

Oral agitation included two elements as originally conceived by the Bolshevik. The first element was political agitation, thought of as being primarily a process of political indoctrination and education of the masses. This is not to be confused with the second element, or practical production agitation. It was conceived to be in no way incompatible and was oriented toward directly mobilizing the

¹ Political Dictionary, 1940, P. 10.

workers, urging them on to greater effort, criticizing their deficiencies, introducing new work techniques, and so on.

The agitator operated, furthermore, as an instrument through which the workers in his group can register complaints and impress their desires on the party committee for whatever they may be worth. He serves the people as a line of contact with the party and acts in part as a substitute for a system of free competitive elections. A very real factor in the motivation of agitators, and not to be minimized, is the conviction of many that the policies they are expounding are correct and the work they are performing is significant and meaningful. They are dedicated. They practice "samokritika" or self-criticism.

The influence of the Soviet press has been increasing. "Urbezhdats" shouted Stalin. "The press should grow not by the day, but by the hour, for it is the sharpest and most powerful weapon of our Party."¹

There were as many as 2294 non-Russian newspapers published in 1939, in fourteen different languages. There are papers for the rural and agricultural sections; for the governmental, and party readers; for trade union members and industrial workers. Then, there are those based on age or occupation; on sex or on military branch of service.

"PRAVDA" one of the two papers directed to all citizens throughout the Soviet Union has a daily circulation of 2,500,000 and it is not designed to carry strictly news. Some news items may be held several days until a Committee Conference has been completely covered. A local newspaper editor is usually a graduate of an editor's course and more

¹ A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. 144.

than likely a party member. If he uses too much of the material furnished by the Tass agency, he is chided for not using his initiative; if he omits important data, he often times is removed. The duties of the lower press are simple, direct, and precisely defined. Their central task is to assist in securing maximum quantity and quality production at the particular plant, enterprise, or farm at which they are located and the smooth and prompt execution of government, party, and trade-union decisions applicable to their production unit.

The total number, (under 10,000 in 1949 with 31,000,000 circulation a single printing), and circulation of Soviet newspapers is not large in relation to the size of the population. This is largely compensated for, however, by careful planning of the distribution of available press resources and by utilization of "wall-newspapers". The party has precisely designed each newspaper to serve a given area, to reach a specific segment of the population, and to fulfill concretely defined functions. In this way the press can serve as an effective instrument in the party's hands for mobilizing the Soviet population. It is this organization of the press which makes a reality of Stalin's slogan that the press must be "a transmission belt between the Party and the masses".¹ The size of each newspaper might not exceed four pages, of which a significant portion is set aside to arm the party members with the knowledge of Marxist--Leninist theory. A Government censorship agency, which is known as Glavlit, was established in order to effect political --ideological, military, and economic security or control over press materials, manuscripts, photographs and similar materials intended for publication.

¹ A. Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, P. 156.

"Ubezhdats" taught by Trotsky, made faster headway after the radio was invented. The first Russian broadcast did not occur until September 17, 1922 when the most powerful and first broadcasting station in the world, according to the Soviets, beamed forth with all of its twelve Watts a few months before those in England or France. The radio does not enjoy the overwhelming importance in Russia as it does in the United States partly because of geographical conditions. Nor is it regarded as being chiefly a source of amusement nor as recreation for the population. Rather, it is a tool for the Communist up-bringing of the masses. It is the primary channel between the party and the masses and a "strong driving belt".

Eight point five million square miles and more than eighty different languages within USSR proper present some major problems particularly when as many as six different language groups live within one small geographical area. The Five-Year Plans have improved the number of broadcasting stations to over 125 with the central broadcasting being done by the cluster of Moscow stations. Every republic or region, however, is covered through networks or local stations repeating the "union programs" directed at every level. Some exchanges serve as many as 40,000 subscribers. In rural areas where no electricity sources exist, wind-mill driven generators can operate as many as four to five hundred speakers. An estimated 25 million sets are actually needed to cover Russia properly.

The Soviet radio is not only a rapid and reliable means of communication, but also powerful means of political development of the workers. It carries to the masses the inspired word of Bolshevik truth, aids the people in its struggle for the full victory of

Communism in our country, summons them to heroic deeds in the name of the furthest strengthening of the power,¹ of the economic and cultural prosperity of the U.S.S.R.

Despite an increase in the availability of receivers, ? however, it is likely that group listening will continue to be encouraged because of its adaptability to agitation. No information is available to indicate the impact television will have, but let us take a peek at the Film Industry.

"Ubezhdats" under Stalin was administered by the cinema. Its power was not unknown to Lenin for in 1907 he said, "when the masses take possession of the film and it comes into the hands of true supporters of socialist culture, it will become one of the most powerful means of educating the masses."²

With the introduction of the New Economic Policy the film industry began to revive. But many of the new films made by the producers were far from being supporters of the new regime. To counteract the liberal themes of free enterprise, the government established strict censorship by numbering and registering all films authorized to be shown to the masses. Government Film Committees were responsible for keeping tabs on the studios. These were succeeded by the All-Russian Photo-Film Department under the Commissariat^{av} of Education and the Commissariat of Cinematography in 1946. Complete control has been exercised by the top level members of the Communist Party because of the importance of this medium in getting to the people.

The effectiveness of the party's effort to transform the film industry into an instrument for mobilizing the population depends on its ability to translate its directives

¹ Trud, Leader, May 7, 1946. IZVESTIYA.

² Lenin-Stalin, Partiya O Kino, P. 7-8.

into motion pictures thrown on the screen before the maximum Soviet audience. Some 175,000 persons, representing the largest film industry in the world, are employed in the various branches of administration, film production, and local screening. Approximately 50,000 projectors are available in Russia. The Party is not unaware that it is dealing with a special art form which has enormous abilities to effect the party's purposes. All films carry a message whether they be historical or designed to rally the audience for new labor sacrifices.

As can be noted by the great detailed description of the Soviet systems for propaganda, much emphasis is placed on the state control of all facets of public opinion. The main reason why I have gone into this detail is to point up even more strikingly the pitifully negligible effort the United States puts into its public information program--as will be seen.

Russia's overseas efforts are not great. She has a problem at home providing the various media with the equipment and technicians. Her large effort in this line seems to be to try to jam the efforts of the Free World radio transmissions rather than counter these with specific broadcasts to any but her own satellites. However, in recent months there seems to have been a shift in policy as more powerful broadcasting stations have been on the air with beams directed towards Western Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. This can become serious! As Russia discloses a policy of trying to point up her "reasonableness" this can have far reaching effects on the ears of some neutrals and on some of the countries immediately adjacent to USSR. Overseas agents play an important role, but usually are drawn from native citizens carrying

the Communist card. They operate both openly and underground when suppressed. They can be counted upon to exploit every opportunity and are not lacking in ability to create a situation. Their numbers are growing in areas where not officially opposed but are dwindling in those Free World countries where stability is assured.

CHAPTER II

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Bureau of Public Affairs, under the direction of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, provides the American public with information about United States foreign policy; acts as public opinion advisor to the Secretary, the Under Secretary, and other high officials of the Department; coordinates the Department's policies applicable to international activities; provides foreign policy guidance to overseas information programs; ... and conducts and coordinates press and public information activities concerning programs of assistance.

The News Division provides, through world-wide daily and weekly news publications, radio and television stations and networks, newsreels, magazines, and photographs, a comprehensive coverage of actions taken by the United States Government in its foreign affairs and makes official public pronouncements on its foreign policy and programs.¹

Another agency designed at creating, if you will, public opinion overseas is the United States Information Agency under the direction of Mr. Geo. Allen.

The purpose of the United States Information Agency, as stated in a directive from the National Security Council, is to submit evidence to the peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace.

This purpose is to be carried out primarily: (a) by explaining and interpreting to foreign peoples the objectives and policies of the United States Government; (b) by depicting imaginatively the correlation between United States

¹ United States Organization Manual, P. 84.

policies and the legitimate aspirations of other peoples of the world; (c) by unmasking and countering hostile attempts to distort or to frustrate the objectives and policies of the United States, and (d) by delineating those important aspects of the life and culture of the people of the United States which facilitate understanding of the policies and objectives of the Government of the United States.¹

Now this agency, along with the efforts of a public sponsored Radio Free Europe, and through the Voice of America, feed the straight dope deep in behind the Iron Curtain. After considerable research and analysis one can only conclude that a large part of the American effort in this field is directed toward countering the tripe thrown out by Russia to her people, her satellites, and the uncommitted countries where she plans to broaden her influence. We appear to be only on the defensive!

Within the United States only during the political campaigns does there appear to be a concerted effort to pluck the strings of public opinion. Various techniques are employed by the politicians. A sounding board speech will be made by some lesser local big shot on an issue which maybe the President wants an advanced reading on the public's reaction. A key official will hold a press conference in late afternoon on the West Coast with prepared statements before Washington will take a stand on the subject for the morning East Coast papers.

Each Government Bureau seems to have its own information personnel trying to sell the public on its activities. Package feature stories will be released to the press and magazines. Certain types of movie shorts are planted to tell a story or

¹ United States Organization Manual, P. 501.

a television series will plug a theme. Government hand-outs keep the Government printing plant working overtime in legitimate as well as hoopla-la. Government officials, Governors as well as the President, hold occasional report-to-the-people radio and television "Fire-side Chats". Congressmen "meet the press", but all in all there is not a sign of coercion in an attempt to persuade the American people. In other words, very little is done in America to convince the public which way to think. The issues are made plain--the people decide. This is as it should be--providing the electorate is well informed.

Conversely, the Government is the pulse of the people. That is the democratic way of doing business. Public opinion controls the action of the Government. If officials act contrary to the way the public feels they should, the next election does away with these candidates. Stonewall Jackson was loathed to fight on Sunday; Woodrow Wilson failed to sell the American people on the League of Nations; the Mid West promoted "isolation"; Pearl Harbor welded together firm support for Roosevelt's war efforts; the outcome of Korea reflected the will of the people; even the islands of Matsu and Quemoy have been cause for alteration of our foreign policy after the attitude of the public became known. Hundreds of examples where public opinion in America demands government action can be cited for each one incident where the government tried to mold public opinion in favor of a policy. The basic Monroe Doctrine was as often forgotten as supported over the years by public opinion here and abroad. The modifications to it by Theodore Roosevelt were repudiated because of public clamor.

With all of the advantages of communication techniques of the United States little is done to match the efforts of the Soviets. Little has to be done, however, because we depend upon the free will of the people where Russia has to mold the minds of their people to keep control of the party over the masses

CHAPTER III

SIMILARITIES, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS.

The comparison of the public information programs of the Russian Government versus the United States Government reveals but little in common. The USSR has an elaborate effective and vigorous internal information program tightly controlled by the Communist Party. This program has permitted three men, Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin by "Ubezhdating" to control the actions of some 600,000,000 peoples if not control all of their thoughts. The United States probably has the greatest potential of equipment, technological advances, know-how and need for informing its people as any country in the world, yet Russia with, in some cases, primitive equipment out-shines us in all areas. The Russians are expanding their overseas thrust at Free World public opinion. American propagandists respond by countering the claims of Russia. Russia shapes public opinion to support her foreign policies; the United States has to make its foreign policy conform to the will of the people. Russia spends millions of rubles supporting all the media; the United States information program operates on a shoe string. The techniques resemble each other only in the sharp contrast of the end result. Russia tells; the United States tries to sell. The strong points of the Russia propaganda machine may be described as:

It is effective covering millions of people widely spread over millions of square miles and involving many languages. It is flexible to the point that often tactics are changed overnight. It is vigorously and continuously at work day and night telling and retelling the party line.

It knows no boundary as it hammers away. It is designed to give complete coverage horizontally for all fields of endeavor and reaching all ages and sex of the population. It gives only the elements of truth which make it seem plausible to its people but distorts the facts to its own purpose. It employs the next-door-neighbor agitator technique to appeal to everyone. It constantly keeps tab on the right word going out and is quick to stamp out defection. It engrains the opinion desired in the minds of the public so that the masses feel the state can do no wrong. It can build its national strategy at will, then inflict it on the public and control support. It can act without fear of public denunciation.

The forte of the American information program is that it is basically honest. It attempts to inform and educate the public so that it can draw its own conclusions. It shapes national strategy according to the dictates of the attitudes of the public. It is trying!

The weakness of the Soviet system seems to be it is subject to the whims of the individual who happens to be in top position while policy is being promulgated. Reversals and self criticism are frequent. The Stalin popularity cycle is typical. It is so repetitive it becomes too routine and hollow. It is ineffective with the educated mind which can see through it. It pulls the wool over only the eyes of those who have never been out from behind the iron curtain. It hides the true motive of the government with a cloak of high sounding phrases. It distracts the mind of the peasants from their hardship and misery to lofty ideals just around the corner. It gets public approval even for mistakes which later are refuted and blame pinned onto an unfortunate individual. It never has to base its theme on facts. It

can juggle the circumstances to fit the needs of the moment. It has filled the minds of the masses with myths of Russian greatness. It subjugates truth and morality in the interest of a class.¹ It will not always be able to "fool all the people all the time".

The foremost defect in the American program is that an essential internal program is lacking. In its overseas program, it needs to be more aggressive; exploiting all opportunities without having to be behind the eight ball jumping from crisis to crisis trying to counter.

¹ Carter, Herz, and Ranney, Major Foreign Powers, P. 556.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The potential of public opinion as it relates to national strategy is great. It can control foreign policy. It can formulate strategy. In the United States it does. In the USSR it has no effect. It can become the dominant force only when the people have the liberty to express their will. It must be based on truth and morality. It shines as the brightest Red star in the heavens. Public opinion can be molded and has been formed by the Communist Party. In all of Russia it is a one-way street, but in America it is a super express highway where all ideas can be aired. The opinion of the masses can never be fully expressed in Russia. The United States Government can never act without taking it into consideration or maintain a policy not partially acceptable to the American voter.

The best and most effective way to control the thoughts of others is to grasp and maintain the control of all mass media. The Bolshevid^{er} did and does. In America public service, time, and space is donated sparingly. In Russia cultivated public opinion has condoned and digested the Soviets announced aim for world domination. In America it has thrice dictated "isolation" and retreat from imperialistic or "Big Stick" policies.

In the USSR:

- a. Thus far the system has been effective but not as successful as Soviet leaders desire.
- b. The criticism of the media might indicate that some of the intellectuals and party members who actually operate the media are not putting their whole heart into their efforts.

c. The apparent inability of the regime to reduce the intensity of control over the masses may point to some lack of success at convincing the public.

d. The main difficulty seems to be in the task assigned the media rather than mechanics by which they operate.

e. It may be that more effort will have to be expended by the media in trying to pacify rather than convince; to lull rather than instill as they have to make up time loss on each crisis which constantly arise.

f. Soviet propaganda may be contributing to some defection among the populace as some of the refugees have been shaken by the falacies noted after arriving in the Free World areas.

Notwithstanding these difficulties the Soviet Government, even when it can not effectively inculcate Soviet ideas, can effectively keep out information and ideas which might weaken the impact of the party effort.

In the United States:

a. It is contrary to American principles of a government of, for, and by the people to control their mind or will.

b. It is logical to conclude that this condition will continue to exist.

Therefore there is not much room for dispute that public opinion in Russia will have little effect on the national strategy of the Soviets where as in the United States no curbs can be instituted which can in any way eliminate the complete influence public opinion will always have on the shaping of the United States National Strategy.

SUMMARY

Since 1917 the Soviets have developed one of the largest and most complex system of public communications in the world. The Communist Party has established and maintained a parallel system of complete control of all the Soviet media to the extent that it is able to mobilize the mind and will of millions of peoples. Being government sponsored the media is not based on pursuit of profit, is not an instrument for the expression of individual opinion or for amusement. The public has no choice but must take what comes out of the wired speakers. The media are used primarily to strengthen the party's leadership in its self designed role as leader, teacher and guide of the Soviet people. The media is not designed to improve the free exchange of ideas, but does devote space and effort for education and cultural material because this facilitates the task of more effective party rule. By absolute control of all media and with their ability to keep the iron curtain drawn so tightly no information which is contrary to Soviet purpose is permitted to reach the populace. Therefore Russia can mold public opinion for complete support for their national strategy.

In the United States no internal information program exists. No formal attempt is made to shape public opinion other than to assure that the public is fully informed on all sides of the question by the guarantee of the free press. The overseas information program is for spreading the truth and attempting to justify United States National Strategy based on rule by free people. In America, public opinion shapes National Strategy and has in cases reversed it. In its relation to foreign policy, public opinion, in a democracy, can have binding influence, but in a country where the

government controls all the media and censors all incoming information, public opinion has absolutely no bearing on the actions of the leaders who form their national objectives.

In the words of a Russian visitor who was asked "What is wrong with the American system?" "Your toilet paper is too thin and your newspapers too thick."