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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 278

13 March 1950

SUBJECT: Soviet efforts to prevent US collection of overt intelligence information

Statement of the Problem:

To estimate to what degree the Soviet Union and the Satellites may have intensified during the last six months their efforts to prevent US collection of overt intelligence information, with particular reference to published material.

Discussion:

Since 1947, there has been an increasingly definite trend toward restricting the quantity and quality of Soviet and Satellite books and periodicals furnished to this country (and, apparently, to other Western countries). Publications thus restricted have usually been technical, economic, and military. The trend has grown considerably during the past six months. In January 1949, the Soviet publications authority terminated 12 of US Embassy Moscow's subscriptions to periodicals. In the past two months, 29 more US Embassy subscriptions were terminated, making a total of 41 publications cut off in the 13-month period. University libraries and research centers in the US have also been stringently cut in the amount of published material they are receiving from the Soviet orbit. Harvard University Library and the Russian Research Center report that they are currently denied 22 periodicals obtainable last year. Fulfillment of Library of Congress orders (arranged informally in 1946) has also become increasingly erratic.

Note: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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There has been a greater restriction of publications which provide information on the iron and steel, railroad, chemical, petroleum, and production equipment industries. There has also been a marked diminution of financial and foreign trade statistics since July 1949. Fewer figures on crop acreages and yields are now being published. In general, there is a definite trend away from material covering the national, as opposed to purely local, aspects of the Soviet economy. For instance, in contrast to previous practice, no reports were published by the Central Statistical Administration at the end of the fourth quarter of 1949 on the failures of Soviet industry to fulfill production plans of specific items. The publications which are still available to the West usually contain less factual technical material than heretofore. They devote more space to general matters and less to industrial statistics and data. Satellite publications are adopting the established Soviet practice of describing alleged production increases in percentage figures.

The progressive restriction of publications to the US is in consonance with the following developments in the Soviet orbit: (a) the adoption of broad security decrees; (b) the prosecution of nationals and foreigners for alleged espionage and sabotage; (c) a restriction on movement and activities of accredited US diplomatic personnel;* and (d) a more militant tone of anti-US and anti-Western propaganda.

CIA regards this tendency toward restrictive action as part of the general Soviet drive toward greater security by restricting the US to publications whose propaganda value to the Soviet Union outweighs their intelligence value to the US. CIA believes that the rapid increase in the tempo of this trend points to a coordinated Moscow-directed drive to deny virtually all overt information of substantial intelligence value to the US.

* The restriction on travel has been most stringent in the USSR and the Balkans and least stringent in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, although the trend toward increased restrictions is evident in the latter countries.

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