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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
**INFORMATION REPORT**

25X1A

COUNTRY USSR

SUBJECT Speculative Interpretive Analysis of Events Following Stalin's Death/Reform of Corruption/weakness of Soviet Domestic Propaganda/Incidental Indicators of Man-in-the-Street Opinions  
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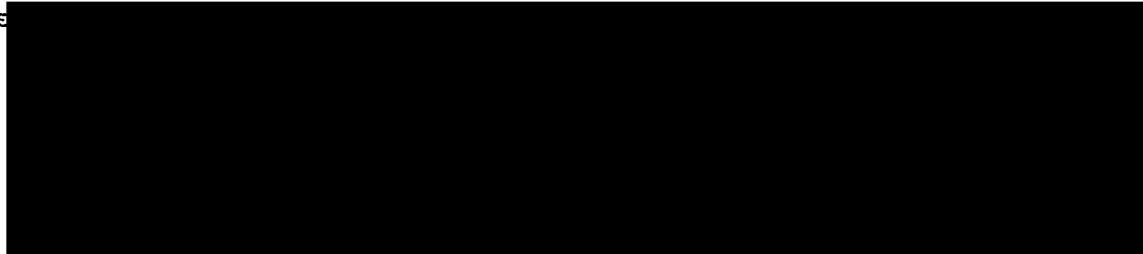
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- Q. On the basis of your analyses of the Soviet press and your comparatively long residence in Moscow, would you like to venture any speculative interpretation of events from the time of Stalin's death up to and including the fall of Beria?
1. A. At the outset I want to make it clear that, with the exception of my analyses of the Soviet press items cited below, my comments will be based on pure speculation. It is my opinion that during the first four months after Stalin's death there was a trend toward a certain amount of "liberalization" in many aspects of the Soviet system. This trend was brought about by actions and policies initiated at the highest governmental levels (as lesser officials lacked adequate power) by a group, probably centered around Beria, which attempted to alter many aspects of the unreasonable and unwavering course of Stalinism. From all indications this attempt ended in failure with the outbreak of the riots in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Assuming that Beria held fast to his proposed reforms even after these events, it seems quite possible that some of his erstwhile supporters, and those who had agreed to go along with the new program until the first signs of a setback, were won over by Beria's opponents. The Berlin riots brought about a sudden fear among Soviet leaders that the "liberalization" program was weakening the very foundations of the Soviet empire and that in order to preserve Soviet ascendancy and their own high positions it would be necessary to remove Beria and revert back to some of the tentatively discarded techniques of Stalinism.
  2. After Stalin's death I made a special point of watching for indications of change in Soviet newspaper items. These signs of change began appearing, not only in the substance of the news itself but also in the milder tone and freer slant of the articles. Even propaganda material slanted against the Western powers lost most of its vitriolic flavor.

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3. Of course one of the most indicative signs of the breaking of past ties with Stalinism was the immediate decline of the Stalin myth. Although Stalin's name was not entirely deleted from press coverage it was severely de-emphasized. Whereas his name had previously appeared one hundred times in each issue of Pravda, it would be actually necessary to search for it after his death. Also during the period between April and June 1953 there was practically no publicity given to Stalin's Economic Problems of Socialism. Indications were that it had been all but junked. Although I have seen no Soviet publications [redacted], I would definitely imagine the appearance of a reverse trend in the press since that time. This reverse would take the form of a gradual and partial restoration of the prestige of the Stalin name. Of course no violent reversal would be practical, but I would definitely watch for increased mention of Stalin's name in news articles.
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4. Another possible indication of the vicissitudes of Stalin's prestige after death is the fact that there has been a five months delay in putting his body on display at the Lenin Mausoleum. It was announced immediately after his funeral that the body would be on display immediately. [redacted] until the time I left. I finally read about it being put [redacted]
5. One of the most significant aspects of the trend during those months, however, was the frequent mention in the press of the protection of the rights of Soviet citizens. This was an entirely new subject, and although the Soviet constitution does not leave many rights to the individual, I had never before seen much mention of a desire to observe even those that were provided. This indication of a possible beginning of a new Soviet "constitutionalism" appeared to emerge from the exoneration of the "doctor-murderers." In publicizing that reversal, attention was paid to the fact that government police had violated the rights of Soviet citizens when they obtained confessions by torture. The press also indicated that anti-Semitism ("stirring up national animosity") was itself a violation of the rights of Soviet people.
6. The Doctors' Plot reversal, of course, was a salient news development, but there were also many small and seemingly insignificant indications of "liberalization" in the Soviet press. One newspaper featured an article denouncing the local police in Lvov for obstructionism in not granting driver's licenses to people who had purchased automobiles. They complained that the police asked too many ridiculous questions about what the purchasers were going to use the car for and where they had gotten the money to buy it. The article stated that the people had saved their money and had a right to get driver's licenses providing they could pass the prescribed operating tests. Similar articles appeared in other parts of the country. One interpretation was that this was a campaign to cut down on the freewheeling of local police officials, but the fact remains that the emphasis was on the rights of the citizens.
7. It was apparent that the Soviet press had begun to gain some flexibility. In April it printed the verbatim text of Eisenhower's speech. But more surprising than this was a theatrical review which appeared in May. The play in question was a new historical opus written and prepared before Stalin's death. The plot concerned the birth of Russian science in the 10th Century. Its hero was Lomonosov, the Russian scholar who was portrayed as independently setting up the foundations of science despite the tendency of the Czar to bring in western influence. The review criticized the portrayal of the foreign scientists (supposedly brought in by the Czar to obstruct Lomonosov) as too "primitive and over-simplified". No reviewer had ever dared make such a criticism of such an obvious political "point" brought out in a play since I first went to Moscow in 1945.
8. Meanwhile, this newfound flexibility was manifesting itself in international relations. The intense xenophobia which seemed to motivate Stalin gradually gave way to a more reasonable attitude which manifested itself in gestures to the West which did not seem to hamper the Soviet position but which alleviated some instances of blind obstructionism. These gestures included the release of the Soviet wives of Western nationals who had previously been denied exit visas. There were strong indications that this policy of no visas for wives was laid down by Stalin himself. Another example was the Soviet influence in bringing about the return of Western civilian internees in North Korea. Then, of course, there was the Soviet-inspired armistice in Korea. Before Stalin's death Mao had stated clearly (see Pravda for 14 Feb 53) that the war would be continued indefinitely by China until the UN command gave in to the Communist demands on prisoner exchange and would even be waged on to "total victory." After the reversal on this stand it seems evident that Stalin personally was obstructing the armistice.

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9. This "liberalization" movement, however, seems to have come to an end after the fall of Beria. The first indication of this was the very language of the Beria denunciation itself. The tone of the press and other media had readopted its original brand of uncompromising hatred. The technique of invective and abuse had returned. Simultaneously with the arrest of Beria, all mention of the rights of Soviet citizens disappeared from the press. In other words, it appeared that the brief "vacation" from the excesses of Stalinism had come to an end.
10. And yet, I think it would be unsafe to say that the complete unreasonableness evident during Stalin's last years would be completely reincarnated. I believe that the present regime will not in the near future be so likely to overstep the bounds of reason as was Stalin. For instance I feel that the new regime would not expel a US ambassador merely for statements criticizing the USSR. What's more, I feel that the possibility of an "accidental" war has also decreased slightly.
11. But I should also like to caution against any overestimation of the rationalism motivating Soviet moves under past or present regimes. I feel that there has been a tendency among Western observers to over-intellectualize Soviet leadership because of the apparent cold-blooded pragmatism of their policies and decisions. In my opinion, behind this facade of rule by pure rationalism there is an underlying emotional irrationalism. I believe that one of the greatest problems of Soviet leadership is a psychological one and that the men who form Soviet policy today are influenced by a pathological psychology which developed during Stalin's lifetime and which has hung over into the present regime. This is a psychological outgrowth of dictatorships everywhere and differs in outward form from that in Hitler's Germany but is identical to it in its basic origin. I intend to cover this subject in detail in some of my future writings.
- Q. Can you comment on Soviet actions to reform corruption in its governmental organs? Are officeholders often purged for corrupt practices?
12. A. When key personnel are purged it is usually for political reasons but they are rarely if ever purged because of personal or organized corruption. In my opinion the Stalinist's idea of reform in a corrupt governmental organ not only took into account the fact that the working or living conditions in each bureaucrat's job helped cause the corruption, but readily assumed that if one official in a given category were found to be corrupt chances were very good that most of the other officeholders in that category were also corrupt. Hence, even if they fired one or more of the officials the conditions which corrupted them in the first place would still be present and would also affect their successors.
13. It was readily apparent that the only alternatives were either to alter the conditions in all similar jobs and departments or to strengthen security measures and attempt to re-educate the entire category of officeholders who needed reforming. Under Stalin the first alternative was practically impossible because of a stubborn refusal to admit or even hint that conditions in the USSR were not what they should be. Hence under Stalin there was a permanent and continuous effort to use various types of criticism to re-educate the people not to do the things that the system forced them to do in the first place.
14. The medium which was called upon more and more for this peculiar task was the use of official satire. Its use continued after Stalin's death but was not quite as venomous as before. The favorite subject has been the use of public funds and official positions for personal comfort and material gain. One case which was cleverly written up concerned a ranking officeholder who used his official limousine and chauffeur to take his dogs for hunts in the woods. Satirical treatment often gets much more serious than this, and often is used in conjunction with other media to get public support for a project. But satire is never used against serious political offenders or deviationists. Obviously these matters are not to be taken quite so lightly.
15. It has been said that satirical campaigns in the Soviet press are usually forerunners of official reform campaigns. Such is often the case but I would hesitate to confirm its use as a reliable indicator of future actions, primarily because of the lack of uniformity in the sequence in which satire appears. Sometimes the action of the reform takes place first and is followed up by satirical references to the evils of the situation as it existed before the reform.

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- Q. In your opinion, what is the chief weakness of Soviet domestic propaganda?
16. A. Notwithstanding the fact that the Soviet domestic propaganda machine has the advantages of being able to beam constant repetitions at a captive audience, it often defeats its own purpose because of its inherent rigidity. It is this rigidity which highlights the inconsistencies of Party line reversals. These reversals then foster the growth of scepticism.
  17. In a free society, changes in the ideas and concepts which govern public opinion come about gradually and naturally and have the necessary flexibility to develop with new situations. But Soviet propagandists ignore the facts of normal change. There would be no change in substance or interpretation of ideas and events for periods of 10 to 15 years. The rigid unchanging original interpretation would be monotonously repeated to the public in unwavering detail. Then after years of this the word suddenly comes down from above to partially or completely reverse the stand or interpretation of some question. Naturally a great deal of scepticism arises from these reversals. One young Soviet student pointed out that he was aware of the artificiality and the "politicalness" of the constant and inconsistent "agitation" beamed at the Soviet citizenry from all media of mass communication.
  18. But over and above the scepticism arising from these reversals is the dismal effect of the monotony of being told, and intimidated to retell, the boring clichés of standard interpretation. I believe that the effects of this forced monotony have a more harmful effect than the sudden reversals which usually occur.
  19. This background of dismal monotony is well reflected in the radio listening habits of Muscovites. Most people cannot afford radios but they do have "reproducers," which are merely loudspeakers pretuned to a basic central station. Outdoor loudspeakers have been installed on many streets and squares for added effect. The Soviet family has become completely conditioned to the droning monotony of the canned propaganda line, and of "news broadcasts" which consist of the verbatim reading of Pravda editorials. They keep the receiver turned on at a very low volume so that the speaker's voice can be heard only as a low murmur. Yet they can invariably tell by the tone in the announcer's dim voice whenever he stops the canned material and begins to make announcements of real interest to the listener or starts to introduce a musical program. Once his tone of voice changes they turn up the volume and listen until the Party line reading returns.
  20. Possibly as a result of the rigidity of interpretation and the inconsistency of the reversals, there has grown up a general scepticism questioning whether or not anyone really is a Communist. Adherence to the prevailing doctrine requires parrot-like repetition of Communist clichés. This type of conformity, when coupled with scepticism, inevitably gives rise to some form of dual personality. Once a person recognizes this complex in himself he feels that others are likewise affected by it and that they too are merely giving lip-service conformity to maintain or elevate their own positions under the existing regime.
  21. This form of mutual understanding has given rise to the very popular slang term shkurnik, which literally translated means "skinner" but in the slang refers to "one who looks after his own skin." This term applies to the "careerist" who is determined to always say the "right thing" in order to gain favor and to "get ahead." Many people scorn the "shkurniks" and assume that anyone who pretends to be "ideiny" (ie a true believer) is a "shkurnik" underneath.
  22. Incidentally, the tendency to lead a double life has given rise to a unique brand of double talk of the kind which inevitably arises under any totalitarian regime. If done skillfully, a person can get across an idea to a friend without actually putting it into words which could later be used as evidence against him.
- Q. Are there any reliable indicators of unofficial man-in-the-street opinions?
23. A. There are none which I could consider reliable, but several are quite interesting. These are rumors, jokes and possibly spectator reactions at sporting events.
  24. Naturally, when official news is tightly controlled, rumors flourish. As they flourish they set up their own channels and machinery for the rapid dissemination of whatever rumor is fed into the mill. Rumors are often based on wishful thinking and express the

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hopes of the people. Ominous rumors often indicate the people's fear, insecurity, or lack of confidence in public officials or policies. But these rumors are reliable indicators only if they arise spontaneously and it is fairly well accepted that the Soviets often use the propaganda technique of the officially inspired rumor. For example, during 1942 and 1943 there was a rumor that after the war the Americans and British would be permitted to open up department stores in Moscow. I think this one was inspired as a morale-lifter. Another case: during the period just before Stalin's death there was a rumor that Jewish doctors had discovered a way to inoculate people with cancer. This was probably police-inspired.

25. Although there is naturally no actual proof of official inspiration of any rumors, whenever the rumors are of sufficient potency to influence public opinion in the direction of current national policy, chances are that they were officially inspired. Rumors which crudely dramatize current propaganda tactics should always be suspect.
26. Jokes, on the other hand, are usually quite spontaneous in origin. Jokes often give indications of what the people are actually thinking about. I remember one such joke which was circulating as far back as 1947 which indicated that Russians were anticipating Stalin's death. This joke was about an old man who wrote a letter to a relative outside of the USSR. In the letter he stated that it looked as if the "old s.o.b. was getting feeble and wouldn't last much longer." Naturally the letter was opened by the censor and turned over to the secret police. The old man was duly arrested and dragged before a secret police colonel for questioning. The colonel quoted the passage and asked him "Just whom did you have in mind when you wrote that 'the old s.o.b.' was getting feeble and wouldn't last much longer?" "Why Winston Churchill, of course," he explained. The colonel looked convinced and told the old man that he could go. But just as he got to the door the old man turned and asked, "By the way, colonel, just whom did you have in mind?"
27. On the subject of spectator reactions at sporting events, I can only recount the oft reported flavor of the demonstrations which occur regularly at Moscow "football" games between the "semi-pro" teams officially sponsored by governmental organs. The two consistently best teams are the ones sponsored by the Red Army and the MVD. Naturally the crowds express vigorous support to the Red Army team and take great delight in booing the team sponsored by the MVD.

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103.2	N
112.1	N
891	N
111.4	N
893.11	N
890.2	N

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