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30 June 1950

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 298

SUBJECT: Use of Propaganda Balloons

PROBLEM: To prepare an estimate "embracing all significant factors with regard to the use of aerological balloons at the present time or in the very near future for reaching the Soviet Union with information from nations of the free world."

This memorandum is limited to a discussion of the following phases of the problem: (1) Effect on the people of the USSR; (2) Effect on the people of the Satellites; and (3) Official Soviet reaction.

1. A balloon-distributed propaganda campaign directed against the USSR and its Satellites might either be "white" (in which case the foreign origin of the propaganda would be disclosed) or "black" (in which case the material would appear to be of internal origin, there being no indication as to the manner in which it entered the USSR\*).

In the case of a "black" campaign, CIA estimates that initially the people of the USSR would be confused; rumors would circulate and there would be great curiosity and a desire to obtain the leaflets. Should the government attempt to control the resultant situation by means of new repressive measures, internal hostility and dissension would result which would necessitate increased police action, thus to some degree aiding the effectiveness of the propaganda. Because police counteraction in the USSR would be a strong deterrent, however, it is believed that the leaflets would be more effective if dropped in rural areas where police surveillance is less efficient than in the cities. The leaflets might be expected to be particularly effective in areas of latent dissension, such as the Ukraine, the Baltic States, the Caucasus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.

A "white" propaganda campaign would lack the asset of confusion and uncertainty and would also lead to more immediate and severe government reaction (see below). In either case, of course, the campaign would succeed only to the extent that the propaganda itself had been skillfully prepared.

\*CIA believes that it would be technically feasible to drop leaflets without allowing any part of the balloon to fall near them and to have the leaflets drop at night so that their descent would probably not be observed.

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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2. Effect on the Eastern European satellite populations of a leaflet campaign directed at the USSR, the Satellites, or both could be expected to be entirely positive, no matter whether the propaganda campaign were of the "black" or "white" variety.

Specifically, the instituting of such a campaign addressed to the satellite populations would probably have the effect of raising the sagging spirits of anti-Communists and counteracting to some extent the feeling of helplessness and of despair which has resulted from the gradual elimination of Western diplomatic missions and the isolation from all Western contacts. In addition, it might stimulate dissension in Communist ranks.

3. As to official Soviet reaction to such a program, it is estimated that a "black" campaign, at least in its initial stages, would be ignored in official internal propaganda. Rather than give additional publicity to the leaflets incident to publication in the official press, and to admit to what might be looked upon as a loss of face (namely, the government's failure to prevent publication of the leaflets), the government would probably be reluctant to acknowledge their existence. Skillful writing (including the use of innuendo rather than direct criticism), as well as special printing and make-up of the leaflets might result in the prolonging of this stage, simply because it might be very difficult for the government to identify any of the material as coming from sources outside the USSR.

Eventually, however, the Soviet Government could be expected to publicize the material as coming from the West (probably would single out the US) and might accuse the Western Powers of violating the borders of the USSR. An official protest to the US Government or to the UN might follow. After this stage had been reached, Soviet propaganda would probably accuse the West of interfering in internal Soviet matters, and would, for national and international consumption, cite the leaflet campaign as further evidence of Western aggression. Arrests and prosecution of Soviet nationals carrying the leaflets or spreading knowledge of their contents would be publicized domestically.

The Soviet home audience further might be told that the West not only had spread leaflets in the USSR, but also various bacteriological warfare and incendiary devices. Any animal or crop pestilence, widespread forest or steppe fires, or even epidemics of infectious diseases among the population might then be blamed on the West.

Although it is possible that the Soviet Government might deem it best never to acknowledge the existence of the balloon campaign, this would be unlikely, particularly if leaflet coverage were sufficient to constitute a serious problem for the authorities. Although the Soviet propaganda reaction might be violent, it is believed that the execution of an intelligently conducted balloon campaign would result in a net gain for the West.

- 2 -

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