MEMORANDUM FOR:  Deputy Director (Plans)

VIA:

SUBJECT: Comments by Ambassador Bohlen

This memorandum is for Information only.

Ambassador Bohlen and also Howard Bogue attended a special meeting of the Committee on Radio Broadcasting Policy on 24 April to discuss the role of Radio Libération as a voice of unapproved speaking to the population of the Soviet Union. He made the following points:

1. The more straight news and the less polemic used, the more effective the station will be. Radio Libération was and should emphasize a different type of news than the official Voice of America.

2. Thinking people in the Soviet Union do not like to be told by any kind of a "foreign" voice about the shortcomings of the Soviet system. There are strong emotional ties and elements of patriotism which cause them to resent this; but they are avid for hard news about world events which they know their own government withholds from them.

3. For Radio Libération to indulge primarily in argumentation and all-out attacks against the Soviet system merely plays into the hands of the Kremlin by giving substance to its attack on the view that foreign interference in their affairs is an ever-present danger. Jamming and the regime's efforts to discredit Radio Libération by attacks on it in domestic Soviet media are part of the official campaign to stifle this danger continually before the Soviet people.
6. The average Russian does not distinguish between YUGA and Radio Liberation. The Ambassador voiced with especial specificity evidence, primarily from defectors, that Radio Liberation is identified explicitly for what it is -- a voice of free people from the Soviet Union speaking from the outside to their fellow countrymen in the interests' interest. He said such testimony from defectors could not always be believed because they are prone to say what they believe their interrogators want to hear.

5. Since World War II when it came into common usage, the word "liberation" has been associated in the minds of Soviet citizens with military intervention. Some of this connotation may have rubbed off in recent years.

6. There are great areas of discontent in the Soviet Union but no evidence of rebellion. There is no possibility of triggering off a revolt within the country from outside.

7. The average Soviet citizen, since the disappointment of Stalinism, has been encouraged to believe that changes are possible within the system. Generally the approach of the average Soviet citizen is to try to effect changes to his advantage; he does not aspire to destroying the system itself.

8. Enigmas as such have never been very popular within the Soviet Union, but we don't really know enough about this to come to any clear decision as to whether the enigmatic character of Radio Liberation is effective in appealing to discontent within the Soviet Union.

9. There are areas in which Radio Liberation understandably could encourage and assist the Soviet citizen in his desire for change. This is particularly true in the economic and cultural fields. Its aims should not involve total opposition to everything in the system but to increase the citizen's desire to push for better housing, more food and consumer goods and a general rise in the level standard of living, which is the chief source of discontent now. The latter theme could be exploited effectively by renewed attention to the ideas of Tsiolkov, demonstrating to his theories were economically achievable but were killed by an exclusively political decision. In other words, we should try to play on this discontent with a low standard of living by showing that a betterment of things within the present framework is
quite practical. Comparisons with free world living standards are far
the most potent counter-productive. Instead, we should try to show the
listener how he might improve his own lot in terms related to his own
experience pattern and in the framework of his political environment.

10. Decentralization of the country's economy will produce new
problems for the regime leadership. Politically we can play on this
theme by pointing to contradictions between economic growth and
educational development and the inflexibility of current political themes
which has voided Marxism of any persuasive power. Radio Libetation
could capitalize on this by putting a first-class Marxist mind to expose
the emptiness and sterility of present political practices as compared
with the realistic of economic and social development.

11. In cultural matters the odyno approach can be very useful
provided speakers and writers of real distinction -- those with names
well-known and respected in the Soviet Union -- can be utilized; and
provided, further, that the ideas they reflect are not "Sovign" ideas
as such.

12. The ferment among students reflects more a resentment against
regime suppression of information and discussion than outright political
opposition to the Soviet system. It is, nevertheless, susceptible of
exploitation.

13. The Ambassador summed up by stating that as the Soviet Union
develops there will be less and less room for the Party structure in
the future. Short of a real excess threatening the regime, he does not
believe it is possible for the leadership to return to the methods of
Stalinism, even though the current process of evolution may not always
be smooth.

Cord Meyer, Jr.
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Chief
International Organizations Division

(24 April 1957)

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III. The Committee decided to meet with Dr. Johnson on May 3 to discuss the forthcoming conference.