

November 29, 1956

Radio Free Europe Hungarian Broadcasts Appraised

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<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114748>

Summary:

Cord Meyer forwards to Allen Dulles, with extensive comment, deputy undersecretary of state Robert Murphy's review, dated November 26, 1956, of selected RFE Hungarian program scripts. Meyer also forwards a CIA/IOD memorandum on RFE policy and program review procedures.

Credits:

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English

Contents:

Original Scan



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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Attached Memorandum from the Deputy Under Secretary of State, Robert Murphy

This memorandum requires action on the part of the DCI. Such requested action is contained in paragraph 6.

1. Mr. Murphy has personally reviewed the RFE scripts which were sent to the Department at their request. He has concluded that the content of these scripts raised basic questions as to whether RFE operations are carried on within the context of established policy guidance and whether it is possible to have effective control over these operations under existing procedures.

2. Mr. Murphy's specific comments are not directed to the major charge that RFE incited revolt or provided outside aid. They deal rather with the less serious question of the extent to which RFE appeared to give tactical advice and unrealistic encouragement to the patriots. We agree with Mr. Murphy that RFE took a line contrary to policy when it attacked Imre Nagy even after his manifesto of freedom. We also agree that some RFE scripts adopted a somewhat too strident and sectional tone and that occasional tactical guidance was given which went beyond approved policy. However, we cannot agree with Mr. Murphy's most serious criticisms which is "that there was close identification of RFE with the patriots and this identification was contrary to policy guidance". RFE was expressly authorized to rebroadcast the statements and the demands of the various free radios which were controlled by the patriots during part of the revolution. RFE, in effect, became a communications center for the patriots spreading the news of developments and the political demands made by one part of the country to all other parts of the country. Thus, it was inevitable that RFE would become completely identified with the patriot cause. The Department of State fully concurred in the decision to permit RFE to rebroadcast the patriot radios.

3. Mr. Murphy has also criticized RFE because some of its commentaries implied that something would be done by the United Nations in behalf of the Hungarian people. We don't understand this criticism, particularly when it

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goes on to say that the United States hoped to circumvent a USSR Security Council vote. It certainly was and is the intention of the United States to do something in behalf of the Hungarian people and it certainly was the intention to circumvent a Soviet vote in the Security Council. RFE was authorized to report extensively the speeches of the President, the Secretary of State and Ambassador Lodge which demonstrate conclusively that the United States did intend to obtain constructive action on behalf of the Hungarian people through the United Nations. We agree that it was not appropriate for RFE to draw any parallels between the Korean War and the Hungarian revolt because this could tend to inspire unjustified hope. We also agree that it was probably inappropriate to play up Hungarian emigre activities and statements because we knew that the emigres were impotent to carry out action in behalf of the patriots.

4. The serious charges which have been made against RFE by some escaped Hungarian patriots and western news correspondents have been that RFE encouraged the patriots to believe that help was coming from outside. These charges have been categorically denied by responsible American officials of RFE who have reviewed the tapes for the whole period of the Hungarian revolution. We think it is important that Mr. Murphy should know that apparently other radios did give the patriots false encouragement. One of the patriot leaders of the Hungarian revolution, an atomic scientist named Bela Zelidi, reports that he personally heard broadcasts from Radio Madrid which urged revolution, which claimed that paratroopers were enplaning in London and Paris enroute to Hungary, which claimed that legionnaires were at the gates of Hungary and that the rescue of the patriots was only a matter of hours. Monitoring of RFE broadcasts from its transmitter near Frankfurt indicates that RFE permitted representatives of the ex-Fascist association of Hungarian former servicemen to broadcast offers of its services to the command of the Hungarian patriot forces. The patriot forces were requested to send a liaison staff to make contact with the representative of the Hungarian servicemen association. The broadcasts said that all members of this association would gladly sacrifice their life and blood for the sacred cause of the nation's liberty. The RFE radio described this message as "an appeal by our Hungarian brothers-in-arms". There are also reports that a communist radio broadcasting from East Germany was beaming inaccurate information into Hungary and using the RFE call letters. (See the attached piece by Theodore Nathan.)

5. The most important matter implicit in this whole controversy is the question of U.S. policy. It is our contention that RFE has carried out within the terms of its charter the public expression of U.S. policy - expressed through the speeches of the President, the Secretary of State, Ambassador Lodge and other U.S. Government leaders. On the other hand, we recognize that the basic policy within the Government which has only been hinted at a few times by Secretary Dulles is that the U.S., at least temporarily, is willing to settle for national communism and is willing to provide economic and even military assistance, as in the case of Yugoslavia, to Eastern European governments which demonstrate sufficient independence from Soviet control.

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It is our opinion that once the U.S. Government decides to support a national communist government, such as Yugoslavia or Poland, it is unrealistic for us, at the same time, to be following a propaganda policy that encourages hope and belief in basic political liberties. We therefore believe that it is important that the U.S. Government come to a fundamental policy conclusion on this subject.

6. We suggest that you discuss these points in your meeting with Mr. Murphy. We suggest also that you ask Mr. Murphy to withhold final judgment on the subject of RFE broadcasts until we have completed the full analysis of the actual broadcasts made during the Hungarian revolution. We estimate that this should be completed in about a month.

CHAD MITCHELL, Jr.

Chief

International Organizations Division

Attachments (3)

Tab A - State Memorandum, November 26, 1956

Tab C - Hughes article, November 26, 1956

Tab B - RFE Policy Procedures, 16 November 1956

IO/ [redacted] (29 November 1956)

Distribution:

- 2 - Addressee w atts.
- 1 - BDCI w att. C
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- 1 - C/IO w att. C
- 1 - EI w/o atts.
- 1 - IO/Chrono w/o atts.
- 1 - IO, [redacted] w att. C

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November 26, 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: [redacted]

SUBJECT: RFE Radio Broadcasts to Hungary

REFERENCE: Your memorandum, IO-111, November 20, 1956

The RFE scripts forwarded to [redacted] the memorandum under reference were read by Identity A, whose comments are as follows:

"I have reviewed the material furnished the Department on the basis of the selection of scripts made available. From this small proportion of the total broadcast material the following conclusions would seem to be justified:

- a. From the outset, some commentaries disregarded the established policy of fostering political objectives considered to be realistically attainable, launched strong attacks on Imre Nagy (even on the date he had called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the neutralization of Hungary), and stressed "maximum" demands unlikely to be acceptable to the USSR.
- b. There tended to be close identification of RFE with the patriots, which may have given the impression to excited Hungarian listeners that RFE, known to be an American organization, was behind both them and their demands. This identification also was contrary to policy guidance, although to some degree unavoidable in the light of deliberate RFE policy of speaking as "the voice of free Hungary" and the "Hungarian opposition".
- c. If the objective was to secure Soviet withdrawal from Hungary, or at least a relaxation of Soviet control, the use of invective in referring to the Soviets ("whining dogs", etc.) may have promoted Soviet obduracy.
- d. The temper of the American and other Western peoples in the face of the Soviet onslaught appears to have been exaggerated. The Western peoples were reported as "filled with rage", fully conscious that the Hungarians were fighting "our" battle. Hungarian listeners might have concluded that a logical sequel to this emotional upheaval in the West would be some form of aid.
- e. Some of the commentaries implied that "something" would be done by the UN in their behalf. For example, a commentary on November 3

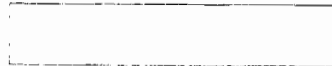
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appeared to draw a parallel between the Korean War and the Hungarian revolt, and pointedly mentioned that the "uniting for peace" resolution could circumvent a USSR Security Council veto of action. Even an unimaginative Hungarian listener would draw the inference that UN activity analagous to that taken in Korea at least was possible.

- f. Similarly, the influence of the Hungarian emigration in bringing about western aid was considerably exaggerated, and may well have given a false impression to the patriots. On November 26, a commentary stated that the Hungarian National Council was bending all efforts to "speed up intervention of foreign governments", with the offices of the Council resembling "a military headquarters". On October 31, a commentator describing emigre activity mentioned that "volunteers want to sign up in the universities". While this had reference to medical and other aid, a wrong inference could be ~~had~~ drawn in a nation in which "volunteers" were joining the fighting.

These conclusions, of course, raise basic questions regarding the extent to which RFE operations are being carried on within the context of established policy guidance and whether it is possible to have really effective control of operations under existing procedures."



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IDENTITIES

Identity A - Deputy Under Secretary of State
Robert Murphit

(12b)

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE 11/17/2001

SECRET

16 November 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: RFE Policy Procedures and Program Content Review

1. RFE strategic policy is based on a policy handbook written in 1951 and supplemented by twenty-seven strategic guidances on major events as they arose. The handbook and all of the guidances were reviewed and approved in Washington.

The basic policy handbook has been revised but the revision has not yet been approved by the President of the Free Europe Committee, General Crittenberger.

2. Daily tactical policy originates primarily in Munich. All political commentaries concerning affairs inside the target countries and the USSR are prepared in Munich. The policy guidance for these commentaries is provided by the Political Advisor's office in separate daily meetings with each of the country desks. No written statement of the daily guidance is prepared.

3. Most international commentary and news of America is written in New York. A daily international commentary paper is prepared by the New York policy staff, copies of which are sent to Washington. In addition to the foregoing policy mechanism, guidances are occasionally sent from Washington to New York, particularly at times of major developments in the target area. These guidances are sometimes sent in written memoranda, but more often, because of the need for speed, they are forwarded directly by telephone to New York.

4. The following are the program review procedures:

a. Complete tapes of all RFE broadcasts are maintained in Munich. These tapes have never been reviewed by Washington. The German Government is presently reviewing the tapes for the broadcasts to Hungary during the recent revolution. [redacted] asked that these particular tapes be forwarded to Washington also.

b. All political commentaries made in Munich are reviewed in a post-audit by the American staff of the Political Advisor's office.

(12c)

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c. New York's political commentaries are reviewed on a spot check basis in a post-audit. In addition, the Program Review Staff in New York reviews 50% of the New York output and an average of 20-25% of the Munich output. On the basis of this review, a brief report is produced each week, primarily for the purpose of providing the Director of RFE with a general idea of what is being said about major political subjects. These weekly reviews are received in Washington.

d. There is no regular review of RFE political scripts in Washington. CIA attempted to persuade the State Department to undertake such a review but this was turned down on grounds of limited budget and lack of linguists trained in propaganda work.

[redacted] have carried out one time spot reviews of RFE scripts for periods up to one month. However, it has been impossible to maintain such script analysis on a continuing basis due to lack of trained personnel.

e. A spot sampling of RFE scripts are translated into English and are occasionally sent to Washington for review, particularly during periods of major political change such as the recent developments in Hungary.

f. The Department of State has recommended [redacted] that it establish a permanent script review staff similar to the one existing in USIA so that at least regular spot checks can be maintained on all RFE political commentary. No action has as yet been taken on this recommendation.