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State Department Comments on Radio Liberty Policy Guidance Paper

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Summary:

State Department Russia expert Francis B. Stevens comments on a draft policy guidance for Radio Liberty broadcasts. [Evidently an initial response to "Office of Policy Coordination Requests State Department Views on Radio Liberty", which is dated June 2 but was drafted on May 26.]

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Subject: Comments on Proposed Basic Policy Guidance Paper for the Russian Language Radio of the American Committee.

I have three major comments on this paper. First, I think it contains too many categorical imperatives. The injunctions against discussing the nationality question, the political aims or aspirations of emigre groups, or the future geographical or political frame work of the USSR are, in my opinion, too sweeping. It is unrealistic to attempt to confine radio operations of this kind within too rigid limitations. It is readily conceivable that situations may arise when it may be topical and desirable to discuss one or another of these subjects and when failure to do so will seriously impair the effectiveness of the operation. Basic guidance should seek to sketch the framework within which programs may be formulated and the broad policy objectives which it is hoped to attain rather than attempt to eliminate certain subjects from any possible consideration.

Second, the guidance fails to provide a central positive theme around which the station can build its programs. It states that the broadcasts are to serve the interests of the Russian liberation movement, but wishes to avoid the question of detsroying or violently overthrowing the Soviet Government, as well as ideological themes. News and features are all very well, but unless they are geared to a central idea which is firmly implanted in the minds of the programming staff, it is difficult to see how the broadcasts can win and hold the allegiance of the target audience and justify the risks which the paper recognizes listeners will run. I advance no suggestion as to what the central theme should be, but I wish to enter a strong plea for the desirability of having one.

Third, I have the impression that the paper loses sight of the fact that the station is to present a Russian viewpoint, operate in the name of a Russian sponser, and present programs written and produced by Russians. If it is to be convincing, if it is to achieve its purpose, it must have a Russian approach and a Russian flavor. I doubt that this can be accomplished under the present directive, and I would suggest that before it is crystallized in final form it be discussed with the senior Russians on the radio staff in Germany in order that a paper may be evolved which incorporates their ideas and which will command their approval and support.

In addition to these general considerations I have the following comments on details in the paper:

1) Paragraph 3 of the general guidance provides that the radio "will direct the brunt of its attack against the Bolshevik party rather than the Soviet government as such or its specific representatives." This is an unrealistic distinction and will be considred by Russians on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Everyone knows that in spite of the academic delineation which the Soviets make, Government and Party are in fact so intertwined as to be indistinguishable, particularly when responsibility for action is concerned. It is difficult to see what can be gained by enforcing such a distinction by a non-official station, and the programs risk acquiring a reputation for naivete.

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2) Paragraph 9 of the program guidance (p.2) (Type and Composition of Features) states: "Program material must make him (the soldier) think and lead him to discuss what he has heard with his comrades." Making the Soviet soldier think is certainly a valid objective. Whether we should seek to induce him to discuss issues raised in the broadcasts with his comrades is more dubious. Defector testimony is unanimous on the presence of informers and provocateurs in the ranks and the grave risk involved in discussing political questions with anyone. Only rarely have instances been mentioned when such discussions occurred, and then only with observance of elaborate scurity precautions. I question whether the programs should suggest any course which might expose listeners to betrayal and punishment.

3) Paragraph 10 (p.2) states that "Ideological themes are to be avoided . . ." It is difficult for me to imagine how programs prepared by Russians for a Soviet audience can possibly avoid ideological themes if they are to carry any punch, and I feel strongly that it would be a mistake for them to do so. We must always keep in mind that the present generation in the Soviet Union has been raised on an ideological diet and that Russians delight in ideological discussions. Furthermore, ideology is the basis of whatever faith the Soviet soldier may have, and since that ideology is full of contradictions, it is a weak point in his armour. We deprive ourselves of a telling weapon if we exclude ideological discussions from our programs.

4) Paragraph 12 (p.3) (Freedom Campaign) indicates that, "at the proper stage", the station will discuss the encouragement of defection. I am not clear what is meant by the phrase "at the proper stage". It would seem to me that the proper stage is now and every day, and that the encouragement of defection should be a constant and major theme.

5) Paragraph 16 (p.4) (Attacks on Stalin: Politburo) states that the Soviet peoples associate Stalin with all the evils they have suffered. The accuracy of this statement is dubious. There is much evidence to indicate that resentment is strongest against officials on the lower levels and that Stalin is held in great esteem by many Soviet citizens, who feel his aims are good but that injustices result from faulty implementation by minor and corrupt officials. This statement and the conclusions drawn from it should therefore perhaps be reconsidered.

The same paragraph directs that the communist system in general should not be attacked since the entire population participates in it. This is like saying forced labor camps should be condoned because 15,000,000 Russians are confined in them. It is specious reasoning. Certainly the system is our major target, and if it is not to be attacked, why are we going on the air?

6) Paragraph 17 (Analysis: Disaffection) states that there should be few theoretical analyses of past Soviet actions, but that the facts will be allowed to speak for themselves. I doubt the effectiveness of this approach. The Soviet public is not accustomed to facts which speak for themselves. It is accustomed to being told what facts mean. Our audience will continue to be subjected to the Soviet interpretation of the meaning of many of the same facts which we will give them. If we are to gain their confidence and win adherents, we must expose the flaws in the Soviet in-

terpretation and present a more convincing one of our own.

7) Paragraph 21 (p.5) (Additional don'ts) requires that the East-West, two-camp approach be avoided where possible. I fail to understand the reasoning behind this directive or to see how, given the present state of the world, it is to be implemented. And if the programmers succeed in avoiding this approach, what are they expected to substitute for it?