

November 20, 1956

CIA Assessment of Radio Free Europe Hungarian Broadcasts

Citation:

"CIA Assessment of Radio Free Europe Hungarian Broadcasts", November 20, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, NARA release.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/114743>

Summary:

CIA provides the White House with an early appraisal of RFE broadcasting to Hungary during the Revolution.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

FILE NO. Case No.

80-502

~~SECRET~~

Document No.

4

② ✓

20 November 1956

MEMORANDUM**SUBJECT: Radio Free Europe**

The U. S. Government has never admitted responsibility for the acts or statements of RFE. However, policy guidance has been given RFE and that guidance, with minor deviations, has been followed, as indicated below.

1. In line with National Security Council policy and with the guidance of the Department of State, the policy governing RFE's broadcasts to Hungary and the other satellites was based on the following principal points during the four month period between the publication of Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20th CPSU Congress and the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution:

- a. To encourage peaceful evolutionary changes working toward the liberalization of their institutions.
- b. To cross-report the progress of anti-Stalinism and the achievement of a degree of liberalization in the several captive nations.
- c. To take full propaganda advantage of the Tito-Khrushchev declaration in Belgrade (2 June 1955) which states, "questions of internal organization or differences in social systems are solely the concern of the individual countries."

Moreover, an RFE policy directive, in full effect since 12 December 1951,

Declassified by 5456-10
date 22 JAN 1982

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

states categorically:

"Speakers are warned not to yield to a natural impulse to bring hope to their compatriots by promising armed intervention by the West. To raise the hopes of our audiences in this fashion would be to do them a cruel disservice; it would also constitute radical misrepresentation of the present policies of the western powers. Such talks may not be broadcast on RFE."

The peoples of Hungary and Poland have been encouraged to look not to armed revolt, but to the gradual relaxation of the de-Stalinization process as their best hope of eventual freedom.

2. During this period RFE (as well as Free Europe leaflets) played the Khrushchev "secret speech" heavily; reported western reaction and the reaction of various communist party leaders in the West to the secret speech; gave full play to the Belgrade Declaration of "differing roads to Socialism"; gave appropriate treatment to the rehabilitation of various "Titoists" and national communists throughout the satellite area; reported all evidences of the liberalization process wherever taking place; and gave full play to the attempts of Gomulka to establish greater freedom from Soviet control in Poland.

RFE also broadcast messages of encouragement expressed by President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, Adlai Stevenson and other American leaders, pledging that the cause of the eventual freedom of the captive peoples would remain a basic part of American policy. The resolution of the U. S. Senate and the platforms of both political parties, calling for freedom of the captive peoples by peaceful means, were likewise given full coverage.

3. When the Hungarian revolution began on 23 October, RFE immediately broadcast the news of the demonstrations which took place in Budapest. As

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

the peaceful demonstrations changed to revolution, and as various local Hungarian radios fell into the hands of patriots, RFE was given specific authorization to report the broadcasts of such radios throughout the country but was cautioned to avoid tactical advice and intervention. By this means the general population outside Budapest became better informed about the course of the uprising since these patriot radios could be heard only in limited areas due to their low power and to Soviet jamming. RFE also broadcast western reaction to Hungarian events, including statements by the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, and expressions of solidarity with the patriots on the part of western trade unions, student groups and other leaders and organizations. RFE gave full play to free world reaction against the use of Soviet military repression, and also fully covered the action on the part of the United Nations with respect to Hungary. During this period, RFE also broadcast various appeals in Russian to Soviet troops in Hungary not to fire on the Hungarian people who were fighting for freedom, and urged the withdrawal of such troops from Hungary.

4. As far as can be determined from a review of scripts currently available, no RFE broadcast to Hungary before the revolution could be considered as inciting to armed revolt. No RFE broadcast to Hungary implied promises of American military intervention.

However, after the revolution was well under way, a few of the scripts reviewed do indicate that RFE occasionally went beyond the authorized factual broadcasting of the demands of the patriot radio stations within Hungary to

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

identify itself with these demands and to urge their achievement. There was some evidence of attempts by RFE to provide tactical advice to the patriots as to the course the rebellion should take and the individuals best qualified to lead it. As soon as these deviations from policy were noted, steps were taken to insure rigid supervision of broadcasting content. Tapes of the actual broadcasts are expected shortly and will be reviewed by Hungarian language specialists.

B. Conclusions:

a. Policy guidance provided to RFE and by RFE to its Hungarian desk was consistent with U. S. policies toward the satellites. RFE broadcasts were generally consistent with such policies.



b. From all information available to date, RFE did not incite the Hungarian people to revolution.

c. From all information available to date, RFE did not directly or by implication offer hope that American military help would be forthcoming to the patriots.

d. RFE broadcasts went somewhat beyond specific guidances in identifying itself with Hungarian patriot aims, and in offering certain tactical advice to the patriots.

e. The chronology and nature of events in Hungary and the statements of the Hungarian Government itself prior to its overthrow make it clear that the uprising resulted from ten years of Soviet repression and was finally sparked by the shooting on 23 October of peaceful demonstrators, and did not result from any external influence, such as RFE broadcasts or Free Europe leaflets.

~~SECRET~~