

# Assessing Soviet Influence Operations

*by Richards J. Heuer, Jr.*  
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# Assessing Soviet Influence Operations

Richards J. Heuer, Jr.

## **Introduction**

This study is intended to help intelligence analysts think about the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations – public diplomacy, propaganda, and active measures. How, why, and under what circumstances can we expect these activities to be most effective? A second goal is to help analysts think about the problems involved in assessing the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations. Are there measures that one could take to monitor the effectiveness of influence operations over time?

Rather than discussing specific Soviet activities, we will build a somewhat abstract model of the influence process. We will identify categories of information that need to be considered, and variables that need to be weighed, in evaluating the effectiveness of influence operations.

The problem is addressed on two levels, what we call the program level and the individual level. The program model is a fairly traditional overview of an influence program as a whole. Who initiates

the operation? Through what channels or types of activities do they work? At what targets are they aiming? And what goals are they seeking to achieve? Generalizations about Soviet influence operations are often misleading. Whether these activities are minimal or massive, ineffective or effective depends upon which aspect of the program one is talking about, and this needs to be specified. The program model specifies these different aspects of the program.

At the individual level, we look at the complex process by which individual opinions and attitudes might be changed and behavior influenced. We develop a simple model that identifies the steps in the influence process and the key variables. Starting with a message that is intended to influence, we ask a number of questions. What are the factors that determine whether the message is actually received by the target? What influences the target's understanding and evaluation of the message? Under what circumstances is the message likely to cause a change in the target's attitudes or opinions? What factors then determine whether a change in attitudes or opinions is likely to cause changes in behavior? We also look at the significance of different types of behavior that might be influenced.

Finally, we look at several different approaches to assessing the effect of Soviet influence operations. Theoretically, measures can be taken at three points in the influence process. One can, to some extent, measure the quantity of Soviet influence activity. Through polling, one can measure changes in opinions or attitudes. Votes and demonstrations provide a measure of behavior. What is very difficult, however, is to confirm causal relationships between Soviet activities and these measures, or to judge how enduring any change might be. One can sometimes demonstrate a correlation between Soviet activity and changes in attitude, or between changed attitudes and actual behavior, but it is very difficult to say that Soviet influence operations caused the change in attitudes, or even that a given change in attitudes caused a change in voting behavior. The causal relationship is difficult to prove because there are so many other variables that confound the picture and preclude firm conclusions.

This report is based on review of relevant portions of the academic literature on cognitive psychology and social psychology, especially those segments of the literature dealing with attitude formation and change, the relationship between attitudes and behavior, and the effects of mass communications. Our goal has been to identify new

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ideas or concepts from these disciplines that may be useful to intelligence analysts dealing with Soviet influence operations.  
Program Level

One difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations is ambiguity surrounding the term itself. There is no agreement as to what is encompassed by the term influence operations. Certainly any measurement of effectiveness must be very specific as to exactly what is being measured. Generalizations are often misleading when they encompass many different types of activity.

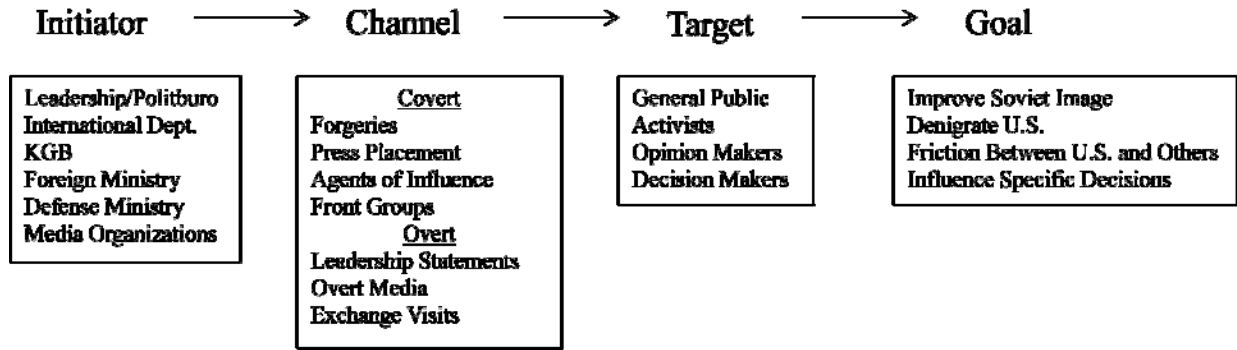
The first thing an analyst must do is specify exactly what Soviet activity he or she is referring to. To facilitate this, Figure 1 shows different types of activities that might be included in an influence program. It identifies different groups that might initiate an influence activity, the channels or means by which it might be conducted, targets it may be aimed at, and goals or objectives that might be pursued.

Within the Soviet Union, influence activity might be initiated by the top leadership, International Department of the Central Committee, KGB, or Foreign Ministry.

Channels may be divided into overt and covert. Overt channels include leadership statements, media, exchange visits, and policy decisions or concrete actions. (Policy decisions as a channel for exercising influence are discussed below.) Covert channels include forgeries, covert press placement, agents of influence, and, in the semi-covert category, front group activities.

Any of these activities might be targeted at influencing the general public, a specific group of activists, opinion makers, or government decision makers.

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### Soviet Influence Program

When assessing Soviet influence operations, it is desirable to distinguish between the various aspects of this multi-faceted program and to specify which aspect(s) the assessment applies to.

The goal of most routine activities has been to improve the Soviet image, denigrate the United States, or cause friction between the United States and other countries. Of greatest interest, however, are operations undertaken with the goal of influencing specific pending decisions. This goal is discussed further below.

There are, of course, alternative conceptual frameworks for looking at Soviet influence activities. Robert V. Daniels, for example, characterizes Soviet propaganda as follows:

"systemic, having to do with the legitimation of the system; strategic, encompassing the party line as it proceeds over periods of years and then changes to other lines; and, tactical, having to do with responses to specific situations and opportunities as they arise."<sup>1</sup>

The main point is that Soviet influence operations are a very diverse lot. Different types of activities have different goals, different methods, different opportunities, and different degrees of success. Rather than generalize about Soviet influence operations as a whole, it is preferable to break the field down into some meaningful set of categories so that one can be more specific about what one is referring to. This is especially true when making judgments about the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations.

The breakdown of Soviet activities according to initiator, channel, target, and goal is not new, and most of the categories are well

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Contemporary Soviet Propaganda and Disinformation: A Conference Report* (Department of State Publication 9536, March 1987), p.42.

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understood. There are two points that merit further discussion, however, particularly in the context of the current, rapidly changing scene in the USSR. One is our conclusion of Soviet policy decisions as a means of exercising influence over another country, as this is not commonly done. The other is the goal of affecting a target country's policy decisions and how that might be achieved.

### **Soviet Policy Decisions**

We often think of propaganda and perceptions management as something that is achieved through words rather than deeds, but this is not necessarily the case. There are two, well-documented historical examples of major changes in Soviet policy that were undertaken, in part, to influence the policies of other governments. The New Economic Policy of the 1920s and abolition of the Comintern in 1943 were motivated, in part, by a desire to influence the decisions of Western countries. In both cases, major changes of policy with wide ramifications did occur. But these changes in tactics were planned to make the West believe there had been a fundamental change toward a more benign long-term strategy. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that no such fundamental change was ever intended.<sup>2</sup>

Some believe that detente and the "peace offensive" of the 1960s and 1970s were comparable tactical maneuvers intended to deceive the West concerning Soviet intentions and thereby influence Western policies.

It is not meant to suggest that current dramatic changes in the Soviet Union are a comparable tactical maneuver. One should be aware, however, that the current unsettled situation does create an atmosphere in which tactical policy maneuvers by the Soviets could easily influence U.S. decisions on a number of issues in ways that would be of long range benefit to the Soviets.

### **Influencing Western Policy Decisions**

Influencing other countries' attitudes toward the Soviet Union and the United States has been a pervasive goal of much Soviet activity, but it is not an end in itself. The ultimate purpose of influence operations is to influence the decisions of another country in ways that are favorable to the Soviet Union. Any true measure of effectiveness must

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen de Mowbray, "Soviet Deception and the Onset of the Cold War," *Encounter* (July-August 1984), pp.16-24.

focus on whether Soviet activities succeed in influencing policy decisions.

Influence on policy decisions might be indirect, through the role of public opinion in the political process, or the influence might be exercised directly on the thinking of key decision makers. To the extent that Soviet activities influence votes, a small change in public attitudes may have a large impact on government policy; a swing of several percentage points may change a government.

Less dramatic outcomes might also be counted as successes. Influence operations may mobilize already existing opinion, define the terms of political debate, provide significant ammunition used in that debate, or deposit an ideological residue that eases the path for subsequent influence operations.

David Yost's study of the 1979-83 Soviet campaign to block modernization of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe is a path-breaking analysis of the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations.<sup>3</sup> Although that campaign did not succeed in preventing deployment of the Pershing missiles, it may have effectively constrained future strategic policy options in NATO. It contributed to polarization of West German political parties and breaking down the previous consensus on defense policy; undermined support for the U.S. nuclear presence in Western Europe and for the Western approach to nuclear arms control; and provided an important political socialization experience for younger generations of West Germans. A unique aspect of Yost's study is his careful effort to understand to what extent these outcomes were caused by the Soviet campaign as distinct from other factors indigenous to West German politics or West German - U.S. relations.

Consideration of ways in which the Soviet Union might influence a target country's decisions also requires discussion of the Soviet theory of reflexive control. This is a formal theory developed by the Soviet military for judging how best to influence an adversary's decisions.<sup>4</sup> It is, in essence, a systematic procedure for evaluating how an adversary

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<sup>3</sup> David Yost, "The Campaign Against INF in West Germany," in Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker, eds., *Soviet Strategic Deception* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), Chapter 17.

<sup>4</sup> Clifford Reid, "Reflexive Control in Soviet Military Planning," in Brian S. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker, eds., *Soviet Strategic Deception* (Lexington MA: Lexington Books, 1987), Chapter 14.

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makes decisions and how those decisions may be influenced in ways favorable to the Soviet Union by providing selected information on which the decisions are based.

The Soviet theory of reflexive control breaks an opponent's decision process down into four elements: the opponent's perception of the situation, the opponent's goals, the opponent's "solution algorithm" (including standard operating procedures, doctrine, analytical methods, behavior patterns, training, etc.), and, finally, the act of making the decision. The last two elements are quite difficult to influence directly. One can, however, influence the opponent's perception of the situation and the opponent's goals, and, by doing so, influence the opponent's decision.

An unclassified study of Soviet writings on reflexive control elaborated as follows:

"The 'perception of the situation' is that element of the decisionmaking process which includes the specific descriptors of forces, and the nature of the conflict itself. Some elements of the perception of the situation include the size and characteristics of one's own forces, the size and characteristics of the opponent's forces, the physical environment within which conflict occurs, the history of actions by the two sides, the current evolution of events, and the objectives and constraints of the opponent. Methods of influencing the perception of the situation are standard ones normally associated in the west with the terms 'camouflage,' 'concealment,' and 'disinformation.'"

"The 'goals' also comprise an important element of the decisionmaking process of an opponent. Goals can be formulated in both peacetime and wartime. In peacetime, examples of goals include force structure requirements, military readiness objectives, and technological developments. In wartime, examples of goals include the control of military regions, the attaining of a prescribed level of damage to enemy forces and facilities, and the prescribed timetables for military operations."

"The Soviet literature suggests at least three approaches to shaping the opponent's goals. One is through a show of force to convince the enemy that a specific objective is unobtainable. A second is to demonstrate a threat of such significance that the countering of that specific threat dominates the opponent's goals. The third is to present

the opponent with such a spectrum of uncertainties about one's own actions that he is unable to define any objective which has a satisfactory outcome for all plausible sets of events. Soviet literature also cautions that the techniques to influence the opponent's goals are 'more difficult to spot, and for this reason they are more insidious and dangerous than techniques ... of shaping the initial situation estimate."<sup>5</sup>

A fourth approach is to persuade an opponent that there really is no threat to be concerned about, thereby causing him to abandon his defensive goals. This approach is apparently not discussed in the unclassified Soviet literature on reflexive control.

A full discussion of the Soviet theory of reflexive control is beyond the scope of this study. The main point here is that the Soviet military does have a formal model for analyzing how to provide information to an adversary in order to influence that adversary's decisions. Whether Soviet political strategists follow a comparable model is not known, but the U.S. analyst who seeks to identify and monitor Soviet influence operations, including potential ulterior motives behind current policy statements, might do well to do so.

That means the U.S. analyst would consider more than just Soviet goals. The analyst must also consider how the Soviets analyze the American or West German or any other adversary's decision process. This includes answering the following questions from the Soviet point of view:

- What are the American preconceptions about the situation?
- What are the American goals, and what options do they have for achieving these goals?
- What American decision would be most beneficial to our interests?
- What will the American decision be if we (the USSR) do nothing?
- What actions could we (the USSR) take, or what information could we provide, that would change the American assessment of the situation or prompt a change in American goals, thereby causing the United States to make a decision more favorable to our interests?
- How confident can we (the USSR) be that the Americans will in fact be influenced in the desired manner? Do the Americans have

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 295-296, citing M. Ionov, "On the Methods of Influencing and Opponent's Decision," *Voyennaya Mysl*, No. 12d, 1971, p. 24, translation by FBIS.

any incentives for favoring a particular evaluation or course of action that would serve out interests?

On the basis of this analysis, which roughly parallels the reasoning process of the Soviet strategist, the U.S. analyst will be able to make inferences concerning motives that might underlie Soviet policy statements. It will be noted that these questions move one into the murky realm of double think. We are asking not only what the Soviets think, but also what the Soviets think that we think. Such analysis is fraught with uncertainties, but it is an essential part of the Soviet theory of reflexive control. "Reflexion" is a psychological term that denotes that each opponent bases its decision on models of himself, of his adversary, and of the reflexive interaction between himself and his adversary.

### **Individual Level**

Cognitive psychologists study how people perceive and process new information. Social psychologists study how attitudes are formed and change and how they influence behavior. Insights from these disciplines are relevant to assessing the effectiveness of influence operations.

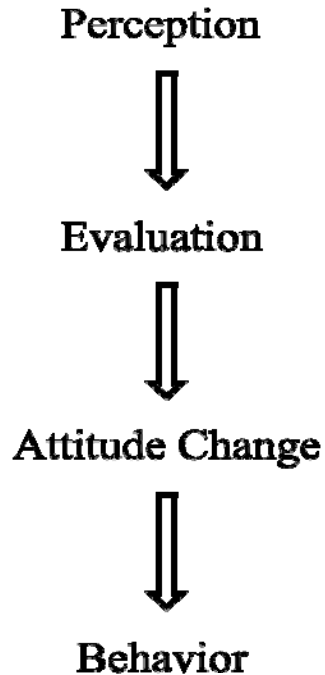
Despite the best efforts of legions of psychologists, however, many aspects of human behavior elude our understanding. The very complex process of influencing another person's behavior is one of them.

This section breaks down the process of influencing a target individual from the time some influence activity is presented to a target until it results in change in the target's behavior. We identify four principal steps in this process: perception or receipt of the message; understanding and evaluation of the message; a change in attitudes, opinions or judgments as a result of the message; and the effect of this change on actual behavior.

To be effective, a message intended to influence must be perceived and then evaluated, it must affect the target's thinking, and this, in turn, must have specific behavioral consequences.

These steps can be viewed as successive hurdles that an influence operation must overcome in order to achieve its goal.

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Each step is discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs, along with some of the many variables that determine whether or not an influence operation is likely to be successful in overcoming the hurdle.

### **Perception**

If a message is not even perceived, it has no influence. Effective distribution of the message has to be the first step in the influence process, but no single channel for distribution of a message reaches all potential targets. Overt propaganda tends to reach those who are already persuaded, and to miss those one most wishes to influence. This is because most people read newspapers and magazines and listen to radio or TV programs that generally express a point of view they are comfortable with. Few deliberately seek out information on opposing views. This tendency toward selective exposure to information adds greatly to the difficulty of influencing other people.

The advantage of covert press placement is that articles can be placed in media that do reach people with opposing views, and it can be done in a manner that conceals the Soviet interest. Because this depends upon covert assets, however, the quantity of covert placement operations is necessarily limited as compared with overt propaganda.

Even if the message does reach the target, there is no assurance it will be perceived correctly. People tend to perceive what they want or expect to see. Perception involves an element of pre-conscious inference as well as sensory awareness. It is a process of inference in which one constructs one's own version of reality on the basis of information provided by the senses. The sensory input is mediated by complex and poorly understood mental processes that determine which sensory data we pay attention to, how we organize it, and the meaning we attribute to it. Thus, what we perceive and how readily we perceive it are strongly influenced by our past experience, education, cultural values and role requirements, as well as by the stimuli recorded by our receptor organs. Many psychological experiments have been conducted to show the extraordinary extent to which information perceived by an observer depends upon the observer's own assumptions and preconceptions.<sup>6</sup>

Patterns of expectation, rooted in past experience and training, tell us, subconsciously, what to look for, what is important, and how to interpret what we see. These patterns form a mind set that predisposes us to think in certain ways. Such a mind set is akin to a screen or lens through which we perceive the world, and it is quite resistant to change. Thus, many influence operations "fall on deaf ears."

We also have various defense mechanisms that enable us to deny the existence of or disguise the nature of sensations, impulses, information, memories or actions which would cause anxiety if we were to be aware of them as they "really are." According to various consistency or balance theories of attitude change, "the individual requires and searches for an interrelationship of beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that has internal consistency and generally squares with the objective environment."<sup>7</sup> A lack of consistency, or what has been called cognitive dissonance,<sup>8</sup> is believed to activate tensions that one subconsciously seeks to reduce. These tensions bias how people seek out and evaluate information. The tensions may be reduced by

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Jerome S. Bruner and Leo Postman, "On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm," in Jerome S. Bruner and David Krech, eds., *Perception and Personality: A Symposium* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Hennessy, Bernard C., "Public Opinion and Opinion Change," in James A. Robinson, ed., *Political Science Annual* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966), p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Festinger, Leon, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

subconscious misperception of the discrepant information, avoiding or escaping from the information, or changing one's opinion. In general, the theory holds that we seek out and interpret information in ways that reduce cognitive dissonance, and that this often leads to misperception. A host of variables have been identified to predict when and under what circumstances this is most likely to happen.<sup>9</sup>

## Evaluation

For a message to be effective, it must be understood and evaluated in the manner intended by its originator. A wide variety of biases in the way people process information have been identified by cognitive scientists and others. Problems in drawing accurate inferences are greatest when data are incomplete, ambiguous or contradictory, when time is short, when emotions are running high, or when motives and personal interests are not clear or are in conflict.

Most pervasive, perhaps, is the tendency to assimilate new information to existing beliefs. Existing beliefs tend to persevere even in the face of change. It takes far less information to form an initial impression than to change that impression once it has become formed. This occurs both at the nonconscious level when processing sensory perceptions, and at the more conscious level when interpreting and evaluating those perceptions.

Psychologist Lee Ross contends that this happens because there is often some distortion in the process by which we assess the relevance, reliability and validity of potentially pertinent information. The weight we assign to evidence tends to be determined by how consistent that evidence is without previous impressions. Specifically, we may overlook the possibility that seemingly supportive evidence may actually be irrelevant or deceptive, or we may be too quick to conceive of and accept challenges to contradictory evidence. As a result, new information will tend to be evaluated in a manner that supports existing beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

Ross provides the following example. The person who:

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<sup>9</sup> Frey, Dieter, "Recent Research on Selective Exposure to Information," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 19 (New York: Academic Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Ross, Lee, "The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 10 (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

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“believes that fat men are jolly, or more specifically that fatness causes jolliness, will see particular fat and jolly men as strong evidence for this theory; he will not entertain the hypothesis that an individual’s jollity is mere pretense or the product of a particularly happy home life rather than obesity. By contrast, fat and morose individuals will be examined very carefully before gaining admission to that [person’s] store of relevant data. He might, for instance, seek to determine whether the individual’s moroseness on the day in question is atypical, or the result of a nagging cold or a disappointing day, rather than the reflection of some stable attribute. It need hardly be emphasized that... one can derive unwarranted support for almost any hypothesis if permitted to delete, *post hoc*, the data points that offend this thesis.”<sup>11</sup>

Ross continues with his explanation:

“It is not contended, of course, that new evidence can never produce change – only that new evidence will produce *less* change than would be demanded by any logical or rational information processing model. Thus, new evidence that is strongly or consistently contrary to one’s impressions or theories can, and frequently does, produce change, albeit at a slower rate than would result from an unbiased or dispassionate view of the evidence.”<sup>12</sup>

One’s openness to new and contradictory information depends upon a number of variables, including, for example, the amount of stress or other difficulties being caused by one’s current beliefs. One is also more open to new and conflicting evidence when that evidence clearly points to the way to some new and acceptable belief, rather than only contradicting the previous belief.

To the analyst assessing the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations, this simply indicates why it is so difficult to actually influence the thinking of other people. To the effective, influence operations need to exploit existing preconceptions rather than seek to change existing beliefs. This limits, to some degree, the potential target audience.

In discussing various techniques of persuasion, J.A.C. Brown concluded that:

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210

“...the mind itself is a filter which permits passage only to those messages for which it is prepared unless reality is so pressing as to overwhelm it completely. In addition, it is a coloured filter, which not only subtracts but, especially when ignorance exists about the real state of affairs, adds to and colours with its own particular spectrum whatever scraps of information are available.”<sup>13</sup>

Even if the message is correctly interpreted, the target may act on the message in a manner different from what was intended. For example, an opponent may instead prompt the opponent to redouble his efforts. A message intended to exacerbate relations between the United States and one of its allies may, instead, prompt the ally to renew efforts to resolve differences.

### **Attitude Change**

The concept of attitudes - how they are formed, how they can be measured, and how to change them - has played a central role in social psychological studies. There is a large body of literature on attitude change and efforts to modify human behavior by changing attitudes.

The confirmed conclusions are few, however, compared with the amount of time and effort devoted to the study of this topic.

Understanding such complex human behavior “is the most difficult of all intellectual activities.”<sup>14</sup>

No effort is made to summarize all the different theories of attitude change. Rather, we have simply selected several points that seem most apt to the present discussion.

The extent to which a target changes his or her opinion or attitude in response to a persuasive communication might be envisaged as “a combined function of (a) the individual's initial position, (b) his attention to the communicator and the message, (c) comprehension of its arguments, examples, appeals and conclusion, (d) general and specific motivation for accepting its position.”<sup>15</sup>

A number of variables are identified under each of these categories. The more extreme the initial position of the target audience, the more likely it is to change. Ready availability of counter arguments inhibits

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, J.A.C., *Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing* (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1963), p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> Zimbardo, Philip and Ebbe B. Ebbesen, *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior* (Teading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969), p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

change. The more attention the target gives to the message, the more influence the message will have. Somehow, the persuasive message must stand out against the background of competing stimuli. The greater the effort required to understand the message, the less attention it will receive. Comprehension of the message will depend upon how it is organized and presented, and on the target's intelligence, relevant experience, and openmindedness.

Motivation to accept the message is essential for attitude change to occur. Does the message run counter to existing beliefs? Are there potential rewards for accepting the message or costs associated with rejecting the information? Are there social pressures for accepting or rejecting the message, e.g., bandwagon effect or deviation from group norms? The audience's susceptibility to the message is one of the most important variables.

One of the most basic and generally accepted conclusions is that a communication is more persuasive if it comes from a source that is deemed creditable.<sup>16</sup> The sources perceived expertise and trustworthiness are the main variables. Anything that focuses attention on potential manipulative intent detracts from the message's impact, as resistance increases sharply as soon as one senses an effort to persuade.

Source credibility is particularly relevant at this time, as there has been, in many circles, a dramatic change in perceived credibility of official Soviet statements under the Gorbachev leadership. As a result, one would expect a significant increase in effectiveness of Soviet public diplomacy with, perhaps, a corresponding decrease in the need for non-attributable propaganda.

The most prominent theory of attitude change is Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance.<sup>17</sup> Attitudes change as a means of seeking consistency among cognitive elements. More recently, Petty and Cacioppo have built on prior work by Festinger and others to develop what they call the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) for understanding attitude change.<sup>18</sup> It posits two alternative routes to

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<sup>16</sup> C.I. Hovland and W. Weiss, "The Influence of Source Creditability on Communication Effectiveness," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1951, 15, 635-650.

<sup>17</sup> Festinger, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Petty, Richard E. and John T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change* (New York: Springer - Verlag, 1986).

attitude change. The "central route" is based on a careful and thoughtful assessment of the merits of the information. The "peripheral route" is based on emotional or other reaction to some simple cue in the message that induces a change in attitude without careful assessment of the merits of the case. Beer and cigarette advertising, for example, commonly follows the peripheral route to persuasion. It seeks to associate the product in the viewers mind with having a good time or appeal to the opposite sex, rather than discussing the product's merits.

Petty and Cacioppo believe that:

"Similar amounts of attitude change can be produced via either route. However, the changes induced via the central route require more cogitation and are postulated to be more persistent, resistant to counterpersuasion, and predictive of behavior."<sup>19</sup>

Which route is taken in any particular case depends, in large measure, on motivation and ability to understand and evaluate the issue-relevant arguments. The greater the motivation and ability to scrutinize the arguments, the more likely there will be a thoughtful evaluation of the merits of the case. Conversely, if either motivation or ability to scrutinize the message is lacking, the peripheral cues become more influential.<sup>20</sup>

Motivation to evaluate a message carefully increases when the message is personally relevant to the recipient, or when the recipient has some personal responsibility for evaluating the message. When motivation is high, strong arguments are more likely to be accepted while weak arguments are more likely to be rejected.

The distinction between central and peripheral routes to attitude change parallels the traditional distinction between education and propaganda. Education also attempts to change attitudes and behavior, but to do so through information, evidence, facts, and logical reasoning. "...the propagandist differs from the educator because he intentionally tries to bias what people see, think, and feel in the hope that they will adopt his viewpoint."<sup>21</sup> The propagandist does this through slogans and symbols that, through repetition, he seeks to

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> Zimbardo and Ebbesen, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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implant in the target's consciousness. These slogans and symbols can then be manipulated, as needed or desired, to evoke either favorable or unfavorable reactions.

As Adolf Hitler wrote many years ago,

“The receptive ability of the masses is very limited, their understanding small; on the other hand, they have a great power of forgetting. This being so, all effective propaganda must be confined to a very few points which must be brought out in the form of slogans until the very last man is enabled to comprehend what is meant by any slogan.”<sup>22</sup>

Propaganda as an approach to persuasion has inherent limitations, however. As Petty and Cacioppo point out on the basis of evidence from psychological experiments, attitude changes that occur through this peripheral route are likely to be less persistent, more susceptible to counterpersuasion, and less predictive of behavior than changes arrived at through careful reasoning. Historical evidence on the effectiveness of propaganda leads to similar conclusions.

Based on his study of propaganda effectiveness during World Wars I and II, Brown concluded as follows:

"...nobody can create emotions which are not already there, and the propagandist is limited to evoking or stimulating those attitudes suited to his purpose out of the total spectrum existing in his audience....

"By and large, our conclusion must be that actions speak louder than words, the actual strategic position of the enemy being more important in determining his attitudes than any amount of propaganda....

"All these examples demonstrate that political propaganda is much less effective than has often been thought and that, in particular, the mass media play only a very small part in changing people's attitudes. Their function is limited to reinforcing or crystallizing *existing* voting intentions, and it is events rather than words which prove effectual.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf*, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 103, 148.

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Recent events in Eastern Europe after 40 years of communist indoctrination suggest that similar conclusions apply to the effectiveness of political propaganda in peace time.

### **Behavior**

An influence operation directed at a specific policy maker, such as might be done through an agent of influence, is intended to influence that policy maker's decision on a specific issue. The great bulk of influence activity, however, is not so narrowly focused. It is intended to influence the general climate of opinion. The goal, nonetheless, is still to influence people's actions, not just to change their opinions. Opinions are often not translated into actions, so actions rather than opinions are the key to evaluating the effectiveness of influence operations.

In considering how individuals might change their behavior, one can envisage a continuum with the passive non-voter at one extreme and the political activist at the other extreme. An influence operation that motivates a non-voter to vote is certainly a successful operation, as is an operation that stimulates a person to join a demonstration for the first time, or to persuade others to vote or join a demonstration. Success might be viewed as moving a target anywhere along this continuum from political passivity to political activism. Obviously, the more persons who are moved, and the farther they are moved, the more successful the operation.

**Political Passivity**

**Non-Voter**



**Voter**



**Opinion Leader**  
• Talk with others  
about one's beliefs



**Demonstrator**



**Political Activist**

**Activist/Worker**

Joining a demonstration or signing a petition is a particularly significant form of action, as there is evidence that public commitment may lead to, rather than follow from, an enduring change in beliefs. In discussing how religious evangelists operate, Zimbardo and Ebbesen note:

"Most significant is their use of public commitment, of coming forward, taking a vow, making an overt pledge, or speaking out. They do not wait until their audience believes before requesting it to act, but rather work on the now firmly established psychological principle that beliefs change following a commitment to behavior discrepant with the original beliefs. In fact, in the Old Testament the rabbis are enjoined not to make their parishioners or converts believe in God before they are asked to pray, but to have them pray first so that belief will follow"<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, joining a demonstration or signing a petition may act as a stimulus to pervasive attitude change, rather than follow from it.

It seems logical to assume that changes in attitude will be followed by significant and enduring changes in behavior, but this appears not to be the case. Research on this issue has repeatedly demonstrated that the relationship between attitudes and behavior is tenuous.<sup>25</sup> One scholar recently concluded that:

"In terms of cost considerations, an incredible amount of money is being spent in applied psychology, marketing, and survey research that can hardly be justified by the strength of covariation presently found in attitude-behavior relationships."<sup>26</sup>

The reason attitudes frequently fail to guide behavior is that behavior is influenced so much by the specific circumstances in which it occurs. It is almost impossible to separate out the situational variables. Recent research<sup>27</sup> has made progress in specifying conditions under which attitudes are and are not predictive of behavior, but the

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<sup>24</sup> Zimbardo and Ebbesen, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> W. Mischel, *Personality Assessment* (New York: Wiley, 1968).

<sup>26</sup> Upmeyer, Arnold and Bernd Six, "Strategies for Exploring Attitudes and Behavior," in Arnold Upmeyer, ed., *Attitudes and Behavioral Decisions* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Petty and Cacioppo, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

following statement by Kiesler et al probably still represents the consensus of social psychologists on this point:

"We will not find a high correlation between attitude and behavior if situational pressures substantially contribute to the observed behavior - and they almost always do."<sup>28</sup>

This is illustrated most dramatically by the recent revolutionary developments in Eastern Europe. It seems unlikely that people's attitudes suddenly changed so dramatically. What changed was Soviet policy and, therefore, the situational constraints that conditioned how people expressed their attitudes and opinions.

Behavior is always the product of personal drives and preferences as conditioned by situational opportunities and constraints. As a general rule, the situational pressures dominate. This suggests that influence operations will be effective only when conditions are ripe and the target has both incentive and opportunity to act. After analyzing the effect of propaganda in World War I and World War II, Brown concluded that:

"...propaganda is successful only when directed at those who are willing to listen, absorb the information, and if possible act on it, and this happens only when the other side is in a condition of lowered morale and is already losing the campaign.... War propaganda can often change attitudes but, unless the real situation is catastrophic, it rarely changes behaviour; and propaganda which does not lead to action has very largely failed."<sup>29</sup>

In considering the relationship between attitudes and behavior, we have to ask "under what conditions does what kinds of attitudes held by what kinds of individuals predict what kinds of behavior?"<sup>30</sup> The recent social psychology literature documents a number of variables that determine when and to what degree attitudes predict actual behavior. These include fears, community standards, inducements, degree to which one has a vested interest, and whether there are cues to suggest that one's attitude is relevant to a decision. Individuals who

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<sup>28</sup> Kiesler, Charles A., Barry E. Collins, and Norman Miller, *Attitude Change: A Critical Analysis of Theoretical Approaches* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), pp. 29-30.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>30</sup> Fazio, Russell H. and Mark P. Zanna, "Direct Experience and Attitude-Behavior Consistency," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 14 (New York: Academic Press, 1981), p. 165.

have a greater degree of self-control or a higher level of moral reasoning also tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their attitudes. Certain types of attitudes are more likely than others to lead to behavioral consistency: these are attitudes that have been formed through logical reasoning, that have remained unchanged over a period of time, that are clearly defined or held with great confidence.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, the route from communication of a message to changed behavior as a result of that message is long and tortuous. There are many hurdles to be overcome for a message to be perceived accurately, evaluated as intended, cause a change in opinion or attitude, and for this, in turn, to cause a change in behavior.

#### Assessing Effectiveness

Harold Lasswell set the traditional approach to analyzing mass communications when he asked the question: "Who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect?"<sup>32</sup> He was concerned with the use of the media for mass persuasion, information, or control. Lasswell's paradigm directed several generations of social psychologists to focus their attention on the goals of the communicator, the meaning of the message, efficiency in distributing the message, and the effect of the message on individuals as measured by survey data.

More recent studies have taken different approaches. One of the newer approaches suggests "that media messages are at least as much received as sent and that choice and perception, and the determinants of these, are at least as significant as the motives for 'sending' and the degree of efficiency achieved."<sup>33</sup> The above discussion of obstacles that must be overcome before a message is perceived and affects attitudes and changes behavior follows this approach.

In a broad historical review of studies of the relationship between mass communications and public opinion, Gladys and Kurt Lang

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<sup>31</sup> Fazio, Russell H. "Multiple Processes by Which Attitudes Guide Behavior: The MODE Model as an Integrative Framework," in Mark P. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 23 (New York: Academic Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Lasswell, Harold, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in L. Bryson, ed., *The Communication of Ideas* (New York: Harper, 1948).

<sup>33</sup> McQuail, Denis, "Sociology of Mass Communication," in Ralph Turner and James Short, eds., *Annual Review of Sociology* (Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews, Inc., 1985), p. 94.

identified four research strategies for examining the effects of mass communications.<sup>34</sup> These same research strategies apply to Soviet influence operations, in which mass communications play a major role.

The Langs describe the strategies as: the study of audiences, the search of correspondences, the concern with refraction, and the study of outcomes. The first two strategies follow the traditional Lasswell model and, historically, suggested that the mass media have not had a significant effect on public opinion. The last two strategies are more recent approaches and have led to the conclusion that mass media do have a considerably greater impact than previously believed. The following discussion is based on the Langs' analysis.

#### Study of Audiences

This strategy assumes that media have direct effects on people, changing their attitudes and behavior. It looks at how people are affected by the media and seeks to identify those factors that make people more receptive or more resistant to media messages. The unit of analysis is the individual member of the audience and the degree of opinion change in response to exposure to media messages. The method of analysis is survey research.

The study of audiences led to two general conclusions. One is that mass media have little if any effect on public opinion or such things as voting behavior. Change that does occur as a result of exposure to the media is in the direction of reinforcing existing dispositions. The second conclusion is that whatever impact a message does have depends very little upon the content of the message or how many people are exposed to it; rather, it depends upon how individuals seek to use the media to gratify their own personal needs.

The conclusion that mass media have little effect on public opinion was the consensus view of social scientists for many years. Burns, for example, refers to "the accumulation of almost entirely negative findings from research over thirty-five years into the extent to which broadcasting actually influences political opinion and voting behavior."<sup>35</sup> When one considers the previously discussed obstacles that a message must overcome before it leads to changes of attitude

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<sup>34</sup> Lang, Gladys and Kurt Lang, "Mass Communication and Public Opinion: Strategies for Research," in Morris Rosenberg and Ralph Turner, *Social Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

<sup>35</sup> Burns, T., "The Organization of Public Opinion," in J. Curran *et al*, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 45.

*from the works of Richards J. Heuer, Jr.*

and behavior, these results are not surprising. Through selective exposure and biased interpretation, most people take from the media only that which supports their existing beliefs. Based on this research, it would be unwise to assume that the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda can be judged by measuring the content of its messages or the level of public exposure to these messages.

More recent research, however, does identify circumstances in which mass media exert an influence. During periods of crisis or unsettling events, or periods of rapid change when people have not yet formulated their views, the media provides a sense of orientation. The public participates in these events through the media. The current turmoil in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is such a time.

Search for Correspondences

This approach seeks to relate some characteristic of the media to some aspect of social or political behavior. The unit of analysis is the cumulative impact on some characteristic of society as a whole, and the method of analysis is generally the correlation of two variables. For example, how does the proportion of editorial endorsements for each presidential candidate compare with the popular vote received by the candidates? Or, what is the correlation between amount of media space or time devoted to an issue and the issue's perceived importance to the public?

In its most familiar form, this strategy has been employed to explore relationships between variations in media exposure or content and aggregate trends in public attitudes or behavior. With respect to Soviet influence operations, this strategy might be used to correlate changes in Soviet propaganda themes with changes in public opinion or voting behavior. The weakness of this approach is the difficulty in establishing causal relationships, as discussed below. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate out the specific influence of mass communications in general (or Soviet communications in particular) from the many other political developments and social influences.

Concern with Refraction

This strategy views the media as creating its own version of reality, which then becomes influential in its own right. Most objects, events and personalities described by the media are outside the range of our direct experience, and our knowledge of them is conveyed by

communications. We have a shared image of the world that is created, in large measure, by the mass media system.

Whether intentionally distorted or not, the image of the world disseminated in the mass media is always depicted from some perspective, brought into focus through some lens, including the various lenses of the television camera. This recognizes, for example, that we generally do not perceive the Soviet Union directly; we perceive a refracted image of the Soviet Union via the media. The Langs prefer to use the more neutral term of refraction rather than bias to designate the influence of the communication system on the image that is disseminated.

This strategy focuses, in part, on how characteristics of the system itself distort the image, e.g., how newspaper deadlines or television's requirement for visual impact affect the message that is transmitted. It also looks at the implicit message about the world in which we live rather than the explicit message intended to be conveyed by a specific communication. According to this approach, "the importance of mass communication lies less in what people are told to do (prescriptive and persuasive messages) than in what they convey about the larger world (descriptive communication)."<sup>36</sup>

With respect to Soviet influence operations, this approach would lead one to ask some questions that are generally not analyzed. Regarding forgeries, for example, one would look beyond the effect of the forgery on the target. One would look at the message that is conveyed by the fact that the Soviets still engage in widespread forgery operations? What does that message convey about the Soviet Union, and what effect does this have on a wider audience?

One conclusion of the joint CIA - Department of State conference on Soviet propaganda and disinformation, held in 1985, was that the Soviets have enjoyed considerable success in controlling the meaning of terms used in international debate - terms like peace, disarmament, liberation, and justice.<sup>37</sup> Analysis of this semantic manipulation would be part of the concern with refraction, as it involves indirect manipulation of one's world view.

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<sup>36</sup> Lang and Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 672.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Dept. of State, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

One would also look at how the mechanism for reporting on the Soviet Union affects the image of the Soviet Union that is reported through this mechanism. How do the controls on journalists in Moscow, and the implicit threats and inducements that lead to some necessary measure of self-censorship by these journalists, affect our impressions of the Soviet Union. Our most fundamental impressions of the Soviet Union, of its leaders, of what drives its policies, and what is happening there, are in large measure created by journalistic or diplomatic reporting from Moscow that is vulnerable to Soviet influence if not outright control through disinformation or agent of influence operations. What the Langs call the refraction strategy would focus increased attention on how our image of the Soviet Union is influenced inadvertently by the Moscow-based media or intentionally by Soviet influence operations in Moscow, how and why this image may diverge from reality, and what effect this has on U.S. policies.

Study of Outcomes:

This strategy recognizes that the media is often more than just a passive reporter of events. It may be an active participant that directly influences the unfolding of events. Rather than effecting events indirectly by influencing public opinion, it may effect outcomes directly by playing a critical role in them.

After studying the Watergate affair from break-in to President Nixon's resignation, the Langs<sup>38</sup> concluded that the media played a major role. This was not because of the media's direct influence on public opinion, but because the media were used by the major actors and helped legitimize the social pressures that led to Nixon's resignation. Gitlin's study of the New Left student movement in America in the 1960s shows that the movement both depended on the media for access to public attention and became trapped by the image the media created of it.<sup>39</sup>

This approach is relevant to Soviet influence operations in several ways. When a newspaper surfaces a Soviet forgery, it becomes an actor in the events that follow, not just a reporter of events. Whether or not that action has a significant effect on outcomes, quite independent of its effect on public opinion, is an appropriate subject for analysis. Ilya Dzhirkvelov, for example, has described a forgery

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<sup>38</sup> Lang, Gladys and Kurt Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Gitlin, T., *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. Calif. Press, 1981).

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operation in which he participated that caused the Peace Corps to be expelled from Tanzania and Uganda.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to peace movements in Western Europe, the common assumption is that they are influenced by Soviet propaganda. Beyond the question of influence, however, one needs to inquire whether this influence has had a critical effect on the outcome of political decisions. One might also ask whether influence operates in the opposite direction as well. Do the Soviets play back themes that originated in the West and found resonance there? Soviet support of the same themes would enhance the credibility and influence of the Western peace groups.

Let us now leave the discussion of the social psychology paradigm for studying mass communication in general, and deal specifically with analysis of Soviet influence operations.

In the abstract, effectiveness of Soviet influence operations might be measured by the number and importance of decisions affected by these operations; or by the numbers and types of people whose opinions were changed, how great this change has been, and the consequences of this change. In practice, however, it is virtually impossible to obtain direct measures of these factors. There are invariably multiple possible explanations for why any given decision was reached or opinion changed.

This has not deterred many observers from making superficial judgments about Soviet influence. For example:  
"Skillful Soviet diplomacy, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns largely changed the political direction of grievances in the Third World. The traditional North vs. South character of the UN discussions (developed versus less developed countries) has been redirected by the Soviets into an East vs. West conflict. In the 1982 General Assembly, Third World nations voted with the Soviet Union an average of 83.4% of the time, and the same group voted an average of 20.4% of the time with the United States."<sup>41</sup>

One must ask the question: What evidence exists to show that Third World nations voted as they did specifically because they were

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<sup>40</sup> U.S. Dept. of State, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> Bittman, Ladislav, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985), p. 57.

influenced by the Soviet Union, rather than because they had common interests or were themselves skillfully exploiting East-West differences for their own purposes. Soviet activities have presumably had some influence on Third World attitudes. In some countries, that influence has probably been very substantial. But attributing Third World voting in the UN "largely" to Soviet influence may oversimplify some very complex relationships.

Judgments about the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations should not be made until all other potential causes have also been examined. This approach appears to be the exception rather than the rule. One of these noteworthy exceptions is the previously cited study by David Yost of the 1979-83 Soviet campaign to block modernization of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe. In studying Soviet influence operations, Yost made a careful effort to view the Soviet activity in the broad context of all other political influences active in West Germany at that time. Yost observed that:

"The effects of Soviet efforts should ideally be sought in a broad framework of analysis including, at the least, the political forces and trends at work in West Germany independent of the INF affair, the overall political-military situation of the Atlantic Alliance aside from the INF affair, and West Germany's fundamental situation of geostrategic vulnerability and political dependence-again, apart from INF. Such an analysis would try to distinguish the effects of various Soviet and non-Soviet factors."<sup>42</sup>

Yost notes that the INF case "poses virtually insoluble problems of causative interpretation, owing to the complexity of the interactions among multitudes of actors."<sup>43</sup> As one of many examples, he points out that "...it is not always clear whether the Soviets incited specific protest movement activities, or whether the existence of such activities incited the Soviets to take supportive steps."<sup>44</sup>

Many studies of Soviet influence operations are descriptive rather than analytical. For example, Clive Rose's book, *Campaigns Against Western Defence*,<sup>45</sup> describes Soviet activities in detail, but does not at any point analyze their effects. The reader does not learn of any concrete impact these activities have had on Western policy. There

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<sup>42</sup> Yost, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>45</sup> London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1985.

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seems to be an implicit assumption that Soviet operations are effective because Soviet themes are echoed by a vocal minority in the West. This minority might exist under any circumstances, however, and it may or may not have an impact. One should analyze how much larger this minority became, or how much more effective it was, as a consequence of Soviet influence operations.

Other studies of Soviet influence operations are analytical in the sense that they deal with how (tactics, targets) or why (motives, goals) the Soviets conduct these operations, or with the differences between Soviet statements and Soviet reality. Very few studies, however, analyze and present evidence for the effects of Soviet activities. Fourteen written papers were presented at the joint CIA - Department of State conference on Soviet propaganda and disinformation. Only one of these papers, "Controlling the Agenda: Soviet Propaganda and American Foreign Policy," by Herbert J. Ellison, presented substantial analysis and evidence concerning the effects of Soviet operations.

Ellison argues persuasively that:

"The most impressive feature of the contemporary international scene is the Soviet ability to attack the policies of the Western alliance from within by means of massive campaigns that are closely coordinated with current Soviet foreign policy objectives and that orchestrate campaign purposes in broadly formulated, widely appealing themes and slogans: peace, democracy, national self-determination, land reform, and social and racial equality."<sup>46</sup>

Ellison emphasizes the role of "intersocietal diplomacy," the whole complex of relationships between societies as distinct from the relationship between governments. This involves academic and cultural exchanges, contacts with churches and other religious organizations, front movements, Soviet-organized international professional organizations, publications, trade and commercial organizations - all of which can be mobilized and controlled from the Soviet side but cannot be controlled by a democratic society. Ellison argues that through its massive organizational and political lobbying effort, the Soviets have set the agenda of political debate and succeeded in shifting the focus from the Soviet's military challenge to the legitimacy of the West's defensive response.

What Ellison does not address, however, is how much of this shift is attributable to the existence and unique character of the Soviet

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of State, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

program of "intersocietal diplomacy." Pacifism and isolationism have a long tradition in the United States. How much of this shift would have occurred even if the Soviets had had a more conventional approach to diplomacy and public information? The difficulty of answering this question does not eliminate the need to ask it.

Measurement of complex social phenomena is commonly done by selecting some measurable indicator of the phenomenon, and then measuring that indicator as a surrogate for the phenomenon itself. The validity of such measurements depends, of course, upon whether the indicator does in fact capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Ladislav Bittman, the former Czech disinformation specialist and current student of Soviet disinformation, writes:  
"The KGB measures the success of propagandistic disinformation in two ways. First, it is interested in the attention given to the message outside the Soviet bloc, the amount of public discussion generated by the message, and the prevailing political tone of the discussion. Second, it determines whether a message forces a target country to make any political changes that could directly or indirectly benefit the Soviet Union."<sup>47</sup>

Attention to a message outside the Soviet bloc and the amount and tone of discussion of the message are measurable indicators. They might be measured by the amount and tone of editorial comment on a new Soviet policy initiative, or by press replay throughout the world of a forged document intended to embarrass the U.S.

Whether they are valid indicators of effective influence is an open question, however. In the context of the previously elaborated model of the influence process, these may be seen as indicators of perception and perhaps even of accurate evaluation, but they do not measure attitude change or behavioral influence. It requires a leap of faith to conclude that effective distribution of a message implies the effective exercise of influence.

An extreme example of the gap between distribution of a message and the influence exercised by that message is Eastern Europe. After total

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<sup>47</sup> Bittman, *op.cit.*, p. 56. Note that Bittman was referring to KGB active measures rather than overt propaganda. Bladimir Shlapentokh and Michael Voslensky both believe the Soviets make little or no effort to assess the effectiveness of the overt propaganda apparatus; see U.S. Dept. of State, *op. cit.*, p. 42-43.

from the works of Richards J. Heuer, Jr.

control of the media for over 40 years, it is now apparent that Soviet propaganda has not had an enduring impact on public attitudes in Eastern Europe toward the Soviet Union. In retrospect, it can now be viewed as only a useful adjunct to Soviet power in maintaining control over the population. Again, one must conclude that actions speak louder than words.

The Eastern European experience raises questions about another tenet of Soviet propaganda doctrine: the cumulative impact of many small pieces of information. According to Bittman:

"Soviet disinformation operatives know that a single covert action, however precisely designed, cannot tip the balance of power between the Western Alliance and the Communist bloc. But they believe that mass production of propaganda and disinformation over a period of several decades will have a significant effect. The strategy seems to work."<sup>48</sup>

This view is commonly asserted but has not been proven. Finer distinctions may be necessary; it may be true for certain types of messages or under some circumstances, but not for others. For example, endless repetition of the same stereotypical formulations has been partially successful in imposing Soviet meanings on key elements of the vocabulary of international politics. On the other hand, the cumulative impact of efforts to persuade target audiences that the United States is responsible for the AIDS epidemic may be far less significant.

Western attempts to measure the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations encounter similar conceptual and methodological problems. We will consider three potential indicators of Soviet influence: quantity of activity, opinion polls, and behavioral indicators.

#### Quantity

Amount of literature distributed, hours of radio broadcasting, number and level of visitors, and frequency of forgeries are all quantitative measures of the level of Soviet influence operations. Monitoring changes in quantity of activity may offer useful clues to changes in foreign policy emphasis or to how the Soviets perceive their role in a given country. It may not tell one much about the effectiveness of Soviet influence, however. A decision to increase Soviet influence

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

operations in a given country, for example, could be stimulated either by past success in such operations in that country, or by past failure and the desire to overcome past obstacles.

To say that Soviet influence activities must be effective because the Soviets devote so many resources to them is akin to saying American foreign aid must be effective because we spend so much money on it. Both programs need to be evaluated on their own merits, not on the resources devoted to them. It is not much easier for the Soviets to evaluate the effectiveness of their influence operations than for us to evaluate ours.

In the context of our model of the influence process, raw quantity of activity is somewhat irrelevant. What counts is amount of influence activity that is actually perceived by the target, evaluated as intended by the target, causes a change in attitude, and leads to behavior that would not otherwise have occurred.

#### Opinion Polls

Recording changes in opinions and attitudes has the advantage of measuring one of the latter stages of the influence process. One may be able to correlate changes in opinions with themes pushed through Soviet influence operations. Even under the best of circumstances, however, it is difficult to be certain that Soviet operations caused the change of opinion. Yost concluded that:

"Even the information that would seem to be relatively precise (for instance, opinion poll results) offers little more than inferential suggestions about the origins of the opinions held. Little insight about the effectiveness of the Soviet anti-INF campaign, in comparison to other possible causative factors, can be drawn from such data."<sup>49</sup>

As an example, Yost noted that:

"West German experts of various political orientations consider U.S. behavior (particularly after January 1981) to have been just as important as (if not more important than) Soviet efforts in contributing to political polarization, the socialization of successor generations, and the delegitimization of NATO nuclear policy in Western Europe. In their view, the way in which the Reagan administration argued the need for Western rearmament efforts deprived the U.S. of public support in Europe. It reinforced the image

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<sup>49</sup> Yost, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

of the U.S. that the USSR has tried to project - namely, that the U.S. is the engine of the arms race, and the truly dangerous superpower.”<sup>50</sup>

In theory, polls could be structured to explore not just what people believe, but why they believe it. Certainly, this would provide more grist for the analytical mill, but results would still not be definitive. A considerable body of psychological research shows that people have a poor understanding of why they believe what they do. They cannot describe accurately the true basis for their judgments.<sup>51</sup>

One thing seems clear. Simple correlation of changes in opinion with Soviet propaganda themes is not sufficient. Other potential causes of the change need to be considered and excluded before attributing it to Soviet influence. To measure the effectiveness of Soviet influence, one also needs to examine whether changes in attitude have led to politically significant decisions or changes in behavior.

Behavior

The ultimate goal of influence is to affect behavior, so measures of behavior are likely to be the most valid measures of influence. Three forms of behavior are particularly susceptible to measurement: voting, participation in demonstrations, and decisions.

Voting gives an objective measure of opinion, and often of changes in opinion. Commonly, however, there are several possible interpretations of why the vote turned out as it did. For example, was it influenced primarily by the candidate's position on the issues, or by the candidate's personal appeal? To use changes in voting behavior as an effective measure of Soviet influence, one must understand why people voted as they did.

To the political action planner, voting behavior is an especially attractive target, as it offers an opportunity to leverage one's influence. Influencing only one or two percent of the voters may cause a change in government with dramatic policy consequences.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, David A. Summers, J. Dale Taliaferro, and Donna J. Fletcher, "Subjective vs. Objective Descriptions of Judgment Policy," *Psychonomic Science*, 18 (1979), pp. 249-250; and Paul Slovic, Dan Fleissner, and W. Scott Bauman, "Analyzing the Use of Information in Investment Decision Making," *The Journal of Business*, 45 (1972), pp. 283-301. For additional references, see Paul Slovic and Sarah Lichtenstein, "Comparison of Bayesian and Regression Approaches to the Study of Information Processing in Judgment," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 6 (1971), p. 684.

Increase or decrease in number of people participating in demonstrations may be a significant indicator. Other forms of public commitment to a cause, such as signing petitions, would be in the same category.

Public commitment is more significant than a vote or response to an opinion poll, because it tends to signify a more lasting commitment and one that is firm enough to lead to action. As previously noted, such public commitment is often the first step leading to a lasting change in attitude, rather than the final step after the attitude has already changed. There is a need for consistency, so once one has taken a position in public, attitudes are realigned to be consistent with that action.

Government decisions are, of course, the ultimate form of behavior that one seeks to influence. Any measure of decisions, including the extent to which they are attributable to Soviet actions, would be the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations. Decisions are public and can usually be characterized as beneficial or adverse to Soviet interests. As previously observed, however, it is commonly difficult to analyze the role of Soviet influence in determining those decisions. It is even more difficult when that influence is exercised through covert agents of influence rather than through more public pressures.

Bittman has written that agents of influence are "harder to detect and far more dangerous than propagandistic disinformation." Certainly they are harder to detect, and they probably are more dangerous than propaganda. Bittman goes on to state:

"The cases of Guenther Guillaume, close aide, advisor and personal friend to West German Chancellor Willy Brandt; Charles Pathe, the French journalist and member of French high society; and Brigadier General Jean-Louis Jeanmaire of Switzerland are clear proof that the influence of Soviet-bloc intelligence on Western political processes and military decisions is much greater than most sources originally believed."<sup>52</sup>

Again, this may well be true, but the case is not made by simply stating it. Little is known of the concrete impacts of any of these cases on West German, French or Swiss decision making. One might

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<sup>52</sup> Bittman, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

assume that Guillaume, in particular, was in position to exercise a strongly pernicious influence. Given the complexity and multiple competing pressures involved in government decision making in an industrial democracy, however, one wonders how strong an influence it is possible for any one person to have. There is much greater opportunity for agents of influence to play a decisive role in less developed societies.

#### Conclusion

There are no easy answers to the question of how to assess the effectiveness of Soviet influence operations. If there were, they would have been found long ago. There are no indicators that might be collected and measured to arrive at unambiguous comparisons or conclusions. If there were, they, too, would have been collected long ago, for this problem has been around for many years.

We believe the problem is best approached through a series of case studies, rather than by any new set of generalized collection requirements. Yost's study of the Soviet campaign to block INF deployment in West Germany is a prototype of what needs to be done. It identifies Soviet influence operations and then analyzes their impact in the context of the myriad other influences at work on West German public opinion and government decision making during the same time period. A series of such case studies on different Soviet campaigns, and dealing with different countries, would provide an improved empirical basis for generalizations about Soviet influence operations.

This study has questioned some of the facile assumptions commonly made in the past about Soviet influence operations. That actions serving Soviet interests have been influenced by Soviet operations. How widely a message is spread indicates how effective it is. That many small pieces of information have a large cumulative effect over time. This challenge to common assumptions is perhaps more plausible since the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe in 1989-90. By questioning some of the shortcuts to judgment that have been employed in the past, this study highlights the need for more systematic analysis. That analysis needs to focus on the effect of Soviet operations, not just on what the Soviets have done and how and why they did it.