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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE IN FULL 1998

17 July 1964

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

FROM: Tennent H. Bagley

SUBJECT: Use of NOSENKO Information in Warren Commission Report

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Lee J. Rankin, General Counsel of the Commission, Mr. Slawson, Mr. Tennent H. Bagley and Mr. Lee Wigren

DATE: 16 July 1964; 1400-1600 Hours

PLACE: Offices of the Warren Commission

1. At Mr. Helms' request we discussed with Mr. Slawson and Mr. Rankin how and in what manner NOSENKO's information might be used in the published report of the Warren Commission. Mr. Helms had discussed this problem with Mr. Dulles and Mr. Rankin and Mr. Murphy had also discussed it with Mr. Dulles (the latter conversation was reported in a memorandum of 8 July 1964). Mr. Helms' instructions to me were to discuss the matter cooperatively but to leave all decisions to Mr. Helms.

2. Mr. Slawson, with whom we spoke alone for the first 20 minutes, had drafted a memorandum to Mr. Rankin proposing a text embodying NOSENKO's information for the Commission's report. He invited us to read and comment on it. This text consisted of about four pages and included most of NOSENKO's statements, attributing them to "a confidential Soviet Union source." Other parts of the proposed text described in a general way what the Government, on the basis of general knowledge of Soviet practices, can presume the KGB to have done in the case of any defector such as Oswald; Mr. Slawson hoped that CIA would be able to give the Warren Commission a statement to the effect that such presumptions were justified on the basis of information available to the intelligence community.

2.

3. After reading Mr. Slawson's proposed text, I told him that CIA wanted to assist the Warren Commission in any way possible. For a number of reasons the proposed text could be damaging to the interests of the Commission:

a. Regardless of the wording of the source description, it was very likely that the press would very quickly be able to identify the "confidential Soviet Union Source" as NOSENKO. (Neither Mr. Slawson nor, later, Mr. Rankin disagreed with this.)

b. NOSENKO is very likely to be uncovered publicly as a KGB plant at some time in the future. When this occurs unsophisticated readers of the Commission's report will be inclined to read his statements through a mirror and to assume that the reverse of what he said was true; i.e., that Oswald was a KGB agent, perhaps dispatched on a mission to kill President Kennedy.

c. The inclusion of NOSENKO's information, followed by the revelation that he was a Soviet plant, would cast a shadow over the reliability of the report and the judgment of the Commission.

d. Revelation that NOSENKO had any specific knowledge of Oswald's case in the Soviet Union would be seized upon by an alert press as the most intriguing new item in the whole report. It would make NOSENKO into a public figure again and would raise demands for public appearances and testimonies. This would have catastrophic results on our current plans to get to the bottom of the NOSENKO affair and, among other things, would lessen our chances of eventually learning the true story behind his Oswald information. If we do, we might be able in this way to contribute significantly to the work of the Commission.

4. Mr. Slawson immediately and without further discussion said that he was convinced of the validity of our arguments. At about this point Mr. Rankin entered the room and was brought up to date on the discussion to that point.

5. Mr. Rankin was convinced that whether or not NOSENKO's name or information were included in the report, the press representatives would specifically ask Commission spokesmen whether or not NOSENKO, the well-publicized KGB defector, had been asked for his knowledge of the affair. The Commission did not want to be in the position of having overlooked this source nor of having withheld matters relevant to the investigation. However, since NOSENKO appears to be a KGB plant, it did not appear necessary or desirable to use his information in full and Mr. Rankin agreed that there would be a public tendency to mirror-read NOSENKO's statements after he was revealed to be a KGB plant.

6. At this point we all agreed that some language could be found which would protect the Commission from later accusations of having used planted information or of withholding testimony. CIA's aim was to avoid NOSENKO's becoming a public figure or mystery or center of attention. We wanted if possible to slide through the publication of the Warren Commission report with our handling of NOSENKO as untroubled as possible. Since Mr. Rankin seemed rather certain that the press would ask whether NOSENKO had been consulted, even if his name did not appear in the report, it might very well be in CIA's interest, as well as the Commission's, to have NOSENKO's name mentioned in the report (in a manner which would discourage further questions). Mr. Rankin was inclined to say, at one point, something to the effect that the Commission also had queried NOSENKO. He would also include a statement elsewhere in the report to the effect that the Commission received information from various confidential sources, without specifying what information or which sources were involved, which information "did not affect the Commission's conclusions." We also discussed the possibility of drafting a statement to be used by Commission members should they be questioned by the press.

7. It was agreed that Mr. Rankin and Mr. Slawson would work out some phraseology which would meet our needs and that they would discuss this wording with CIA, perhaps with Mr. Helms present. They did not say when this would be ready, but it will presumably be very soon, since the Commission's report is to be published on August 7.

8. I was quite frank with Mr. Rankin about our reading of NOSENKO and our hopes eventually to break him. We informally discussed theories about Oswald's and

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Marina's real status with the KGB, in the light of  
BOSENKO's reporting and of our knowledge of KGB prac-  
tices.

Tennent H. Bagley  
Chief, SR/CI