

Mind-Control Studies Had Origins in Trial of Mindszenty

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 1—In the summer of 1977, it may be difficult for Americans to comprehend the frame of mind of the men who nearly 30 years earlier started the Central Intelligence Agency's effort to manipulate human behavior.

As some of the former high-ranking C.I.A. men recall now, they had looked into the vacant eyes of Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty at his treason trial in Budapest in 1949 and had been horrified.

They had been convinced that his confession had been wrung from him while he was either under the influence of some mysterious mind-bending drug or that he was standing before the dock in a post-hypnotic trance. The sight touched off memories of earlier "show trials" in the Soviet Union.

The C.I.A. leaders were certain the Communists had embarked on a campaign to control men's minds and they were determined to find a defense, setting out in earnest the next year—1950—with Project Bluebird, which evolved into Project Artichoke, then became MK-ULTRA-MK-DELTA. With each code name change, they broadened their sweep, until there remained virtually no avenue of human behavior control they were not exploring.

Fears Seemingly Confirmed

Subsequent developments seemed to confirm their fears: The arrest in Germany of two Soviet agents armed with identical plastic cylinders containing hypodermic needles, said to cause a victim "to become amenable to the will of his captor." Then, the startling confessions of downed American airmen to false charges of carrying out germ warfare against North Korea.

A short time later, however, in 1953, a high level military study group determined that events had not been what they seemed. Neither the Russians nor anyone else had devised a means of turning men into robots and there was "little threat, if any, to national security," the study said.

The intelligence community rationalized: They would go ahead anyway, against the chance that the Communists might some day live up to their dread. Furthermore, they saw great potential in developing these tools for their own offensive use.

There was an "urgent need," the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies argued to develop "effective and practical techniques" to "render an individual subservient to an imposed will or control."

The C.I.A. men, who led the way, enlisting the support of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Departments of Agriculture, Health, Education and Welfare and several other agencies, acknowledged among themselves that much of what they were setting out to do was "unethical," bordered on the illegal and would be repugnant to the American people. So they made certain that these activities

were tightly held, known only to the director, Allen W. Dulles, and a handful of operatives and high-ranking aides.

"Precautions must be taken," one agency official wrote in an internal memo, "not only to protect the operation from exposure to enemy forces, but also to conceal these activities from the American public in general," adding that this information "would have serious repercussions in political and diplomatic circles and would be detrimental to the accomplishment [of the agency's] mission."

Fragmentary accounts of the C.I.A.'s efforts to control men's minds have been published in the past. But a far more comprehensive picture has emerged from a study of more than 2,000 pages of freshly released agency documents and an investigation by a team of New York Times reporters.

The behavior control, undertaken by men who presumably saw themselves as sincere and patriotic, takes on in retrospect the appearance of a bizarre grope into the world of science fiction. The C.I.A. investigators let their imaginations run: Was there a way to dissolve the Berlin Wall? What about a knockout drug that could incapacitate an entire building full of people? A pill that would make a drunk man sober; a way to manufacture food that looked and tasted normal but, when eaten, would create "confusion-anxiety-fear."

Rubber From Mushrooms?

One long discussion focused on whether rubber could be produced from mushrooms. Another on whether water witching could locate an enemy submarine.

They worked on ways to achieve the "controlled production" of headaches and earaches; twitches, jerks and staggers. They wanted to reduce a man to a bewildered, self-doubting mass to "subvert his principles," a C.I.A. document said. They wanted to direct him in ways that "may vary from rationalizing a disloyal act to the construction of a new person."

One of their longest running goals was to develop a way to induce amnesia. They wanted to be able to interrogate enemy espionage agents in such a way that neither the agents nor their superiors would know they had been compromised, and they wanted to be able to wipe clear the memories of their own agents after certain missions and, especially, when they were going into retirement.

They were interested in simple destruction, too. As with the other business that made amnesia so attractive, they wanted to be able to get away with murder without leaving a trace.

An Expert's Suggestions

One apparent medical or scientific expert, whose identity has been deleted from the documents, suggested that the agency might kill a man by putting him in a small, air-tight room with a chunk of dry ice, giving off suffocating carbon dioxide gas. He also proposed reduc-

ing a victim's body temperature to below freezing or exposing him to a lethal dose of X-rays. Or, he said, there were two "techniques" that required no special equipment: smothering the victim with a pillow case or strangling him with a bath towel.

In attempts to develop ways to administer lethal and mind-altering drugs surreptitiously through clothing as thick as a leather jacket, they tried out small spray guns and pencil-like injectors.

They conducted interviews with scientists and doctors and members of other intelligence agencies around the world. They studied the writing of the psychologist who worked with Adolf Hitler, wondered about the use of the "occult" and of "black psychiatry," and of course pored over their own stream of intelligence data.

There was an agent's report of a "confession gang" that had arrived in Shanghai, and, without the use of "old-fashioned torture or drugs," could obtain "any confession they desire." In one case, the report from China went, "the prisoner was not allowed to close his eyes for 26 days."

Most of the ideas the C.I.A. considered never got off the drawing board. For a few years in the early 1950's, though, the agency had one or two "special interrogation" teams that went on operational missions in Europe and Asia. A team was supposed to consist of a psychiatrist, a hypnotist and an interrogator and was to elicit information through the use of drugs and hypnotism.

In actual practice, the size of the teams and the procedure they followed varied. In one series of interrogations in Europe, for example, they employed neither hypnotism nor a combination of drugs and hypnotism—the very essence "of special interrogation" at the time—because the psychiatrist was in a hurry to resume an interrupted vacation and no hypnotist was available.

11 Days of Questioning

Working in the basement of a suburban home, guarded at times by armed military police in civilian clothes, the team questioned three European espionage agents who had been working for the C.I.A. "behind the Iron Curtain" and whose loyalty had become suspect.

Over 11 days, the three agents were individually given intravenous injections of an unidentified drug—possibly sodium pentothal—then engaged by the interrogator and the psychiatrist in fantasies.

The team decided that all three agents had responded to questions truthfully and should be continued in operational use. But they reported in the document that one of the agents who had resisted the effects of the drugs and later disappointed his interrogators by making reference to the "solution" that was injected, thus giving no indication of "amnesia," seemed a "poor operational type."

They said they felt that "if ever taken into custody by the Soviets he would also tell them the truth as he knew it under the slightest duress" and should not be trusted with important assignments.

A former senior intelligence official told of another "special interrogation" effort in Europe in which the C.I.A. tried to determine whether a Viennese count who had been promising information on Soviet cipher codes was telling the truth. The count was given sodium pentothal and hypnotized, the official said, but "it was a complete bust; he just laughed at us." Some time later the count was subjected to the C.I.A.'s "old reliable," the lie detector, and the agency concluded he had been lying.

The C.I.A. was fascinated by LSD and other psychochemicals that they thought might be useful in getting people to talk or in temporarily putting them out of action. They were aware that it was considered unethical to experiment on people with drugs without their knowledge, but they decided that "unwitting" testing was essential if accurate information on LSD and other substances was to be obtained.

Fatal LSD Experiment

In the C.I.A.'s very first experiment with LSD on a group of unwitting men, one of them, Dr. Frank Olson, a civilian working on top secret germ warfare in a unit at Fort Detrick, Md., which provided data for both the Army and the C.I.A., went into a depression that ended in his leap from a 10th-story hotel room window in Manhattan in the fall of 1953.

Earlier in the same year, in the first experiment with psychochemicals that the Army had sponsored at a civilian facility, Harold Blauer, a professional tennis player, had been given a fatal dose of mescaline derivative at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in Manhattan.

The fact that both men died in Government experiments was kept secret from their families and the general public for more than 20 years. Two years after the deaths the C.I.A. made an arrangement with the agents of the Bureau of Narcotics to test LSD surreptitiously on unwitting patrons of bars in New York and San Francisco, some of whom became violently ill and were hospitalized, never knowing exactly what had happened to them.

Some of the C.I.A. officials—past and present—and former military men who worked on the behavior control project, look back at their endeavors with a measure of disappointment that they had accomplished so little, but they had no regrets.

"I think it was certainly worthwhile," said one former agency official who agreed to speak only with the promise of anonymity. "People had quite a lot of fears, and if nothing had been done, people's imaginations could have gone most anywhere. I think what we did helped. It proved that things weren't as bad as people might have thought."