

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR      25 APR 1956

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable J. Edgar Hoover  
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation

SUBJECT      : Brainwashing

The attached study on brainwashing was prepared by my staff in response to the increasing acute interest in the subject throughout the intelligence and security components of the Government. I feel you will find it well worth your personal attention. It represents the thinking of leading psychologists, psychiatrists and intelligence specialists, based in turn on interviews with many individuals who have had personal experience with Communist brainwashing, and on extensive research and testing. While individuals specialists hold divergent views on various aspects of this most complex subject, I believe the study reflects a synthesis of majority expert opinion. I will, of course, appreciate any comments on it that you or your staff may have.

(signed)  
Allen W. Dulles  
Director

ENCLOSURE

## A REPORT ON COMMUNIST BRAINWASHING

The report that follows is a condensation of a study by training experts of the important classified and unclassified information available on this subject.

### BACKGROUND

Brainwashing, as a technique, has been used for centuries and is no mystery to psychologists. In this sense, brainwashing means involuntary re-education of basic beliefs and values. All people are being re-educated continually. New information changes one's beliefs. Everyone has experienced to some degree the conflict that ensues when new information is not consistent with prior belief. The experience of the brainwashed individual differs in that the inconsistent information is forced upon the individual under controlled conditions after the possibility of critical judgment has been removed by a variety of methods.

There is no question that an individual can be broken psychologically by captors with knowledge and willingness to persist in techniques aimed at deliberately destroying the integration of a personality. Although it is probable that everyone reduced to such a confused, disoriented state will respond to the introduction of new beliefs, this cannot be stated dogmatically.

### PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN CONTROL AND REACTION TO CONTROL

There are progressive steps in exercising control over an individual and changing his behaviour and personality integration. The following five steps are typical of behaviour changes in any controlled individual:

1. Making the individual aware of control is the first stage in changing his behaviour. A small child is made aware of the physical and psychological control of his parents and quickly recognizes that an overwhelming force must be reckoned with. So, a controlled adult comes to recognize the overwhelming powers of the state and the im-

personal, "incarcerative" machinery in which he is enmeshed. The individual recognizes that definite limits have been put upon the ways he can respond.

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2. Realization of his complete dependence upon the controlling system is a major factor in the controlling of his behavior. The controlled adult is forced to accept the fact that food, tobacco, praise, and the only social contact that he will get come from the very interrogator who exercises control over him.

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3. The awareness of control and recognition of dependence result in causing internal conflict and breakdown of previous patterns of behaviour. Although this transition can be relatively mild in the case of a child, it is almost invariably severe for the adult undergoing brainwashing. Only an individual who holds his values lightly can change them easily. Since the brainwasher-interrogators aim to have the individuals undergo profound emotional change, they force their victims to seek out painfully what is desired by the controlling individual. During this period the victim is likely to have a mental breakdown characterized by delusions and hallucinations.

4. Discovery that there is an acceptable solution to his problem is the first stage of reducing the individual's conflict. It is characteristically reported by victims of brainwashing that this discovery led to an overwhelming feeling of relief that the horror of internal conflict would cease and that perhaps they would not, after all, be driven insane. It is at this point that they are prepared to make major changes in their value-system. This is an automatic rather than voluntary choice. They have lost their ability to be critical.

5. Reintegration of values and identification with the controlling system is the final stage in changing the behaviour of the controlled individual. A child who has learned a new, socially desirable behaviour demonstrates its importance by attempting to adapt the new behaviour to a variety of other situations. Similar states in the brainwashed adult are

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pitiful. His new value-system, his manner of perceiving, organizing, and

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giving meaning to events, is virtually independent of his former value-system. He is no longer capable of thinking or speaking in concepts other than those he has adopted. He tends to identify by expressing thanks to his captors for helping him see the light. Brainwashing can be achieved without using illegal means. Anyone willing to use known principles of control and reactions to control and capable of demonstrating the patience needed in raising a child can probably achieve successful brainwashing.

#### COMMUNIST CONTROL TECHNIQUES AND THEIR EFFECTS

A description of usual communist control techniques follows.

1. Interrogation. There are at least two ways in which "interrogation" is used:

a. Elicitation, which is designed to get the individual to surrender protected information, is a form of interrogation. One major difference between elicitation and interrogation used to achieve brainwashing is that the mind of the individual must be kept clear to permit coherent, undistorted disclosure of protected information.

b. Elicitation for the purpose of brainwashing consists of questioning, argument, indoctrination, threats, cajolery, praise, hostility, and a variety of other pressures. The aim of this interrogation is to hasten the breakdown of the individual's value system and to encourage the substitution of a different value-system. The procurement of protected information is secondary and is used as a device to increase pressure upon the individual. The term "interrogation" in this paper will refer, in general, to this type. The "interrogator" is the individual who conducts this type of interrogation and who controls the administration of the other pressures. He is the protagonist against whom the victim develops his con-

flict, and upon whom the victim develops a state of dependency as he seeks some solution to his conflict.

2. Physical Torture and Threats of Torture. Two types of physical torture are distinguishable more by their psychological effect in inducing conflict than by the degree of painfulness:

a. The first type is one in which the victim has a passive role in the pain inflicted on him (e.g., beatings). His conflict involves the decision of whether or not to give in to demands in order to avoid further pain. Generally, brutality of this type was not found to achieve the desired results. Threats of torture were found more effective, as fear of pain causes greater conflict within the individual than does pain itself.

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b. The second type of torture is represented by requiring the individual to stand in one spot for several hours or assume some other pain-inducing position. Such a requirement often engenders in the individual a determination to "stick it out." This internal act of resistance

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provide a feeling of moral superiority at first. As time passes and his pain mounts, however, the individual becomes aware that it is his own original determination to resist that is causing the continuance of pain. A conflict develops within the individual between his moral determination and his desire to collapse and discontinue the pain. It is this extra internal conflict, in addition to the conflict over whether or not to give in to the demands made of him, that tends to make this method of torture more effective in the breakdown of the individual personality.

3. Isolation. Individual differences in reaction to isolation are probably greater than to any other method. Some individuals appear to be able to withstand prolonged periods of isolation without deleterious effects, while a relatively short period of isolation reduces others to the verge of psychosis. Reaction varies with the conditions of the isolation cell. Some sources have indicated a strong reaction to filth and vermin, although they had negligible reactions to the isolation. Others reacted violently to isolation in relatively clean cells. The predominant cause of breakdown in such situations is a lack of sensory stimulation

(i.e., grayness of walls, lack of sound, absence of social contact, etc.). Experimental subjects exposed to this condition have reported vivid hallucinations and overwhelming fears of losing their sanity.

4. Control of Communication. This is one of the most effective methods for creating a sense of helplessness and despair. This measure might well be considered the cornerstone of the communist system of control. It consists of strict regulation of the mail, reading materials, broadcast materials, and social contact available to the individual. The need to communicate is so great that when the usual channels are blocked, the individual will resort to any open channel, almost regardless of the implications of using that particular channel. Many POWs in Korea, whose only act of "collaboration" was to sign petitions and "peace appeals," defended their actions on the ground that this was the only method of letting the outside world know they were still alive. May stated that their morale and fortitude would have been increased immeasurably had leaflets of encouragement been dropped to them. When the only contact with the outside world is via the interrogator, the prisoner comes to develop extreme dependency on his interrogator and hence loses another prop to his morale.

Another wrinkle in communication control is the informer system. The recruitment of informers in POW camps discouraged communication

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between inmates. POWs who feared that every act or thought of resistance

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would be communicated to the camp administrators, lost faith in their fellow man and were forced to "untrusting individualism." Informers are also under several stages of brainwashing and elicitation to develop and maintain control over the victims.

5. Induction of Fatigue. This is a well-known device for breaking will power and critical powers of judgment. Deprivation of sleep results in more intense psychological debilitation than does any other method of engendering fatigue. The communists vary their methods. "Conveyor belt" interrogation that last 50-60 hours will make almost any individual compromise, but there is danger that this will kill the victim. It is safer to conduct interrogations of 8-10 hours at night while forcing the prisoner to remain awake during the day. Additional interruptions in the remaining

2-3 hours of allotted sleep quickly reduce the most resilient individual . Alternate administration of drug stimulants and depressants hastens the process of fatigue and sharpens the psychological reactions of excitement and depression.

Fatigue, in addition to reducing the will to resist, also produces irritation and fear that arise from increased "slips of the tongue." forgetfulness, and decreased ability to maintain orderly thought processes.

6. Control of Food, Water and Tobacco. The controlled individual is made intensely aware of his dependence upon his interrogator for the quality and quantity of his food and tobacco. The exercise of this control usually follows a pattern. No food and little or no water is permitted the individual for several days prior to interrogation. When the prisoner first complains of this to the interrogator, the latter expresses surprise at such inhumane treatment. He makes a demand of the prisoner. If the latter complies, he receives a good meal. If he does not, he gets a diet of unappetizing food containing limited vitamins, minerals, and calories. This diet is supplemented occasionally by the interrogator if the prisoner "cooperates." Studies of controlled starvation indicate that the whole value-system of the subjects underwent a change. Their irritation increased as their ability to think clearly decreased. The control of tobacco presented an even greater source of conflict for heavy smokers. Because tobacco is not necessary to life, being manipulated by his craving for it can in the individual a strong sense of guilt.

7. Criticism and Self-Criticism. There are mechanisms of communist thought control. Self-criticism gains its effectiveness from the fact that although it is not a crime for a man to be wrong, it is a major crime to be stubborn and to refuse to learn. Many individuals feel intensely relieved in being able to share their sense of guilt. Those individuals

however, who have adjusted to handling their guilt internally have difficulty adapting to criticism and self-criticism. In brainwashing, after a sufficient sense of guilt has been created in the individual, sharing and self-criticism permit relief. The price paid for this relief, how-

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## THE EXERCISE OF CONTROL: A "SCHEDULE" FOR BRAINWASHING

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From the many fragmentary accounts reviewed, the following appears to be the most likely description of what occurs during brainwashing .

In the period immediately following capture, the captors are faced with the problem of deciding on best ways of exploitation of the prisoners. Therefore, early treatment is similar both for those who are to be exploited through elicitation and those who are to undergo brainwashing. concurrently with being interrogated and required to write a detailed personal history, the prisoner undergoes a physical and psychological "softening-up" which includes: limited unpalatable food rations, withholding of tobacco, possible work details, severely inadequate use of toilet facilities, no use of facilities for personal cleanliness, limitation of sleep such as requiring a subject to sleep with a bright light in his eyes. Apparently the interrogation and autobiographical material, the reports of the prisoner's behaviour in confinement, and tentative "personality typing" by the interrogators, provide the basis upon which exploitation plans are made.

There is a major difference between preparation for elicitation and for brainwashing . Prisoners exploited through elicitation must retain sufficient clarity of thought to be able to give coherent, factual accounts. In brainwashing , on the other hand, the first thing attacked is clarity of thought. To develop a strategy of defense, the controlled individual must determine what plans have been made for his exploitation. Perhaps the best cues he can get are internal reactions to the pressures he undergoes.

The most important aspect of the brainwashing process is the interrogation. The other pressures are designed primarily to help the interrogator achieve his goals. The following states are created systematically within the individual . These may vary in order, but all are necessary to the brainwashing process:

1. A feeling of helplessness in attempting to deal with the impersonal machinery of control.
2. An initial reaction of "surprise."
3. A feeling of uncertainty about what is required of him.



ever, is loss of individuality and increased dependency.

8. Hypnosis and Drugs as Controls. There is no reliable evidence that the communists are making widespread use of drugs or hypnosis in brainwashing or elicitation. The exception to this is the use of common stimulants or depressants in inducing fatigue and "mood swings."

9. Other methods of control, which when used in conjunction with the basic processes, hasten the deterioration of prisoners' sense of values and resistance are:

a. Requiring a case history or autobiography of the prisoner provides a mine of information for the interrogator in establishing and "documenting" accusations.

b. Friendliness of the interrogator, when least expected, upsets the prisoner's ability to maintain a critical attitude.

c. Petty demands, such as severely limiting the allotted time for use of toilet facilities or requiring the POW to kill hundreds of flies, are harassment methods.

d. Prisoners are often humiliated by refusing them the use of toilet facilities during interrogator until they soil themselves. Often prisoners were not permitted to bathe for weeks until they felt contemptible.

e. Conviction as a war criminal appears to be a potent factor in creating despair in the individual. One official analysis of the pressures exerted by the ChiComs on "confessors" and "non-confessors" to participation in bacteriological warfare in Korea showed that actual trial and conviction of "war crimes" was overwhelmingly associated with breakdown and confession.

f. Attempted elicitation of protected information at various times during the brainwashing process diverted the individual from awareness of the deterioration of his value-system. The fact that, in most cases, the ChiComs did not want or need such intelligence was not known to the prisoner. His attempts to protect such information was made at the expense of hastening his own breakdown.

4. A developing feeling of dependence upon the interrogator .
5. A sense of doubt and loss of objectivity.
6. Feelings of guilt.

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7. A questioning attitude toward his own value-system.
8. A feeling of potential "breakdown," i.e., that he might go crazy.

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9. A need to defend his acquired principles.
  10. A final sense of "belonging" (identification).

A feeling of helplessness in the face of the impersonal machinery of control is carefully engendered within the prisoner. The individual who receives the preliminary treatment described above not only begins to feel like an "animal" but also feels that nothing can be done about it. No one pays any personal attention to him. His complaints fall on deaf ears. His loss of communication, if he has been isolated, creates a feeling that he has been "forgotten." Everything that happens to him occurs according to an impersonal; time schedule that has nothing to do with his needs. The voices and footsteps of the guards are muted. He notes many contrasts, e.g., his greasy, unpalatable food may be served on battered tin dishes by guards immaculately dressed in white. The first steps in "depersonalization" of the prisoner have begun. He has no idea what to expect. Ample opportunity is allotted for him to ruminate upon all the unpleasant or painful things that could happen to him. He approaches the main interrogator with mixed feelings of relief and fright.

Surprise is commonly used in the brainwashing process. The prisoner is rarely prepared for the fact that the interrogators are usually friendly and considerate at first. They make every effort to demonstrate that they are reasonable human beings. Often they apologize for bad treatment received by the prisoner and promise to improve his lot if he, too, is reasonable. This behaviour is not what he has steeled himself for. He lets down some of his defenses and tries to take a reasonable attitude.

The first occasion he balks at satisfying a request of the interrogator , however, he is in for another surprise. The formerly reasonable interrogator unexpectedly turns into a furious maniac. The interrogator is likely to slap the prisoner or draw his pistol and threaten to shoot him. Usually this storm of emotion ceases as suddenly as it began and the interrogator stalks from the room. These surprising changes create doubt in the prisoner as to his very ability to perceive another person's motivations correctly. His next interrogation probably will be marked by impassivity in the interrogator 's mien.

A feeling of uncertainty about what is required of him is likewise carefully engendered within the individual . Pleas of the prisoner to learn specifically of what he is accused and by whom are side-stepped by

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the interrogator. Instead, the prisoner is asked to tell why he thinks

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he is held and what he feels he is guilty of. If the prisoner fails to come up with anything, he is accused in terms of broad generalities (e.g., espionage, sabotage, acts of treason against the "people"). This usually provokes the prisoner to make some statement about his activities. If this take the form of a denial, he is usually sent to isolation on further decreased food rations to "think over" his crimes. This process can be repeated again and again. As soon as the prisoner can think of something that might be considered self-incriminating, the interrogator appears momentarily satisfied. The prisoner is asked to write down his statement in his own words and sign it.

Meanwhile a strong sense of dependence upon the interrogator is developed. It does not take long for the prisoner to realize that the interrogator is the source of all punishment , all gratification, and all communication. The interrogator , meanwhile, demonstrates his unpredictability. He is perceived by the prisoner as a creature of whim. At times, the interrogator can be pleased very easily and at other times no effort on the part of the prisoner will placate him. The prisoner may begin to channel so much energy into trying to predict the behaviour of the unpredictable interrogator that he loses track of what is happening inside himself.

After the prisoner has developed the above psychological and emotional reactions to a sufficient degree, the brainwashing begins in earnest. First, the prisoner's remaining critical faculties must be destroyed. He undergoes long, fatiguing interrogations while looking at a bright light. He is called back again and again for interrogations after minimal sleep. He may undergo torture that tends to create internal conflict. Drugs may be used to accentuate his "mood swings." He develops depression when the interrogator is being kind and becomes euphoric when the interrogator is threatening the direst penalties. Then the cycle is reversed. The prisoner finds himself in a constant state of anxiety which prevents him from relaxing even when he is permitted to sleep. Short periods of isolation now bring on visual and auditory hallucinations. The prisoner feels himself losing his objectivity. It is in this state that the prisoner must keep up an endless argument with the interrogator. He may be faced with the confessions of other individuals who "collaborated" with him in his crimes. The prisoner seriously begins to doubt his own memory. This feeling is heightened by his inability to recall little things like the names of the people he knows very well or the date of his birth. The interrogator patiently sharpens this feeling of doubt by more questioning. This tends to create a serious state of uncertainty when the individual has lost most of his critical faculties.

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The prisoner must undergo additional internal conflict when strong feelings of guilt are aroused within him. As any clinical psychologist is aware, it is not at all difficult to create such feelings. Military servicemen are particularly vulnerable. No one can morally justify kill-

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ing even in wartime. The usual justification is on the grounds of necessity or self-defense. The interrogator is careful to circumvent such justification. He keeps the interrogation directed toward the prisoner's moral code. Every moral vulnerability is exploited by incessant questioning along this line until the prisoner begins to question the very fundamentals of his own value-system. The prisoner must constantly fight a potential breakdown. He finds that his mind is "going blank" for longer and longer periods of time. He can not think constructively. If he is to maintain any semblance of psychological integrity, he must bring to an end this state of interminable internal conflict. He signifies a willingness to write a confession.

If this were truly the end, no brainwashing would have occurred. The individual would simply have given in to intolerable pressure. Actually, the final stage of the brainwashing process has just begun. No matter what the prisoner writes in his confession the interrogator is not satisfied. The interrogator questions every sentence of the confession. He begins to edit it with the prisoner. The prisoner is forced to argue against every change. This is the essence of brainwashing. Every time that he gives in on a point to the interrogator, he must rewrite his whole confession. Still the interrogator is not satisfied. In a desperate attempt to maintain some semblance of integrity and to avoid further brainwashing, the prisoner must begin to argue that what he has already confessed to is true. He begins to accept as his own the statements he has written. He uses many of the interrogator's earlier arguments to buttress his position. By this process, identification with the interrogator's value-system becomes complete. It is extremely important to recognize that a qualitative change has taken place within the prisoner. The brainwashed victim does not consciously change his value-system; rather the change occurs despite his efforts. He is no more responsible for this change than is an individual who "snaps" and becomes psychotic. And like the psychotic, the prisoner is not even aware of the transition.

#### DEFENSIVE MEASURES OTHER THAN ON THE POLICY AND PLANNING LEVEL

##### 1. Training of Individuals potentially subject to communist control.

Training should provide for the trainee a realistic appraisal of what control pressures the communists are likely to exert and what the usual human reactions are to such pressures. The trainee must learn

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the most effective ways of combatting his own reactions to such pressures

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and he must learn reasonable expectations as to what his behaviour should be. Training has two decidedly positive effects; first, it provides the trainee with ways of combatting control; second, it provides the basis for developing an immeasurable boost in morale. Any positive action that