

Take manipulation of crisis information into account

Historic archive document illustrating manipulation of Chernobyl crisis
information

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United States
Information
Agency

Washington DC 20547

607
April 29, 1986



Senator David Durenberger
375 RSOB
Washington, D.C. 20510

Submitted anonymously from Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Durenberger:

Now that there is conclusive evidence that the breakdown of a Chernobyl nuclear power plant reactor produced a considerable quantity of radioactive fallout, we have a chance to utilize this fact for propaganda purposes. Furthermore, it is good for us that Moscow has made no official statement on the event.

Therefore we suggest that following steps should be taken:

- Reports should be spread by our associates in European information media giving the public the details of Chernobyl disaster:
 - number of victims should be alleged to be somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000;
 - mass evacuation of population from the 100-mile zone;
 - transport problems, shortage of various goods, chaos, and panic should also be given publicity;
 - appropriate illustrations and textual material should be provided;
 - campaign should be organized by USIA officials who should also supply the material needed.
 - In view of the forthcoming Tokyo summit data should be provided for the statement on the Chernobyl disaster to be issued by the seven leaders.
 - Considering the facts about the increased air pollution, our allies should be recommended to stop imports of food and other commodities from Eastern bloc.
 - Our allies should be influenced so as to make a request for compensation for contamination of their territory.
- We will keep you informed of any future measures.

Best regards,

Herbert Romerstein

Herbert Romerstein
Senior Policy Officer
on Soviet Active Measures

CC: BL
JCP
MMC
PZ
SE

Archive document illustrates USIA manipulation of crisis information

- Distributed to policy makers (Tokyo summit G7) and “allied” press
 - April 29/4/1986
 - *Cold war style*
- VUB/PISA research on nuclear controversy and communication
 - thesis K. Deneckere (2007) compared progressive and conservative Belgian press approaches of the Chernobyl accident over 20 years
 - Communication has content and context related aspects
 - Underlying ideologies and group think are shaping media coverage
 - Media are potentially manipulating public opinion through polarisation
 - Soviet Union was more focussed in early period than nuclear safety feedback
 - Transparency needs a **guardian of the process of public information**

Good practise for crisis communication: Apply RISCUM model for transparency

- Cold war games could still play a role to-day
- The project case of minor European contamination had no relevance from radiation protection point of view and could have been triggered
- Authenticity and legitimacy also requires to identify hidden agendas
 - K.Andersson: *Transparency and accountability in science and politics: the awareness principle*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008