

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

September 29, 1986

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INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN M. POINDEXTER

FROM: JACK F. MATLOCK *JFM*  
PAULA DOBRIANSKY *PD*

SUBJECT: The Chautauqua Conference

In our view, the Chautauqua Conference, which was recently held in Riga, Latvia, performed two important functions. First, it provided us with a useful opportunity to review a broad range of issues germane to US-Soviet relations. The USG participants (Matlock, Palmer) delivered formal speeches and participated in numerous lengthy exchanges. These discussions enabled us to communicate our views cogently to the Soviets and to rebut various misconceptions about US policies. While the Soviet learning curve on US-Soviet matters has improved, most Soviet officials are remarkably ignorant about the US and our policies. Enhancing their knowledge about the US does not guarantee more benign Soviet policies. However, it does tend to mitigate against Soviet blunders based on a misreading of our views and intentions.

Second, the conference served as a useful public diplomacy forum. It was well covered (by Soviet standards) in the Soviet media. Soviet national news allocated several minutes per day to discuss the conference and Latvian television devoted approximately two-four hours a day. Although the coverage was selective, the very fact that a conference of this nature was publicized seemed to be viewed by the Soviet people, who are rather adept at reading between the lines, as an affirmation that US-Soviet relations are not bad -- thus, countering Soviet propaganda about an imminent Western threat. Also, the essence of our Baltic non-recognition policy got through to the Latvian people and was extremely well received.

In addition, the conference exposed numerous Soviet non-governmental participants to American views. Undoubtedly, the majority of the Soviet participants was carefully pre-selected by the authorities. Nevertheless, the US participants were able to meet and talk with other people who came to the conference site. The Latvian-Americans on the trip established contacts not only with their relatives, but with the Latvian populace.

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