

THE PRESENT — JANUARY 13, 2023

39 years ago, a KGB defector chillingly predicted modern America

A disturbing interview given by a KGB defector in 1984 describes America of today and outlines four stages of mass brainwashing used by the KGB.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

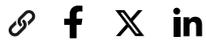
A former KGB agent named Yuri Alexandrovich Bezmenov claimed in 1984 that Russia has a long-term goal of ideologically subverting the U.S. He described the process as “a great brainwashing” that has four basic stages. The first stage, he said, is called “demoralization,” which would take about 20 years to achieve.



Listen to this article



Paul Ratner



This article was first published on Big Think in July 2018. It was updated in January 2023.

In 1954, early on in the Cold War, the Soviet Union created the Committee for State Security, more commonly known in the West as the KGB. The group came to oversee the Soviet Union's internal security, secret police, and domestic and foreign intelligence operations.

Across the world, the KGB did whatever it could to thwart pro-Western and anti-Soviet political movements and figures. The group would **assassinate political leaders with cyanide** and other weapons. It would fund and arm leftist groups, especially those in **developing nations**. And the KGB successfully established moles in U.S. intelligence agencies, though the exact number still isn't — and may never be — known for sure.

Also unclear were the group's long-term plans involving the U.S. One glimpse, however, comes from a former KGB agent named Yuri Alexandrovich Bezmenov, who defected to Canada in 1970. He claimed to know details of a Soviet plan to undermine the U.S., not on the battlefield but in the psyche of the American public.

In 1984, Bezmenov gave an interview to G. Edward Griffin from which much can be learned today. His most chilling point was that there's a long-term plan put in play by Russia to defeat America through psychological warfare and "demoralization." It's a long game that takes decades to achieve but it may already be bearing fruit.

Bezmenov made the point that the work of the KGB mainly does not involve espionage, despite what our popular culture may tell us. Most of the work, 85% of it, was "a slow process which we call either ideological subversion, active measures, or psychological warfare."

What does that mean? Bezmenov explained that the most striking thing about ideological subversion is that it happens in the open as a legitimate process. “You can see it with your own eyes,” he said. The American media would be able to see it, if it just focused on it.

Here’s how he further defined ideological subversion:

“What it basically means is: to change the perception of reality of every American to such an extent that despite of the abundance of information no one is able to come to sensible conclusions in the interest of defending themselves, their families, their community, and their country.”

Bezmenov described this process as “a great brainwashing” that has four basic stages. The first stage is called “demoralization” which takes from 15 to 20 years to achieve. According to the former KGB agent, that is the minimum number of years it takes to re-educate one generation of students that is normally exposed to the ideology of its country — in other words, the time it takes to change what the people are thinking.

He used the examples of 1960s hippies coming to positions of power in the 1980s in the government and businesses of America. Bezmenov claimed this generation was already “contaminated” by Marxist-Leninist values. Of course, this claim that many baby boomers are somehow espousing KGB-tainted ideas is hard to believe but Bezmenov’s larger point addressed why people who have been gradually “demoralized” are unable to understand that this has happened to them.

Referring to such people, Bezmenov said:

“They are programmed to think and react to certain stimuli in a certain pattern [alluding to Pavlov]. You can not change their mind even if you expose them to authentic information. Even if you prove that white is white and black is black, you still can not change the basic perception and the logic of behavior.”

Demoralization is a process that is “irreversible.” Bezmenov actually thought (back in 1984) that the process of demoralizing America was already completed. It would take another generation and another couple of decades to get the people to think differently and return to their patriotic American values, claimed the agent.

In what is perhaps a most striking passage in the interview, here’s how Bezmenov described the state of a “demoralized” person:

“As I mentioned before, exposure to true information does not matter anymore,” said Bezmenov. “A person who was demoralized is unable to assess true information. The facts tell nothing to him. Even if I shower him with information, with authentic proof,

with documents, with pictures; even if I take him by force to the Soviet Union and show him [a] concentration camp, he will refuse to believe it, until he [receives] a kick in his fan-bottom. When a military boot crashes his balls *then* he will understand. But not before that. That's the [tragedy] of the situation of demoralization."

It's hard not to see in that the state of many modern Americans. We have become a society of polarized tribes, with some people flat out rejecting facts in favor of narratives and opinions.

Once demoralization is completed, the second stage of ideological brainwashing is "destabilization". During this two-to-five-year period, asserted Bezmenov, what matters is the targeting of essential structural elements of a nation: economy, foreign relations, and defense systems. Basically, the subverter (Russia) would look to destabilize every one of those areas in the United States, considerably weakening it.



Subscribe for counterintuitive, surprising, and impactful stories delivered to your inbox every Thursday

SUBSCRIBE

The third stage would be "crisis." It would take only up to six weeks to send a country into crisis, explained Bezmenov. The crisis would bring "a violent change of power, structure, and economy" and will be followed by the last stage, "normalization." That's when your country is basically taken over, living under a new ideology and reality.

This will happen to America unless it gets rid of people who will bring it to a crisis, warned Bezmenov. What's more "if people will fail to grasp the impending danger of that development, nothing ever can help [the] United States," adding, "You may kiss goodbye to your freedom."

It bears saying that when he made this statement, he was warning about baby boomers and Democrats of the time.

In another somewhat terrifying excerpt, here's what Bezmenov had to say about what is really happening in the United States: It may think it is living in peace, but it has been actively at war with Russia, and for some time:

“Most of the American politicians, media, and educational system trains another generation of people who think they are living at the peacetime,” said the former KGB agent. “False. United States is in a state of war: undeclared, total war against the basic principles and foundations of this system.”

You can watch the full interview here:

KGB defector Yuri Bezmenov's warning to America



RELATED

THE PAST

In the Soviet Union, murderers had an easier



POLITICS & CURRENT AFFAIRS

10 intellectuals who were expelled on Soviet Russia's 'philosopher's ships'



time than political dissenters

Soviet researchers studied crime through a Marxist-Leninist lens. Under Lenin, a humanitarian approach to criminality briefly emerged, but dissipated when Stalin rose to power.

THE PRESENT

10 of the most controversial people in Russian history

The hard part was keeping the list down to ten.



THE PAST

A Russian mathematician rewrote world history — and it is bonkers

Searching for truth in unorthodox ways can be a valuable exercise. But Anatoly Fomenko’s alternate world history is just plain weird.



Authoritarian regimes have had a long history of targeting intellectuals who don’t agree with them. What kind of people get deported? We have a list of ten people whose work got them shipped out of Russia.

POLITICS & CURRENT AFFAIRS

40% of Republicans don’t mind if Russia interfered in 2016 election, poll finds

A new poll highlights the dramatic influence of partisan thinking in the U.S. with regards to key principles of international law.



UP NEXT

THE PAST

Here’s what being filthy rich in Europe looked like in 1000 BC, 1 AD, and 1000 AD

Studying the display of personal wealth across time can help us better understand the history of socioeconomic inequality.



SUBSCRIBE

Get counterintuitive, surprising, and impactful stories delivered to your inbox every Thursday.

Your email address	GO
--------------------	-----------

FOLLOW US



SECTIONS

- Neuropsych
- Thinking
- Leadership
- Smart Skills
- High Culture
- The Past
- The Present
- The Future
- Life
- Health
- Hard Science
- Special Issues
- Business

COLUMNS

- Starts With A Bang
- The Well
- Perception Box
- 13.8
- Strange Maps
- The Learning Curve
- Everyday Philosophy

VIDEO

- The Big Think Interview
- Your Brain on Money
- Playlists
- Explore the Library

ABOUT

- Our Mission
- Work With Us
- Contact
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of Use
- Accessibility
- Careers

SUBSCRIBE

- Free Newsletters
- Memberships

The Weekly Crossword



Get Big Think for Your Business. Enable transformation and drive culture at your company with lessons from the biggest thinkers in the world.

LEARN MORE →

© Copyright 2007-2024 & BIG THINK. BIG THINK PLUS. SMARTER FASTER trademarks owned by Freethink Media, Inc. All