

“Drugs” as Weapons

A Psychochemical Weapon Considered by the Warsaw Pact: A Research Note

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Contrary to widespread rumours during the Cold War era, little, if any, evidence existed in the scientific literature to support the view that the Soviet Union or its Warsaw Pact allies considered the use of psychochemical weapons militarily. The Hungarian State Archives have recently opened up declassified records of Hungary’s State Defence Council meetings held between 1962 and 1978. Materials submitted to the Council include reports about the coordinative meetings of the Warsaw Pact military medical services. Research into possible countermeasures against psychotropic drugs is listed as a research priority assigned to Hungary in 1962. Hungary rejected this task in 1963, but joined the ongoing project again in 1965. Methamphetamines were produced in Budapest for use as an experimental model of such weapons. Within the context of contemporary western research, this drug was considered to be an effective interrogation tool. Similarly to the CIA, Hungary also failed to develop an antidote against it and the project was terminated, fruitlessly, in 1972. These documents serve as evidence that a Warsaw Pact forum had, in fact, been considering a psychochemical weapon as a “warfare agent.”

Keywords Warsaw Pact; Hungary; Cold War; truth drugs; methamphetamine; antidote; weapon; behavior-modification drugs; brain washing; drug weapons

Introduction

The CIA launched Operation MKULTRA during the early 1950s to develop psychochemical tools for mind control to counter perceived Soviet and Chinese advances in brainwashing techniques. Western experts and societies alike suspected that the communists had already developed and used mind-control and behavior-modification drugs. Public testimonies of US prisoners of war in Korea, or that of Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary admitting to

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unrealistic crimes in fabricated trials appeared to support this opinion (Douglass, 2001). And indeed, decades later Mindszenty mentioned pills that got him to make a confession (Mindszenty, 1974). A new branch of science, neuropharmacology, emerged in parallel with its immediate political and military misuse. Matched with American military efforts (Sziniacz, 2005), Britain was also secretly working on the weaponization of LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) and BZ (3-quinuclidinyl benzilate) as nonlethal battlefield drug weapons (Dando and Furmanski, 2006).

However, evidence in the psychological weapons area supporting the suspicions against communist regimes was scarce, and efforts to found a policy that was based on anecdotes and conspiracy theories faced growing scepticism. MKULTRA evolved from a defensive to an offensive nature involving approximately 150 research projects when, in 1973 it was accidentally unveiled, and the records were deliberately destroyed. Meanwhile, the British army also concluded that the desired effects of drugs, as weapons, were unpredictable under battlefield conditions and gave up experimentation. Experts in the East and the West equally suggest that “drug weapon” stories associated with communist regimes are unreliable hints given the apparent absence of documentation in state archives.

After the brutal suppression of the Prague Spring (a liberal reform with anticommunist tendencies) by Warsaw Pact (WP) armed forces in 1968, General Jan Sejna defected to the United States. Before his emigration he had been the head of the Defence Council Secretariat and Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defence in Czechoslovakia. He claimed to have been involved in planning and monitoring Czechoslovakia’s participation in drug warfare programs from 1956 until his defection (Douglass, 1999). He noted there had been two programs. The one code-named *Peoples’ Friendship* aimed at large-scale drug trafficking with the purpose to destroy the moral coherence of western societies at their own expenses. Another program, code-named *Flute*, was targeting the enemy inside; political dissidents, and religious leaders known or suspected to disagree with the communist ideology.

A decade later, Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa escaped to the United States. As a former head of the secret police of communist Romania, he was the highest-ranking intelligence official ever to defect from the Soviet bloc. He also mentioned these two types of “drug misuses,” claiming, however, that these activities had been carried out by Romania either independently from other WP countries (Pacepa, 1993), or in collaboration with communist Cuba (Pacepa, 2006).

Finally, Kanatjan Alibekov (Ken Alibek), the 1st Deputy Chief of the Soviet Union’s (later Russia’s) bioweapons program, defected in 1992. In his memoirs (Alibek and Handelman, 1999), he briefly mentions the project, code-named *Flute* aimed to develop psychotropic and behavior-modification drugs. He claims that this development took the form of a large-scale project pursued in major psychiatric clinics of Moscow.

Although these defectors were knowledgeable high-ranked technocrats, they based their living on selling their stories to western societies after their defections. This raised scepticism on the reliability of their claims. Independent reports of former targeted persons appear to verify the widespread misuse of psychoactive drugs. These accounts, however, refer to drug misuse of a medical nature, while direct military aspects are not known (Rózsa and Nixdorff, 2006; López-Muñoz et al., 2006). Thus, information about a military misuse of psychotropic drugs as “drug weapons” by WP regimes is essentially anecdotic. Given the apparent lack of such documents in the state archives of former communist countries, disbelief about their “drug weapons” continue to prevail up until today. This is not at all surprising; the history of biowarfare had often been affected by misperceptions on enemy intentions (Furmanski, 2006).

New Findings

During mid-2007, the Hungarian State Archives (MOL) received newly declassified records of the State Defence Council of the Hungarian People's Republic. The documentation, which was open to researchers, refers to the Council's meetings that were held between late 1962 and 1978. These documents unveiled new information referring to a formerly unknown drug-as-weapon research project.

Apparently, the WP held its 1st Military Medical Conference in September 1962, and decided to make it a regular annual meeting to be held every September. Documents of this first conference have not been found, but it is briefly mentioned in the report describing the second Conference (see below). These conferences had always been confined to a strictly military nature. The Hungarian delegates submitted a proposal to the second conference proposing that each WP state should delegate representatives of both the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health; however, this had been rejected.

In November 1963 the State Defence Council discussed a report (Anonymous, 1963) describing the WP's 2nd Military Medical Conference held in Varna, Bulgarian People's Republic during September 12–16, 1963. The text listing prevailing research priorities noted,

For our proposal, the meeting deleted the subject of psychochemical warfare agents from the list of priorities assigned to the Hungarian People's Republic in September 1962. . .

A few years later, in January 1966, another report (Anonymous, 1966) submitted to the Council described the WP's 4th Military Medical Conference held in Prora, German Democratic Republic during September 09–16, 1965. It listed several priorities of military medical research including this paragraph:

Now again, we take part in research into psychochemical warfare agents' mode of action, remedies or medications of their potential toxic effects. (As a potential model agent suitable for experiments, i.e. methylamphetamine, had already been synthesized at the Experimental Medical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

In the following year, the next similar report (Anonymous, 1967) submitted to the Council gave details of the WP's 5th Military Medical Conference held in Londek-Zdruj and Warsaw, Polish People's Republic, in September 05–13, 1966. It repeated a similar paragraph about research into psychochemical weapons referring to an ongoing project that had, however, a deviation. It named the Pharmacology Institute of the Budapest Medical University as the organization responsible for drug production. The person responsible for the project probably changed affiliation during that year.

The next report describing the 6th WP Military Medical Conference held in Socialist Republic of Romania during September 18–27, 1967 did not mention drugs; although it routinely repeated most of the text from former reports.

In 1968, no WP Military Medical Conference was held. Thus, the 7th Conference was held in September 1969, the exact date and locality is unknown. According to the proposal that was reported by this meeting to the Council (Anonymous, 1969), the Conference reviewed the entire 1962–1969 period of cooperation, and established a plan for the 1970–1975 period. An attachment providing technical details of future research (Anonymous, 1970) listed the modes of action, prophylaxis, and cures of "toxicity caused by

psych-omimetic toxic materials” as one of the ongoing research priorities. It also named the institutions involved; two of them were those already mentioned above, and the third one was the State Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, Budapest. Naming this institute was remarkable at least for two reasons. Firstly, unlike the former ones, this was well suited for experiments carried out on human beings. Secondly, legends or anecdotes about Hungarian communist regime’s misusing psychiatry clinics always mentioned this particular one. These dark legends are not necessarily related to “drug weapon” research, however. They may simply refer back to the fact that during the early 1950s, i.e., the darkest Stalinist period of Hungary, the institute was headed by Lili Hajdú, mother of the well-known and influential communist, Miklós Gimes (who turned against Stalinism in 1956 and was sentenced to death in 1958).

The WP military medical services’ next coordinative meeting was held in Varna, Bulgaria in September 1971, and was reported to a 1972 meeting of the council (Anonymous, 1972). This report noted:

Based on the experiences of 1970–1971, however, we conclude that in a few topics listed in the 2/211/1970 Defence Council resolution, particularly in the mode of action of particular psychochemicals, and the production of their antidotes, no due advance was achieved. Significant results cannot be expected even in the long run, chiefly because of the inadequate intellectual and financial capacities. Thus it seems necessary to delete these topics.

And indeed, the Council terminated this research project in its resolution (Defence Council, 1972).

Implications

Though these texts are brief, they are sufficient enough to clarify a few important points.

Firstly, the military medical chiefs of the former WP regarded “drugs” as being potential weapons in the early 1960s and later period.

Secondly, even though participation in their conferences was restricted to high-ranking military experts, something that might have allowed for a direct use of language, the available documents exclusively refer to research for defence purposes, such as developing antidotes against methylamphetamine actions and cures against its effects. Neither research for offensive military purposes, nor the actual use of drugs for such purposes are mentioned. This is, of course, not to deny that offensive activities *could have* existed within a more secretive and undocumented circle.

Finally, the chemical identity of the drug chosen as a model weapon corresponded to contemporary western “drug weapon” developments. Within the context of the CIA’s MKULTRA, this stimulant was considered as being a potent “truth drug.” Interestingly, contemporary CIA efforts also failed to develop pharmaceutical countermeasures to its pharmacological actions and/or “drug experiences”. The CIA concluded that the only full safeguard against narco-interrogation is to prevent the administration of the drug (Anonymous, 1977).

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

RÉSUMÉ

Une arme psycho-chimique envisagée par le Pacte de Varsovie

Contrairement aux rumeurs répandues pendant la guerre froide, il y avait très peu de preuve dans la littérature scientifique qui supportait l'opinion selon laquelle l'Union Soviétique ou son Pacte de Varsovie aurait envisagé l'utilisation des armes psycho-chimiques dans un contexte militaire. Les Archives d'État de Hongrie viennent d'autoriser l'accès aux rapports déclassifiés des réunions du Conseil de Défense d'État de Hongrie ayant eu lieu entre 1962 et 1978. Les documents soumis au Conseil comprennent entre autres des rapports sur les réunions de coordination des services militaires du Pacte de Varsovie. Recherche sur les contre-mesures potentielles des psychotropes est mentionnée comme priorité de recherche assignée à la Hongrie en 1962. La Hongrie a refusé cette tâche en 1963, mais a rejoint le projet en cours en 1965. Méthylamphétamine a été produit à Budapest en tant qu'un modèle expérimental de telles armes. Dans le cadre d'une recherche contemporaine occidentale, ce drogue a été considéré comme un instrument effectif pour des interrogations. Comme le CIA, la Hongrie a également échoué à développer un antidote contre ce drogue, et le projet a été terminé sans succès en 1972. Ces documents prouvent que le Pacte de Varsovie a considéré l'utilisation des drogues psycho-chimiques en tant qu'arme de guerre.

RESUMEN

Un arma psicoquímica considerada por el Pacto de Varsovia

En contraste con generalizados rumores durante la era de la guerra fría, hay pocas evidencias en la literatura científica, si acaso existe alguna, que apoyen la visión de que la Unión Soviética o sus aliados del Pacto de Varsovia consideraron el uso de armas psicoquímicas en un contexto militar. Los Archivos del Estado Húngaro han desclasificado recientemente registros de reuniones del Consejo de Defensa del Estado celebradas entre 1962 y 1978. El material enviado al Consejo incluye informes sobre reuniones coordinadoras de los servicios médicos militares del Pacto de Varsovia. La investigación sobre posibles contramedidas frente a drogas psicotrópicas se incluye como una tarea prioritaria asignada a Hungría en 1962. Hungría rechazó esta tarea en 1963, pero se unió al proyecto, ya en marcha, en 1965. Se produjo metil anfetamina en Budapest para su uso como un modelo experimental de tal tipo de armas. Dentro del contexto de la investigación occidental contemporánea, se consideró a esta droga como una herramienta efectiva para interrogatorios. De forma similar a la CIA, Hungría también fracasó en el desarrollo de un antídoto contra la citada droga y el proyecto acabó sin resultados positivos en 1972. Estos documentos evidencian que el Pacto de Varsovia consideró, de hecho, un psicoquímico como un "material de guerra."

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ

A Varsói Szerződés foglalkozott egy pszichokémiai fegyverrel

A hidegháborús korszak elterjedt pletykáival szemben a tudományos irodalomban szinte semmilyen adat nem utal arra, hogy a Szovjetunió vagy annak szövetségesei, a Varsói Szerződés országai, katonai értelemben is számoltak volna a kábítószer fegyverekkel. A

Magyar Országos Levéltár a közelmúltban kutathatóvá tette a magyar Állami Honvédelmi Bizottság 1962 és 1978 közti üléseinek dokumentumait. A Bizottság elé benyújtott dokumentumok a Varsói Szerződés katonai koordinációs üléseinek jegyzőkönyveit is tartalmazzák. Ezek szerint 1962-ben a magyar kutatási prioritások egyike a tudatmódosító szerekkel szembeni lehetséges ellenanyagok kifejlesztése lett. Magyarország azonban 1963-ban lemondta ezt a témát, majd 1965-ben mégis csatlakozott a közben megindult kutatáshoz. Metamfetamint állítottak elő Budapesten, hogy a kísérletek során a kábítószer-fegyverek modelljeként használják fel. A korszak nyugati kutatási programjaiban e kábítószer hatékony vallatási eszköznek tekintették. Magyarország – éppúgy, mint a CIA – képtelen volt ellenszert kifejleszteni, és a program végül eredménytelenül zárult 1972-ben. E dokumentumok bizonyítják, hogy a Varsói Szerződés egyik fóruma egy kábítószer „pszichokémiai harcanyag”-nak, vagyis fegyvernek tekintett.

THE AUTHOR



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