

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

NSC UNDER SECRETARIES COMMITTEE

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NSC-U/DM-142

January 6, 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: NSSM 245: US International Broadcasting
Facilities

The United States international broadcasting effort is a key element of our foreign policy. Making known our policies and our ideals to the peoples of the world is of vital importance to the furtherance of US interests and objectives. Our most critical audiences for international broadcasting are in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, where censorship and controlled media provide the peoples of the area with distorted images of the US, US policy, and events within their own countries and the world at large.

There are two distinct US international broadcasters to this area -- The Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The VOA is an integral part of the US Government and its primary function is to present world news, to give expression to US official policy and to articulate American values and opinions. RFE/RL, on the other hand, are by law "independent broadcast media, operating in a manner not inconsistent with broad foreign policy objectives..." Their primary task is to encourage a constructive dialogue with the peoples of the USSR (RL) and Eastern Europe (RFE). Broadcast content is focused on the interest of the local audiences. VOA broadcasts are generally, if reluctantly, accepted by the Soviet and East European regimes as an official USG activity;

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RFE/RL are still falsely labelled by these regimes, despite the change in the Radios' basic approaches and funding, as "cold-war relics", dedicated to subversion rather than the freer flow of information.

In the FY 1977 Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Congress asked that the President submit a report on the US international broadcasting effort. The Act states:

Sec. 403. Not later than January 31, 1977, the President shall submit to the Congress a report --

- (1) recommending steps to be taken to utilize more effectively the transmission facilities for international broadcasting, both existing and planned, of the United States Government;
- (2) examining the feasibility of greater cooperation with foreign countries to insure mutually efficient use of nationally owned and nationally funded transmission facilities for international broadcasting;
- (3) containing a comprehensive outline of projected needs for United States international broadcasting operations based on anticipated language requirements and anticipated cooperation among various agencies of the United States Government, United States Government-funded organizations, and foreign governments involved in international broadcasting;
- (4) recommending steps which should be taken to extend broadcasting operations similar to those carried out under the Board for International Broadcasting Act of 1973 to additional countries where access to information is restricted by the policies of the governments of such countries.

This memorandum and the attached study are the result of the Under Secretaries Committee examination of measures to improve the effectiveness of US funded international broadcasting and the impact of such measures on current and future USG funded information exchange programs. A draft report to the Congress is also attached.

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Conclusions

-- With present program scheduling there is no significant unused transmitter capacity available for sharing between VOA and RFE/RL or between Western Governments or other USG Agencies and either of those radios.

-- VOA could add or increase the strength of transmitters in the UK and the FRG without great difficulty. RFE/RL could do the same in the FRG and Portugal. Arrangement for added transmitters in the UK and/or Greece for joint VOA/RFE-RL use would probably encounter political difficulties. Success might only be possible in the UK, if other RFE/RL facilities were in jeopardy and we were prepared to approach the UK at the top level of Government.

-- The rationale for two US broadcasters to the USSR and Eastern Europe (VOA and RFE/RL) with distinct missions remains valid. At the same time, the national interest does not preclude consideration of reduction of duplication and/or elimination of some of the language broadcasts.

-- There is positive advantage in maintaining the separate identities of the two radios (VOA and RFE/RL). Blurring the distinction between them might jeopardize their individual effectiveness, might lead to renewed jamming of VOA, and could have an adverse impact on the other US informational and cultural activity directed toward the USSR and Eastern Europe. These adverse effects are manageable to a degree and should not prevent sharing of transmitter facilities if necessary to preserve RFE/RL operations. Otherwise, the benefits of sharing should be carefully weighed against its costs.

-- Even a cursory examination of the advisability of extending US broadcasting operations to additional countries where access to information is restricted suggests that there are immense difficulties in such a project. This question arose in Congress with regard to RFE/RL operations and referred to a possible

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geographical expansion of the Radios' transmissions. Except for Western Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and a very few other countries, virtually all the remaining governments of the world restrict the access of their citizens to information by controlling the local press and/or by controlling and censoring international media coming into the country. Such restrictions would have to be judged as severe at least some of the time in several dozen countries in the Middle East, the Far East, Africa and Latin America. Political conditions, moreover, in many if not most of these countries can change markedly, resulting in a further tightening, or loosening, of restrictions. Thus, the list of "restricted" countries would be constantly shifting.

To undertake additional native-language broadcasting to countries outside of the USSR and Eastern Europe where information is substantially restricted would require construction of a world-wide network of transmitters the cost of which would run well over \$100 million. The transmitters would have to be located in a number of appropriately located countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is extremely unlikely that the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) would be able to obtain agreement to lease all or most of the required transmitter sites. Those sites BIB could obtain would be vulnerable to political uncertainties of the host countries.

The existing US world-wide broadcasting effort carried out by VOA goes a long way towards meeting our needs. VOA presently broadcasts in 36 languages to diverse parts of the world for a total of 789 hours weekly. The VOA English Service is worldwide and averages 164 hours weekly. Among the major languages, Spanish to Latin America is on 38 hours each week, French to Africa 37 hours, and Arabic 49 hours weekly. At times, unusual political circumstances arise in a single country which call for increased VOA activity. For example, the changing and volatile political situation in Portugal after the 1974 revolution led USIA to introduce a VOA service in Portuguese to Portugal since US policies and viewpoints were not receiving a fair hearing in the then Communist controlled media.

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-- While this study has focussed on RFE/RL and VOA broadcasting in Europe, it is possible to apply minimal signal strength requirements to VOA transmissions to Asia and Africa to arrive at a figure for transmitter requirements for a comprehensive US world-wide broadcast plan. In Asia and Africa, the US will require eight and four additional transmitters respectively to meet world-wide requirements. USIA will seek authorization for four of its Asian transmitters in Fiscal Year 1978. A larger USIA plan calls for the eventual construction of ten additional transmitters in the UK -- five for Europe and five for other VOA world-wide requirements.

-- The current crowding of the shortwave broadcasting band continues to reduce the quality of the signals on the available frequencies. There will be a World Administrative Radio Conference in 1979 to address the question of expanding the shortwave broadcast band.

-- With the assistance of a recognized technical expert fourteen separate options were examined, including several which would assume integrated programming by the two radios. Four of these are assessed below and later in this memorandum. It should be stressed that all four accept the premise that, whatever the decision on the program schedules, the US should transmit signals which meet minimum requirements for technical effectiveness.

Options

1. Option one would retain current program scheduling of VOA and RFE/RL broadcasts to the USSR and Eastern Europe and add seven transmitters to meet the minimum technical requirement (62 100 to 250 KW transmitters) for effective signals if no allowance is made for jamming.

This option essentially would take the step considered necessary by competent experts to provide the current radio operations the minimal technical strength to pursue their missions as currently defined, thereby remedying a long-standing inadequacy. It would avoid the risks (possible resumption of VOA jamming and/or Soviet and

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East European inhibitions on other US informational and cultural activities) of blurring the radios' separate identities. And it would reaffirm the US commitment to a freer flow of information in the face of the sharp Soviet/East European attacks on RFE/RL. It should command Congressional support.

This option would make no provision for an enhanced RFE/RL capacity to penetrate jamming or for meeting the contingency of loss of RL's transmitter site in Spain (still a possibility) or resumption of jamming of VOA (a less likely development). Nor would it provide new transmitters for a reserve or strengthening capacity. At the same time, it would cost about \$14 million and thus forego the economies possible under the third and fourth options.

2. Option two would retain current program scheduling and add sixteen transmitters, the seven of option one for current technical requirements plus nine to boost RFE/RL's capacity to counteract jamming, to serve in a reserve capacity, and to upgrade and strengthen existing facilities.

This option would cost about \$32 million. It could not completely overcome jamming, but the deployment of additional transmitters to counteract jamming is a feasible, realistic and necessary strategy to increase the level and reliability of RFE/RL reception in the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. The study established the minimum number of transmitters required for broadcasting in an unjammed environment, and found that the requirements for RFE/RL broadcasting to jammed environments should be in excess of the requirements for an unjammed environment. While the number of additional transmitters to be deployed for this purpose is a matter of judgment, the study suggested a modest but significant increase of one additional transmitter for each of the nine sets of three transmitters for language broadcasts now being jammed -- a total of nine additional transmitters. The Office of Management and Budget does not believe the addition of transmitters would overcome jamming, especially if the Soviet Union and the East Europeans step up their jamming in response.

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This option would also reaffirm in strong terms our commitment to the freer flow of information. It would provide transmitters which could serve in reserve capacity in case of breakdown of existing facilities, and which could serve to upgrade and strengthen existing older and underpowered facilities. It avoids blurring the Radios' identities, but it would forego the economies of options three and four. (It would, however, be possible to make the reductions in language transmissions foreseen in Options three and four, but add transmitters to combat jamming in the remaining broadcasts.)

A variant of this option would add six more new transmitters (cost \$12 million) to provide additional capacity against the contingency of resumed jamming of VOA or loss of transmitter sites, but the Committee does not deem these contingencies sufficiently urgent to justify the additional expenditure at this time.

3. Option three would eliminate RL broadcasts in the native languages to indigenous Soviet nationalities in Belorussia, the Caucasus and Central Asia and integrate VOA and RFE/RL broadcasting schedules for the Eastern European countries, the Ukraine and the Baltic states (Full and separate VOA and RL Russian broadcasts would remain).

From the point of view of effecting economies through program alteration this option is the most feasible of the numerous options examined. Its advantages and disadvantages are substantial and it has received the most careful consideration.

This option would effect a saving of nine transmitters (\$14 million for new facilities) from the 62 required for minimum technical transmitter requirements (option 1) and about \$2.5 million in annual operating costs. Full VOA and RL programming in Russian would be maintained as would RL and VOA native language transmissions to

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Western-oriented nationalities (the Ukraine and the Baltic states) and VOA native language transmissions to the Caucasus and Central Asia (Uzbek only). No "original" programming in prime time hours by VOA or RFE/RL would be sacrificed in the integrated program languages (East European languages, Baltic languages and Ukrainian). Fifteen hours of simultaneous broadcasting by VOA and RFE/RL would be eliminated. RL languages eliminated (Belorussian, Georgian, Armenian and the Moslem languages) may be currently among the least effective of RL's nationality broadcasts.

On the other hand, the integration of program scheduling would blur the distinction between the radios and thereby afford additional opportunity to the Soviet Union and the East Europeans to step up attacks on VOA, to resume the jamming of VOA and/or to inhibit other US information and cultural activities. This risk is difficult to evaluate but has been judged substantial by the previous US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Walter Stoessel.

The substantial reduction in prime time transmission to the Ukraine and the Baltic states (over 50%) and Eastern Europe (about 25%) and the replacement of at least 3-1/2 hours daily of unjammed VOA broadcasting by jammed RFE/RL broadcasts would occasion an appreciable decline in listenership. Coupled with the elimination of the only Western broadcasts to eight Moslem nationalities, these changes could well be interpreted by our public, some sectors of Congress, some allies and the USSR and East Europeans themselves as a weakening of our commitment to the Helsinki principles in the face of the Soviet attacks on US international broadcasters. In particular, key Congressional supporters would probably not find acceptable the reduced transmission to Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic states. Lastly, no provision would be made to improve the RFE/RL's capacity to overcome jamming, to meet the contingency of the loss of the Spanish transmitter site, or to provide reserve or upgraded transmitter capacity.

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On balance, the Committee believes that the disadvantages of this option outweigh its benefits.

4. Option four would eliminate RL broadcasts in the native language to indigenous Soviet nationalities in Belorussia, the Caucasus and Central Asia without any sharing of VOA and RFE/RL facilities.

This option would effect a modest saving of three transmitters (\$6 million) from the 62 required for minimum performance (option 1) and about \$2.5 million in annual operating costs. RL and VOA Russian, Ukrainian, and Baltic language broadcasts to the areas would be maintained as would VOA native language broadcasts to the Caucasus and Central Asia (Uzbek only). Currently, the eliminated broadcasts may be among RL's least effective transmissions. Congressional opposition would be less strong than if the Ukrainian and Baltic languages were eliminated. And the dangers and disadvantages of shared VOA and RFE/RL facilities would be avoided.

The option would eliminate the only Western native language broadcasts to eleven nationalities, convey diminished US interest in eight Moslem nationalities with rapidly increasing populations, and in the Georgians and Armenians, all quite nationalistic groups. It would probably be interpreted by the Soviets, some allies and some sectors of our public and Congress as a weakening of our Helsinki commitment in the face of Soviet attacks on RFE/RL.

While this may be a feasible option, it would seem preferable to continue transmission in these languages and regard the transmitters employed as reserve capacity to meet the contingency of RL loss of the Spanish transmitter site.

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Recommendations

1. The Departments of State and Defense, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The United States Information Agency, the Board for International Broadcasting, and the Central Intelligence Agency recommend the acquisition of sixteen new 250 KW transmitters (option 2).

The Office of Management and Budget supports the acquisition of seven transmitters (five for VOA, two for RFE/RL) as described in Option one. OMB does not believe that a sufficient case has been made that the acquisition of nine additional transmitters (or any other number) will overcome jamming. Copies of OMB's letter of December 20 and of technical consultant James Mocerri's letter of December 28 are attached.

2. All members of the Committee recommend that the BIB review with the RFE/RL organization the management and staffing arrangements and program planning with a view to improving the professional level of the RL broadcasts in the Soviets nationality languages.

3. All members of the Committee further recommend that the United States Government keep under constant review situations that might arise to threaten our broadcasting effort (i.e., a transmitter site agreement with Spain may not be consummated; there could be difficulties with the transmitter sites in Portugal; the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe may reinstate jamming of VOA). Should any of these contingencies appear to be developing we should be prepared to reexamine the practical questions related to sharing transmitter facilities and to discuss with the United Kingdom the installation of at least six additional transmitters in Britain for use by VOA and/or RFE/RL.

4. All members of the Committee finally recommend that the US Interdepartmental Radio Advisory Committee consider the need for expansion of the

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shortwave broadcast bands in its preparation for
the World Administrative Radio Conference in 1979.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles W. Robinson". The signature is written in dark ink and is located above the typed name.

Charles W. Robinson
Chairman

Attachments:

As stated

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