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By ~~op~~ NARA Date 5-16-06



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June 19, 2008

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S P58

JUL 27 1976

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~~White House Memorandum~~

NODIS

TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: C - Mr. Sonnenfeldt

FROM: EUR - Arthur A. Hartman *AA*

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Polish Party leader Gierek complained to Ambassador Davies on July 4 about RFE's commentary on the price rises and the public reaction to them (Warsaw 4657, 4666 at Tab 1). In this connection, we would like to review the Department of State-Board for International Broadcasting-RFE/RL relationship.

The Legislative Mandate

The Board for International Broadcasting Act of 1973 established the BIB as a presidentially appointed body with authority, inter alia, to grant funds to the Radios, to review and evaluate the Radios' mission and operation, and to "assess the quality, effectiveness, and professional integrity of their broadcasting within the context of the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States". The Act declared the RFE/RL to be in the national interest and "independent broadcast media, operating in a manner not inconsistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the US and in accordance with high professional standards".

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The Act restricted the role of the Secretary of State to providing "the Board with such information regarding the foreign policy of the US as the Secretary shall deem necessary".

Congress intentionally followed the recommendations of the Eisenhower Commission in seeking to insulate the Radios from the Department of State and to prescribe BIB authority over RFE/RL in policy rather than operational terms.

#### RFE Internal Guidelines

The criteria for determining whether the Radios are acting in a manner "not inconsistent with" US policy are set out in RFE's internal guidelines. These guidelines, prepared by the Radios in consultation with BIB and State, call for objectivity, relevance and timeliness of broadcasts, and list a multitude of restraints, such as avoidance of vituperation, belligerency, emotionalism, sweeping generalization, and incitement.

#### State's Role

We have attempted to carry out the task of providing foreign policy guidance through continued liaison, correspondence and briefings, both here and in Munich, with BIB and RFE/RL officials. Informally, we have attempted to guide the Radios away from some of their excesses and towards more effective broadcasting. This has meant:

--Providing statements of policy guidelines for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union;

--Establishment of effective liaison between our Consulate in Munich and the Radios' Munich headquarters by assignment of a qualified FSO to Munich.

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- Setting up a working relationship between State, BIB and, to lesser extent, RFE/RL in Washington;
- Exchanging of views between RFE desks and FSOs from our Moscow and EE Embassies visiting Munich;
- Encouraging our Embassies in the USSR and Eastern Europe to provide constructive criticism of RFE/RL broadcasts, from monitoring or scripts.

Perhaps our best channel of communication regarding programming is between the Political Officer at our Consulate General and RFE management in Munich. That relationship allows for urgent consultation and timely guidance suggestions to the Radios, but in touchy situations requires that we inform and obtain concurrence from BIB and RFE in Washington. Our man in Munich also maintains contact with researchers and broadcasters throughout the Radios and is an extremely useful source for us of the Radios' internal problems and policies.

The Polish Case

The recent case of RFE treatment of the Polish price rises is illustrative of both our efforts to and problems with influencing the radio's output, even on an issue as potentially disruptive as the price increase. Especially so, as the journalistic talent, the almost defiant independence and the political connections of the Polish broadcasting desk have made it the center of differences between State and BIB on one hand and RFE/RL on the other over RFE programming.

After Foreign Minister Olszowski briefed Ambassador Davies on the upcoming price rises and specifically asked that we use our influence to get RFE

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to treat them accurately and responsibly, Davies made some specific recommendations and suggestions regarding RFE handling of the issue. We immediately alerted BIB (Roberts) to the problem and he obtained RFE/RL (Mickelson) concurrence that the issue should be handled responsibly and that we could make suggestions regarding its treatment in Munich. Hemsing (a former USIA officer, appointed RFE Program Director last year) assumed direct responsibility for the Polish treatment and we relayed to him through Consulate Munich suggestions regarding handling of the issue. However, the analyses and commentary are prepared in Polish and Hemsing has not been able to establish a position which would allow him to screen and approve commentary in advance. Hence, although in close touch with us, he gave daily instructions, reviewed scripts post facto and, we understand, subsequently reprimanded the Polish service for some scripts, Gierak complained to Davies on July 4 that the Poles had found some RFE broadcasts objectionable and our review of the scripts later revealed some grounds for legitimate complaint by the Poles.

We went over these scripts with BIB (Roberts) and RFE/RL (Mickelson) and they acknowledged that while most scripts were satisfactory, some of them were overly emotional, seemingly unrelated to the facts and given to sweeping and unbalanced generalizations. They agreed that there was some violation of RFE's own internal guidelines and undertook to take appropriate action to correct the problem. However, Mickelson held firm to his insistence that the Radios were "independent" and would exercise final discretion in what should be carried on the Radios.

#### The State-BIB-RFE/RL Relationship

The basic problem stems from the fact that much of the Radios' programming personnel are emigres from the fifties, steeped in undiluted and rather

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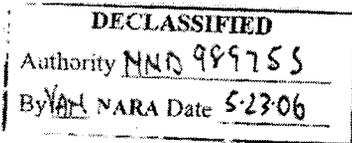
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indiscriminate emigre-oriented hostility to the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, convinced that the Radios' effectiveness stems from its ability to free-wheel "independently" and operate outside State's direct guidance. The problem is most acute on the Polish and, to a lesser extent, the Romanian desks. Personnel on the Polish desk have close communication with Polish-American circles and are aware that Congressional and other public circles would be responsive to any appeals that they were being "muzzled" by State censors (you will recall the letters from Brzesinski-Griffith-Pipes; there was also a recent one from Aloysius Mazewski, head of the Polish American Congress).

When BIB was formed, Dave Abshire, Foy Kohler, John Roche of the Board and we were agreed that the key to establishing effective guidance and programming of the Radios lay in replacing the directing radio officials here and in Munich, namely the head of RFE/RL here, the head of the combined operations in Munich and the head of RFE operations (RL has been much less of a problem). Unfortunately, it has not worked out as planned. Mickelson whom Abshire chose to head the operation has little sense of or feel for the political aspects of the Radios' operations (as his misjudgment of the significance of the Soviet moves against the Radios at the Innsbruck Olympics demonstrated), has become captive to the old approach, placed an ex-henchman of former RFE head William Durkee at his right hand, been resistant to our and/or RFE/RL guidance, and unwilling to give the essential support to the new RFE program chief that is necessary to establish control over the language services.

The BIB-RFE/FL relationship has deteriorated so badly that John Roche (Fletcher School) has formally notified Dave Abshire that he would not attend the July meeting and "In the event that between now and the next Board meeting the management does

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not cease its charades and stonewalling tactics toward the Board, I am prepared to state to the Congress, in a separate dissent if necessary, that while my total commitment to the mission of the radios remains unchanged, I believe the present oversight and funding instrument - the Board - needs to be replaced by a direct governmental instrumentality." (Letter at Tab 2. )

David Abshire informed Mickelson at the Board's July meeting that he had lost the confidence of one board member and was now in a position of having to restructure his relations with the Board in order to regain its confidence and support. A full-scale program review conference has been scheduled in Munich for late August and we have been invited and will be participating. It is our impression that at this juncture Abshire does not wish to have a public confrontation with Mickelson which might be treated by the media and some of his Congressional support as turning around the "muzzling" issue.

#### Conclusions

-- The operation of the radios continues to serve our interests in the USSR and in the Eastern European countries.

-- The Polish price increase experience illustrates the state of State-BIB-RFE/RL coordination. We were able to influence RFE handling decidedly for the better but not in a fully satisfactory way.

-- The personnel position of the Political Officer in Munich is vital to any effective coordination with BIB and the radios. It has been eliminated in the recent reduction in personnel positions abroad and this decision should be reversed.

-- Effective coordination of RFE/RL programming will depend importantly on David Abshire's success in establishing a much better working relationship with the Washington head of RFE/RL - or in effecting some key personnel changes.

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-- You may wish to discuss the matter during your next conversation with David Abshire, stressing our belief that changes are required in the present situation in order that effective guidance can be exercised over the radios in crucial situations.

Attachment:

- Tab 1 - Warsaw 4657 and 4666
- Tab 2 - Letter from Mr. Roche

Drafted by: EUR:JAArmitage/ EUR/EE:KBrown:sk/slu  
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