Reaching Captive Minds with Radio

by Kevin J. McNamara

With the collapse of the Soviet empire, some now argue that the time has come to retire broadcast stations run by the U.S. government — particularly Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), which broadcast to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union respectively. Launched in the early 1950s as covert programs of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Munich-based radios today operate openly under the supervision of the U.S. Board for International Broadcasting. Yet their mission remains unchanged. Unlike the Voice of America (VOA), which conveys information about life in America and articulates U.S. foreign policy, RFE/RL are surrogate domestic radio stations for the communist countries to which they broadcast. Radio Martí, though operated by VOA, has performed a similar service for Cuba since 1985. Other Western radio stations with large audiences behind the iron curtain include the BBC and the German stations, Deutsche Welle and Deutschlandfunk.[1]

The arguments against the U.S. stations vary widely. Some are partial objections, targeting a single operation or aspect; some attack the very idea of government broadcasting, whether VOA or RFE/RL. Frequently, the objections contradict each other. But five arguments seem to predominate: Washington's broadcasting operations have not been effective; on the contrary, the programs have accomplished their mission, and thus ought to be shut down; private news media could perform the same function and would better accord with RFE/RL's own goal of promoting limited government and with current U.S. budgetary restraints; U.S. broadcasters produce nothing but official propaganda; and the danger of retaliation by targeted countries, in various forms, outweighs the benefits gained.

In short, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of VOA, America's first global broadcast agency, many knives are drawn against U.S. international broadcasting. Moreover, the Bush administration and Congress are engaged in a major review of U.S. broadcasting. On both counts, then, it is an opportune time to address the issues involved and the doubts that have been raised.

[1] See Maury Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union: International Politics and Radio* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp. 5, 69-70, 160-72; and K.R.M. Short, ed., *Western Broadcasting Over the Iron Curtain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 227-63.

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An Ineffective Foreign Policy Tool?

The most frequently cited argument for the ineffectiveness of RFE/RL is that broadcasting cannot change listener attitudes, and that U.S. and other Western stations that pierced the iron curtain during the cold war were merely preaching to the converted. One advocate of this view, John Spicer Nichols, a professor of journalism at Pennsylvania State University, contends that operations like RFE/RL are based on "a simplistic and outmoded communication theory," namely, that media campaigns can affect the attitudes of audiences toward important values.[2] This is simply not true, he maintains. According to "modern communication theory," says Nichols, "the major effect of international propaganda is to reinforce existing opinions. . . ."[3] Dissidents undoubtedly listen to stations like RFE/RL, but that is because they

> first become alienated from their governments independently and afterwards seek out foreign propaganda that reinforces their new attitudes. In other words, contrary to [Reagan] administration claims, RFE and Radio Liberty are probably preaching to the converted.[4]

With the collapse of the communist states in Eastern Europe, and the coming of reform in the Soviet Union, we are now able to assess far better the accuracy of Nichols's argument. And we can see that there is some truth in his point about the reaffirming effect of broadcasting and about preaching to the converted. Yet there is abundant testimony that apparatchiks followed Western radio broadcasts as closely as did dissidents; not only did political prisoners such as Anatoly Marchenko listen, but so did his Soviet guards.[5] During the coup attempt of 1991, even Mikhail Gorbachev turned to the BBC, Radio Liberty, and VOA for information.[6]

Another fallacy in the position of critics like Nichols is that they draw from their notion of the "converted" the erroneous conclusion that preaching to them is an exercise in futility. In fact, according to testimony now available from East European and Soviet dissidents, the reaffirming Voice of America was vital to their efforts. Ludmilla Alexeyeva, a veteran Soviet dissident and one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Committee, has explained how, contrary to Nichols's projections, Western broadcasters not only sustained dissidents but spurred larger reform movements. "While our own authorities ignored our calls to dialogue and reform, the West wanted to know all about us. As a result, our struggle received sustained, detailed coverage from Western reporters," she said. The arrests and trials of dissidents in the Soviet Union, she noted, "received coverage by virtually every Western news organization in the Soviet Union. Those dispatches were then broadcast back into the Soviet Union over the Voice of America, Radio Liberty, the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and

[2] John Spicer Nichols, "Wasting the Propaganda Dollar," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1984, p. 129.
[3] Ibid., p. 139.
[4] Ibid., pp. 136-37.
[5] Anatoly Marchenko, *To Live Like Everyone* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), p. 179.
[6] *The New York Times*, August 23, 1991.

other shortwave radio stations. Their listeners in the USSR numbered in the tens of millions."[7] She concluded that "it would be difficult to exaggerate the impact on Soviet society of foreign radio broadcasts beamed to the USSR. Without foreign broadcasts, neither the human rights movement nor the religious rebirth in our country would have been possible on anything like the scale which they have attained."[8]

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Czechoslovak playwright Ivan Klíma, a persistent critic of communist rule, has recalled "the great part played in propagating what was called 'uncensored literature' by the foreign broadcasting stations Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America." "I'm convinced," he said in an interview, "that this 'underground culture' had an important influence on the revolutionary events of the autumn of 1989."[9] Throughout 1989, as one communist regime after another collapsed across Eastern Europe, Romanians were listening to Western radio accounts of the disintegration of the Soviet bloc. "This autumn we listened to the radio every day and every night," Gabriel Marcescu, a student at the University of Bucharest, told an American newspaper correspondent in 1989. "When the revolution happened in Czechoslovakia, I listened every hour." In the weeks leading up to the Christmas uprising that overthrew the Ceauşescu regime, Western radio provided the organizational locus of dissident activity, and boosted morale, according to Coen Stork, the Dutch ambassador to Romania. "The radio helped a lot. It gave people courage," Stork said.[10]

Are critics such as Nichols wrong in saying that the broadcasts would not change fundamental values in their mass audiences? Not exactly. But neither was the broader audience unaffected. According to Robert Sharlet, a specialist on dissent in the Soviet bloc, Western radio reports tended to influence individuals from a broader cross-section of society to take action. "The example of the political activist often emboldens religious and ethnic dissidents to step forward."[11] Alexeyeva makes the same point. "Thanks to those broadcasts," she says, "thousands of wronged and disaffected people nationwide learned that a loosely knit network of Muscovites had systematic access to foreign journalists and shortwave radio stations. The Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Armenians, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetians, Volga Germans, Jews, Bap-

[7] Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Co., 1990), pp. 181-82.

[8] Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *U.S. Broadcasting to the Soviet Union* (New York: U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, 1986), p. 1.

[9] Philip Roth, "A Conversation in Prague," *The New York Review of Books*, April 12, 1990, p. 16.

[10] *The Washington Post*, December 29, 1989.

[11] Robert Sharlet, "Dissent and the Contra-System in East Europe," *Current History*, November 1985, p. 355.

tists, Adventists, and Pentacostals learned that it was possible to use our Moscow samizdat and our Western-press connections to bring *glasnost* to their struggles."[12]

This is the key point that Nichols overlooked in his analysis. "Dissidents," says Vladimir Tismaneanu, a Romanian emigré and analyst with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, "are different from their fellow citizens in terms of behavior, not of opinions."[13] Disenchanted intellectuals, then, were not Western radio's only listeners. Yet even if they had been, "preaching to the converted" can make a critical difference — in the actions that the converted take.

When Jan Nowak, the former director of RFE's Polish service, entered Warsaw, he was met with a hero's welcome and was feted by Lech Walesa.

In sum, the available evidence suggests that RFE/RL were effective in their aim of bringing about liberalization in the countries to which they were directed. When Jan Nowak, the former director of RFE's Polish service — he was largely unknown in America — returned to Warsaw after an absence of forty-five years, he was met with a hero's welcome and was feted by Lech Walesa. Bronislaw Geremek, a Solidarity leader, said of Nowak: "We are here thanks to him."[14] Three former dissidents — Hungarian President Arpad Guncz, Czechoslovak President Václav Havel, and Alexander Dubček, leader of the aborted Prague Spring — went out of their way to visit VOA headquarters in Washington, D.C. to praise U.S. radio broadcasts for sustaining their opposition movements. Havel said, "You have informed us truthfully of events around the world and in our country as well, and in this way you helped to bring about the peaceful revolution that has at long last taken place."[15]

Despite this evidence, it might be asked how Western radio broadcasters can claim to have aided the liberalization of the Soviet empire when the stations had been broadcasting for forty years before that empire collapsed. But this is clearly a non sequitur. Erosion may undermine a structure for many, many decades before it collapses; that in no way implies the erosion was not responsible for the structure's collapse.

Yet another argument against the effectiveness of Western radio broadcasts is that factors other than radio broadcasting contributed as much or more to the revolutions of 1989 and 1991. Prominent among these factors are

[12] Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 182.

[13] Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 166.

[14] *1990 Annual Report on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Inc.* (Washington, D.C.: The Board for International Broadcasting, 1990), p. 4.

[15] *Public Diplomacy for a New Europe* (Washington, D.C.: United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, May 1990), p. 5.

the travel and cultural exchanges permitted under the Helsinki Final Act of 1975; the policy of glasnost initiated by Gorbachev in 1985; and the increasing economic misery of the stagnant communist systems. Unquestionably, all of these factors did help to bring about the revolutions of the last few years; but frequently they had their effect in conjunction with international radio broadcasting. For example, the Helsinki accords of the mid-1970s undoubtedly gave fresh impetus to the dissident intellectuals who had begun organizing in the 1960s. But only the broad reach of Western radio turned this dissident elite into the nucleus of a mass protest. And only the complaints of this broad population prompted Gorbachev to begin his policy of glasnost.

Likewise, economic deprivation, though important, was not the only motivation for popular unrest. "Americans tend to see the current revolutions in Eastern Europe primarily as revolts against the system's economic failure — its inability to provide consumer goods, for instance. Few are as aware of the role played by art, philosophy, and literature in these revolutions," Tismaneanu said. "But the communist dictators were aware of it, which is why they were such ruthless censors."[16] While economic misery could be felt directly, it was undoubtedly felt more poignantly when radio broadcasts allowed people to compare their own plight with the situation in more prosperous countries and especially with the situation in more prosperous Soviet satellites (for example, comparing Hungary's relative economic success with impoverished Romania).

Thus, with due credit to all the factors involved, when it comes to claiming pride of place in the liberation process, partisans of other causes have the burden of citing testimony and evidence on a scale adduced above for broadcasting.

The effectiveness of broadcasting ought also to be measured against its cost. What, for instance, does the United States get for the $200 million spent each year by the Board for International Broadcasting, which runs RFE/RL? To help answer that question, RFE/RL have created a respected audience and an opinion research division which conducts extensive surveys of Soviet bloc travelers to the West (not emigrés) in order to gauge the size and character of its audiences, as well as the audiences of the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and the Voice of America. Using a standard questionnaire, and working through independent European survey research organizations, the American stations had by 1985 amassed a data base of twenty-five thousand interviews, to which it was adding about four thousand each year.[17]

The year before Gorbachev assumed power, these surveys show, the Voice of America reached 14 to 18 percent of the USSR's adult population at least once a week; Radio Liberty ranked second with 8 to 12 percent; the BBC was third with 7 to 10 percent; and Deutsche Welle was fourth with 3 to 6 per-

[16] Vladimir Tismaneanu, "The Madness Revisited," *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, August 5, 1990, p. 27.

[17] R. Eugene Parta, "Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research (SAAOR) at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty," in Short, *Western Broadcasting Over the Iron Curtain*, pp. 227-44.

cent. In Eastern Europe, listenership was even higher. According to surveys from 1982-83, Western radio was listened to at least once a week by 68 percent of Poles, 64 percent of Romanians, 58 percent of Hungarians, 37 percent of Czechoslovakians, and 33 percent of Bulgarians. Moreover, throughout the Soviet bloc, listeners to Western radio stations constituted an emerging elite, according to these surveys. They tended to be younger, better-educated, and more likely to reside in urban areas than nonlisteners.[18]

International broadcasting specialist Maury Lisann's research reveals that when Soviet authorities began to survey "basic public attitudes" in 1965, they discovered that forty to sixty million people (approximately 15 to 25 percent of the population) listened to foreign radio broadcasts; of these, 50 to 75 percent learned of major public issues mainly through foreign radio broadcasts; and 30 to 50 percent considered official Soviet media inadequate. "In addition," Lisann noted, "from 20 to 30 percent of the population, and perhaps more, seem generally to doubt the credibility of all Soviet information sources, and by inference, much of the basic ideological legitimacy of the system."[19]

Over the years, such statistics have been subjected to much criticism, such as the observation that Soviet bloc travelers to the West are not representative of the broader populations from which they emerge.[20] The implication of this, however, is quite the reverse of what the critics intended. Those permitted to travel outside of communist countries tended to be the most loyal to their governments, which means that the polling samples probably underestimated listenership — which the collapse of the Soviet empire has since proved. As one senior research analyst for RFE put it, "only now, when we can visit the countries, are we learning that the impact before the revolution was far greater than even the best estimates we had. We undervalued ourselves seriously."[21]

Likewise, Americans may underestimate the impact of RFE/RL partly because few Americans listen to shortwave-radio broadcasts, and partly because of an assumption that jamming makes shortwave broadcasts hard to hear. In fact, radios capable of receiving shortwave broadcasts are common in the ex-Soviet bloc. In Eastern Europe alone, about two-thirds of all residents are able to receive short-wave signals.[22] To be sure, Soviet bloc regimes until recently spent great sums of money to jam the broadcasts. Yet the noisy interference — nicknamed "KGB jazz" — was not very effective. While jamming was still in effect, for example, *New York Times* correspondent Hedrick Smith encountered young people in the Siberian city of Bratsk who had compiled a library of recordings of the Voice of America's music selections — recordings whose clarity would be considered important.[23] "The only areas where jamming has been

[18] Parta, "SAAOR at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty," p. 230.

[19] Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union*, pp. 154-55.

[20] Nichols, "Wasting the Propaganda Dollar," pp. 134-35.

[21] *The New York Times*, May 6, 1990.

[22] Paul Lendvai, *The Bureaucracy of Truth: How Communist Governments Manage the News* (London: Burnett Books, 1981), p. 143.

[23] Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., Inc., 1976), p. 174.

substantially effective are the central parts of large cities, where local ground wave jammers are installed," according to Lisann.[24] Perhaps recognizing its futility, the Kremlin ceased virtually all jamming by 1988, when Radio Liberty was heard freely in the Soviet Union for the first time in thirty-five years; Moscow had ceased jamming of the BBC and VOA the previous year. Jamming of Radio Free Europe also had ceased by the end of 1988.

Mission Accomplished?

A contrary case against continuing the operation of RFE/RL is made by arguing that the liberalization of the communist bloc, which America's surrogate radio stations were established to achieve, has been achieved. Thus, *The New York Times* has editorialized that "with the spread of democracy and freedom, [RFE] has lost its main mission."[25] Sometimes, those who make this argument will even acknowledge that the radio stations played a large part in achieving that liberalization. Thus, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, a bipartisan advisory panel of the United States Information Agency (USIA) that includes conservatives such as Edwin J. Feulner of The Heritage Foundation and Priscilla Buckley of *National Review*, has said that "The United States should begin planning now to end broadcasts by Radio Free Europe because the goal of democratic change in Eastern Europe is being achieved. . . ."[26] In particular, the panel recommended phasing out broadcasts to Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, while phasing out broadcasting to Romania and Bulgaria as circumstances warrant.

Others, who share the view that RFE/RL has succeeded in its goals, argue that it should undertake new tasks. Gene Pell, president of the RFE/RL, says, "We have an evolving mission. Our surrogate broadcasting role is diminishing; our rising role is that of an alternative domestic medium."[27] Morton Kondracke adds that "Havel and others want [RFE] as a 'critical mirror' against which to judge newly emerging domestic media."[28] Unfortunately, this answer does nothing to ease the anxiety of conservatives who are both anticommunist and antibureaucracy. The call for a shift in RFE/RL's mission looks like a classic case of a bureaucracy refusing to close down when its mission is accomplished.

Friends of RFE/RL would be better advised to admit that the mission of the radios is to be a surrogate station for countries in the region that lack the free media necessary to nourish a free society. Since advances toward a free media have clearly taken place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the question then becomes whether it is premature to declare victory — whether the changes that have taken place so far in the region include the emergence of such media as a free polity requires.

[24] Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union*, p. 2.
[25] *The New York Times*, July 15, 1990.
[26] *The New York Times*, May 17, 1990.
[27] *The New York Times*, May 6, 1990.
[28] Morton Kondracke, "Fine Tuning," *The New Republic*, May 28, 1990, p. 11.

No one pretends that changes of that magnitude have yet taken place in the Soviet Union, and consequently the mission of Radio Liberty remains. The coup attempt is a reminder of the enormous latent hostility within the communist bureaucracy toward the reform efforts underway in the USSR. Likewise, no one pretends that the liberated Baltic republics (which are served by RFE) yet have a free media or free polity. *The New York Times*, following the lead of the USIA advisory panel, also concedes editorially that RFE's mission remains in Romania and Bulgaria.

Stopping broadcasting now may snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, an act comparable to stopping short of Baghdad and Saddam Husayn's removal.

So the test for ending the mission of RFE comes down to the cases of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The presidents of those three states have written to President Bush to express their gratitude for the work that RFE has done over the years, and to ask that the station continue in operation.[29] One may wonder: Why do these chief executives believe that their countries still need surrogate stations?

The International Media Fund, a private, nonprofit organization that aims to assist free media in East-Central Europe, made the answer clear in a recent report, *Impediments to the Development of Free Media in Eastern Europe*. Even in the three freest countries of Eastern Europe, liberty of the media exists only in the sense that the state does not directly censor expression. A considerable danger to the media still remains nonetheless because of the state's economic role in areas affecting the media. And it is by no means clear that this economic role is going to be appropriately diminished.

Poland. The legal status of the media in Poland is expected to change soon, with the adoption of a new constitution and a broadcast law. Although the latter may lead to private television stations, the expectation is that it will not. In the meantime, Poland is moving ahead with some media privatization, but Polish state radio is still a powerful presence and "suffers from the difficulty of breaking the habits of a government propaganda organ."[30] The national news agency also remains under state control, and state television "has had little success in dislodging TV's old functionaries and nomenklatura."[31] Moreover, even where communist party functionaries have been replaced, some critics accuse their replacements of being no less partisan on the side of President Lech Walesa.

Hungary. Hungary has as yet no legal guarantee of press freedom, although a press law is being debated. In addition, no legal basis exists for issu-

[29] *The New York Times*, August 5, 1990.
[30] Marvin L. Stone and Leonard Marks, *Impediments to the Development of Free Media in Eastern Europe*, (Washington, D.C.: The International Media Fund, 1991), p. 17.
[31] Ibid., p. 16.

ing private broadcasting permits, and "there is little hope that a law will be enacted in the near future."[32] There is also a moratorium on private cable facilities. Obviously, no one can guess what rules, restrictions, and burdens future press laws may impose on private media generally and the electronic media in particular, if and when such laws are passed.

Within this limbo, privately owned newspapers and magazines do exist in some numbers, but Budapest retains a de facto monopoly on printing and distribution, and controls all subscriber lists. The state also runs the only two national television services, the Hungarian news agency, and promotes a daily newspaper, *New Hungary.*

Czechoslovakia. President Havel is deeply opposed to censorship, but his attitude alone is not sufficient to secure media freedom. Only one of three available network channels in Czechoslovakia is slated to be private; the other two will be run by the government. In Slovakia, the prime minister opposes issuing any private broadcast licenses at this time. As in Poland and Hungary, the national news agency is run by the state and "has control of most of the news provided by the Czechoslovak media, partly because it serves as the agency for providing subscriptions to Western wire services."[33] As for the printed media, the development of commercially independent outlets is hampered most by onerous taxation: a 20 percent tax on newsprint, an 11 percent turnover tax (a kind of sales tax), and a 55 percent tax on profits. As a result, there are no commercial newspapers in Slovakia.

Thus, the situation of free media even in these three countries is far from sound, and on that basis a mission for RFE remains. As Walter Laqueur has argued, the whole region covered by RFE/RL should be considered as in transition to freedom. Until that transition is completed, the stations should continue broadcasting. Stopping now, he says, may snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, an act comparable to stopping short of Baghdad and Saddam Husayn's removal.

> There seems to be a curious new syndrome in U.S. foreign policy — the inclination to end a campaign and announce victory just a little too early. The price that might have to be paid for such errors of judgment could be very high indeed.[34]

In sum, better to err on the side of staying too long than of stopping too soon. If nothing else, Washington will thereby set a precedent for not halting other democratization programs at every thaw and rapprochement. Since such programs seem likely to become more prevalent in the future, and since the autocrats targeted by them are bound to complain, that is a valuable precedent to have.

But how can Washington keep Laqueur's legitimate policy that "it ain't over 'til it's over" from turning into Pell's "evolving mission"? Only by setting up

[32] Ibid., p. 8.
[33] Ibid., pp. 20-21.
[34] Walter Laqueur, "Keep Those Stations on the Air," *The Washington Post*, July 23, 1991.

specific criteria that will signal a time for withdrawal. Three such criteria would seem necessary: the country should have multiple private media, both printed and electronic, whether commercial or subsidized by churches, labor unions, or political associations — pluralism is the key; private supplies of paper and printing facilities must be available, as well as private distribution networks; and the government should permit broad freedom of the press, at least de facto.

Ripe for Privatization?

On many grounds, Washington should prefer to let private groups do what they can and step into the breach only where absolutely necessary. Nowhere is this principle truer than in the realm of aiding the media, where the potential for government regulation of ideas looms largest. Thus, the question of privatizing RFE/RL can be raised on a variety of levels. It can be raised on a principled level, questioning the very right of government to engage in such broadcasting outside of a wartime context. Or it can be raised on a tactical level, seeing in privatization a way to reduce government expenditure.

On the principled level, the question is: How do such broadcasts enhance the national security of the United States? The theoretical answer is that free states are relatively less likely to engage in hostilities than totalitarian states. Insofar as RFE/RL can rightly claim the accolades now showered on it for helping to undermine the totalitarian Soviet bloc, the tiny sums spent on surrogate radio broadcasting have surely been justified under even the most minimalist theory of the state.[35] Indeed, dollar for dollar, they were probably the best foreign policy expenditure of the past fifty years. If similarly exiguous sums can help to assure that formerly unfree states make a full transition to liberty, the money will likewise be justified and well-spent.

On the tactical level, though, one may wonder whether surrogate broadcasting is a task that could be performed as well, or almost as well, by private commercial or nonprofit institutions. But, commercially, it is hard to see how such broadcasting could be made profitable, except in a few unusual circumstances. Almost by definition, the listening audience in the unfree world is not at liberty to respond to advertising that a surrogate station might carry. Could a large listening audience in the free world — which is at liberty to respond to advertising — support the cost of broadcasting to elements in the unfree world? Generally, no. The most important news that a surrogate station broadcasts is typically of major interest only to its unfree audience — for example, news about Bulgaria, broadcast to Bulgaria, in the Bulgarian language.

Cuba might seem to be an exception. Commercial stations in Florida, run by and for Cuban exiles, would seem to be suitable surrogate stations for their homeland. In fact, however, they did not become such, and that is why Radio Martí was created. When Thomas O. Enders, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, testified in favor of Radio Martí, he said, "Florida radio

[35] See James Robbins, "Foreign Policy and Limited Government: Towards a Muscular Libertarianism," *Orbis*, Fall 1991, pp. 533-47.

stations broadcasting in Spanish to Cuban-Americans . . . can tell Cubans much about us, but they are not an adequate source of information about what is going on in Cuba itself."[36] The reason is obvious. Typical commercial radio stations do not maintain a staff of Cuban scholars or a network of contacts inside Cuba because advertisers are not interested in supporting the cost of reaching an audience unable to buy their products.

This brings up the possibility that surrogate stations might be privatized and run, in whole or in part, by nonprofit institutions such as churches, universities, labor unions, or political associations. The difficulty with this alternative is that surrogate stations serve an important foreign-policy function for the government, and it is not clear this function would be well carried out under other auspices. For example, some churches, such as the Roman Catholic church and the Christian Science church, sponsor international radio broadcasting. One can imagine that free members of those churches might want to operate surrogate stations to help unfree members of their communion. For this reason, Radio Vatican in particular would seem a logical choice to take over the surrogate function of RFE/RL in areas where Catholics predominate.

Would that be desirable from Washington's point of view? In many areas of the world — from Ukraine and Yugoslavia to Cuba and Nicaragua — the Catholic church has its own distinct interests, and these are not necessarily Washington's. The same could be said of the Christian Scientists or any other church. In addition, no private organization stands ready to broadcast in anything approximating the variety of languages, the number of hours per week, or the transmitting power that RFE/RL now provides.

Nothing But Propaganda?

The journalistic aspects of VOA and RFE/RL have come under criticism from all sides. Some of this criticism comes from Americans who accuse station employees, particularly emigré employees, of not behaving like professional American broadcasters and newsmen. To the extent that the stations do emulate commercial media, on the other hand, the criticism is heard from emigrés (and others) that the broadcast agencies have adopted the commercial media's alleged anti-American biases.

In the first case, the argument is made that America's international broadcasting stations engage in propaganda rather than reporting. Indeed, this argument has from the very beginning made U.S. government broadcasting highly suspect on Capitol Hill and elsewhere. Walter Lippmann, for instance, once urged that VOA be abolished, calling it "a government propaganda agency."[37]

[36] Thomas O. Enders, "Statement before the Subcommittee on State, Justice, Commerce, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies of the Senate Appropriations Committee, May 4, 1982," *Department of State Bulletin*, September 1982, p. 68.

[37] Walter Lippmann, "Why the Voice of America Should Be Abolished," *Reader's Digest*, August 1953, pp. 41-43.

It is certainly true that some programs of RFE/RL have been influenced by the passions of internecine emigré politics; in the early 1980s, even accusations of anti-Semitism were leveled at Radio Liberty. These problems must not be ignored, but neither should they overshadow the professional reputation of RFE/RL. Carnes Lord has rightly said that "anyone even minimally familiar with these radios knows that they have acquired over the years a distinguished reputation for scholarly analysis of the Communist world."[38]

More generally, the answer to critics who attack Western government radios as propaganda is that much of what these Western stations broadcast is simply taken from commercial news organizations. BBC, Deutsche Welle, and VOA have traditionally relied on Associated Press and Reuters to supplement the reports of their own correspondents; the BBC and VOA also subscribe to United Press International.[39] Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty likewise rely on commercial news organizations. Shortwave services, then, provide Soviet bloc audiences with the reporting of Western commercial media that otherwise would never reach them.

As Zbigniew Brzezinski has stated, "the loss of communist monopoly over mass communications is the key to the breakdown of communist totalitarianism."

In fact, so closely do America's international stations mimic commercial news organizations, complete with their trivialities and occasional anti-American biases, that their broadcasts have provoked conservative attacks. The charge of triviality, made famous by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, is generally lodged against VOA rather than RFE/RL, and not without reason. In its coverage of American life, for example, VOA has included such fluff as a story on beer can collecting. That may have seemed like a cute bit of Americana to the broadcasters but, as Solzhenitsyn says, such broadcasts only "irritate the hungry and oppressed millions of listeners."[40] Likewise, VOA's attempt to report the Persian Gulf war in a balanced fashion led Saudi officials to complain that its Arabic language broadcasts displayed an "anti-American tilt" more appropriate to "Voice of Baghdad."[41]

But while conservatives were correct that a more anticommunist orientation would have been more effective, they underestimate the power of mere truthful information. That is, they failed to appreciate the key importance that a monopoly on information plays in maintaining a communist regime. Zbigniew Brzezinski has stated, "the loss of communist monopoly over mass communi-

[38] Carnes Lord, "In Defense of Public Diplomacy," *Commentary*, April 1984, p. 47.

[39] Donald R. Browne, "The International Newsroom: A Study of Practices at the Voice of America, BBC and Deutsche Welle," *Journal of Broadcasting*, Summer 1983, pp. 205-31.

[40] Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, "Misconceptions about Russia Are a Threat to America," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1980, p. 823.

[41] *The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 1991.

cations is the key to the breakdown of communist totalitarianism."[42] Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski made the same point, arguing that "the entire power system" of communist regimes "is based on the control of information."[43] Similarly, Roy Medvedev told *New York Times* correspondent Hedrick Smith that modernization alone would drive Soviet society toward greater democracy, and cited international radio and satellite television broadcasting in particular as technologies that "will make it impossible for authorities to keep the lid on the spread of information and ideas."[44]

In other words, the medium matters as much as the message. Alternate sources of information represent alternate sources of authority; and this alone serves to undermine communist governments, which need to monopolize information in order to legitimize their power. Thus, the debate between advocates of ideologically slanted propaganda and more neutral information has been largely irrelevant. Reasonably accurate information about current events turned out to be inherently subversive of governments behind the iron curtain. In fact, Soviet authorities perceived neutral news reporting as a more sophisticated threat; they called it "agitation by facts." The reason for this was explained by Maury Lisann, when he observed that

> the simple availability of the news had greater immediate importance than the ideas or interpretations that it might carry. Foreign radio made known the existence of facts that the Soviet media reported late or not at all. It was not so much a matter of whether the facts could convey a possibly anti-Soviet interpretation, although, of course, they might, but that . . . their simple existence undermined trust in the Soviet media, which inevitably meant undermined trust in the government and in the system itself.[45]

Nevertheless, America's international broadcasting stations do face a two-fold problem regarding their credibility: one, the veracity of government-sponsored organizations is suspect because they broadcast only government-approved programs; two, to the extent that U.S. broadcast agencies use reports provided by major commercial media or seek to emulate these media, they are susceptible to the same biases some critics perceive in, say, *The New York Times* or NBC News. These two accusations, however, tend to work against each other, perhaps giving official U.S. broadcasters the kind of overall editorial balance not possible anywhere else.

Provoking Retaliatory Threats?

Finally, RFE/RL and Radio Martí have been criticized for provoking responses from their targets that are damaging to ordinary diplomacy. In his classic work, *Diplomacy,* Sir Harold Nicholson called propaganda "a dangerous

[42] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), p. 254.

[43] Leszek Kolakowski, "On Total Control and Its Contradictions: The Power of Information," *Encounter,* July/August 1989, pp. 65-71.

[44] Smith, *The Russians,* pp. 448-49.

[45] Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union,* pp. 33-34..

weapon." He added, "It appears more necessary than ever to affirm that the art of diplomacy (which is the art of negotiating agreements between sovereign states) is not concerned with dialectics, propaganda, or invective: its purpose is to create international confidence, not to sow international distrust."[46] More recently, Carnes Lord confirmed that there remains "the feeling that public diplomacy is an intrusive, not easily controllable, and fundamentally unnecessary instrument which only obstructs what is seen as the central business of foreign policy — the creation of an international climate congenial to negotiation."[47] Yet Nicholson's criticisms clearly had in mind hostile Nazi and Soviet propaganda, and Lord strongly defended public diplomacy.

Certainly none could accuse RFE/RL of promoting an atmosphere of good fellowship between Washington and the totalitarian governments it targets. Over the years, for example, officials from the Soviet bloc have denounced the stations vituperatively. Vladimir Kryuchkov, a former KGB chairman and one of the prime movers in the recent attempted Soviet coup, had earlier blamed Soviet unrest on Radio Liberty.[48] Army colonel Vladimir Petrushenko, a leader of the conservative Soyuz faction in the now-defunct Congress of People's Deputies, agreed: "The sustenance of the liberals, the so-called 'democrats,' has been Western propaganda."[49]

But what is wrong about having bad relations with bad regimes? Clientitis, after all, is a hazard of diplomacy, not a virtue. In fact, U.S. broadcasts of the truth regarding a dictatorship may better advance America's interests than do the obfuscations of diplomats. In the period leading up to the Persian Gulf war, for instance, VOA irritated Saddam Husayn with criticisms of Baghdad's secret police while U.S. senators and Ambassador April Glaspie were at best sending mixed signals. Senator Bob Dole (Republican of Kansas) went so far as to tell Saddam in their April 1990 meeting that a VOA journalist had been fired for the broadcasts. (The senator was wrong.)

Suppose, however, that surrogate broadcasting provokes more than verbal hostility, as in fact it has. Polish agents burglarized a Chicago home in 1972, stole two letters written by Jan Nowak, then head of RFE's Polish service, and doctored them to include embarrassing criticisms of U.S. senators conducting hearings on the Munich stations.[50] Scotland Yard's investigation into the death in London of Georgiy Markov, a Bulgarian defector who worked for the BBC, Radio Free Europe, and Deutsche Welle, indicated he was murdered in 1979 with poison injected with the tip of an umbrella. The Bulgarian government denied involvement, but a senior KGB official at the time, Oleg D. Kalugin, has since admitted helping Bulgarian agents kill Markov.[51]

[46] Sir Harold Nicholson, *Diplomacy*, 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. vii, 144.

[47] Carnes Lord, "In Defense of Public Diplomacy," p. 48.

[48] "Kryuchkov on 'Destructive Forces,'" Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Soviet Union*, December 24, 1990, from TASS, December 22, 1990.

[49] *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1990.

[50] Gerhard Wettig, *Broadcasting and Détente: Eastern Policies and their Implications for East-West Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 33-38.

[51] *The New York Times*, June 13, 1991.

These virulent responses, it is said, create trouble for U.S. diplomacy that is not worth the gains offered by the stations. The most notable recent example of such provocation concerns Radio Martí and TV Martí. Before Radio Martí went on the air, American broadcasters were trembling over Castro's threat to interfere with American radio stations, particularly WHO in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1983, Cuban deputy foreign minister Ricardo Alarcon warned of massive interference with commercial U.S. radio stations if Radio Martí went on the air.[52] And, in fact, when the station actually went on the air two years later, Castro retaliated by jamming Radio Martí and suspending a five-month-old immigration pact with Washington. That pact would have allowed twenty to thirty thousand Cubans to emigrate legally to the United States each year, and would have returned to Cuba nearly two thousand criminals from the Mariel boatlift. *The New York Times* editorialized:

> It makes no sense to sacrifice the large benefits of returning prisoners and accepting real refugees from Communism for the dubious benefit of irritating Fidel Castro. The way to turn Radio Martí into a force for democracy is to turn it off.[53]

Yet the *Times* felt obliged to publish a second editorial on Radio Martí a mere ten days later, apologizing for implying that the station was not effective:

> Contrary to our statement, the station appears to have found a responsive audience and filled a void in Cubans' information. Contrary to our fears last year, it has avoided propaganda and supplemented, not duplicated, commercial Spanish-language broadcasts from Florida.[54]

Castro eventually stopped jamming Radio Martí on a regular basis until TV Martí went on the air in 1990, when Havana resumed jamming of Radio Martí and also jammed TV Martí. The television station has suffered technical difficulties, is restricted to a very limited late-night schedule to avoid illegal interference with Cuban television, and is more effectively jammed than Radio Martí. For these reasons, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy has criticized TV Martí as "not cost effective," but said its future should be decided by Congress.

Conclusion

The role of shortwave radio broadcasting in recent U.S. foreign relations suggests two broad policy guidelines.

Firstly, if the United States wishes to promote in some unfree society a climate favorable to freedom, the experience of the past forty-odd years suggests that it can do so through radio broadcasting. And indeed Washington ought to do so, not limiting itself to countries that pose a strategic threat to the United States and its allies. America ought to sponsor overseas broadcasting

[52] *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1983.
[53] *The New York Times*, March 12, 1986.
[54] *The New York Times*, March 22, 1986.

and other democratizing initiatives, to the extent that it can, for reasons both realistic and idealistic. The realistic reason is that democracies will, in most cases, be friendlier to the United States and its interests than nondemocratic regimes; the idealistic, that U.S. foreign policy needs popular backing, and the promotion of democracy abroad may be the only foreign policy vision the American people will support in an ever less threatening world.[55] Broadcasting to free countries may likewise influence foreign opinion in some way favorable to the United States. Yet at a time when budgetary constraints drive policy, targeting countries which tightly control the means of communication ought to have the first priority.

Currently, some progress is being made through the construction of a new radio transmitting facility in Israel, which will enhance U.S. radio broadcasts to regions where freedom remains more a hope than a reality, especially Soviet Central Asia. Yet more effort is required. VOA continues to target programs at Spain and Greece, for instance, while Soviet Georgia receives a mere forty-five minutes of VOA programming daily. Similarly, Radio Liberty broadcasts only three hours daily to Ukraine, a semifree country of fifty million that is the size of France, and may soon be independent.

Secondly, granted that unfree and semifree countries should be given priority, it follows that surrogate broadcasting of the kind performed by RFE/RL is a more appropriate tool than the traditional broadcasting of the BBC and VOA. Specifically, surrogate broadcasters undermine totalitarian regimes by ending the information monopoly that such regimes exercise within their borders. The BBC and VOA also help to break down information monopolies, and in that sense, they are allies of the surrogate stations. But it takes a broadcasting service closely covering a totalitarian society's internal events to bring about the transition from disaffection to dissidence. This is the task of surrogate broadcasting. Without surrogate broadcasting, VOA's Russian Service would still perform a valuable role in Russia, despite Washington's editorials and the focus on America — but Radio Liberty is better.

(The question of allocating differing roles for VOA and RFE/RL does not decide the question of how to organize the administration of these agencies. There are a variety of proposed reorganizations, such as placing RFE/RL and VOA under one agency, but these should not be confused with debates over the mission of the stations.)

Lastly, the U.S. experience with broadcasting suggests a number of more specific policy recommendations. One is that U.S. international broadcasting deserves a bigger budget. This ought to be easy because overseas broadcasting is a bargain — the United States spent $392 million for all of its international radio and television broadcasting in FY 1988; the amount spent the same year on defense was $282 billion.

[55]Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1991).

Secondly, because elements within the Bush administration seem prepared to phase out Radio Free Europe too quickly, Congress should postpone cutting specific language programs until the East European countries served by those programs develop free media. Likewise, Radio Martí is having an impact and ought to continue. The twenty-four-hour radio station "has developed a significant audience in Cuba," according to *The New York Times*.[56] A variety of sources confirm this. *Moscow News* correspondent Alexander Makhov recently reported, "I know from personal experience that the U.S.-based Radio Martí is being listened to by many of Cuba's residents, in spite of significant government-imposed interference and the Cuban authorities' strict prohibition, just as Soviets listened to the Voice of America and Radio Liberty in the past."[57] A Cuban air force pilot, Major Oréstes Lorenzo Peres, who defected to the United States in March 1991 by flying his Soviet-made MiG-23 into Florida, told reporters that Radio Martí is popular among Cubans, and that Fidel Castro is not.[58]

Thirdly, the White House should support the bipartisan proposal under study in Congress to create a new surrogate station modeled after RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia (also known as Radio Free China), which would be aimed at the People's Republic of China and, perhaps, neighboring countries under communist control. "There is absolutely no reason why we can't attack the Bamboo Curtain with the same vigor and persistence that we did the Iron Curtain," said U.S. representative Helen Delich Bentley (Republican of Maryland), who together with U.S. representative John Porter (Republican of Illinois) has introduced bills to create the new surrogate broadcast agency.[59] The biggest obstacle is the estimated cost of launching an entirely new broadcast network, but this system could be built gradually, perhaps as the Munich stations wind down their operations. The Republic of China on Taiwan, which already broadcasts one hundred hours of programming daily to the mainland, might assist in this effort, providing the facilities for American broadcasts.

This proposal has won key support from liberals, many of whom were long suspicious of RFE/RL. In 1972, Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, "These radios should be given an opportunity to take their rightful place in the graveyard of cold war relics."[60] But evidence of their success inside the Soviet bloc, and a renewed concern with human rights, has won official radio broadcasting widespread support. Among those now urging the Bush administration to support Radio Free Asia are *The New Republic* and *The Washington Post*, and a number of liberal Democratic senators, including Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of Delaware, Alan Cranston of California, Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut, Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, and Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland.

[56] *The New York Times*, March 24, 1990.

[57] Alexander Makhov, "Subversive 'Voice' for the 'Freedom Island,'" *Moscow News*, September 8-15, 1991, p. 13.

[58] *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1991.

[59] "Prospects for Increased Radio Broadcasting to Asia," statement, Conference on U.S. Broadcasting to Asia, Washington, D.C., April 10, 1991.

[60] *The New York Times*, February 21, 1972.

Other steps can be taken. The United States ought to assist the spread of shortwave radio receivers, perhaps encouraging third parties to smuggle them into closed societies in the same way that prohibited books and other items were smuggled in and out of the Soviet Union for many years. The BBC might finally recognize that Russian is an alien language in many regions of the USSR and begin broadcasting in local languages.

The potential influence of broadcasting can also be exploited more completely with the increased use of satellite transmission of television signals. Pictures from the West would undoubtedly be more popular with foreign peoples than audio messages. For years Third World and Soviet bloc representatives at the United Nations pushed restrictive measures in negotiations on direct satellite broadcasting; the spread of satellite technology to the Third World and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, however, mean that international agreement on satellite broadcasting may be easier now than at any time in the past. For the consumer, television technology is more cumbersome than radio, requiring satellite dishes. Yet miniaturization proceeds apace, shrinking the size and cost of dishes. As many as 60 percent of China's peasants own televisions, and the Soviet television viewing audience amounts to perhaps 150 million.

Satellites already are providing global television programming; in 1984, USIA launched WorldNet, which employs satellite technology to offer inexpensive news and public affairs programming to cable systems and hotels around the globe. STAR-TV, the first pan-Asian television service, was launched in April by Hong Kong businessman Li Ka Shing. The BBC likewise has launched World Service Television, an all-news channel currently broadcasting to Europe and Asia, with Africa and North America to follow.[61] Television technology — which was most conspicuously displayed by CNN during the Persian Gulf war — presents the United States and other Western governments with a tremendous opportunity to influence world opinion that they should not fail to seize.

[61] See *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1988; *The Economist*, April 20, 1991; and *Newsweek*, October 28, 1991.