

December 1960

Sprague Committee Critical of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty

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Summary:

The President's Committee on Information Activities Abroad, chaired by Mansfield Sprague, concludes that RFE and RL are slow to adapt to changes in the Soviet orbit and resulting shifts in U.S. policy. [Also available in the Richard Helms Collection released by CIA in 2008.]

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Excerpt from Classified Portion of Appendix

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE
PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE
ON
INFORMATION ACTIVITIES ABROAD
December 1960
(Sprague Committee)

RADIO

23. The allocation of functions among official and unofficial stations is logical: The Voice of America deals primarily with the American scene; Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and the Radio in the American Sector of Berlin concern themselves mainly with European and Bloc developments and give more emphasis to a European point of view.

Recommendation:

The missions of official and unofficial Government radio stations should be periodically re-examined in the light of political and technical developments.

24. VOA should be the official radio presenting the policies of our Government to foreign audiences clearly and persuasively. Its broadcasts should present a balanced and comprehensive picture of American society, thought and institutions. VOA should build its credibility through consistently reliable, accurate, objective presentation of the news. It is recognized that editorial leeway in reporting discussion will, from time to time, be useful for supporting foreign policy objectives of the Government.

Recommendation:

The Voice of America as a component of USIA should continue to be guided by the Presidential directive of October 22, 1953, to USIA. Any additional guidance which is necessary to clarify and stabilize the program policies of VOA within this framework should be issued by the Director of USIA.

25. The broadcasting activities of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and the Radio in the American Sector of Berlin have been useful in the past and

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still offer unique advantages to our information program.

Recommendation:

RL, RFE and RIAS should continue to be operated with Government support and financial aid.

26. The programs of RFE and RL have sometimes been slow or unsuccessful in adjusting their message to changes within the satellite countries and to changes in official broadcast policy line. There have been differences between State and CIA on the role and efficacy of these broadcasts and, some times, on the interpretation of events in Poland and possibly elsewhere. Improvements can be made both in Washington and in the field in the arrangements for control of broadcasts, particularly those which comment upon internal affairs in the satellite countries and on major foreign policy issues relating to those areas.

Recommendations:

a. Our missions and consulates in the target countries should be associated earlier, more systematically and directly with development of policy guidance, and with the suggestion of useful ideas and themes, for RL and RFE. They should also report fully and regularly on the impact of programs in their areas, and their ideas should be passed promptly to CIA.

b. RL's present apportionment of broadcast time to internal Soviet affairs should be continued.

c. As conditions change, RFE's treatment of satellite internal affairs should be promptly modified, especially in countries like Poland where we are presently trying to achieve some of our objectives by working through or upon a Communist government.

27. The problems which RFE and RL have had in translating policy control into actual broadcast scripts stem in part from their dependence on refugee or emigre script writers and announcers who have had difficulty adjusting their personal aspirations and resentments to our broadcast policy. Current personnel procedures are not flexible enough to cope with the problem.

Recommendations:

a. The Government and interested corporations should devise adequate and flexible programs for the retirement of alien personnel; for replacement, where feasible, of aliens by Americans; for

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rotation of personnel; and for continuing recruitment and training procedures which will offset, insofar as possible, dependence on refugees.

b. RFE should take action (comparable to that taken by RL) to assure American supervision, control and monitoring of broadcasts, especially to Poland.

28. The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service is a major informational asset, because of its size and generally favorable effect on "eaves-dropping" foreign audiences. The network should continue to aim essentially at our armed service audience, and to exemplify the best in American entertainment and public service broadcasting.

Recommendation:

Military field commanders should be fully advised of current political themes suitable as guidance for AFRIS news broadcasts. AFRIS officials should exclude from their programs material that is likely to have an undesirable effect on foreign audiences.

29. To preserve the AFRIS image of Americans talking to Americans, AFRIS should not be identified openly with VOA or USIA. However, some VOA or USIA-TV educational programs can supplement current AFRIS program sources, and occasionally the use of VOA or USIA-TV news broadcasts on AFRIS may be desirable. When VOA or USIA-TV programs are used, it is preferable that there be no reference in the broadcast to its origin.

Recommendation:

There should be closer relationships between Defense, USIA and State in Washington and the field to maximize impact of AFRIS on foreign audiences. Defense should be represented on the Radio Broadcast Policy Committee.

30. In addition to supporting the U.S. Commander of the United Nations Forces in Korea, the Voice of the United Nations Command also supplements VOA broadcasts to the people of Korea and mainland China. This means that the U.S. is represented by two voices in this area. There is need for close coordination between USIA and VUNIC and continuing VUNIC efforts to insure that its broadcasts accord with U.S. policy.

Recommendation:

The Radio Broadcast Policy Committee, including representatives from Defense, should conduct a study of VUNIC's operations to include its relationships with VOA, its relationships with USIA and State in the field and the content and effectiveness of VUNIC broadcasts.

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