Chapter Thirteen:
The Cold war Triumph of Radio Free Europe

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Radio Free Europe (RFE) was arguably America's most successful venture in what has come to be known as public diplomacy and among America's most notable non-military initiatives during the Cold War. RFE went on the air in 1950, beaming a pro-democracy, anti-Communist message to five of Eastern Europe's Soviet satellite states: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. (It later added the services beamed to the three Baltic republics). For nearly two decades, the station was covertly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, as was America's other "freedom radio," Radio Liberty, which broadcast a similar message to the Soviet Union in both Russian and the languages of the non-Russian peoples.

In its heyday, RFE boasted a huge listenership throughout the satellite bloc. Poles regarded RFE with reverence; the station played an important role in bringing down at least three party leaders and was instrumental in sustaining the trade union Solidarity when it was forced underground by martial law. During Nicolae Ceausescu's time, RFE was Romania's most popular source of news. Ceausescu responded with fury; he dispatched hit squads to assassinate RFE journalists and hired the international terrorist Carlos the Jackal to bomb the station's Munich headquarters. The émigré writer Georgi Markov was murdered in the infamous umbrella assassination incident on direct orders of Bulgaria's party chief, Todor Zhivkov, because of broadcasts over RFE that touched on Zhivkov's personal life.

Radio Free Europe derived much of its credibility from the popularity of its commentators: men who, had they lived in normal societies, would have been the editors, columnists, and news anchors of a free press. When Ceausescu dispatched his thugs to kill or maim RFE journalists, he chose as his targets those who were the most beloved by the Romanian people. Each of RFE's services could place before the microphone commentators who had the rare ability to give quiet inspiration to oppressed people without polemics, pontification, or condescension.

The station's appeal was strengthened further by its diligence in reporting facts that the Communist authorities either distorted or ignored. This was a major challenge due to Communism's ability to seal off practically all sources of accurate information. RFE thus hired a team of researchers who specialized in ferreting out whatever information was available and then providing the broadcast services with reasonably reliable information to counter whatever fabricated success stories filled the regime press.

Although everyone understood that RFE was an American project, it consciously cultivated the image of a European radio station. Its broadcasts did not emphasize American popular culture, and when it pointed to examples of Free World achievement,

it was countries like West Germany and Austria – Central European societies that had attained both freedom and prosperity – that were cited.

Finally, from the very outset RFE had an intelligently strategic approach to the question of whether to target the masses or the elites. In its early years, RFE broadcasts deliberately tried to reach the East European masses through harsh condemnations of Communist leaders and personalized attacks on individual Communists, even to the point of denouncing by name a Hungarian factory manager who demanded sexual favors from women workers. Eventually, the station's message evolved: it was accessible to a mass audience (a legendary Hungarian broadcaster introduced rock music to his country's youth) while concentrating on comprehensive coverage of political developments. The core RFE audience included, naturally enough, the democratic opposition (RFE devoted little coverage to opposition groups that advocated violence or ultra nationalist ideas), but also included members of the governing apparatus, military officers, and high party officials who understood that the day of reckoning with the people would eventually come.[1]

Origins

Radio Free Europe was not, of course, the only foreign radio station to which the people of Eastern Europe listened. But while the BBC was appreciated for its professionalism and the Voice of America valued for its programs on American culture, only RFE was given the status of honorary member of the democratic opposition. This treatment attests to RFE's unusual character. The Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty model is unique not simply to the Cold War, but to the history of diplomacy. Many countries have established international broadcasting entities, ranging from respected journalistic services like the BBC to the crudely propagandistic global networks sponsored by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. But only with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty did a country establish broadcast services whose purpose was to change the form of government in foreign nations by airing news not about the country from which the broadcasts originated, but about the countries which were the broadcast targets. Radio Free Europe did not conceal its American origins, although the fiction that RFE was funded by private contributions was maintained for two decades. And certainly American affairs were covered in RFE news programs, especially as they related to the Cold War. From the outset, however, RFE concentrated its focus on developments within the target countries, particularly on the rule, or misrule, of Communist regimes. Radio Free Europe was to become a surrogate home service, the only reliable source of news and commentary on domestic matters for the people of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe.

For the United States to have initiated this unprecedented project in peacetime propaganda—for RFE was publicly described as a propaganda instrument at its creation

1 For general discussion of origins of Radio Free Europe, see Puddington 2000.

—represented a radical departure from this country's political tradition. Until World War II got underway, America had shown no inclination to participate in the global war of the airwaves. During the war, the United States created a propaganda agency, the Office of War Information, and an international radio network, the Voice of America. But while the American public supported international radio during wartime, there was considerable sentiment that, with the end of hostilities, the government should close down its propaganda and information projects; by 1947, the VOA's budget had been slashed and influential members of Congress were advocating the elimination of what remained of American international radio (Browne, 1982, 96-100).

The impulse towards a revived isolationism was checked by the onset of the Cold War. Having defeated, at great cost in life and resources, one great European totalitarian power, the United States found itself confronted by another, and in some respects more insidious totalitarian state, the Soviet Union. Communism seemed a more rational, even inspirational, creed than was the Thousand Year Reich, and could count as allies the local Communists who existed, in some cases in impressive numbers, throughout Europe. Furthermore, the Soviets approached the challenge of constructing a totalitarian social order with utmost seriousness. Within the satellite countries of Eastern Europe, the Soviets and the local Communists moved expeditiously to silence opposition voices, eliminate an independent press, outlaw non-Communist political parties, neutralize religion, and seal off the borders from foreign influence.

Radio Free Europe was the brainchild of some of the most prominent architects of America's early Cold War strategy, particularly those who believed that the Cold War would eventually be fought by political rather than military means. Here the most important figure was none other than George F. Kennan, the author of the famous "X" article and father of the containment doctrine. Unlike some others involved in the creation of America's "freedom radios" – as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty came to be known – Kennan was not a proponent of an American policy to liberate Eastern Europe from Soviet domination. But a program of aggressive ideological warfare did not clash with Kennan's preferred strategy of preventing the spread of the Soviet empire beyond its East European boundaries. The logic of containment demanded a policy of creating complications for the Soviets within their own sphere of influence, since the more Moscow was preoccupied with keeping the restive peoples of Eastern Europe in check, the less likely it would cast a hungry eye on Western Europe (Mickelson, 1983, 14-16).

During the early 1950s RFE was committed to a muscular brand of political warfare. The men who represented RFE before the American public made no secret of the station's combative nature. Frank Altschul once described RFE as a "citizens' adventure in the field of psychological warfare" which sought to "sow distrust and dissension among our enemies."(Frank Altschul memorandum, July 17, 1950)

Radio Free Europe was conceived at a time of great concern over the prospect of Moscow's expansion into Western Europe. Three events – the establishment of a Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, the Berlin Blockade, and the Italian elections – convinced many Western politicians that Stalin's ambitions stretched well be-

yond his East European "sphere of influence." The inevitability of Soviet expansionism was, of course, the basic assumption behind George Kennan's proposals to contain Soviet power within its Eastern perimeter. This nervousness over Soviet adventurism seems also to have influenced the early direction of RFE programming. Clearly, some planners believed that fomenting trouble in Moscow's backyard was one mean of diverting Stalin from westward expansion.

The early impact of RFE was exemplified by what was called the Swiatlo affair. In December 1953, Lieutenant Colonel Josef Swiatlo, one of Poland's highest ranking secret police officials, slipped away from a traveling companion during a shopping expedition in West Berlin, made his way to a Western embassy, and asked the astonished officials there for asylum. Swiatlo was not the first Communist functionary to have defected to the West. But Swiatlo was no ordinary member of the party apparatus. He had served as chief of Department Ten of the U.B., as Poland's secret police were popularly known. Department Ten was responsible for the political and ideological purity of Communist Party officials, a counterintelligence force against deviation. Swiatlo was uniquely positioned to know the most intimate details about the private lives of the men who had reached the pinnacles of power, details about their financial affairs, their mistresses, their acts of betrayal, and their relations with high Soviet officials (Karpinski, 1982, 30-35).

Swiatlo's revelations would lead to a major shake-up of the Polish Communist Party, contribute to a softening of Soviet control over its East European empire, and they would accelerate the pace of de-Stalinization. Swiatlo's defection would, furthermore, have widespread implications for the future of Radio Free Europe. For it was over RFE's Voice of Free Poland that Swiatlo told the inside story of Polish Communism. His scripts were aired almost nightly for three months; Swiatlo recounted the details of secret police torture, rigged elections, and, especially, the mechanisms through which Soviet officials controlled Polish life (Radio Free Europe, undated press release).

Swiatlo's sensational accounts represented much more than a tabloid version of political journalism. Swiatlo was an intensely political man; he had personally arrested Wladyslaw Gomulka when Gomulka was purged from the party ranks for nationalist tendencies. His message was that in People's Poland, a hierarchy existed in which the party was ruled by the police and the police were ruled by the Soviet Union. That Poland lacked genuine sovereignty was hardly news. But by piling on one episode after another, by naming names, by providing places, times, and dates, the Swiatlo broadcasts aroused the nation and rattled the Communist Party. Jakub Karpinski, a historian of Polish post-war politics, believes that the Swiatlo commentaries rank with Khrushchev's secret speech and the Poznan worker riots as events which changed the course of Communism in Poland (Karpinski 1982, 102-106).

Thus Radio Free Europe became the most influential source of news in Poland, a remarkable achievement for a foreign radio station whose signal was frequently rendered unlistenable by jamming. During the Swiatlo broadcasts, residents of Warsaw, where reception was often dreadful, tuned in during the late-night hours when jamming

was least effective, and spent their days in conversation over the incredible things they had heard through the static. The Polish service had attained what RFE had originally set out to do: win acceptance as surrogate home service, with all that implied for the totalitarian project.

Radio Free Europe was unusual in that while its message was intensely political, its principal appeal was to a popular audience, rather than to the elites who ordinarily make up the core supporters of political journalism. Workers and peasants – the very classes exalted in Communist scripture – were the prime targets of RFE's message, not intellectuals. In later years, as dissident intellectuals and disillusioned party members began to press for democratic reforms, RFE's broadcast focus would change as well.

The program schedule was divided into two broad categories. The first group consisted of programs aimed at specific audiences. Each language service broadcast programs for workers, peasants, young people, women, religious believers, and those interested in the arts. The second category consisted of programs with generalized anti-Communist themes. One program, called "The Other Side of the Coin," offered refutations of party propaganda. Another program, "Messages," consisted of denunciations of spies and informers.

All programs except the newscasts featured some political content. For example, a musical program on the Hungarian service might include a composition by Bela Bartok, whose works were effectively banned by the regime. A Polish literary program might consist of readings from a nineteenth century patriotic poem in which the tyranny of Russia was decried. A youth program might contrast the freedom which young people enjoyed in the West to the regimentation and constricted opportunity under Communism (Michie, 1958, 52-58; Interviews with Paul Henze, Ralph Walter, and William Griffith).

In the station's early years, its leadership was convinced that the collapse of Communism was likely in the relatively near term. How the collapse was to be achieved – whether through internal resistance, the intervention of the West, or an implosion triggered by the system's internal contradictions – was never made clear. But there could be little doubt that the East European regimes were on shaky ground. Radio Free Europe hardly needed to exaggerate the difficulties facing East European Communism. Reports of food shortages, plan failures, police state terror, and internal party division, as reflected in wave after wave of purge trials, represented powerful testimony to the inherent instability of East European Communism

By 1953, some within the American government, and within RFE as well, were convinced that the hour of decision was at hand. Indeed, the pace of events did seem to be accelerating. First, Stalin died, triggering a Kremlin power struggle that was to stretch over many months and lead to the execution of one of the leading contenders for the succession. Rather quickly, many satellites adopted a political New Course entailing a shift away from crash industrialization, forced collectivization, and the hunt for deviationists from the party line.

In this period, broadcasts to party members were regarded as especially important in the post-Stalin period. The goal was to unnerve Communists by reminding them of just how dangerous a career in the party could be. RFE had powerful evidence to fortify its arguments. Purges and counter-purges had occurred throughout the bloc, and some of those who had been persecuted a few years previously were now regaining their freedom and undergoing rehabilitation, a process which raised questions about the fate of those implicated in their persecution. Furthermore, the ghost of Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's secret police chief, hovered over the Communist parties, and especially over the security forces. Beria had been arrested and liquidated during the summer of 1953, a chilling development for the many "Beria men" – Josef Swiatlo was a prominent example – in the satellite parties. Beria's fate carried a message for all Communists: if the most powerful party officials can be brought down, the same fate could just as easily befall the humble party official serving as a trade union steward or collective farm manager. Radio Free Europe reminded Communists of the untrustworthiness of party bosses and of the impossibility of honest initiative in an environment of suspicion (RFE policy guidance, July 11, 1953).

The Impact of Hungary

The tone of RFE broadcasting was to undergo significant change after the failed Hungarian Revolution. Before the Revolution, RFE was a respected and valued institution of American Cold War strategy; after Hungary, RFE's reputation would be forever tarnished, as historians, diplomats, and journalists accused the station of having made a bad situation worse or, in the most extreme cases, of actually having triggered the Revolution through shrill and irresponsible broadcasts. The latter charge is unfair; Communist oppression caused the Revolution, not American propaganda. And it is typical of the tendency of Americans to exaggerate their own power and the power of their institutions.But the charge of incitement became embedded in Cold War mythology; one latter-day commentator even coined the phrase, "Radio Free Europe syndrome," to describe situations where the United States eggs on a tyrannized people to rebellion without providing the means for victory.

While in the past the question of RFE's performance during the Revolution has been a source of bitter controversy, it is now possible to reach a reasonably definitive conclusion about the station's broadcasts. If the ultimate charge of incitement is unjustified, there is little question today that the station's broadcasts to Hungary during the Revolution's first eleven days violated – repeatedly and sometimes flagrantly – many of the accepted canons of professional journalism.

One reason for RFE's troubles was pointed to by Richard Condon, the director of the Munich operations when he raised serious questions about the competence of the Hungarian staff. He described the Hungarian service as containing many rightists who "tended over the years to become more and more shrill, emotional, and over-general in tone, to an extent where we have for some time felt that rather drastic measures are

needed to de-emotionalize their scripts, make them more specific, and prevent them from antagonizing our listeners." (Condon memorandum, November 20, 1956).

The most thorough, and blunt, evaluations of RFE's performance came from within the radio station. One report declared that RFE's Hungarian broadcasts were "inexpert due to poor content, emotional tone, and inadequate programming techniques." The report was scathing in his comments about the Hungarian subeditors, describing them as "out of touch with the situation in their country, inadequately trained in professional radio techniques, and politically out of tune with the patriots." (Internal RFE report, issued December 7, 1956).

The Hungarian debacle has haunted Radio Free Europe ever since. During the Cold War, the myth of RFE as the nerve center of the uprising was carefully cultivated by Communist authorities in Budapest and elsewhere. In 1981, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Revolution, the Chicago Tribune noted that, "The party's position on what happened...remains basically unchanged: that naive workers and students, urged on by Radio Free Europe and the late Josef Cardinal Mindszenty, took to the streets without knowing what they were doing." The question of RFE's role was a point of bitter contention even after the collapse of Communism; a 1996 Budapest symposium on the fortieth anniversary of the Revolution featured a loud debate over the Radio's guilt or innocence. If they deal with RFE at all, Cold War histories usually mention two, and only two, facts: RFE was funded by the CIA, and RFE was widely blamed for inciting the Hungarian people to a doomed revolution (Tyner 1981).

The charge that RFE was responsible for the Revolution is absurd. William Griffith, the chief American program manager at the time, is almost certainly right in asserting that, "Propaganda cannot control or decisively influence events within a country in a state of revolution." A more relevant question might be whether the very existence of Radio Free Europe contributed to popular discontent and therefore laid the foundation for the Revolution. This, basically, was the argument of Senator J. William Fulbright when, in the early 1970s, he attempted to eliminate American support for both RFE and Radio Liberty. There is, of course, a risk in broadcasting even straight news reports to societies under totalitarian control, whose only recourse to misrule is resistance, violent or otherwise. Under totalitarian conditions, people are prone to hear what they want to hear. Where a Western audience will understand a politician's ritual denunciation of tyranny for what it is, a person living in a state of oppression may interpret boilerplate rhetoric as a promise of help. In any event, important changes were afoot in Eastern Europe in the period leading to the Revolution, and those changes were reflected in RFE broadcasts. As a memorandum prepared by the CIA observed (Central Intelligence Agency memorandum, "Radio Free Europe," November 20, 1956):

> During this period RFE...played the Khrushchev "secret speech" heavily; reported Western reaction and the reaction of various Communist party leaders in the West to the secret speech; gave fullplay to the Belgrade Declaration of "differing roads to socialism"; gave appropriate treatment to the rehabilitation of various "titoists" and national Communists throughout the satellite area; reported all evidences of the liberalization process wherever takingplace; and gave full play to the attempts of Gomulka to establish greater freedom from Soviet control in Poland.

In addition, RFE gave extensive coverage to the declarations of President Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles, Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson, and other political leaders pledging that the cause of East European freedom would remain a fundamental goal of American policy, and informed its listeners of congressional resolutions and party platforms calling for freedom of the captive peoples.

Some critics fault RFE for failing to present an accurate picture of Communism's strength. In the years leading up to the Revolution, RFE pounded home the notion that the regimes were weak and the people were strong. As the events of 1956 demonstrated, this was a reasonably accurate assessment of East European reality in 1956. Indeed, Griffith and other RFE analysts were anticipating a crackdown in Hungary and Poland during the summer; instead, the forces of change continued to gather strength while the Communist parties in both countries seemed on the verge of collapse. A more appropriate question was whether RFE was sensitive to Soviet determination to retain control over the satellites. Yet even here, events could lead to different interpretations. The Soviets were not engaging in the sabre-rattling which preceded the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia. And without Soviet intervention, or the threat of Soviet intervention, Communism would have been overthrown in both Hungary and Poland; ultimately, the people were much stronger than the party. Nor is it fair to describe the Hungarian Revolution as predestined to fail. That the Soviets would use force to keep Hungary in the socialist camp was by no means certain; the power struggle which divided the party after Stalin's death was unresolved, and recently released evidence from the Kremlin archives indicates that Khrushchev went through a period of profound uncertainty before opting for military intervention.

Change in Policy

After Hungary, the State Department assumed responsibility for policy guidance. In 1957, the State Department, in conjunction with the interagency Committee on Radio Broadcasting, an entity which included representatives from the State Department, CIA, and United States Information Agency, issued a series of policy documents which were to provide a framework for American broadcasting to Eastern Europe, both for the VOA and RFE. But instead of drafting five distinct country guidances which took into account the often striking differences between one country and another, one basic document was issued for all five RFE countries. The purpose of the guidances, then, was less to provide political direction than to drive home the point that American radio propaganda was to proceed along a much more cautious path in the post-Hungary environment (State Department for Czechoslovakia, 1957).

Thus in spelling out American policy objectives, the guidance for Czechoslovakia observed that while the ultimate goal was freedom from Communism, the short-term, realistic objective was "to foster an evolutionary development resulting in the weakening of Soviet controls and the progressive attainment of national independence." To accelerate the slow march towards liberty, the guidance declared that American policy

favored the "establishment of a 'National Communist' regime which, though it may be in close military and political alliance with the USSR, will be able to exercise to a much greater degree than in the past independent authority and control in the direction of its own affairs.

The guidance reaffirmed RFE's unique role by referring to it as an instrument of "grey" propaganda as distinct from the VOA's position as the official broadcast service of the American government. As such, the guidance declared, RFE might sometimes be used for the dissemination of "unannounced" government policies.

Of more practical significance was a statement that henceforth RFE was to regard itself as a European rather than as an American or exile station. In covering world news, RFE broadcasts "should generally be in the European context as seen through European eyes." Radio Free Europe was encouraged to provide more coverage of European news, broadcast more interviews with European leaders, and emphasize the success of the movement towards European integration as an example of voluntary cooperation in contradistinction to the imposed unity of the Warsaw Pact (State Department for Czechoslovakia, 1957).

The strategic goal was modest compared with the ambitious agendas of previous years. Radio Free Europe's broadcasts were to encourage common people, intellectuals, and party members to think and act independently of Moscow, to the degree that prudence permitted. The guidance recommended that RFE should seek to "keep the people in touch with Western life and thought," and acquaint the listeners with alternatives to Communist methods of organizing and administering society (State Department for Czechoslovakia, 1957).

In July 1961, *Foreign Affairs* magazine published an essay which urged a new direction in American policy towards Eastern Europe. The article was of more than passing interest to RFE, since the authors were Zbigniew Brzezinski, then just emerging as a leading expert on the Communist world, and William E. Griffith, the former policy adviser in Munich. Brzezinski and Griffith advocated a policy of "peaceful engagement" towards the satellite countries, with the aim of stimulating greater diversity within the bloc, encouraging independence from Moscow, and, ultimately, creating a neutral belt of countries, not hostile to the Soviet Union, but enjoying freedom of choice in domestic affairs (Brezezinski and Griffith 1961, 642-654).

The authors argued that America should adopt a dual approach to Eastern Europe, seeking improved relations with the Communist leadership where feasible, while expanding the range of contacts with the East European people. They explicitly warned against a policy which seemed to recognize the permanence of Communist rule and Soviet domination. And they described Western radio broadcasting as the most effective instrument for maintaining indirect contact with the East European people (Brezezinski and Griffith 1961, 642-654):

> Given the Soviet violations of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, the West has a right and obligation to maintain direct contact with the peoples involved….In broadcasting to the captive peoples, the West is performing one of the roles of a free democratic opposition which the Soviet

Union and the East European Communist parties deny to their peoples. We should not consider stopping these broadcasts in return for some Soviet concession.

As prescription for American policy, the *Foreign Affairs* article made eminent sense, as the authors balanced realpolitik and moral values and never lost sight of the eventual goal of freedom for Eastern Europe. But despite its endorsement of foreign broadcasting, the article pointed to looming dangers for Cold War radio broadcasts, and for RFE most of all. For anti-Communists like Griffith and Brzezinski, the value of a home service radio for Eastern Europe was self-evident. But there was no guarantee that officials with their sophisticated understanding of the Communist world would be setting the tone for American policy. What would be RFE's fate if America sought détente with the Soviet Union and stability in Europe? Would RFE be seen as an obstacle to peace, a relic of the past, something to be bargained away in return for the suspension of Soviet broadcasts, which had a tiny Western audience and even less influence?

But despite the lessening of Cold War tensions and a growing East European cynicism over Western intentions, RFE clearly stood as the most popular foreign broadcast service in the Eastern bloc. A survey conducted in 1959-60 by several European research institutes for RFE found the station with far more regular listeners than either the BBC or the VOA. While the BBC was regarded as the most objective station, RFE was deemed the most influential (Nowak 1963).

RFE Under Peaceful Coexistence

The period between August, 1961, when the Berlin Wall was erected, and 1968, with its upheavals in Poland and Czechoslovakia, was a time of relative calm in Eastern Europe. Political developments in the people's republics moved at a glacial and often obscure pace. There were no leadership purges, popular upheavals, or reform initiatives; organized dissent hardly existed. Nevertheless, the esprit de corps at RFE remained high, a reflection of the strong sense of mission which the exile journalists retained. Their commitment may have derived from the belief that in what some were calling a post-Cold War environment RFE remained the one institution committed to East European freedom. "Resolute, strong, and dangerous," is how Mieczyslaw Rakowski, an official Polish journalist, described the station in 1964.

One of the most important stories of the 1960s was the rise of Mieczyslaw Moczar and his group of "Partisans" in Poland. A leading party member, Moczar could count on a core of support from the security forces and from a group of army veterans, thus the name, Partisans. Moczar harbored ambitions to replace Gomulka as party chief and sought support by portraying himself as a populist nationalist who was prepared to purge the country of alien elements, namely Jews. In 1962, Jan Nowak, the director of the Polish language service, was summoned to Rome for an urgent meeting with a high ranking Polish Communist, who demanded anonymity and thus was dubbed by Nowak, Mr. X. Mr. X told Nowak that the Moczar group posed a serious danger to Poland,

given its ties to the police, the support it enjoyed from certain elements in the Soviet party, its anti-Semitism, and its access to security files. Mr. X claimed that the Partisans were readying a power grab, and begged Nowak to mount an anti-Moczar campaign in RFE broadcasts.

The RFE Polish section was divided over involvement in Communist Party factionalism; some reasoned that it was no concern of RFE whether one group of scoundrels prevailed over another group of scoundrels. Nowak, however, believed that it was important that Poland not fall under the control of the Moczar group, and in 1963 RFE began what was to be an eight-year campaign against the Partisans. Radio Free Europe here benefited from inside information provided by party and security sources. The campaign eventually found its way into the European press, and Nowak claims that he was at one point asked by the State Department to keep out of internal Polish politics. But the Polish section persevered, and many believe that RFE's campaign played an important role in thwarting Moczar's ambitions (Interview with Jan Nowak).

Radio Free Europe also played an important role in its coverage of the 1967 Israel-Arab war. With the exception of Romania, the Communist press gave the conflict thoroughly distorted coverage, placing blame for the conflict on Israel and the United States. Radio Free Europe provided factual coverage, emphasizing Arab battlefield defeats and the loss of Soviet prestige both in military action and in maneuvers at the United Nations. A professor who was visiting Warsaw during the conflict reported that every social gathering was interrupted as Poles listened to RFE war coverage; even party members acknowledged reliance on RFE for accurate news of the war.

Finally, RFE devoted hours upon hours of coverage to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. It broadcast the complete text of President Kennedy's October 22 speech revealing the crisis, and stressed the themes of American determination, the risk of nuclear war, and the subservience of East European governments, most of which were giving various forms of aid to Cuba, to the dangerous policies of the Soviet Union. When the crisis finally ended and Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles, RFE received, for perhaps the only time in its history, instructions which veteran staffers claim emanated directly from the White House: "Don't gloat." (Interview with Richard Rowson).

Time of Troubles

In the late 1970s, opposition to the Vietnam War and the rise of revisionist interpretations of the Cold War led to a series of journalistic investigations into the Cold War's impact on American domestic life, and led, inevitably, to the Central Intelligence Agency, with its far-flung empire of proprietary organizations, foundations, and publications, which had been set up to ensure that the West would be well-armed in the war of ideas with Communism.Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were the largest, most expensive, and most successful of the CIA's intellectual properties; it was thus

only a matter of time before the relationship between the radios and the CIA was made public.

In its March 1967 issue, *Ramparts* magazine, a freewheeling forum of New Left journalism, published an article which probed the CIA's role as funding agency for putatively non-governmental domestic political organizations. The article concentrated on the National Students' Association, for years the recipient of CIA subsidies. Neither the radios nor the Free Europe Committee were mentioned. Yet even before the magazine's official publishing date, journalists who had seen advance copies were asking pointed questions about the source of the radios' funding. Thus in a column on the broad issue of the CIA's domestic projects, Max Frankel of the New York Times asked: "How can the citizens be protected against campaigns which solicit financial contributions to Radio Free Europe, an intelligence agency operation represented as a non-profit enterprise." For a few weeks thereafter, the "open secret" of CIA funding became a matter of frequent press comment.

There is, ironically, evidence that by the late 1960s the radios did not enjoy universal support within the CIA. According to Victor Marchetti, co-author of *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, many high-ranking agency officials were convinced that the radios had outlived their usefulness and favored phasing them out or placing them under different sponsorship. While those urging the elimination of the CIA's relationship were not necessarily dissatisfied with the radios' broadcast performance, they felt that RFE and RL no longer served the interests of the agency to the same extent as in their early years, when RFE maintained its network of information bureaus, conducted interviews with thousands of refugees, and functioned as a scholarly and informational nerve center on matters concerning East European Communism. The radios were expensive; furthermore, some CIA officials believed they were widely infiltrated by Soviet bloc agents. Although those favoring elimination were fortified by the conclusions of several internal studies, the radios survived, Marchetti claims, because they continued to enjoy the support of important CIA veterans, presumably including Richard Helms, the Director of Central Intelligence at the time (Marchetti and Marks, 1972, 67-170).

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were also prime targets of J.W. Fulbright, an influential member of Congress who was opposed to the entire direction of Cold War policy. Fulbright laid out his critique in *The Crippled Giant*, a 1972 book which was remarkable for the radicalism of its analysis, given the author's position within the political establishment. Fulbright was especially concerned with what he perceived as the immature unwillingness of America's cold warriors to accept Moscow's domination of its neighbors. He thus declared: "Insofar...as we raise false hopes with provocative propaganda, maintain high troop levels, and continue the arms race, we retard the natural process of European reunification, lingering morbidly and uselessly in the graveyard of cold war relics." (Fulbright, 1972, 20-21, 34).

To reassure the Kremlin of our peaceful intentions, Fulbright proposed the withdrawal of American troops from Europe and the liquidation of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Fulbright was particularly churlish towards the radios: "Purporting to

show [East Europeans] that there is a better 'way of life' outside the 'Iron Curtain'," he wrote, "we foster futile discontent, not for any discernible purpose of policy, but for purposes of ideological mischief. In this way we detract from the broader purposes of our own policy and of world peace, which requires us to live in the greatest attainable harmony with the Communist governments of the world...." As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Fulbright carried out a two year crusade to put these purveyors of "ideological mischief" off the air. Fulbright's single-minded campaign did not succeed, but it did represent the most serious threat to the radios' existence during the Cold War (Fulbright, 1972, 35-36).

In fact, Fulbright's efforts to win support for his anti-radio drive were a notable failure. Congress, including most Democratic doves, favored retaining RFE and RL under non-CIA administration; over half the Senate endorsed a statement supporting the radios sponsored by Senators Hubert Humphrey, the former Vice President, and Illinois Republican Charles Percy. Subsequently, Congress passed legislation that provided federal funding for the radios while establishing an independent governing entity, the Board for International Broadcasting, to function as a firewall against efforts to politicize the radios' policies.

Reform Communism

By the mid-1970s, the proposition that Eastern Europe would be transformed through gradual liberalization of the ruling Communist parties was increasingly being rejected by Western experts, and at RFE as well. The one exception was Hungary. Radio Free Europe had excoriated party leader Janos Kadar as one of the great villains of the Hungarian Revolution, but shifted its perspective in the mid-1960s, when Kadar made his famous pronouncement that those Hungarians who "are not against us are with us." While Kadar remained a grey, undynamic figure, a reliable supporter of Soviet foreign policy, and cautious in his approach to domestic affairs, he did permit a carefully controlled policy of cultural and economic change. In response, RFE covered the regime's policies with a more approving eye, praising the reforms and attacking those figures who were regarded as impediments to liberalization.

Eventually, RFE became more deeply involved in internal Hungarian politics. Joseph Szabados, who became Hungarian director in 1972, was a proponent of aligning RFE with the positive aspects of Kadarism. "If we praised the positive policies," he reasoned, "the reformers would be encouraged to continue and expand on those policies....We did not criticize the reformers."(Interview with Joseph Szabados).

Szabados went one step beyond simply promoting the reform agenda in RFE commentaries. He would hold meetings with representatives of the regime at discreet locations in Western Europe, usually Vienna or Rome. The Hungarian delegation included acknowledged leaders of the reform camp, as well as a more controversial figure, Gyorgy Aczel, a Politburo member whose abilities were recognized but whose reform credentials were a matter of dispute.

In discussing the meetings years later, Szabados said it was clear to both sides that each was trying to put across its own agenda. "They tried to manipulate me, and I in turn tried to out-manipulate them." The Hungarian goal was to convince RFE to put its muscle behind some new policy that was running afoul of conservative resistance. The Hungarians would pass along information which was not available in the Hungarian press, enabling the radio to broadcast expert, informed analysis unavailable anywhere else. The Kadarists, for example, urged RFE to support the breakup of large industrial enterprises into smaller entities which could be run as cooperatives. Such a request posed no problem for Szabados, since he favored almost any proposal which contributed to the dismantling of the Stalinist economic structure (Interview with Joseph Szabados).

A major priority for RFE during this period was to ensure that its Polish audience was fully informed about the activities of the Polish-born Pope, John Paul II. The general rule was to give his every action extensive and favorable coverage. As Zygmunt Michalowski, the Polish director, observed: "In my view, RFE was obliged to cover the entire scope of his work, his every movement, every word, all the echoes in the Western press, and to expose all the tricks employed by the Communists to censor him." Radio Free Europe hired a Polish correspondent for assignment to the Vatican, from where he provided daily reports on the latest papal developments. It also gave minute-by-minute coverage of the Pope's first visit to Poland in 1979. Even though it was prevented from assigning correspondents to cover the pageantry on the scene, RFE kept its listeners informed by the simple trick of reporting the event as it happened from American and West German television. Radio Free Europe devoted a full 13 of its 19 on-air hours to the Pope's visit; Western reporters quoted Poles who claimed to listen to RFE's coverage eight hours each day (author's correspondence with Zygmunt Michalowski). Meanwhile, official Polish television limited its coverage to two minute segments on the evening news, and edited out the Pope's calls for religious freedom while stressing his politically safe comments about peace, cooperation, and the Church's traditional stance against divorce, abortion, and materialism.

Solidarity

Radio Free Europe responded to the emergence of Solidarity with a combination of enthusiastic support and caution. Michalowski, who was editor-in-chief from Solidarity's founding in the summer of 1980 through the early stages of martial law, was determined that RFE would not be accused of destabilizing an already precarious situation (author's correspondence with Zygmunt Michalowski):

> We supported the democratic opposition by spreading information about their program and commenting favorably when the situation warranted. But we were careful not to increase the existing tensions. On the contrary, on numerous occasions we urged restraint on both sides, pointing to unforeseeable and potentially dangerous developments if the situation became uncontrollable. Sometimes we referred to the possible drastic response of the Soviets.

In its coverage of martial law, the Polish service was, if anything, more cautious in its news coverage than were Western newspapers and press services. The station refused to report accounts of massacres or alleged atrocities unless they could be verified, and refused to broadcast information about casualties unless there were corroborating reports from several responsible Western media. Almost always, RFE's judgment was vindicated, as the rumors of mass killings, assassinations, and burial sites never proved accurate (Interviews with James Brown, Robert Hutchings, Marek Latynski, and Michalowski).

Coverage during the martial law period was notable for its measured critique of Communist policies. Zdzislaw Najder, the new service director, created a program entitled, "The Poland That Could Be," in which he speculated on the future of Polish society after Communism. Radio Free Europe also concentrated on the woeful condition of the Polish economy. Leszek Gawlikowski, the editor of the economics program, explained why it would be impossible for Poland to emulate the model of authoritarian economic change set by Chile, an important subject given Jaruzelski's well-known fascination with General Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean strongman who instituted economic reforms while keeping his country under dictatorial grip (Interview with Leszek Gawlikowski).

Chernobyl

The first big story of the Gorbachev era was the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, a major embarrassment for the new leader and a near catastrophe for his country. On April 26, 1986, one of the four reactors at the Chernobyl complex in Ukraine exploded, killing 31 people and sending clouds of radiation throughout Eastern Europe. The disaster was seen as the first important test of *glasnost*, the policy recently announced by Gorbachev of candor and honesty in discussing the Soviet Union's shortcomings. The official response to Chernobyl was not impressive. Indeed, the Soviet press gave every indication of trying to cover up the accident just as it had ignored or lied about previous disasters, natural as well as man-made.

Here, then, was the ideal story for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. All the elements were present: Soviet incompetence, censorship, the lack of sovereignty of the East European countries, whose press, following the Soviet lead, downplayed the incident. Chernobyl also stoked the fires of anti-Russian sentiments among the Soviet Union's non-Russian peoples, especially in Ukraine and the Baltic republics, whose people lay in the direct path of the fallout. The radios understood the ramifications of Chernobyl, and devoted hour-after-hour to the story. Broadcasts gave instructions on the decontamination of food and clothing and the protection of children. The radios interviewed Western nuclear experts, energy officials, and anti-nuclear activists. They explained the accident's implications for neighboring countries. They covered the accident's internal political repercussions, such as the resistance of army reservists from

Estonia, who had been called to help decontaminate the area around the Chernobyl reactor.

This would be one of RFE's finest hours. All indications suggest that listenership rose dramatically throughout the early stages of the crisis. The Communist media fumed and complained about what Poland's regime spokesman, Jerzy Urban, called RFE's "unjustified, unfounded, but deliberate actions intended to scare [the] population." But there is no evidence that RFE practiced irresponsible journalism. As was usually the case in times of crisis, the station was more cautious than the mainstream Western press; it did not, for example, broadcast the wildly exaggerated claims of 2,000 deaths in the Chernobyl area which had been reported by the UPI and had run in many newspapers (Whittle 1956, Kaufman, 1986).

Covering the Baltic Spring

Until the late 1980s, Baltic programming consisted of the usual mixture of émigré voices, cultural news, and reports about political dissent. Although many Baltic broadcasters harbored strong anti-Russian sentiments, they were under strict instructions to avoid ethnic slurs, and in identifying the adversaries of Baltic independence, RFE broadcasts concentrated on a combination of Russian imperialism, Communism as an idea, and the functionaries of the local Communist parties. They did not, as one editor put it, distinguish between bad Russian Communists and good Lithuanian Communists. Once Gorbachev launched his reform program, however, events began to move swiftly, and RFE was compelled to make adjustments in its political strategy and programming approach (Interview with Kestutis Girnius).

One immediate problem was the coverage of Gorbachev. Was he a reformer, as many in the West claimed, or simply another Russocentric Communist bent on economic modernization? The Lithuanian service decided initially on a cautious approach. "We were sensitive to the Western proclivity to treat each successive Soviet leader, from Malenkov to Andropov, as a reformer," explained Kestutis Girnius, the Lithuanian section chief. "Given that history, we were skeptical about Gorbachev for some time." (Interview with Kestutis Girnius).

For Toomas Ilves, the chief editor of the Estonian service during the crucial years of the independence struggle, the broadcast mission was to accelerate the freedom process by whatever means prudence allowed. Ilves was an Estonian-American who combined a fierce commitment to the Estonian cause with a shrewd instinct for American politics. He pushed the limits of the permissible right to the edge, but was careful to avoid rash acts that would embarrass Radio Free Europe and set back the cause generally. Thus when in 1988 the old-line leader of the Estonian Communist Party was replaced by a Gorbachevian man of Eurocommunist sympathies, Ilves was unimpressed. "I felt that my job was to show that this Gorbachev idea of Communism with a human face was still Communism."

Ilves believed that RFE should be a participant in the struggle for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Fortified by a sense of historic mission, he and his small staff worked twelve hour days – longer in times of crisis – to inform the Estonian people about the fast moving developments in their own country and in the greater world. But Ilves adhered to the established guidelines. When in 1991 President Bush betrayed a lack of sympathy towards Baltic demands for independence – an attitude which infuriated most Balts – RFE avoided editorial comment, and instead kept its listeners informed through reports on what the world press was saying about the American policy. A similar, if more nuanced, approach was adopted by the Lithuanian service. In reporting on the Western reaction to Baltic events, Kestutis Girnius stressed the distinctions between a newspaper editorial, the declaration of a member of Congress, and an official State Department position. Girnius also endeavored to explain the realpolitik behind the official statements, why, for example, America might not want to support Baltic independence given its stake in Gorbachev's survival. "We tried to explain why Denmark could openly support independence, but why Germany might be less enthusiastic. We didn't dampen hope. But we tried to give a realistic picture of the outside world's thinking." (Interview with Toomas Ilves).

The Wall Comes Down

For Radio Free Europe, 1989 represented the culmination of nearly forty years of service in the cause of East European liberty. To say that it was a year of astonishing developments is an understatement. No one, and certainly not RFE, believed that by the end of the year, Communism would no longer survive as a governing system in its target countries.

It was apparent that Communism was facing serious challenges as the fateful year began. This was especially true in Poland, where talks between Solidarity, which until recently seemed a spent force, and the Jaruzelski regime produced an agreement calling for partially free elections. For the Communists, this represented a remarkable concession. It was an article of anti-Communist faith that Communism could never compete effectively under democratic conditions, and Communists historically had given every indication of agreeing with that assessment.

Marek Latynski, RFE's chief Polish editor, took the attitude that the elections constituted a remarkable opportunity – both for Poland and for the radio. He proceeded on the assumption that the balloting would not be rigged and that the Communists faced the prospect of a devastating setback. Elections had already been conducted in Lithuania, and the result was a complete rout for the party. Latynski therefore believed that the Polish election might revolve around the single issue of whether a candidate was or was not a Communist (Interview with Marek Latynski).

The elections were conducted on a non-party basis; candidates ran without affiliations, a policy insisted on by the Communists. Radio Free Europe therefore saw its job as making sure that the Polish people knew which candidates were representing the

party and which were not. During the campaign, RFE attempted to interview as many non-Communist candidates as was possible by telephone. As polling drew near, RFE announcers read out the names of the non-party candidates for each election district, dull radio for sure, but quite possibly helpful to the opposition. The radio also summarized the most important articles in Gazeta Wyborcza, the leading opposition newspaper, which was unable to print enough copies to reach its potential audience (Interview with Robert Gillette; Latynski).

Radio Free Europe's coverage was thus non-polemical, but hardly non-partisan.Its pro-Solidarity tilt was likely not welcomed by the State Department, which privately fretted that a Solidarity landslide would erode Gorbachev's precarious standing in Moscow. Some high American officials, in fact, were known to be favorably disposed towards Jaruzelski. Yet despite its high interest in the Polish elections, the State Department did not intervene in RFE's coverage, and after Solidarity scored a smashing victory at the polls, RFE moved quickly to establish bureaus and assign correspondents to cover news from inside the country.

Events in Czechoslovakia were moving at a much slower pace than in Poland, or so it seemed. But beneath the surface, elements within the party were increasingly dissatisfied with the leadership's course. They were unhappy with their country's pariah reputation, embarrassed by the mediocrities who dominated the government, and convinced that the forces which were threatening party control in other countries posed a threat to the system in Czechoslovakia as well.

In the fall of 1989 came the incident of the Jakes tape. Milos Jakes had only recently been elevated to succeed Gustav Husak as party leader. Jakes was an uninspiring timeserver who was committed to the status quo. Earlier in the year, he had addressed a conference of local party activists. The speech was an embarrassment to the leadership, in every respect. It was candid about the party's woeful standing among the people. It was also ungrammatical, rambling, incoherent. Within a few weeks, a tape of the speech made its way to Radio Free Europe. Irena Lasota, an activist on behalf of East European democracy, was given the tape by Jan Ruml, a dissident who later became a government official in the post-Communist period; she then passed it along to the radio. But the original source of the leak came from within the party, from those who hoped to undermine Jakes and others in the leadership. This goal was certainly achieved. The Jakes tape was the talk of Prague, as people passed around cassettes recorded from RFE broadcasts and mimicked the semi-literate words of their country's leader (Lucas 1989).

Even more important than the Jakes tape was RFE's intense coverage of the massive movement of East Germans to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and from there to West Germany. The significance of East German events in accelerating the pace of Communist disintegration throughout the rest of Europe cannot be overemphasized. The GDR was notorious for the strict control of its citizens; it was also the most economically successful Communist state. Moreover, it had always been assumed that however much experimentation and liberal change Moscow might permit in the other people's democracies, its tolerance for change in East Germany was limited. Yet here was East

German Communism coming apart at the seams, and a passive Soviet Union unwilling to utter a word of support for the party leadership. Events in East Germany at once lifted the fear of Soviet intervention from the people of Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, while sending the message to the dispirited party leaderships that they could no longer depend on the Soviet Union as the ultimate guarantor of their survival (Interview with Irena Lasota).

The RFE Legacy

In the aftermath of Communism's collapse, RFE was hailed by its audience countries as among the heroes of the Cold War. When the émigré journalists returned to their home countries, they were treated like members of a victorious army. And the United States was given due credit for having supported RFE even during times of duress.

Why was RFE so highly valued by the democratic opposition of Eastern Europe? What accounts for the credibility of what the Communist leadership and many in the West regarded as an instrument of American propaganda?

Part of the answer lies in the nature of Communism. In its very essence, Communism relied on a series of lies and myths – about capitalism, about the nature of democracy, about religion, about the achievements of the Soviet Union, about Lenin, Stalin, and their lesser acolytes. To compensate for the weakness of their argument, Communists sought absolute control over the means of communication. The state or the party owned the media, foreign newspapers were banned, and foreign broadcasts jammed. The subjects of Communist regimes understood that they were living under a system constructed on a foundation of lies. They were eager for a free press and truthful commentary, and in the absence of indigenous alternatives, they cared not at all whether the sponsor was the American government, the CIA, or a committee of concerned American citizens.

If Communist repression created what amounted to a captive audience, the fact that the radios were free from direct American government control made an enormous contribution to their success. Operating under the covert and relatively relaxed oversight of the CIA ensured that the radios could avoid the meddling of congressional critics, be they rightwingers on the lookout for ideological softness or liberals who feared that criticism of the Soviet Union might impede the progress of detente.

Finally, the radios were instrumental in thwarting Communism's attempt to isolate and atomize its subjects. Especially in its early years, Communism succeeded in demoralizing the people of Eastern Europe by convincing them of the futility of united opposition. Marcin Krol, a prominent historian and essayist, has written of RFE's impact on Poland during the Cold War's early years (Krol 1992, 431):

> Several conditions defined the situation of the individual under totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe. Persecution and terror were among them; so was an endless amount of lies. What is perhaps less known – and has not yet been properly described – is how lonely everyone felt and how cut off from the greater tradition of Western learning and thought....Listening to Radio Free Europe

created for a vast number of Poles the perhaps artificial but nevertheless essential sense that one was living in larger company.

Some commentators cultivated a radio style through which they seemed to speak directly and personally to each listener. They projected the message that others understood their plight, not simply the commentator, but millions in the Free World as well. The radios paid particular attention to the acts of protest and rebellion, and by instantaneously relaying accounts of dissent, promoted the idea that events in Krakow carried important implications for listeners in Kiev, Brno, and Sofia. Through RFE-RL and the other foreign broadcast entities, the Communists were never able to gain a media monopoly, and were thus deprived of the most potent tools of totalitarian control.

It is unfortunate that most histories of the Cold War deal with RFE and RL as footnotes, or as CIA manipulated propaganda instruments. For in fact the radios proved one of the most successful institutions of America's Cold War effort, and made an important contribution to the peaceful nature of Communism's demise.Their success can be measured by the gratitude expressed by millions of listeners, for whom the radios often served as a voice of hope and sanity in an often hopeless and insane world. Or by the fury their broadcasts generated among the Communist party elites – who listened in spite of their anger in order to find out what was really going on in the world. In the war of ideas between Communism and democracy—and this, after all, was the central conflict of the Cold War – RFE proved to be one of democracy's most powerful weapons.

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