APPENDIX B

Cold War International Broadcasting: Lessons Learned

Briefing to the Rancho Mirage Seminar

A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta

The Cold War Broadcasting Impact Conference, held at Stanford in October 2004 and sponsored by the Hoover Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, reviewed evidence from Western and Communist-era archives and oral history interviews to assess the impact of Western broadcasts to the USSR and Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Conference participants agreed that these broadcasts had an indisputable impact, as documented by external and internal audience surveys, by elite testimony, and by the magnitude of Communist regime

countermeasures against the broadcasts. Conference participants then explored the reasons for this impact, drawing on archival data from the target broadcast countries themselves and the experience of veteran broadcasting officials.

INDICATORS OF IMPACT

Audience surveys from among over 150,000 travelers to the West, once-secret internal regime surveys, and retrospective internal surveys commissioned after 1989 all indicated remarkably large, regular audiences to Western broadcasts — about one third of the urban adult Soviet population and closer to a half of East European adult populations after the 1950s. (See Charts 1–6.) These large audiences were further increased by extensive word-of-mouth amplification.

Information conveyed through Western broadcasts was particularly important in influencing attitude and opinion formation during crises. For example, when the USSR shot down the Korean airliner in 1983, Western radio stations immediately reported the incident while Soviet media remained silent for a week. Soviet authorities then launched a major media campaign in an attempt to mobilize Soviet public opinion behind the regime's position that the downing was accidental. By this time, however, many had learned of the incident, and Soviet culpability for it, from Western

radio and were highly skeptical of the delayed Soviet media coverage. Outside information was thus more credible than the internal version of events and contributed to shaping alternative attitudes. (See Charts 7–9.)

As another example, Soviet media remained silent on the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster until two full days had passed and never provided a full report or necessary health precautions. Instead, Western radio was the first source on the disaster for over a third of Soviets queried in a survey, and it was the most complete source for most. Western radio thus filled the gap when Soviet media was slow and reluctant to report on a major issue. (See Chart 10.)

Other examples of the role of Western radio in contributing to the formation of alternative attitudes, such as the Soviet war in Afghanistan, were presented at the Hoover conference.

Reinforcing this survey data, both Communist and post-Communist elites have testified to the importance of Western broadcasts. Vaclav Havel, in video greetings to the Hoover conference, said that RFE/RL's "influence and significance have been great and profound." Former Hungarian propaganda chief Janos Berecz, in his paper for the conference, said: "I became convinced that Western broadcasts were among the accepted sources of information among the youth." East German spymaster Marcus Wolf, in his memoirs *Man Without a Face,* said "of all the various

means used to influence people against the East during the Cold War, I would count [Radio Free Europe] as the most effective."

Another indicator of impact was the massive resources devoted by the Communist regimes to countering Western broadcasts. They organized expensive radio jamming on a massive scale, spending more on jamming than the West did on broadcasting. They placed spies in the Western radios and attempted to interrupt the flow of information to them about domestic developments. They took reprisals against listeners and Radio employees. They organized counterpropaganda, while at the same time secretly circulating monitoring of Western broadcasts among top officials to provide information not available from their own controlled media or intelligence services. Even counterpropaganda had to acknowledge and thus amplify in local media some information provided by Western radios. These countermeasures were a significant drain on domestic resources, yet they failed to neutralize Western broadcasts.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

How do we explain the remarkable success during the Cold War of these Western information programs that, in national security terms, cost very little? We have identified

nine essential elements, which are listed below, not necessarily in order of importance. Our analysis focuses on Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which emphasized saturation home-service "surrogate" programming. The Voice of America (VOA), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and other Western broadcasters also had significant impact for many of the same reasons.

First, a clear sense of purpose congruent with the aspirations and possibilities of the audiences. We knew what we wanted—to constrain Soviet power (without provoking suicidal revolt), to keep alive hope of a better future, to limit tyranny, and to broaden the boundaries of internal debate, all in order to make the Soviet empire a less formidable adversary. These were long-term, strategic objectives, not short-term policy goals. They emerged after some fumbling in the early 1950s with notions of early "liberation," "rollback," and "keep[ing] the pot boiling."

Second, a capability for sophisticated appraisal of the adversary. Significant Radio resources were devoted—especially at RFE and RL—to detailed analyses of national Communist regimes and the societies they ruled, based on extensive information collection and associated research that drew on Western press, official Communist sources, interviews with travelers, and regime opponents within the target countries. A cadre of specialized researchers was developed with

deep area expertise. This information and analysis function was not envisaged at the outset—it was developed at the Radios over time in response to operational need. It became in turn a major input to U.S. government and scholarly analyses.

Third, differentiated and tailored programs for multiple audiences among and within the target countries. RFE and RL were saturation home services with something for everyone (although RL focused more on elites and the urban intelligentsia; RFE more on the general population). Balanced world and regional news was a staple for all audiences. Programs for Communist elites included coverage of conflicts within and among Communist parties and reports on social democracy in Europe. Programs for non-Communist elites covered Western culture and intellectual life and, as internal dissent developed, amplification of that dissent. Programs for general audiences covered everything from agriculture to religion to labor to sports. Banned Western and internal music was featured. Willis Conover of VOA introduced a generation of Russians and Poles to jazz, the RFE Hungarian Service "teenager party" program attracted a generation of Hungarian youth to RFE, and Western music attracted listeners in the other RFE target countries as well. In the USSR, the Magnitizdat phenomenon introduced banned Soviet underground music to a wide public.

Fourth, programs that were purposeful, credible, responsible, and relevant to their audiences. Events of the day were covered, but thematic programming was important as well (e.g., a series on parliamentary institutions in a democracy). Commentary was included along with straight news and news analysis, and audiences were attracted to star-quality commentators. It was essential that programs built and maintained credibility by reporting the bad news along with the good, for example in coverage of Watergate and Vietnam. Responsible programming was (at its best) calm in tone and (after the early 1950s) avoided tactical advice and especially any encouragement of violent resistance. Programming emphasized local developments and was attuned to the listeners through constant audience feedback obtained from traveler surveys and listener mail and through continuous management of quality control.

Fifth, decentralized broadcast organizations. RFE and RL were the models, with autonomous country broadcasting units rather than central scripting. Over the years VOA and BBC moved in this direction as well—and gained larger audiences. Émigré broadcast service directors with intimate knowledge of their audiences, many with prominent reputations, were responsible for broadcast content, within broad policy guidelines and under American management oversight.

Sixth, multi-media operations. Distribution of printed materials supplemented broadcasting in some instances. In the early 1950s, program content was spread in Eastern Europe by balloon leaflets. Subsequently, leaflets, periodicals, Western books, and locally unpublished texts were distributed (by open mail and by travelers) in target countries.

Seventh, appropriate funding and oversight mechanisms. Sufficient public funding was provided by the Congress (although RFE raised some private funds through the Crusade for Freedom). The CIA covertly (until 1971) and then the Board for International Broadcasting overtly (after 1972) made grants to RFE and RL and exercised fiscal oversight, working with the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accounting Office, and Inspector Generals. The BBC World Service had an analogous relationship to the British Foreign Office.

Eighth, distance from official government policies and journalistic independence. The CIA took a laissez-faire approach to RFE and RL—a relationship insisted on by the Radios' influential boards and CEOs. After 1972 the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) provided a "firewall" between the Radios and the State Department and other Executive Branch offices. The BIB legislation provided for "an independent broadcast media, operating in a manner

not inconsistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States and in accordance with high professional standards," giving RFE and RL considerable journalistic flexibility. Advocacy of specific U.S. policies was not required and, in fact, was avoided. The BBC enjoyed similar autonomy in the British context. VOA's journalistic independence, affirmed in 1976 by law in the VOA Charter, was sometimes challenged by administration policy interference and complicated by the requirement to broadcast administration policy editorials.

Ninth, receptive audiences that identified with many of the goals of the broadcasters. Soviet and East European audiences lived in an "information-poor" environment, were subject to regime propaganda and censorship, and were deprived of other alternative information. East Europeans were artificially cut off from the rest of Europe and were mostly pro-American. Soviet listeners were more under Communist regime influence, but a significant minority were pro-democratic (or at least proto-democratic) in outlook.

CONCLUSION

Western broadcasts had a remarkable impact in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the circumstances of the Cold War.

They reached mass audiences, as documented by traveler surveys at the time and confirmed now by evidence from the formerly closed Communist archives. They reached key elites, both within the Communist regimes and among regime opponents. The keys to the mass and elite audiences were the credibility and relevance of the broadcasts. Government mechanisms were geared to providing public funding and oversight while ensuring management autonomy and journalistic independence.

CHARTS

CHART 1

Weekly Reach of Western Radio in Poland: 1962–1988

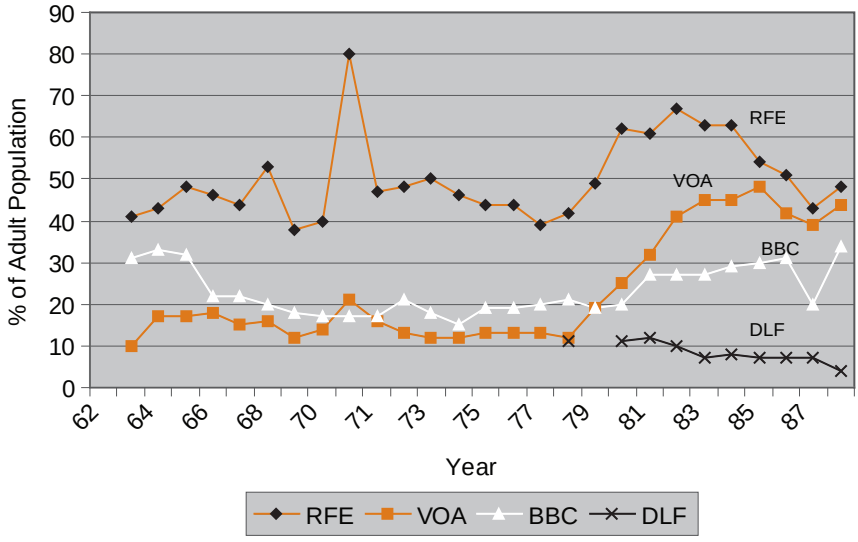

CHART 2

Weekly Reach of Western Radio in Hungary: 1962–1988

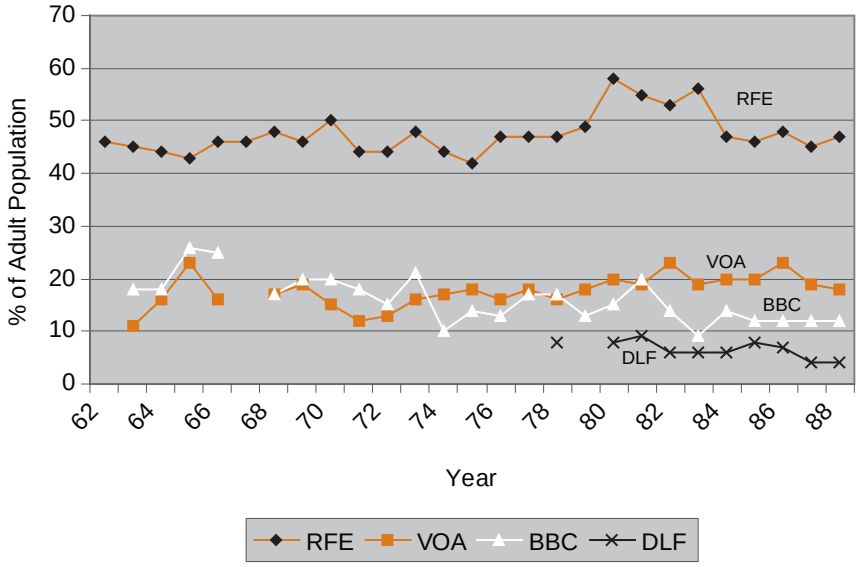

CHART 3

Weekly Reach of Western Radio in Czechoslovakia: 1963–1988

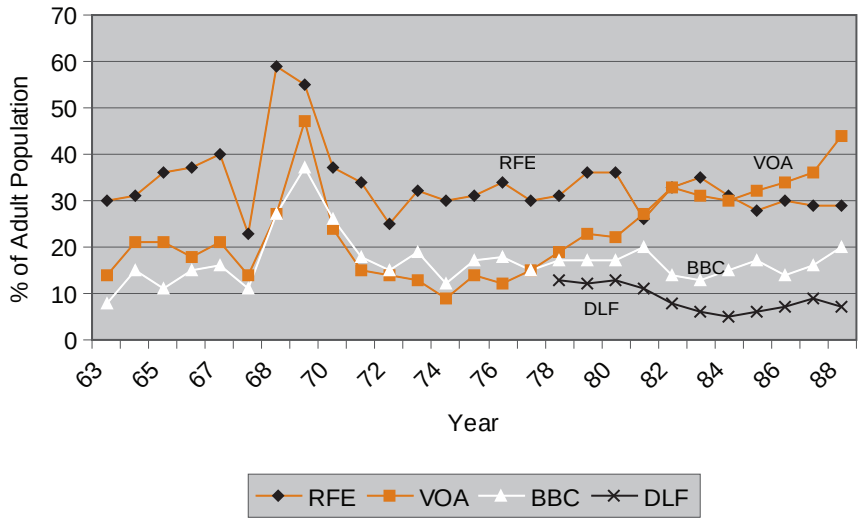

CHART 4

Weekly Reach of Western Radio in Romania: 1962–1988

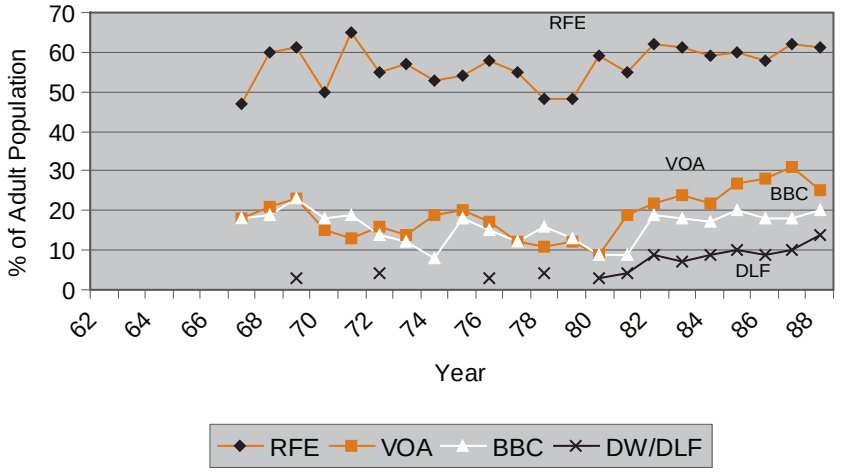

CHART 5

Weekly Reach of Western Radio in Bulgaria: 1962–1988

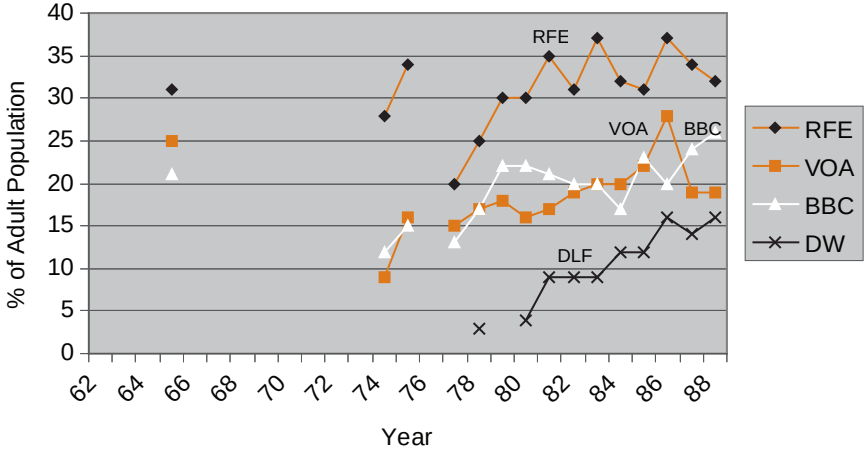

CHART 6

Weekly Reach of Western Broadcasters in the USSR: 1980–1990

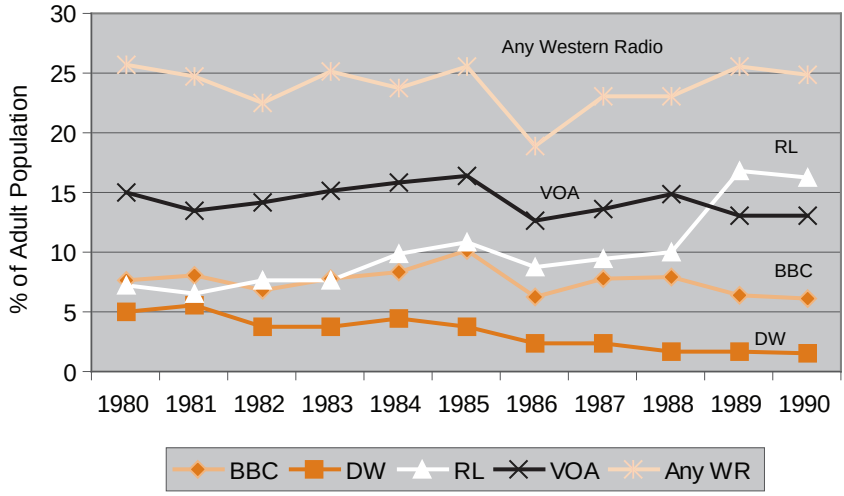

CHART 7

Sources of Information on the KAL Incident

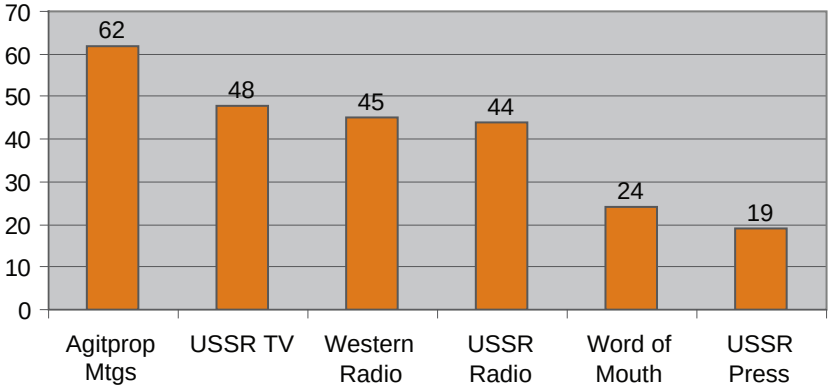

CHART 8

Credibility of Media Sources on KAL Incident Among Listeners and Non-Listeners to Western Radio

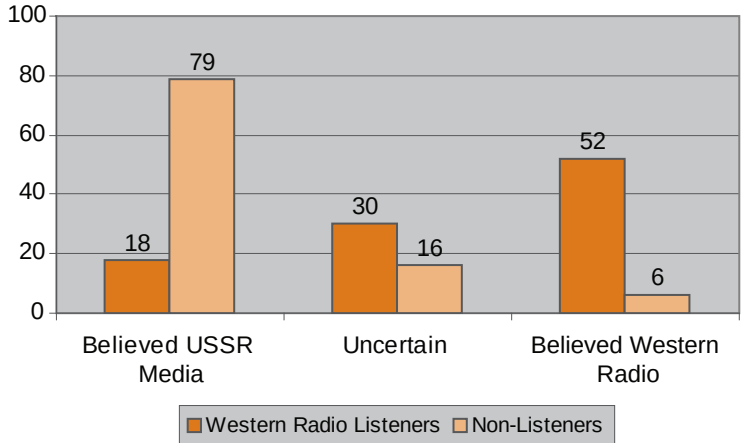

CHART 9

Attitudes Toward the USSR Action in the KAL Incident Among Listeners and Non-Listeners to Western Radio

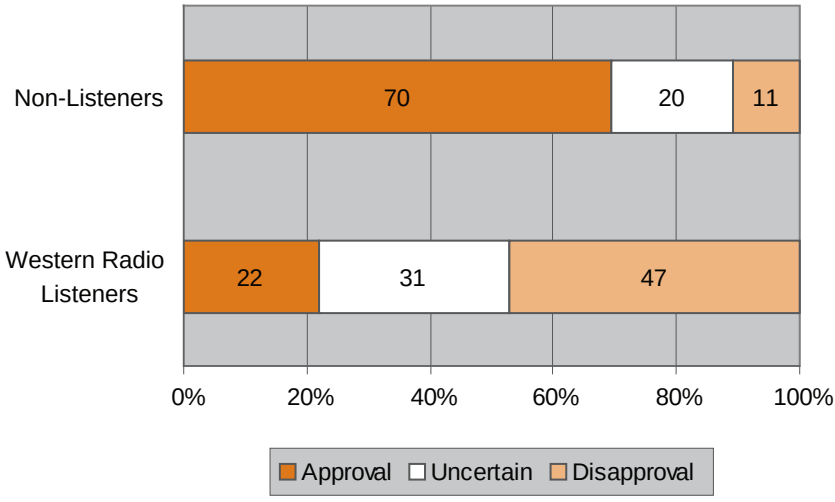

CHART 10

First Source of Information on the Chernobyl Disaster