

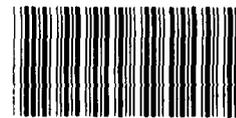
GAO

Briefing Report to the  
Honorable Arlen Specter  
United States Senate

April 1986

UNITED NATIONS

Content of and  
Charges for Radio  
Broadcasts  
Transmitted by the  
Voice of America



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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

NATIONAL SECURITY AND  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

April 30, 1986

B-222268

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Specter:

As you requested, we are providing information on U.N. radio programs which, until recently, were broadcast from Voice of America (VOA) transmitters under annual leasing contracts between the United Nations and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). Due to a sizable rate increase proposed by USIA for VOA transmission services for 1986, the United Nations suspended these broadcasts in January 1986, when the old contract expired. According to a U.S. official, the United Nations is considering resuming the broadcasts, at least on a limited scale, when the General Assembly opens in September 1986.

This report supplements our April 18, 1986, report to you on U.N. public information materials.<sup>1</sup> That analysis included U.N. radio programs which are taped and sent by mail to users around the world but did not include U.N. radio programs broadcast by shortwave over VOA transmitters. We did not include these programs because (1) written transcripts were not available and (2) a representative sample could not be made since most tapes are destroyed once the programs are broadcast.

Although we were unable to conduct a systematic analysis of U.N. programs transmitted by VOA, we listened to a collection of 22 taped programs broadcast in English to the Caribbean and Asian regions in 1984 and 1985 and made an informal assessment of their content. We found instances of both favorable and unfavorable treatment of the United States and U.S. policy interests in these programs.

In examining the leasing arrangements between the United Nations and USIA, we found that USIA has subsidized past broadcasts by charging a rate which included only the direct costs of VOA transmission services. For 1985, USIA charged the United Nations \$30 per broadcast hour for the 3,048.8 hours

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations: Analysis of Selected Media Products Shows Half Oppose Key U.S. Interests (GAO/NSIAD-86-98, Apr. 18, 1986)

broadcast, for a total of \$91,464. The proposed new rate is \$179 per broadcast hour--an increase of about 500 percent. The higher rate is comparable to the lowest rate which VOA itself currently pays in leasing time on the transmitters of other international broadcasters.

If the U.N. broadcasts over VOA are resumed, we believe the Department of State should examine some of these broadcasts as part of its effort to strengthen its review of U.N. public information materials.

#### BACKGROUND

The United States began providing radio transmission services to the United Nations in 1946. At that time, the arrangement was seen as a temporary measure until the United Nations could acquire its own transmitter, a plan long since abandoned. In the early years, the United Nations contracted for broadcast time directly with the VOA licensees operating the transmitters. More recently, it has entered into annual leasing contracts with USIA for these services. The Radio and Visual Services Division of the U.N. Department of Public Information has been responsible for negotiating this contract with USIA.

The contract covering calendar year 1985 specified that USIA would provide shortwave radio transmission services at a rate of \$30 per broadcast hour for a projected 4,211 transmitter hours for U.N. dispatches, General Assembly meetings, emergency Security Council meetings, and special sessions. VOA also agreed to extend its services if U.N. requirements exceeded this projected level. The agreement was subject to VOA program priorities; that is, VOA broadcast schedules and requirements were to take precedence over any U.N. request for transmitter time.

#### VOLUME OF BROADCASTS

In 1985, U.N. radio programs were broadcast in 13 languages to Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Far East and Pacific, and Europe over VOA transmitters in both the United States and foreign countries. From September through December, when the General Assembly met, broadcasts were made 6 days a week. Broadcasts were made only on Fridays and Saturdays for the remainder of the year. VOA transmissions of U.N. radio programs in 1985 by transmitter location are shown on the next page.

VOA Transmissions of U.N. Radio Broadcasts  
During Calendar Year 1985

<u>Location</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Bethany, Ohio	138.0
Delano, California	202.0
Greenville, N.C.	1,994.7
Monrovia, Liberia	280.1
Tinang, Philippines	195.0
Tangier, Morocco	<u>239.0</u>
Total	<u><u>3,048.8</u></u>

USIA CHARGES FOR BROADCAST SERVICES

USIA has historically charged the United Nations only for the direct costs of its transmissions. These costs, which include electrical power and replacement part expenses, amounted to \$30 per broadcast hour in 1985. According to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, the reasonable rates which USIA has offered may be at least partly responsible for the substantial expansion of U.N. radio broadcasts in recent years--from 1,735 hours in 1983 to 3,048.8 hours in 1985.

VOA officials told us that, in early 1985, an emphasis on cost cutting led the agency to re-examine the way it was calculating the rates it was charging the United Nations and others for transmission services provided on a reimbursable basis. In April 1985, VOA officials advised the United Nations that it would be recalculating the rate for 1986 to more accurately reflect the actual costs of VOA transmissions. In December 1985, VOA notified the United Nations that it was proposing a new rate of \$179 per broadcast hour for its 1986 broadcast services. According to VOA, this figure represents the full cost of the transmissions, including power, replacement parts, and a pro-rated share of VOA indirect costs, including salaries, facility support, and investment in plant and equipment.

Although forewarned of an increase, U.N. officials were apparently not prepared for the extent of the increase--almost 500 percent over the 1985 rate. In March 1986, the U.N. Secretariat notified the U.S. mission that, in view of budgetary constraints, it was suspending its broadcasts until further notice. The last broadcast under the old contract was made on January 3, 1986.

One U.S. mission official advised us that the current suspension of broadcasts is not a serious loss to the United Nations since it normally broadcasts only on the weekends at this time of year. He said that the United Nations is considering resuming the broadcasts, at least on a limited scale, in the fall when the General Assembly is in session.

In addition to programs broadcast from VOA facilities in 1985, the United Nations broadcast news in Arabic from Italian transmitters and in Russian from Swiss transmitters. VOA officials do not have information on what the United Nations pays for these broadcast services. VOA itself leases transmission time from two international broadcasters in Latin America and the Caribbean and pays \$167 and \$240 per broadcast hour, respectively, for these services. The \$179 rate which VOA has proposed to the United Nations is therefore comparable to the lowest rate which VOA currently pays for such transmission services. However, VOA officials said they had recently been advised that they should expect a substantial increase in the \$167 rate when the contract is renegotiated.

CONTENT OF RADIO PROGRAMS  
BROADCAST OVER VOA

VOA monitors only the technical quality of the broadcasts, so officials could provide no insight into the content of U.N. radio programs. At our request, the U.N. Radio and Visual Services Division made available to us taped radio programs which had been broadcast over VOA facilities and were on file at U.N. Headquarters in New York. Although most broadcast tapes have been destroyed, tapes of programs which the United Nations believes are especially noteworthy are sent to users around the world and copies are retained at U.N. Headquarters. We do not know how representative the tapes we reviewed are of all the programs broadcast.

To provide some baseline for analysis, we selected programs which, according to U.N. indexes, provided features on the four topics included in our recent report to you on U.N. public information materials--apartheid, disarmament, new world orders, and the question of Palestine. The 22 programs we reviewed represented all the English-language tapes on file which were broadcast during the September through December General Assembly periods in 1984 and 1985 and which contained excerpts on the four topics. We excluded programs which provided only news coverage of U.N. events. The selections were from three U.N. programs: Caribbean Echo, U.N. Caribbean News Magazine, and U.N. Calling Asia.

Two GAO evaluators listened to these tapes to identify how U.S. interests related to the four topics were presented. The evaluators used the criteria provided by the State Department for our earlier analysis to define what positions would be considered contrary to U.S. interests. (See app. III in our April 18, 1986 report.) In addition to the excerpts on these topics, we evaluated discussions on other topics in these same programs when the United States or U.S. policies were specifically mentioned.

We found instances of both favorable and unfavorable treatment of the United States and U.S. policy positions in the programs. On the favorable side, we identified at least two

programs in which U.S. positions appeared to have been given greater attention than the opposing view. One included lengthy criticism of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea; the other afforded full explanations of Western objections to a resolution proposed by developing countries regarding establishment of a new world information and communication order.

In contrast to this favorable treatment, we found instances in which the United States and U.S. policy interests were unfavorably treated in 12 programs. For example:

<u>Unfavorable presentation</u>	<u>Example</u>
1. Criticism of U.S. or other Western countries' policies without explaining their positions.	Several statements from African states criticized U.S. "collaboration" with South Africa on apartheid. No Western spokesman was included.
2. More favorable treatment of Soviet bloc positions than of Western positions.	Entire feature was devoted to Soviet view on establishing the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. Narrator provided no insight into Western reservations on convening a conference on this issue.
3. Unnecessarily critical remarks about the United States.	Narrator passed on unconfirmed reports that the United States had pressured the United Kingdom on its decision to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

Themes which were presented in ways opposing U.S. interests included imposition of mandatory international sanctions against South Africa, criticism of continued commercial and economic ties with South Africa, espousment of Soviet positions on disarmament, and uncritical acceptance of alleged Israeli human rights abuses in the occupied territories.

### CONCLUSIONS

The past method of computing charges to the United Nations for VOA broadcast services has resulted in the United States

subsidizing the broadcasts--a further cost of U.S. participation in the United Nations which may not have been readily apparent. Charging the United Nations for the full cost of the transmissions should remove this subsidy.

Because U.N. broadcasts transmitted by VOA are not monitored, U.S. officials do not know to what extent these programs support or oppose U.S. policy interests. The U.N. Department of Public Information observed in 1983 that, with approximately 1.2 billion radios in the world, it considered this medium the most effective means of disseminating information on a global scale. If this is correct, the U.N. broadcasts could have a considerable impact on world understanding of U.S. policy positions.

In our earlier report to you, we recommended that the Secretary of State develop a review to better monitor selected U.N. public information materials. In its comments on our draft report, the Department of State said it has taken steps to strengthen its review of such materials and to ensure that effective action is taken when biased materials are identified. Although we made only a limited analysis of issues related to the U.N. broadcasts from VOA facilities, we believe that if the broadcasts are resumed, the Department of State should include these programs in its review of U.N. public information materials.

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We conducted this review at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and U.N. Department of Public Information in New York, and at the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. We reviewed agency files at the U.S. mission and the VOA and discussed the contents of this report with the Department of State, VOA, and U.S. Information Agency officials. We did not discuss the report with U.N. officials nor did we validate the reasonableness of VOA's proposed new rate.

We are sending copies of this report to the Department of State, U.S. Mission to the United Nations, U.S. Information Agency, Office of Management and Budget, and appropriate congressional committees and will make copies available to other interested parties upon request.

Sincerely yours,

  
for Frank C. Conahan  
Director

(472108)

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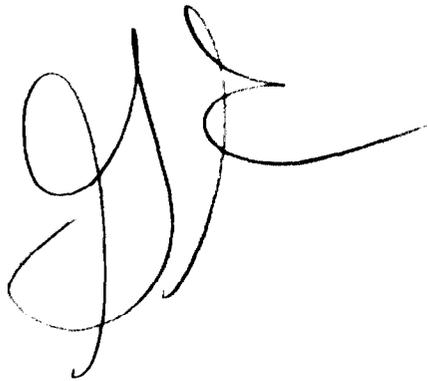
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