

6 April 1981
MLD-1015

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, FBIS
FROM : Chief, London Bureau
THROUGH : Chief, Operations Group
SUBJECT : Monthly Report -- London Bureau -- March 1981

I. GENERAL

- A. The bureau file set a record on 24 March, reaching 152,390 words and edging by a nose the previous high of 152,250 set back in December 1975. The daily file exceeded 100,000 words 18 times during the month.
- B. Construction of the ROSET installation continues on schedule. It is expected that everything will be ready for the pouring of concrete on 13 April.
- C. With the arrival in London of Staff Engineer on PCS, Headquarters placed the Islamabad Unit under the administrative control of London Bureau.
- D. The bureau chief, the deputy chief and the chief editor entertained Karl Lehman, the BBC's retiring Editor, News and Publication, at lunch at the White Hart in Sonning on 27 March. His replacement, Roland Challis, was also a guest.

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II. OPERATIONS

A. Editorial/Monitorial

1. The continuing Polish crisis reached its most critical level so far when a warning strike and the threat of a general strike came amid Warsaw Pact military exercises and a sharp rise in Soviet and East European criticism of events in Poland. In response, the BBC reinstated the Polish overnight shift on the 20th and began an open watch on Warsaw I on the 27th. Weekend staffing at the BBC's overseas operation and additional mediumwave Warsaw II casts -- fed via the VCVC from Austria -- were also laid on. The alert measures remained in effect as the reporting period ended.

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2. There were interesting developments in Polish media during the month. Warsaw radio and television devoted unusual attention to opposition views and to domestic and external events that suggested the situation was growing more serious. The PAP Maritime Press Service carried several unique items calling for changes in the PZPR. The independent trade union Solidarity began a news service in Polish for abroad via telex. The BBC is obtaining copies of this service from Bush House, one of the recipients, and is providing FBIS with translations, but because the status of this news agency is unclear it has decided not to publish the material. The bureau has filed a number of these items as FYI's (not for publication) to Headquarters only. Warsaw Radio on 2 April reported that the first issue of the "national union weekly 'SOLIDARITY' dated 3 April has been published" by the independent trade union Solidarity. PMU is attempting to obtain a subscription to this officially sanctioned periodical.
3. A number of events during the month reaffirmed the unique value of FBIS material and services. Headquarters requested on behalf of a high-level Administration official an original voice recording of a speech by Al-Qadhdhafi and a vernacular transliteration of that portion of it in which he called for the liquidation of regime opponents. A Paris embassy officer asked for and received, courtesy of the Okinawa Bureau a refile of an AFP report on Sihanouk's efforts to obtain U.S. and PRC support prior to his talks in Pyongyang with Khmer Rouge leaders. Caversham's role in handling Moscow and Kabul media coverage of the PIA plane hijacking affair was noted with thanks by an embassy in one of the countries affected. A complimentary message was received from an ambassador concerning a TASS item that apparently distorted the remarks of a Third World official on a contentious international issue. Shortly after the attempted coup in Mauritania, the embassy there sent the following: "Despite minimize imposed Nouakchott, FBIS news items of great value; would appreciate continuing to receive them throughout this period." Similar interest in bureau reportage of this event and its aftermath was

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expressed by the embassy in Rabat when it sought assurance that we would monitor an expected speech by the Moroccan prime minister.

4. Losses and gains marked Caversham's coverage picture this month. The problems that hampered the printing of Tehran PARS during February worsened, and the agency's transmissions were untraceable most of the month. Gulf continues to backstop from spotty reception. The upgrading of the East Berlin ADN German service from 50 to 100 baud and difficulties in securing a line that can handle the new speed resulted in loss of the service for 10 days. ADN in English and extra Voice of the GDR newscasts were added temporarily to fill the gap. New ANGOLAN PRESS AGENCY transmissions in Portuguese and French were monitored on the 24th. Reception has been good, but these ANGOP casts have yet to settle into a regular pattern and observations will continue before a permanent commitment is made. So far the agency has carried little original material of interest. Nagging technical problems in arranging ad hoc links with the Brussels rediffusion company Radio Public seem to have been overcome and the BBC was able to monitor from French television preelection interviews with Mitterand, Barre, Marchais and Giscard. The first ever switch to daylight savings time in the USSR on 1 April, coinciding with the usual spring changes, has had a significant effect on broadcast times and frequencies. BBC cruisers are making intensive efforts to verify the new schedules. Of particular interest is the fact that Moscow has doubled its Polish broadcasts to 5 hours daily. Details of all of the above have been reported to FCS.
5. When the Austrian Bureau again requested PMU's help in Polish press processing, we learned that the BBC was no longer receiving TRYBUNA LUDA. Consequently, the London Admin Office once again sought out a local supply source, this time successfully. PMU is now receiving more or less regularly copies of both TRYBUNA LUDU and ZYCIE WARSZAWY and is assisting with

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processing. In addition, PMU's Polish/French monitor, is on standby to go to Vienna if the situation warrants.

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6. PMU began receiving the Madrid weekly MUNDO OBRERO and filed two items from it during March.

B. Communications

1. DCA ordered a European MINIMIZE on 5 March when continuing technical difficulties with the planned downtime at Coltano Switch placed a heavy burden on the European Switches at Croughton and Pirmasens. Most of the bureau's routine copy was punched and held until the MINIMIZE was lifted at 1730 the following day. Other bureaus were reminded to protect BBC interests in deciding what should be filed to London.
2. Headquarters has advised that the planned 48-hour downtime of Croughton Switch will take place on 18 April. A phase III Altroute (via the Pirmasens Switch) has been arranged for the bureau's Mode I and a similar arrangement has been requested for the Mode V.

III. ADMINISTRATION

- A. FBIS staff engineer, arrived PCS on 27 March. Frank will be the ROSET project officer.
- B. Associate Editor resigned on 1 April. There are no plans to replace him at present.

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IV. VISITS

- A. Headquarters ED&SS, returned to the bureau on TDY 16-17 March, after making improvements to the circuit in Islamabad. The new equipment now installed at each end of the circuit has resulted in a noticeable improvement in the audio quality and provides the BBC with a ringing capability.
- B. the BBC's new Editor, News and Publication, received an orientation in the bureau on 25 March.

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Attachment

cc: Chief, Austrian Bureau
Chief, Cologne Unit