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OPERATIONS GROUP FILE

RECORD OF THE THIRTY FIRST MEETING OF THE FBIS-BBC MONITORING SERVICE COORDINATING COMMITTEE HELD ON 18-19 NOVEMBER 1980 AT WASHINGTON, D.C.

Present: Mr. David Witherow, Head of Monitoring Service, BBC
Mr. George Novakovic, Head, Reception Department,
BBC Monitoring Service

[Redacted] Director, FBIS

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[Redacted] Deputy Director, FBIS

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[Redacted] Chief, Operations Group, FBIS

[Redacted] Executive & Planning Staff, FBIS

1. FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

FBIS noted the increasing costs of overseas monitoring operations, including an inflation rate of over 100 percent in certain areas, and pointed out that Congress has not yet approved the FBIS appropriation for the current fiscal year, which began 1 October. FBIS is hopeful, however, of eventually obtaining funds for all current operations, including those begun this past year with the special appropriation for Muslim World coverage.

BBC reported that the cash limit received for the current year does not cover inflation. Nevertheless, no staff cuts have been necessary, as the deficit has been offset by deferring capital expenditures and by receipts from sales which have been good. There is some gloom in store in the coming financial year, which begins 1 April, when inflation may again be higher than the cash limit. Moreover, next year promises to be as busy as the last with existing resources stretched to the limit. BBC is now preparing a case for an increase in staff to provide some flexibility. Although BBC is currently receiving high praise for its achievements over the past year, there is no certainty that additional funds will be forthcoming. BBC will make its case in December and know next year's appropriation in February. (C)

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2. POLAND AND EAST EUROPE

BBC noted that it had had to increase its Polish staff to cover the crisis; the Berlin operation has proved invaluable, covering 8 or more regional radio stations a day, along with TV. A second person had been assigned to Berlin to provide 7-day per week coverage at the height of the crisis, and such reinforcement could be provided again. The expanded coverage of Poland will continue for as long as necessary.

FBIS expressed its appreciation for the excellent coverage of Poland by BBC and noted that much material has been run on the Wire Service; this has been greatly valued by U.S. consumers.

BBC pointed out that its Berlin operation just happens to be near the regional Polish transmitters of most interest in this crisis. A crisis elsewhere in Poland or in other parts of East Europe might present some problems as far as regional and local stations are concerned. BBC suggested exploration of the possibility of locating other listening posts in the area, perhaps in Austria. FBIS agreed to jointly explore this idea.

BBC noted the need for a second VCVC line, which will cost some £40,000 per annum. A proposal for a second line will be included in the case BBC makes to the Treasury this December.

FBIS reported that its temporary monitoring van is in place in [redacted] in anticipation of the need to cover a Yugoslav crisis. BBC reconfirmed its intention to supply two monitors to this operation if it is activated, while FBIS will provide the necessary editorial and technical help. (C)

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3. SOVIET UNION

BBC reported that since Brezhnev's speech in November 1978 on the role of the mass media, Moscow has instituted more newscasts and an additional beam. Although the monitoring output has not increased significantly, more listening time is now necessary. One monitor has been added to the evening shift to cover this increase. BBC pointed out that the monitoring of Soviet TV [redacted] will in all likelihood add to the workload of the Russian team.

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BBC and FBIS agreed that the processing of the audio signal from Soviet TV will be handled by the BBC although the staffing implications will need to be carefully considered. FBIS will provide technical support and will handle any processing of video tapes.

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BBC noted that its interest in coverage of Russian regional stations is as high as ever. FBIS pointed out that the Office of Economic Research depends heavily on BBC's Weekly Economic Report for regional economic reporting. (A memorandum to this effect was provided to BBC.)

FBIS said that there is continuing interest in reporting on Soviet nationalities and that FBIS remains committed to this coverage.

BBC and FBIS reaffirmed the commitment to round-the-clock coverage of Moscow Domestic Radio. However, it was agreed that the two services would examine the possibility of some reduction in the processing requirements of unproductive feature programs, though this would be done carefully and prudently.

BBC reported that it has for the third time requested permission from the local planning authority to construct the building necessary to process the material from the Islamabad remote unit. The planning authority is to meet in December; if it again turns down the request, which is a real possibility, then BBC would select an alternate site. In the meantime temporary space will be provided for the monitors as they are recruited. (C)

4. IRAN, AFGHANISTAN AND THE SUB-CONTINENT

FBIS reported on progress at Gulf Bureau where there is now Arabic, Persian and Urdu capability, although no Asian minority language monitors have yet been recruited. The monitors are still relatively inexperienced and the bureau is undergoing some reception problems.

BBC noted the unique regional coverage provided by Gulf Bureau in the Iran-Iraq war and the fact that Teheran Arabic monitored by Gulf has on several occasions carried items before the Teheran Domestic Service in Persian.

FBIS reported that the communications link between the monitoring unit in Islamabad and London should be established in a matter of days and that this should provide improved coverage of Kabul, as well as coverage of several Soviet regional stations. One staff technician and two local technicians are now assigned to Islamabad.

BBC noted the difficulty in recruiting Asian minority language monitors.

BBC pointed out that with the seizure of the American hostages in November 1979 it had instituted round-the-clock live coverage of Teheran domestic, increasing its Persian team from four monitors to nine. The 24-hour live coverage will be continued as long as necessary.

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FBIS noted that the BBC Persian team's effort is greatly appreciated at all levels in the U.S. Government, including the White House.

BBC recommended that requests for complete texts of speeches in Persian be held to a minimum and FBIS agreed to screen carefully all such requests from U.S. consumers.

FBIS reported its belief that Iran will remain an area of intense international interest long after the U.S. hostages are released. FBIS recommended against any reduction in current Persian capability, and noted that FBIS will retain its Persian capability. (C)

5. MIDDLE EAST

BBC noted the usefulness of patching programs from Nicosia and Gulf Bureaus to Caversham when reception there was not good.

FBIS and BBC agreed to pursue the idea of a proper survey of the Cyprus sovereign base area. BBC expressed willingness to send someone to carry out the survey. The main interest is coverage of Libya and the Sudan. (C)

6. AFRICA

BBC reported that reception in Salisbury is not markedly better than that in Lilongwe. Given the political instability in Zimbabwe, BBC is not proceeding at present with further investigation into the possibility of establishing a unit in Salisbury. BBC will continue with its 2-man operation in Lilongwe.

FBIS reported that it is still waiting for a reply from Swaziland on its proposal to locate a bureau there. If approval is received, FBIS would, given the current funding situation, have to establish the bureau as funds become available.

BBC noted the usefulness of the material provided by Abidjan Bureau, particularly for the newsroom. BBC would welcome more from Abidjan Bureau on all subjects and all countries concerned. (C)

7. FAR EAST

FBIS reported that an additional Korean monitor has been added at Seoul Bureau. DPRK TV coverage has been temporarily lost but hopefully will soon be restored.

FBIS reported that its remote antennas are now operational in Hong Kong and should provide considerably better reception of Chinese regionals. The Hong Kong Bureau will also soon be moving to a new location. FBIS will also be adding to its press coverage in Hong Kong over the next 2 years.

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FBIS noted that the dish antenna at Okinawa Bureau for monitoring Soviet satellite transmissions should be operational in January.

[redacted]

[redacted] FBIS noted its intention to continue its current level of Southeast Asia coverage and to possibly institute coverage of an Indonesian media satellite transmission sometime in 1983.

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BBC expressed its appreciation for the supply of Chinese, as well as other Asian material. (C)

8. WEST EUROPE

BBC noted that the West Europe TV survey was in its 4th week and should be completed soon. Both FBIS and BBC will study the results. BBC pointed out that the necessary communications from Brussels were difficult to acquire and that considerable time should be allowed for acquisition of such communications in the future.

FBIS reported that there is growing interest in reporting on West Europe and that this will probably continue. FBIS presently has no funds to establish a West Europe bureau.

BBC reported that it is looking at the possibility of getting access to Italian as well as other West European TV from Switzerland. (C)

9. CENTRAL AMERICA

FBIS reported the acquisition of leased lines from the U.S. embassies in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala to Panama Bureau. Contract employees at each of these sites record and relay programs to Panama over the leased lines. This has proved a very successful operation and production from these stations has improved tenfold. FBIS is considering a similar arrangement with leased lines from Santiago, and eventually Lima and La Paz to Asuncion Bureau; greater distances will be involved and there will therefore be more expense and probably less reliability. FBIS noted the problem of relying on local leased lines, particularly in the case of political disturbances. (C)

10. RELATIONS WITH [redacted]

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BBC noted [redacted] is providing about as much material as can be expected, given its resources, but that this does not represent a fair return for what BBC gives [redacted] BBC will continue to seek a larger financial contribution [redacted] in return for the extra material being provided, especially the Polish file. BBC would also like [redacted] to arrange for monitoring of East German regional radios which could be relayed for processing by BBC in a crisis situation.

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FBIS reported that it is satisfied with its exchange [redacted] [redacted] FBIS will replace [redacted] next summer and intends to continue the arrangement indefinitely. (C)

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11. FLASH COVERAGE AND FYI'S

BBC noted its continuing interest in flash coverage and reported that the guidance on this coverage in the new FBIS editorial handbook is exactly right. In practice, however, BBC still finds many fewer substantive flash FYI's than it would prefer.

FBIS agreed to remind each bureau of BBC's interest, calling attention to the appropriate section of the editorial handbook.

FBIS reported a need for better FYI's from the Persian team. The BBC said that the ability of the Persian team to provide FYI's was steadily improving with experience; but there were very considerable pressures on the team, with the BBC bearing in mind the special FBIS requirements in regard to the hostage issue. (C)

12. TECHNICAL

FBIS reported on its efforts to make technical improvements, including the development of a remote unit which can store and forward material with little on-the-spot human intervention; the acquisition of alternative circuits for the very expensive leased lines now used; and various efforts to overcome reception problems.

BBC reported that remoting of its radio-teletype room is proceeding and that it is looking at ways of modernizing the listening room. (C)

David Witherow

David Witherow
Head of Monitoring Service
BBC

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Director, FBIS

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Agenda for
BBC-FBIS COORDINATION MEETING

18-19 November 1980

Washington, D.C.

1. Financial Outlook
2. Poland and East Europe (Berlin, Vienna, VCVC, Balkans, Brindisi)
3. Soviet Union (schedule changes, regionals, satellite monitoring)
4. Iran, Afghanistan and Sub-Continent
5. Middle East
6. Africa (including Southern Africa)
7. Far East
8. West Europe (including TV survey)
9. Central America
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11. Flash Coverage and FYI's
12. Technical
13. Any Other Business

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FBIS - BBC Monitoring Service 31st Coordination Meeting,
18-19 November 1980

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