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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Daily Reporting Division

10 October 1979
MAU-9079

SUBJECT : Austrian Bureau Comments - Trump-Conn Report

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A. Attached are original comments by bureau staff editors [redacted] and [redacted], and associate editor [redacted]. I hope to pass on further comments by [redacted] on a month's leave at the time this was received, next week when he returns. I have no serious disagreements with their various points, but perhaps more of a sense of deja vu, a realization that many of these suggestions were actual practice in the not too distant past, and perhaps a bit more skepticism about the extent to which some of their suggestions could be implemented.

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B. My own comments follow:

1. There is a fundamental conflict between current FBIS policy that emphasizes the need for high quality field copy that requires little or no further editing, and the suggestions Trump-Conn make regarding doing more pure "editing" by professionals in Hqs and leaving "copy editing" to lower-paid mechanics. The goal of finished copy from the field was of course to minimize Hqs editing by a reduced staff using computers, video-editing terminals, on a more continuous, split-shift basis, as well as to make all major corrections in the field where this is best done in close teamwork with the monitors. Trump-Conn's emphasis here suggests some misunderstanding of fundamentals--FBIS is not and cannot be a lively Washington POST, New York DAILY NEWS, jazzing up copy and translations to attract readers--FBIS editors are slaves of their radio, press agency, and foreign press sources to a much greater degree than are U.S. newspaper editors. That is, "just the facts," no or minimal embellishment or alteration, within the limits of good, clear translations. And is "editing" separable from "copy editing," and if it is, what does FBIS do with its editors when they come home to Hqs, if copy editors are doing their jobs?

2. Trump-Conn's speculation on the "high" attrition rate in 1978 is not necessarily valid; I believe this had more to do with some unwise recruiting/hiring decisions made from about 1974-76 or 77, several of whom lacked a real desire to serve overseas, others having working wives, and still others simply being bad choices in the first place. Drudgery has always been an element in DR work in the past, and it did not produce such high attrition before; I suggest the explanation lies more in selecting some people who were from the start not well suited to FBIS work at home or abroad.

3. FBIS over the years has had several good training programs on paper. Implementation has been something else, training usually suffering for lack of well-qualified, field-experienced senior editors assigned with enough staff to allow training time. I recall that during [redacted] tenure as DRD Special Assistant, he had a regular workshop project going aimed at training new editors on editing practices, including field uses. Any new or revived program will require more bodies--and time--to devote to training. Is DRD now staffed to do this? There is the key.

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8. Trump-Conn suggestions under Rotation (pp 20 ff) mostly reflect what I have perceived to be the present situation, i.e., many editors already spend 60-70 percent of their time overseas, the rest at Hqs, we try to provide sound area familiarization through FSI courses, etc. where time permits, and we should perhaps try to stabilize Hqs assignments a bit more so that, at the least, new editors could be reared by the same supervisor for, say, the first 12 months.

9. It is interesting that Trump-Conn propose a more substantively oriented morning meeting. I am not sanguine this will necessarily provide better use of available pages or better "perspective"; they seem to slight the amount of inter-branch coordination that does take place during the day, as new material comes in, and existing practices regarding cross-referring items affecting two quite different geographical areas. Perhaps the fact that FBIS for years has not had its morning briefing and the former "Pink Sheet" officer who kept top management informed of substantive and coverage developments has led to some loss of communications, attention, and interest in top staffers that has, in turn, made editors feel "no one cares" anymore.

10. I agree quite strongly with Trump-Conn remarks on recruiting new editor talent with more emphasis on journalistic ranks. Given the eternal overcrowded nature of the journalistic profession, FBIS should have no trouble, with its competitive salary and benefits, in recruiting more "true" journalists with 2-3 years actual experience behind them and their rough edges polished nicely. Suggestions regarding more foreign-language training preparatory for assignment abroad are not novel; it would of course be useful in many cases, if FBIS can spare the time, but local language is not as essential as for Foreign Service Officers constantly engaged in representational liaison with host country diplomats. And where a bureau covers a broad region of 12-14 countries, the local language is of more use for living convenience than for operational value in the office.

11. While it is self-evident that better-trained editors assigned to the field will do better, the lack of a true FBIS field bureau in the immediate Washington area—such as the old ECB—will, unless rectified, inevitably make it necessary to rely either on the present expensive Panama/Okinawa TDY program or let the bureaus to which new people are assigned perform the role. Most Trump-Conn suggestions here are somewhat ingenuous and naive. I do not subscribe to the idea that FBIS field editors somehow will gain much of use by "developing sources and contacts" in the field and rely less on "radio, television, magazines and newspapers." This is a fatuous remark raising serious questions about the basic understanding Trump & Conn had of what FBIS' mission is, and their ignorance of Embassy and Station missions overseas as well as proscriptions against such contacts with the working press, especially foreign press correspondents. (p.45)

12. Trump-Conn remarks on DR automation retrace well-known ground, and I see nothing novel or original in their suggestions not already known to FBIS management. If their suggestions (p. 47) mean they believe all field monitors should ultimately be equipped with automated VDT terminals and be used as the first and sole inputters into a computerized system, then they don't fully understand the limitations of many monitors or the cost implications for field bureaus worldwide. FBIS would spend millions for equipment to save thousands in salaries for the lowest-paid teletypists, whose main jobs would be foisted upon monitors whose prized skills are language, not teletyping ability.

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4. The question of "teaching news judgment" by "professional" editors from Washington newspapers or wire services is curious: it implies that these people somehow have a unique knowledge or talent lacking among FBIS senior editors and experienced personnel generally. This is naive. Some would argue that most intelligent persons are born with an inherent sense of judgment that includes "news" or "intelligence" judgment; I think there may be some truth in that, but I doubt whether we need seek the wisdom of Solomon only from Washington newspaper foreign news editors. Our own long experience, our consumers, and our intelligence requirements form the basis for our own FBIS "news judgment." This can be taught best on the Wire, first of all, as well as the DRD branches. It would do no harm to bring in outsiders for special lectures or discussions of judgment, but I would not expect any miraculous revelations from such professionals. If we restored an East Coast Bureau in the Hqs area, we could again provide more real life training in news judgment without the TDY expense.
5. Suggestions regarding a reborn "Managing Editor" and responsibilities vis-a-vis the branch chiefs pose a dilemma. If "general priorities" of stories would be determined by the Managing Editor, how does that enhance the interest in his work for a DR branch chief and his editors? This is a rather flawed, fuzzy proposal, I submit. The C/DRD and his deputy and special assistant should have maximum time and attention to the DRD product, and not—I hope—be overly concerned with purely "managerial" functions such as attending meetings, panels, liaising with outside offices, etc. Bob Scheuer, once the "king of the Counting House" in the old DR, fulfilled precisely the functions proposed here, but then he was eminently qualified for that job. Our present Managing Editor staff is of course nothing at all like that, and is misnamed as indicated by Trump-Conn.
6. Trump-Conn write as if DR branch chiefs were not responsible for training new editors. This, and other clues, suggest they really didn't grasp very well what the functions are. Or has this changed? DR branch chiefs, and the Wire chief, deputy chief and senior editors, all should be directly in line for training new personnel.
7. Morale: I question Trump-Conn's assumption that the "something of a nadir" in morale results from largely lack of challenge in the work. So far as I am aware, the nature of this work has not really changed much since 1966-67. There has, however, been a large number of retirements by senior personnel who used to care a lot about product quality. I wonder if this loss is not more directly a cause of low morale—the old guard has gone, no new one has developed any esprit de corps. Perhaps also there is—as I have heard when in Washington—a perception among new people that FBIS top management is now less interested in DAILY REPORT quality than before. I think at least two things can be done to stimulate better morale among new people: a) start their training on the frontlines of the FBIS Wire, rather than the DR, with the Wire having sufficient experienced staff to provide for a mentor who can devote considerable time to training new people; the Wire also provides an early taste of work more closely resembling field work, a faster pace and broad geographic exposure to the whole world. b) Re-establish an East Coast bureau—with a real coverage mission, editors and monitors—that can provide more training time in a real situation and encourage new editors. I see little chance of adding much "creativity" in the DR publishing duties—by definition, FBIS is obliged to follow our foreign sources and not over-edit or rewrite materials as any newspaper does freely.

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13. To achieve the goal of making DR editing work more interesting and less mechanical, perhaps the time has come—when a revised automation system has been developed, and in conjunction with the spreading use of computer storage, "SAFE" and the like in Headquarters—to seriously reconsider a proposal I made some 15 years ago that never got beyond [redacted] desk: To make a radical change to a completely wirefiled Daily Report, using-FBIS^S computer storage, staffing around the clock, and keeping all our reporting on a current basis with no backlogs. There would continue to be the main wire, with worldwide coverage just as now; there also would be regional wires corresponding to the present eight books, or perhaps a fewer number possible by judicious combining; primary service would be to consumers using quiet Extel-type printers, or into their own small computer or large computer storage—in the latter case, the consumer could each morning "read his mail"—the regional items filed into his computer overnight by FBIS editors, or if he chose to have only an Extel printer, he would have his book available when he arrived at work the same day, not 1-2 days later as is now. There would still be the possibility of a printed DR for circulation to libraries, outside consumers, etc, by using computer-to-microfiche or computer-to-print modes, as appropriate, but these would no longer be a primary concern. On the positive side, this would eliminate the typist bottleneck, and the artificial delays imposed by the DR ~~at~~ 7-3:30, Monday-Friday work schedule: consumers would have a much more current product. On the negative side, more shift work would be involved, but this would not necessarily be as heavy on grave shifts as one would think, since worldwide there is not much copy arriving from the field during these hours.

This would enable FBIS to "publish" by a main and regional wires the entire field take, not just 4/5ths of it.

cc: Chief, Operations Group

[redacted]
Chief, FBIS Austrian Bureau

Attachments:

Comments by [redacted]
[redacted] (associate ed.)
and [redacted]

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1 October 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Daily Report Division

THROUGH: Chief, FBIS Vienna, Austria

FROM:

[Redacted]

Senior Editor, FBIS Vienna, Austria

SUBJECT: Trump-Conn Report

1. My first reaction to the Trump-Conn report was one of shock. The two consultants had really been able to grasp the frustrations and drudgery of working for the Daily Report. I had expected an innocuous report similiar to those produced by the FAT team or by those group sessions at [Redacted]

2. I thought the report was very accurate and the recommendations--at least most of them--were well-founded, attainable and, indeed, necessary if the Daily Report as a product and as a place to work is to be improved. I strongly favor all the "significant recommendations" pointed out in [Redacted] letter to the Director dated 7 September 1979.

3. I disagree with the Trump-Conn report on the following points:

a) Page 10: "News judgment should be taught by professional editors." While some FBIS editorial duties parallel those of media journalists and editors, I think the "news judgment" needed by FBIS editors could be better developed through a closer working relationship with our primary consumers at HQS and at the State Department.

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b) Page 45: "Editors in the field (must) develop sources and contacts, so that they rely not only on radio, television, magazines and newspapers, but also primary sources." This is not a good idea.

c) Page 55: Eric Pace, The New York Times: "Tell the CIA to hire trucks and deliver the Reports under the door of correspondents every hour on the hour."

Page 55-56: Jay Mathews, The Washington Post: "The Post and three or four other newspapers 'would pay anything' for a direct feed" of the FBIS wire.

The primary consumers for the FBIS product are not and should never be the open media.

4. Finally, let me restate my strong agreement with the recommendations for change in the Daily Report. If the Trump-Conn recommendations are considered and implemented, including the recommendation on page 40 that the front cover of the Daily Report include "a logo stylizing the geographic areas of the various books", then FBIS should also consider changing the name from the Daily Report to the Daily Planet. You will have created a SUPER JOB and a SUPER PRODUCT.



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1. Paragraph or two at beginning of the Daily Report highlighting that day's events in the area would be useful for regular consumers--BBC's Summary for Eastern Europe is a useful tool for editors in reading in.
2. Occasion^{a)} use of maps in the Daily Report would be a good idea--ordinary commercial maps as opposed to specially prepared illustrations--eg. to illustrate location of speech, as when Bulgarian leader Zhivkov chooses Blagoevgrad as location of speech to army officers, i.e. in controversial Bulgarian-Yugoslav border area of Macedonia, or to illustrate the extent and location of earthquake damage.
3. Difficult to see point of cartoons in a publication like the Daily Report, although illustration of speaker could be of visual interest (like Daily Telegraph's Parliamentary Reports--cameras not allowed in parliament).
4. Double column format and use of boldface ~~in~~ headings could only improve appearance of Daily Report. Agree that DR covers should not be so self-effacing (The Economist reported that its policy of ~~in~~ arresting covers boosted sales).
5. Agree with suggestion that editors in training visit some kind of journalism course and rub shoulders with working journalists, which could ~~in~~ help them to acquire judgment of what kind of events provoke international repercussions and what kind of stories need really fast handling. It could also help them learn to present material--show editorial reports should be presented, being clear about attribution, extracting salient points for fyi's--and also to distinguish our work from that of a journalist on a daily newspaper.

Another--strongly urged--suggestion: to have FBIS spelling (apart from proper names) conform to Webster's.

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AS A RELATIVE NEWCOMER TO EBIS I found the report sensible and perceptive. I am generally in agreement with the conclusions of the report and would especially emphasize my agreement with the conclusions on the looks of the finished product and the atmosphere of the working areas. I disagree with the suggestion to give editors exposure to reporters. I would suggest instead more exposure to the intelligence community and processes with particular emphasis on requirements. I would also strongly urge a complete revision of the editorial handbook as soon as possible.

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