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25 March 1986
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Operations Group
THROUGH : Chief, Panama Bureau
FROM : Deputy Chief, FBIS Panama Bureau
SUBJECT : Report on Semi-annual Inspection Tour
of FBIS Central America Remote Operations
2-15 March 1986

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Together with Panama Chief Technician I performed the Spring, 1986, semi-annual inspection tour of the four FBIS remote sites in Central America: San Salvador, Tegucigalpa, Guatemala City and Managua.

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At all of the sites located within the American Embassy in the respective capitals, we met jointly with the local FBIS contractors to brief them on current operational and technical requirements and, while performed routine maintenance on the remote circuits and associated equipment, I met with local embassy officers to discuss various issues concerning support necessary for and provided by the FBIS local presence.

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Issues discussed at every site included:

-- The continuing requirement that FBIS Panama Bureau be provided with copies of FBIS contractor's work vouchers;

-- Confirmation that -- with the exception of Managua -- FBIS contractor's must receive their reimbursement in local currency and not in U.S. dollars;

-- A reemphasis that remote feeds should be made using the dedicated remote circuits whenever possible and restricting the use of commercial feeds to emergency last resort situations;

-- Plans for installing Nefax machines in each site some-time this year and the associated need for the FBIS contractors to have access to an embassy Xerox machine;

-- FBIS equipment at each site was inventoried and signed for by a responsible embassy officer;

-- Emergency backstop procedures that would be employed in the event that Panama Bureau's operations were interrupted for any reason, i.e. FBIS contractors would be contacted and requested

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to provide open source media items via a commercial phone patch feed to an alternate FBIS field bureau (Key West or Paraguay) or even possibly to FBIS Headquarters;

-- The availability and value of the video aspects of local television news and special events programming and procedures for a sampling survey;

-- The change of command at FBIS Panama Bureau in which [redacted] would assume bureau chief duties in August.

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San Salvador, El Salvador 2-5 March

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FBIS contractors [redacted] (Voice) and [redacted] (press) and [redacted] (alternate) were briefed on current requirements. [redacted] agreed to provide 12 U-Matic videotapes of selected San Salvador television programming to Panama. Following an initial sampling of the video product a determination would be made by FBIS about the continued value of such efforts.

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I met with embassy officers Donald Hamilton, PAO; his deputy John Williams, USIS information officer; and USIS Administrative Assistant Christine Limpach. Mr. Hamilton expressed his warm praise for the FBIS product and asked that Panama bureau begin regular coverage of the Sunday homily by the San Salvador archbishop (or his designate) that is broadcast on Voz Pan Americana on 800 kHz. Arrangements were made to begin the regular service the following Sunday. Mr. Hamilton said that he was being replaced in late June by Jake Gillespie, currently chief of P/GF at ISIA State in Washington, D.C.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras 5-8 March

I met with embassy officers Michael O'Brien, PAO, his deputy Arthur Skop, USIS Information Officer; and James Prietsch, RSO, to discuss the recent dismissal of FBIS contractor [redacted] on the recommendation of the embassy security office. I was informed that when [redacted] was confronted with allegations of improper financial dealings he signed his resignation without protest and departed. Subsequent to my return to Panama, I learned that just one week after his dismissal as FBIS contractor, the Honduran authorities arrested [redacted] on charges of embezzlement of funds unrelated to his work for FBIS or the earlier allegations that led to his dismissal by the embassy.

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I interviewed five candidates for the position of FBIS contractor and hired [redacted] a 22-year-old who came highly recommended by embassy officers for his enthusiasm and initiative. [redacted] is fully cleared by the embassy and presently working on

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a personal services contract at GSO. USIS employee and alternate FBIS contractor [redacted] agreed to work closely with [redacted] to train him in the use of the FBIS equipment and operational needs. STAT
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[redacted] had previously arranged for the Tegucigalpa LA PRENSA to receive materials censored from its sister paper Managua LA PRENSA. If the censored materials were subsequently published FBIS could openly exploit them. The censored materials were received in Tegucigalpa but not used after Managua LA PRENSA warned that the Sandinista authorities could use their republication as rationale to close their paper down. STAT

Embassy officers agreed that the video aspects of Honduran television coverage were generally very poor and would not merit consideration for exploitation at least for the present. STAT

Finally, in the equipment inventory we found one small radio unaccounted for and believed it was still in [redacted] possession. [redacted] agreed to ask [redacted] for it when he returned for his final paycheck. STAT
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Guatemala City, Guatemala 8-12 March

Embassy officers in Guatemala had advised us that they would be moving the FBIS equipment from a room on the third floor of the chancellery to another room on the ground floor and that all major work would be accomplished before our arrival. As it happened, except for installing ducting between the two rooms, no real work on moving our equipment and lines was completed and [redacted] performed journeyman efforts to run the necessary cables to the new room and to disconnect and reinstall all the equipment in just 2 days. STAT

I met with embassy officers Robert Austin, administrative counselor; Aida Castellanos, personnel officer; John Wilson, RSO; and Julio Perez, GSO, to discuss continued embassy support for the FBIS remote operation.

FBIS contractor [redacted] agreed to provide VHS format samples of Guatemalan television news and special event programming to Panama Bureau. [redacted] was asked to continue her duties acting as [redacted] alternate. STAT
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Managua, Nicaragua 12-15 March

[redacted] installed a NEFAX machine (transferred from Tegucigalpa) for use by the FBIS press contractor. The NEFAX will facilitate our processing more items from the Nicaragua press than possible under the previous system of having the contractor STAT

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read selected items into a tape recorder and feed that recording over the remote line to Panama.

I discussed some concerns expressed by our contractor [redacted] STAT
[redacted] with Christopher Swenson, embassy administrative counselor, STAT
about her paychecks, a request for a W-2 form for income tax reporting, and for a separate embassy contract with alternate contractor [redacted] Mr. Swenson agreed to accommodate us STAT
on all questions of required support.

Voice contractor [redacted] agreed to provide U-Matic STAT
videotapes of selected Managua television programming to Panama Bureau.

CONCLUSION

All FBIS contractors and embassy officers that we dealt with were very gracious in the hospitality and assistance offered during the inspection trip. The trip was considered a success because we were able to coordinate operational, technical and support requirements in meetings with key officers at each site.

[redacted] STAT
Deputy Chief, FBIS
Panama Bureau