

## ESCAPING THE SOVIET RADIO TRAP

One of the more bizarre episodes of the Reykjavik summit was the involvement in international negotiations of U.S. Information Agency Director Charles Z. Wick. Holding an unscheduled meeting with Aleksandr Yakovlev, Soviet director of propaganda, Wick apparently agreed to Yakovlev's proposal that the U.S. government facilitate Soviet broadcasting on AM radio in the United States in exchange for Moscow's stopping its jamming of the Voice of America. Since returning from Iceland, Wick has been asking U.S. commercial broadcasters to provide transmission time for the Soviets on medium wave U.S. radio.

In the heady atmosphere of an apparently successful summit, Wick decided to call on his counterpart on the Soviet delegation. The USIA Director and an assistant sat down for a friendly chat with propaganda chief Yakovlev and a group of Soviet officials. The Soviets praised Wick for arranging cultural exchanges, got him in an ebullient mood and then sprang their trap.

If the U.S. would permit the Soviets to broadcast to Americans from a medium wave transmitter either in the U.S. or offshore (presumably from Cuba), they would stop jamming the Voice of America, Yakovlev proposed. Without consulting the State Department, the National Security Council or even his staff at USIA, Wick replied "You've got a deal." Only later did the rest of the summit collapse.

Months earlier Wick had proposed to the Soviets an exchange whereby each side would buy air time on the other's AM radio system, giving the U.S. access to the Soviet public. Wick apparently believed that Yakovlev was talking about such an exchange, but the record indicates the Soviet official referred only to Soviet broadcasting in the U.S. in exchange for ending VOA jamming, not mentioning U.S. medium wave broadcasting to the USSR.

When Wick's discussion became known, there was consternation within the Administration. For years the U.S. and its allies have been protesting Soviet jamming, not just of VOA, but also of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, the BBC, West German radio Deutsche Welle, Israeli radio, and other foreign radio broadcasts, as a violation of international law. In 1984 the World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC), meeting in Geneva, passed a resolution critical of jamming by

any country and instructed the International Frequency Review Board (IFRB) to investigate such activity.

The U.S., British, and West German governments filed formal complaints of Soviet and East bloc jamming. The IFRB spent some ten months investigating the charges and found the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia guilty of jamming in violation of article 35 of the International Telecommunications Union Convention. This was an unprecedented finding by an international body that the Soviet Union has been violating an international treaty.

The U.S. and its allies, attending the meetings of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that are now underway in Vienna, are protesting Soviet-bloc jamming. The State Department has sent the U.S. delegation two and a half pounds of documents verifying illegal Soviet radio interference, for presentation at the conference.

The Soviet attempt to negotiate access to the U.S. public on AM radio in exchange for an end to VOA jamming appears designed to head off international opprobrium by making their jamming the subject of U.S.-Soviet negotiations. It also may be a ploy to get something in exchange for doing what they eventually may have to do anyway. By trying to cut a deal on VOA jamming, which has been on and off at various times anyway, the Soviets apparently hope to deflect attention from their determined heavy jamming of the broadcasts they most dislike--those of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

An interagency committee under NSC chairmanship has suggested that USIA concentrate on cultural exchanges and leave the problem of Soviet jamming to the State Department. As a result, Wick no longer is trying to negotiate an end to Soviet jamming of the VOA, but apparently he still hopes to get American broadcasters to provide "access" to Soviet broadcasts.

This Soviet proposal is contrary to U.S. interests. The U.S. should: 1) continue to protest Moscow's jamming as a violation of international law and demand that it be stopped; 2) refuse to negotiate about the jamming and offer no concessions for ending it; 3) insist that the Soviets and their East-bloc surrogates stop all jamming, of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty as well as the VOA; and 4) stop seeking time from U.S. commercial broadcasters for the transmission of Soviet propaganda.

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For further information:

Carnes Lord, "Open Airwaves: Call the Soviets' Bluff," The Washington Post, November 5, 1986.

William Safire, "You've Got a Deal," The New York Times, November 10, 1986.

Charles Fenyvesi, "Radio Moscow on Your AM Dial?" U.S. News and World Report, November 17, 1986.