April 27, 1967
Telegram from the American Embassy in Warsaw to the Department of State, 'Appraisal of RFE Broadcasts to Poland' [Declassified September 19, 2016]

Citation:

Summary:
In Warsaw Embassy Airgram A-666, US Embassy officers analyze six weeks of RFE Polish broadcasts and conclude that they support US policy objectives by informing Poles about developments in Poland and the world and encouraging evolutionary change.

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English

Contents:
- Scan of Original Document
TO: DEPARTMENT OF STATE  

FROM: An Embassy WARSAW  

DATE: April 27, 1967  

SUBJECT: Appraisal of RFE Broadcasts to Poland  

RFE has and maintains a large following in Poland. While some listeners are more enthusiastic than others, all find RFE a quick and reliable source of international and domestic news. They appreciate the fact that news reports are timely, items are interesting, and the style is objective.

Despite some small criticisms that might be made about particular broadcasts, taken as a whole RFE provides effective support for U.S. policy objectives in Poland. RFE keeps the Polish audience informed of continuing U.S. interest in the Polish people; RFE gives a fuller view of developments which are often treated in a simplistic, heavily laden and biased manner by the Polish public media; and RFE provides information about significant events in Poland that often go unmentioned here and about which knowledge is confined to limited circles. The total effect of the information broadcast is to keep listeners abreast of developments in the world, to make them feel part of the Western world, to put pressure on the Polish press to cover news that might otherwise go unreported, and to encourage internal forces for change and modulation. RFE is not inflammatory; it skillfully encourages evolutionary changes and shows a realistic understanding of the situation in Poland today.

GROUP I Excluded from automatic release.
The assessment contained in this report is based not only upon the intensive monitoring of broadcasts by Embassy language officers in the past month and a half and a careful reading of broadcast scripts, but by impressions gained over the past year or more by Embassy officers either in the course of interviewing visa applicants or in various other conversations with Poles.

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RFE has a very large audience in Poland. Although there is no way of accurately measuring its popularity, it is our impression that it is probably the most popular of all foreign broadcasts—especially among the better educated. It is frequently nicknamed "Warszawa Zachodnia." Anti-Party Polish intellectuals have almost a proprietary feeling towards RFE, while the non-party intellectuals have a lively interest in keeping up with RFE. Party members are also frequent listeners, but for good and obvious reasons tend to be critical, especially when commenting to Embassy officers.

Although peasants too listen to RFE, there is a tendency among them to confuse RFE with VOA and the BBC. Even among intellectuals there are some who confuse RFE with VOA. It should be noted that intellectuals rank BBC above RFE but this is in large measure a carry over effect from World War II. These people still think of RFE in terms of its broadcasts and the role it played during World War II.

A curious reaction among a wide assortment of peasant non-immigrant IVY applicants to RFE was recorded by the interviewing officers. The peasants were dissatisfied with what they considered bland or too fast presentations when compared with what they read in the Polish press. When asked whether they consider the Polish press objective, they replied that they know a lot is not true but some of it must be. For example, they would often say, the Polish press reported that the U.S. is killing civilians in Vietnam and finally the U.S. Government was forced to admit it. Interestingly, educated IVY applicants avoided any comment whatsoever on RFE.

From other reports and opinions gained by the Embassy, it is our impression that the intelligentsia holds RFE in considerable regard. A typical comment was that of a Polish intellectual who said, "it is our window to the West, and we cannot afford to have been closed." While Party intellectuals will understandably be critical when talking to Embassy officers, those outside the Party and a source of strength and sustenance in their own effort to challenge the system. Many outside the Party will say, "I read The New York Times, listen to RFE, and make up my own mind." When a new topic is pressed most often such an individual will end up by taking the position taken by RFE.
The extensive treatment given to the KOLAKOWSKI affair by RFE is a case in point. Although a matter of keen interest in intellectual circles, with special importance for Party members, the Kolakowski case was discussed privately in Poland but never mentioned in the press. By providing information about the case, RFE first of all demonstrated that one cannot depend on the Polish press for news. Secondly, by presenting the issues involved it helped reinforce the desire for greater freedom of expression even within the Party.

RFE's treatment of Adam SCHAFF's article in the Austrian Party Weekly Volk und Ziol in all likelihood also served to foster pressures for liberalization of the system. In that article Schaff pointed to the failure of socialism to overcome either in theory or in practice known forms of alienation. He noted that the state, bureaucracy, and planning system are sources of alienation. Were it not for RFE's dissemination of Schaff's expressed views they would have gone unnoticed except for the privileged few within the Party.

The broadcasts about U.S. activities in or affecting Poland are particularly valuable. They help correct the distortions and omissions of the Polish press. Thus in reporting the recent treaty agreement and the negotiations leading to it, RFE emphasized the U.S. interest in finding mutually advantageous projects and the special efforts of the Ambassador toward this end. The audience was reminded of the highly considerable sales of almost a half a billion dollars worth of agricultural commodities to Poland in the period since 1957 and the credit was also drawn to the Krakow children's hospital built with U.S. funds. This is typical of the kind of helpful broadcasts covering U.S. actions in Poland.

On broader questions concerning U.S. policy toward Eastern Europe RFE play an educational role. The account of BREZINSKI's response to a roundtable discussion on Channel 13 in New York devoted to "What Happened to the Iron Curtain?" is a good example. The Polish audience was given a serious and thoughtful presentation explaining long term U.S. policy objectives in Eastern Europe which reflected the desire of the U.S. to reinforce ties between Eastern Europe and the West.

In the case of presenting the other side of the picture and explaining the basis for U.S. actions in Vietnam, RFE treatment of JENNISSKIE's article in WYBOROWIEZKO and Komunosolska Pravda were particularly effective. Such programs are important in the face of the anti-American and one-sided view of the Vietnam war presented in the Polish press.
By pointing out certain developments in other Eastern European countries and holding them up as a model, RFE prompts the audience to ask itself "where is Poland?". In this way pressures for change are reinforced. Such RFE reports as that on the freer press in Yugoslavia (Feb. 27), on parliamentary reforms in Hungary (Feb. 21), or on Yugoslav and Bulgarian moves to open up their countries to western tourism are examples. RFE effectively applauds certain Polish actions while encouraging still more. This was so in the report of Poland's liberalization of visa issuance procedures for Scandinavians. In its treatment of the problem of handicrafts and private enterprise in Poland RFE conveyed the impression of a sound observer of the Polish scene interested in improving matters. The broadcast explained the problem, the measures taken to improve the situation, the shortcomings of these steps and the source of resistance to such actions.

On Church-State matters, RFE presents the problem in a balanced way. It contrasts with the one-sided view contained in the Polish press. RFE treated Monsignor CALCAROLI's recent mission to Poland in a straightforward fashion. RFE explained the issues involved, pointing to regime tactics to undermine the Church and separate the Polish Episcopate from the Vatican. RFE has also broadcast critical but objective assessments of the Church problem in Poland. KUSIEBOWSKI's article in Die Wurche, which was reported at length, is an example.

RFE has also dealt openly with the sensitive but important problem of anti-Semitism. This problem is only hinted at in the Polish press. The February 25 discussion "Jews—About Us and Ourselves" gave mature treatment to an extremely complicated problem in Poland.

For a better understanding of international developments both inside and outside the Communist world, RFE is helpful to the listener. The Polish press reported the meeting of European Communist Party representatives in Warsaw last February but typically did not explain the issues involved. RFE, however, provided such information. In fact the meeting was announced on RFE before the Polish press carried it. Through RFE the listener can keep up more fully with international affairs than he can by relying on the Polish press.

Reports of scandals, like that in the Ministry of Health, draw attention to the seamy side of life. Gossipy items are of course fascinating to the Polish listener.
Some small criticisms of broadcasts should be noted. One specific level: a) in referring to the VietCong, the word "partyzanci" is used. This evokes the sympathies of the Poles. It is suggested that the term VietCong be used instead. b) The program "o szostej dzieniac" might better concentrate on playing records than on the wonderful fan letters received from Poland. c) Interrupting records to insert commentaries is annoying. It is preferable to play the record out and then start with commentaries.

On a more general level, the discerning audience is inevitably going to find cause for criticism in any systematic program to provide information and analysis to a population that is deprived of the free flow of ideas and information, or is fed "managed" news. Some of the criticisms we have heard of RFE reflect this, but do not, in our opinion, add up to reasons for retrenching or representing the RFE "mission to Poland." On the contrary, we believe that the results of our program and script analysis, and of conversations with varied representatives of the Polish audience, add up to a vote of confidence for RFE broadcasts to Poland. We should remember that by stimulating thought and criticism, even when some of this criticism is directed back at RFE, the broadcasts are at the same time stimulating Poles to think critically about the extent to which they are informed, or misinformed, by their own media. The Polish Government's sensitivity and the considerable attention it devotes to RFE testify to the effectiveness of RFE.

GRONOWSKI

CONFIDENTIAL: Detailed working notes prepared by Embassy officers on monitored RFE programs.
Detailed working notes prepared by Embassy officers on monitored RTE programs:

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<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Subject and Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>1315</td>
<td>7160</td>
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<td>3/13</td>
<td>21:00</td>
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<td>3/13</td>
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<td>3/13 after</td>
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<td>3/13</td>
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<td>779</td>
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<td>3/12</td>
<td>23:00</td>
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- Too much interference to understand broadcast.
- Program on Steinbeck's trip to Vietnam; discussion of his reply to attacks on him in Komsomolskaya Pravda. Reception poor. Program was interesting, however, in view of the considerable space recently devoted by Polish press to Steinbeck and his trip, program may be considered timely and apt. His defense seemed apt and concrete, a good antidote to the one-sided presentation of the Polish press.
- News. Commentary on controversy at Warsaw University and case of Michnik in particular. Commentary on changes in Yugoslav Party. Interview with Winzer on his experience in Soviet labor camps. The latter was especially good by virtue of its graphic and concrete reminder that these camps continue to exist and Poles are still in them. Announcer promised that names of such Poles would be read out in subsequent broadcasts. I am told that this series of broadcasts has aroused considerable interest in Poland.
- Program of American pop records. Reception good.
- Program on Stangl. Good reception, very clear. Interview with Wiegenthal in Vienna, who was instrumental in tracking down Stangl (as well as other Nazi criminals in the past). Said he was glad to be speaking Polish, something he rarely did nowadays (his Polish sounded perfectly convincing to me). He detailed Stangl's war time activities, the circumstances leading up to his apprehension in Brazil and gave some reflections on the purpose of bringing such people to book, even though war over twenty years ago. (His reasoning was that trials, though they don't expiate the crime, are a constant reminder of...
what happened, they put a whole generation in Germany on the defensive and served as the most "effective brake we have" on possible resurgence of Nazi movements. It will be necessary to run down Nazis as long as any of the people directly or indirectly responsible are alive.) This program was most interesting, and should have appealed to all listeners, whatever their political views as supplementing what has so far appeared in the Polish press. (Wiesenthal acknowledged that he was unlikely to get any credit in the Polish press.) One important aim of the program appeared to be to show that the Polish regime has no monopoly on the desire to bring war criminals to book. However, the collective guilt thesis that Wiesenthal developed has certain anti-German overtones. I think we should examine text of the broadcast carefully when it comes in with this in mind.

1/2 2230 719
Program of records. Good reception.

1/12 2245 719
Lecture on health. This program was a bore. Perhaps it was intended for people in the countryside, but I doubt whether they would be interested.

2/12 2303 719
News. This was a particularly good and intelligent coverage of day's news, with special emphasis on items likely to be of interest in Poland. Main news items covered were: French elections (announcer mentioned that several Government ministers defected with help of Communists); defection of Stalin's daughter (Polish press next day reprinted TASS item which was referred to in broadcast, saying that she was abroad and it was her own business how long she stayed there); Vietnam (perfectly factual); new anti-Soviet demonstrations in Tokyo; new President of Indonesia; Mrs. Gandhi re-elected premier of India; power struggle in
3/13 1800

I was looking for a commentary on Ulbricht, but didn’t find one. Must be a lot of material on Ulbricht "on Poland" which could be used.

* * * *

3/13 2115 719

Commentary on defection of Svetlana Stalin. Gave details of her life and her defection (according to accounts in British press). Particularly timely. Subject is of great current interest in Poland. Commentary on Sukarno. Commentary on Polish Days in Vienna. Commentary on film director Skolikowski, a propos of a Belgian press article. Too short to be of much interest. Broadcast from London: English lords open their castles to the public. (A peculiar subject, not likely to be of much interest here. No real hint in program as to why this subject was chosen.) Report on London Olympia show. Concentrated on gadgets. Of marginal interest. (If comparison with Polish national spring show at Poznan was implied, this was not very clear.)

3/13 2150 719

Review of European sports events. (Nothing about Poles.)

3/13 2200 719

News. French elections; new Indian Government; U.S. disarmament head Foster in Rome for talks on non-proliferation treaty (useful item in that it showed that FRG is not only country raising questions about it as implied in Polish press); U.S. hits North Vietnamese battalion in South Vietnam (not the type of report on Vietnam which appears in Polish press); Svetlana Stalin; West Berlin elections (communists gained no seats in Berlin Senate); Romanian technical delegation in Britain; Worker in U.S. launches fund raising campaign (item designed to show that Worker is in financial difficulties because of low circulation); Jaroszowicza going to Moscow; houses in Sandomierz threatened by landslide.
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<td>3/13 2215</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>Review of Western press commentary on Svetlana Stalin's defection, mainly from New York Times and Le Monde. Point of these commentaries was U.S. delicacy in not wanting to give offense to Kremlin at time of growing detente by having Svetlana go directly to U.S. Review of Neue Zurcher Zeitung article on decision of writer Leopold Tyrmand not to return to Poland. This item would be of particular interest to Polish intellectuals. It was presented in factual way, as seen through eyes of Swiss press.</td>
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(General comment: Since this was day before Ulbricht visit, it seems strange that there was no mention of this in news broadcast or following commentary. Admittedly, I took in only about an hour and a half of the broadcasts, but seems to me they should have been hitting this hard.)

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3/22 2105 700 kc on BC band Reception excellent. News broadcast. The news was delivered in a good objective style. Particularly noteworthy were two items: 1) the Red Guard item included a quote of Izvestiya regarding the arrest of officials in Canton; 2) the value of Nixon's talks in Romania was emphasized, without making any explicit reference to the Poles' refusal to admit Nixon. I think the ordinary Pole would be pleased to be left to his own conclusion after the blatant point-making of the local press.

3/22 2120 700 kc on BC band Panorama News. Two items on Faster celebrations in Rome and London. Again good that no explicit moral was drawn. 1) The report on the Gypsy Hoth passing Cape Horn was exciting, in marked contrast to the Polish reportage of the same event. Torret Canon story. I though the emphasis on the owners' tremendous loss in dollars was a bit crass. No comment on the other items.
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<tr>
<td>3/22 2200</td>
<td>7250 kc</td>
<td>Reception excellent. Dziennik Radiowy. Here and elsewhere the VC were referred to as &quot;partyzanci&quot; in keeping with Polish press practice. I think this is ill-advised. The word is too evocative in the Polish mind and has not one unfavorable or even neutral connotation that I know of.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/22 2220</td>
<td>6160 kc</td>
<td>Reception poor, often blocked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/23 1205</td>
<td>11810 kc</td>
<td>Reception good. News broadcast. Item on Russian spy ring was especially good, since the Polish press ignored it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/23 1210</td>
<td>25 M band</td>
<td>Panorama Data. Same program as yesterday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/23 1225</td>
<td>11810 kc</td>
<td>Musical dedication program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23 1255</td>
<td>11810 kc</td>
<td>Interference blocked signal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23 1815</td>
<td>5650 kc</td>
<td>Better reception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23 2250</td>
<td>700 kc</td>
<td>Good reception. Technika Dzis i Jutro. Interesting talk on development of air safety measures in U.S. Item on U.S. Far East policy from Washington correspondent. Balanced, but again the &quot;partyzanci&quot;, this time in Thailand. Aside from the content, the reasonable and fair style of the reportage is in good contrast to the biased and sarcastic tone of the Polish press.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/23 2300</td>
<td>700 kc</td>
<td>News. East Germany referred to as &quot;East Germany&quot;, rather than &quot;GDR.&quot; This is tendentious, although I can see some good reasons for doing it. I don't think it makes a good impression on the Poles. Gossip items from Warsaw on officials, professors, protests and so on, naming names. I would think this would be very fascinating to the Poles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/24 1610</td>
<td>700 kc</td>
<td>O szostej dziesiec. The panel of a record request program discusses their wonderful fans back in Poland and all the nice letters they get. It is hard to see that this program represents money's worth when they're not playing records.</td>
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Reporting Officers: Globel/RFOber,Jr./NTerrell:jpk 4/27/67