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Add-on

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

10 October 1979

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR: DAVID AARON

FROM: PAUL B. HENZE 

SUBJECT: BBC Cuts

REFERENCE: Your Note on Prof. Breitrose's Letter
(TAB A)

As you will see from the attached package, the subject came up the week before last at a Radio Working Group meeting I called to review several current questions. As a result we prepared the package at TAB B that went to Zbig on 4 October. His reaction was not to involve the President but let Vance take up the issue with Lord Carrington. ICA sent a package to State with this request on 9 October--copy attached at TAB C.

The issue is serious. BBC's prestige around the world is enormous and serves our common cause well, not simply British interests. BBC is the main foreign voice heard in Iran (except for the Soviets' clandestine broadcasts) and VOA will have to broadcast in Persian for years before it has a chance of gaining an audience comparable to BBC's. BBC is the only significant foreign broadcaster to Somalia and its evening broadcasts there are a national institution. There are numerous other examples of BBC effectiveness. There is a great cry being raised in many quarters about threatened BBC cuts. If Vance gets nowhere with Lord Carrington, we should still consider additional actions from the USG.

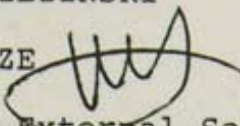
Atts: TABs A-C

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ACTION

October 4, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
FROM: PAUL B. HENZE 
SUBJECT: Cuts in BBC External Service

At the Radio Working Group Meeting I held last Friday, VOA raised the problem of cuts in BBC's external services which Mrs. Thatcher's economy campaign is calling for. There was unanimous agreement that these would have an effect, no matter which options for cuts might be selected, out of all proportion to the money saved and would be damaging to the entire Free World information effort. Ambassador Brewster has already weighed in with the British on this issue. BBC has asked for VOA help and Brewster has recommended additional U.S. government representation beyond those he has already made to the FCO.

VOA/ICA suggest a Presidential appeal to Mrs. Thatcher. State endorses this idea, though George Vest has recommended a concurrent appeal by Vance to the Foreign Secretary as well--or an appeal at this level in any event if the President does not see fit to communicate with Mrs. Thatcher on this matter. Bill Griffith has also reviewed this question, about which he feels strongly, and drafted the proposed message from the President to the Prime Minister. An alternative would be the oral talking points proposed by Charlie Bray.

Attached are USICA's memorandum to you (Tab B) with talking points attached and a brief memorandum from you to the President transmitting the written message (Tab I).

The problem of the proposed BBC cuts has been attracting a good deal of attention in the press (NYT editorial, 3 October). Just for your background I also attach a memo I received yesterday from Steve Simmons of the Domestic Staff who heard a good deal about it at a recent conference in London and a letter to David Aaron from Professor Henry Breitrose of Stanford. (Tab C)

Attachments

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

SUBJECT: Threatened Cuts in BBC External Services

During a recent interagency review of foreign broadcasting issues, the damage that could be done by a drastic cut in the BBC's prestigious external services was raised. Ambassador Brewster has taken a strong stand against the cut with the FCO. State and USICA have recommended that you send a short message to Mrs. Thatcher on the problem. Giving the enormous impact of BBC in most parts of the world and the fact that it broadcasts to many areas where we do not, curtailing its overseas services would have a negative effect on Free World information efforts out of all proportion to the money saved. It would be a loss which VOA and broadcasting services of our other European allies could not easily make up.

RECOMMENDATION

That you authorize cabling of this message to Ambassador Brewster for delivery to the Prime Minister.

APPROVE _____

DISAPPROVE _____

PROPOSED MESSAGE TO MRS. THATCHER

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Although I certainly do not want to interfere in your economizing and budget-cutting measures, for I'm sure that you feel as strongly in principle about their necessity as I do, I would like, as a long-time friend and ally of Great Britain, to express to you privately and informally my personal concern about the foreign policy implications, for us both and for the Alliance, of the prospect of severe cuts in the BBC's foreign language service.

We have long regarded the BBC's foreign-language broadcasts as the oldest and one of the most essential instruments to get all the truth to those who need it and cannot get it so well elsewhere. I feel the same about Voice of America, and I have always regarded VOA and the BBC as an allied effort in common struggle.

It is because we have learned so much from it, and from Great Britain, about how to carry on such broadcasts objectively, professionally, and therefore with maximum effect, that I would like to stress how much we view these BBC broadcasts as one of the essential instruments of the Alliance. At a time when we are all trying to strengthen our efforts in the face of rising challenges, I would like to express my hope that you will be able to see your way clear to keep this instrument as effective as it so long has been.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O.12958, Sec.3.6

PER 3/15/99 XSL/HV RE XLC-48-146
BY J NARS. DATE 3/23/99



**International
Communication
Agency**

United States of America
Washington, D.C. 20547

Office of the Director

42C

October 4, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable
Zbigniew Brzezinski
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
The White House

FROM: Charles W. Bray III *CB*
Acting Director

SUBJECT: BBC Cuts

The BBC faces a 25% cut in its foreign broadcasting as part of Mrs. Thatcher's determination to reduce British Government public expenditures across the board except for defense and police. While it has not yet been finally determined precisely where the cuts in the BBC External Services (which are financed by a Foreign Office grant-in-aid) will be made, any one of the three options being considered would constitute a major and significant diminution in the Free World international broadcasting effort, directed in part to offset and counter the tremendous radio propaganda campaign of the Soviet Union and its allies. (The three options are outlined in Tab A.)

VOA and BBC have recently discussed the implication of the BBC cuts. BBC has approached our Embassy in London for USG support against the cuts, and Ambassador Brewster agrees we should help -- beyond the informal approach to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) he has already made -- emphasizing to HMG how detrimentally these BBC cuts would, in our view, affect Western public diplomacy efforts, especially in those parts of the world where the BBC has been particularly effective. (See the commendable editorial on this subject in The New York Times, October 3, Tab B.)

The approach, we believe, should be made on the highest political level, since the cut is primarily a political decision and cannot be blunted by the FCO without the Prime Minister's approval. We should point out that while we obviously do not wish to interfere in British domestic affairs, as allies and friends we feel it appropriate to express our concern regarding the damage the cuts would do to our mutual public diplomacy interests in keeping the world informed about the true nature of events and about our aims and policies.

The BBC has been in the vanguard of this effort for almost 50 years. Its effectiveness has been proved over and over again. VOA has largely molded its efforts on the BBC model, and the two work successfully as partners, especially in those areas of the world where other methods of communication are either denied by governments, ineffective or unavailable.

Recommendation:

That the President informally contact Mrs. Thatcher and point out our concern about the BBC cuts and the negative implications of these cuts on our joint worldwide public diplomacy efforts (suggested talking points attached as Tab C). The HMG White Paper, which will define the cuts in public expenditures, is scheduled to be issued before the end of this month. It may be easier for Mrs. Thatcher to respond favorably to our concerns about BBC if the final decisions have not already been announced and cast in concrete. Thus an early approach is advised.

cc: NSC - Mr. Henze
STATE:EUR - Mr. Vest

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TAB A

BBC CUTS

25% of foreign language programming:

Options:

1. Western European Services including Finnish, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, German, Greek and Turkish; African Services including Hausa, Swahili and Somali.

2. All Asian Services except Arabic, including Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Nepali, Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Malay and Indonesian.

3. Western European Services (as above) plus Arabic.

Note: The BBC World Service (in English), the Eastern European and Russian broadcasts as well as the technical audibility of the remaining BBC programs are not to be affected by the BBC cuts, the FCO determined.

Omitted, for reason of copyright:

Cutting of editorial from *New York Times*, 3 October 1979
“Muting the BBC”

Described suggestions that UK Government intended to cut BBC global coverage as “unhappy news”, given the BBC’s authority and wide range of listeners in states with repressive governments. *Voice of America* would have to do more, while Britain would be “jamming its own voice”. “Mrs. Thatcher should reconsider”.

SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

- We obviously don't wish to interfere in HMG's economizing measures and budget-cutting efforts, but we believe that, as friends and allies, we may and should express our concern regarding the implications for our mutual foreign policy interests, if there were severe cuts in BBC's vernacular language programming.
- We, along with much of the rest of the world, have regarded the BBC as an outstanding public diplomacy medium for Great Britain and all it has stood for during the past 40-50 years.
- The BBC and our Voice of America together have carried out a singularly effective effort to keep the world informed about the true nature of events and about the aims and policies of our democratic societies.
- The BBC and VOA have, as partners, been particularly concentrated on those areas of the world where other methods of communication are either denied by governments, ineffective, or unavailable. BBC cuts would be especially damaging in our joint efforts to offset and counter the worldwide propaganda of Radio Moscow and its puppets (Havana, Prague, East Berlin).

As I understand it, the BBC has been through the board's anti-inflation move by which the board has decided they must deal with it if the BBC is getting a lot across the board under pressure and it would seem that services so vital, you know the BBC has been the world's in other areas. This is, of course, the BBC's role in other areas and our best approach may be to try to get it, however, in light of the fact that the BBC is the only one and the attached letter, I think you will find it a brief look into you.

Thanks.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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October 3, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: PAUL HENZE
FROM: STEVE SIMMONS *Stm*
SUBJECT: Cutback in BBC External Services Program

Attached please find a letter to Dave Aaron concerning a proposed cutback in the budget of BBC's external services program, from the Chairman of the Department of Communication at Stanford University, Henry Breitrose. You may have received a copy of this already, but since this appears to fall in your bailiwick I wanted to make sure that you get it.

As you know, I was at the London Conference of the IIC which Breitrose refers to, and I can tell you that the BBC personnel I met were very concerned about the impending cutback in their external services budget. They stated that this cutback should be of concern to the United States because:

- for minimal dollars, the external services program has been a foreign policy success for the West.
- the external services program reaches a number of areas our radio services do not cover.
- we may have to increase our ICA budget to ensure that services still reach the areas that were covered by the BBC (they maintain that a 10% cutback in funds would result in a 25% cutback in service.)
- the external services are involved in "monitoring" for us which would also have to be cut back.

As I understand it, the 10% cut is part of an across the board anti-inflation move by Prime Minister Thatcher (one question they must deal with is if the BBC is getting a 10% across the board budget decrease and it considers the external services so vital, why does the BBC not make the needed cuts in other areas?) This is, of course, an internal British matter, and our best approach may be to stay totally away from it. However, in light of the discussion I heard at the Conference, and the attached letter, I thought the issue at least merited a brief look from you.

Thanks.

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September 25, 1979

Mr. David Aaron
Deputy Assistant to the
President for National Security
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear David:

Why is it that whenever I go to Europe it results in a letter to you about America abroad?

In this case, though, my purpose is to call your attention to the projected reductions in the BBC's vernacular foreign language service. As you may know, the External Service of the BBC is supported by a British government subvention together with some funds from the U.S. to support the foreign broadcast monitoring service, which results in the FBIS volumes. Mrs. Thatcher has proposed and seems bent on carrying out a series of spending cuts which would pretty well destroy BBC broadcasts to a great number of countries in their own language.

My concern, quite frankly is that there are precious few reliable and credible sources of information about world events and, indeed, internal events in many parts of the globe. Even though some alternative sources may be available, such as Deutsche Welle and VOA, the BBC has the infinitely valuable asset of some 40 years of credibility, and it would be a great loss if this could not be maintained.

I don't know what, if any leverage the U.S. has in such matters, but as a professional in the communications area, I would urge that some serious thought be given to the impact of losing BBC's external vernacular services to the U.S. national interest.

Best regards,

Henry Breitrose
Professor and Chairman

cc: Steve Simmons, Domestic Policy Staff, White House