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**WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE
NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT
IN
1988-1990**

Yerevan
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1988-1990.**

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ACRONYMS

AFP	Agence France Presse
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEU	Central European University
CMIA	Caucasus Media Institute Archives
CPSS	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NKAO	Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NSC	National Security Council
OSA	Open Society Archives
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
TASS	Soviet Telegraph Agency
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VOA	Voice of America

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INTRODUCTION

*For Azerbaijan the issue of Karabakh is a matter of ambition,
for Armenians of Karabakh it is a matter of life and death*

Andrey Sakharov
Nobel Prize winner

The coverage of an interethnic conflict by mass media has a dynamics of its own that constantly affects developments within the actual conflict, either positively or negatively. In the modern world, it is by no means surprising that media coverage of a conflict should impact events on the ground. The role of the media industry, especially in countries where multiethnic populations are governed by authoritarian political systems, is undoubtedly very complicated. There are well documented cases when violence was either provoked by media publications or broadcasts, or came as a byproduct of reports streaming out of the region of conflict.

Unfortunately, few things in our world are as newsworthy as war and conflict. Analysis of the media coverage of the war in Iraq shows that media both are important and are perceived as an important player in conflicts and wars. The employment of special reporting techniques used to relay information about the conflict, particularly under the watchful conditions of the State's 'Argus eye,' validates the importance of researching and evaluating media reports.

The role played by mass media in interethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union has been researched very little. Meanwhile such research could be very valuable in terms of shedding light on the use of news media as a tool for shaping public opinion. Important lessons are to be learned from cases when media reports from post-Soviet conflict zones provoked new waves of escalation and violence.

Although interesting studies of the media coverage of ethnic conflicts and wars saw light in recent years, most of them focus on the Balkan case.¹ Of the numerous publications about Nagorno-Karabakh, only a few touch on the media coverage of the conflict. So far, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been reviewed from various perspectives, including history, law and conflict resolution. One recent study even regards the conflict as a psychological war in which historical

1 I would like to thank my colleague Mark Grigoryan for providing some books and references on the topic such as: McCormack, Gillian (ed.). *Media and Conflict in Transcaucasia*. Düsseldorf, 1999; Thomson, Mark. *Forging War*. Luton: 1999; Mursaliev, Azer. "Azerbaijan in the Russian Press (1988-2000). Subjective View of the Object". *Russia and Azerbaijan: Societies and States*. Ed. Dmitri E. Furman Moscow: 2001, pp. 478-489; (in Russian) Jusić, Tarik. "Media Policies and the Settlement of Ethnic Conflicts". *Managing Multiethnic Local Communities in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia*. Ed. Nenad Dimitrijević, Budapest: LGI Books, 2000, pp. 231-249.

arguments were used to corroborate the parties' points of view.²

One of the reasons why the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh deserves further research is that had represented one of the first major challenges to Soviet ethnic policy. As soon as the conflict emerged, it revealed both lingering Stalinist legacies and the overall deficiency of the Soviet administrative system, stemming from a vulnerable political infrastructure and general inability to deal with conflict.

For the purposes of this study, it is essential to understand the nature of interethnic relations in the former USSR and ethnic mobilizations on its territories, leading to the disintegration of the USSR. We must realize that Soviet media coverage of ethnic conflicts was an integral part of the Soviet conflict resolution policy.

This study follows Western media reports at the first stage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I tried to show how the parties in conflict were presented by the media, and to analyze both the Soviet and the Western propaganda-and-counterpropaganda discourses about the conflict. For this purpose, I also studied the techniques used by Soviet mass media while reporting news that concerned the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which was the first popular movement inside Soviet borders.

The method used here to study Western media coverage of the Karabakh conflict was content analysis of Western articles, mainly ones from US media, showing the unfolding of the first violent ethnic conflict in the Soviet Union. Chronologically, the study covers sample publications and broadcasts from the early 1988 until 1990. Selected publications from American and European print media, and printed reports of RFE broadcasts, were subjected to qualitative analysis. All printed media reports, news reports and analytical articles in the sample were subjected to content analysis, and the results were presented against a historical background.

Another important aspect of the study was to reveal the keywords and phrases most commonly used to describe the parties in conflict, as well as popular clichés and stereotypes reflected in Western and Soviet media samples.

One of the objects of this study has been the interplay between Soviet and Western mass media with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. From the very beginning of the conflict, the peculiarities of a totalitarian system were clearly manifest in the way the Soviets rigidly controlled all media publications on the topic, and the way they reacted to Western «interventions». In Communist society, control over mass media had two main goals: to ensure that the media publish the right things and to make sure they do not publish any wrong things that contradict official propaganda. The two tasks were so closely interlocked

2 Lisichkin, V and L. Shelepin. *Third Informational-Psychological World War*. Moscow: 1994, p. 40.

that they were of equal importance for Communist propaganda. The task of supervising the mass media could not be narrowed down to one of censorship alone, as is the case in dictatorships or countries with a different social order.³

The relative peace of interethnic relations within the history of the Soviet Union was always secured by the Soviet Communist Party's propaganda of 'internationalism' and a policy of suppressing manifestations that had nationalistic aspirations. But this does not imply that interethnic problems were resolved. Most of the festering ethnic conflicts and ethnic animosities were frozen for a while, as a direct result of being under the strict control of Soviet power structures such as the KGB.

The authoritarian Soviet regime created a facade of harmonious interethnic relationships and then went to great lengths to conceal the root causes of ethnic conflicts and problems surrounding ethnic concerns. The rosy image of interethnic relations created in the oeuvre of Soviet scholars prevailed for a long time after the collapse of the USSR.⁴ As far as Soviet scholars were concerned, the problem of ethnic nationalism in the USSR had been resolved once and for all. The same ideological and psychological trends ran rampant within the Soviet mass media.

As Tashkent-based researcher F. Muminova wrote, "...journalism is huge instrument of forming appropriate national identity and trough it means for creating of new statehood. If journalists serve to state apparatus and are not independent, thus the world of values and symbols created by them help the leaders to establish in the society wondered for them national identity, which could be non-adequate to the real identity."⁵

The sources for this study were found in the superbly organized Open Society Archives based at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary. My main sources were reports from print media and printed versions of broadcast news from the archives of *RFE/RL*.

Part 1 of the book provides a general outline of the situation with information and propaganda warfare during the Cold War. This outline is necessary as the background for the situation with media coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in its first stage. Part 1 opens with a chapter on information and propaganda warfare and ends with a description of the Cold War discourse over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The necessity for such a structure came

from the need to describe the atmosphere of psychological and informational warfare between the Eastern and Western blocks at the inception of the popular movements in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Part 2 contains a brief historical survey, a chronological description, and an analysis of conflict dynamics in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988-1990. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the movement for reuniting the Armenian enclave with Armenia created big cracks in the Great Wall of the Soviet system.

Part 3 focuses on the propaganda surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, specifically, the methods and tactics employed in the media coverage of the conflict within the context of Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* policies. With very few exceptions, from the very start of the conflict, Soviet print and electronic media reports of events on the other side of the Caucasus mountain range were brimming with stereotypes and ideological clichés.

Part 4 reveals the stereotypes used by Western media to report about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These stereotypes were analyzed here against a political background of the final stages of the Cold War and 'the velvet revolutions' in Eastern Europe.

Finally, Part 5 shows how propaganda strategies developed by the ideological rivals during the Cold War were reflected in the media coverage of events in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Reports of those dramatic developments were very often based on the standard formulae of Cold War propaganda. The Cold War was, amongst other things, an ongoing propaganda war, so it was natural that both superpowers used propaganda strategies as a means of non-violent warfare. Intensive propaganda campaigns were directed and addressed to the masses, both inside and outside the Eastern and Western blocks. The Soviet and Western governments funded printed media and radio broadcasting in order to win over the support of people living in the opposing camp. The US government funded *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* to broadcast inside the borders of the Soviet block. The Soviets, in turn, funded Communist media in the West to advocate their cause. The situation changed drastically after Mikhail Gorbachev launched a limited liberalization policy that also touched the sphere of the media.

The Appendices contain some of the sources used in the study, selected in a way to produce an overall impression of Western perceptions of the Armenian popular movement. The appended documents include excerpts from US Congressional debates, declassified CIA documents, US Senate and European Parliament resolutions, and print media reports. Photos show those banners and slogans from rallies held in Yerevan in 1988-1989 that criticize Soviet media coverage of the Armenian popular movement. Several Soviet and Western cartoons were also included in the Appendices.

3 Burek, Antony. *How the Communist press works*. London: Pal Mall Press, 1964, p. 113.

4 Chugrov, Sergei. "Ideological Stereotypes and Political Myths: the Empire Strikes Back". *The Fall of the Soviet Empire*. Ed. Anne de Tinguy. East European Monographs, No. CDLXXXI. New York: Boulder, Colombia University Press, 1997, p. 310.

5 Muminova, Fatima. "National Identity, Mentality and Mass Media". *Central Asia and Caucasus*, No. 5(23), Stockholm: 2002, p. 159.

The Caucasus being a small and remote region, the first reports about developments in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in both Soviet and Western media were mostly informative, containing background information on the region, its population, history, religions and ethnic groups. The Soviet coverage was also brimming with propaganda based on the Leninist principles of 'ethnic brotherhood' and 'internationalism.' Besides, Soviet journalism had no prior experience of reporting ethnic conflict inside the Soviet borders, and was squeezed in the stiff framework of government propaganda and ideology.

Soviet and Western media reports served both informative and propagandistic functions, as a result they sometimes clashed with each other. As a rule, Soviet reports on the conflict were scrupulously reviewed and heavily censored. Information was limited to a minimum needed for a basic understanding of the situation in the conflict zone; disinformation was also practiced. The Soviet media were viewed as a "powerful weapon of the Party".⁶ The fact that the Communist Party had full control over the Soviet media network made life very difficult for foreign media trying to report events happening in the USSR.

The local Armenian and Azerbaijani media reacted quickly to the initial stages of the conflict by launching a war of their own. At the first stage of the conflict, this was mostly a 'war of histories': media publications of that time manipulated historical facts and ongoing events in a way that led to further escalation of interethnic tensions.

From the first stages of the conflict, both parties gave rise to distorted images of the enemy, creating stereotypes based on historical references and age-old memories, thus intensifying the hostility and intolerance between conflicting sides. Both local and foreign media were either directly or indirectly involved in escalating the hostile discourse, thus fuelling hostilities on the ground.

Western mass media coverage of the conflict was clearly based on existing Western stereotypes about the Soviet system and a simplistic vision of the East in general and the Eastern block in particular. Even after the break-up of the USSR, Western media coverage of events in the Caucasus was perceptibly flawed. As Thomas Goltz put it, "the media did not cover enough. Journalists affiliated with major newspapers suffer from 'Moscowitis,' for they continue to look at the former Soviet Union from Moscow or other world capital cities."⁷ This Western representation and perception of the Oriental world is a phenomenon that Edward Said referred to as 'Orientalism'.⁸ According to Said, "one aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the

media resources have forced information into more standardized mold. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping intensified the hold of the ninetieth century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient."⁹

Last but not least, an important objective of this study was to identify the techniques used by Western and Soviet mass media for propaganda purposes, to analyze the impact of this propaganda, and to examine the peculiarities of propaganda and counterpropaganda with respect to Nagorno-Karabakh within the context of the Cold War.

6 Speech by V. Afanasyev, Editor-in-Chief of *Pravda*, given at a Communist Party Assembly. *Pravda*, September 27, 1989.

7 Goltz, Thomas. "A View From the Front: Coverage of the Post-Soviet Caucasus". *Contemporary Caucasus Newsletter*. The Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Issue 7, winter 1998-1999, p. 24.

8 Said, Edward W. *Orientalism. Western Conception of the Orient*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

9 Ibid. p. 26.

PART I

Glasnost has given people fetishes of possible symbolic value, but no real content.

Françoise Thom

THE 'WAR OF ANTENNAS': INFORMATION WARFARE BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST TOWARDS THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War between the East and the West involved information warfare. Since the end of WWII, and throughout the Cold War, negative images of the ideological rivals, the East and the West, prevailed in the mass media. Most of the time, those images reflected the respective governments' foreign policies: officially in the Soviet Union, where the press was closely tied to government and Communist party structures, and indirectly in the United States, where the media, in spite of their presumed adversarial role, were largely sympathetic to government policies, and especially foreign policies.¹

The frontlines of the Cold War reserved a special role for radio broadcasts, and both Superpowers spent enormous amounts of money on propaganda and counter-propaganda that often relied on *hate speech* and clichés. The mission of Western radio broadcasts was auxiliary but not marginal, as far as their involvement in upsetting the Communist system. Two Western radio stations, *the Voice of America (VOA)* and *Radio Liberty (RL)*, played very important roles and had clearly defined missions as the vanguards of ideological and informational warfare against the Communist block. "The main task of *VOA* was to explain [to the] Soviet people how good it is to live in the U.S., while *RL* had to send messages to Soviet audiences showing how bad was to live in the USSR."²

Since the late 1940's, the Washington-based *VOA* and the U.S.-sponsored European stations, *RFE* and *RL*³, had been the principal tools of Western propaganda and information dissemination, presenting a great challenge for the Soviet ideological isolation beyond the Iron Curtain.

1 Dennis, Everette E., George Gerbner and Yassen N. Zassoursky. *Beyond the Cold War: Soviet and American Media Images*. London-New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991, p. X.

2 Hovhannisyan, Eduard. "Radio Station Liberty Yesterday and Today". *Golos Armeni*, Yerevan, March 23, 2003. The author is ex-director of Armenian programs on RFE/RL.

3 Launched separately, the two stations merged in 1976 to become Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Both stations were originally set up by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency as part of its covert propaganda operations in early 1950s. Since 1971, the merged radio station has claimed to have severed all links with the CIA and is funded and supervised directly by the U.S. Congress.

A quote from the speech made by *RFE/RL* Chairman C. Jackson at the opening of the radio station was a favorite of the Soviet media, used "to unveil" the true mission of Western radio stations. Jackson had said: "The radio station is a service in the psychological war. It was founded to provoke internal disorders in the countries to which it broadcasts...."⁴

To meet the challenge, Moscow chose a policy of jamming the Western broadcasts, spending enormous amounts of money to this end. According to Steve Salerno, the funding disparity was most noticeable in the obvious superiority of Moscow's hardware. The Kremlin has about 300 transmitters scattered throughout the USSR and Bulgaria, while *VOA* had about half as many. As to antenna power, the Soviets had more than 100 million Watts available to them, out-powering the U.S. by a ration of almost 4 to 1. Moscow's advantages were no less striking when it came to foreign languages. *VOA* broadcast in 43 languages; the Soviets, in 81.⁵ In order to combat the barrage of Soviet jamming and keep the Soviet audiences supplied with alternative news, all three Western stations practiced broadcasting at unpredictable times or at several frequencies at once.

Between 1980 and 1987, the jamming of *BBC* and *VOA* broadcasts was further intensified due to the rise of the *Solidarity* movement in Poland. Special attention was paid to jamming *RFE/RL*. Even before the suspension of Soviet jamming against the *BBC* and the *VOA*, *RFE/RL* had been the target of more than 70 percent of all Soviet jamming.⁶ In turn, the West continued to strengthen information penetration beyond the borders of a now, collapsing Soviet Union. Before the Soviets ceased jamming *RFE/RL* in June 1987, the United States and Israel signed an agreement to construct a U.S. short-wave relay station in Israel to strengthen *RL*'s airing range. A joint project of the Board for International Broadcasting and United States Information Agency, the relay station consisted of sixteen 500-kilowatt transmitters, enabling the *VOA* and *RFE/RL* to penetrate the massive Soviet jamming and send a much stronger signal into the Western parts of the USSR, reaching into Central Asia's Muslim-populated areas. After the Soviet Union halted its jamming of the *BBC* and *VOA* broadcasts in 1987, the radios considered it imperative to expand their facilities.⁷

Despite all Soviet efforts, the Western radio programs enjoyed great popularity in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. As a rule, the programming focused on domestic affairs of the Soviet countries, featuring news and cultural affairs not covered by official media.⁸ Serge Schmemmann wrote that "while the *BBC*, *VOA* and *Deutsche Welle*, as well as other Western stations, concentrated on

4 *Argomenti i Fatti*, No. 7, April 23-29, 1988.

5 Salerno, Steve. "Spreading Freedom's Word". *The American Legion Magazine*, July 1987.

6 Sosin, Gene. *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 201.

7 Ibid.

8 Nicols, John Spicer. "Wasting the Propaganda Dollar". *Foreign Policy*, October 1984, p. 30.

projecting their 'home' society and the policies of their respective Governments, *RFE/RL* primarily focuses on events in the world of local and regional concerns to a Soviet and Eastern European audience. In short, the station not only broadcasted to, but also about, the Communist world, a form of 'cross reporting' with crucial political importance."⁹

Some scholars believe that the Cold War was largely a communication phenomenon wherein the "war" was carried out in activities variously called 'public information', 'propaganda', or 'disinformation', depending on one's ideology or interpretation.¹⁰

The Soviets constantly accused the West of 'subversive activities'. One Soviet Cold War publication explains which methods Western military intelligence bodies such as the CIA and the Pentagon were allegedly using to wage 'information warfare' against the USSR: "Those methods are: disinformation, distortion of facts, political demagoguery, creation of various myths, dissemination of negative information, and obfuscation of people's minds with fears and suspicions."¹¹

Another Soviet author wrote that Soviet allegations used to prove the illegality of the actions of *RFE/RL* were almost equally applicable to other radio centers in the West, which also engaged in instigative and subversive propaganda against the USSR and Eastern Europe.¹²

One of the main principles of the United States' Cold War strategy was responding to self-determination movements worldwide and avoiding actions that could lead to military confrontation with the Soviet Union. Every decision to support a self-determination movement was based on its potential input in the worldwide struggle against the Soviet Union.¹³ Within the context of the Cold War, the Soviets used similar tactics to challenge American involvement or control over a region or country.

On the eve of the popular movement for the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, the Soviet media reaction to Western media broadcasts and publications is well illustrated in the following extract from *Argumenti i Fakti*, a popular Soviet weekly that sold several million copies:

"On the orders of the special services, RL/RFE is constantly changing its tactics, using sophisticated means and methods of exerting a hostile ideological influence. In the present-day situation, together with the old, outmoded calls for the kindling of discord between nations, incitement to religious fanaticism,

and so forth, the RFE/RL radio saboteurs see, in their broadcasts in the languages of many nationalities, to "convince" listeners of the "futility" of perestroika and the program for socioeconomic renewal in our country...

The big and small nations and ethnic groups living in the Soviet Union are virtually in a state of hostility. This conflict will continue to deepen and will seemingly be the basis of the collapse of the Bolshevik tyranny..."¹⁴

The Soviets rated Western media advocacy for human rights and national liberation movements as anti-Soviet propaganda, because basic human rights were being constantly violated in the Soviet social environment. However, Western radio coverage of these issues was clearly selective and based on double standards: while advocating for the rights of East European nationals, they ignored the rights of other nations, such as Kurds, Palestinians etc.¹⁵ Radio stations mostly covered domestic affairs in target countries, concentrating on keeping listeners informed of those important developments in their country that were unpublished, distorted or inadequately discussed by official media. Since the official ideology often fostered distortion of the historical past, *RFE/RL* offered listeners basic historical and cultural materials on the heritage of their respective areas.¹⁶

There is little doubt that Western radio stations played an important role in the formation of attitudes diverging from the official Soviet position.¹⁷ In the summer of 1982, the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial while referring to the Soviet strategy in the Cold War environment mentioned the following activities:

"The Soviet Union's propaganda war has manifold aims: to influence world public opinion against U.S. policies; to portray the U.S. as an aggressive and "imperialist" power; to discredit those foreign governments and officials who cooperate with the U.S.; to obfuscate the true nature of Soviet actions and intentions, and to create a favorable environment for the execution of the Soviet foreign and military policies."¹⁸

Since the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, the Soviet media paid unprecedented attention to the susceptibility of East European audiences to *RFE* broadcasts. The major thrust of Communist attacks against *RFE* was to denigrate *RFE* as a "remnant of the Cold War" and an obstacle to the Détente. In the early 1970's, the trend has been to portray the *RFE* as a tool of the dangerous Western concept of "peaceful coexistence." The Soviets condemned *RFE* as the West's

9 Schmemmann, Serge. "Soviets Stop Jamming Radio Liberty broadcasts". *The New York Times*, December 1, 1988.

10 *Beyond the Cold War*, op. cit., p. 2.

11 Zamyatin, Leonid. "Washington's Crusades". *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, June 30, 1982.

12 Alov, Gennady and Vassily Viktorov. *Aggressive Broadcasting: Evidence. Facts. Documents*. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1985, p. 149.

13 Halperin, Morton H., David J. Scheffer and Patricia L. Small. *Self-Determination in the New World Order*. Washington D. C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1992, p. 11.

14 *Argumenti i Fakti*, No. 7, April 23-29, 1988.

15 Hovbannisyan, Eduard, op. cit.

16 Short, K. R. M. "The Real Masters of the Black Heavens: Western Broadcasts over the Iron Curtain". *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain*. Ed. K. R. M. Short. London - Sidney: GROOM Helm, 1986, pp. 91-92.

17 Parra, R. Eugene. "Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research (SAAOR) at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty". *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain*. Ed. K. R. M. Short. London - Sidney: GROOM Helm, 1986, p. 229.

18 "The Soviet Forgery War" (editorial). *The Wall Street Journal*. July 13, 1982.

“ideological tool” in a new “revisionist strategy.”¹⁹

Since the end of WWII, Soviet newspapers launched a number of campaigns against the way Western radio and other news media covered the USSR and Communist countries. The *RFE* was the major target of those campaigns. The impact and efficiency of *RFE* broadcasts addressing sensitive Soviet issues could be measured by the intensity of reactions in Soviet printed media. Since *RFE* openly discussed those topics which were banned in the USSR, it was only natural that the Soviets reacted.²⁰

RL, originally launched under the aegis of the CIA together with *RFE*, was intended to “to fill the information gap” while at the same time practicing selective approaches in pursuing its clearly defined objectives. During the Cold War, the *RL* had to keep its broadcasts in line with American government policies. For example, Muslim desks were instructed to never praise Khomeini or condemn Israel in their programming. The Armenian desk was prohibited from addressing the topic of the Armenian Genocide or condemning Turkish policy, since Turkey was a U.S. ally in the NATO.²¹ Another policy observed by Western radio stations, as claimed, was to avoid comments or broadcasts that could be reasonably construed as incitement to revolt or support for illegal and violent actions.²²

The Soviet press regularly condemned almost all foreign radio stations as media arms of the ‘capitalist world’. An important component of Western broadcasting was the airing of *samizdat* documents and statements by unofficial organizations. *Samizdat* was clearly distinguished from editorial content²³; national desks sometimes aired *samizdat* materials that contained hate speech, quoted from chauvinistic or nationalistic *samizdat* publications.²⁴

The jamming of the ‘Western voices’ was ordered by Stalin in 1948 and continued for about 40 years until the end of the Cold War. All the Russian-language services of the *VOA* and subsequently other Western radio stations were put on the list of *non grata* radio stations.²⁵ Charles Z. Wick, the former Director of the U.S. Information Agency, claimed that in the early perestroika years, the Soviet jamming resources comprised 15,000 technicians working at 2000 jamming stations.²⁶ By the estimates of *VOA* and *BBC* engineers, the Soviet Union spent between \$500 million and \$1 billion annually on jamming, more than

the combined annual operating budgets of the *VOA*, *RFE/RL*, *BBC*, and *Deutsche Welle*.²⁷ In 1985-1986, the European Parliament passed resolutions condemning the jamming of *RFE/RL* and other Western stations by the governments of the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia.²⁸

A significant aspect of Western broadcasting on Soviet territories was its very careful programming in minority languages. The *RFE/RL* had a monopoly in this sphere, having the resources to broadcast in almost all the languages spoken in the Communist world. During the 1970’s, the National Security Council (NSC) made a decision to strengthen *RL* broadcasts to the nations of Soviet Central Asia. The decision was based on views, voiced by U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and other experts, to the effect that Muslim republics within the Soviet Union were the USSR’s weak spot.²⁹ Moreover, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, *Radio Liberty* as well as the *BBC* launched an Afghan service, broadcasting in Daro and Pashto.³⁰

This is what S. Enders Wimbush, former director of *RFE/RL*, wrote:

“My thinking was quite simple. The Soviet Union was a multinational empire. Multinational empires don’t survive. The Soviet Union was an evil empire, one of the most pernicious experiments in human history. And its very existence was contrary to the interests of the United States. My view was very different from those who believed that dissent or economic failure would bring the Soviet Union down. I always believed that the nationality problem was the Soviet Union’s most serious weakness. And I believed that it was in the American interest to prevent the Soviet Union from feeling that it had complete control over its border regions. Because if the Soviet leaders felt their country’s borders were secure, they were more likely to become aggressive internationally.”³¹

The beginning of Gorbachev’s reforms signaled a new relationship between the East and the West, with the increasing news coverage of the Soviet Union, now rated as more newsworthy by American and European mass media.

During the Reykjavik meeting in the fall of 1986, initiated by Gorbachev, radio news and radio propaganda were on the agenda of discussions between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and the Soviet leader. Mikhail Gorbachev pointed out what he said was an “unequal position”, referring to numerous radio transmitters surrounding the USSR, broadcasting in the languages of every Soviet nation.

19 Congressional Record Service. Price, James R., March 22, 1972, pp. 161-162.

20 Ibid.

21 Hovhannisyanyan, Eduard. *op. cit.*

22 Short, K. R. M. “The Real Masters of the Black Heavens: Western Broadcasts over the Iron Curtain”. *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain*. Ed. K. R. M. Short. London-Sidney: GROOM Helm, 1986, p. 94.

23 Ibid.

24 E.g. in 1989 the Azeri-language service of *RFE/RL* broadcast *samizdat* compilations made by Azerbaijani historian Sabir Asadov and containing negative descriptions of Armenians quoted from various sources, including chauvinistic and anti-Semitic publications. A reaction to this broadcast was published in Armenian press, see Muradyan, Paruyr. “The Hypocritical Voices”. *Kommunist*. Yerevan, September 30, 1988.

25 “BBC Russian service turns 40”. *RFE/RL records*. 23 March, 1986, Krasny Arkhiv, HU-OSA, 300/80/1/764.

26 Wick, Charles Z. “What do Soviets Fear”. *The Washington Times*. May 28, 1986.

27 Sosin, Gene. *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 203.

28 “European Parliament Condemns Radio Jamming”. *RFE/RL Records*. 11 October, 1985, Krasny Arkhiv, HU-OSA, 300/80/1/764. For the another resolution, see Appendix no. 1.

29 Puddington, Arch. *Broadcasting Freedom. The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. University Press of Kentucky, 2000, p. 290.

30 “Afghan Broadcasting in Daro Started in 1985 and Then in Pashto”. *RFE/RL Records*, Krasny Arkhiv, HU-OSA, 300/80/1/78, “BBC Will Expand its Broadcasting to Russia, Begin Afghan Service.” *The International Herald Tribune*, February 28, 1981.

31 Puddington, Arch, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

The Soviets made the following offer: we stop jamming the *VOA*, and you allow us to broadcast to U.S. citizens on your territory.³²

With the start of the détente between the USA and USSR, officials in the East and West responsible for orchestrating the "information war" began corresponding with each other, proposing to hold consultations about the "needless war of words."³³

Although radio stations in the late 1980's were considered an anachronism of the Cold War, and the former rivals were discussing prospective positive steps towards the establishment of an atmosphere of mutual confidence, the Soviets continued to accuse the West of subversive initiatives. For example, after riots broke out in Alma-Ata in December 1986³⁴, the *Washington Post* wrote: "When major political riots in Alma-Ata greeted the dismissal of D. A. Kunayev as boss of the Kazakhstan Communist Party, *Radio Liberty* broadcasts far more about the size and intensity of the riots than came out of Moscow – and more about Kunayev's corrupt past than Gorbachev may have wished."³⁵ Soviet accusations of subversive anti-Soviet activities were usually dismissed by Western experts and officials.

After the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, the Soviet government did its best to conceal the consequences. While Soviet censors concealed the information about the accident for several days, the news was immediately disseminated by *RL*. Vera Tolz, *RFE/RL* leading expert on Soviet affairs and Soviet media, wrote: "The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant was regarded in the West as a serious test of Gorbachev's campaign for openness. The initial Soviet delay in announcing that the accident had taken place and the subsequent reluctance to release the details about it made it appear that glasnost' had failed that test resoundingly."³⁶

"Media behavior in times of crisis gives some idea of the true value of *glasnost*. Whenever taken by surprise by some unexpected serious event, the press has maintained a cautious silence or given a brief report while waiting for instructions from the top on how to proceed. This was the case with the Alma-Ata, Sumgait riots and also with Chernobyl."³⁷

Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet Foreign Minister, later confessed, "Chernobyl was the first test for Glasnost, and it was failed. I thought that we had just started and all the events were taking us further still. However, we

32 See *Pravda*, October 23, 1986.

33 See "The letter of Charles Z. Wick, Director of USIA, to Yegor Yakovlev, Editor, Moscow News Newspaper." *The Moscow News*, April 13, 1988.

34 Interview with Kazakhstan SSR KGB Chairman M. Miroshnik. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, June 7, 1988.

35 Evans, Rowland and Robert Novak. "Don't Cripple Radio Liberty." *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1987.

36 Tolz, Vera. "Glasnost' in the Soviet Media Since the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress." *Radio Liberty Research Record*, October 20, 1986. *RL* 391/86, HU-OSA, 300/80/1/657, p. 6.

37 Thom, Françoise. *The Gorbachev Phenomenon. A History of Perestroika*. London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1989, p. 35.

were confronted with events in Alma-Ata, Sumgait, Stepanakert, Baku, Tbilisi, Vilnius and Riga. Here again, the same old-fashioned mechanisms used for simplifying, distorting or simply totally covering the truth about the events came into play."³⁸ Moreover, even during the Glasnost era, the Soviet Union lodged a formal diplomatic protest with the United States embassy, accusing the U.S. government-run *VOA* radio network of subversion and encouraging public unrest during broadcasts in the Soviet Baltic Republics, "making provocative insinuations about the growth of nationalist sentiment in the Baltic republics."³⁹

The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev raised the topic of "subversive radio voices" in his address to the Plenum of the Central Committee of Communist Party in February 1988. He said:

There are persistent attempts to transfer the ideological struggle over *perestroika* and détente onto our territory. "Radio-voices" spread provocative inventions about escalating tension in the Soviet society, saying that "opposition" against *perestroika* and the foreign policy of the CPSS is on the rise.

In a hurry, they have worked out new techniques of subversive work against other socialist countries also going through dynamic modernization of socialism. For each country, they look for specific methods to operate, taking national specificity into account.⁴⁰

The fact that the Plenum discussed ethnic tensions and interethnic relations in the Soviet Union came to the attention of foreign observers.⁴¹ Almost ten days after the address by Gorbachev, on February 29, 1988, the Soviets sent a protest to the U. S. embassy in Moscow, alleging that *VOA* news broadcasts had a "subversive thrust" and were intended not to report but to "provoke nationalist actions" in the Baltic republics. Simultaneously, a new Soviet propaganda charge against the United States stated that the U.S. Army had created and spread the AIDS virus as a biological weapon against Third World countries. These allegations appeared in the Soviet press in mid-March 1988.⁴²

However, even after a huge and unprecedented détente, both rivals were either overtly or covertly keeping up the policy of influencing each other. Anti-capitalist rhetoric still prevailed in the Soviet print media⁴³, well illustrated by the words of Yevgeny Primakov, Director of the Institute of World Economics

38 Shevardnadze, Eduard. *My Choice for Defending Democracy and Freedom*. Moscow: Novosti, 1991, p. 296.

39 "Moscow Protests "subversive" Broadcasts by Voice of America." *RFE/RL Reports*, 29 February 1988, Krasniy Arkhiv, HU-OSA, 300/80/1/771.

40 Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU. *Pravda*, February 19, 1988.

41 Shanker, Thom. "Gorbachev Acts on Minorities." *The Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1988.

42 "VOA Denies Soviet Charge, Says Honest News Will Continue." *RFE/RL Reports*, USIS, March 26, 1988. Krasniy Arkhiv, HU-OSA 300/80/1/771.

43 Krivolapov, A. "The BBC and M 5." *Izvestiya*, August 20, 1985; Alekseev, A. and V. Valentinov. "New Recipes in an Old Cuisine." *Izvestiya*, May 22, 1987; "Attempts by RFE and VOA to Disorientate Public Opinion in the Republic." *Sovetskaya Latvija*, August 20, 1987; Belitsky, B. "The Two Faces of the "Aunt", or How BBC Tries to Make Us Hate Our Home." *Sovetskaya Kultura*, February 5, 1987; Matyash, V. "Heralds of "Psychological War."" *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, March 22, 1988; Ivanenko, A. "Instigators from Overseas." *Izvestiya*, July 8, 1987; Voytenko, V. "Freedom or Irresponsibility." *Argumenti i Fakti*, No. 10, March 10, 1988.

and International Relations: "Professional anti-Soviet activists in the West have been finding it more and more difficult to sustain their false images of the USSR as a bellicose, non-democratic state standing over the world and thinking only of expansion... The current popularity of the Soviet Union and of our leadership abroad, whether among the masses or with intelligentsia, is unprecedented.⁴⁴ Despite the cessation of broadcast jamming, the Soviet position towards Western radio broadcasts did not have any cardinal shifts from the line of information warfare. That is, although the Soviets initiated *Glasnost*, they kept their agents in the *RFE/RL*. The exposure of Oleg Tumanov, a KGB agent in the Russian service of the *RFE/RL*, led to conclusions "that Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost was little difference from Leonid Brezhnev's censorship."⁴⁵

Gorbachev's *glasnost* slightly opened the internal Soviet debate on many of topics that had been previously tabooed. Attitudes to Western reporters also relaxed quite a bit. On April 13, 1989, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted new "Basic rules regulating the professional activity of correspondents of foreign countries' mass media on the territory of the USSR."⁴⁶ According to this document, accredited foreign journalists could not lose their accreditation, or be expelled or otherwise punished, as a result of engaging in lawful professional activities, or based on the content of their reports or any materials broadcast by the information companies they represented.⁴⁷ As David Remnick wrote, while reporting the official summit of the Soviet and American leaders in Moscow, "Soviets had gone to extraordinary lengths to make life acceptable for pampered Western journalists."⁴⁸

Another significant event in 1989 was the replacement of Viktor Afanasyev, a rather conservative Editor-in-Chief of the very conservative *Pravda* newspaper, by the more liberal Ivan Frolov.⁴⁹

At the same time, attacks on Western journalists were fairly common in Soviet press. Moreover, in the time since M. Gorbachev came to power and launched his *glasnost* campaign, there had been many cases of physical assault on Western television crews. Correspondents of the *New York Times*, *The Times*, *AFP*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, and *Le Figaro* were beaten up.⁵⁰ As K. Short put it, "Although the new Soviet look initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev gives the appearance of liberalization, it is liberalization applicable

only to the western media and the manipulation of western public opinion.⁵¹

Another sign of partial media liberalization was the cessation of the relentless jamming of Western radio stations. The Soviet Union stopped jamming the Russian language broadcasts of the *VOA* in May 1987, and those of the *BBC*, five months later. However, the Soviets continued jamming *RFE/RL*. E. Eugene Pell, the president of *RFE/RL*, said that "the cessation of jamming represents a significant step on the part of the Soviet government toward the free flow of information."⁵² The reasons why the Soviets continued jamming *RFE/RL* after they stopped jamming the *VOA* and *BBC* were explained by M. S. Forbes, former *RFE/RL* Director:

"I think primarily because we touch the nerve far more than other free outside broadcasting operations do. *BBC*, for example does a fine job of international news, while we take a more micro approach and concentrate on local events. For example, when Alma-Ata had riots 18 months ago, we didn't just report the riot. We were able to give detailed biographical on the players involved, the background of the friction between the local population and the Russians going back to the 1930s, when Stalin killed a goodly portion of the population to try to Russify the region. Even in Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s, we gave considerably more detail, depth and analysis than anyone".⁵³

Although the Soviet steps towards liberalization were welcomed in the West and particularly in the USA, there were some skeptical reactions in Western mass media circles towards the Gorbachev *glasnost* and *perestroika*. There were both skeptics and people who applauded the Gorbachev reforms. Andrew Rosenthal from the *New York Times* wrote: "Mr. Gorbachev is bringing important changes to the Soviet Union... but it is a serious moral and political error for the United States to commit itself now to a man who is still the dictator of the most powerful totalitarian nation in the world."⁵⁴ Françoise Thom gave the following description of the functions of *glasnost*:

"Glasnost was introduced to neutralize Western influence in two ways: first by taking away the West's monopoly of exclusive news stories about the USSR. Furthermore, *glasnost* aimed to enlist the Western media in the service of Soviet propaganda by bombarding them with rumors and sensations, which they then hastened to broadcast both in the West and to the Communist Block. Thanks to *glasnost*, the West is losing interest in the Soviet opposition, preferring to fix its attention on the intrigues within the Politburo and the conflict between the 'conservatives' and

44 "Disinformation." *Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation Forecast*. Winter 1988, No. 8.

45 Puddington, Arch. "Broadcasting Freedom." *The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, University Press of Kentucky, 2000, p. 286.

46 The entire document see: *Vestnik MID SSSR*, No. 10, 1989, pp. 48-52.

47 *Ibid*, p. 50.

48 "Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behavior-1988-90: Gorbachev-Reagan-Bush Meetings at the Summit." *Special Studies Series on Foreign Affairs Issues*. Vol. III, April, 1991, p. 91.

49 Goldstein, Steve. "Gorbachev Replaces Pravda Editor with Reformer Friend." *The Knight-Ridder Newspapers*, October 20, 1989.

50 Walker, Martin. "Izvetiya Condemns 'Slander.'" *The Guardian*, January 8, 1987; Bohlen, Celestine. "Soviets Attack Demonstrators, Western Journalists." *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1987.

51 Short, K. R. M. "The Real Masters of the Black Heavens: Western Broadcasts over the Iron Curtain." *Western Broadcasting over the Iron Curtain*. Ed. K. R. M. Short, London - Sidney: GROOM Helm, 1986, p. 1.

52 Schmemann, Serge. "Soviets Stop Jamming Radio Liberty Broadcasts." *The New York Times*, December 1, 1988.

53 "Glasnost Heightens Radio Free Europe's Role." Interview with M. S. Forbes, Jr. *The San Diego Union*, July 3, 1988.

54 Rosenthal, Andrew M. "Formerly, the Evil Empire." *The New York Times*, June 3, 1988.

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