

**REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR
ENSURING THAT RADIO MARTI BROADCASTS
ADHERE TO APPLICABLE REQUIREMENTS**

99-IB-010

JUNE 1999

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
B/R	Office of Program Review, International Broadcasting Bureau
GAO	General Accounting Office
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
IMC	International Media Center of Florida International University
OCB	Office of Cuba Broadcasting
OCB Guidelines	Office of Cuba Broadcasting Radio and TV Marti Editorial Guidelines
OIG	Office of Inspector General, Department of State
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RM	Radio Marti
USIA	United States Information Agency

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The purpose of this review was to examine the effectiveness of internal review practices and external oversight procedures to ensure that Radio Marti (RM) adheres to the Voice of America (VOA) Charter, the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, and journalistic standards. As part of this review, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), in consultation with the Office of Inspector General (OIG), contracted for a panel of independent journalists to conduct a content evaluation by sampling 20 hours of 1998 RM broadcasts. The purpose of the BBG panel evaluation was to assess whether RM programs were adhering to VOA broadcast standards.

Background

Radio Marti plays a key role in the effort by the United States to promote the cause of freedom and democracy in Cuba. In contrast to the Cuban media, RM was established to offer listeners an uncensored, comprehensive, and balanced perspective on current events. By law, RM programs must conform to the VOA Charter to ensure accuracy, objectivity, and balance in their content, and be consistent with “the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.” RM was established in 1983 primarily to provide the Cuban people with a surrogate for the free press that is denied them by the Government of Cuba. The station was modeled after Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a surrogate broadcaster to Eastern Europe, Russia, and the former states of the Soviet Union. RM is part of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and is entirely funded by the U.S. Government.

The VOA Charter directs that (1) the news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive, (2) programs will represent America, not any single segment of society, and (3) programs will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussion and opinion on these policies. The U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994 directs that broadcasts be

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“consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.” An array of internal and external controls and oversight mechanisms exists to aid managerial decisionmaking and ensure that RM adheres to these requirements. Although some of these measures were developed to meet the special circumstances of RM, others are similar to practices in use at other U.S. Government broadcast entities.

Internal controls consist of daily editorial conferences, a program review committee, supervisory review of program content, and focus groups. External organizations primarily charged with oversight are the BBG and the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) of USIA.

Under the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, USIA became the umbrella agency for both the BBG and IBB. The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 mandates major changes in the organization and oversight of U.S. Government international broadcasting. The chief changes are the merging of USIA with the Department of State (the Department), and the designation of BBG as an independent entity to supervise all civilian U.S. Government international broadcasting. IBB, under the BBG, will be responsible for the daily direction of all civilian U.S. international broadcasting, except for RFE/RL and Radio Free Asia (RFA). The Secretary of State will assume the USIA director’s position on the BBG. The information contained in this report was gathered prior to the passage of the Act in October 1998.

The 1994 Act consolidated all civilian U.S. Government international broadcast services, including RM, under the BBG. The bipartisan board includes eight members who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, plus the USIA director in an ex officio role. The first BBG was sworn in on August 11, 1995. BBG is charged with assessing the “quality, effectiveness and professional integrity” of all international broadcasting activities “within the context of the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.”

At various times, the IBB has carried out oversight activities of RM programming, including in-depth reviews, spot checks, external review panels, and real-time monitoring.

Results in Brief

VOA and Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) guidelines provide a general framework for developing and checking RM programs. In response to these guidelines, OCB used such internal controls as daily editorial conferences, a program review committee, supervisory review of program content, and focus groups. OIG recognizes these controls

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are not foolproof, and numerous press articles and comments from many interviewees indicate that questionable RM broadcasts have existed for some time.

In the spring of 1997, new management at RM pledged to address some of these concerns. Existing internal controls had not always prevented mistakes in the past, but the new management, citing the need to streamline internal administration and to cut costs, placed much less emphasis on them. One result of the weakening of various internal controls is that the rationale for new programs and participants was often not clear, and some programs were aired without supervisory review or preparation.

The new OCB management team also began a major program shift to live instead of prerecorded programming, so that by September 1998, 80 percent of RM programs were live. The stated purpose was to make RM programs more spontaneous, contemporary, and appealing to younger audiences. Nevertheless, management did not take sufficient steps to ensure that RM's new and ongoing programs adhered to VOA guidelines.

In the spring of 1998, we shared our concerns with IBB that these and other new developments at RM had resulted in a variety of shortcomings. Several weeks later IBB informed us RM would upgrade some internal control procedures.

A panel of independent journalists, convened by the BBG in consultation with OIG, reviewed about 20 hours of RM programming that had been broadcast between January and May 1998. The panelists found fewer problems with top-of-the-hour news programs than they did with RM's mixed news and commentary. The problems identified centered on the credibility of news reports and professionalism. We believe weaknesses in RM internal controls, particularly in light of the increased live programming, may have contributed to the problems identified by the panelists and made RM more prone to violating VOA broadcasting standards.

The panel of journalists did not make an overall judgment on whether RM broadcasts presented U.S. policies clearly and effectively as required in the VOA Charter. Furthermore, the panel did not address the legal requirement in the 1994 Act that broadcasts be consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives.

BBG and IBB have engaged in external oversight of RM in the past, but many of those we interviewed, including senior officials familiar

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with the history of oversight, told us they were ineffective. Both the IBB and BBG have recently taken aggressive steps to improve external oversight as well as RM operating procedures. Most past attempts have concentrated on critiques of program content rather than internal controls to assure adherence to VOA standards. However, both are essential to effective oversight.

Principal Findings

Improvements Needed in RM Internal Procedures

Overall, Radio Marti's internal practices and procedures have been lax. In past years, RM used morning editorial conferences to discuss packaging programs, participants, upcoming events, and the day's news. A program review committee evaluated program changes and made recommendations to management. In March 1997, after the arrival of current OCB management, participation in daily morning editorial board meetings declined. Beginning in early 1998 an all-purpose, afternoon meeting, which also served as a program review committee meeting, was instituted with fewer participants. During this period, no written record of these meetings was kept. The afternoon editorial meeting was not consistent with the guidance of the VOA Programming Handbook, which calls for "editorial conferences early in the broadcast 'day' and [which] involve every member of the staff in discussion...." Also, merging the program review committee function into the afternoon meeting weakened a useful filter designed to evaluate proposals and identify, modify, and weed out questionable material or programs.

The panel of journalists found the packaging (e.g., intermingling news and commentary) of some RM broadcasts to be deficient, which it regarded as a reflection on the station's professionalism. As a result, some questionable material, which might otherwise have been screened out, aired in apparent violation of VOA guidelines.

Supervisory review of stories before airing and the establishment of an efficient editorial chain of command are necessary to prevent errors and ensure adherence to VOA guidelines. In the past, both internal evaluators and outside critics raised objections to specific RM stories and programs they viewed as inappropriate or in violation of guidelines. In its review, the BBG panel of journalists similarly cited many instances of problems on RM programs that affected both credibility and professionalism, and possibly violated VOA guidelines. With RM's greatly increased live broadcasting, a practical system of editorial control is more important than ever. The current system is inadequate, allowing broadcasters to go on air without sufficient

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preparation or prior supervisory consultation. The panel of journalists suggested that staff training, especially for hosts and moderators, might be the best way to correct this problem. Accordingly, BBG asked the panelists to recommend what specific training was necessary and directed IBB to draw up an action plan based on the recommendations.

RM sometimes used focus groups in connection with the program review committee for evaluating both new and continuing programs. Because the Cuban government does not normally permit audience reaction or listenership surveys, focus groups can be an especially useful tool. However, according to the OCB Director, RM stopped using them in 1997 because of budgetary problems. As a result, some new programs were aired without benefit of this valuable evaluation tool.

In the spring of 1998, we shared our concerns about the weaknesses in RM internal controls with IBB. Subsequently, IBB informed us that RM would reemphasize daily morning editorial conferences, reconstitute program review committee meetings, and hold a limited number of focus groups, funded by IBB, to review RM's most controversial programs.

Assessment of Content of RM Broadcasts

The purpose of the BBG panel evaluation was to assess whether RM programs were adhering to VOA broadcast standards, including the requirement for "clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government." The panel's report identified problems in two main areas, credibility of news reports and professionalism. The problems affecting credibility were lack of balance, fairness, objectivity, and lack of adequate sourcing. The problems affecting professionalism dealt with intermingling news and opinion, and using poor judgment in the selection of stories. The various problems identified raise concerns about compliance of some RM programs with VOA standards. After learning of the problems noted by the panelists, BBG asked them to conduct a follow-up evaluation of RM's needs for research, plus education and training for key editorial personnel. BBG directed IBB to recommend steps RM should take to correct identified deficiencies.

Adherence to Foreign Policy Objectives

Some individual panelists commented on whether the programs evaluated presented U.S. policies "clearly and effectively," but their summary report made no overall judgment on that aspect of RM's broadcasts. Moreover, the panel largely confined its comments to journalistic values and did not address the question of whether RM

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broadcasts are consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.

The 1994 Act requires that broadcasts be consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives. BBG interprets this to mean that the mandate is fulfilled if an international broadcast entity is meeting journalistic standards such as those embodied in the VOA Charter, because international broadcasting is an essential instrument of U.S. foreign policy. We disagree, on the grounds that the 1994 Act treats foreign policy and journalistic criteria as separate entities, and therefore each must be evaluated. We believe that policies and procedures for evaluating foreign policy requirements need to be established so that future panels can address them.

External Oversight of RM Needs Strengthening

External oversight by USIA, BBG, and IBB has been lax. For example, IBB has not conducted regular reviews of RM program content. In the past, RM has often not responded to suggestions and comments on programs resulting from various oversight efforts. Another fundamental problem has been RM's lack of success in installing a functional program logging system to track the contents of individual programs and provide fast retrieval.

BBG has not exercised sufficient oversight to ensure the effectiveness of Radio Marti. It can do so by supporting a program review process similar to the one in place for VOA language services, and ensuring that oversight findings are discussed and appropriate changes implemented. Both IBB and BBG have recently provided more effective and systematic oversight, especially in regard to conducting regular reviews and making RM management more responsive to problem solving. However, both entities must ensure that findings are discussed and recommendations acted on.

Recommendations

Our major recommendations are that:

- Radio Marti should reengineer a system of internal reviews and controls, regarding editorial conferences, program reviews, focus groups, and an effective editorial chain of command.
- The International Broadcasting Bureau and the Broadcasting Board of Governors should improve their oversight by developing a comprehensive system of (1) program review to ensure that Radio Marti adheres to the law and Voice of America standards, and (2) effective follow-up to ensure compliance on recommendations.

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- The Broadcasting Board of Governors should establish policies and procedures so future evaluations can assess whether the foreign policy requirements of U.S. international broadcasting are being met. Evaluations should include a determination of whether Radio Marti broadcasts are consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives and present U.S. policies clearly and effectively.
- The International Broadcasting Bureau should prepare a written action plan to correct any deficiencies noted by a panel of journalists contracted to assess Radio Marti operations and training needs and conduct regular program content evaluations.
- Radio Marti should acquire and install a practical and efficient program logging system.

Agency Comments

OIG provided a draft of this report to BBG, IBB, and OCB for review and comment. With one exception, the broadcasting officials agreed with the report recommendations. The BBG chairman outlined steps being taken to correct deficiencies, and concurred in the action plan prepared by IBB. IBB's response contained specific items for RM "to address immediately to upgrade the quality of programming at Radio and TV Marti" so that RM meets the requirements of the VOA Charter and journalistic standards. The IBB action plan, if carried to completion, should address the issues raised in our report.

BBG did not concur with our recommendation to establish policies and procedures so that future evaluations can determine whether broadcasts are consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives and that they clearly and effectively present those policies. BBG believes it already ensures compliance with statutory requirements through State Department clearance of editorials and review of news programs by independent journalists. OIG believes the BBG approach only partially fulfills the foreign policy requirements of the Act because often foreign policy aspects of broadcasting go beyond just editorials. U.S. foreign policy is also covered in news broadcasts, commentary, and analysis. These broadcast aspects are not included in the BBG approach. OIG believes that BBG should devise procedures to assure that all broadcast material is assessed for consistency with the Act.

OCB agreed with our recommendations but disagreed with many of the assertions in the report about the daily editorial board conferences and the program review committee meetings. (See OCB comments as part of Appendix B, Attachment 3.) Some of the differences between the information we collected during our review and the OCB Director's comments could not be reconciled because during the

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period in question there was no written record of when these conferences and meetings were held or what information was discussed. Nevertheless, problems identified by the independent review panel clearly point to weaknesses in OCB's internal controls. We weighed all these factors in arriving at our findings, conclusions, and recommendations and made adjustments to the report, as appropriate, based on BBG, IBB, and OCB comments. These comments are included in their entirety as Appendix B of this report.

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this audit was to examine the effectiveness of internal review practices and external oversight procedures to ensure that RM adheres to the VOA Charter, the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, and journalistic standards. We also evaluated the roles of the BBG and USIA in overseeing and monitoring RM broadcasts. The information in this report is based on individual interviews, broadcast samples, and documentary evidence. We interviewed more than 80 individuals who had or have some direct program responsibility at RM or oversight responsibility for the station, or who are especially knowledgeable about the politics and environment in which RM functions.

At the outset, we planned to assess the content of RM broadcasts to determine whether they adhere to VOA standards. To accomplish this, the OIG contacted the International Media Center (IMC) of Florida International University to convene an independent panel of experts to evaluate 20 hours of RM broadcasts. The panel was to include five journalists and two members with foreign policy experience. After discussion and agreement, the BBG assumed responsibility for overseeing and funding the contract. However, only journalists were included and they did not evaluate the legal requirement that RM broadcasts be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States. In August 1998, the panel reviewed 20 hours of RM programs aired between January and May 1998. For further discussion of the panel and its work, see Section B.

Interviewees for this review included present and former RM employees and executives; personnel from IBB, BBG, the National Security Council, the Department of State, USIA, RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Executive Director of the Presidential Advisory Board, and journalists and academics familiar with RM.

We reviewed pertinent studies, audits, inspections, and other oversight reports issued by OIG, the General Accounting Office (GAO), USIA, and the Congress. In addition, we reviewed laws and regulations governing program content issues, cable traffic, and other pertinent documentation. We also consulted relevant orders, instructions, and procedures governing language services broadcasts issued by BBG, IBB, and OCB.

Fieldwork for this review was conducted in Washington, D.C. and Miami, Florida. The Office of Audits, International Broadcasting Division, performed the review. Major contributors to this report were Luther L. Atkins, division director; John M. Trembler, audit manager; Max L. Aguilar, auditor-in-charge; and William R. Lenderking, management analyst.

The review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests and auditing procedures as were considered necessary under the circumstances. Audit work for this review was conducted from January 1997 to October 1997, and from March 1998 to October 1998.

III. BACKGROUND

Radio Marti was established in 1983 by the Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act (P.L. 98-111) “to support the right of the people of Cuba to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers....” The Act further notes that VOA already broadcasts “a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions,” but that there is a “need for broadcasts to Cuba which provide news, commentary, and other information about events in Cuba and elsewhere to promote the cause of freedom in Cuba.” The Act also mandates that RM adhere to the spirit and letter of the VOA Charter, and that RM broadcasts “shall be in accordance with all VOA . . . standards to ensure the broadcast of programs which are objective, accurate, and balanced.” In addition, the United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994 directs that all United States international broadcasting “be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.”

The VOA Charter standards, stated in Public Law 94-350, provide that:

- (1) VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective and comprehensive,
- (2) VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions, and
- (3) VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussion and opinion on these policies.

A further elaboration of standards is contained in the Office of Cuba Broadcasting Radio and TV Marti Editorial Guidelines, (OCB Guidelines), a document that provides general principles for broadcasters in “making day-to-day editorial decisions,” and covers balance, sourcing, tone, handling U.S. policy, and proscribed actions. It serves as a supplement to the VOA Programming Handbook (Third Edition, 1992), which contains general guidance on newsroom organization, basic rules and procedures.

In contrast to VOA, which “tells America’s story to the world,” RM serves as a surrogate for a free press in Cuba, focusing on events there as well as international news relevant for a Cuban audience. RM was modeled after RFE/RL, a surrogate broadcaster to Eastern Europe, Russia, and the former states of the Soviet Union. RM and TV Marti together comprise the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

RM’s first broadcast was on May 20, 1985. Its programs air 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, except for 5 hours early on Monday mornings. RM is divided into two departments, news and programs. On a typical weekday, the news department produces approximately 8 hours of programming, 9 hours by the programs department, with 6 hours of repeats encompassing the

products of both departments. In addition, RM uses the audio version of 30 minutes of daily news from TV Marti. Top and bottom of the hour news bulletins complete the 24-hour menu.

RM estimates that news and public affairs programs account for about 80 percent of RM's air time, and 20 percent consists of entertainment. During 1998, OCB greatly increased the number of live shows and call-ins by listeners in Cuba.

In April 1994, the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-236) created the Broadcasting Board of Governors to oversee all civilian U.S. Government broadcasting. BBG is charged with assessing the "quality, effectiveness, and professional integrity" of all international broadcasting activities "within the context of the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States." BBG was placed under the umbrella of USIA, and supervises the five broadcasting services: OCB, VOA, the Office of WORLDNET Television and Film Service, and the two government grantee organizations, RFE/RL and RFA.

The Act also created the International Broadcasting Bureau to carry out the broadcasting activities of OCB, VOA, and WORLDNET Television, and to provide transmission facilities for all five-broadcast organizations. Its oversight responsibilities include monitoring of RM programs and conducting regular program reviews. The IBB director is appointed by BBG, in consultation with the director of USIA.

In October 1998, Congress passed the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act that will bring major changes in the organization and oversight of U.S. Government nonmilitary international broadcasting. USIA will be merged into the Department of State, and the USIA director's position on the BBG board will be assumed by the Secretary of State. The BBG will become an independent entity with supervisory responsibility for all U.S. civilian international broadcasting. The IBB, under the overall supervision of BBG, will be charged with the daily direction of all international civilian-broadcasting activities, with the exception of RFE/RL and RFA. The information in this report was gathered before the passage of the Act.

Over the years, there have been numerous reviews, audits, and evaluations initiated by various governmental entities to assess allegations of problems at RM. For example, in a 1993 report, GAO deferred to broadcast management to determine whether charges of biased broadcasts were valid, but suggested that an external review panel for RM be established to ensure that it met VOA standards. In March 1994, the so-called "Straus Panel" report called for "a broad spectrum of opinion but opinion...identified as such," and noted that "a more democratic and professional environment will make for a more credible product." Also in 1994, GAO recommended that broadcast management develop a tracking system to ensure that panel suggestions were fully considered and appropriate actions taken. In a May 1994 audit report and a January 1997 investigation report, OIG found deficiencies in OCB personnel practices. All of these dealt with problems prior to the arrival of the current OCB management team.

This report evaluates the editorial practices and controls currently in place to ensure adherence to guidelines and regulations, including editorial supervision, monitoring, and effectiveness of both internal and external oversight.

IV. FINDINGS

A. IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN RADIO MARTI INTERNAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The VOA Charter, the VOA Programming Handbook, and OCB Editorial Guidelines provide a general framework for how RM is supposed to operate. RM broadcasters are “legally bound to abide by the policies and procedures of the Voice of America,” and they must “adhere to all VOA guidelines.” As part of this framework, RM has often used various internal control practices and procedures, such as daily editorial conferences, program review committee meetings, and focus groups to ensure adherence to VOA guidelines. Supervisory review of programs before they aired was also an essential internal control procedure to ensure that they met VOA standards.

The VOA Programming Handbook puts great emphasis on the “broadcast team,” and the “need for teamwork” (emphasis added) in putting a program on the air. The “core” broadcast team usually includes an editor, producer, and master of ceremonies, and their responsibilities are outlined in the Handbook.

During audit work carried out in 1997 prior to the arrival of the current OCB management, OIG found evidence of lax editorial controls and procedures, and poor adherence to VOA guidelines. When we conducted additional fieldwork in the spring of 1998, the new OCB management team was in place. However, we found that it had de-emphasized the use of established internal controls. As a result the team concept was weakened, and we found deficiencies similar to those existing in the past. For example, in early 1997, OCB management, citing the need to reduce costs and streamline what it saw as a cumbersome system, reduced the use of three mainstays of the review process: daily editorial conferences, internal program reviews, and focus groups. As a result, many employees with journalistic experience no longer had input into program decisions. At the same time, many of those we interviewed, both within and outside RM, questioned RM’s adherence to VOA programming standards. Their random observations meshed closely with the findings of the previously mentioned IMC independent panel of journalists, who employed a systematic methodology to carry out their evaluation. The panel specifically noted credibility problems because some of the broadcasts lacked balance, fairness, and objectivity.

It was also unclear to us and to many RM employees what criteria management used when making program decisions or in reviewing and approving new programs. The OCB director insisted that he does not participate in journalistic decisions, but we heard ample testimony indicating that the decision to initiate or remove a particular program was sometimes made solely by the director, and sometimes over the objections of his professional staff.

Another problem was that RM editorial personnel often did not adequately review stories before they were broadcast. A common thread running through the programs reviewed by the IMC panel was that they seemed to suffer from editorial carelessness and lack of focus.

By de-emphasizing internal controls and weakening the team concept, we believe that RM made itself more prone to violations of standards that are proscribed in the VOA Charter, the VOA Handbook, and OCB Guidelines, especially in regard to accuracy, balance, and tone. Internal controls alone cannot guarantee that standards will be observed, but RM senior managers weakened them and often ignored staff input, thereby removing an important internal filter.

Daily Editorial Conferences

The OCB Editorial Guidelines describe daily editorial conferences as providing “specific editorial orientation” for RM broadcasts. The Programming Handbook adds that “one of the best ways to organize time and staff for a particular program effort is to hold editorial conferences early in the broadcast ‘day’ and involve every member of the staff in the discussion about what the program will contain.” Prior to the installation of the present OCB director in early 1997, the attendees at the RM daily meetings usually included the acting OCB director, the RM director, the program director, the news director, the chief of the writers unit, the managing news editor, the Washington news manager, the TV Marti news director, a representative from the VOA Spanish language service, the RM New York correspondent, and the field research director. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss ideas for programs and potential participants based on the day’s news and upcoming events.

According to OCB officials we spoke with, when the new OCB Director arrived in March 1997, he initially attended the morning editorial conferences and then stopped because he felt his presence might have been inhibiting open discussion by the participants. Also, these officials indicated that, through the remainder of 1997, participation in the morning meetings declined and beginning in early 1998 an all-purpose, afternoon meeting was instituted with fewer participants. In April 1998, we attended one of the afternoon meetings and found that the meeting focused on what had already aired or decisions already made, rather than providing information on upcoming events or offering opportunities for staff input. The afternoon editorial meeting was not consistent with the guidance of the VOA Programming Handbook, which calls for “editorial conferences early in the broadcast ‘day’ and [which] involve every member of the staff in discussion....”

In late spring of 1998, we shared with IBB our observations concerning daily editorial conferences, especially our view that the afternoon format did not seem productive and that information was not fully shared with other RM staff members with a need to know. Subsequently, IBB informed us that RM would reemphasize early morning editorial meetings and that minutes would be kept. Information provided in December 1998 by the OCB director indicates that OCB began documenting morning editorial conferences in May 1998.

In commenting on the draft report, the OCB Director said that the afternoon meeting was an additional meeting instituted to enhance internal supervisory mechanisms over RM programming. He added that this additional meeting in no way implied the cancellation of the regular morning editorial meetings, and that the morning editorial meetings were never suspended, subordinated or diluted within the functions of the program review committee.

Because there was no documentation of these meetings during the period in question, we could not definitively determine when editorial conferences were held during the broadcast day, who may have participated in these meetings, or what subjects may have been discussed. Nevertheless, the independent panel of journalists found confusing packaging and poor news judgment in RM story selection, which suggests a more rigorous editorial process is needed.

Program Review Committee Meetings

The purpose of RM's internal program review committee is to provide management with a peer review of program changes. Such a committee is not specifically required by any of the various guidelines, but over the years it became a staple at RM. In the past, this committee reviewed program changes, such as the addition, elimination, or restructuring of a program. The committee consisted of a cross section of up to 10 senior editorial staffers.

In a series of changes beginning in the summer of 1997, the new OCB director reduced the size and frequency of meetings. Later, unhappy with the amount of time it took to review new programs, the RM director, the program director, and the executive producer usually made decisions outside the committee. Finally, according to the RM director, committee meetings were merged into the all-purpose afternoon staff meeting, but until May 1998, when minutes were reinstated, there was no record of what decisions emerged from it.

Since January 1998, RM management has contracted for approximately 15 new programs and made a major switch to live talk shows, citing a need to make broadcasts more focused, spontaneous, and appealing to younger audiences. These may be worthy goals, but, as indicated by the following examples, a properly functioning program review committee might have helped RM's programs adhere more closely to VOA standards.

- In the fall of 1997, the OCB director recruited a popular Miami commercial radio personality, whose trademark is spicy language, to do an unspecified number of pithy commentaries without compensation. The commentaries contained some obscene and vulgar references. Although 10 programs were taped, only 4 aired. According to the then RM Programs Director, who was a member of the program review committee, he was not aware of these commentaries prior to their airing.

The guidelines regarding vulgarity in the VOA Programming Handbook are clear: "Vulgarity and idle chatter are not permitted in, or even near, studios...This rule applies whether the microphone is off or on." In addition, IBB's Office of Program Review noted the commentaries and forwarded a memorandum to the OCB director criticizing the use of "foul, vulgar language in violation of the law which created the station." Meanwhile, the OCB director terminated the spots, not because they were improper, but because, according to him, the person involved accepted a lucrative commercial offer. In response to our draft report, the OCB director said that the program review committee was certainly consulted and its decision to approve the short fillers was based primarily on the idiosyncrasies peculiar to Cuban culture.

- Our evaluation also found alleged instances in which individuals provided political commentary without RM offering a reasonable sample of balancing viewpoints. This gave

the appearance that RM was endorsing a particular point of view, and not adhering to the requisite standards of fairness and balance.

The VOA Charter states that broadcasts “will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.” Relevant to that requirement, the independent panelists cited instances of imbalance in the programs they evaluated.

The OCB director told us that all political points of view have a right to be represented on RM. He also said that RM has no right to censor anyone. We agree; the issue here is not censorship, but rather balance, credibility and fairness. A properly functioning program review system, had it been used, should have suggested the appropriate use of balancing viewpoints, which is a VOA requirement.

In May and June 1998, we shared our concerns with IBB regarding the apparent lack of a full and open review process for the many new RM programs. This is extremely important given RM’s recent decision to extensively shift to live programs. As of September 1998, 80 percent of RM’s new material was broadcast live, in contrast to the previous year when 80 percent was prerecorded. We believe the special emphasis on live broadcasts increases the need for a program review committee, morning daily editorial conferences, and other internal control processes to ensure better adherence to VOA standards. IBB informed us in late spring 1998 that RM would reconstitute the program review committee, with written minutes, as part of an effort by IBB to bring greater transparency to RM. Information provided in December 1998 by OCB shows that the program review committee function is now part of the morning editorial conferences. Minutes of these meetings were started on May 19, 1998.

Inadequate Supervisory Review of Programs

The VOA Programming Handbook provides general criteria for supervising program content, without attempting to formulate rules to cover every contingency. Several knowledgeable RM employees told us that most non-news programs, and some news programs, did not receive regular review before being broadcast. Several senior broadcasting and RM officials told us the key to effective and reliable programs is an editorial chain of command. This requires staff writers and freelance contributors to submit materials in advance to permit checking by senior editors for compliance with journalistic and VOA standards and other program requirements. Staff writers correct or modify their copy in accordance with this editing. It is noteworthy that many of the alleged lapses or mistakes brought to our attention concerned mingling fact with opinion and occurred on non-news programs such as talk shows or commentaries, which now account for a major share of all RM broadcasts.

The view of many RM staffers and knowledgeable outside observers that RM programs contain a significant level of inappropriate and problematical material in violation of VOA standards is consistent with the findings of the IMC panel of journalists. The panel’s summary report states that “the evaluators tended to find fewer objections to the all-news programs than they did to those which mixed news and comment. Special problems were found with some

hosts, moderators, commentators, and analysts.... (including) bias, lack of expertise, and lack of professionalism.”

In fieldwork conducted in 1997, reviewing procedures in place before OCB’s current management took over, we found that of the approximately 35 non-news weekly programs, only 10, or about 28 percent, received regular editorial review. The rest went on the air without it. When we interviewed key RM editorial employees in the spring of 1998, several told us that editorial supervision had not improved. According to them, many of the contract personnel for the new programs that began airing in early 1998 simply showed up at the studio and went on air without preparation, in effect “winging it.”¹

Shifting RM to an 80 percent live format has presented special challenges, as yet unresolved by RM. The OCB Director told us that going on the air without a script generates spontaneity, and “isn’t easy.” We agree.

In that regard, we note that although the IMC panelists did not differentiate between live and scripted programs in their evaluations, some of their individual comments addressed the special problems of live programs. One live show was described as “uneven and lacked focus.” The panelist noted that “This is a continuing problem with broadcasts of this sort on Radio Marti.” He suggested choosing “moderators with stronger journalistic credentials who can keep the discussion flowing and come up with some sort of conclusion,” and added that “most moderators know that you don’t just open the microphones and let panelists say whatever they will; that way lies chaos.”

As part of our review, we checked into standard operating procedures for the editorial review process. Senior management officials told us in 1998 that three levels of control existed: news director, assistant producer, and producer. What we found, however, was different. Several reporters and editors told us that no consistent operating procedure exists. Consequently, news department employees sometimes broadcast stories without editorial review or approval.

Further, several RM news department employees were classified as supervisors, but did not supervise any staff. Some supervisors were, in fact, staff writers. However, given their supervisory title and no clear chain of command, much of their programming material received no supervisory editing. Similarly, several employees told us that producers of commentary and analysis programs are allowed to say what they please on the air, and generally do not receive prior guidance or editorial review of their programs. They cited several broadcasts they felt contained inaccurate or unsupportable statements, in violation of VOA guidelines.

The independent panel, citing different examples, reached a similar conclusion, summarized by the comment: “...substituting criticism and editorial commentary for analysis was a recurring problem in news broadcasts -- perhaps the most glaring and disturbing problem of all, from a journalistic standpoint.”

¹ We have not identified these employees because several of them, citing fear of management reprisals, asked that we protect their identities and requested to meet with us off-site. When we asked the OCB director about their concerns, he responded that all RM editorial employees are familiar with VOA guidelines and that editorial checks in the newsroom are sufficient.

Even the most efficient editorial chain of command cannot prevent all errors, and we recognize the need for flexibility. However, many of the errors described to us probably could have been prevented by an effective internal editorial review process. A former IBB director told us that an effective editorial chain of command is more important than any amount of monitoring or reviews after the fact.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, with International Broadcasting Bureau oversight, reengineer its internal review procedures, particularly for non-news programming, to include appropriate supervisory review of prebroadcast material and editorial guidelines for live shows, to ensure adherence to VOA standards.

OCB agreed with the recommendation, stating that it will work to strengthen its current system of internal reviews and controls and is open to suggestions on how to improve its operations. Nevertheless, OCB disagreed with some of the assertions made in the report regarding daily editorial board meetings and program review committee meetings. Some of these differences could not be reconciled because written minutes of these meetings were not instituted until after the period in question. In response to the recommendation, IBB, as part of a comprehensive action plan (see Appendix B, Attachment 1) to improve RM broadcasting effectiveness, has required RM to “draft rules and procedures for proper review and editorial chain of command for live programming, and require preshow review of program plans.”

RM Focus Groups

The use of focus groups was another internal control practice that in the past helped to ensure adherence to VOA standards. Focus groups also were linked to the program review committee process for evaluating new programs. IBB audience research professionals consider them especially useful for a broadcast service like OCB, whose audience is located where normal audience research surveys cannot be conducted.

If the program review committee decided that a proposed program was worthwhile, a pilot was prepared and tested by focus groups. They also reviewed existing programs. According to the former chief of OCB’s Office of Program Evaluation, programs having the most policy importance and greatest potential for controversy received the most attention. Most programs were tested about once a year. The resulting appraisals went to program department heads responsible for making the recommended program changes. The use of focus groups increased in 1991 when their use was systematized and formalized. After the current OCB director arrived in early 1997, focus group evaluations were not held until July 1998, when IBB initiated and paid for six focus group discussions.

Before 1997, focus groups met every 2 or 3 months. Typically, an IBB contractor recruited participants in Miami from recent arrivals from Cuba and conducted the evaluation sessions using professionally accepted procedures of question and response. Since early 1991, over 1,800 Cuban travelers have participated in 127 focus group sessions, evaluating over 200

radio and television programs. According to IBB's research experts, they have produced valuable insights and valid audience reactions for the guidance of RM decisionmakers.

According to the OCB Director, focus groups were never cancelled but were suspended for budgetary reasons. He indicated that focus groups are a valuable evaluation tool but that they are costly and they were suspended at a time when OCB had inherited substantial cuts in its budget. The former chief of OCB's Office of Evaluation said that a series of focus groups cost about \$20,000, or \$5,000 per session. During each session, three 20-minute programs might be evaluated. Focus groups were costing OCB about \$120,000 annually. His conclusion was that the cost of these groups was "well worth it," especially since other scientifically valid data on RM programs was rare.

Focus groups can provide a unique means of helping management make sound decisions about improving existing programs or starting new ones. Because the Castro government does not normally permit audience reaction or listenership surveys to be conducted in Cuba, the use of focus groups can be an especially useful and objective tool. In addition, using focus groups to review new and possibly controversial programs can help to assure that RM broadcasts adhere to VOA standards and RM program objectives.

We discussed our observations on focus groups with IBB, and in June 1998 IBB informed us that it would fund a limited number of them, concentrating on controversial new programs. By the end of July, IBB had evaluated six programs, and their Office of Research (B/R) had compiled the results in a report issued on September 4, 1998. Formal follow-up on focus group surveys normally takes place during IBB's annual program review process, which IBB hoped would take place for RM in December 1998.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, working with the International Broadcasting Bureau, revive focus group evaluations for all new, major, and controversial program changes and proposals, and that the International Broadcasting Bureau ensure that survey results are fully integrated into Radio Marti decisionmaking.

OCB agreed with the recommendation and commented that it included focus groups in its budget and plans to conduct at least two focus group sessions next year. OCB expected that this practice would continue in the future. BBG and IBB emphasized that they plan to use focus groups "as part of a panoply of research tools...as funds are available," but place a higher priority on such things as journalistic training, direct audience research, and program review of RM programming. Notwithstanding, BBG has directed OCB to "include mandatory focus group screening of proposed shows, focus group review of existing programs on a rotational basis, and annual in-country audience measurement surveys."

B. ASSESSMENT OF CONTENT OF RM BROADCASTS

The IMC panel evaluated 20 hours of RM broadcasts from the period January through May 1998. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess whether RM programs were adhering to

VOA broadcast standards, including the requirement for clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government.

Results of Independent Panel

Each panelist listened to the tapes individually and prepared a detailed report on the content of the programs. In addition, the deputy director of the IMC prepared a summary report (see Appendix A) stating that “the evaluators tended to find fewer objections to the all-news programs than they did to those which mixed news and comment.” Further, the report stated that the panelists found special problems with some hosts, moderators, commentators, and analysts. The report identified problems in two main areas, (1) credibility of news reports, and (2) professionalism. The problems affecting credibility were lack of balance, fairness, objectivity, and lack of adequate sourcing. The problems affecting professionalism dealt with intermingling news and opinion in a confusing manner and using poor judgment in the selection of stories.

The panel had mixed views on whether RM met the VOA standard for clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government. Three panelists said “yes,” one said “no,” and one said “sometimes.” Criticisms concerned “vague generalities,” insufficient background, and insufficient information on news items.

OIG believes the various problems identified in the summary report raise serious concerns about compliance of some RM programs with VOA broadcasting standards. On September 14, 1998, the panelists briefed BBG, OCB, and OIG on its findings. The panelists made no formal recommendations, but suggested that RM do more research to improve sourcing of stories, and that hosts, moderators, and commentators be given off-the-air training on handling panelists and conducting interviews. The BBG chairman then requested that (1) the panelists visit RM to observe its program operations and evaluate its needs, including education and training for hosts, commentators, and program moderators; and (2) the director of IBB recommend steps that RM should take to correct deficiencies noted by the panelists.

Based on our review of RM’s internal policy and procedures discussed earlier, we believe that RM internal control processes need improving to ensure that broadcasts meet legal requirements and the journalistic standards referred to in the summary report of the IMC panel. We also believe RM’s deemphasis of internal controls made it more prone to violations of VOA standards. Finally, because RM’s new emphasis on live programs will likely increase opportunities for violations, there is now an even greater need for RM to ensure that broadcasts meet those standards. However, as USIA and IBB employees and others have pointed out on a number of occasions, RM has frequently not followed up and corrected documented deficiencies.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that once the International Media Center panel’s evaluation visit to Radio Marti is completed, the International Broadcasting Bureau prepare a written action plan to correct any deficiencies noted by the panel, providing copies to the Broadcasting Board of Governors and the Office of Inspector General. The action plan should include, among other things, recommendations for improving the sourcing of stories and for the training of Radio Marti employees.

IBB agreed with this recommendation and, with BBG approval, prepared an action plan designed to correct deficiencies and strengthen RM's broadcasting effectiveness. The action plan appears to address most of the deficiencies identified, including the sourcing of stories, training of RM employees, and conducting of regular assessments of RM content.

Adherence to U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives

There are two statutory requirements governing the presentation of foreign policy-related material by U.S. international broadcasters. The first is contained in section 3 of the VOA Charter ("present the policies...clearly and effectively") and is discussed in the VOA Programming Handbook. The Handbook says that "the portion of VOA programming specifically designed to present United States official views is the editorial" and that there is a clear distinction "between news reporting and official government views." The Handbook adds that there is a "responsibility to report official statements and opposition to the policies of any administration accurately and fairly. Today, the journalistic and policy advocacy functions of VOA are separate and distinct." BBG believes that the policy requirements of the VOA Charter are satisfied by broadcasting editorials cleared by the Department, containing the official views of the U.S. government and labeled as such.

The second policy requirement is contained in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994: "U.S. international broadcasting shall be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States."

The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 states that "international broadcasting is.... an essential instrument of United States foreign policy." In applying this concept to the foreign policy criterion of the 1994 Act, it is BBG's opinion that if a broadcast entity adheres to journalistic standards (e.g., the VOA Charter), it meets the foreign policy requirements of the Act as well. We found nothing in the 1994 Act or the legislative history of that provision that would support BBG's opinion. However, the fact that the law requires international broadcasting to be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States and also requires it to be conducted in accordance with the highest standards of broadcast journalism indicates that Congress regarded the foreign policy and journalistic criteria as separate. For this reason, OIG believes that it is not sufficient for foreign policy content to be evaluated solely by journalistic criteria.

Similarly, the work of the panel of independent journalists did not deal with this issue. Although some panelists commented on whether RM presented U.S. policies clearly and effectively, the report made no overall judgment on that criterion, and did not address at all the legal requirement that broadcasts be consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives. The chairman of the panel explained that, as journalists, the panelists preferred to evaluate purely journalistic values such as balance, objectivity, and avoidance of propaganda, which are standards contained in the VOA Charter but do not cover examining whether the RM broadcasts were consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Broadcasting Board of Governors establish policies and procedures so that future evaluation panels can assess whether the foreign policy requirements of the Voice of America Charter and the 1994 International Broadcasting Act are being met. Future evaluation panels should include a determination of whether broadcasts clearly and effectively present the policies of the United States and are consistent with broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.

BBG disagreed with the recommendation, formally commenting that policies and procedures are currently in place to ensure that broadcasts are in compliance with the statutory foreign policy requirements. Specifically, BBG pointed out that all editorials are cleared in advance by the Department to ensure accurate articulation of official U.S. foreign policy. In addition, BBG stated that the requirement for all U.S. international broadcasting to be consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives is satisfied by adherence to statutory journalistic standards. In this regard, according to BBG, panels of independent journalists review all programs, after they are aired, to ensure truthfulness and therefore the programs are consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives.

We disagree. Editorials are only a small part of U.S. international broadcast programming, and the foreign policy aspects of broadcasting go beyond editorials. U.S. foreign policy is often covered in news broadcasts, commentary, and analysis. IBB's comments amply demonstrate this by including a long list of public affairs programs carried by VOA language services that contain foreign policy material. However, IBB does not explain how it determines whether this material clearly and effectively presents policies or is consistent with broad foreign policy objectives. Carrying editorials cleared by the Department only partially fulfills the policy requirements. In addition, evaluating noneditorial material through program reviews and independent panels only in accordance with journalistic criteria falls short of the need to assess whether broadcasts are consistent with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives.

In summary, OIG believes that the relevant laws clearly require U.S. international broadcasters to adhere to journalistic standards and foreign policy requirements. The former are described in the VOA Programming Handbook and evaluated in IBB program reviews. Noneditorial foreign policy content, on the other hand, is evaluated for adherence to journalistic standards, but not for consistency with U.S. foreign policy objectives. We maintain that the procedures for conducting evaluations are not complete and must be supplemented by practical ways of evaluating all foreign policy content, not just editorials.

C. EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT OF RM NEEDS STRENGTHENING

In general, external oversight of RM programming by USIA, BBG, and IBB has been lax. Past efforts to apply an array of review mechanisms used for VOA language services to RM programs have not been successful, due in large part to inadequate management support within both the oversight organizations and OCB. Current IBB management is aware of these shortfalls and is attempting to revive a system of program review for RM similar to the one now in place for VOA language services, and this time with adequate management follow-up.

USIA Role in RM Oversight

The USIA Director is an ex officio member of BBG and provides it with information and guidance on foreign policy issues. He also is apprised of operational problems because of his senior position in the broadcasting hierarchy.

Several informed and authoritative people we interviewed, including present and former USIA officials, were critical of USIA's oversight effectiveness and what was often termed its "hands-off" attitude towards RM. However, because USIA will be merged with the Department in 1999 and the USIA Director's ex officio position on BBG will be assumed by the Secretary of State, detailed discussion of USIA's past oversight performance is moot. BBG will have sole responsibility for the overall supervision of OCB and other civilian U.S. Government broadcast entities.

BBG Role in RM Oversight

As part of the reorganization of the civilian broadcast activities of the U.S. Government, BBG was created to "direct and supervise all broadcasting activities." Accordingly, the BBG is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of OCB's broadcasting services. This involves strategic planning, budget, editorial integrity, research, and program review. According to BBG's 1996 Annual Report, the board also "reviews general management practices, assessing effectiveness and efficiency, and recommends improvements." BBG's first full year of operation was 1996.

The bipartisan board includes eight members who are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, plus the USIA Director in an ex officio role. The first board was sworn in on August 11, 1995.

We found that BBG has been slow to fulfill its mandate on RM, with little evidence until recently of BBG activity in the areas listed above. After the current OCB director assumed his duties in March 1997, BBG understandably wanted to allow the new management time to establish itself and address some of the charges and concerns raised in the past about RM broadcasts. Recently, BBG has begun to take a more active role in RM oversight.

In the past, one of the more frequent complaints raised against RM was that its programming was biased and excessively influenced by leaders within the Cuban exile community in Miami. To address the charge of biased programming, the BBG in 1996 attempted to convene a panel of distinguished journalists to conduct an independent and systematic examination of Radio and TV Marti to determine whether they were meeting journalistic standards. However, the potential panelists declined to serve primarily because they perceived the problems at RM to be more political than journalistic or programmatic.

IBB Role in RM Oversight

Under the current U.S. international broadcasting structure, IBB has principal responsibility for overseeing RM operations. Within IBB, the Office of Program Review (B/R)

is charged with carrying out reviews of the VOA language services as well as monitoring and reviewing RM broadcasts. Current IBB management is working to institutionalize review procedures for RM similar to those applied to other IBB broadcast operations.

B/R regularly reviews VOA's broadcasting language services using the IBB program review process. Ideally, most of the language services are evaluated yearly, although this is not a rigid schedule and troubled services may be checked more frequently. Typically, B/R discusses its findings with the language service in an open but structured meeting to assist the service to improve its product. Often the panel includes outside language and area experts. Six weeks following the review, B/R assesses implementation of the recommendations.

Past attempts to fully apply the B/R program review system to RM programs have not been successful. According to a cross-section of present and former broadcast officials, staff, USIA and RM employees, and knowledgeable outside observers, this has been due largely to the lack of full support of former USIA, IBB, and OCB management. In June 1996, B/R again tried to establish a comprehensive system of review for RM. At the request of the former IBB director, B/R developed a plan to monitor RM's adherence to standards. The plan proposed a four-part strategy, including (1) bi-annual, in-depth RM program reviews, (2) monthly spot checks of RM broadcasts by two outside experts, (3) reestablishment of the Radio and TV External Review panels, and (4) continued real-time monitoring by B/R staff. The plan was approved by the former IBB director, but was not carried out.

In-depth Program Reviews

IBB plans to conduct regular in-depth program reviews for RM as an essential element in its overall goal of improving its oversight responsibilities. At the time of our audit work, B/R had not conducted any in-depth program reviews of RM programs.

B/R officials told us that an accurate logging system is necessary for holding program reviews. The VOA Programming Handbook describes radio logs as "the official written record of a VOA direct broadcast or feed," and says that "every element of the broadcast...should be listed on the radio log." The Handbook contains detailed instructions on how they should be prepared and what information they should contain. Without an accurate logging system, program reviews and editorial oversight of previously broadcast programming are impossible, because the reviewers cannot determine the contents of a given program without laboriously listening to each tape.

B/R officials also told us that they had repeatedly brought the need for an efficient logging system to the attention of the former RM director, but RM was never able to develop one. In addition, B/R officials cited the lack of support from former IBB management as another reason the program reviews had not been implemented.

During our review, the system logs we examined contained only fragmentary information; for example, some showed only the titles of programs. In many cases, it was unclear from the logs what subjects were covered, and what people were interviewed. Also, many logs were missing. In addition, it appeared that some RM employees failed to log in their

programs or did so incorrectly. Consequently, we estimated that it would have been impossible to find about 20-30 percent of RM broadcasts without listening to the individual logger tapes. Because of the poor logging system, B/R officials told us that it took as long as 2 weeks or more to receive programs requested from RM.

We also learned that RM had tried, but was unable, to install a new, state-of-the-art digital logging system. It was originally scheduled to be operational by April 1996, then promised for April 1997, and then postponed until the fall of 1997. Finally, according to the OCB director, when start-up problems persisted, exacerbated by the move to Miami, the project was abandoned in early 1998, at an estimated investment of \$350,000.

RM problems in developing a functional logging system have continued under the present OCB director. In a renewed effort to treat RM like all other language services, IBB had planned to conduct a formal in-depth program review in June 1998. As part of this review, two outside experts evaluated 24 hours of randomly selected tapes, but IBB was unable to complete the project on schedule because the absence of a logging system made it impossible to select appropriate programs by their content. In October 1998, IBB commented that it planned to complete the review in December. Whenever completed, it should be a positive step in IBB's efforts to improve oversight and follow-up. Meanwhile, IBB is working with RM to ensure that RM employees maintain adequate program logs so that the basic assessment can finally begin.

A B/R official told us that RM's response to resolving this fundamental problem has been "minimal." B/R adds that the problem is not technical, but lies with the willingness of RM employees to make required entries, and RM management to see that the work is done properly.

This new delay is symptomatic of RM's inability to develop an adequate logging system of its broadcasts. We found that B/R employees had urged RM to adopt an efficient system, but that IBB management had failed to ensure that RM carried out the project.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, with advice and technical assistance from the International Broadcasting Bureau, acquire and install a practical and efficient logging system, giving full consideration to adapting commercial, off-the-shelf technology and the need for compatibility with other international broadcasting entities.

OCB agreed with the recommendation and commented it was in the final stages of developing a practical and efficient program logging system. IBB also concurred with the recommendation, and has scheduled an April 1999 RM program review contingent on the successful installation of the logging system.

Outside Spot Checks of RM Programs

Another part of the B/R 1996 evaluation strategy to monitor RM programming was to have at least two outside experts participate in monthly spot checks of randomly selected broadcasts. We found that no spot checks had been made of RM programming. However, outside experts did complete two RM broadcast reviews in 1997, which are more extensive than

spot checks. According to a B/R official, each of these experts reviewed 20 hours of RM programs. Some of their comments were very critical of style, content, appropriateness, and balance. B/R information shows that it forwarded summary results of the reviews to OCB for comment, but there is no indication that any comment was made. We found there was no requirement that RM consider the review comments or take any action based on them, nor was there any follow-up with RM by B/R concerning the review results.

An RM External Review Panel

An external review panel was first established in 1993 as part of RM's quality control process. The mission of the five-member panel was to provide regular, independent evaluations of RM programming from a variety of broadcast professionals and academic or journalistic Cuba specialists. In 1995, without any clear explanation, the panel stopped meeting. In June 1996, IBB recommended to BBG that the RM panel, as well as the TV Marti panel, be revived. In October 1998 we were told that there were no plans to revive either panel.

A GAO report in 1994 noted two defects in making the work of the panel effective. One was that the B/R director had no authority to ensure that OCB adequately considered suggestions made by the panel. The second was that there was no follow-up process to monitor whether actions agreed to by OCB were actually taken. In response to GAO's recommendation, USIA's Acting Associate Director, Bureau of Broadcasting said that he would charge B/R with monitoring OCB responses and task OCB to provide a formal response to the panel as to how it planned to address each of the panel's suggestions. However, this was not done. "No one made the system work," a senior IBB official told us.

In March 1997, when we met with the B/R director, the RM panel had not met for over a year, although there had been no formal decision to terminate it. The B/R chief had proposed the reactivation of the panel in his June 1996 memo and, he said, that decision rested with the BBG. When the panel did meet, there were delays in convening it and meeting deadlines for submission of reports. Also, RM often did not implement recommendations and suggestions.

In considering a comprehensive oversight process for RM, we make no recommendation regarding the reestablishment of a regular RM external review panel, noting only that there appear to be ample oversight mechanisms at hand. Past oversight efforts that were not successful were generally marked by lack of follow-up by the oversight bodies and resistance to change at OCB. In this regard, the observation of a BBG official in 1997 seems especially relevant: "Radio Marti is perceived as lacking in integrity... (but) raising individual examples of violations is not particularly effective. You have to deal with the broader problem."

Real-time Monitoring by B/R

A long-standing feature of the IBB program review process for RM has been use of a real-time monitor from B/R to provide a daily critique of RM's program content, especially with regard to program accuracy, fairness, balance, and consistency with U.S. foreign policy objectives. Despite the monitor's efforts to provide RM with frequent professional assessments

of problems and successes, this initiative has not worked well. More recently, it appeared not to be functioning at all because of other priorities assigned to the monitor.

In 1992, when B/R took over responsibility for reviewing RM programming, USIA decided to assign a B/R staff person to monitor the daily broadcasts of RM. Any problems detected by the monitor were to be reported directly to USIA rather than to OCB. Starting in the fall of 1997, the monitor substantially reduced the time devoted to monitoring RM because of new responsibilities, and produced only one memorandum on specific RM programming during a 10-month period. In addition, up until late 1997, the monitor only listened about 20 hours a week to RM programming, which included no evening or weekend programming. According to the monitor, his job was hampered by the lack of an efficient RM logging system, delays in receiving broadcast tapes from OCB, and unresponsiveness to cited problems at RM. Given the limited amount of monitoring actually being done, and IBB's goal of reinvigorating other elements of the review strategy, it may now be time to consider discontinuing it. (The B/R official assigned to monitor RM left IBB in November 1998, and a successor had not been assigned at the time of this report). Random monitoring might be an effective substitute under present circumstances.

Although the four-part strategy put forward and approved in June 1996 for the evaluation of RM programming appeared to be a sound approach, it never gained the necessary support from management officials within OCB, IBB, and BBG. Despite many assurances from the former RM Director, RM was never able to implement the necessary logging system to enable a successful monitoring effort. Also, the belief of some former IBB Directors that B/R's regular program review system would not work because of RM's unique circumstances led to the establishment of real-time monitoring of RM broadcasts. It is now time to put in place a pragmatic oversight process for RM that will spotlight problems as they occur, and provide for the effective follow-up that has been lacking in previous efforts.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the International Broadcasting Bureau and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, in consultation with the Broadcasting Board of Governors, establish external oversight procedures to ensure that Radio Marti adheres to the law and Voice of America standards. The procedures should include yearly program reviews, similar to those of the Voice of America language services, and spot checks, focus groups, and external review panels as necessary. In addition, a mechanism should be established within the International Broadcasting Bureau to ensure that recommendations to improve programming are acted on and implemented.

IBB and OCB agreed with the recommendation. Specifically, IBB commented that it has begun to standardize the review process of RM so that it mirrors the process used for all VOA language services, including follow-ups to ensure compliance with appropriate recommendations. OCB agreed to work with IBB and BBG to achieve the highest levels of professionalism and efficiency that will enable it to carry out its mission. In addition, BBG is requiring formal monthly reports from OCB on its progress in implementing corrective actions designed to strengthen RM broadcasting effectiveness.

V. CONSOLIDATED LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, with International Broadcasting Bureau oversight, reengineer its internal review procedures, particularly for non-news programs, to include appropriate supervisory review of prebroadcast material and editorial guidelines for live shows, to ensure adherence to VOA standards.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, working with the International Broadcasting Bureau, revive focus group evaluations for all new, major and controversial program changes and proposals, and that the International Broadcasting Bureau ensure that survey results are fully integrated into Radio Marti decisionmaking.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that once the International Media Center panel's evaluation visit to Radio Marti is completed, the International Broadcasting Bureau prepare a written action plan to correct any deficiencies noted by the panel, providing copies to the Broadcasting Board of Governors and the Office of Inspector General. The action plan should include, among other things, recommendations for improving the sourcing of stories and for the training of Radio Marti employees.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Broadcasting Board of Governors establish policies and procedures so that future evaluation panels can assess whether the foreign policy requirements of the Voice of America Charter and the 1994 International Broadcasting Act are being met. Future evaluation panels should include a determination of whether broadcasts clearly and effectively present the policies of the United States and are consistent with broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.

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