

# Background

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## Friend of Liberty: Cuba Broadcasting Targets the Castro Tyranny

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**Abstract:** *Since World War II, U.S. international broadcasting has been a major tool for breaking information barriers and blockades constructed by totalitarian and similarly closed authoritarian regimes. Today, the United States continues to open new doors to individual and media freedom, and to advance the free exchange and debate of ideas for citizens of states that are still not free. Despite this record, Radio and TV Martí—the United States’ Spanish-language broadcasts to Cuba—have come under increasing attack primarily from liberals and members of the Democratic Party. The Heritage Foundation explains why U.S. broadcasts to Cuba are as vital to the cause of freedom as ever.*

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U.S. policy toward Cuba is governed by America’s enduring concerns about the absence of democracy, liberty, and respect for human rights during the 52-year reign of the Castro dictatorship. As candidate Barack Obama stated openly and correctly about Cuba, “Never, in my lifetime, have the people of Cuba known freedom. Never, in the lives of two generations of Cubans, have the people of Cuba known democracy. This is the terrible and tragic status quo that we have known for half a century—of elections that are anything but free or fair; of dissidents locked away in dark prison cells for the crime of speaking the truth. I won’t stand for this injustice, you won’t stand for this injustice, and together we will stand up for freedom in Cuba.”<sup>1</sup> He continued, “My policy towards Cuba will be guided by one word: *Libertad*. And the road to freedom for all Cubans must begin with justice for Cuba’s

### Talking Points

- U.S. policy toward Cuba is governed by America’s enduring concerns about the absence of liberty and respect for human rights during the 52-year reign of the Castro dictatorship.
- Despite this long-standing commitment to fighting tyranny, and despite President Obama’s specific promise to advance liberty in Cuba, many in Congress want to eliminate U.S. broadcasting to Cuba.
- It is essential to bear in mind that in Cuba, individual rights and freedoms considered inalienable in the U.S. are regulated by Cuba’s Communist masters.
- The U.S. should maintain its steadfast commitment to the Cuban people by equipping them with the tools to establish freedom and democracy.
- International broadcasting reached captive audiences during the Cold War, and it continues to do so today. The U.S. government’s Radio and TV Martí is the essential vehicle for reaching the Cuban public, and any effort to eliminate it should cease.

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political prisoners, *the rights of free speech, a free press and freedom of assembly*; and it must lead to elections that are free and fair.”<sup>2</sup>

Before the United Nations in September 2010, President Obama gave the appearance of recognizing that the U.S. has a role to play in fighting tyranny in its varied forms. The “price of our own freedom,” Obama said, “is standing up for the freedom of others.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite the United States’ long-standing commitment to fighting tyranny, and despite President Obama’s specific promise to advance liberty in Cuba, some Members of Congress want to either reduce U.S. broadcasting directed at Cuba or shut it down entirely. A May 2010 report by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) recommends major policy changes in the U.S. information strategy for Cuba.<sup>4</sup> The SFRC report primarily recommends integrating the U.S. government’s Radio/TV Martí (*Radio y Televisión Martí*, aimed at Cuba) into Voice of America (VOA). The report also proposes that Radio and TV Martí’s parent organization, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), be moved from Miami to Washington, D.C., where OCB would be

largely folded into Voice of America’s overall management and operations. Such a move would open the door for internal feuding over coverage areas, would likely encourage budgetary battles, and make Communist Cuba a media audience on par

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with Costa Rica or Uruguay. In addition, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) has considered closing down all shortwave transmission in Spanish on VOA—which would then also include Radio Martí, spelling its effective end.

Contrary to these proposals, the U.S. should maintain its steadfast commitment to the Cuban people by equipping them with the tools required to establish freedom and democracy. Any effort to eliminate international broadcasting to Cuba should cease and Radio/TV Martí should be retained as the chief vehicle for reaching out to the

1. “Remarks of Senator Obama: Renewing U.S. Leadership in the Americas,” speech at the Cuban American National Foundation, Miami, Florida, May 23, 2008, at [http://www.barackobama.com/2008/05/23/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_obam\\_68.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/05/23/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_68.php) (November 18, 2010).
2. *Ibid.* (Emphasis added.)
3. Press release, “Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly,” The White House, September 23, 2010, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/23/remarks-president-united-nations-general-assembly> (November 18, 2010). President Obama’s speech at the U.N. marks an important recognition of the central role that promoting democracy and defending human rights still plays in U.S. foreign policy, and includes an appeal for stronger global support for democracy. The speech recalled the commitment of former President George W. Bush in his 2005 inaugural address to make it U.S. policy to support “the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” December 10, 1948, at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml> (November 18, 2010). Article IV of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man states that “Every person has the right to freedom of investigation, of opinion, and of the expression and dissemination of ideas, by any medium whatsoever.” Organization of American States, “American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man,” 1948, at [http://www.oas.org/dil/access\\_to\\_information\\_human\\_right\\_American\\_Declaration\\_of\\_the\\_Rights\\_and\\_Duties\\_of\\_Man.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/access_to_information_human_right_American_Declaration_of_the_Rights_and_Duties_of_Man.pdf) (November 18, 2010). See also John Lewis Gaddis, “Ending Tyranny,” *The American Interest*, September/October 2008, at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=459> (November 18, 2010).
4. The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) will perhaps provide a more bipartisan approach in an upcoming study. Several of the BBG’s members, including Ambassador Viktor Ashe, Susan McCue, and Dana Perino, were requested by the BBG to conduct a “listening tour” of Congress in August regarding the future of broadcasting to Cuba. An upcoming report is expected to be released at the conclusion of their observations. Press release, “BBG Record of Decisions, July 2010,” Broadcasting Board of Governors, August 6, 2010, at <http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/pressreleases-article.cfm?articleID=469> (November 18, 2010).

Cuban public. Rather than undertaking a costly move to Washington, OCB should be allowed to keep its headquarters in Miami. Since OCB's establishment, the United States government has made a significant investment in equipment and human capital which has expanded in recent years. Renewed efforts should be directed at revitalizing and adjusting public diplomacy and media strategies to meet the challenges of new social networks and digital-age information technologies. Such measures should empower ordinary Cubans with the tools they need to judge their society and promote peaceful change. These measures should prepare Cubans for the inevitable economic and political transitions to a democratic state with a market-based economy.

In terms of technical capacity, the OCB should also modernize its broadcasting capabilities, content, and means of delivery. By concentrating on modernizing OCB's capabilities and its program content, the U.S. government can capture a broader and more attentive audience. Until there is a recognizable transition to democracy underway in Cuba, the U.S. should not feel compelled to deliver what will be interpreted on the island as a major political victory for the Castro brothers by a major reduction in either the resources or operating capabilities of Radio/TV Martí.

### The Isle of the Unfree

Far too many Americans forget that Cuba remains a totalitarian throwback state ruled by the same leaders who ousted the dictatorship of Fulgenio Batista in 1959. In Cuba, between 85 percent and 90 percent of economic activity is directed by the state. Only members of a single party—the Cuban Communist Party, the vanguard party of the revolution—are allowed to compete for and hold public office. Political opposition and free debate are restricted. The secret police possess broad and arbitrary powers of arrest and a capacity to violate the privacy of any Cuban. People with opposing or dissenting political views are subject to arrest for

crimes such as “dangerousness,” and have none of the fundamental rights and liberties—speech, assembly, travel—that are promised by the Organization of American States Inter-American Democratic Charter.<sup>5</sup>

When discussing relations between Cuba and the United States in the area of public diplomacy and international broadcasting, it is essential to bear in mind the fact that in Cuba, individual rights and freedoms considered inalienable in the U.S. are governed by Cuba's Communist masters. Unlike a free society, Cuba recognizes no right of free speech, no right to freedom of information. The Cuban constitution of 1992 enshrines the state's right to “regulate the use and benefits of telecommunications.”<sup>6</sup> The press in Cuba exists in order to “conform to the aims of socialist society.”<sup>7</sup> All media are property of the state and can never be privately owned. Therefore, independent forms of expression are suppressed. To voice unauthorized opinions publicly, or to publicize criticism of the regime is to challenge state authority and is considered action detrimental to the security of the state.

Penalties for criticizing the Communist regime can lead to jail sentences of three months to a year. The Cuban regime systematically denounces anyone who calls for fundamental changes in the regime or the sacrosanct revolution as an enemy and automatically labels them “mercenaries” and “traitors.” Article 103 of the Cuban Penal Code defines the crime of *propaganda enemiga*, or “enemy propaganda,” stating “that anyone who incites opposition to the social order, international solidarity or the socialist state by means of verbal, written, or any other kind of propaganda, or who makes, distributes, or possesses such propaganda, can be imprisoned for one to eight years.” Furthermore, “anyone who spreads false news or makes malicious predictions likely to cause alarm or discontent among the population, or public disorder, can be imprisoned one to four years. If mass media are used, the sentence can be between seven and fifteen years in prison.”<sup>8</sup>

5. Organization of American States, “Inter-American Democratic Charter,” September 11, 2010, at [http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1\\_en\\_p4.htm](http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm) (December 6, 2010).

6. “Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, 1992,” at [http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const\\_92\\_e.htm](http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm) (November 18, 2010).

7. *Ibid.*

During the infamous Black Spring of 2003, the Cuban authorities, acting on direct orders from the government, arrested 75 human rights activists, independent librarians, and journalists.<sup>9</sup> Twenty-five of those arrested were journalists whose only crime was telling the truth about conditions in Cuba. Although the Castro regime has begun a process of releasing many of those incarcerated in 2003, it is forcing these advocates of an open Cuban society into exile. Observers of the Cuban scene have become increasingly skeptical that the gradual release of political prisoners is a harbinger of a genuine opening of the regime to participation by any other than members of the Castro regime. Hopes for progress via a dialogue with the Catholic Church, civil society, and dissidents remain remote. The Castro regime shows no signs of moderating or removing laws that preserve the state's grip on information, and employs selective acts of repression to silence opposition. The end goal of the Castro brothers is not a transition to democracy but a more sustainable form of Communism.

The Cuban government operates a comprehensive propaganda machine designed to indoctrinate the ordinary citizen and glorify and justify the Cuban Revolution. The government runs four national television channels, 16 regional TV stations, and an international TV channel as well as 91 radio stations. The regime churns out 723 periodicals, 406 of which are in print and 317 that are digital, all state-owned and state-operated. There is no opportunity for an independent or diverse media. Computer and Internet access is severely regulated. As of 2005, there were only 3.3 computers for every 100 people. Furthermore, it is forbidden to purchase computer equipment unless granted per-

mission from the proper government authorities under Decree Law 209.<sup>10</sup> Less than 2 percent of the Cuban population has access to the Internet. Because there are so few opportunities for Cuban dissidents to voice their opinions publicly, they often resort to covert operations, using illegal dial-up connections and building computers with parts from the black market.<sup>11</sup>

### **Cuba Broadcasting: A Reagan Legacy in the Battle of Ideas**

During the Cold War, U.S. international broadcasting scored significant successes in delivering new information and hope to millions suffering under Communism. For President Ronald Reagan, the battle for hearts and minds was an essential component of peaceful, non-military confrontation with the Communist behemoth. "I want," said Reagan in 1980,

more than anything I've ever wanted, to have an administration that will, through its actions, at home and in the international arena, let millions of people know that Miss Liberty still "Lifts her lamp beside the golden door." Through our international broadcasting stations—the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and the others—let us send, loud and clear, the message that this generation of Americans intends to keep that lamp shining; that this dream, this last best hope of man on earth, this nation under God, shall not perish from the earth.<sup>12</sup>

In response to the relentless censorship and information blockade practiced in Cuba, on May 25, 1982, President Reagan signed Executive Order 12323, establishing the Presidential Commission

8. Cuba Verdad, "Crime of Enemy Propaganda," at [http://www.cubaverdad.net/crime\\_of\\_enemy\\_propaganda.htm](http://www.cubaverdad.net/crime_of_enemy_propaganda.htm) (November 18, 2010).

9. Theresa Bond, "The Crackdown in Cuba," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59191/theresa-bond/the-crackdown-in-cuba> (November 18, 2010).

10. Reporters Without Borders, "Going Online in Cuba: Internet Under Surveillance," October 2006, p. 3, at [http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport\\_gb\\_md\\_1.pdf](http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_gb_md_1.pdf) (November 19, 2010).

11. Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media," March 30, 2009, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=199&parent=19&report=79> (November 19, 2010).

12. Ronald Reagan, "Labor Day Speech at Liberty State Park, Jersey City, New Jersey," September 1, 1980, at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/9.1.80.html> (November 19, 2010).



on Broadcasting to Cuba.<sup>13</sup> U.S. Congress later followed, passing the Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act in October 1983. This law, adopted with broad bipartisan support, established Radio Martí, providing Cubans information that they would not normally receive. According to President Reagan,

For the first time in the 25 years of Communist domination of Cuba, the Cuban people will be able to hear the truth and to hear it in detail, about Cuban domestic and foreign policy. The Cuban people will be in a better position to make Cuba's leaders accountable for their conduct in foreign policy, economic management, and human rights.<sup>14</sup>

The first broadcast to Cuba was made from Washington, D.C., on May 20, 1985. In 1990, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting was established and TV Martí was founded. The objectives of the OCB are to:

1. Provide the opportunity for Cubans to seek, receive, and impart information through media outlets;
2. Create an open dialogue and flow of ideas through television and radio;
3. Share informative news that is accurate, objective and comprehensive; and
4. Provide news, commentary, and other information to Cubans and people around the world to promote free societies.

Originally, international broadcasting functions were under the auspices of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). The International Broadcasting Act of 1994 created the Broadcasting Board of Governors, responsible for Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio/TV

Martí, and WORLDNET Television.<sup>15</sup> When USIA was disbanded in 1999, the BBG became a separate, independent agency.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting became subject to BBG oversight. Despite changes in organizational structure, political repression and information control on the island represented an opportunity for the U.S. to provide outside information to a public held captive by its government.

**Radio Martí.** Based in Miami, Florida, Radio Martí and TV Martí employ a 151-member staff that provides listeners with news around the clock. Radio Martí is available to Cuban listeners for all but six hours every week. Seeking to fill in the information gaps caused by more than 40 years of Communist rule, Radio Martí makes its broadcasts as widely available as possible, through shortwave, AM, and the Internet. Since Radio Martí's inception, the Cuban government has made considerable efforts to limit Martí's broadcasting capabilities and American influence. Jamming shortwave signals and interfering in AM signals by counter-broadcasting at a higher power level on the same frequency are constantly employed. Radio Martí then counters by switching its frequencies 10 times a day. While the regime is successful in jamming signals inside Havana and some surrounding cities, it has little impact outside of these areas. Shortwave reception in eastern parts of Cuba is strong and listeners can access it with minimal effort. Additionally, there are significant areas on the island where medium-wave jamming is not a major obstacle to listening audiences.<sup>17</sup>

The public reception to Radio Martí has been positive. In a survey conducted by the BBG's Office of Inspector General (OIG) in July 2007, 72 percent

13. The Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba was established by Executive Order 12323 and amended by Executive Order 12366, permitting the President to appoint 12 members to the Commission. The National Archives, "Executive Orders Disposition Tables, Ronald Reagan: Executive Order 12366," May 25, 1982, at <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/1982.html> (November 19, 2010).
14. Ronald Reagan, "Statement on the Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act," October 11, 1983, at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/101183d.htm> (November 19, 2010).
15. United States Information Agency, "Factsheet," February 1999, at <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/usiahome/factshe.htm> (November 19, 2010).
16. Broadcasting Board of Governors, "FAQ's," at <http://www.bbg.gov/about/faq.html#q1> (November 19, 2010).
17. "Cuba: Immediate Action Is Needed to Ensure the Survivability of Radio and TV Martí," S. Rep. 111-46, 111th Congress, 2nd Sess., April 29, 2010, p. 9.

of respondents reported that they have listened to Radio Martí's news broadcasts (30 percent of them said they listen daily).<sup>18</sup> Despite the setbacks, Radio Martí has had considerable success in penetrating the barriers established by the Castro regime.

**TV Martí.** TV Martí broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week through Hispasat, a direct-to-home satellite television system, available illegally in Cuba through home receivers and cable stations throughout Latin America.<sup>19</sup> However, owing to Cuba's continuous jamming of U.S. satellites, OCB has had to find more creative ways of transmitting television signals. In addition to sending signals from ground-based transmitters, TV Martí also uses satellite providers. Through DirectTV satellite, TV Martí broadcasts two 30-minute live newscasts each day, and three and a half hours of additional programming on weekdays (two hours on weekends).

Until 2005, OCB used the Tethered Aerostat Radar System (TARS) in the Florida Keys to send airborne signals to Cuba. To ensure timely and relevant information to the broadest geographic range of the island, OCB used TARS combined with an EC-130 Commando Solo cargo plane. The intent was to provide continuous broadcasting—when TARS was grounded for maintenance or poor weather conditions, the airplane could take its place.<sup>20</sup> But shortly thereafter, Hurricane Dennis destroyed TARS, and OCB introduced AeroMartí. Powered by a twin engine, the propeller-driven AeroMartí flies over U.S. waters, transmitting television signals to Cuba. AeroMartí broadcasts programming four and a half hours per day, six days a week. Cuba has retaliated by flying airborne jamming platforms.<sup>21</sup> When determining audience numbers for Martí, Lockheed Martin projected that even with jamming, TV Martí's Channel 20 broadcast signal potentially extends over 21.1 percent of the main island (outside

Havana). Furthermore, AeroMartí's Channel 13 could potentially reach 22.7 percent of the island. The current aircraft is a state-of-the-art platform with capabilities that cannot be easily duplicated.

### A Program with Enemies

Over the years, broadcasting to Cuba has attracted a number of critics who believe that the efforts of Radio and TV Martí should be massively overhauled or even ended. Critics attack the program for a variety of reasons. Some consider broadcasting to Cuba a Cold War anachronism and believe the U.S. should end any form of targeted-action directed at penetrating the information wall that protects Cuba's Communist regime. Others complain that the broadcasting process has become the reserve of a small, exceedingly anti-Castro clique within the Cuban-American community. For some, OCB is a vulnerable target that allows a handful of legislators to demonstrate their vigilance and support for fiscal discipline. Finally, other critics may give lip service to the idea of seeking to break Cuba's stranglehold on information and its regime of censorship, but feel the entire program is not sufficiently cost-effective and claim that resources should be redirected or spent on other more worthy endeavors. Since the change from the Bush to the Obama Administration, Cuba broadcasting has also continued to lose bureaucratic and congressional support.

The Council on Foreign Relations' chief Cuba expert, Julia Sweig—a long-standing advocate of closer ties with the Castro regime, frequent visitor to the island, and occasional interlocutor with Fidel Castro—is representative of the critics of Cuban broadcasting. She dismisses Radio/TV Martí claiming it has evolved from “a surprisingly professional broadcast given its political aims into a propaganda

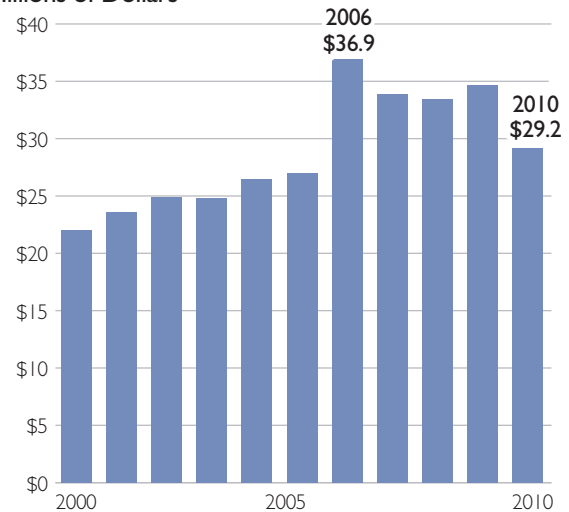
18. U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, “Report of Inspection: U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Cuba,” No. ISP-I-07-27A, July 2007, p. 18, at <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/121798.pdf> (November 19, 2010).
19. Broadcasting Board of Governors, “BBG 2009 Annual Report,” p. 29, at <http://media.voanews.com/documents/09anrprt.pdf> (October 8, 2010).
20. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, “Report to the President,” May 2004, p. 27, at <http://www.cafc.gov/documents/organization/67963.pdf> (November 22, 2010).
21. “TV Martí: A Station in Search of an Audience?” Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 111th Congress, 1st Sess., June 17, 2009, p. 1.

tool with not a whit of dispassion or neutrality. The broadcasts offend not only the Cuban government but also many of the professionals within Voice of America. By 1987, Jorge Mas Canosa, founder and former president of the anti-Castro Cuban National Foundation, began to float the idea for a TV Martí, and Congress appropriated \$16 million for its launch in 1990. By 2007, U.S. taxpayers had contributed over \$500 million to radio and TV broadcasts that few if any Cubans actually see or hear.”<sup>22</sup> But Sweig does not address the Cuban public’s growing restlessness and dissatisfaction with the Castro regime. Furthermore, arguments like hers falter under closer scrutiny.

**Budget.** In its efforts to provide uncensored news, OCB has faced persistent budgetary and resource challenges. OCB’s budget has been shrinking considerably and remains a favorite target for those who want to downgrade or end its role in providing information to Cubans. In fiscal year (FY) 2006, OCB’s budget was \$36.9 million. The budget proposal that President Obama sent to Congress for FY 2011 (which began on October 1, 2010) has decreased to \$29.2 million. In 2010, Senator Byron Dorgan (D–ND), a strong advocate of closer ties of trade and tourism with Communist Cuba and an active opponent of Radio and TV Martí, initiated OCB’s largest cut when he added a provision to the FY 2010 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations bill. The approved measure stripped TV Martí of \$4 million in funding, adding to the already reduced appropriation requested by the President. Furthermore, the provision ordered OCB to spend less than \$5.5 million for anything other than salaries and benefits.<sup>23</sup> According to the SFRC report, the intention of these congressional actions has been to kill off AeroMartí by resource-starvation. As TV Martí’s FY 2010 budget was only \$12,025,901, AeroMartí encompasses approximately half of TV Martí’s total budget, making it an expensive and potentially unsupportable operation.

### Annual OCB Budgets on the Decline

Annual Budgets in Millions of Dollars



Sources: Broadcasting Board of Governors, Annual Reports, 2000–2009, at <http://www.bbg.gov/reports/annual-reports.html#PastAnnualReports> (October 15, 2010); “U.S. Media Campaign Has Failed to Influence Cuba, Senators Say,” *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2010, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/03/AR2010050304426.html> (October 15, 2010).

Chart 1 • B 2499 heritage.org

**Audience Numbers.** One of the major complaints against TV Martí is its supposed lack of sufficient audience numbers. According to the SFRC report, “Most available research suggests that Radio and TV Martí’s audience is small, due in large part to signal jamming by the Cuban Government.”<sup>24</sup> According to some surveys, TV Martí’s audience size could be under 2 percent of the Cuban population. According to the SFRC report, “All of IBB’s [International Broadcasting Bureau] telephone surveys since 2003 show that less than 1 percent of respondents said they watched TV Martí during the previous week.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, critics claim, there was no increase in viewership following the launch of AeroMartí and DirectTV broadcasting in 2006.<sup>26</sup> Repre-

22. Julia A. Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 103–104.

23. “Cuba: Immediate Action Is Needed,” p. 4.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

sentative Bill Delahunt (D–MA), arguing against TV Martí’s effectiveness, takes this a step further stating that TV Martí “is a station that no one watches.”<sup>27</sup>

Even though the SFRC report mentions the fact that specific audience numbers are almost impossible to determine accurately and that the surveys suffer from extreme methodological limitations, the report treats the low claims as true. When gathering audience data, the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), conducts random telephone surveys. Surveyors call listed numbers in Cuba and ask a series of questions concerning the frequency which they listen to or watch Radio or TV Martí.

Cuba is a Communist country where it is illegal to listen or watch Radio or TV Martí. As a result, the number of respondents who state that they are regular viewers is predictably low. Despite continued efforts on all sides to obtain accurate audience numbers, there is simply no way of determining real audience figures or verifying with certainty critics’ claims of tiny audiences. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R–CA) summarized this dilemma in a June 2009 Senate hearing stating,

When you live in a dictatorship, if someone calls you to ask if you are listening to radio broadcasts that attack the dictatorship, how many people are going to answer honestly?... It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that people don’t answer telephone surveys in Cuba about their political beliefs.<sup>28</sup>

The limited method IBB used to survey individuals contributed to low audience findings. Telephone, mobile phone, and Internet access in Cuba is the lowest of any Latin American or Caribbean country. According to data from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in 2008 there were only 15.5 landlines per 100 inhabitants.<sup>29</sup>

Cubans are more likely to have radios and televisions than they are telephones. Considering there are so few people with landlines, it can also be assumed that those with telephone lines are people of relative affluence and, hence, those inclined to be most supportive of the regime. It is highly unlikely, then, that the individuals surveyed would hold hostile views toward the regime, and if they did have opposing views, would jeopardize their standing and admit such to an unnamed surveyor.

According to the SFRC report, “Telephone interviewers almost immediately were confronted with hostile respondents, who thought that the interviewers were working on behalf of the Cuban government and were trying to trick them into admitting that they listening to Radio and TV Martí, which would incriminate citizens and government opponents.”<sup>30</sup> Again, it is important to remember that average Cuban citizens live under constant watch by the government. They live in fear that if they voice their true opinions they and their families will suffer adverse consequences.

Owing to the high likelihood of less-than-candid responses from the phone survey in Cuba, OCB conducted another survey in 2007 of Cubans who recently arrived in Miami. The results indicated that Radio and TV Martí’s audience numbers were considerably higher than the telephone surveys had previously specified. According to the new survey, 45 percent of the 382 respondents stated that they had listened to Radio Martí, and 21 percent responded as having watched TV Martí within the last six months before leaving Cuba.<sup>31</sup> These conflicting numbers represent serious inconsistencies in determining Radio and TV Martí’s audience size. In 2007 congressional testimony, Jess Ford, director of International Affairs and Trade with the Government Accountability Office, acknowledged that the

26. *Ibid.*

27. “TV Martí: A Station in Search of an Audience?” p. 3.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

29. Information Policy, “Cuba Reports Misleading Progress in Internet Access and Telecoms Sector,” June 23, 2010, at <http://www.i-policy.org/2010/06/cuba-reports-misleading-progress-in-internet-access-and-telecoms-sector.html> (November 19, 2010).

30. “Cuba: Immediate Action is Needed,” p. 7.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 8.



U.S. government has no overall good information on a national basis on audience size for Radio and TV Martí.<sup>32</sup>

**Jamming.** The great lengths to which the Cuban government goes to jam signals from Radio and TV Martí are proof of the priority the regime attaches to negating the inflow of often critical information.<sup>33</sup> While the regime has successfully blocked some programming, it has not been able to disrupt all of it. Yet critics of Radio and TV Martí claim that jamming is a suitable reason for shutting down OCB, or, at least, for eliminating TV Martí. The regime's efforts to block U.S. broadcasting have also come with a hefty price tag. According to a RAND report in 1996, defectors who aided in jamming estimated that the Cuban government expended \$2,000 to \$4,000 per hour flying two helicopters that blocked TV Martí. At the time, Cuba also maintained 10 jamming sites around Havana and 15 to 20 in surrounding provinces.<sup>34</sup>

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***The U.S. government should maintain independent means to communicate with the Cuban public in times of crisis or transition.***

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Critics such as John Nichols of Pennsylvania State University have claimed that “Unless TV Martí figures out a way to overcome the laws of physics...its broadcasts cannot be seen on the island without the compliance of the Cuban government...”<sup>35</sup> However, Nichols also acknowledges that U.S. programming can be received in Cuba via satellite. Both DirectTV and Hispasat reach the country with a high-grade signal. Additionally, while it is unknown how many satellite dishes are

currently in use, since many are covertly made from parts on the black market, TV Martí and other U.S. program options are available. Nichols admits that “it is nearly impossible to precisely quantify the number [of viewers],” yet he has determined that “television Martí has virtually no audience.”<sup>36</sup>

As long as TV Martí's platform on AeroMartí operates inside U.S. airspace and is subjected to constant jamming, its capacity to reach Cuban audiences will be limited by regulatory and physical restraints and hostile action. Nevertheless, the U.S. government should maintain independent means to communicate with the Cuban public in times of crisis or transition. In order to ensure that broadcasting capacity is available when needed, perhaps on extremely short notice, viable broadcasting platforms should already be in place.

**Journalistic Standards.** Other arguments against Radio and TV Martí include criticism of journalistic standards, poor management, and a competitive broadcasting market. Despite significant improvements in recent years, OCB is charged with not following proper journalistic practices. Referencing a 2009 GAO report, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) insisted that “listeners and viewers never received the kind of high quality programming that was originally intended.”<sup>37</sup> Since OCB staff is composed of people, including Cuban exiles, who oppose the Castro dictatorship, critics claim that Martí's programming content lacks balance and objectivity.

The SFRC report also failed to recognize the many changes and improvements that have been made since 2007. According to an external report conducted by the Office of Inspector General,

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting has significantly improved its broadcasting under the

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32. Jess T. Ford, “Broadcasting to Cuba: Observations Regarding TV Martí's Strategy and Operations,” testimony before the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, June 17, 2009, at <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/for061709.pdf> (November 19, 2010).

33. U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Broadcasting to Cuba: Actions Are Needed to Improve Strategy and Operations,” GAO-09-127, January 2009, p. 10, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09127.pdf> (November 19, 2010).

34. Larry Press, “Cuban Telecommunications, Computer Networking, and U.S. Policy Implications,” RAND, July 1996, at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/drafts/2008/DRU1330-1.pdf> (November 19, 2010).

35. “TV Martí: A Station in Search of an Audience?” p. 32.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

37. “Cuba: Immediate Action is Needed,” p. v.

strong leadership of the current director.... The director and his experienced and talented senior staff have implemented an organizational realignment that combined the radio and television components of OCB and streamlined its operations. This reorganization has facilitated efforts to improve the quality of broadcasts.<sup>38</sup>

BBG and OCB have taken significant steps to implement almost all of the recommendations that the OIG proposed in 2007. In its findings from 2003 to 2007, the OIG recommended 20 changes for improvement in OCB's standards. Of these 20 recommendations, OCB has completed 17. These improvements were most notably made in the areas of OCB operations, including audience research, contracting, adherence to journalistic standards, and strategic planning.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, according to IBB quality reviews, radio and television programming have considerably improved in production quality and content.<sup>40</sup>

Radio and TV Martí do not only report on news and politics in Cuba, but feature a variety of programming. TV Martí, for instance, features a show called "Let's Talk," which focuses on issues of interest to women. The show "High Voltage" provides music videos, sports summaries, and news programs from the Voice of America. Lately, OCB has made many successful improvements in its operations, including the implementation of institutional realignment by combining the radio and television components of OCB, thereby streamlining its operations. Moving OCB from Miami to Washington, D.C., as the SFRC report recommends, would be

inefficient, and moving the Spanish-language broadcasting from shortwave to the Internet would be counterproductive, since very few Cubans have Internet access (and those who do are employed by the government).

**Competitive Market.** Currently, 58 television stations and 225 radio stations, including international broadcasters such as CNN en Español, BBC, Radio España Internacional, and Radio Netherlands, are available in Cuba. But while these sources of broadcasting provide news and entertainment, they do not specifically target Cuban audiences, nor do they challenge the totalitarian information monopoly on the island. On these channels, reporting from Cuba is restricted by the institutional filters that the regime imposes, either directly, such as through off-limit topics, or indirectly, through self-censorship.<sup>41</sup> These news and information sources have limited staff and resources for specific Cuba coverage. As Radio and TV Martí are broadcast by a democratic government with the strategic objective of fostering a democratic alternative for the island's future form of governance, there is good reason to assume that Cubans, when able, will choose to view or listen to Radio and TV Martí.

Information on viewing selection remains sketchy. Compared to the projected percentage of Cubans who watch Radio and TV Martí (which could range from under 2 percent to 21 percent), approximately 30 percent of individuals stated that they watched CNN en Español. Additionally, more than 90 percent of respondents polled stated that they watched Cuba's national television broadcasts during the week.<sup>42</sup> Despite the regime's resentment

38. The United States Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, "Report of Inspection: Office of Cuba Broadcasting," Report Number ISP-IB-07-35, June 2007, p. 1, at <http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/89909.pdf> (November 22, 2010).

39. GAO, *Broadcasting to Cuba*, p. 10.

40. U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, "Report of Inspection: Office of Cuba Broadcasting," p. 1.

41. Many of these stations, such as CNN en Español, which began broadcasting from Havana in 1997, had "high hopes" of "transmitting the reality of Castro's dictatorship to American audiences." When the Media Research Center reviewed all 212 stories about the Cuban government and Cuban life that were presented in CNN's primetime new programs from March 17, 1997, to March 12, 2002, analysis showed that "CNN has allowed itself to become just another component of Fidel Castro's propaganda machine." Rich Noyes, "Megaphone for a Dictator: CNN's Coverage of Fidel Castro's Cuba, 1997-2002," Media Research Center *Special Report*, May 9, 2002, at <http://www.mediaresearch.org/specialreports/2002/rep20020509.asp> (November 19, 2010).

of the United States, American television shows such as *Friends*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *The Sopranos*, as well as sports programming, are readily available. Radio and TV Martí must therefore contend with a variety of broadcasting outlets that are often easier to access. A wider band of choices will also make audiences more selective. Although OCB's critics claim that competitors are making Radio and TV Martí irrelevant by undercutting the need for alternative news sources, they ignore the fact that Radio and TV Martí represent a certain recognized and reliable brand, outside the Castro government's control, that is used more selectively by Cuban audiences. It also traditionally brings greater expertise and familiarity with Cuba-related issues to its programming.<sup>43</sup>

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***The success of other news sources has little to do with the United States' long-standing democratic principles of promoting alternatives to a captive nation.***

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OCB has served the Cuban public when it was most needed. When Hurricane Ike struck the island in September 2008, causing massive destruction, the Cuban government failed to report the damage. Radio Martí filled in the information gap by providing news and firsthand accounts of the destruction.<sup>44</sup> Many Cubans called the station to express thanks. One listener said, "Thanks to the staff of Radio Martí. The station has been the source of information on Hurricane Ike since Cuban media is not reporting about the damages."<sup>45</sup> These are the success stories emblematic of Martí's purpose to provide news coverage to the Cuban people when they most need it, especially when their own government fails them.

It is important that the United States provide Cubans with the option of viewing programs that possess different content than the state-controlled media. Other international broadcasting networks have continuously failed in their mission to deliver realistic and balanced news coverage of the continuing human rights violations committed by the Cuban regime. According to Jordan Allott, a documentary filmmaker with experience working in Cuba, networks are allowed in Cuba if they have a history of being sympathetic to the government's way of thinking.<sup>46</sup> The entire premise of OCB is to promote the right of Cubans to seek information and ideas. As long as the Cuban regime fails in its attempts to block every individual's access to TV and Radio Martí, OCB can claim a measure of success. While there are always changes that would make Radio and TV Martí more competitive, including programs that would attract a wider audience, such as increased news programming,<sup>47</sup> the success of other news sources has little to do with the United States' long-standing democratic principles of promoting alternatives to a captive nation.

### **Cuba Broadcasting: Why it Still Matters**

The transition to a post-Castro regime in the months and years ahead remains a major issue of debate and a potential challenge to U.S. national security. The Castro brothers and the revolution they made remains the central source of legitimacy on the island. The passing from the scene of these two historic leaders will likely trigger a complex and conflictive struggle for succession. In the event of a full-fledged crisis or violent civil conflict, the U.S. government could easily find that its interests and security, as well as the lives and safety of Cuba's long-suffering population, could be influenced by the existence of an authoritative voice capable of reach-

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42. "Cuba: Immediate Action Is Needed," p. 11.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Press release, "Cubans Tune to Radio Martí in Aftermath of Hurricane Ike," Broadcasting Board of Governors, September 10, 2008, at <http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/pressreleases-article.cfm?articleID=252> (November 19, 2010).

45. *Ibid.*

46. Jordan Allott, "Oscar's Cuba: The Courage, Faith, and Hope of One of Cuba's Hidden Heroes" remarks at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., October 7, 2010.

47. U.S. Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Office of Inspector General, "Report of Inspection: U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Cuba."

ing the island. While some advocate handing over responsibility for any airborne broadcast capability to an overburdened Department of Defense, especially in a time of crisis on the island, it seems more sensible to preserve civilian capabilities, including aerial platforms at the disposal of the OCB. It is therefore highly advantageous for the U.S. government to have an independent means for communicating with the Cuban public. Such communication could save Cuban lives by delivering messages in times of crisis, particularly if unforeseen events led Cubans to consider taking to the seas *en masse* in a climate of uncertainty and massive panic.

The battle of ideas is far from over in the Americas. With the election of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and the construction of a new political and economic structure of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), there has been a resurgence of anti-Americanism and a consistent effort to undercut U.S. interests and values in the region. Governments operating under the ALBA umbrella continually disseminate a false narrative about the U.S. and its role in the Americas and the world, casting the U.S. as a militarized power and universal archetype of global imperialism and enemy of peace. For Cuba, the alliance with Chávez has provided a conduit for fresh resources and an expanded area of action for propagating and replicating Cuban political, economic, and security programs. The assault on press freedoms is most intense in countries that are ALBA members or nations like Argentina that align with Chávez.<sup>48</sup> Identifying and countering anti-American propaganda is a function best performed by organizations dedicated to the defense of democratic ideals.

The U.S. therefore should:

- **Keep Radio and TV Martí.** U.S. democracy promotion in terms of international broadcasting is being cut across the globe in countries that lack freedom of the press. For the past several years,

the Broadcasting Board of Governors, charged with oversight of U.S. international broadcasting, has eliminated a number of Voice of America's language services, including Russian, Hindi, and Arabic. Just days before Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, Voice of America's Georgian-language service was cut. Cuba should not be added to this list. The BBG argued that the cut-backs were due to a shift in resources, focusing on new technology and critical audiences in the Middle East, North Korea, Somalia, and Cuba,<sup>49</sup> yet the OCB's budget continues to diminish from \$36.9 million in 2007 to the currently proposed \$29.2 million for FY 2011.

Radio and TV Martí are essential to reaching the Cuban people. The focus should not be on budget numbers but on ways to strengthen and improve channels of communications to Cuba, and on the steady introduction of news and views that allow Cubans to apply more objective criteria as they make personal decisions regarding the conduct of their lives in a Communist system. The OCB can help provide this focus in a way that is uniquely relevant to Cubans.

- **Keep Martí in Miami.** It would be disruptive and expensive to move Radio and TV Martí to Washington. There is a wealth of investment in infrastructural and technical capabilities as well as human capital at the Miami headquarters. In his report for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Kerry argues that the "OCB must 'return to basics' to clean up its operation" and that the creation of a service similar to Radio/TV Martí as part of VOA would resolve current operational issues and prove beneficial for broadcasting to Cuba. This point is debatable. If anything, folding TV and Radio Martí into VOA would require a considerable amount of time and financial resources. Furthermore, in 2009, Voice of America expanded its Latin America service,

48. The free press is under regular assault in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. In Argentina, under the leadership of the late Nestor Kirchner and now his wife, current president Christina Fernandez de Kirchner, a similar, if slightly more disguised, attack on press freedom is underway, such as the continued attempts to advance an agenda of democratic rollback by members of Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian alliance.

49. Delphine Schrank, "VOA Says Goodbye to Uzbek, Other Tongues," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2007, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/22/AR2007022201654.html> (November 19, 2010).



particularly to Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua using Radio/TV Martí's production facilities in Miami.<sup>50</sup> (Budget cuts had made it difficult for Voice of America's Latin America service to have its own facility.) As a result, both services are already working together. Radio/TV Martí has a state-of-the-art production facility in Miami. There is no need to encumber the service with additional bureaucratic frictions and reshuffling when any improvements can be made from its present location.

- **Improve Content and Delivery of Radio and TV Martí.** The central mission for the future is continuing development of broadcast strategies that will advance the cause of freedom in Cuba. The OCB should explore a broader menu of broadcasts and target the needs and preferences of Cuban audiences in terms of informational, educational, even entertainment programming. The cultural magnetism of the U.S. should not be lightly dismissed, and the OCB should continue to focus on promoting a pluralistic, non-ideological Cuba that opens a pathway to a democratic transition. While Radio and TV Martí can be received in many areas outside Havana, OCB should continue to explore innovative ways to increase its broadcasting reach to the highest-populated areas, which lie in the city. Reaching Cuban audiences should include use of Internet and digital media, though the vulnerability of these media to government interference must be recognized. New strategies, such as the Global Internet Freedom Consortium, should be synchronized with the work of the OCB.<sup>51</sup> Additional access to Martí should also be established through its Web site. Social networking and other new media innovations should be consistently and more widely included.

## Conclusion

International broadcasting was an effective method of delivering news and information to captive audiences during the Cold War and it continues to be so

today. The duration of the Castro regime is finite. The capacity of Cuban Communism to survive the passing of its founding leaders—Fidel and Raul—and to preserve political legitimacy without significant democratization is highly uncertain. Genuine change will come only as a result of efforts of Cubans as they begin to break free of the walls of enforced isolation imposed by the Communist regime. True change will require free communications, open debate, and genuine dialogue that clears the way for the political, economic, and social decisions that will govern the lives of new generations of Cubans. Broadcasting to Cuba can play an active role in supporting a genuine process of democratic opening for all Cubans.

Until a democratic transition is underway in Cuba, the United States cannot treat Cuba as if it were just any other country in the region. The Office of Cuba Broadcasting is a symbol of American efforts to breach the firewalls of Communism and disseminate news, opinion, and U.S. policies geared toward the people on the island. Although there is always room for improvement and fresh strategies and technological advancement, the U.S. should not eliminate the OCB. When Cuba does begin to transition to a democracy, the United States should be available to provide assistance and support. A professional cadre of informed and experienced specialists in public diplomacy and mass communications conversant with the daily realities of life in Cuba will be an invaluable asset for Washington policymakers. Likewise, Washington will want—and need—to have the appropriate equipment and technical capabilities to deliver timely and effective messages to Cuba.

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50. Juan O. Tamayo, "V of America Expands Audience," *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/23/AR2009112303863.html> (November 19, 2010).

51. Jackson Diehl, "Access Denied," *The Washington Post*, October 25, 2010, at <http://www.statesman.com/opinion/diehl-access-denied-996118.html> (November 19, 2010).