

Sad Story for Voice of America

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It wasn't the kind of story that anyone at the Voice of America was very happy about:

"It's a mean story, not at all consistent with what we think of ourselves," said the chief of the news division. But at 6:30 P.M. They were ready to start broadcasting it around the world.

In English, the radio script begins this way: "In Washington, a Senate investigation reveals that the United States Central Intelligence Agency was involved in several plots to kill foreign leaders."

By midnight, it would be broadcast several times in English and in Khmer, Thai, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Urdu, Ukrainian and, at what will be dawn in Moscow, Russian.

As the 24-hour broadcast cycle turns, the story—modified by time change and expanded with reaction, background and analysis—will be broadcast in all the 35 languages in which the Voice—the broadcast arm of the United States Information Agency—is fluent.

Differences in Content

There would be modifications for different regions. To be included in broadcasts to Southeast Asia was a more detailed look at the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, the South Vietnamese President.

For Africa, the plots to kill the first Prime Minister of the Congo, now Zaire, Patrice Lumumba, were detailed, along with the fact that Mr. Lumumba was in fact, "apparently murdered by his rivals," not by the C.I.A.

For the Latin-American service, the plots against Fidel Castro of Cuba, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Gen. Rene Schneider of Chile were given prominence.

"If you're caught not telling it straight," said Bernard H. Kamenske, chief of the news division, "you lose any sense of trust with your listener."

He acknowledged that this is not a universal view in government circles, that there are those who think the United States should not be paying good money to advertise its own faults. But he insisted, "There is no alternative to it. What we attempt to provide is reality. And any diplomat who thinks that they're hurt by reality, they're mistaken."

Sometimes those other voices have prevailed. Last spring, under the direction of the State Department, information about the United States evacuation from Saigon was restricted to "official statements" from the Administration or Congress.

Mr. Kamenske and his superior, Alan Heil, chief of news and current affairs, at first yielded to the pressure to go along with the limitation, then they broke with it in a memorandum to the Voice staff. "It is important to remember that we strive to know the truth and tell it," the memo said.

Mr. Kamenske, a big, bespectacled man of 48, said that the C.I.A. story did cause many at the broadcast service a sense of "personal embarrassment" because "we are an American abroad."

Kenneth R. Giddens, the Alabama businessman who

heads the agency, was personally regretful: "I think it's a very tragic thing that we're confronted with this situation, which I doubt does this nation any good. Everybody knows we live in a jungle world, and activities take place by almost all nations when their interests are threatened. But most of them have laws, such as official secrets laws, so that some of the more distasteful things they've done aren't spread on the record."

He added, "I wish we were smart enough and our system permitted some way legally—legally—so we could clean dirty linen in private."

Playing It Straight

Public laundering being the way things are done, however, Mr. Giddens said he had not even discussed the C.I.A. report with the news staff, and assumed, "The men down there in charge are going to play this thing straight." He was asked if there had been any pressure to handle the story gingerly, or to downplay it: "Not on this," he said, with a smile.

In a studio down the hall, at 3:30 P.M., Anatol Petrov was broadcasting to the Soviet Union about the Senate committees decision to disregard the President and publish a "report about participation of C.I.A. in plots to kill foreign state leaders."

A few hours later, in time for early-rising Muscovites to listen with their morning tea, the Russian service would be saying something very much like, "In Washington, a Senate investigation reveals..."