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THE GAO RENDERS ITS VERDICT: THE U.N. INFORMATION SERVICE IS ANTI-AMERICAN

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. General Accounting Office has confirmed that the United Nations' main public information organ is biased against the U.S. A recently completed GAO content analysis of materials produced by the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) finds that these materials frequently oppose key U.S. interests, discuss U.S. policies in a biased manner, and distort or ignore U.S. positions at the United Nations.

In theory, DPI, which is a part of the U.N. Secretariat, has the responsibility "to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among the peoples of the world."¹ Its 1946 Mandate from the U.N. General Assembly specifically prohibits it from engaging in "propaganda."² Yet the GAO report finds that the DPI is indeed producing propaganda that is distressingly anti-American. This is an extremely serious finding, since DPI publications and broadcasts are regarded as credible sources of information in most of the world's nations--especially in the more than 100 developing countries. The DPI's anti-American barrage thus directly undermines U.S. interests abroad. To make matters worse--and more galling--the U.S. is the most generous supporter of DPI, paying for 25 percent of its total budget.

1. General Assembly Resolution 13(I), February 13, 1946.

2. Ibid.

The 53-page GAO Report, entitled "Analysis of Selected Media Products Shows Half Oppose Key U.S. Interests," is notable for its restrained tone and sound methodology. The GAO team took great care in selecting representative information materials and made every effort to insure that the results of its analysis would be authoritative, i.e., that other well-informed, impartial raters would reach very similar conclusions about the materials in the study. Similarly, the team members did not include those publications and broadcasts whose degree of opposition to U.S. interests they did not agree on in their statistical analysis.

The GAO gives the DPI the benefit of the doubt at every opportunity, taking note of the Under-Secretary General for Public Information's statements and directives on the need for press neutrality, emphasizing the cooperation of DPI officials, and several times mentioning that the U.S. is in a minority position on a number of the political issues on which DPI reported. Furthermore, other important questions about DPI, such as whether the Department really needs a staff of 162 professionals, were not considered. The findings of the Report, though, are all the more powerful because of the GAO'S scrupulously balanced attitude. Conclude the investigators:

We found that a substantial number of the media items opposed U.S. interests because they took political positions unfavorable to U.S. interests and/or contained indications of bias against the United States. Indications of bias included language which biased discussions against the United States, coverage of arguments for only one side of important political issues for some media items, and imbalanced presentation of material in DPI's Radio Perspective program.

METHODOLOGY

The Report, requested by Senator Arlen Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican, was prepared over a period of nine months by a team of GAO auditors. Their research is based on DPI documents obtained from U.N. Headquarters in New York and the U.N. Information Center in Washington, as well as on interviews with officials of DPI, the State Department, and the U.S. Mission to the U.N. To insure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the Report, a total of 90 "media pieces" produced between late 1983 and August 1985 were selected for analysis. They represented five distinct types of media activity which the GAO concluded have "wide dissemination or impact" and/or "were most likely to contain interpretative data": free DPI publications; transcripts of Radio Perspective, the most widely distributed U.N. taped radio program; transcripts of World Chronicle, the principal DPI television production; "Perspective" features from U.N. Chronicle, DPI's main periodical; and summaries

of briefings given at the U.N. to representatives of several hundred nongovernmental organizations.

All of the selected broadcasts and publications dealt directly with one of four issues chosen by the State Department from a list of 11 "priority areas which the General Assembly identified for the focus of public information activities": apartheid, disarmament, new world orders (New International Economic Order, New World Information and Communication Order, and the Law of the Sea), and "the question of Palestine." The Department chose the first three issues "based on their importance to U.S. interests and the need to have related U.S. positions fairly presented," and included "the question of Palestine" because of Specter's specific interest in DPI's treatment of Israel.

The State Department then "provided criteria defining what political positions would be considered contrary to current U.S. policies and/or interests for the four topic areas." On the so-called question of Palestine, for example, State's guidelines urged the GAO to consider as contrary to U.S. policies and/or interests statements which "challenge Israel's right to exist." On materials relating to the New World Information and Communication Order, the State Department advised that statements which "advocate a policy of government control over the content of media communications" would be contrary to the U.S. position.

Three GAO evaluators carefully analyzed the texts of the 90 broadcasts and publications, guided not only by the State Department criteria but also by a detailed and pretested set of GAO evaluation guidelines. Each paragraph of every text was rated, first to determine whether its political positions supported, opposed, were neutral toward, or unrelated to U.S. policies and/or interests and, second, to determine bias for or against the U.S. by identifying "emotional language, language emphasis, and imbalanced comparisons of the United States and other nations." Emotional language included the use of terms like "racist," "imperialist," and "barbaric," which would clearly prejudice any discussion of an issue.

Each evaluator rated each item, using a seven-point scale, ranging from "very opposed" to U.S. policies and/or interests (1) to "very supportive" of them (7). The basis for these ratings were the "proportion of paragraph text determined to be favorable or unfavorable," "incidence of statements containing bias for or against the United States," "relative prominence of favorable and unfavorable text within the media piece," and "balance of coverage for major arguments on both sides of the political issues discussed."

Finally, the raters agreed on their scoring 87 percent of the time, a very high rate. The GAO is therefore confident that other well-informed raters analyzing the same materials would reach very similar conclusions.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The results of the study firmly indict the Department of Public Information. Of the 79 items on which all of the raters fully agreed, 38 were neutral or balanced, while a majority of 40 opposed U.S. interests and policies. One item supported U.S. interests. While the 40 that opposed U.S. interests showed a relatively even degree of opposition (15 slightly opposed, 15 moderately opposed, and 10 very opposed), the lone item supporting U.S. interests did so only slightly.

DPI coverage of the "question of Palestine" and apartheid was particularly unfavorable to U.S. interests. This is particularly damaging considering the volume of media items DPI produces on these subjects. Out of 79 items, 9 of 11 items on the "question of Palestine" and 17 of 26 items on apartheid opposed U.S. interests. Two-thirds of the unfavorable items, moreover, were rated moderately to very opposed, while none were supportive of U.S. interests to any degree. Seven of 26 disarmament items were opposed to U.S. interests, with none supportive, and 6 of 16 new world orders items were similarly opposed.

Typical of this intense opposition to U.S. interests is a publication on apartheid--a Background Paper from the Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination--published by DPI in June 1983. The paper is clearly an excerpt from a study by Aureliu Cristescu, the Romanian Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, but is prominently labeled "United Nations Department of Public Information." The paper, which purports to be a study of the right to self-determination, states that:

While colonialism, in the traditional sense, is nearing its end, imperialism and the policy of force and diktat continue to exist and may persist in the future, under the guise of neo-colonialism and power relationships. The exploitation by colonialist forces of the difficulties and problems confronting developing or recently liberated countries, interference in the internal affairs of those States and attempts to maintain, especially in the economic sector, a relationship based on inequality are serious threats to the new States. Economic pressure and domination, interference, racial discrimination, subversion and

intervention and the threat of force, are neo-colonialist devices against which the newly independent states must guard.

Though this is an accurate analysis of Soviet foreign policy goals, its target is clearly the West--"colonialist forces" are multinational corporations, for example, and "recently liberated countries," likewise, include Nicaragua, but not Grenada. The fact, however, that this paragraph (and the entire document, for that matter) could have been lifted verbatim from any Soviet propaganda text seems not to have troubled DPI or prevented its distribution as a United Nations document for which the U.S. pays the lion's share. As an indication of GAO's fairness, it rated this report as only "moderately opposed" to U.S. interests.

In its paragraph by paragraph analysis, GAO found that, of all textual materials related to U.S. interests, almost 45 percent were unfavorable to those interests, while roughly 11 percent were supportive, with the balance neutral. The Report notes that "some items, however, contained a higher concentration of unfavorable text than was average," including "8 media items with 40 to 85 percent of the text rated as opposed to U.S. interests."

On the topic of the Middle East, virtually all U.N. documents contained high incidences of unfavorable text, testifying once again to the U.N.'s relentless campaign against Israel. Example: the "Programme of Action for the Achievement of Palestinian Rights" adopted by the International Conference on the Question of Palestine in 1983 and published by DPI urges all U.N. members, among other things, to:

- (9) Consider ways and means of meeting the threat that Israel poses to regional security in Africa in view of Israel's disregard of United Nations resolutions, and its close collaboration with the apartheid regime in the economic, military and nuclear fields, thereby contributing to the continued illegal occupation of Namibia and enhancing the regime's repressive and aggressive capacity.
- (10) Encourage, through bilateral and multilateral contacts, all States, including Western European and North American States which have not yet done so, to welcome all peace initiatives based on the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which were also welcomed by Chairman Yasser

Arafat in his address to the International Conference on the Question of Palestine.

These recommendations have been disseminated worldwide under the aegis of the United Nations.

Considering the large degree of opposition to U.S. interests found in DPI materials, the GAO team extended their analysis and discovered that, while only 2.5 percent of the paragraphs contained outright bias of any kind, virtually all of it was directed against the United States. As bad, arguments supporting U.S. policies were given little or no coverage at all. Explains the GAO report:

...a greater proportion of the materials provided better or much better coverage for arguments opposed to U.S. policy positions. The most items identified by any evaluator as covering arguments supporting U.S. positions better than those opposing them was three....We found 11 cases (about 16 percent) where only one side of the issues was presented and no arguments favoring the U.S. position were given at all.

The primary cause of this pattern of opposition to U.S. interests, then, is not so much flagrant bias as the extensive and favorable coverage given to arguments opposing U.S. positions, virtually never presented with sufficient rebuttal.

The best example of this phenomenon is the Declaration of the North American Regional Conference for Action against Apartheid, published by DPI in its semi-annual review, Objective: Justice, and included in the GAO study. As the GAO notes of the U.N.'s taped radio program, DPI sometimes presents "U.S. public figures opposing U.S. policies rather than featuring official U.S. delegations or spokesmen." "Dissident spokesmen from the Soviet bloc," said GAO, "were not featured in any of the items in our study."

Yet this also occurs in DPI's publications, as the Objective: Justice review makes abundantly clear. DPI briefly reports on the Conference, which was held in June 1984 to consider the situation in Southern Africa and "the policies and actions of Canada and the United States with respect to the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa ..." and then publishes in full the Conference's Declaration, which includes excerpts from the speeches of Senator Edward Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Professor Angela Davis, former Vice-Presidential candidate of the Communist Party of

4. DPI No. 803, 4/84.

5. DPI No. 834, 12/84; Objective: Justice, Vol. XVI, no. 2.

the United States. The text explicitly criticizes all of the policies of the United States and Canada in Southern Africa, openly advocates support for the South-West Africa Peoples Organization and other terrorist groups and refers in thinly veiled terms to the desirability of popular action against the Reagan Administration in the (then upcoming) 1984 Presidential election. There is no coverage at all of any views supporting any element of U.S. policy and no indication that the views of the five Americans quoted (Kennedy, Jackson, Davis, Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, and Charles Yancey, a Boston City Councillor) do not represent the full spectrum of U.S. political viewpoints.

THREE TRENDS

The Report's findings highlight three particularly disturbing trends.

First, although all the documents analyzed were published by DPI and relied largely on DPI source material for the information and opinions expressed, other sources also were used in preparing broadcasts and publications. These included U.N. General Assembly resolutions, statements and speeches by U.S., Soviet, and "non-aligned" representatives and delegates, and programs of action and declarations from U.N. Conferences. The remarks by Soviet bloc representatives predictably were very unfavorable to U.S. interests. But so were virtually all the other sources which DPI used in preparing these materials. States the GAO: "Non-aligned country spokesmen and reporters opposed U.S. interests 59 percent and 34 percent of the time, respectively. About 54 percent of the text attributable to U.N. General Assembly resolutions and about 74 percent of the text attributable to programs of action and declarations from U.N. conferences opposed U.S. interests."

Even when DPI spokesmen themselves discussed the U.S. or issues important to U.S. interests, says the GAO report, "their statements were neutral about 53 percent of the time, opposed to U.S. interests about 44 percent of the time, and supportive of them about 3 percent of the time." The fact that DPI broadcasts and publications frequently opposed U.S. interests, though certainly significant in and of itself, must nonetheless be viewed in the context of the U.N.'s broad, systemic anti-American and anti-Western bias.

Second, the format that received the highest negative ratings in every respect is Radio Perspective, the taped U.N. radio program. It is also the format over which DPI has the greatest editorial control. According to the GAO, DPI presents and arranges "selected bits of statements by member state delegates on issues under discussion in principal U.N. bodies" on the program, while "a DPI narrator provides commentary on these statements and links the various cuts in a logical format." This enables DPI "to select which speakers

and statements it wishes to highlight in presenting a specific topic," and has evidently been used to promote unbalanced and misleading discussions of key issues.

The GAO notes, in particular, that "statements by Western spokesmen selected by DPI were in some cases too short and/or vague to adequately explain their views or policies," that "U.S. or Western explanations of policy were often given lesser prominence or sandwiched between large amounts of opposing discussion," and that "In two cases, the speakers selected to illustrate political positions were exclusively from the Soviet bloc and non-aligned states."

Example: one Radio Perspective program involved a discussion of the prospects for a World Disarmament Conference and featured speakers from Sri Lanka, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria.

Example: a program discussing the Law of the Sea Convention had speakers from Malta, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Although the U.N.'s television program, World Chronicle, is less openly biased, it is still distressingly unbalanced. A 1983 World Chronicle program,⁶ for instance, featured James Jonah, then Secretary General of the Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination; a transcript of the program was subsequently reprinted in one of DPI's magazines, Objective: Justice. In it Jonah starts by discussing racism in South Africa, but then cites instances of racism in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the "Nordic Countries," and "many Latin American countries." He mentions no instances of racial discrimination against non-Russians in the Soviet bloc, much less Afghanistan.

Prompted by the DPI-appointed moderator, who characterizes the U.S. as a country with "a major racial problem," Jonah states that the U.S. and Israel will not participate in the Conference because the 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism has not been repudiated. The message this discussion conveys, as that of similar Radio Perspective programs: the U.S. and Israel are pariahs, petulantly defying world opinion and acting as accomplices in criminal and hegemonistic policies. The United States' strong anti-colonial stand and its achievements in civil rights are ignored.

The U.S. is the target of another attack in a similar World Chronicle program⁷ dealing with the international economic situation. The guest, Mr. Shridath Ramphal, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, begins by speaking generally about the debt crisis, and then attacks the International Monetary Fund, charging it

6. World Chronicle No. 140, 1/84; Objective: Justice, vol. XVI, No. 2, 12/84.

7. World Chronicle, No. 157, 5/84.

with "insensitivity" and claiming that it is "introducing, in fact, more and more chaos" into the world economy. Michael Littlejohns, the DPI selected moderator, then queries Mr. Ramphal on the causes of the IMF's insensitivity:

Littlejohns: Is this a reflection of the attitude of the United States, the Reagan Administration, at this time?

Ramphal: I'm afraid I must say, it seems to be very directly a reflection of that policy. And I say that with sadness, because a part of the integrity of the IMF, is that it should not follow the policy prescriptions of any single member country no matter how powerful. So the integrity of the Fund is under attack.

Littlejohns: So the United States is calling the shots in the IMF?

Ramphal: We know (emphasis DPI's) the United States is calling the shots and it is sad because this has not been in the tradition of the United States which helped at Bretton Woods and after to build these institutions, because the United States believed in internationalism. It really did believe and at times sustained that belief when Europe was floundering and faltering. The United States today, seems to be pursuing policies which are the very antithesis of internationalism.

Ramphal continues to state that "We talk about the Soviet Union and its satellites. We don't talk about Europe as a satellite of the United States, but you know, quite a lot of the time it behaves in that way." Asked by a New York Times reporter about the Eastern bloc's attitude toward the debt crisis, Mr. Ramphal concedes that the Soviets "have a very bad record of practical assistance to the third world," but then notes that "They've helped liberation movements, movements that have been pursuing just struggles with arms. And that has been a help and a contribution." This equation between arming Marxist insurgencies and pouring billions of dollars into development assistance, the attacks on U.S. policy and the integrity of the U.S. commitment to global economic development--all these factors combine to once again paint the U.S. as a villain on the international scene.

The third and most significant trend cited by GAO is the "multiplier effect" of the worldwide distribution of DPI products on world public opinion. The GAO notes that "the worldwide dissemination of DPI materials through the high-impact media of radio, television and the press amplifies the effect these materials may have on world understanding of events and issues before the United Nations." Indeed, DPI publishes and distributes over two million documents annually; issues two periodicals and coordinates the activities of 66 U.N. Information Centers worldwide; broadcasts over 3,000 hours of radio programs annually in 25 languages to 167 countries (all currently suspended pending leasing renegotiation of facilities from the Voice

of America) and distributes 110,000 taped programs to radio stations worldwide; provides press services to almost 300 print and electronic media correspondents from 45 countries; produces 1,000 television news packages annually; sponsors or helps produce as many as 10 original films every year and regularly disseminates more than 150 U.N. films annually through information centers.⁸

Although the cumulative impact of these activities is difficult to quantify, it is undeniable that the U.N. plays a major role in the development of world public opinion, especially in the Less Developed Countries. Notes Singapore's Ambassador to the U.S. Tommy Koh, formerly his country's representative at the United Nations:

If you were in Asia or Africa or Latin America 15 years ago and you asked people about the Palestinians, everyone looked puzzled. Today, students, intellectuals, and political activists in every country know about the Palestinian cause and sympathize with it. That's the result largely of the U.N. People are always underestimating the importance of the U.N. in altering perceptions.⁹

DPI's "public information" mandate, thus, is a significant and powerful one. As such, the fact that U.S. views do not get a fair hearing in DPI media products should be a matter of serious concern. Furthermore, though the causes of worldwide anti-Americanism are surely complex, the role that DPI may play in encouraging such an attitude should not be overlooked.

DPI RESPONSE TO THE GAO REPORT

On April 21, three days after the GAO report was released, DPI issued a public response, which purports to expose the GAO's errors and inconsistencies. It is unfortunate that DPI flatly refused to take the GAO's criticisms in a constructive spirit; it is astonishing that DPI would attack the accuracy of the widely respected GAO.

In its response, DPI claims that:

1) The documents analyzed were ones over which DPI had little editorial control, and thus reflected only the mandates of the U.N. Committee on Information.

8. See Roger A. Brooks, "The U.N. Department of Public Information: A House of Mirrors," Heritage Foundation Background No. 332, February 23, 1984.

9. The New York Times Magazine, September 16, 1984, p. 62.

It is true that DPI is guided by the public information mandates of the Committee on Information, where Western countries are in a tiny minority. It is also true that DPI reprints and distributes many documents over which it has little or no editorial control.

Yet this overlooks the crucial point that the most biased media type--Radio Perspective--was the one over which DPI exercises the greatest control. DPI chooses the speakers, format, and subjects. As a result of DPI's extensive control, the discussion of the issues is often very unbalanced. The Department also has a good degree of editorial control over its magazines, television program, and briefing summaries.

Furthermore, though DPI, as a part of the U.N. Secretariat, is guided by the directives of the U.N.'s Member States, William C. Sherman, former Deputy U.S. Representative to the Security Council, has perceptively noted that "The Secretariat does what the member states ask it to do. On the other hand, there are always ways for the Secretariat to operate to insure that the member states ask it to do the right things."¹⁰ The fact, therefore, that DPI is in some instances responding to politicized mandates and/or reproducing the biases of other departments or the U.N. generally (a fact which the GAO noted), cannot adequately explain the persistent and pervasive opposition to U.S. interests in these media types.

2) The documents selected for GAO analysis, argues DPI, were an unrepresentative sample.

GAO chose samples from a range of different media on the specific grounds that they were likely to be widely distributed or were broadcasts and publications over which DPI had substantial editorial control. The GAO carefully chose documents that directly addressed the four subject areas selected by the State Department. Furthermore, the GAO included in the Report all 72 media items which DPI produced between January 1984 and August 1985 on the selected subjects in the five media categories. This is hardly an unrepresentative sample. The fact that the GAO did not analyze such general interest publications as Everyone's United Nations has no bearing on the GAO's conclusions, since such publications were unlikely to contain any interpretative data confirming or denying charges of bias and opposition to American policies and positions.

10. As quoted in Linda M. Fasulo, ed., Representing America: Experiences of U.S. Diplomats at the U.N. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), p. 297.

3) The subjects chosen, says DPI, prejudged the result.

The U.S. is indeed in the minority in the General Assembly and other U.N. bodies on apartheid, the "Question of Palestine," new world orders, and to a lesser extent, disarmament. But it is precisely for this reason that it is critical that U.S. positions be fairly presented. As for the GAO ignoring DPI media products dealing with Afghanistan and Kampuchea, these issues were not identified by the General Assembly for a focus of public information activities, as the other subjects were. Consequently, there is a very limited selection of materials on these subjects prepared by DPI. These subjects, moreover, are not discussed at practically every session of every U.N. body, agency, and conference, as are the other subjects. Nor does DPI produce and distribute massive amounts of materials on Afghanistan and Kampuchea, as they do on the other issues.

4) Multilateral information activities cannot be judged, maintains DPI, by any "narrowly defined" national interest.

The U.S. of course does not and cannot expect the U.N. Department of Public Information to serve as a mouthpiece for its views and policies. What the U.S. (and every other U.N. member) can expect, though, is that these views and policies are represented accurately and fairly. In the case of the U.S. they clearly have not been. To state, as DPI does, that it can never satisfy all U.N. members is disingenuous and overlooks one of the most interesting findings of the GAO report: that the U.N. Department for Disarmament Affairs' publications were "notably neutral," and present conflicting U.S. and Soviet views in a generally unbiased and balanced manner. If this Department, which handles a highly complex, contentious and emotional issue, can achieve a high degree of professionalism and objectivity in its publications, so should DPI.

CONCLUSION

The GAO report recommends that "The Secretary of State develop a review process to better monitor selected U.N. public information materials." However, as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Alan L. Keyes noted in his comments on the GAO report, this would be extraordinarily difficult and time consuming for State Department officials and staffers at the U.S. Mission to the U.N., considering the huge volume of materials that DPI produces. It would be worth the effort only if intended to verify that DPI were removing the anti-American bias from its products. The State Department should set deadlines for this.

In the meantime, the U.S. vigorously should protest this bias at the next meeting of the Committee on Information, which begins June

15. If DPI fails to respond to American concerns and does not meet the State Department's deadlines or refuses to do so, the Reagan Administration and Congress should initiate two policies:

1) publicize the fact that DPI is biased and counter the bias in publications and broadcasts; and

2) halt U.S. funding of DPI's budget, which for the 1986-1987 biennium is roughly \$75.7 million. Of this, the U.S. pays 25 percent or approximately \$19 million.

As Senator Specter stated in a recent letter to Secretary of State George Shultz: "The GAO study has clearly shown that our interests are not being furthered by DPI and I strongly urge that all U.S. funding for this program be withheld until DPI produces unbiased and fair materials that do not undercut our vital interests."

It is quite simply too much to ask the American taxpayer to bear the double burden of paying to have the U.S. and its positions and policies misrepresented before the world.

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