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Fact Sheet for the Chairman,
Subcommittee on International
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INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Construction of U.S. Radio Relay Station in Israel





United States
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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally
Chairman, Subcommittee on
International Operations,
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On November 2, 1989, you asked us to obtain certain information regarding the U.S. radio relay station project in Israel funded by the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB). Specifically, you asked us to (1) compare the cost of the project, as currently envisioned, with the cost of other alternatives that had been considered and (2) determine the reasons for selecting BIB as the lead agency to manage the project.

In 1987, the United States and Israel signed an agreement to allow the construction of a short-wave radio relay station in Israel. The station will be for the joint use of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a grantee of BIB, and the U.S. Information Agency's Voice of America (VOA). The new station will enhance Radio Liberty's shortwave broadcasts into Soviet Central Asia and VOA's broadcasts to Eastern Europe, North and East Africa, and Southwest Asia. BIB was designated the lead agency to oversee the design and construction of the project.

Results in Brief

According to BIB and VOA officials, in the late 1970s and early 1980s several Middle East countries were contacted to determine their receptivity to hosting a radio relay facility. Only Israel responded positively to the U.S. request. These officials told us that cost alternatives were not a major consideration in selecting the current site in Israel. They indicated that technical requirements were the primary consideration in choosing the Israeli site. In addition, we were told that cost was not a major consideration in assigning the lead agency responsibility to BIB. Appendix I provides additional details regarding the cost of the project versus alternatives and cost considerations in designating BIB as the lead agency for the project.

Scope and Methodology

To obtain information on the process leading to the construction of the radio relay station in Israel, we interviewed key BIB and VOA officials and reviewed pertinent documents. We did not verify the accuracy of the

First Committee Concern — Alternatives Considered

The Chairman asked us to compare the cost of the project, as currently envisioned, with the cost of other alternatives that had been considered.

According to BIB and VOA officials, there were no alternatives to establishing a relay station site in Israel. Other countries in the Middle East were not receptive to hosting a U.S. installation.

Since the late 1970s, BIB had been looking for a site in the Middle East to build a shortwave radio relay site for RFE/RL to improve its ability to broadcast to the Central Asian and Kazakhstan region of the Soviet Union. Working through the Department of State, BIB made several inquiries in the Middle East but was unsuccessful in gaining permission to build a relay site.

In 1982, the National Security Council (NSC) reviewed the U.S. international broadcasting system and set priorities for the future programming of both RFE/RL and VOA. In the fall of 1982, the Reagan administration and the Congress agreed that VOA needed a large-scale modernization. As a part of this mandate, VOA assessed its needs and concluded that it also needed a Middle Eastern site to meet NSC's requirements for the Central Asian area.

Because of the difficulties in locating sites for U.S. radio relay facilities, the Reagan administration decided in 1983 that it was both politically and technically feasible to develop a joint site to meet the needs of RFE/RL and VOA. According to BIB and VOA officials, establishing a joint relay station rather than building separate facilities would reduce the overall cost to the U.S. government. This would also set a precedent for future cooperation between BIB and USIA in sharing radio relay facilities.

BIB and VOA again made inquiries through the State Department to all the countries in the Middle East that were considered friendly and had possible sites. Before December 1984, the United States was unable to negotiate any agreements to establish a site. However, in December 1984, President Reagan sent a personal letter to the Israeli Prime Minister requesting that Israel reconsider its initial opposition to a site. In February 1985, the Israeli government gave its approval, and negotiations for the site concluded in an agreement signed in June 1987.

According to BIB and VOA officials, cost considerations were not a major element in the initial phase of seeking a relay station site in the Middle East. The primary consideration was finding a site suitable to meet technical needs. Once the Israeli government agreed to allow a relay station

Appendix I
BIB/USIA Radio Relay Facility in Israel

As a small oversight agency, BIB does not have the staff to administer the Israeli project directly. Therefore, BIB worked with RFE/RL and USIA to establish the International Broadcast System, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, to manage the project under BIB's direction. The International Broadcast System has a staff authorization of 22 people, including several from RFE/RL. According to BIB officials, International Broadcast System, Inc., will cease operation when the station is completed in 1993.

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to be built in Israel, eight locations in Israel were considered for the station. According to BIB and VOA officials, the total project cost was not arrived at until the actual site was selected because of unknown variables, such as lease of the land, site preparation, power supply, and security requirements.

When the agreement with Israel was signed in June 1987 and specific plans were developed, the cost was placed at \$310 million. The cost was later reduced to \$290 million based on a decision to reduce the number of antennas. This decision was made primarily because of the cessation of jamming by the Soviet Union. BIB has stated that if jamming were resumed, it would seek the necessary funds to add the antennas that were cut.

The \$290 million cost estimate for the station includes \$274 million for planning, designing, and constructing the relay station and \$16 million for the government of Israel. In exchange for the \$16 million payment, the government of Israel, for the duration of the agreement, will pay all land-lease costs associated with the site; payments to the communities in the site region; land-use charges; municipal and regional taxes, exclusive of fees for services actually provided; and security costs, exclusive of on-site security during the design and construction phase of the project.

Second Committee Concern — Choice of Lead Agency

The Chairman asked us to look at the reasons for selecting BIB to oversee the project versus VOA.

BIB was designated the lead agency after consultation with the appropriate congressional authorization and appropriation committees, the Office of Management and Budget, and NSC. The arrangement was formalized on December 1, 1987, with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between the BIB and USIA.

According to BIB and VOA officials, BIB was designated the lead agency because (1) USIA was facing budget constraints at the time and felt that to take on another large project would cause other USIA programs to be cut, (2) VOA was involved in an \$800 million modernization of its worldwide transmission facilities and felt that it could not staff another major project, and (3) RFE/RL would be the major user of the station.

Cost was not a major consideration in assigning lead agency responsibility to BIB. According to BIB and VOA officials, the cost of the project would be the same regardless of whether BIB or VOA managed it.

BIB/USIA Radio Relay Facility in Israel

Negotiations between the governments of the United States and Israel to establish a U.S. shortwave radio relay station in Israel began in March 1985. Engineering studies by the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) and the Voice of America (VOA) had shown that a new relay station located in the Middle East would deliver a reliable signal into the USSR's Central Asian republics, Eastern Europe, the sub-Sahara region, and Southwest Asia. Negotiations were concluded in the spring of 1987, and an agreement was signed on June 18, 1987, providing for joint use of the station by BIB's grantee Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and the U.S. Information Agency's (USIA) VOA.

The terms of the agreement call for the facility to be designed by a U.S. or Israeli company and built by an Israeli contractor using U.S.-manufactured transmitters and antennas. The agreement runs for 25 years from the date of the first operational broadcast and is renewable by mutual consent. Construction of the station is scheduled for completion in 1993.

As of February 1990, the technical design of the relay station had been completed. The actual construction awaits the approval of the Environmental Impact Statement and National Outline Scheme by the Israeli government and the awarding of four major contracts. The contracts are for site preparation and a water system, a super high voltage substation, a facilities and security system, and the broadcast system.

The new radio relay station will be located on a 2,500-acre desert site in the Arava Valley, approximately 20 miles south of the Dead Sea. The station will have sixteen 500-kilowatt high-powered, shortwave broadcast transmitters (10 for BIB and 6 for VOA) and 37 curtain antenna arrays (15 for BIB and 22 for VOA). The station will enhance broadcasts of RFE/RL and VOA to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and of VOA to Central Asia, Central and East Africa, and Southern Asia. The station will also require administrative and maintenance facilities, satellite ground stations, and a power substation and distribution system.

In December 1987, BIB was designated as the lead agency responsible for all design, construction, funding, and personnel activities, as defined by the Memorandum of Agreement between USIA and BIB.

information provided by these officials. We discussed the information contained in this fact sheet with responsible BIB and VOA officials and incorporated their views where appropriate. As agreed with your staff, we are separately addressing your request regarding the need for the relay station, given the recent developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 5 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of the report to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

This fact sheet was prepared under the direction of Joseph E. Kelley, Director, Security and International Relations Issues, who may be reached on 275-4128 if you or your staff have further questions. Other staff who made major contributions to this report were Jess T. Ford, Assistant Director, and Paul G. Atkins, Evaluator-in-Charge.

Sincerely yours,



Neal P. Curtin
Director, Planning and
Reporting

