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Title:

Comrades at War: Soviet radio broadcasting during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War

Abstract

The Sino-Vietnamese War could have escalated into a wider confrontation involving the Soviet Union. Public communications played an important role in keeping the conflict limited. By focusing on transcripts of Soviet domestic radio produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation's Monitoring Service (BBCM), this article makes a contribution to our understanding of state-controlled broadcasting during the crisis. It also adds to our knowledge of Soviet radio in the late Cold War, arguing that it was comprehensive, varied and timely in communicating news about the war and that Soviet radio had achieved considerable sophistication in framing its message by the end of the 1970s. The article also discusses how the vast collection of BBCM radio transcripts, which consists of 'raw' transcripts that were not necessarily fed into the British and US government departments, allows us to assess the role broadcasting played in Soviet political messaging.

Key Words: Sino-Vietnamese War, Soviet Radio, Cold War, Radio Monitoring, BBC, Open Source Intelligence

The Sino-Vietnamese war was the last military conflict the People's Republic of China (PRC) fought to date. It remained a short, limited if very violent conflict with an estimated death toll of 40,000 to 70,000.¹ It was also one of the few Cold War military conflicts that could have escalated into a wider war between the superpowers. The United States, the Soviet Union and the PRC never lost sight of the potential dangers involved. By the late 1970s and against the background of the 'Global Cold War',² all three had become experienced in signalling their intentions. High-level diplomacy played an important role in defusing the crisis. US President Jimmy Carter for instance wrote immediately to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev after the war broke out.³ Yet public communications were also crucial. British and American government records show that monitoring Soviet media was considered very important. Officials in Washington and London were keen to know how Moscow informed its citizens about the conflict to get a better understanding of Soviet policy towards the conflict.⁴

Scholarly interest in the Sino-Vietnamese war has recently been renewed and new details on military aspects as well as Chinese policy have come to light.⁵ This article contributes to our knowledge of public communications during the war by making use of the unique collection of radio transcripts produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation's Monitoring service (BBCM). The focus is on the Soviet Union, investigating how Soviet domestic radio covered this international crisis. The article argues that Radio Moscow had achieved considerable sophistication in framing its messages by the late 1970s.⁶ During the Sino-Vietnamese war Soviet radio communicated the Soviet Union's policy of restraint successfully while still mounting a sustained attack on US as well as Chinese policy. Moreover, the analysis of BBCM transcripts demonstrates that Soviet domestic radio's coverage of the war was more comprehensive, varied and timely than one might expect in the light of previous studies. The argument expands the existing literature on Soviet media in two ways. First, it challenges assertions that highlight the lack of speed and actuality in Soviet media coverage in the late Cold War. There was no necessity for Soviet listeners interested in the Sino-Vietnamese war to turn to international Western radio to get timelier information or to learn about other countries' viewpoints – the two reasons usually cited in the literature in an attempt to explain why about a third of the urban Soviet population generally tuned in to Western radio stations.⁷ Second, there are no indications that Soviet officials believed Moscow's credibility was less at stake in its radio coverage than in the reporting of its party newspapers as has

been claimed.⁸ The BBCM transcripts show, on the contrary, that radio was used to reiterate, highlight and thereby magnify the most important points *Pravda* or the official news agency TASS had made.

This investigation of crisis coverage of a transient medium during the Cold War relies on the invaluable BBCM collection, which consists of ‘raw’ transcripts of Soviet radio. Most of them did not become part of the BBCM’s widely circulated output that was fed into British and US government departments. In making use of the transcripts to analyse Soviet broadcasting it is important to keep in mind that the transcripts were mainly created for the US and British governments. This requires a discussion of the role of BBCM within the British government in the 1970s as well as looking into high-level diplomacy during the Sino-Vietnamese War. The article therefore also relies on primary US, British as well as West and East German documents. The role of BBCM and diplomatic exchanges are discussed in the first part of the article. The focus then shifts to a detailed analysis of Soviet domestic radio coverage.

BBC Monitoring in the 1970s

BBCM was established in 1939 and played an important role in the Second World War. The main reason for maintaining radio monitoring on a large scale after 1945 was the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe. British officials regarded broadcasting as an important source of information and intelligence gathering in closed states.⁹ The Cold War justified the considerable expense on BBCM, which the British Home Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office shared from 1955.¹⁰ As the British Treasury was constantly trying to save money, the value of broadcast monitoring was regularly reviewed. BBCM survived these reviews unscathed for two reasons. First, in 1946 London and Washington agreed to share the burden of global radio monitoring. Britain focused on the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, the US Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) assumed responsibility for the rest of the world.¹¹ BBCM became an important part of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship. From a British point of view, BBCM’s radio monitoring of the Soviet Union and its satellites proved the value of London’s contribution in this partnership. Monitoring therefore gained political significance beyond its immediate contribution to the intelligence community. When an intelligence review in 1974

looked into the possibility of making cuts to BBCM, the CIA successfully put pressure on the British, which persuaded them to keep reductions to a minimum.¹² Second, intelligent assessment staff valued BBCM's products. In addition to the Summary of World Broadcasts, which was publicly available and contained only a small selection of material monitored,¹³ they were keen to receive the teleprinter news service of the BBCM. This was arranged in 1976 at the expense of the main British news agency, the Press Association.¹⁴

In meetings with officials from the British Joint Intelligence Committee, BBCM also made clear that the service could provide more material on request, for instance full texts of speeches. BBCM also offered a 'special watch' service in times of crises.¹⁵ It is unclear if or how the assessment staff of the Joint Intelligence Committee made use of this possibility. In fact, it is worth noting that the letters and memoranda the intelligence service produced in support of BBCM did not mention any specific cases that proved BBCM's vital contribution to their work. The praise was unequivocal but general. Yet it was also noted that by the 1970s BBCM had become less significant in gathering intelligence, although British officials admitted that it was hard to draw a line between information and intelligence.¹⁶ One reason for this view was that BBCM products were delivered to many customers. The teleprinter service was regarded as 'a relevant stream of information' but it was 'indiscriminate in that it cannot be adjusted except for all customers.'¹⁷

Three aspects of the context of BBCM's work in the 1970s need to be taken into account when working with the transcript collection. First, the BBCM's most important customers were not only British government departments, but also the Americans. The selection of broadcasts covered in depth tend to include items that involve topics of interest to the US and the UK. Second, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were the BBCM's main focus. Indeed, the Foreign Office's Soviet Department was regarded as one of the BBCM's most important customer.¹⁸ Therefore, Soviet international and domestic broadcasting was covered extensively and consequently many 'raw' transcripts were produced. These provided a good basis for the analysis of Soviet radio's coverage of the Sino-Vietnamese war. Third, concrete evidence of how specific BBCM material influenced the policy process in Whitehall is hard to find. It is safe to say that BBCM's products were consumed and appreciated, yet there are hardly any traces of them in Foreign Office and Prime Ministerial records on the Sino-

Vietnamese war.¹⁹

Diplomacy during the Sino-Vietnamese war

The Sino-Vietnamese war began in the early hours of 17 February 1979 when Chinese forces launched a massive attack on Vietnam's Northern border. Three weeks later, after advancing into Vietnamese territory and capturing several provincial towns, Beijing declared that its aim to 'teach Vietnam a lesson' had been achieved and announced that its troops would withdraw. China's short, punitive strike against its Southern neighbour was indeed over a month after the initial attack.²⁰

'The Chinese attack could not have come as a surprise to the Soviet government,' opined the British ambassador in Moscow after the outbreak of the war.²¹ In a similar vein, *The Guardian* called the attack a 'well-advertised invasion'.²² Relations between the PRC and Vietnam had steadily deteriorated since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. A number of problems soured relations, which recent scholarship characterised as an 'issue spiral' that triggered the war.²³

One of these issues was Vietnam's increasingly close relationship to the Soviet Union.²⁴ The enmity between the Soviet Union and the PRC emerged in the 1950s and dramatically worsened in the late 1960s when Soviet and Chinese troops exchanged fire on the Ussuri river.²⁵ After Mao Zedong's death in 1976 relations had not improved. In the late 1970s, tensions between Moscow and the new regime in Beijing led by Hua Guafeng and Deng Xiaoping remained high. It was difficult for China to tolerate Vietnam's alliance with Moscow. Yet for Hanoi good relations with the Soviet Union promised economic benefits. While Hanoi had managed to maintain the support of both Moscow and Beijing during the Vietnam War, by 1978 the Vietnamese felt they had to make a choice between the two major Communist powers. They opted for a formal treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union.²⁶

In addition to the Sino-Soviet dispute, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia had become a major bone of contention between the PRC and Vietnam. Pol Pot was Beijing's ally, but he was loathed in Hanoi. Khmer forces provoked armed incidents at the border to Vietnam. Moreover, Pol Pot purged Communists with ties to Vietnam to consolidate his

power with the Khmer Rouge. The PRC warned Vietnam repeatedly not to attack its neighbour. Undeterred, Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia in late December 1978 and removed Pol Pot from power in January 1979.²⁷ The invasion was regarded as an open challenge of the PRC. While Beijing justified its attack on Vietnam as self-defence in the wake of border incidents, diplomats in the West – and East – were convinced that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia had triggered China's decision to go to war.²⁸

Still, in January 1979 Western diplomats thought the planned visit of Deng Xiaoping to the US would make a Chinese attack politically unfeasible.²⁹ However, Deng used the visit to repeat publicly Beijing's view that Vietnam needed to be 'taught a lesson'. In his private talks with President Jimmy Carter he revealed that the PRC was quite seriously planning to attack Vietnam. He asked Carter for public support, stressing that the 'lesson will be limited to a short period of time.' Carter replied he would not want to know details of a 'punitive strike'. In public, it would be difficult for the US to encourage violence.³⁰ In a meeting a day later, Carter told Deng that an attack would be a 'serious mistake'.³¹ However, this was hardly a strong warning. In fact, Deng received the reassurances he was seeking when the US continued to share intelligence on the Soviet Union with Beijing.³² To Deng relations with the US were very important as the PRC needed Western technology to move forward with his plan to modernise China.³³ The US, still no friend of Vietnam, made clear that 'normalisation' of its relations with the PRC was irreversible.³⁴

Throughout the war diplomatic channels between all powers remained open. In his correspondence with Carter, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev stressed that he thought the US and China were coordinating their policy, pointing to Deng's visit to the US shortly before the attack.³⁵ Carter refused to admit that the US had discussed Vietnam with Deng. 'We had no private information on Vietnam,' he told Soviet ambassador Dobrynin on 27 February.³⁶ This was quite a dubious statement because Deng let Carter know just hours before that attack that the war was about to start.³⁷ However, Moscow made clear that it was keen not to let the Sino-Vietnamese war harm its relationship with the US. Disarmament and SALT II were too important.³⁸

Soviet Radio as a source of news

BBCM produced thousands of transcripts of Soviet domestic radio in February and March 1979. Many longer discussion programmes were transcribed verbatim, which makes it possible to analyse the themes Moscow developed. In contrast, relatively few news broadcasts were transcribed verbatim. The bulk of this material consists of summaries. They usually contain two pieces of information that are crucial for our investigation. First, they provide the sources cited in the news item, for instance a foreign newspaper or the Soviet news agency TASS. Second, they list the order of items in bulletins, giving an indication of the importance Soviet broadcasters attached to them.

BBCM focused its coverage of domestic Soviet broadcasting on Radio Moscow's first channel and Radio Maiak, the second programme of All-Union Radio. Maiak ('lighthouse') was founded in 1964 and was less official in tone than the first channel. It provided light music and regular news updates in an attempt to discourage Soviet citizens from tuning to foreign stations.³⁹ In early February 1979, both stations covered the rising tensions between China and Vietnam. Most bulletins monitored in the week prior to the Chinese attack contained one or more items that either dealt with the situation in Cambodia or the border incidents between China and Vietnam. Some of the news was reported prominently, for instance a Vietnamese appeal to the United Nations protesting Chinese border provocations.⁴⁰ Most of them, however, tended to be included towards the end of bulletins, giving them less urgency.⁴¹ The overall impression to those listening to Soviet radio was that of growing tensions in Southeast Asia.

The British embassy in Hanoi sent an urgent telegram to London in the early afternoon of 17 February, reporting that the Vietnamese foreign ministry had held a press conference and revealed that the Chinese started a massive attack.⁴² Soviet radio communicated the beginning of the war almost as swiftly. It was included in its bulletin at 8pm Moscow time (1700gmt), just three hours after the British government had received confirmation of the Chinese attack from its embassy.⁴³ In the next twelve hours Soviet listeners learned about Hanoi's official statement on the attack and the first domestic and international reactions to the conflict. They were also informed of the first semi-official Soviet government response in *Pravda* whose publication was delayed that day to include a short article on the war.⁴⁴ Radio

Moscow quoted from the article by ‘political observer’ Vitaly Korionov in the early hours of 18 February. Korionov called the Chinese attack a ‘brazen aggression’ to ‘weaken the Eastern flank of World Socialism’. Importantly, he also stressed that ‘heroic Vietnam’ was ‘capable of standing up for itself’, foreshadowing the line taken in the official Soviet government statement on the war released later that day.⁴⁵ This statement was included in Radio Moscow’s news bulletin only minutes after it had been issued by TASS.⁴⁶ It was repeated prominently throughout the day,⁴⁷ demonstrating the efficient and well-coordinated role Soviet radio played in Moscow’s information policy.

Other key Soviet statements during the war were communicated in a similar way, be it the Soviet Union’s second official statement on the war or Brezhnev’s electoral speech, both at the beginning of March. The same was true of the PRC’s offer to negotiate with Vietnam and its announcement to withdraw its troops on 5 March. However, the sincerity of Chinese statements was always put in question. From 6 March onwards, bulletins stressed that fighting was continuing ‘despite the withdrawal announcement’.⁴⁸ These messages were mixed with reports that Chinese units were indeed moving back north.⁴⁹ On 12 March, bulletins still claimed that ‘Chinese aggression’ continued, quoting Vietnamese sources.⁵⁰ Although Radio Moscow refrained from treating Beijing’s position fully, Soviet listeners were aware of the PRC’s stated intention to withdraw. In repeating the Vietnamese media’s information that fighting was continuing well after 5 March, Radio Moscow was not wrong either. As late as 14 March, Western diplomats were concerned about the continued violence. ‘We are not out of the wood yet,’ reported the British ambassador and voiced his fear that the fighting might escalate again.⁵¹ It is noteworthy that Soviet radio began to report the war less prominently after the Chinese withdrawal announcement, placing information on the war increasingly at the end of bulletins.⁵²

Radio Moscow’s war coverage also included reports from Leonid Krichevsky, its correspondent in Hanoi. These were not always delivered by Krichevsky himself but read by a newsreader.⁵³ While Krichevsky was able to travel to the battlefield, his reports relied as heavily on Vietnamese sources as did Radio Moscow’s general coverage.⁵⁴ News of the fighting in Vietnam therefore generally mirrored Hanoi’s information policy. This did not mean that Soviet listeners were not updated regularly or were kept in the dark about Chinese

advances. Vietnam readily admitted them while stressing heavy losses of the Chinese. Western audiences were no better informed. In the second week of the war *The Guardian* stressed that most reports had to rely on Radio Hanoi and the PRC's international news agency NCNA.⁵⁵ Overall, it seems that Hanoi provided a broadly accurate, if general, account of the movement of the frontline. The British embassy in Hanoi monitored these reports, and US intelligence assessments in the first days of the war were also in line with Hanoi's statements.⁵⁶ In turn, Radio Moscow also reported Vietnam's updates regularly.⁵⁷ The fact that the most important source of the war's progress was Moscow's close ally facilitated Soviet radio's timely reporting. There was hardly a risk of stepping out of line politically in mirroring Vietnam's media line.

Covering Western responses was a different matter for Soviet radio. As we will see in the next section, the Soviet government was keen to stress that the PRC had betrayed the Communist movement and was now in collusion with the 'imperialist' West. In following this line, Radio Moscow did not find official British and US condemnations of the Chinese attack newsworthy. Instead, Radio Moscow quoted from the *New York Times* the day after the attack. The US newspaper reported that the Chinese attack had not come as a surprise to Washington and that US intelligence had accurately forecast the start of the offensive.⁵⁸ In the following days Radio Moscow promptly reported the arrival of US Treasury Secretary, W. Michael Blumenthal, in Beijing.⁵⁹ They also focused on the visit of British Industry Secretary, Eric Varley, which was criticised by the left-wing of the ruling Labour Party, as Moscow's London correspondent Yuri Kobaladze pointed out.⁶⁰

At the time, London and Beijing were negotiating the sale of British Harrier aircraft to China. While Prime Minister Callaghan had privately instructed Varley not to seal the deal on the vertical take-off jets because of the war,⁶¹ visits of Western officials were indeed politically significant. They demonstrated that neither the US nor Britain were prepared to let the war disturb the improving relationship with the PRC.⁶² In contrast, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India's minister of external affairs, cut his visit to China short when the war broke out. Radio Moscow reported this immediately and stressed that Vajpayee publicly condemned 'Chinese aggression' on his return to New Delhi.⁶³

Promoting political messages

Soviet journalism was about interpreting facts, not just about relaying them.⁶⁴ Sergei Lapin, head of Soviet broadcasting from 1970-1985, embraced this attitude towards journalism. He was known for his ideological rigidity and autocratic management style. There were some indications that he was prepared to loosen the tight grip on radio journalists by allowing them live commentaries in the latter part of his reign.⁶⁵ Yet the BBCM transcripts do not show any signs of this more modern, liberal approach in 1979. On the contrary, they demonstrate the impact of Lapin's view of socialist journalism with its focus on celebrating Soviet workers and peasants.⁶⁶ Their voices, however contrived, needed to be given room to show the response of common Soviet citizens to Chinese aggression. Demonstrations of socialist solidarity worldwide was also important.

Radio Moscow's reporting duly focused on domestic and international reactions to the war in the first few days of the conflict. Even before Moscow's first official government statement was issued, Soviet radio conveyed angry responses to the Chinese attack. Worldwide condemnation of the PRC from 'progressive' forces, either Socialist states or Communist parties in Western countries, were leading news items. In the early afternoon of 18 February, the first Soviet worker, Lidiya Aleksandrovna Maturina from Moscow expressed her criticism on the radio.⁶⁷ An hour later, workers from the Dynamo works in Moscow voiced their indignation.⁶⁸ Once the official Soviet government statement was published, workers' reactions followed immediately after the official news. 'Meetings' in more and more cities were mentioned. Radio Maiak's news late on 18 February contained three reports from factories in Moscow, Minsk and Rustavi.⁶⁹ Early on 19 February, Radio Moscow reported meetings in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tashkent, Kharkov, Kazan, Kuybyshe, Kursk, Sverdlovsk, Khabarovsk and 'other towns'.⁷⁰ The political message could have been hardly more obvious: the PRC was isolated in the world, and Soviet workers led the groundswell of opinion against Chinese aggression.

While Radio Moscow's coverage of domestic and worldwide condemnation was predictable, the BBCM transcripts show that there was constant variation. Reporters went to different factories in various places in the Soviet Union. Domestic reactions were mixed with

international demonstrations; foreign newspapers, often Communist, were quoted. Coverage of public protests against the Chinese attack was extensive in the first few days after the attack, but soon petered out.⁷¹ This also sent an important message to international observers. Moscow's leaders did not intend to encourage further domestic agitation, indicating that they were not preparing the population for a dramatic Soviet response. Instead, the way Soviet broadcasting reported the war left Moscow's options open.

The BBCM transcripts also demonstrate Radio Moscow's role in magnifying the political messages contained in *Pravda*. We have already seen how promptly Radio Moscow broadcast the content of the short *Pravda* article that contained the first, semi-official Soviet reaction to the war. Programmes reviewing *Pravda* were a regular feature of Radio Moscow. Articles of particular importance were also cited in news bulletins. On 26 February, for instance, Radio Maiak included a long discussion of Aleksandr Petrov's latest *Pravda* article. Petrov, a pseudonym known to indicate high-level authority,⁷² discussed the war in the context of US-Soviet relations. The article claimed that Beijing intended to complicate the relationship between the superpowers. Maiak reported that Petrov blamed the US for 'playing up to [China's] anti-Soviet policy'.⁷³ Chinese 'collusion' with the 'imperialist' West against the interest of the Socialist world was one of the main Soviet themes in criticising the PRC. Broadcasting Petrov's article gave it additional significance. It brought it to the attention of Soviet listeners, many of whom were unlikely to read *Pravda*.⁷⁴

In addition to news bulletins, Moscow's radio stations offered its listeners longer discussion programmes. 'International Observers at the Roundtable' was one of them. Chaired by a 'commentator' from All-Union Radio, it featured two 'special observers'. They were usually introduced as being from *Pravda*, *Izvestiya* or TASS and their 'analysis' outlined Moscow's interpretation of world events more comprehensively than news bulletins. The discussions that dealt with the Sino-Vietnamese conflict show that most of the anti-Chinese and anti-US themes used in late February had already been established before the war. On 11 February, *Pravda* observer Mikhael Zenovich criticised the 'connivance of Washington and Peking' and reminded listeners of Deng Xiaoping's visit to the US in January, when the Chinese leader had made public threats against Vietnam.⁷⁵ Also before the war, TASS observer Yuri Kornilov talked in a special programme of the PRC's history of aggression, stressing that war between

the Soviet Union and the US was 'Peking's passionate dream'.⁷⁶

During the war, on 25 February, Ivan Shchedrov of *Pravda* was a discussant at the 'International Observers Roundtable'. He stressed China's long-standing intention to dominate Southeast Asia, claiming that Chinese textbooks of 1954 had shown Vietnam as territory that once belonged to the Chinese empire. He also sought to illustrate Chinese aggressiveness by references to the 1962 border war with India. Shchedrov talked about Sino-American 'collusion'. Deng's US visit had given China Washington's 'silent consent' to the attack, he claimed. Finally, he criticised the visit of Eric Varley and the British intention to sell Harrier jets to China. Yevgeny Kachanov, who was chairing the programme that day, agreed with Shchedrov's views. 'This hypocritical position of certain Western countries is now opposed by the public opinion of literally the whole world,' he commented. Kachanov took the opportunity to remind listeners of Soviet policy, repeating the gist of the official statement of 18 February: 'heroic' Vietnam was 'capable of standing up for itself', and Hanoi had 'reliable friends', among them the Soviet Union.⁷⁷

Spelling out Moscow's view of the war and repeating the main points of official policy statements were major aspects of the longer discussion programmes. Another case in point was the treatment of Leonid Brezhnev's electoral speech of 2 March. Again, Radio Moscow's task was to magnify the Soviet leader's message. The host of the 'International Observers Roundtable' of 4 March, Viktor Levin, called the speech 'striking and inspired'.⁷⁸ Nikolai Shishlin, introduced as 'journalist of international affairs',⁷⁹ discussed the part of the speech that had dealt with the Sino-Vietnamese war, the 'burning issue of the day', as he put it. Brezhnev, he said, had stressed the 'inviolable solidarity' of the Soviet Union with 'heroic Vietnam'.⁸⁰ He failed to mention that Brezhnev devoted only a few sentences to the topic, 20 lines West German diplomats pointed out, as opposed to 130 lines on disarmament and SALT. In fact, his statements on the war did not add anything new to the Soviet position.⁸¹ Soviet signalling was very clear. Brezhnev's speech downplayed the significance of the war. Yet Moscow still wanted to demonstrate that there were limits to its moderate response.⁸² Only hours after the speech, the Soviet government published its second official statement, which was sharper in tone than the first. At the roundtable, Nikolai Shishlin also stuck to the sequence of events and after mentioning Brezhnev's views, he highlighted the importance of

the second official statement. He repeated the key passage that contained a veiled threat to Beijing: 'The Chinese aggressors ... must know that the more crimes they commit, the more severe will be the retribution for them.'⁸³

Conclusion

While British diplomats regarded the Soviet leadership as 'emotional' when dealing with China, they also found Soviet media coverage carefully within the limits of Soviet policy.⁸⁴ It is hardly surprising that Soviet radio reporting reflected Moscow's political line. Yet it is still worth noting that in being firm but measured, it demonstrated maturity and experience in signalling in the Cold War. The analysis of BBCM transcripts provide insights into how Soviet domestic broadcasting disseminated these political messages. On the one hand, radio magnified messages that were first published by *Pravda* and TASS.⁸⁵ Radio highlighted main themes and repeated them. On the other hand, longer radio programmes explored some of Moscow's allegations in more detail. Soviet media regularly charged that the Sino-Vietnamese war was an expression of Sino-American 'collusion'. While propagandistic in tone, these allegations were often supported by some evidence and, as we can see from primary diplomatic records, not completely unfounded.

What is more, the BBCM transcripts provide an impression of the style of Soviet radio journalism. Ordinary workers had to be given voice. BBCM transcripts demonstrate how much emphasis Soviet radio put into including workers' voices in the coverage of an international crisis such as the Sino-Vietnamese war. Radio reporting was also generally prompt and comprehensive. It included correspondents' reports from Vietnam and other countries. While certainly predictable and formulaic in its political interpretation, it seems reasonable to assume that Soviet domestic radio offered informative news coverage of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict that listeners would have found attractive. Finally, this article's findings also help to explain results of contemporary as well as recent surveys of Soviet listeners. Studies in the early 1980s suggested that Soviet citizens generally trusted Soviet media reporting on international affairs. Recent surveys found that Russians in the post-Soviet era often display a positive attitude towards the way media informed them before 1985.⁸⁶ The findings therefore also have wider significance for the study of Soviet and Russian media. The historical

legacy has important implications for post-Soviet media practices that often combine old and new journalistic norms.⁸⁷ Revisiting how Soviet broadcasters informed their listeners provides a framework for understanding why Soviet citizens might have trusted domestic media and, as current Russian media are perpetuating some of the Soviet Union's media practices,⁸⁸ to what extent Russian citizens are inclined to do so now and in the future.

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¹ Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 203.

² For a discussion of the importance of Asia in the Cold War see Westad, *Global Cold War*.

³ Carter to Brezhnev, 17.2.79, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*. Washington DC, 2013 (hereafter *FRUS*), vol. VI, 514-515.

⁴ Moscow to Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), telegram, 21.2.79, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter: TNA), PREM 16/2292.

⁵ See Zhang, "China's 1979 war," Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, Khoo, "Revisiting the Termination".

⁶ The sophistication Radio Moscow International in framing its messages in the 1970s is demonstrated by a recent study that made extensive use of BBCM transcripts. Deal, "Framing War," 222-228.

⁷ Bashkirova, "The Foreign Radio Audience," 118. Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 211. Parta, "The Audience to Western Broadcasts," 71. Mickiewicz, Ellen. "Policy Issues," 115, 118.

⁸ Axelrod & Zimmerman, "The Soviet Press," 197.

⁹ Goodman, "British Intelligence," 120.

¹⁰ Report by Geoffrey Archer, 17.10.1974, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹¹ Goodman, "British Intelligence," 121.

¹² Minute by Thomas, 29.6.1974, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹³ Memorandum by Lane, 4.7.1974, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹⁴ Thomas to Christie, 28.7.1976 and Right to Redfern, 23.6.1976, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹⁵ Bonner to Whiter, 21.1.1977, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹⁶ Memorandum by Archer, 17.10.1974, TNA, CAB 163,253.

¹⁷ Nicholls to Thomas, 21.1.1977, TNA, CAB 163/253.

¹⁸ Memorandum by Archer, 17.10.1974, TNA, CAB 163,253.

- ¹⁹ One exception is a note by the research department on new appointments in the Vietnamese council of ministers referencing the Summary of World Broadcasts. Carey to Humphrey, 2.3.1979, TNA, FCO 15/2576.
- ²⁰ For a concise summary of the military conflict see: Zhang, "China's 1979 war", 863-865. For a contemporary study see: Yee, "Sino-Vietnamese Boarder War".
- ²¹ Moscow to FCO, 18.2.79, TNA, PREM 16/2292.
- ²² "The risk China is taking." *The Guardian*, 19.2.79, p. 10.
- ²³ Dreyer, "One Issue leads to Another," 298.
- ²⁴ Recent interpretations see the 'Soviet factor' as most important: Khoo, "Revisiting the Termination," 323-324. Goscha, *History of Modern Vietnam*, 431.
- ²⁵ Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 340-345.
- ²⁶ Goscha, *History of Modern Vietnam*, 439-440.
- ²⁷ Goscha, *History of Modern Vietnam*, 432. Khoo, "Revisiting the Termination," 345. Yee, "Sino-Vietnamese Border War," 21. Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union*, 206-208.
- ²⁸ East German Memorandum on Sino-Vietnamese relations, 15.1.79, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (hereafter PAAA), Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (MfAA), C6656; West German embassy Beijing to Auswärtigen Amtes (AA), 14.2.79. PAAA, Zwischenarchiv (ZA) 110.760. See also: Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, 66.
- ²⁹ AA to Beijing, telegram, 29.1.79, PAAA, ZA 110.760.
- ³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, 29.1.79, *FRUS*, vol. XIII, 766-770.
- ³¹ Carter to Deng Xiaoping, oral message, 30.1.79, *FRUS*, vol. XIII, 770-771.
- ³² Memorandum of Conversation, 29.1.79, *FRUS*, vol. XIII, 766-770. See also: Goscha, *History of Modern Vietnam*, 434.
- ³³ Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, 66.
- ³⁴ Washington to FCO, telegram, 20.2.79, TNA, PREM 16/2292. Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War*, 63. Goscha, *History of Modern Vietnam*, 432.
- ³⁵ Brezhnev to Carter, 18.2.79, *FRUS*, vol. VI, 516-517.
- ³⁶ Memorandum of conversation, 27.2.79, *FRUS*, vol. VI, 523-524.
- ³⁷ Deng Xiaoping to Carter, oral message, undated, but according to National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski delivered on 15.2.79, *FRUS*, vol. XIII, 792.
- ³⁸ Brezhnev to Carter, 11.3.1979, *FRUS*, vol. VI, 530-531.
- ³⁹ Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 151. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 167-170.
- ⁴⁰ RM 1st, 11.2.79, 1600, BBCM, SU/B/499.
- ⁴¹ RM 1st, 11.2.79, 1600; 12.2.79, 1330; 13.2.79, 1200; 14.2.79, 1900, BBCM, SU/B/499.
- ⁴² Telegram no. 75, Hanoi to London, 17.2.79, TNA, PREM 16/2292.
- ⁴³ Maiak, 17.2.79/1700, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁴⁴ Hella Prick and Alex Brummer. "Chinese forces forge ahead." *The Guardian*, 19.2.79, p. 1.
- ⁴⁵ RM 1st, 18.2.79/0200, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁴⁶ RM 1st, 18.2.79/1400, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁴⁷ It was the first item in a number of bulletins: RM 1st, 18.2.79/1430 and 1445; also on 19.2.79/0305 and 0500; Maiak, 18.2.79, 2100, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁴⁸ RM 1st, 7.3.79/0430, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁴⁹ RM 1st, 11.3.79/1900, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁵⁰ RM 1st, 12.3.79/1745, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁵¹ Hanoi to FCO, telegram, 14.3.79, TNA, PREM 2292.
- ⁵² RM 1st, 12.3.79/0100; RM 1st, 13.2.79/1600, RM 1st, 14.2.79/0500; Maiak, 15.2.79/0230, BBCM, SU/B/501.

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- ⁵³ Maiak, 27.2.79, 0600, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁵⁴ Maiak, 19.2.79, 1800, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁵⁵ Robert Whyment and John Gittings. "The distant wars where truth is the first casualty." *The Guardian*, 27.2.79, p. 19.
- ⁵⁶ Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 18.2.79, FRUS, vol. XIII, 806-807.
- ⁵⁷ RM 1st, 19.2.79, 1745; Maiak, 24.2.79/1400, BBCM, SU/B/500. RM 1st, 9.3.79/0100, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁵⁸ Maiak, 18.2.79/1330, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁵⁹ RM 1st, 24.2.79/1330, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁶⁰ RM 1st, 19.2.79/1900, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁶¹ Callaghan to Varley, 19.2.79, TNA, FCO 15/2574.
- ⁶² Callaghan to Carter, 19.2.79, TNA, PREM 16/2292.
- ⁶³ RM 1st, 19.2.79/0900 and 1330, BBCM, SU/B/500. In private the Indian attitude was far less anti-Chinese: telegram 183, Delhi to FCO, 21.2.79, TNA, PREM 16/2292.
- ⁶⁴ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 162. Voltmer, "Constructing Political Reality," 478.
- ⁶⁵ Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 212. Evans, *Between Truth and Time*, 141. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 216-217.
- ⁶⁶ Evans, *Between Truth and Time*, 139-140.
- ⁶⁷ The BBCM transcript provides the name of the worker noting that text of her condemnation was omitted. Maiak, 18.2.79/1130, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁶⁸ RM 1st, 18.2.79/1230, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁶⁹ Maiak, 18.2.79/2100, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁷⁰ RM 1st, 19.2.79/0305, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁷¹ The climax was 19 February, when some broadcasts consisted mostly of reports condemning the attack. See for example: RM 1st, 19.2.79, 1745, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁷² Hella Pick. "Asian conflict sours US-Soviet relations." *The Guardian*, 21.2.79, p.8.
- ⁷³ Maiak, 26.2.79, 1030, BBCM, SU/B/500.
- ⁷⁴ Internal Soviet reports stressed that listeners, particularly outside Moscow, needed to hear the central press. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 161.
- ⁷⁵ RM 1st, 11.2.79, 0800, BBCM, SU/B/499.
- ⁷⁶ RM 1st, 13.2.79, 0315, BBCM, SU/B/499.
- ⁷⁷ RM 1st, 25.2.79, 0800, BBCM, SU/B/500,
- ⁷⁸ RM 1st, 4.3.79, 0800, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁷⁹ Nikolai Shishlin was a member of the International Department of the Central Committee and became in the 1980s one of Mikhael Gorbachev's advisers. See: Chernyaev, *My Six Years*, 84.
- ⁸⁰ RM 1st, 4.3.79, 0800, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁸¹ Loecking to Darker, 3.3.79, PAAA, ZA 110.760.
- ⁸² West German diplomats were impressed by Moscow's moderate response. AA memorandum, 2.3.79, PAAA, ZA 110.761.
- ⁸³ RM 1st, 4.3.79, 0800, BBCM, SU/B/501.
- ⁸⁴ Moscow to FCO, telegram, 22.2.79; Moscow to FCO, telegram, 21.2.79, TNA, PREM 2292.
- ⁸⁵ In the early 1960s, Soviet officials decreed that radio had to receive TASS reports first, newspapers second. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 160.
- ⁸⁶ Downing, "Trouble in the Backyard," 8. Oats, "The neo-Soviet model," 1295. Evans, *Between Truth and Time*, 141. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 134-135.

⁸⁷ Voltmer, “Constructing Political Reality,” 469.

⁸⁸ Gatov et al., “From Soviet to Russian,” 7.