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Broadcasting in Cuba: The Martis are Castro's Enemy Number One ^[1]

According to the Reuters news agency, "Cuba today started 24-hour jamming in Havana of Radio Marti, the United States' Spanish-language station transmitted from Miami, and said it would extend the jamming to the whole island."

That was back in May 1990.

Sixteen years later, Fidel Castro is still attempting to jam not only Radio Marti, but also TV Marti, which debuted in 1990, 5 years after its sister radio station. Today the Martis are in Castro's face as never before, literally from every direction, from the sky and all over the broadcast bands. U.S. government support for the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) has made TV and Radio Marti a blue chip stock, if there was such a thing in the U.S. government. With the ever-rising clout of Cuban Americans, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has even appointed a special diplomatic officer whose sole job is to bring down Castro, diplomatically, of course. [LINK](#).

Castro's anti-broadcast arsenal includes antique jamming equipment from the old Soviet Union, perhaps picked up from Craigslist, once used to interfere with the radio signals from the U.S. government's Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty broadcasts. Castro's government has not let up on its condemnation of TV and Radio Marti as a subversive intrusion of Cuban territory. Says OCB chief-of-staff Alberto Mascaro, "Fidel has been complaining quite a bit which only tells us that we are being effective in our transmissions."

A generation ago TV Marti began to broadcast from a transmitter in the nose of a helium balloon nicknamed "Fat Albert," floating over the Florida Keys on a string, as its older sister, Radio Marti, was beaming signals into Castro's Cuba from Washington and Miami. Who would have thought back then that the Martis would outlive Voice of America's English broadcast service, which may soon go dark.

Like the Cold War radios attempting to reach audiences in countries behind the Iron Curtain, Cuba Broadcasting managers have become more savvy at protecting their programs from being jammed over the years. (One of the most inventive efforts during the Cold War was China Radio's attempt to get its Russian language broadcasts to audiences through Soviet jamming. China Radio would broadcast some programs backwards, making them unintelligible. Soviet censors did not bother to jam these programs, which Russian listeners would tape and then play in reverse).

Today, in addition to its AM frequency service, Radio Marti has four shortwave radio channels which change frequencies often, making them more difficult for Cuban government jammers to track. Marti Radio listeners know that if the station cuts out after a song, they should dial

around until they hear the same song, which indicates another Marti frequency. Changing frequencies makes more work for jammers, who, historically, like to snooze.

TV Marti is also getting a spanking new transport airplane all its own, instead of sporadically using a U.S. military C-130 plane fitted with a powerful TV transmitter to beam programs from off the Cuban coast. TV Marti's new \$10 million plane will beam programs throughout the island, including areas outside Havana where frequencies are not jammed.

Programs parodying Castro and his government seem to be striking a chord with audiences on the island, according to Alberto Mascaro. Movies from filmmakers in Cuba are banned on the island, but are being successfully smuggled out of Cuba and run on TV Marti, under the program series "Silver Screen," transmitted from the military plane off the Cuban coast.

One mini-movie, a parody on purported spying by Castro's state police, shows police knocking on the door of an apartment, where they ask permission to survey the residence for the placement of microphones, because they have difficulty hearing conversations over the noise of an air conditioner, which is banned in Cuba. Another mini-documentary features a bored grade-school teacher with a cigarette dangling from her mouth, misspelling words on a blackboard and being corrected by her young students. Other films smuggled from Cuba seek to contrast the reality of what the Castro government claims, and what it actually delivers, especially in the field of medical care.

Castro is on his ninth U.S. president, but time is running out. The U.S. will keep sending in new management recruits with new ideas, and Congress will buy a fleet of airplanes if necessary, to show its support of the surrogate broadcast services.

But when the day comes when Castro is not there, better sell your blue chip Marti stock in a hurry, because Marti's plane flying off the Cuban coast will be coming in to land for good.
