

REASSESSING U. S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report

By many accounts, U.S. international broadcasting's mission is unclear, its attachment to U.S. foreign policy strategies tenuous at best, and its organizational structure ineffective. Many see the entire enterprise as broken. In this report we set out to explore the proposition that U.S. international broadcasting is facing multiple weaknesses that policy makers need to address. To do so, we engaged the thinking and analysis of approximately 30 individuals with extensive experience in foreign policy design and strategy, international relations more generally, international broadcasting, commercial media, public diplomacy and the promotion of human rights and democracy. They were asked to address three overarching questions:

- What is U.S. international broadcasting supposed to do, and how should it do it? What kind of strategic instrument is U.S. international broadcasting today?
- What is the nature of the connection between U.S. international broadcasting and U.S. foreign and security policy?
- How should U.S. international broadcasting be organized to optimize both mission and strategy?

The interviewees' assessments of U.S. international broadcasting and its environment included the observations below. Their most powerful and persistent observation was the need to completely re-conceptualize how the U.S. government communicates in support of its foreign policy, starting from the ground up. This may or may not result in some kind of "broadcasting" capacity, but nearly all stressed that today's broadcasting structure—a product of the Cold War beginning in the 1950s—is ill-suited for the complex competitive communications and media environment of today. Shuttering or radically overhauling today's U.S. international broadcasting in favor of a more modern and attuned communications paradigm stands as this report's preeminent insight.

The World Today and the Changed Media Environment

Competition in the new and emerging communications space—with more differentiated audiences and greater technological power—is more aggressive and more complex than in the era for which U.S. international broadcasting was created. Competitors with anti-US messaging are fomenting an information war—and winning—while U.S. international broadcasting is challenged to keep pace with competitors and changes in the media landscape. In particular, understanding the role and power of social media is essential. Broadcast strategy should be replaced by media strategy.

Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting

U.S. international broadcasting's overarching mission does not systematically address the realities of what is happening in the world. Responding to threats, advancing democratic norms, and conveying U.S. foreign policy interests should be key parts of the mission. Yet, individual missions among the networks are blurred and inconsistent. They require sharpening and realignment.

The Great Divide: Public Diplomacy and Surrogate Broadcasting

The traditional division of U.S. international broadcasting into public diplomacy and surrogate missions should be strengthened and deepened. Both roles are critical but distinctions must be drawn more sharply. Today, however, tension over the public diplomacy and surrogate roles has grown, diluting mandates and creating duplication. The surrogate function should not be jumbled together with public diplomacy. Surrogate broadcasting is likely to gain in importance and strategic influence in the foreseeable future. Increasingly, local media environments in local languages are becoming the main competitive playing field. Broadcasting in each place should be tailored to that audience. Surrogate presence assumes greater importance as regimes monopolize information that really counts.

American Values

Supporting and demonstrating American values should be integral to U.S. international broadcasting's mission. Ideas matter; U.S. international broadcasting should not be an ideas-free zone. Programming should be oriented to give hope. Detractors should be denied an opportunity to tarnish America. The conveying of U.S. values should be consistent but not didactic.

Telling America's Story

Telling America's story and informing audiences of U.S. positions, policies and attitudes is not a side issue but rather a central objective of U.S. international broadcasting, and the Voice of America is its vehicle. U.S. international broadcasting should be the definitive source for news on America. America should be shown in all its complexity, nuance and diversity.

Audiences

The U.S. is engaged in a war of ideas. U.S. international broadcasting should be an essential soft power instrument with key audiences. "Thinking" media consumers should remain the main target audience. Audiences should be differentiated on the basis of local conditions and platform use. Metrics that show influence are urgently needed to gauge how well U.S. international broadcasting effects change. Audience size is an ambiguous measurement of influence.

Network Independence, Objective Journalism and Firewalls

U.S. international broadcasting should use good journalism as its platform. Its networks are not independent news agencies, as if they were CNNs that happen to receive their funding from the U.S. government. To justify the investment, its activities must be tied to America's strategic interests. Purveying "objective journalism" is by itself insufficient reason for U.S. international broadcasting to exist. The journalism "firewall" that has come to characterize the relationship between U.S. international broadcasting and other parts of the government is overblown and frequently counterproductive.

Does Broadcasting Connect to U.S. Foreign Policy Strategies?

U.S. international broadcasting is nowhere effectively linked to U.S. government foreign policy planning processes or structures. Oversight by the Broadcasting Board of Governors is haphazard and diffuse, with little capacity to set broadcasting priorities, which in fact should be set at the highest levels within the U.S. government. Oversight should be redesigned and relocated in government to facilitate its connection to foreign policy objectives and practices. Broadcasting strategies and content should be aligned across all U.S. government communications facilities, except for military efforts, and U.S. international broadcasting's activities should be coordinated with foreign service components in the field.

Can it Be Fixed? Possible New Models

Currently the taxpayer has little idea—or the wrong idea—of what he or she is paying for with regard to U.S. international broadcasting. A number of alternative models for organizing U.S. international broadcasting can be imagined, but all will require political and legislative efforts of considerable weight. This is made more difficult because little strong support for U.S. international broadcasting exists in government, where memory of its successes during the Cold War is weak. Moreover, U.S. international broadcasting is a low-budget item that commands little attention. Alternative models include developing a single broadcasting corporation along the lines of the BBC; funding local media in areas we seek to influence; creating an NPR-like broadcast corporation that could accept corporate sponsorship; transforming today's operations into a much smaller agency that is simply a portal for information and links; creating a national strategic communications agency at the cabinet level or attached to the White House; and merging all of today's broadcasting elements into a 501(c)3 NGO that advocates for freedom, human rights, free markets and media freedom.

Why Not Start Over: A New Paradigm

U.S. international communications strategy should be rebuilt from the ground up. The intellectual model for U.S. international broadcasting was created for the Cold War. It is outdated and ineffectual. The proposed legislative reform is a good patch, but it is not a permanent fix. "Starting over"—abolishing today's "international broadcasting" while simultaneously designing a new communications capability to support U.S. foreign policy that resonates with the realities of today's world and media possibilities—should be given urgent attention. Much of the effort to re-

conceptualize why and how the U.S. should communicate in support of its foreign policy priorities and preferences could take place outside of government, in the think tank, university and NGO communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

U.S. international broadcasting is a three-quarters of a billion dollar taxpayer-supported operation that currently is composed of five separate media networks and an overarching governing board. The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) is composed of eight governors, with the sitting Secretary of State serving *ex officio*. The Board is bipartisan. The President nominates four members, and the Senate leader from the party not holding the White House selects four members who are then nominated by the President. All governors are confirmed by the Senate for three-year staggered terms. As of 2013, U.S. international broadcasting “is one of the world’s largest newsgathering and reporting operations, with 50 news bureaus and offices worldwide. The five broadcast entities it supervises employ more than 3,500 journalists, producers, technicians, and support personnel full time in Washington, Miami, and Prague. It employs approximately 1,500 freelancers around the world.”¹

By many accounts, the mission, attachment to U.S. foreign policy aims, and organizational structure of U.S. international broadcasting are unclear, and some see the entire enterprise as broken. A 2013 assessment from the Office of the Inspector General referred repeatedly to governance of this vast broadcasting empire as “dysfunctional,” and the governing body, the BBG, as “failing in its mandated duties.” These shortcomings stem from a virtual absence of strategy and “a flawed legislative structure.”²

A coincidental assessment from the Government Accounting Office highlighted how investment in U.S. international broadcasting is wasted through duplicating operational elements, replicating objectives, and a lack of business strategy.³ An independent auditor’s report of the BBG (November 12, 2014) found “material weakness” and “significant deficiency” in key areas of BBG operations, none of which had been addressed from similar assessments one year earlier.⁴ Even former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has weighed in. In her view, U.S. international broadcasting’s contribution to the nation’s public diplomacy efforts is now “defunct,”⁵ a theme echoed in further congressional hearings.⁶ Senator Richard Lugar’s assessment of U.S. international broadcasting of two years earlier—“U.S.

¹ OIG Report, p. 4.

² “Inspection of the Broadcasting Board of Governors,” Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of State (ISP-IB-13-07), January 2013. (Hereafter “OIG Report”.)

³ Government Accounting Office, January 2013. Also Deloitte Consulting LLP, *Broadcasting Board of Governors Grantee Merger Assessment*, November 10, 2011 (redacted), <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/11/Deloitte-Grantee-Consolidation-Assessment-Redacted.pdf>.

⁴ <http://oig.state.gov/system/files/aud-fm-ib-15-10.pdf>

⁵ Testimony to House Committee on Foreign Affairs, January 23, 2013.

⁶ Hearing: Broadcasting Board of Governors—An Agency “Defunct,” House Committee on Foreign Affairs, June 26, 2013.

International Broadcasting: Is Anybody Listening?”—laments the growing disconnect between the strategy and operation of U.S. international broadcasting and American foreign policy objectives.⁷

Concerned about this state of affairs, many have asked: What happened to U.S. international broadcasting? This once-powerful instrument of America’s public diplomacy is an intimate part of the Cold War’s historical narrative. Transformational leaders like Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, and Boris Yeltsin lauded the work of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and the Voice of America for helping to topple communist regimes and usher in democratic processes.

Coming off its Cold War triumphs, many have argued that U.S. international broadcasting was abruptly downgraded as a strategic instrument in America’s foreign policy arsenal, substantially de-funded, and reorganized in a way that impedes effective oversight, diffuses strategic focus, thwarts planning, and deepens inefficiencies while increasing waste and duplication. While individual journalists and some language services often create excellent programs, and the different networks enjoy isolated successes, U.S. international broadcasting has on the whole been on a downward trajectory for nearly two decades. An authoritative study by two international broadcasting veterans concludes that “[i]n an increasingly competitive global media environment, [U.S. international broadcasting] remains a disparate and disorderly archipelago of largely separate cold-war-era entities.”⁸

The period immediately following the end of the Cold War should logically have provoked an intense examination of the mission and objectives of U.S. international broadcasting generally, with a particular focus on where and how this kind of communicating fits into new strategies for enhancing America’s competitive position on a more diverse and dynamic landscape. New challenges to America’s interests were emerging across the globe, articulated through new alliances and relationships, enhanced capabilities, seductive ideologies, and outright confrontations. New technologies—e.g., the digital revolution and the arrival of social media—were poised to reshape the capabilities of international broadcasting’s traditional operations and art.

Yet this strategic re-examination—undertaken mostly outside of government—was arguably piecemeal at best.⁹ U.S. international broadcasting essentially doubled

⁷ “U.S. International Broadcasting: Is Anybody Listening?” Office of Senator Richard Lugar, June 6, 2010.

⁸ A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, “A 21st Century Vision for U.S. Global Media,” Wilson Center Occasional Paper, November 2012, p. 2.

⁹ Several efforts are notable: “Cold War Broadcasting Impact,” Report on a conference organized by the Hoover Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at Stanford University, October 13-16, 2004; “Understanding the Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting,” McCormick Tribune Foundation (Chicago, 2007); R. Eugene Parta,

down on what was already understood, or thought to be so, based on formative Cold War experience that reinforced its logic. Downsized budgets for public diplomacy and strategic communications that were driven by the “peace dividend” also thwarted a potential re-examination of purpose and objectives. A comprehensive review, had it occurred, would have sought to identify what U.S. international broadcasting did well, where it needed to adapt to new and future foreign policy challenges, and how best to focus its strategic and operational priorities to fit new funding paradigms.

In the meantime, Congress justified a continued role for broadcasting to serve U.S. foreign policy in familiar terms, first to provide a reliable picture of America, its values and policies via the Voice of America (VOA); and, second, via a proliferation of “Radio Frees,” or “surrogate” broadcasters, to deliver targeted local and international news and information to places where local media’s supply was incomplete or inaccurate. To do this, Congress incrementally assigned a byzantine duplicative conglomeration of media networks to tackle these different missions. The VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) remained in place following their Cold War triumphs. After adding broadcasts from Radio Marti to Cuba in 1985, and TV Marti in 1990, Congress created the International Broadcasting Bureau in 1994 (see below). Then came Radio Free Asia (RFA) in 1996 and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN) in 2004, which set in motion Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV. Along the way, several additional semi-networks were incorporated within the larger entities, for example Radio Free Afghanistan within RFE/RL and the Persian News Network (PNN) within the VOA, in response to particular Congressional mandates.

To govern this expanding universe of media companies, Congress created the BBG via the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, and placed the new board and the newly created International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) in the United States Information Agency (USIA).¹⁰ The IBB was handed jurisdiction over the VOA, the Office of Cuban Broadcasting (OCB), which encompassed Radio and TV Martí, as well as the engineering and technical services to support them. In 1998, the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act merged USIA into the Department of State. The BBG was transformed into an independent federal agency, like the Department of Defense or the Department of Commerce.

At the same time the BBG’s jurisdiction was extended to include all U.S. international broadcasting networks, both within the federal agency and outside it. It was designated to oversee operations and impose on all networks some kind of

Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR During the Cold War (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007).

¹⁰ The BBG replaced the highly effective Board for International Broadcasting (last Chairman: former congressman Dan Mica), which had had jurisdiction over only Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty from 1973 until its replacement by the BBG.

comprehensive communications strategy consistent with American foreign policy objectives. In addition, the BBG became the funding conduit for all U.S. international broadcasting—via direct appropriations to the networks inside the federal agency (VOA, IBB, and OCB) and via congressional appropriations to the BBG, which the BBG then turned around as “grants” to those networks outside the federal structure (RFE/RL, RFA, MBN).

This proliferation of capabilities, and consolidation under BBG governance, might appear normal to those familiar with commercial acquisitions, where bringing similar industries into a synthetic corporate structure makes good business sense. But U.S. international broadcasting’s disparate pieces were in no sense similar, despite Congress designating all of them as part of U.S. international broadcasting.

Confusion was built in. As part of the federal agency, the VOA, IBB and OCB are subject to federal guidelines and restrictions in everything from human resources policy to budgeting and reporting. In contrast, RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN were created outside the federal agency as 501(c)3 tax exempt non-profit organizations funded by Congress through grants from the BBG. Never part of the federal agency, these “grantees” operate under laws, guidelines, conventions, and restrictions of the private sector, while still accountable under certain guidelines of the Office of Management and Budget. This forced marriage of wholly incompatible parts is at the root of U.S. international broadcasting’s organizational dysfunction, as will be seen. The IBB illustrates another level of confusion entirely. Put into the draft law for unclear reasons and with a legislative sunset provision that would have stripped it out at the request of any member of the Senate prior to a final vote, the IBB survived when no one objected. What role it actually performs and its jurisdiction remain obscure and debated to this day.

This Report

The project is intended to contribute to a new conversation about U.S. international broadcasting, drawing on the wisdom and insights of a wide range of senior foreign policy practitioners and strategists, many of whom have direct experience with U.S. international broadcasting and its possibilities. We believe that this effort will also help to establish an analytical architecture for thinking about U.S. international broadcasting’s mission, the connective tissue attaching it to U.S. foreign policy, and its reorganization into an effective instrument, highlighting a range of options for policy.

In the report, we initially set out to explore the proposition that U.S. international broadcasting is facing multiple challenges that policy makers need to address. To do so, we engaged the thinking and analysis of approximately 30 individuals with extensive experience in foreign policy design and strategy, international relations more generally, international broadcasting, commercial media, public diplomacy and the promotion of human rights and democracy. Most of our interviewees possessed experience, skills and interests in a number of these areas and disciplines.

Our interviews were open-ended. We sought to keep interviewees focused on the larger questions, while encouraging them to drill down into questions and issues they understood particularly well. Thus, some interviews focused primarily on the emerging media environment, the strengths and weaknesses of America's public diplomacy or soft power, or the need to represent America more effectively and completely. Others approached the demands on U.S. international broadcasting from the perspective of different geographic, political, or security challenges; for example, addressing repressive regimes in places like Iran or North Korea, or the revanchist policies of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Still others concentrated on where U.S. international broadcasting fits within a broad array of America's foreign policy instruments.

Our selection of interviewees was not "scientific," as one might expect from a public opinion survey, not least because the number of individuals possessing an informed or proprietary interest in U.S. international broadcasting is small. We attempted to avoid the trap of partisanship by selecting evenly wherever possible from the main political camps, that is, to the extent we could determine which camps our interviewees were in. This sensitivity to possible political affiliation paid an early and significant dividend. It quickly made us aware that any partisan approach to U.S. international broadcasting is difficult to discern. To the contrary, with respect to our main lines of inquiry nearly all interviewees had reached similar conclusions, regardless of their affiliations on the political spectrum.

From our own experience at both the operational and policy levels in U.S. international broadcasting, we are aware that most discussion is about incremental change, usually within the confines of existing budgets. In seeking to elevate this discussion in the direction of key strategic concerns or "first principles," we asked our interviewees to address three overarching questions.

First, what is U.S. international broadcasting supposed to do, and how should it do it? What kind of strategic instrument is U.S. international broadcasting today? What should we hope to achieve by using it?

Second, what is the nature of the connection between U.S. international broadcasting and U.S. foreign and security policy? How should U.S. international broadcasting fit within the universe of organizations supporting and informing U.S. foreign policy. Is it intended to be part of the human rights community—a kind of Freedom House with antennae—as some call for? Or should it be an instrument of "strategic communications" or psychological operations, more appropriately coordinated by the Pentagon or the NSC, as others argue? Is U.S. international broadcasting's traditional justification as the source of objective information sufficient to justify the taxpayers' investment in it, especially in an environment overflowing with media claiming both objectivity and comprehensive coverage? What new roles and responsibilities should we anticipate?

Third, how should U.S. international broadcasting be organized to optimize both mission and strategy? Should it remain a honeycomb of media networks that compete for resources, or alternatively a single organization? Should it be subsumed by the State Department or the Pentagon? What kind of oversight and management conventions might enhance U.S. international broadcasting's ability to reflect America's foreign and security policies?

We have opted in the report wherever possible to allow the interviewees to speak for themselves, with our efforts directed mainly toward supplying connections that contribute to creating a clear analytical narrative around their observations without doing violence to these observations or the frame of reference in which they were offered. We have attempted to organize their observations and conclusions into concise discussions of particular issues, which appear as individual sections of the report to follow.

The interviews quickly and repeatedly established the following theme:

U.S. international broadcasting done well and harnessed effectively to U.S. foreign policy has been and should again become a potent instrument in America's public diplomacy toolkit.

But support for the converse also was strong; namely, if U.S. international broadcasting cannot be fixed, it is not worth the current investment, which amounts to one half of the current government budget for "public diplomacy." The interviewees' most powerful and persistent observation was the need to completely re-conceptualize how the U.S. government communicates in support of its foreign policy, starting from the ground up. This may or may not result in some kind of "broadcasting" capacity, but nearly all stressed that today's broadcasting structure is ill-suited for the complex competitive communications and media environment of today. Strong support for shuttering or radically overhauling today's U.S. international broadcasting in favor of a more modern and attuned communications paradigm stands as this report's preeminent insight.

Key insights will be fleshed out in the sections to follow. Among these are:

- Competition in the new and emerging communications space—with more differentiated audiences and greater technological power—is more aggressive and more complex than in the era for which U.S. international broadcasting was created. Competitors with anti-U.S. messaging are fomenting an information war—and winning—while U.S. international broadcasting is challenged to keep pace with competitors and changes in the media landscape. In particular, understanding the role and power of social media is essential. Broadcast strategy should be replaced by media strategy.

- U.S. international broadcasting's overarching mission does not systematically address the realities of what is happening in the world. Responding to threats, advancing democratic norms, and conveying U.S. foreign policy interests should be key parts of the mission. Yet, individual missions among the networks are blurred and inconsistent. They require sharpening and realignment.
- The traditional division of U.S. international broadcasting into public diplomacy and surrogate missions should be realigned and deepened. Both roles are critical but distinctions must be drawn more sharply. Today, however, tension over the public diplomacy and surrogate roles has grown, diluting mandates and creating duplication. The surrogate function should not be jumbled together with public diplomacy.
- Surrogate broadcasting is likely to gain in importance and strategic influence in the foreseeable future. Increasingly, local media environments in local languages are becoming the main competitive playing field. Broadcasting in each place should be tailored to that audience. Surrogate presence assumes greater importance as hostile regimes monopolize information that really counts.
- Supporting and demonstrating American values should be integral to U.S. international broadcasting's mission. Ideas matter; U.S. international broadcasting should not be an ideas-free zone. Programming should be oriented to give hope. Detractors should be denied an opportunity to tarnish America, but the conveying of U.S. values should be consistent and not didactic.
- Telling America's story and informing audiences of U.S. positions, policies and attitudes is not a side issue but rather a central objective of U.S. international broadcasting, and the Voice of America is its vehicle. U.S. international broadcasting should be the definitive source for news on America. America should be shown in all its complexity, nuance and diversity.
- The U.S. is engaged in a war of ideas. U.S. international broadcasting should be an essential soft power tool with key audiences. "Thinking" media consumers should remain the main target audience. Audiences should be differentiated on the basis of local conditions and platform use. Metrics that show influence are urgently needed to gauge how well U.S. international broadcasting effects change. Audience size is an ambiguous measurement of influence.
- U.S. international broadcasting should use good journalism as its platform. But its networks are not independent news agencies, as if they were CNNs

that happen to receive their funding from the U.S. government. To justify the investment, its activities must be tied to America's strategic interests. Purveying "objective journalism" is by itself insufficient reason for U.S. international broadcasting to exist. The journalism "firewall" that has come to characterize the relationship between U.S. international broadcasting and other parts of the government is overblown and frequently counterproductive.

- U.S. international broadcasting is nowhere effectively linked to U.S. government strategic foreign policy planning processes or structures. Oversight from the Broadcasting Board of Governors is haphazard and diffuse, with little capacity to set broadcasting priorities, which in fact should be set at the highest levels within the U.S. government. Oversight should be redesigned and relocated in government to facilitate its connection to foreign policy objectives and practices. Broadcasting strategies and content should be aligned across all U.S. government communications facilities, except for military efforts, and U.S. international broadcasting's activities should be coordinated with foreign service components in the field.
- Different models for organizing U.S. international broadcasting should be considered. Currently the taxpayer has little idea—or the wrong idea—of what he or she is paying for with regard to U.S. international broadcasting. A number of alternative models for organizing U.S. international broadcasting can be imagined, but all will require political and legislative efforts of considerable weight. This is made more difficult because little strong support for U.S. international broadcasting exists in government, where memory of its successes during the Cold War is weak. Moreover, U.S. international broadcasting is a low-budget item that commands little attention. Alternative models include developing a single broadcasting corporation along the lines of the BBC; funding local media in areas we seek to influence; creating an NPR-like broadcast corporation that could accept corporate sponsorship; transforming today's operations into a much smaller agency that is simply a portal with information and links; creating a national strategic communications agency at the cabinet level or attached to the White House; and merging all of today's broadcasting elements into a 501(c)3 NGO that advocates for freedom, human rights, free markets and media freedom.
- The proposed legislative reform of U.S. international broadcasting is a good patch, but it is not a permanent fix. U.S. international communications strategy should be rebuilt from the ground up. The intellectual model for U.S. international broadcasting was created for the Cold War. It is an outdated and ineffectual paradigm. "Starting over"—abolishing today's "international broadcasting" while simultaneously designing a new communications capability to support U.S. foreign policy that resonates with the realities of today's world and media possibilities—should be given urgent attention.

Much of the effort to re-conceptualize why and how the U.S. should communicate in support of its foreign policy priorities and preferences could take place outside of government, in the think tank, university and NGO communities.

II. THE WORLD TODAY AND THE CHANGED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

- **Competition in new and emerging communications space is more aggressive and more complex than in the era for which U.S. international broadcasting was created.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting is challenged to keep pace with well-funded competitors and changes in the media landscape.**
- **Competitors with anti-U.S. messaging are fomenting an information war—and winning.**
- **Some regimes continue to exercise a monopoly over the information their citizens receive even in a globalized information world.**
- **Social media deserves special attention in any U.S. media strategy.**
- **English-language capability creates new opportunities for broadcasters to reach targeted audiences.**

As several interviewees stressed, any discussion of what U.S. international broadcasting is doing or should be doing must be predicated on the question of what is happening in the world today and the direction in which things are likely to go. At the end of the Cold War, a sense of promise for peace and the ushering in of liberal democracies prevailed, at least for a period in the 1990s. But since then, and particularly after 9/11, significant areas of the world have become more dangerous and unstable. The U.S. has often been caught off guard and largely reactive to events, the latest being ISIL and Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Many interviewees also expressed the view that U.S. international broadcasting, too, has largely lagged behind in anticipating where extremism and anti-Western elements would likely develop and proliferate. Funding has been flat in areas most in need of U.S. international broadcasting, while non-priority areas receive duplicate funding, and the criteria for determining priorities has itself been short sighted and disconnected with realities on the ground. As one interviewee said, “we need to step back and define the world we live in today.... What is out there that might influence us?.... It is a range of countries that are not democratic that are extremely hostile to the United States and to the values it represents; and are influencing the way they think about those values and think about us. That is a BIG problem.” “Information from bad regimes is vile and bold, but people still believe it,” cautioned another.

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The implication of his point, which was shared by others, is that any strategy must be clear-eyed in confronting the inconvenient truth that the U.S. has formidable foes who wish to see it back on its heels and in retreat. As a first step, U.S. international broadcasting must restore clarity in looking at how the world is. “It’s not the way we would like it to be, and we have to face it the way it is.” Indeed, one very effective

strategy imposed by adversaries to ensure their own survival is to paint the U.S. as an enemy.

A consensus view emerged that a new vision of how the United States communicates in support of its foreign policy objectives is more necessary now than it was several decades ago, despite the explosion of information sources and platforms in most parts of the world that might make one think that efforts to impede or restrict flows of information or to spin and target them for narrow purposes could not succeed. The pattern of media development in many countries that have undergone political or social transitions in the last few decades, noted a former ambassador, has gone from “closed to open to corrupt.”

The greater availability of information has done little, he and others remarked, to erase the way authoritarian regimes and media-savvy non-state actors control access to information or tailor it in service of strategies supporting their preferred political outcomes. These regimes and groups have become serious communications competitors, offering, for example, highly produced television programming and their version of news on state-run outlets, which remain most popular with audiences. They have also, by extension, consolidated their virtual monopolies on information by disseminating content across digital platforms and borders, thus reaching and influencing consumers to whom they wish to target their propaganda. The results—from China to the Balkans to Russia to Syria—range from thwarted peaceful, democratic transformations to full-fledged conflicts and wars.

“The media ‘revolution’ in much of the world has gone from closed to open to corrupt.”

In other words, the communications revolution has encouraged regimes not just to wall off information in predictable ways—for example by restricting or denying the Internet through technical means, as happens in China, Iran or North Korea. More subtle but effective strategies are on the rise. Several interviewees whose organizations wrestle with the problem of states controlling information observed that, in many places, what one might call “hybrid regimes,” have emerged. In these, the state controls media and uses it as an instrument to maintain power. Such states effectively have a monopoly over the information their citizens receive, and what citizens receive from other sources is essentially marginal.

Growing competition from point-of-view media at the global level is also a problem, for example Al Jazeera in Arabic or Iranian broadcasts in the Middle East or Russia’s RT and its local stations, as is regimes’ practice of saturating local airways with “information” and “analysis” that is tendentious, distorted and blatantly mendacious, as one sees clearly in Russia’s unfolding communications strategy toward Ukraine and its other neighbors. Observed a long-time student of Russian affairs, “The scale of disinformation and outright lies on the part of the Russian government and the Russian media, I think, exceeds anything we saw in the Soviet period.”

Both global and local communications strategies increasingly rely on the integration of old and new technologies. “The interface between various platforms in an age where people are getting news off smart phones, those who know how to integrate well are the ones succeeding,” observed a senior diplomat among our interviewees, noting further that the State Department is not alone in being especially weak on the use of Twitter and other social media platforms. Old consumption patterns for information are dying, especially among younger people. “The way people are getting information, for example from Buzzfeed, has changed, it’s moving fast. This is the future for news. Email is passé.” The diplomat cited his own children’s preferences in this regard, pointing out that they never turn on TV for information any more, which they get from other platforms, mostly social media. Radio for them is practically a prehistoric concept. “Saudi women now download Anchorfree, Whisper, etc., platforms we need, because this is our target market,” noted another. “We need to be very, very current about what is going on and what is changing and what technology is being sold to other governments.”

“We are a long way from the era when the battle was simply RFE versus Radio Moscow. Therefore, ‘broadcast strategy’ must give way to ‘media strategy’ in a broader sense.”

A public diplomacy strategist argued for “more explicitness about how the rise of social media has changed the nature of the competition for audiences that broadcasters once could assume would be their own. Broadcast strategy and social media strategy must be tightly linked.” He and others noted growing trends around the world of people relying more on social media, and trusting them more, than on “traditional information providers,” and they cited the example of ISIL and other radical groups using social media effectively in targeting their audiences. Observed this strategist: “We are a long way from the era when the battle was simply RFE versus Radio Moscow. Therefore, ‘broadcast strategy’ must give way to ‘media strategy’ in a broader sense.” And the paradigmatic shift to “media strategy” with its focus on new platforms, new technologies, new audiences and their more specialized information consumption preferences “needs to be institutionalized, not *ad hoc*.”

On the supply side, several interviewees argued that journalistic standards for information gathering have declined, and that fewer foreign correspondents and bureaus “result in an ant’s view,” with no good overall picture. This decline is attributable in part to the absence of good journalism training and mentoring, and the lack of career paths for young journalists. Another interviewee—a former foreign correspondent—disagreed. In fact, there are more foreign correspondents than ever, he argued, “just not ours,” and he went on to discuss how the “business model for investigative journalism and foreign correspondence is broken.” In this environment, the BBG, which operates a global network of journalists, would seem to enjoy a distinct advantage. One interviewee cited a recent State Department approach to offer workshops on the empowering potential of media tools

themselves in efforts to build more open societies. “This should be a continuing priority for U.S. broadcasting and related programs.”

A continual theme in the interviews was prefaced by universal acknowledgement that the media environment into which the United States now seeks to communicate in support of its foreign policy preferences may now be unrecognizable to the media strategies built on “broadcasting” as the BBG and State Department currently understand it. Indeed, in a complex and dangerous world, U.S. international media has largely been reactive, lacking a global, proactive strategy to encourage and help shape more hospitable environments and counter threats, ideally before they happen. Most interviewees questioned whether we can succeed on a competitive communications landscape working from a blueprint prepared in the 1950s. “How do you get a message across?” was asked repeatedly.

Several interviewees went so far as to recommend that U.S. international broadcasting concentrate solely on helping to remove barriers to global consumers’ access to the cascade of information produced beyond the U.S. government, for example by concentrating investment on the development and distribution of anti-internet-circumvention technologies, or by having dedicated Twitter feeds with informational links to other information providers, wherever they might originate. The reasoning behind this recommendation is straight-forward: Technologies have given birth to a fluid marketplace of ideas in which users can judge for themselves what is valuable and what is not. But they are often not directed to information that is curated to present an accurate view of what the United States is really all about.

Another development in the media environment, especially since the end of the Cold War, should influence broadcasting strategy on both the demand and supply sides: the growing use of English. The globalization of media has underlined the importance of English use in business, international affairs, the arts, culture, even sports. Few regimes are able to wall off their populations from massive intrusions of English-language content, whether via news, music or movies. Our interviewees pointed to the rapidly growing number of English-capable young people in places like the new states of the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, and Asia generally. They argued that the rise of English as the global language—and efforts by young people to participate at this level—serves as a natural connection to America and its narratives. Not surprisingly, they noted, some adversaries increasingly target not just Western audiences but English-capable non-Western ones with their own sophisticated English-language media: a clear admission of the language’s magnetic powers. Many interviewees argued that few things facilitate the entry of diverse audiences into the world of Western ideas and values better than command of English; and at the level of strategy, attracting English-capable youth would go far in any broadcasting effort to focus on audiences of critical thinkers. And they expressed dismay that English-language broadcasting at the VOA has recently been reduced and that English-language programming on local themes for “surrogate” audiences has yet to be attempted in a serious way. These commissions and

omissions were attributed to the weakness of a compelling overarching strategy for U.S. international broadcasting.

III. MISSION

- **U.S. international broadcasting needs a sharper, more coherent mission that actively *promotes*, rather than simply supports, democracy; addresses and combats competitive threats; and advances U.S. interests, goals, and values.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting must contest an information space of renewed ideological warfare.**
- **The U.S. is increasingly ceding the information space to adversaries.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting should exist within the realm of public diplomacy in a more official sense.**
- **Missions among U.S. international broadcasting's networks are blurred and inconsistent.**

The mission of US international broadcasting, revised by the BBG in 2010, is: “To inform, engage and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.” If U.S. international broadcasting’s *raison d’etre* is to support freedom and democracy, one might expect a narrower definition of who and where it should be targeting its efforts—that is, places where democracy and freedom are unknown or under siege and where these deficits create threats to the U.S. or to the global community.

Nearly all of our interviewees stated that U.S. international broadcasting’s mission should be about much more than what it purports to be. They spoke to the need for a sharper, more coherent mission that actively *promotes*, rather than simply supports, democracy; addresses and combats competitive threats; and advances U.S. interests, goals, and values in the most constructive ways possible. The first step in articulating these, or any other tactical goals, they argued, was to understand the new media environment, both in terms of technologies, competitors and audiences, and where U.S. international broadcasting fits within that context. As the president of a democracy-promotion NGO put it: “You have two separate problems—how to understand what are the problems that arise from the world we live in, and, second, to understand how the U.S. international broadcasting mission is related to that. We have always operated within the assumption of a strong West, international stability and so forth, which are not there today.”

Many took this a step further in arguing that U.S. international broadcasting should exist within the realm of public diplomacy in a more official sense. “Broadcasting is inextricable from the larger public diplomacy issues...not as something independent but as part of a broader and larger and deeper U.S. use of cultural means to engage with the world,” one said.

Understanding the new media environment and the need for more flexible, nimble models for media, brought to the fore the priority most interviewees felt was lacking in U.S. international broadcasting’s mission: the ability to communicate U.S. foreign

policy preferences, interests and values where they are increasingly under threat. Part and parcel of these aims is the promotion of democracy but in a more targeted sense, that is, in regions that are both dangerously anti-democratic and using anti-American narratives as a means of indoctrinating populations to support their cause. These threats were seen as much more potent and threatening to America's own interests and that of the peaceful democratic order.

“You have two separate problems—how to understand what are the problems that arise from the world we live in, and, second, to understand how the U.S. international broadcasting mission is related to that. We have always operated within the assumption of a strong West, international stability and so forth, which are not there today.”

One common view held by interviewees was that U.S. international broadcasting has very clear adversaries, such as Russia and ISIL, in an information space of renewed ideological warfare. This, they said, must be at the forefront of U.S. international broadcasting's efforts. As one scholar put it: “We are now beginning a long-term fight against radical *jihadism*. This will be the unifying message of our foreign policy from Morocco to Pakistan for as far as the eye can see. Broadcasting should be in this light. There are lots of different ways to do it, but if you are not in this mindset it's not going to happen.” Other interviewees underlined that broadcasting/media should be used to counter violent extremism, particularly in terms of undercutting extremists' recruiting efforts. “The U.S. [broadcasting] product is reactive and is not integrated within the larger public diplomacy and foreign policy context,” argued a public diplomacy strategist. Further, he argued, this mission should not be mainly the preserve of our military's communications efforts, for example those of some combatant commands.

A former senior diplomat said: “We [should be] using U.S. international broadcasting to achieve the national interest. That's the end game. We're looking at things we want to get done in the world... We want more countries to be free because that makes us safer. Broadcasting helps in that by helping nations become freer because it provides a free press to places that don't have a free press, and it helps explain American foreign policy.”

There was significant concern among interviewees that the U.S. was ceding the information space to adversaries, and was simply not a presence when it most needed to be. Description of this phenomena included U.S. international broadcasting's defensive posture in having to resort to debunking of lies about the U.S. or its policy, rather than assuming a proactive stance. While countering disinformation and attacks on the U.S. is important and should be an official function, one also noted that: “We need to be more aggressive than just stating policy, what we do in the world. I think we take it for granted that everybody understands it or

that it doesn't matter. That is definitely not my view." Another stressed that U.S. international broadcasting should be more confident in "explaining our foreign policy and cannot just rely on intermediaries to do it for us, whether Russian news, NBC, anybody."

Others said that as long as the U.S. is influential, audiences and information consumers will want to know what it stands for. Not being a strong presence leads to a weakened posture in the realm of ideas, to the extent that "silence implies consent." One interviewee said, "It's not a war of ideas, but it is entering that arena and being a presence there is critical because the default option, it seems to me, is that then we are not at all playing in that game. And I think more harm would be done. A lot of other people are in the game, and if you pull out of it, then people will listen to others. Does that mean they will do certain things? I don't know. But do you want to take that chance?"

The discussion of what a renewed mission for U.S. international broadcasting should encompass and how such a mission should be prioritized and structured in extraordinary times would not be complete without a more granular look at the missions of the five networks at the heart of U.S. international broadcasting. As the networks produce content and carry out programming, they should theoretically have a more nuanced understanding of what it is they are doing and why, and what their audiences need and want.

"A lot of other people are in the game, and if you pull out of it, then people will listen to others. Does that mean they will do certain things? I don't know. But do you want to take that chance?"

However, there remains much confusion and fuzziness over how these individual missions are carried out despite what may be written in their corporate statements of purpose and role. The statements themselves are not clearly aligned. Some of the objectives of the networks stress the "promotion of," rather than simply "in support of" democracy through the provision of a free press or objective news and information; part of one statement is to serve "America's interests with reliable information that presents the policies of the United States clearly and effectively." A third focuses primarily on the provision of news and information. One stresses radio but does not mention the plethora of other platforms being used around the world, which calls into question the engagement piece of U.S. international broadcasting's overall mission. By way of illustration, one interviewee pointed to a seeming disconnect within the mission of a single network: "When Middle East Broadcasting was set up, there was already by then a mushing of the two missions. All you have to do is go online, you read the two different purposes written there, and they are kind of contradictory."

Questions often arose in interviews as to how effective these missions were, whether they are contradictory, complementary, or duplicative at the operational

level, and whether they are in sync with the mission of U.S. international broadcasting at all. The consensus among interviewees was that little attention has been paid to this issue, resulting in what one decried as “complete mission drift and mission creep. When did it happen? Who knows? Three, five, seven, nine years ago, but it has been *happening*.”

IV. THE GREAT DIVIDE: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND SURROGATE BROADCASTING

- **Tension over the public diplomacy and surrogate roles has grown, diluting mandates and creating duplication.**
- **Both roles are critical, and distinctions must be drawn more sharply.**
- **The public diplomacy role and the surrogate role should not be jumbled up; these are separate functions that should be addressed separately.**
- **Surrogate media are likely to gain in importance and strategic influence in the foreseeable future. Local media environments in local languages are becoming the main competitive playing field.**
- **Surrogate presence assumes greater importance as regimes monopolize information that really counts.**

The traditional distinction between the Voice of America and U.S. international broadcasting's other networks—Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Middle East Broadcast Networks, Radio Free Asia and the Office of Cuban Broadcasting (Radio and TV Martí)—is supposed to be straightforward. The VOA, as its names indicates, was intended to be responsible for describing America to a global audience in all its wonder and complexity in a variety of languages. It was indeed “America’s voice” with its emphasis on “us.”

The other networks—“surrogate” broadcasters in today’s parlance—were designed to provide what are essentially credible local broadcast services in local languages for the audiences in countries that either forbade or restricted such services or offered their citizens misleading, tendentious or mendacious information and commentary intended to defend the domestic regimes’ power and to support their narratives and objectives. Programming from the surrogate broadcasters for the most part eschewed “doing America” in favor of deep and penetrating broadcasting about the local issues through factual reporting and provocative discussions. Surrogate broadcasting, in contrast to the VOA’s being “about us,” for the most part, was “about them.” Both the VOA and the surrogate stations developed strong journalistic standards and accountability as the platforms for their broadcasts.

Tension between the VOA model of “official” or “public diplomacy” broadcasting and the surrogate model of “local” broadcasting is long-standing, beginning almost at the creation of Radio Free Europe (1950) and Radio Liberty (1953) for the specific purpose of undermining communist rule in Eastern Europe and the USSR. For the most part, the surrogate stations avoided the VOA’s mission of presenting America to their audiences, although a few exceptions existed. Many VOA language services, on the other hand, operated as mostly surrogate stations. By the time the USSR collapsed in 1991, duplicate language services with strong surrogate orientations proliferated across the networks, with overlap being particularly pronounced between the VOA and Radio Liberty. Overlap multiplied with the creation of Radio Free Asia in 1996, as both RFA and the VOA broadcast similar “local” programming

to a number of Asian countries. Noted one interviewee possessing deep experience in U.S. international broadcasting, who argued for the VOA's dual mission:

The view that was always claimed about VOA, and maybe this should have been the view, that VOA was broadcasting [only] about America to the world—it's not true.... If there is a function for VOA, you have to do some local reporting, or people don't listen to you.

Yet disquiet over the VOA's investment of resources into surrogate services where they are already provided by other U.S. government networks has grown in recent years as official public diplomacy is increasingly seen to be failing. Surely the VOA, this view goes, should be a powerful public diplomacy instrument in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives, but it is now too far out of its lane to maximize its effect.

“For the [public diplomacy] function, addressing the disinformation, that really is a more official function. And the U.S. has to begin to take that function seriously, which it has not done until now. And it needs to. But it is not going to take it seriously if it is jumbled up with the other thing [surrogate]. My advice on structure and strategy and substance is that you have two separate problems which should be addressed separately.”

A strong consensus exists among the interviewees of this project that both roles—the public diplomacy role played largely by the VOA and the surrogate role of the other networks—continue to be critical, and that the role of each needs to sharpened. One interviewee cautioned against the continued blending of the two roles. “For the [public diplomacy] function, addressing the disinformation, that really is a more official function. And the U.S. has to begin to take that function seriously, which it has not done until now. And it needs to. But it is not going to take it seriously if it is jumbled up with the other thing [surrogate]. My advice on structure and strategy and substance is that you have two separate problems which should be addressed separately.”

Interviewees pounded home the message that surrogate broadcasting is likely to be an increasingly valuable communications instrument on unfolding landscapes where America's vital interests are challenged. Clearly Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of parts of Ukraine, and Iran's resolute march toward developing nuclear weapons heightened many interviewees' sense of urgency in this regard, but beefing up surrogate broadcasting generally was cited as a need from Cuba to North Korea. Surrogate media in these contexts should exist to confront internal, or domestic, realities, for example, the crushing of moderate pluralistic elements in Russian society and elsewhere.

“It [surrogate media] does have to do with providing the audiences—the people who follow these issues, the people who are active in trying to have a more open society, people who are under great, great pressure today—the kind of information that would be extremely difficult to get in a systematic way,” said one interviewee. “I do believe that that function is still necessary in a larger number of countries than you might think. Certainly, most of the former Soviet Union but probably beyond that in a lot of countries.”

The surrogate media function must not be conflated with the public diplomacy function, he added. The surrogate dimension is “very different from what kind of information the United States as a country should be trying to project to the world, not only about itself, but to counter what is today a very, very dangerous international information environment. This has nothing to do with, or is very indirectly related to surrogate broadcasting, but it has to do with the fact that certainly Putin, but not only Putin, is projecting messages not only through his own messages but through RT, China through CCTV, Iran, etc.”

“After the breakup of Soviet Union, we tried to bring notions of Western journalism, but now that is being undermined. The whole situation cries out for a more coherent American response.”

Broadcasting in each place should be tailored to that audience. “We say there is a lot of media out there, but people are really watching limited channels for news,” noted a long-time Russia specialist. “And they want it in Russian or in their own language, but Russia’s media is still dominant. None have developed channels as sophisticated as Russia’s [in the post-Soviet space].”

Another key role for the surrogates is to provide a model for independent indigenous media where corruption and media manipulation are rampant. This function must be stressed to a greater extent, said one analyst. “After the breakup of Soviet Union, we tried to bring notions of Western journalism, but now that is being undermined. The whole situation cries out for a more coherent American response. And it is politically significant with what is now going on in eastern Ukraine with people getting totally different accounts of what they think is going on with what we know to be the case.”

Deepening the surrogate presence assumes greater importance as regimes monopolize information that really counts. As much as it may seem that media pluralism and choice are abundant owing to new technologies, this is not actually the case. As one interviewee said: “The trajectory is clear: the degree of political control tracks with the relevant available political information in Russia. If you are motivated, savvy with technology, educated, you can find anything. But if you are a monolingual Russophone struggling to stay afloat financially you’re probably watching RTR or Channel 1. So it’s more the question of how you use the elements of pluralism to get the information that matters and counts to the right audiences. A

monopoly might be too strong a term, but effective control of news that counts is probably close to it.”

Proposed legislation pending at the time of this writing is focused primarily on forcing the VOA back into its public diplomacy lane and out of the surrogate lane, with some exceptions. The International Communications Reform Act of 2014 (HR 4490) at this writing has been passed by the House of Representatives and is awaiting action by the Senate. The ICRA reflects the bipartisan concern of many members of congress and senators, diplomats and strategists that America’s international broadcasting capability has diminished significantly since the end of the Cold War, and that emerging situations like Georgia (2008), the Arab Spring (beginning in 2010) and Ukraine (2014) are precisely the kinds of “soft power” responses for which U.S. international broadcasting was created. The proposed legislation addresses three problems specifically: the tension between U.S. international broadcasting’s public diplomacy and surrogate missions, its dysfunctional organization, and its link to U.S. foreign policy.

With regard to the first, the legislation is aimed at adjusting what its authors argue is the dilution of the critical distinctions between U.S. international broadcasting’s twin missions. The legislation, therefore, seeks to reinforce the public diplomacy/surrogate distinction. If HR 4490 becomes law, the VOA will be refocused on a public diplomacy role cooperating closely with the Department of State. This role includes, in addition to carrying news and information, the traditional responsibility to “tell America’s story” and explain U.S. official policies. It will also be charged with combating false information about the U.S. circulating in its broadcast regions. Significantly the VOA will enjoy only limited license to engage in surrogate broadcasting (for example in Africa where the VOA is America’s only broadcaster). The State Department, by design, will play a significant role in determining where the VOA will operate and where it will not, and it will be a strong voice in how the VOA exercises its public diplomacy function.

And U.S. international broadcasting’s surrogate function will also be strengthened. Surrogate broadcasters will be consolidated in a new Freedom News Network [FNN]. The mission of the FNN’s networks is defined rigidly in the legislation as “surrogate broadcasting,” with emphasis on local news and information, culture, society, history, arts, and religion; democracy building; and training of journalists. Put differently, the FNN’s surrogate stations will be responsible for none of the VOA’s public diplomacy mission.

V. AMERICAN VALUES

- **Today’s audiences frequently question the applicability of concepts like democracy, rule of law, a free press, free markets and human rights, and they discount the freedom and individualism at the heart of Western beliefs.**
- **Ideas matter. U.S. international broadcasting should not be an “ideas free zone.”**
- **Orient programming to give hope. Understanding how the values we seek to promote align with the needs and yearnings of countries requires a level of sophistication and nuance that is hard to achieve.**
- **Deny detractors an opportunity to tarnish America.**
- **The conveying of U.S. values should be consistent but not didactic.**

In today’s world, core American values routinely are dismissed by representatives of political and religious cultures in many parts of the world who advocate rejecting them wholly or specifically as offensive, imperialistic or inappropriate. For U.S. international broadcasting, this poses an unfamiliar challenge from the days of Cold War competition, when it was generally believed that American democracy and the values inherent in it were powerfully appealing to the nascent desire for freedom among people who were not free. In contrast, today’s broadcast spectrum increasingly is composed of audiences who at the very least question the applicability of concepts like democracy, rule of law, a free press, free markets and human rights to their own societies; and they frequently reject them in favor of forms of governance, social justice, communications, economic organization and community norms that discount the democratic ideals at the heart of Western beliefs.

As the U.S. international broadcasting environment has focused increasingly on areas of the world where criticism or outright rejection of American values, as they are understood, is more common, broadcasters have questioned the threshold at which support for American values becomes unappealing to listeners or is seen simply as “propaganda.” Broadcasting to the Islamic world has underlined this challenge, where criticism of what Americans really stand for is fueled by the pervasive negative influence of ubiquitous American popular culture.¹¹ One interviewee recalled a discussion he had had with an imam in Afghanistan. “The imam asked me if Americans can understand two things being true at the same time. The imam argued:

¹¹ Martha Bayles, *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America’s Image Abroad* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014). See, also, A. Ross Johnson and George P. Shultz, *Communicating with the World of Islam* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

I am opposed to the Taliban, I want girls to go to school, I think TV and painting should be permitted...I oppose stoning of women. But Southern California is not a model for my Afghanistan for a long list of reasons. Can you understand that both are true at the same time?

We asked our interviewees how U.S. international broadcasting should address the “American values” issues in its programming, anticipating that some would argue for ideas-free programming in this often skeptical environment. Yet not a single interviewee supported such a position; if anything the strong consensus among them was for more and stronger support for core American values across the entire spectrum of international broadcasting. American values are an indispensable ingredient—indeed, an underlying platform—of what we have to say and how we say it. American values, truths and ideals “are imbedded and inherent in everything we do.” Moreover, simply engaging with audiences in a neutral way—for example, by just presenting news and information as a kind of media service to the world—is not enough to justify the effort to communicate. “If we are not founded on some absolute truths,” observed one interviewee,

what do we have to tell people? Or are we just supposed to be ‘expressing our interest’ and [therefore] to be seen as manipulating people to serve our own interests, which is what is happening now? U.S. international broadcasting should be an important vehicle to establish your own moral legitimacy and undermine the moral legitimacy of those who oppose the principles by which we seek to live.

What are we telling them, what truth do we have to share that is so important that we need to do it, both because it represents ourselves and explains ourselves to the world, but that it also gives hope?”

In this sense, underlining American values in programming has both “offensive” and “defensive” elements. Articulated effectively, values in a public diplomacy strategy can uplift and inspire audiences. “Everything we do,” noted a long-time public diplomacy specialist, “should be oriented to give hope” to listeners and viewers. To emphasize this point, this interviewee quoted Abraham Lincoln:

The sentiments of the Declaration of Independence gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weight should be lifted from the shoulders of all men and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

“Well, of course that’s what Jefferson thought,” he continued. “Insofar as the VOA was supposed to reflect U.S. principles and institutions, I think that was the idea. What are we telling them, what truth do we have to share that is so important that

we need to do it, both because it represents ourselves and explains ourselves to the world, but that it also gives hope?"

This sentiment—that America “still has truth to tell” and that this truth spreads hope—was dominant throughout the interview sample, regardless of the interviewees’ generation, political identification or affiliation. “It is in the DNA of our country to think of ourselves as offering an example for the world,” added another interviewee. If we ignore or cede this role, or if it is seen as illegitimate, then the world is worse off, he and others concluded, underlining that U.S. international broadcasting has an important role in maintaining American legitimacy by operationalizing the powerful ideals that sustain it. And audiences can be expected to respond positively to this evocation of American values, even if more explicit visions of American popular culture or particular American policies are not welcome. Observed another:

In many places in the world they may not want American-style democracy for a variety of reasons, but the basic principles of American freedom resonate. People like accountable government of some sort, people tend not to like arbitrary rule and tyranny generally, people like to decide their fate on their own or with their families or communities.

What is U.S. international broadcasting’s operational role in supporting and defending American values? U.S. foreign policy, several observed, is a tricky balance between interests and values. With regard to values, “we are not Amnesty International,” simply pursuing altruistic goals. On the other hand, “we are not pure un-distilled realism either.” Understanding “how the values we seek to promote align with the needs and yearnings of countries, without going over the top...requires a level of sophistication and nuance that is hard to achieve.” Observed another, “The disconnect between ideal and actual policy looks like hypocrisy to the rest of the world. Policy should aim for ideal results but take a pragmatic view in particular countries.” This level of sophistication and nuance, several emphasized, will be unachievable if American values are presented didactically, that is, as a recitation of moral instructions. “The idea of beating them over the head with our ideals is the wrong approach,” concluded a long-time public diplomacy professional in a summary that captured the overwhelming sentiment of our interviewees.

“The biggest message that America has is that it is an open society, that it helps the democratic aspirations of other people, that it has a democratic structure in itself... When broadcasters reflect a multiplicity of views, there is a hike in audience. Because America is about pluralism, open society and opportunities.”

A winning strategy for U.S. international broadcasting, therefore, is to describe and demonstrate America’s openness. American values are on display best when we show America’s complexity. “We should offer a narrative about ourselves that

represents ourselves in the most complicated and vibrant and contradictory and boisterous way possible, because that's the only way to show the reality of ourselves." Interviewees pointed out repeatedly that Americans bring certain frames of mind to bear on crises. They gravitate toward rational, dispassionate voices capable of articulating broad diversity in opinion while identifying options for action. Embedded in this frame of mind is a vision of how world problems should be solved. A typical comment: "The biggest message that America has is that it is an open society, that it helps the democratic aspirations of other people, that it has a democratic structure in itself.... When broadcasters reflect a multiplicity of views, there is a hike in audience. Because America is about pluralism, open society and opportunities."

VI. TELLING AMERICA'S STORY

- **The America narrative has been badly diluted over time and needs to be restored. America's story is no less attractive or compelling today than previously.**
- **The America narrative has suffered because Americans' own belief in the narrative has been fractured.**
- **Show the complete America with nuance, complexity and diversity.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting should be the definitive source for news on America.**

"Aren't we the advertising agency, the PR agency of the U.S. government to the people of the world, even in the darkest places? Why don't we do that?"

A dominant theme of the interviews was that the most important function of the VOA, and increasingly of MBN (Alhurra TV) is to "tell America's story." Giving listeners "the sense of America" was cited repeatedly as the essential ingredient of VOA and MBN programs, including news and information programs. "You want people around the world to have an appreciation of America that they would otherwise not have, a sense of American institutions and values that are important," noted one. At times, he continued, this can "require doing things in the journalistic enterprise that may not be perceived as in the interest of the governing power," but the attachment to the "sense of America" cannot waver. Another interviewee captured a prevailing attitude in our sample in describing the instructions of a famed BBC broadcaster: "There are 20 different ways of reporting a story, and your job is to find the one that best serves the British Empire." And: "Report the news, and if it doesn't make us look good, okay, but we don't have to do warts and all for the purpose of accentuating the warts."

A senior media executive argued that these networks' goal should be "to seize control of the strategic narrative." America's narrative, his and others' observations underlined, should be aimed directly at the competing narratives of our adversaries, for example those from Russia's RT and broadcast from Iran.

But the consensus view of these interviewees is that the America narrative has been badly diluted over time. In part, this is the pernicious effect of the spread of American popular culture, which offends many whose morals or cultures reject the violence, sexual license and social conventions portrayed as common to America. But interviewees could point to no strategies or even efforts to form strategies within U.S. international broadcasting to counter these effects and push back. "The pop culture draw isn't as powerful as it used to be," noted a former ambassador. "And there is a lot about pop culture that is challenging not just to the bad guys but makes the good guys feel uncomfortable.... The message comes across that if you are not living in America in 2014 you are retrograde and repressive." Telling America's

narrative effectively should be a potent antidote to this message. “The Chicago Symphony is also America,” said a former ambassador, “not a Hollywood export. We need better ways of showing this.”

In part, it is the signal sent by America’s leaders. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s public rebuke of U.S. international broadcasting in a congressional testimony as “defunct” and lacking the ability to tell America’s story was seen as particularly damaging. “Whether or not it’s analytically true,” observed a scholar and strategist with deep ties to broadcasting, “it’s not something you want the Secretary of State to be saying. There are times when analytical truths should be left to the think tank community, and the political message should be something else.” Another interviewee criticized President Obama’s choice of Al Jazeera over the VOA or Alhurra to communicate to Middle Eastern audiences shortly after being inaugurated for the first time as the wrong signal to send audiences we seek to attract to America’s strategic narrative. “A huge, huge mistake.”

One public diplomacy strategist disagreed. “The White House made a wise decision: Al Jazeera had or has a far larger and more influential audience than any U.S. government broadcasters. The credibility of the audience’s own media should not be underrated.” He went on to argue for a more integrated media strategy for advancing U.S. foreign policy interests that includes using non-American media more effectively. This question—How do we take advantage of local media capabilities and expertise to advance our interests?—was raised frequently in our interviews. “We need to understand,” this strategist argued, “the fact that the most credible way for American policy to be delivered to foreign publics is through the foreign publics’ own voices.... This is public diplomacy by proxy.”

In part, the America narrative has suffered because Americans’ own belief in the narrative has been fractured. A number of interviewees observed that we are less comfortable these days telling our own story. A strategist described what he sees as the prevailing irony: “We have in mind this artificial distinction, this idea, that if we are doing it we are not doing it so well, and so we shouldn’t want to disadvantage our own people because it will be a waste of time and effort, which is itself kind of an obscene self-fulfilling prophecy.”

In fact, none of our interviewees bought the notion that America’s story is less attractive or compelling today than previously. Indeed, they argued, it is in many ways more attractive, especially to those educated and engaged audiences we seek to attract with our programming. Noted a retired diplomat: “Pretty simple: if you open up lines at any embassy and said ‘free visas’ that line would be endless.” America continues to represent opportunity, freedom, liberty, independence and education: “a bundle of aspirations and practical attributes that the U.S. represents even if it is not selling them. It exists at the street level, rather than over the airwaves.... We, too, have to believe that narrative.” “Why,” asked another, “is it that America is the number one desired destination in Iran? If people don’t like what America has to offer, they won’t come.”

MBN's Alhurra TV has done laudably well in Iraq, argued a specialist of the Middle East. No surprise here, he noted, as Iraqis want to understand America, and "they have no truck for the Al Jazeera story of the world." We should double down on the America narrative, he argues:

If you are an Arab and you want to understand America, this [Alhurra] should be your first stop on the dial...the reportage of what we are doing in the Middle East should be second to none. We should be light years ahead of everybody... If we get that right, which is essential, then we can be really objective reporters about events, trends and developments in the Middle East.... We may not do so well as others in reporting what happened in Cairo yesterday, but that is not our comparative advantage. Our comparative advantage is the America piece, and we should be winning that battle hands down.

Dominating this market—anyone with anything to do with America—is essential, and much more should be done at the VOA and MBN on America. He noted that the operational management of MBN seems to understand this, but there is a tug in the opposite direction when it is translated down to line producers. Others observed that at critical services, like VOA's Persian News Network, resistance to the America narrative is strong.

"I would want to spend the majority of the money on simply doing great objective reporting on all aspects of American society. I think that is incredibly powerful!"

What should the America narrative say? "A good representative of America is not someone who shouts for or against America. A good representative of America is someone who represents the sophistication and nuanced view of America." This view from a senior scholar of the Middle East was repeated often in our interviews. America's story should not be "preached" or proselytized, it should be "explained." Further, added a former ambassador, "Making our libertinism the center piece of the way we present American culture is not our strong suit right now.... We need a way of telling the American story that makes it clear how comfortable one can be in America if you are a religious believer or traditionalist. It's complicated to capture the whole story of America and make it an attractive product." "Explain and show confidence in U.S. institutions with arguments and open discussion," advised a senior foreign service officer with extensive experience in wartime posts. He described how this kind of confidence pays significant dividends, a "multiplier effect even in places with a poverty of civil society."

The America narrative should capture the complexity of American life; it is not mainly about "having little portraits of small town America," a kind of Norman Rockwell vision of American goodness, but America's story is not only about Washington and what goes on there. "Washington is a bad place to do international

broadcasting from, increasingly,” observed a business executive with deep foreign policy experience. “It’s more effective if it comes from America as a whole. Especially as so much of government comes from localities and states, while Washington is way behind the curve.” “America is like baseball,” is how a leading academic described it. “It’s complicated. You can be fooled by its simplicity. The game within the game is the best metaphor.”

“Washington is a bad place to do international broadcasting from, increasingly. It’s more effective if it comes from America as a whole. Especially as so much of government comes from localities and states, while Washington is way behind the curve.”

Interviewees returned repeatedly to the theme of the America narrative providing “a lot of detail. It should provide information on every aspect of American society without trying to promote it.” “When in doubt, explain. Present arguments on both sides, let people decide. Explaining is what we do.” Another argued that America’s shortcomings and the debates that flow from them translate into attractive and compelling strengths.

There is a narrative to be built on how this country is based on the distrust of power.... There is a role in educating outsiders who don’t know the U.S. system and how it works...the role of money in politics, interest groups. Tell our story warts and all, civil rights, women’s movement—how far we’ve come, changes and challenges overcome, along with mistakes made. Discuss the debate on income inequality. If we don’t discuss these things we aren’t credible.... Soft power has to be credible.... Show the American experience. What have been the titanic struggles, but show that we have done a lot of things very successfully.

“Concerning journalistic standards,” noted another, “careful thought needs to be given to how self-serving the U.S. product should be.

For instance, the torture report—how should it be covered? It cannot be ignored or whitewashed; there are too many alternative information providers that offer detailed coverage. Would it be “anti-American” to have a debate on VOA about the report’s content, with one side defending “enhanced interrogation” and the other describing the practices as being contrary to American values? The debaters need not be government officials; law professors might be good. Such a program would be controversial, but this kind of approach is the only way to capture the attention of a skeptical audience. That Americans are willing and able to broadcast such an open debate has value in itself.

Observed a well-known strategist: “We want soft power to translate into the most honest, realistic presentation of who we are as a society because there is a very powerful narrative that tries to depict the United States in very unflattering ways.

People listen to that message. There is such a thing as anti-Americanism. It's very real." Another concluded that a good offense is the best defense:

We have a story to tell, it's a kaleidoscope. There is a lot in our story. Tell our story! My view is, if people want to hate America, let them hate the reality, let them not hate the fantasy. We are not going to stop people from hating America if they choose to hate it, but let them hate what exists, not some figment in their imagination.

Noted yet another: "We win if the ideas and the merits of the country are powerful and stand up on their own.

And all we need to do is actually present them. All we need to do is to stop those ideas from being manipulated and twisted by other people. For me that means a lot of public interest stories, a lot of objective understanding, it also means a willingness to have debate, willingness to look at some of the issues that frankly are more American for the U.S., and I think there is strength in being able to do that.

The interviewees' unambiguous insistence on the overwhelming importance of telling America's story—of getting the America narrative right—and making it compelling by emphasizing different understandings of the diversity of the American experience cannot be overstated. Summed up a veteran foreign policy specialist: "I would want to spend the majority of the money [allocated to U.S. international broadcasting] on simply doing great objective reporting on all aspects of American society. I think that is incredibly powerful!

VII. AUDIENCES

- **The U.S. is engaged in a war of ideas. U.S. international broadcasting should be an essential soft power instrument.**
- **“Thinking” media consumers should remain the main target audience.**
- **Audiences should be differentiated on the basis of local conditions and platform use.**
- **Metrics that show influence are urgently needed to gauge how well U.S. international broadcasting effects change.**
- **Audience size is an ambiguous measurement of influence.**
- **The advent of social media poses new challenges to media strategy and target audience selection.**

Historically, U.S. international broadcasting has sought to attract a better educated and informed audience through a provocative interplay of news, commentary and features. While some of its programming intentionally sought mass appeal—for example, through music and sports programming—by and large the intended audience contained societies’ opinion formers and shapers, and especially those elites aspiring to move their societies in the direction of liberal democratic values and institutions. “Wars of ideas are fought by people who think,” argued a former network director,

and therefore you orient your programming toward people who do think, because they will influence the people who don’t think. And to try to influence the people who don’t think is an exercise in futility and a waste of resources when you only have a certain amount of money and you can’t reach everyone. So the people who think are the multipliers, and those are the ones you try to influence.

The networks’ focus on attracting this “force multiplier” elite audience was most intense at the surrogate broadcasters, which had been created for precisely this reason, but the VOA also used its broader mandate to transmit ideas and values intended to help local elites—and increasingly youth—to promote freedom, human rights and democratic norms in their countries.

Our interviewees generally accepted the proposition that we should aim the force of our broadcasting efforts toward those who can shape societies and not toward mass popular audiences. But they also observed that the explosion of digital communications, the internet and, especially, social media has blurred the elite-popular dichotomy. These days, observed a former broadcasting and public diplomacy executive, “there is no one answer to measuring an audience. I’m not sure a smaller elite audience is the way to go, it’s not the Iron Curtain era. Blogs are filling an elite niche, key audiences are in certain places.” Others noted how the new media landscape has made being “discriminatory about audiences and differentiating in markets” essential ingredients in any communications strategy. “Everyone has their

own eyes and ears at this point,” observed a prominent expert on public diplomacy. “They want to see their own lives through their own eyes,” which strengthens credibility. Moreover, “People expect to talk back.” This is a very different model from U.S. international broadcasting’s historic role to inform and provide context.

Today’s networks’ successes are measured largely by the size of their audiences. The BBG routinely publishes new statistics of audience size. Several interviewees expressed doubt about the quality of BBG’s audience research. One with deep roots in the Middle East placed no credibility in any of the BBG-commissioned audience research, regardless of network. He noted that the science of measuring viewership in Arab countries is weak. “How do you measure viewership if a large number of people are getting their TV by watching what’s on at the coffeehouse?... We have no useful effective measure. We get impressionistic things.”

But the larger problem, as a number of interviewees pointed out, is that audience size does not necessarily translate into influence. What has broadcasting actually achieved, and how has it done it? These questions have never been answered satisfactorily, perhaps because impact or influence is hard to identify and, therefore, resists measurement. One interviewee went so far as to challenge a central underlying premise of U.S. international broadcasting, noting that there is little empirical evidence to show that free media leads to more consideration of alternative views that encourage people to be more moderate and tolerant, a theory put forward by philosopher John Stuart Mill, among others. Mill, he argued, “assumed that with open media everyone will participate, which will result in the better truer idea rising to the top. Maybe this happens, maybe not.... When? How often? Under what conditions? There is very little research.... Is there actual evidence that addresses the mechanisms? What are improvements of press freedom and freedom of expression supposed to be doing that lead to outcomes that are moderate, stabilizing, democratic, smart?”

“Freer media is supposed to make for a more informed citizenry. Does it?”

The search for “influence,” in this view, is critical, especially in an environment flooded with social media, which has dramatically changed information content, form and flows; and altered consumption patterns. Trying to study people’s understanding of democracy and what it means has always been tricky, several interviewees observed. It is a very subjective endeavor, where questions are not consistent over time and differ across countries. Opinion research firms that measure the size of the audience lack basic data sets; moreover no one has bothered to ask whether media has improved people’s political knowledge. “People are happy to go along with their liberal assumption on this rather than examining it empirically.”

Another interviewee pointed to the lack of data for understanding this question more fully, but wondered if it really matters. “I would challenge the assumption that there is not a shred of evidence that [free media promotes more democratic outcomes]. Some things can be true without evidence for it. The possibility exists. But I would be up front about the methodological problems. There are many other places that one can look. For example, people come here to the U.S. for reasons other than economic. Some things are not provable.”

Nonetheless the “what moves the needle” question will become increasingly critical as new trends in media consumption, especially among younger audiences using social media, swell audience figures. “At BBG, a lot of audience measurement exists,” noted a communications strategist, “but we are no closer to the answer to the question of how much more likely are Iranians to support U.S. foreign policy, or how many Iranians have we convinced.” Observed another: “Measuring influence is difficult. So many variables, the game is figuring out what to measure.”

A former network executive cautioned that while understanding how social media fits into a more integrated and comprehensive media strategy, we must beware of falling into the trap of equating large audiences with success. “Technologies drive up the audience,” he observed. “Popular reality shows are largely content free, but my God are they cost efficient, and they are scoring big with audience share. But that’s not the game we breathe. The outcome of the Cold War took decades.” He cautioned that getting into the “did it move the needle” syndrome might lead to larger audiences, especially via social media, but these may not be the audiences we seek to attract. And he agreed with others that the attachment of social media to the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy goals requires a great deal of study and experimentation.

Interviewees cited a number of examples of how understanding the audience—not just its size but what moves it, what constitutes influence—is a compelling priority for U.S. international broadcasting. Competition with resurgent Russia was cited repeatedly, in this regard. A number of interviewees pointed to the sophistication of Russia’s communications strategy, noting that it has been successful in coopting much of the “elite” audience that typically would have been aficionados of U.S. international broadcasting. “Putin has been clever in identifying the American hostility to tradition as something that gives him a tool for pushing back. He’s not a dictator, he’s a defender of Russian traditional norms.” His edge over U.S. international broadcasting is his recognition that people want to address conflicts in their own terms. “Young people, unfortunately, seem to be one of the stronger supports of the regime,” noted another. “Putin plays them pretty well. He’s a tough guy and understands the popular culture.” Added another, educated urbanites aged 15-30, a distinct minority, will likely decide the future of Russia after Putin. “We assume wrongly that they are on our side. Our focus needs to be on them, to help them develop the capability to question assumptions about their leadership, to stimulate their critical thinking. If we engage just these people effectively, we can change things.”

Other interviewees remarked on U.S. international broadcasting's approach to Islamic audiences, which most saw as ineffective. A specialist of the Arab world argued that patronizing treatment of Islamic audiences does them no service, and it fails to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. "We don't treat Islamic populations seriously enough, maturely enough," he argued. "We treat them like kids, actually like other people's kids. We don't talk about serious issues with the depth they deserve. We also project in many ways the way we think people would like to see certain things, rather than the way they are."

A former ambassador summed up the importance of understanding influence: "With the renewal of ideological warfare and the assertion by Putin [and other adversaries] of a contrary world view, it's clear why you want to be in the arena and pushing back and arguing our side of the story. But a lot has also changed in the world that makes it less obvious how you do it in a way that represents real added value." This is because it is no longer so hard to get information or news; it is not the scarce resource it was in the past. Now more than ever, it is essential that U.S. international broadcasting experiment to try to determine influence. "You have to make mistakes if you want to be in the game."

VIII. NETWORK INDEPENDENCE, OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM AND FIREWALLS

- **U.S. networks are not independent news agencies, as if they were CNNs that happen to receive their funding from the U.S. government.**
- **Journalism is U.S. international broadcasting's operational platform, but "objective journalism" is by itself insufficient reason for U.S. international broadcasting to exist.**
- **Journalism is not a strategy, but the means to achieve other strategies.**
- **VOA or the surrogate broadcasters must not be turned into propaganda instruments that slant or twist information to support tendentious policies, preferences or points of view.**
- **The "firewall" that has come to characterize the relationship between U.S. international broadcasting and other parts of the government is overblown, limiting U.S. international broadcasting's ability to support U.S. foreign policy.**

Little support existed among our group of interviewees for the idea that the VOA or any of the surrogate broadcasters is just another independent news agency, a kind of CNN that happens to receive its funding from the U.S. government. All agreed that accuracy and comprehensiveness in reporting are critical, as is the attractiveness of all programming; independence—in the sense that these stations' association with the American government and its role in promoting U.S. foreign policy are masked or unacknowledged—is not.

In this vein, a number of interviewees sought to address what they described as a persistent tension in recent years, especially in the VOA newsroom, between journalists' sense that being both "independent" and employed by the American government are incompatible. This tension mirrors a larger one, discussed elsewhere in this report, surrounding the attachment of U.S. international broadcasting to U.S. foreign policy. The journalists' concern is that too close or too obvious a connection between broadcasting and its affiliation with the U.S. government compromises the credibility of their work, especially if their mission is to support U.S. policies and positions.

The interviewees in our sample were unsympathetic to this view. "They don't understand who they are working for," noted one who had had extensive interaction with the VOA's newsroom. "Some of them see themselves as entirely neutral with respect to anything having to do with U.S. foreign policy. How can that be? Intuitively, why would one wish to pay for that, and why wouldn't you want to go and work for Fox or CNN anyway? It's a great conceit and indulgence that has taken place over time."

Most interviewees held an unambiguous view of journalism as U.S. international broadcasting's operational platform: "Objective journalism" is by itself insufficient

reason for U.S. international broadcasting to exist. Several argued that exporting good journalism in and of itself was more within the purview of NGOs like International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) or Internews. There was broad agreement that keeping journalism standards high sends the right message to those we seek to influence because it enhances American credibility. But journalism unhooked from general or specific foreign policy objectives is not what the taxpayer believes he or she is paying for.

“Really good journalism directed at a particular goal is actually a really powerful tool.”

Journalism “is not the end, it’s the means. The end is national interest, foreign policy goals. This is the means to it,” was a common refrain in interviews. Journalism is a convention that U.S. international broadcasting should direct toward winning the information war, most noted. One observed that “one way of putting it is, really good journalism directed at a particular goal, is actually a really powerful tool.” Another added that U.S. international broadcasting should be carried out with “a journalistic frame of mind,” but it should not be unhinged from U.S. policy objectives. Journalism is not a strategy, but the means to empower other strategies. Journalism “should be seen as a foreign policy tool to achieve specific ends. So that if the policy goal is to discourage Iranians from getting a nuclear weapon, broadcasting can play a clear role in that, absolutely.”

“Objective journalism” in any case is an elusive standard by which to measure U.S. international broadcasting’s achievements, just as it is elusive for measuring the journalism of CNN, Fox News or *The New York Times*, argued several participants. “How much objective journalism is there?” asked an interviewee once responsible for a major journalistic enterprise:

Subjective judgments are made at all levels—what to cover, what to put in, what to leave out, what illustrations to use, which interviews, what to emphasize—that it is hard to think of “objective” journalism as some kind of activity like a natural science, like we are down in the lab like a bunch of chemists, when really it is more like a social science where a lot of judgment is involved. Those who say “objective journalism” are hiding behind something that is not real. Accurate, yes. Reliable, yes. Well contextualized, yes. But we are always...making judgments that are all highly subjective.

One interviewee acknowledged his understanding of what the VOA’s journalism is supposed to achieve. “I never think of VOA as objective journalism,” he noted. “I do interviews with them because I want to support the U.S. But I never think people will listen to it the way they would to the BBC. It is clearly the U.S. official presentation.”

“Journalism is only part of [U.S. international broadcasting],” concluded another senior diplomat, summarizing the views of most interviewees.

These programs, whether it's VOA or the surrogates, should be involved in cultural programming, in presenting alternative ideas, in presenting accurate, not revisionist, history, religious programming for people who have been denied religious freedom. The cultural programming includes music. And that's because this isn't simply news, this isn't simply journalism. Journalism is one of the half dozen missions of these broadcasters, the others are to connect in different ways with the publics with which we are dealing."

A renewed and more focused purpose for journalism in U.S. international broadcasting would be a means to realizing the mission, whether combatting false narratives, creating conditions for accurate information to help shape democratic societies, or articulating the U.S. position on policy. One put it this way: Within confines of good journalism, you are "countering the enemies of freedom who are newly empowered and resurgent and making it a priority to silence opposition media in their own societies."

No one in our sample argued for turning the VOA or the surrogate broadcasters into "propaganda" instruments that slant or twist information to support tendentious policies, preferences or points of view. U.S. international broadcasting is not "a messaging machine," one said. Nearly all interviewees offered some version of "people have a good nose for propaganda," or "we're not going to win if it's a propaganda game," or "we would be idiots to transform these networks into purely propaganda stations...because audiences are too sophisticated." Propaganda is recognized and rejected quickly. But caution is necessary. "With democracy promotion as the overarching idea, then the argument that we are not going to be a propaganda station is less compelling."

The quest for "objective journalism" has also had the adverse effect of widening the gap between the networks and foreign service operations where both might benefit. Several interviewees recalled that this kind of thinking arose at the VOA in the mid-1980s after foreign service officers were excluded from the network newsrooms where they had been detailed to familiarize themselves with journalistic protocols and broadcasting conventions in advance of taking up assignments in the field. This information drew a rebuke from a former ambassador: "It's not propaganda to have sitting U.S. officials participate, it's part of their job!" Their departure and other measures supported the insinuation of a so-called firewall between the broadcasters and government agencies, especially the Department of State. A senior foreign service officer recalled that this separation was reflected in his training at the Foreign Service Institute. There he and his colleagues received a single hour's description of the importance of what U.S. international broadcasting was and what it was meant to accomplish. "Our ambassadors were not seeing the instruments of U.S. power in full array."

The same senior officer described how, later in his career, he was posted to a country then receiving two separate American international broadcasts, one each

from the VOA and RFE/RL. He said that he never knew what either station was transmitting, and even though he was the senior public diplomacy officer for his region, no one from either station ever stopped to consult with him. This diplomat lamented that the firewall thus prevented two unique payoffs to U.S. foreign policy: first, opportunities for him to leverage his operations to the messages the stations were broadcasting; and, second, information and insights that he might feed back to the stations about conditions on the ground that might improve their programming. "I had no desire to control their programming," he explained, "but my efforts to strengthen our foreign policy objectives in the region would have benefitted from knowing what was in it." Moreover, he observed, a strong probability existed that at some moment the broadcasters would be sending messages or information contradicting his own efforts to communicate officially via his consulate.

The BBG, noted a senior diplomat with roots in both State and broadcasting, was constructed first and foremost with the idea of preserving the journalism. Part of U.S. international broadcasting's dysfunction stems from conflict between those who believe it is a foreign policy tool and those who believe it is a journalistic institution. He asked: "Can it be both, and if it is, which takes precedence? It is very difficult to square this circle." The BBG, he and others observed, is largely "out of the loop" with respect to interagency cooperation on foreign policy and security matters. Not surprisingly, continued this diplomat, "BBG seems to be proudest of the firewall. Yes, it gives you a greater sense of importance being attached to established journalistic standards, but this is not real journalism...."

"Whatever the purpose of the firewall was," offered a senior diplomat with experience in international broadcasting,

the BBG members mostly misunderstood the spirit of it, because it is strange to hear people contend that the firewall was there to assure that the broadcasts in substance and form were wholly independent of U.S. foreign policy aims, and kind of neutral as a commercial broadcaster like CNN would be. But that then begs the question, well, then, we already have CNN, so why would the taxpayers be paying for a second kind of CNN, which has the greatest allergy to anything U.S. foreign policy related?

IX. DOES BROADCASTING CONNECT TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIES?

- **Structural flaws hamper the BBG in setting U.S. media strategy. The BBG should be redesigned and relocated in government to facilitate its connection to foreign policy objectives and practices.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting's priorities should be established and reviewed at the highest level within USG.**
- **Broadcasting strategies and content should be aligned across all U.S. communications facilities, except for military efforts.**
- **U.S. international broadcasting's activities should be coordinated with foreign service components in the field.**

Does U.S. international broadcasting have a connection to U.S. strategy and foreign policy? If so, what is it?

“We approach U.S. international broadcasting backwards. We start by asking which [networks] are doing what and how could they do it better, rather than by assigning a strategy, then slotting in the instruments to achieve it in the most effective way. Is Radio Free Europe doing this, or is the VOA doing that is important. But it’s a sideshow.”

The strong consensus of the interviewees was that U.S. international broadcasting is largely unhooked from U.S. strategy and foreign policy making and implementation. “We spend \$1.5 billion on public diplomacy, half for broadcasting and half for everything else,” argued a well-known strategist. “No one, in my experience, has ever looked at this as a coherent whole.... Nobody at State has ever wanted to look at broadcasting as an integral part of public diplomacy.... This is a huge mistake. What an asset!” Added another: “We had an instrument that no one in charge of the war knew about.” “We approach U.S. international broadcasting backwards,” argued another. “We start by asking which [networks] are doing what and how could they do it better, rather than by assigning a strategy, then slotting in the instruments to achieve it in the most effective way. Is Radio Free Europe doing this, or is the VOA doing that is important. But it’s a sideshow.” Added a another: “None of the questions [of what to broadcast and where] is done with strategic intelligence. It’s the mindlessness of this process that amazes me.... It goes well beyond the BBG. I don’t think anyone anywhere is giving intelligent strategic consideration to these questions. To get intelligent strategic consideration and analysis to these problems you need some people who care about it and who understand.”

A senior ambassador who served in several war zones described his displeasure that U.S. international broadcasting in no way connected to his mission in a particularly difficult trouble spot:

It always seemed kind of bizarre to me that we had no relationship at all and no interaction [with U.S. international broadcasters]. We had a good cordial relationship, but they had a different mandate and they saw it that way. It was very frustrating that [the embassy's] point of view was not getting out into society, where we were in [information] combat every day.

Interviewees repeatedly returned to the failure of the U.S. government to play any role in creating narratives that can be advanced through U.S. international broadcasting. “We are losing the battle of narratives,” was a continual refrain in these interviews. No such narrative creation or design function exists in the U.S. government, in this regard. “Add to that,” argued another, “the preternatural approach of any American-trained journalist, which is an adversarial relationship to the institutional structure, and you have the perfect makings for what the Chinese and Russians can leverage.”

Today U.S. international broadcasting simply does not figure in American foreign policy strategies as a consequence of firewall sensitivities and structural problems within the national security framework. A number of interviewees had served in government in the last 20 years or so, but when asked if they could recall an instance when U.S. international broadcasting was factored in as part of overall U.S. strategy on any issue, none could cite one. “BBG is out of the loop, it is only voluntarily part of things,” argued a former national security planner. “There are attempts at interagency cooperation, but U.S. international broadcasting is not in the chain of command.” “The more contact with policy and State, the better,” concluded another, echoing a strong sentiment throughout the interviews. “If BBG is supposed to have some kind of effect on achieving American interests in foreign policy, then being isolated from the foreign policy apparatus—and being proud of it—I don’t think that is the answer.”

Interviewees described a chicken-egg situation, where U.S. international broadcasting’s enforced distance from the foreign policy apparatus reinforced policy makers’ ignorance or lack of interest in communications’ place in a comprehensive foreign policy. A persistent theme in these interviews was a variant of “no one is thinking about it, no one cares.” And the small group within the foreign policy community that does understand broadcasting “doesn’t think about it from a strategic point of view.” Recent turmoil in Ukraine was cited often as an example of U.S. international broadcasting’s absence from foreign policy strategies: “Events in Ukraine scream for a long-term strategy to include energy and military strategy as well as communications strategy.”

But where should strategic focus be developed? Who should be in charge? And how should U.S. international broadcasting connect? On these questions no clear consensus emerged from the sample, with interviewees advancing a number of options.

Some argued for centralizing the function in government. “Those broadcasting about our policy have to be coordinated, and the White House is the obvious place,” argued one. “There is no advantage to pluralism or competition if we are trying to get across a clear message.... It can’t be the general has one message and the president has another. That’s very dangerous.” The budget needs to be controlled, not subject to a level of particular preferences. Decisions, by this reckoning, should be made at the cabinet level so that they align with policies and strategies with enough lead time to ensure implementation. U.S. international broadcasting “needs to fall in line with policy...just the way decisions are made in Russia and China: at the cabinet level.”

Others argued that foreign policy makers should set U.S. international broadcasting’s priorities, and that alignment with strategic priorities should be revisited every four years, not unlike the national security statement the president puts out. Such a review would allow the government to “articulate its strategic view. This doesn’t mean that everything is done hook, line and sinker, but at least it forces them to think about the issue, it forces them to define their preferences.” Or, as another put it: “We can’t do everything. There will be tradeoffs.... Government can make such decisions, but you need an understanding as to what aims are.”

Others were less enthusiastic about this degree of centralization, arguing that there should be “no top-down command and control.” The White House had few defenders, in this respect. “Frankly, I wouldn’t be comfortable putting [the broadcast function] in the NSC,” argued one in a frequently repeated sentiment. Several interviewees favored creating a “cluster unit” at State. Participants were less outspoken—and perhaps less certain—about what an alignment mechanism might look like.

Nonetheless, a strong consensus emerged on four points.

First, the BBG, U.S. international broadcasting’s oversight body, was universally rejected as the appropriate place for this kind of strategy making, with many interviewees arguing that any board sitting behind a firewall will present problems. “It’s hard to align an institutional structure that has a level of independence to it,” was a common theme. The BBG is structurally flawed and has been from the beginning was another common theme: a randomly chosen group of part-time political appointees, some with no foreign policy experience, who are widely dispersed in the United States and, indeed, around the globe; a chairmanship with no vested powers that changes frequently; and no senior executives actually in charge of the day-to-day operations of U.S. international broadcasting. Such a hodgepodge, nearly everyone argued, should not control a strategic function vital to American interests. Interviewees did not rule out the possibility of some other kind of board—perhaps along the lines in the proposed U.S. international broadcasting reform legislation—but only if it aligns with other parts of government in “a dialogue about strategic aims and, within that, narratives.” That said, no support existed in this sample for any board configuration being a part-time function.

Second, strong support emerged in the sample for communicating cross-agency, and especially for forging a closer and tighter alignment between U.S. international broadcasting and the official public diplomacy function at the Department of State. It is essential that “everybody knows what everybody else is doing.” Still, a balance needs to be struck with caution. “The organization of U.S. international broadcasting is different from public diplomacy, at times you may want plausible deniability,” argued a former senior executive from international broadcasting. Finding a way for U.S. international broadcasting to support—and be supported by—“country teams” was cited by a number of interviewees. Several former foreign service officers described the confusion that could arise when U.S. international broadcasting personnel with no responsibility to the country team arrived to manage their own operations in their theater.

Third, securing the support and commitment of the Secretary of State to U.S. international broadcasting is essential. In the current BBG structure, the Secretary is an *ex officio* member, and he/she designates the sitting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to participate in BBG deliberations. In fact, this seldom happens. “The Under Secretary should take full responsibility, recognizing that there are other black boxes out there...but none of them has played even to the letter of the law, in this regard.” Moreover, these under secretaries typically leave government after no more than 18 months or so. The BBG’s connection to the Secretary him/herself is even more tenuous, with interactions reduced to extremely rare photo-ops for board members. Noted one: “The connection to State that seems organic through the Secretary’s membership on the BBG has never happened.”

“It is reasonable to carve out armed forces broadcasting as a separate operation.”

Fourth, efforts to coordinate U.S. international broadcasting with communications operations by the U.S. military—for example, with the combatant commands or psychological operations—should be avoided most times. A strong sentiment among the interviewees was that military communications should remain “hived off” from U.S. international broadcasting operations, and that “military support for public diplomacy”—a recently created office in the Pentagon—should not be allowed to intrude on mainline public diplomacy efforts, including those employing U.S. international broadcasting. (Several interviewees described how the Office of Military Support for Public Diplomacy was intended as a coordinator, but that “there was nothing to coordinate.”) As one suggested, we should think about strategic communications as hardware (e.g., DoD) and software (State), with the latter thinking more holistically about what outcomes we seek from the application of soft power. In fact, no interviewee was aware of dialogue currently between military and non-military communicators. Most, however, cited the importance of information sharing, “so that large strategic aims are consistent among entities operating in the same theaters among the same audiences.” A former ambassador with a strong national security background recommended that, at a minimum, a

senior military officer should serve on the BBG or whatever oversight structure eventually is determined. That would at least pay lip service to the notion of coordinating across agencies, and, indeed, some positive synergies might result.

“None of the questions [of what to broadcast and where] is done with strategic intelligence. It’s the mindlessness of this process that amazes me.... It goes well beyond the BBG. I don’t think anyone anywhere is giving intelligent strategic consideration to these questions. To get intelligent strategic consideration and analysis to these problems you need some people who care about it and who understand.”

Even if strategic narratives that specified operational priorities existed, translating these priorities to U.S. international broadcasting operations is an equally daunting task. Many interviewees argued that international broadcasting is by nature a long-term endeavor, that it takes years to develop credibility among suspicious audiences. “You can’t turn it on and off like a faucet,” observed a senior strategic planner. “Soft power doesn’t automatically translate into concrete support for particular things,” noted another. “But it is not ultimately about that. It is about trying to get across to people who are attracted to ideologies and beliefs that have real consequences for us. And it is a long-term project.” “The principles guiding programming should not change,” added another, “because it takes a great long time to establish and maintain credibility.”

Yet a strong consensus existed in this sample that the BBG, which today is nominally responsible for deciding where to broadcast and in which languages, fails its strategic task. “The BBG acting as a normal board should decide strategy, priorities and not micromanage. The Board should understand its basic functions,” said one with long experience dealing with the BBG. Instead, he and others noted, it has no strategy, cannot set priorities effectively, and frequently meddles in the operations of the networks under its supervision.

No one in our interview sample believed that the BBG could meet these essential criteria because of its flawed structure. Several cited the duplication of language services that had accreted over time—at last count 23 out of 84—that no recent board has either consolidated or abolished with the goal of redirecting investment elsewhere. The investment in “legacy” language services are like impossible-to-eliminate entitlements, often driven by ethnic politics in Congress. Action on adding new language services to address emerging strategic challenges is slow or non-existent. A former director of a major network described his experience:

I did things that I thought were right, and one could argue I should not have had the power to do them. But a bureaucracy would have made it impossible...I didn’t go to State.... You don’t want bureaucrats in these jobs. You need the

entrepreneurial spirit.... I don't know if I had the power, but I did it. I believe there should be a process by which network heads talk to people. But if I had to ask State, I never would have done things.

Several interviewees cited a current example of the BBG's inability to prioritize. Unable to anticipate and to respond rapidly to Russia's aggression in Ukraine by refocusing U.S. international broadcasting's existing Russian language services—one in the VOA, a second in RFE/RL—the BBG accepted a one-time \$1M grant from State to produce a half-hour Russian-language news program with mostly new people, effectively working around the existing Russian language services. Several well-known Russia hands among the interviewees expressed incredulity that U.S. international broadcasting was incapable of freeing and focusing existing resources for a more robust response. That it was able to muster only a single half-hour program against Russia's saturation of the strategic communications space—and this a year late while awaiting additional investment—was seen as emblematic of the BBG's failure.

No one believed that the BBG could overcome its structural flaws, which is why considerable support emerged in this sample for creating a strong CEO position under any oversight board, with far-reaching executive power to manage and coordinate the operations of the different networks with the assistance of a strong staff, which was cited often as essential to make the CEO position effective. The CEO would articulate and enforce investment priorities and rationalize budgets, and determine—working with other parts of government and with the engaged think tank community—which languages U.S. international broadcasting should embrace and which it should remove, replace or avoid. [At this writing, a CEO had just been appointed by the BBG, assumed office, then rapidly departed. This after nearly four years of debate and delay.]

X. CAN IT BE FIXED? POSSIBLE NEW MODELS

- **Little strong support for U.S. international broadcasting exists in government because memory of its successes is weak and because it is a low-budget item. Any reform will be difficult.**
- **The proposed legislative reform of U.S. international broadcasting may represent the limits of the possible.**
- **Alternative models for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. international broadcasting are available.**

Interviewees described why fixing U.S. international broadcasting as we know it is a large task. First, only a “vague memory” of VOA’s and RFE/RL’s success during the Cold War tends to inhabit the public’s consciousness. No popular demand for reform or restructuring has yet arisen. Second, by Washington standards, its investment of three-quarters of a billion dollars in U.S. international broadcasting is a piddling sum, which, a number of interviewees suggested, is the reason it never gets fixed. “No attention is paid to communications by senior policy makers,” observed an influential insider, “and it’s not given public attention by political figures in major campaigns. Who’s going to fight over three-quarters of a billion dollars? That’s just not significant enough to figure in domestic politics.” Most interviewees pointed, by contrast, to the vast sums—in the many billions of dollars—that adversaries like Russia, China and Iran invest.

“No attention is paid to communications by senior policy makers, and it’s not given public attention by political figures in major campaigns. Who’s going to fight over three-quarters of a billion dollars? That’s just not significant enough to figure in domestic politics.”

Interviewees almost unanimously took the position that the current poor return on investment from U.S. international broadcasting should not detract from America’s pressing need of a capability to communicate effectively with foreign audiences. Indeed, a clear consensus existed that it is worth doing in principle. No one argued that communicating with these audiences is an expensive strategic irrelevance. To the contrary, the *leitmotif* of the interviews was that communicating is a strategic priority that is badly underfunded, on one hand; and, on the other, what is funded is not working.

Nearly every interview featured some variant of this assessment: The model we currently have works poorly. It is cumbersome, thwarts creativity, is mired in budget and bureaucracy constraints, is consumed by competing equities and overlaps, is out of touch with new realities or unable to address them, and suffers a waning connection to both changes in the audience and the concerns of foreign policy planners. Several interviewees argued that the current model might be made

to work if roles were clarified, the BBG's functions were re-defined, and the operations it supervises were rationalized and streamlined, but the number supporting such a view was very small. Nonetheless, this small group made it clear that it saw "fixing" the current model as the only viable approach because scrapping it or reinventing the international communications function would be fraught with too much upheaval, impossible because of vested interests in Congress, and probably beyond the imagination of government generally. These interviewees generally favored the reform legislation currently proposed (HR4490) largely because they believed it represents the outward limits of possible reform.

Interviewees were asked specifically to describe alternative models of organization, operations and governance for U.S. international broadcasting, of which the below are examples:

- Develop a BBC-like corporation by combining all current broadcasting networks into a single non-federal broadcast company. This would require de-federalizing the VOA and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, which participants acknowledged would find a tough road through Congress. But "de-federalization is a fight worth having," argued a former ambassador. A leading strategist endorsed the BBC model as "more credible." Another recommended "not only to collapse all into one, but also develop a range of outside partner organizations."
- Fund local media in the areas we seek to influence. "Let's give the Estonians the money," argued one by way of explaining that the most powerful influence going forward would be that generated by sympathetic local media communicating with local populations. The U.S. could support this proxy approach through funding, training and editorial assistance. Funding, support and governance would be channeled through an organization like the IREX, Internews, or the trust elements of the German Marshall Fund, which already fund media as a basis of their operations.
- Create an NPR-like broadcast corporation that could accept corporate sponsorship. "Corporate sponsorship is something the U.S. government is culturally adverse to.... We should include in legislation that we encourage private sector involvement," argued a former ambassador. A public diplomacy and technology expert likewise advocated a public-private market-based organization that accepts funding from commercial underwriting while providing tax incentives. Yet another advocated joining with NPR to produce and market good programming.
- Transform today's broadcast operations into a much smaller agency that is simply a portal of information and links. In this view, there is little reason for U.S. international broadcasting to be creating "content" when so much is already available from other sources. This would result in making the VOA a

technical “voice” only. One described the model this way: “Create a portal to connect people to real information that they can’t get. For the new generation of change agents. There are now 400,000 million bloggers in China. How do you find a niche in this space via an American portal? Branding and competing in that space would be unique, not traditional reportage.... Radio’s days are probably over.” This new operation would also fund and distribute anti-circumvention technologies.

- Create a national strategic communications agency that is attached to the White House at the cabinet level. “Either State or possibly White House and NSC, or some new organization...should be in some chain of command that leads to the President.” This agency would have responsibility for all communications by the U.S. government, including public diplomacy, surrogate and military. Argued one: “This is so cheap in national strategic terms that it ought to be funded according to national strategic need. My recommendation is to create a defense and foreign affairs budget where all of this is melded into one big budget where soft power and hard power and diplomacy can be funded according to national strategic need.”
- Merge all of today’s broadcasting elements into a 501(c)3 NGO that advocates for democracy, human rights, free markets and media freedom. The National Endowment for Democracy was cited by several interviewees as a possible model, which was lauded frequently for the quality of its leadership and governance. However, others pointed out that U.S. international broadcasting probably is too far an operational reach for NED or any other existing NGO.

Some of these models are radical, some more incremental in their adjustments to U.S. international broadcasting as we know it. They suggest opportunities to add, swap, or share different elements to achieve considerable transformation.

XI. WHY NOT START OVER: A NEW PARADIGM

- **The intellectual paradigm for U.S. international broadcasting was created for the Cold War. It is outdated and ineffectual.**
- **The taxpayer has no little idea—or the wrong idea—of what he or she is paying for.**
- **The proposed reform legislation is a good patch, but not a permanent fix.**
- **U.S. international communications strategy should be rebuilt from the ground up.**

Today the taxpayer has little idea of what return on investment in U.S. international broadcasting might be available for his or her tax dollars. There is negligible public sense of what U.S. international broadcasting is and what it is supposed to accomplish. “Taxpayers think they are paying for something completely different from what is actually happening,” observed a senior diplomat and communications specialist. “Which is why they are in a state of shock when they are informed of the real situation,” added a former network director. “The trend has been to give the audience what it wants,” argued a former ambassador, “whether or not it advances a U.S. interest. Why would the taxpayer want to pay for this?” “At the very least,” argued another, “there should be a sunshine law.... If the body as a whole can’t be persuaded that we’re important today, even if we once were, we shouldn’t be kept on for nostalgic reasons. I don’t think that this is the function of the U.S. government.” Noted a specialist of the Middle East:

Whether this is a viable enterprise, or it is a viable enterprise are two different questions. The idea that the U.S. would not have a presence in the realm of ideas, and the republic of ideas, so to speak, and compete with local bullies and compete with Deutsche Welle and BBC in presenting the U.S.’s vision of the world and of itself is, to me, a non-starter. Obviously, a power like the United States needs that kind of a presence. So, it is, in my view necessary. But whether that it is this, is a very different question.

“I would blow the whole thing up and start over.”

Nearly all interviewees concluded that today’s U.S. international broadcasting is not the “it” we should strive for. Several interviewees approached this question retrospectively. A prominent strategist offered this assessment:

It still remains a very good question if this is the best way to spend the money. As you know, that is rarely the question that is asked...usually it’s how do we improve what we have, how do we tinker on the margins, how to make sure that there is balance and objective reporting and projecting American interests...that’s the usual set of questions. But if someone were to write a check for \$750M could we create a profoundly more effective system? I am sure the answer is yes.

Indeed, those interviewees familiar with the proposed reform legislation for the most part favored it, some enthusiastically so. But the general consensus was that no reform would likely go far enough to fix U.S. international broadcasting's myriad challenges because the communications paradigm has changed. "We are not doing it right. If we try to readjust along old lines, it's a tremendous waste of money," argued an authority on public diplomacy.

A strong consensus for doing something much bolder emerged from these interviews: re-conceptualizing and redesigning from the ground up how the U.S. communicates for foreign policy purposes, beginning with the abolition of the current U.S. international broadcasting structure. "I would blow the whole thing up and start over," argued a specialist of public diplomacy in a sentiment repeated frequently in these interviews. "If I were to start all over," said a former diplomat and broadcaster, "I would not create this...we don't need to construct this giant apparatus in this media age." Yet another argued that this would be hard to do. "You can't overlook the historical process, that's not the way life is. The question is: Given what you have, how do you turn a sow's ear into a silk purse?" Most interviewees expressed their agreement that starting over would not be an easy thing to achieve, but there remained considerable support for undertaking such a laborious effort.

"We are not doing it right. If we try to readjust along old lines, it's a tremendous waste of money."

Advocates for starting over based their arguments on two intersecting arguments. First, the existing BBG-headed structure has failed. Noted a specialist of institutional dynamics: "The BBG is an interesting case study in mis-governance. Usually these boards are meant to insulate organizations from politics, and this one did the opposite." Second, the operational environment for U.S. foreign policy demands a more sophisticated and adaptable communications function that transcends the paradigm of "broadcasting." Observed a noted strategist: "I would call for just starting over from scratch. It is such a different world ideologically, politically, technologically. I would stop it all, take a breather...start all over but really fresh, asking what world do we live in, how do we get information, how do we reach the change agents. How does it connect to strategy and foreign policy...."

Interviewees returned repeatedly to the theme that the intellectual model for U.S. international broadcasting was designed and implemented during World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War. It was predicated on, first, the nature and urgency of bipolar geopolitical competition; and, second, on the availability of that era's dominant analog technologies. In 2014, many noted, the way we think about international broadcasting has scarcely changed, despite the diffuse and diverse character of America's strategic challenges and the emergence and operational sophistication of technologies that in 1950 could not even have been imagined. Indeed, we still speak of "broadcasting"—and the primary American oversight

board is still called the Broadcasting Board of Governors—although communicating through traditional broadcast media represents an increasingly small share of where sophisticated media consumers obtain their information.

Can added value be squeezed from the existing idea and structure of U.S. international broadcasting? Many interviewees were doubtful or outright dismissive of such a proposition. “I would like to see a top to bottom overhaul of the foreign broadcasting,” argued a long-time practitioner of U.S. international broadcasting, “and maybe there wouldn’t be a VOA that came out of that.... We need an entity that looks at the whole and assesses where we should be in the internet age and asks, why should they listen to us.” “If it doesn’t connect to American international interests, we shouldn’t be doing it,” said another. “But it may be that those interests are best served by the people not being ‘government journalists’.”

“I would call for just starting over from scratch. It is such a different world ideologically, politically, technologically. I would stop it all, take a breather...start all over but really fresh, asking what world do we live in, how do we get information, how do we reach the change agents. How does it connect to strategy and foreign policy....”

The interviews multiplied and amplified this particular sentiment—why not start over?—many times. Obviously, creating a new model is not a short-term project, and no one advocated for simply shutting down U.S. international broadcasting without a suitable replacement. Meanwhile, the current proposed reforms of U.S. international broadcasting, assuming they are enacted into law in some sense resembling their initial drafting, are very likely to improve the current state of America’s strategic communications, though only by affirming the assertion that “broadcasting” as we know it is the right instrument with which to support our foreign policy.

But is the U.S. international broadcasting paradigm as we know it where we should be investing scarce human and financial resources, or should we be thinking beyond “broadcasting” toward new paradigms of communicating with and influencing strategically pivotal audiences? This project did not set out to answer this question—indeed, the authors were repeatedly surprised at how fervently our interviewees argued for a communications capability that transcends today’s “broadcasting” to resonate with a far more complex human and technological landscape. But the concept deserves serious consideration.

For obvious reasons, government probably is not the place for such an exploration, though it should certainly be part of it. The world of think tanks, universities and foundations would seem the natural place to launch such an effort. It will take time, it is not a short-term project. And it will require contributions of the deep expertise—some represented in this report—the U.S. possesses on how to think about the role of communications in support of America’s foreign policy. If done well,

the results will almost certainly strengthen the instruments of that policy, and, importantly, its chances for success.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES

Interviewees for this project included the following:

Dr. Michael Auslin, Resident Scholar and Director of Japan Studies, American Enterprise Institute

Mr. Donald Bishop, President, The Public Diplomacy Council

Dr. Ian Bremmer, Founder and President, Eurasia Group

Mr. Geoffrey Cowan, Chair, USC Annenberg School Center on Communication Leadership and Policy; President, Annenberg Trust at Sunnylands; former Director of the Voice of America

Dr. John Dunlop, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution

Mr. Douglas J. Feith, Senior Fellow and Director, Center for National Security Strategies, Hudson Institute

Dr. Francis Fukuyama, Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI); resident in FSI's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University

Dr. Jeffrey Gedmin, Chairman of Global Politics and Security, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service; former President of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Mr. Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy

Mr. Robert Gillette, Former Director of Broadcasting, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Member, Board of Directors, InterMedia

Amb. James Glassman, Chairman and CEO of Public Affairs Engagement, LLC; Visiting Fellow, American Enterprise Institute; former Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors

Ms. Barbara Haig, Deputy to the President for Policy & Strategy, National Endowment for Democracy

Mr. Glen Howard, President, The Jamestown Foundation

Dr. A. Ross Johnson, Senior Scholar, Wilson Center; Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution; former Director of Radio Free Europe; former Acting President of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Mr. Markos Kounalakis, President and Publisher Emeritus, Washington Monthly; journalist, the *Sacramento Bee*; Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution

Mr. David Kramer, former President, Freedom House; Senior Director for Human Rights and Human Freedom, McCain Institute for International Leadership

Dr. Gail Lapidus, Professor of Political Science, Emerita; Senior Fellow Emerita, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University

Dr. John Lenczowski, Founder and President, The Institute of World Politics

Amb. Michael McFaul, Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies; Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Dr. Rajon Menon, Anne and Bernard Spitzer Chair in Political Science, City College of New York/City University of New York; Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council

Dr. Abbas Milani, Hamid & Christina Moghadam Director of Iranian Studies and Co-Director of the Iran Democracy Project, Stanford University; Research Fellow, Hoover Institution

Hon. Marc Nathanson, Chairman, Mapleton Investments; Board of Trustees, The Aspen Institute; former Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors

Mr. Arch Puddington, Vice President for Research, Freedom House

Mr. Robert Reilly, Senior Fellow, American Foreign Policy Council; former Director of the Voice of America

Dr. Robert Satloff, Executive Director and Howard P. Berkowitz Chair in U.S. Middle East Policy, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Hon. George P. Shultz, Thomas W. and Susan B. Ford Distinguished Fellow, Hoover Institution; former Secretary of State

Mr. Philip Seib, Vice Dean, USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism; Professor of Journalism, Public Diplomacy, and International Relations, USC

Amb. Stephen Sestanovich, Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Professor for the Practice of International Diplomacy, SIPA, Columbia University; George F. Kennan Senior Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations

Dr. Jack Snyder, Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Relations, Department of Political Science; SIPA, Columbia University; Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Amb. Kurt Volker, Executive Director, McCain Institute for International Leadership; Senior Fellow, Center for Transatlantic Relations, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

Mr. Christopher Walker, Executive Director, International Forum, National Endowment for Democracy

THE AUTHORS

S. Enders Wimbush

S. Enders Wimbush was nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate as a Governor on the United States Broadcasting Board of Governors, where he served from 2010-2012. From 1987-1993, he served as Director of Radio Liberty in Munich, Germany, overseeing transformative change in U.S. international broadcasting during the period featuring the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR.

Elizabeth M. Portale

Elizabeth M. Portale has nearly twenty years of operational experience in international affairs and media with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Munich, Prague, and Washington, D.C. As Vice President and Chief of Staff based in Prague, she was the President's key deputy overseeing the daily operations and management of 500 multicultural staff operating in 28 languages, and she played an instrumental role in devising and implementing innovative strategies and structures to meet the evolving needs of audiences in 21 countries across Eurasia, the Middle East and Southwest Asia.