

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency supervising all US government-funded civilian international broadcasting whose mission is:

To promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multimedia communication of accurate, objective and balanced news, information and other programming about America and the

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# BBG HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Goals, Challenges, and Accomplishments Around the BBG

October 2009



At and around the UN General Assembly, VOA interviews the Presidents and Prime Ministers of (left to right) Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia.

## Exclusive Coverage and High-Level Interviews at UNGA

BBG broadcasters cover events at and around the 64th session of the UN General Assembly in New York

BBG broadcasters provided extensive coverage of the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly, broadcasting President Obama's first-ever speech before the body, and following many other heads of state who attended the meetings in New York City in late September.

Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa carried President Obama's speech live with simultaneous translation, along with those of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. VOA also ran Obama's speech live on TV, radio and online.

Many language services broke news in interviews with visiting world leaders. VOA's language services conducted interviews with, among many others, Bosnian President Zelko Komsic, who told the Bosnian Service, "Successful reforms and processes in Bosnia and the other Balkan countries could not happen without strong US engagement," and Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha, who downplayed devaluation of the national currency in an interview with the Albanian

Service that was covered by Reuters and picked up by domestic media.

Broadcasters connected the content of addresses with analyses of ongoing issues. For example, RFE/RL had devoted several reports in September to the growing tensions between Uzbekistan and its neighbors Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan over hydropower stations that Uzbek ecologists have denounced as catastrophic for the environment. The Uzbek Foreign Minister reiterated the charge at the UN.

VOA's Persian News Network and RFE/RL's Radio Farda reported on demonstrations outside the UN against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The founder of the group Cycling for Human Rights, one of the groups that demonstrated, told Radio Farda that "the aim in going to New York is not to interrupt Ahmadinejad's speech" but to take advantage of "a very good opportunity to let the world know about the poor condition of human rights in Iran."

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# Briefs

## Threats to Journalists

Rahman Bunairee was granted asylum in the U.S. in a hearing on October 19, making him eligible to begin work for *Deewa Radio*. Bunairee arrived in the US in August on a J-1 visa, but was first detained by immigration authorities and then denied permission to work. Bunairee's home in Pakistan was destroyed by the Taliban as a result of his reporting for VOA.

On October 1, the Deputy Minister of Information of Puntland, the semi-autonomous region in northeastern Somalia, banned three VOA reporters – Nuh Muse, Mohamed Yasin and Abdulkadir Mohamed – from working in the region and ordered all affiliate FM stations to stop airing VOA programs. The ban was lifted on October 9 after discussions between the Puntland government, the U.S. State Department and the VOA Director.

## Transmission Updates

VOA inaugurated a new radio station in Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland. *Hargeisa 800*, airs VOA programs 24/7, including 3.5 hours of news and features from the Somali Service, with a goal of boosting the reach and clarity of VOA's broadcasts in Somalia.

RFE/RL Ukrainian began broadcasting its morning show and a weekly Saturday interview program on *Kanal Melodya*, a top 10 national network. The Ukrainian Service now has national distribution on two major radio networks.

VOA and RFA are advertised for the Asia Broadcasting Union meeting in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. VOA and RFA banners were also prominently displayed in the conference center.

While in Ulaanbaatar for the meeting, RFA's Dan Southerland was granted an exclusive interview with Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj.



VOA Burmese reporters staked out the hotel where the Burmese delegation was staying and where demonstrators were protesting. VOA exclusive video coverage of protestors throwing shoes, coffee and eggs at the motorcade of Prime Minister Thien Sein and Foreign Minister Nyan Win was widely picked up online.

For their audiences in the Middle East, Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV had extensive reports on the trilateral meeting between President Obama, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and what it portends for the future of peace negotiations. ■

## Large Audiences, High Credibility Cited in BBG Testimony on War Zone Broadcasting

### Senate hearing focuses on BBG broadcasting to Iraq and Afghanistan

BBG Governors D. Jeffrey Hirschberg, Steven Simmons and Joaquin Blaya testified at a Senate hearing on the role of international broadcasting in Iraq and Afghanistan, saying that “we cannot prevail against the extremists through force alone ... it is of critical importance to engage audiences, whose attention we and our adversaries both seek.”

“We play a critical role, especially in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan that lack adequate press freedom and credible alternative media,” Blaya told the October 15 hearing of the International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy and Global Women's Issues Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee, chaired by Senator Ted Kaufman of Delaware.

“We succeed when: (a) we deliver the news our audiences want and need to make informed judgment about their societies; and (b) when we deliver our content via the media our audiences prefer and they can easily access,” said Blaya.

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*“In my view, the independence and autonomy of the BBG is the key to its success”*  
Senator Ted Kaufman

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One way the BBG measures impact is through its audience reach, Governors told the panel. 73 percent of Iraqi adults listen to or watch one of the four BBG broadcasters serving that country – Alhurra TV, Radio Sawa, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq and VOA Kurdish. In Afghanistan, VOA and RFE/RL reach 56 percent of all adults in Dari and Pashto and RFE/RL is itself the most popular radio station in the country.

“[RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan] is also the service Afghans say they turn to first – first – for news and information, and the one Afghans said they most preferred for news about the recent elections,” Hirschberg said.

The Governors highlighted the credibility of BBG broadcasters in the eyes of their audience, suggesting that this perception of trustworthiness contributes to their reach. Research shows over 90 percent of the Afghan audience finds BBG broadcasts credible or mostly credible.

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BBG Governors (l to r) Simmons, Hirschberg and Blaya testify at the hearing.

"In my view, the independence and autonomy of the BBG is the key to its success," observed Senator Kaufman in his remarks. "First, it serves as a credible source of balanced news reporting, and second, it demonstrates the true meaning of a free press internationally."

Another driver of impact is program interactivity with audiences through mechanisms like call-in shows. Feedback indicates that local Pashto-speakers on the Afghan-Pakistan border seek engagement, Simmons noted.

"We see robust audience reaction every day in some 400 listener phone calls to on-air discussion programs," said Simmons of VOA's *Deewa Radio*, which broadcasts in Pashto to the border region.

Governors also discussed the impact of using local platforms and local content. In Iraq, for example, local news bureaus and operations, local FM and television distribution in major cities, and high levels of domestic coverage, including Alhurra's dedicated Iraq stream, have "won a wide Iraqi following," according to Blaya.

The hearing included discussion about interagency coordination on public diplomacy. In response to a question from Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Hirschberg emphasized the independence of BBG content saying, "If the question is are we in the room from time to time, the answer is yes. If the question is does the State Department or Ambassador Holbrooke suggest programming or content to us, the answer's no."



Senators Ted Kaufman (D-DE), who chaired the hearing, and Roger Wicker (R-MS).

Senator Wicker pointed out in his opening statement that there are populations in war zones that "no public diplomacy strategy will reach or persuade;" however, as Hirschberg noted, BBG broadcasts reach some important – and surprising – components of the Afghan population.

"We are attracting the really hard-to-reach audience on a daily basis. RFE/RL and VOA together reach 25 percent of those who say they strongly oppose the Afghan government." ■

## Briefs

### New Programming

As of October 1, TV Marti began broadcasting 5-minute newscasts every half hour from 7—11 p.m., which cover the leading stories of the day and are updated throughout the evening. TV Marti has also changed *Washington al Dia* from a two-minute information spot to a half hour program airing three days a week, and introduced a new half hour program, *Cuba al Dia*.

### Press Clips

At the Sept. 29 annual meeting of the five largest international broadcasters, including VOA, the [Directors expressed their](#) "resolve to jointly increase our efforts to set up a global civil society, where the free flow of information and the dialogue of cultures can take place unimpeded," according to Deutsche Welle Director Erik Betterman.

RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin called surrogate broadcasting "one of the most effective and cost-efficient programs ... to promote democracy and advance U.S. national security interests" in a piece for [Foreign Affairs](#) on Sept. 27.

[New York Times](#) reporter David Rohde, captured by the Taliban in Nov. 2008, related his experiences for the paper, saying his captors "listened to hourly news updates on Azadi radio," the local name for RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan.

[AFP](#) featured Daoud Sediqi, former host of Afghan Idol, who fled to the US where he continues to "work for Afghanistan" as a radio host on VOA. The Sept. 21 piece describes how Afghan Idol broke ethnic and gender barriers, and led to threats against Sediqi and performers.

[Alhayat](#) newspaper published an interview in Arabic with Alhurra correspondent Michel Ghandour. Ghandour talked about how he has been enriched by working at Alhurra and assured readers Alhurra does not have hidden political messages.

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## Radio Farda Broadcasters Die in Prague Car Crash



Radio Farda reporters Rosa Ajiri, 27, and Amir Zamani-Far, 29, [were killed](#) in the early morning of September 30 when their car was struck by a truck. Radio Farda's Mahin Gorji, 43, is in a coma, and a fourth passenger, a visiting journalist, was treated and released from the hospital.

Rosa and Amir were widely respected for their courageous and resourceful journalism. Listeners from Iran and around the world have

called, e-mailed, and texted messages of condolence to Radio Farda and RFE/RL.

RFE/RL's Associate Director of Broadcasting Abbas Djavadi said in a statement, "They were young and vibrant. Optimistic and hopeful. Open and lovely. Smiling and fun. Hard working and helpful. Educated and dedicated -- to their families, friends, their country, and to freedom."

Radio Farda's Golnaz Esfandiari [remembers the two journalists](#) in a piece for RFE/RL and Payvand.

## Briefs

"I listened to Radio Free Europe several times a day, and those who did not do so were idiots," Nobel winner Herta Muller told the *Epoch Times* in an Oct. 18 article. She was responding to a question from Radio Free Asia, which the *Epoch Times* says is "very much appreciated" in mainland China.

An [Asia Sentinel](#) piece on Oct. 15 described the struggles of Chinese Uighurs to receive information, saying that they use extra antennas or pieces of tin that must be hidden from the police to receive signals from news sources like RFA.

According to the [Phnom Penh Post](#) on Sept. 16, the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights said RFA Cambodian reporter Ratha Visal and another activist have been, "harassed and intimidated by both provincial authorities and the court in relation to their tireless struggle to defend the rights of communities dispossessed of their land and livelihoods ...."

Kurt Achin, VOA Bureau Chief and correspondent in Seoul, told the International Conference on North Korean Human Rights that the challenge in reporting on North Korea is to not let the nuclear issue dominate coverage to the detriment of human rights issues, reported the [Daily NK](#) on Sept. 24.

The Moshe Dayan Center reported that VOA has a "popular" Twitter feed, that "speeds up the capacity to deliver the news" in the Middle East, according to a report posted to [Global Voices](#) on Sept. 21.

The [Weekly Standard](#) on Sept. 15 quoted from an RFA report on the Burmese army's forced conscription of children as young as 10 in their campaign against the Karen ethnic group.

## Implementation Strategies at Work

From the BBG 2008-2013 Strategic Plan

### Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies

#### RFA Vietnamese Starts New Webcast

RFA's Vietnamese Service, which broadcasts on radio, began producing a webcast of news, posted on both the RFA site and YouTube. The show is shot in an improvised studio with a green screen, and clips are about 4 minutes long. The shows feature four to six news items illustrated by photos and videos, including material sent by citizen reporters.



This screen grab shows one of RFA's Vietnamese webcasts, which are posted on YouTube and linked to the RFA Vietnamese site.

#### VOA Vietnamese Adds New Blogs

VOA's Vietnamese Web site added blogs by five prominent Vietnamese bloggers on topics from technology and social trends to literature and poetry to politics and the economy. Since July, the bloggers have contributed more than 180 posts that have elicited over 8,000 comments.

### Facilitate Citizen Discourse

#### RFE/RL's Moldova Service Airs Exclusive Interview with New Government

Prime Minister Vlad Filat gave his first interview after being approved by the parliament to RFE/RL's Moldova Service, telling listeners that Moldova needs to establish special strategic relations with the United States. RFE/RL interviews with Moldova's Speaker of Parliament, Acting President and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Education, Culture and Defense were also quoted by domestic media.

#### VOA Armenian Exclusive Interview Anticipates Armenia-Turkish Accord

On October 10, Turkey and Armenia signed a historic accord normalizing relations after almost a century of hostility. Days earlier, the Armenian President Serge Sargsian signaled his government's intentions to normalize relations with neighboring Turkey in an exclusive interview with VOA's Armenian Service during his visit to New York. VOA's reports were broadcast by an affiliate in Yerevan and scooped the station's own reporter, who was traveling with Sargsian.

### Engage the World in Conversation About America

#### Alhurra Remembers 9/11 Attacks with Special Coverage

Alhurra TV commemorated the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with special coverage and a town hall meeting with six experts on the Middle East, U.S. foreign policy and homeland security. *Al Youm* also aired reports from the U.S. and the Middle East on peaceful coexistence among Christians, Muslims and Jews in New York, the negative effects of terrorism on Saudi Arabian youth and how victims' relatives are turning their grief into actions against violence.

### Preserve Credibility and Ensure Overall Programming Excellence

#### Radio Martí Reports on H1N1 Ensure Spread of Accurate Information

Radio Martí broke the story that a pregnant woman had died of H1N1 in Cuba, a fact that was not recognized by the Cuban government until nearly a month later. Increased coverage of H1N1 during September included health information, interviews with officials from the Pan American Health Organization and interviews with doctors in Cuba who confirmed that patients are arriving at hospitals with H1N1 symptoms. Radio Martí is not labeling these reports as H1N1 patients until they are confirmed.