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U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING INTO THE WAR ZONES: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

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U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING INTO THE WAR ZONES: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2009

U.S. SENATE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,

Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Edward E. Kaufman, presiding.

Present: Senators Kaufman, Shaheen, and Wicker.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD E. KAUFMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM DELAWARE

Senator KAUFMAN. This afternoon I am honored to chair the International Operations and Organizations Subcommittee hearing examining the work of the Broadcasting Board of Governors in war zones, specifically Afghanistan and Iraq. International broadcasting is an issue I care deeply about, especially given my 13 years on the board.

The U.S. international broadcasting began during the early years of World War II when Voice of America broadcast into areas formerly under Nazi occupation. The programs began by saying: "Daily at this time, we shall speak to you about America and the war. The news may be good or bad. We shall tell you the truth."

This proud tradition of journalistic integrity has continued to this day as the BBG's entities, consisting of Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network, broadcast in 60 languages—that is 60 languages—to an estimated weekly audience of 175 million people globally.

I joined the BBG in 1995 as a charter member when it was placed in the U.S. Information Agency, or USIA. In October 1999, 10 years ago this week, Congress established the BBG as its own independent Federal agency with a board appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The impetus for this decision was to preserve the so-called firewall, separating policymakers from broadcasting. This is why the broadcasting entities report directly to the board, which is comprised of four Republicans and four Democrats, as well as the Secretary of State.

As such, there is a clear delineation between those making programming decisions and those shaping policy, which is critical for maintaining journalistic integrity. In my view, the independence

and autonomy of the BBG is the key to its success. This is what allows the BBG to fulfill two primary goals central to its mission. First, it serves as a credible source of balanced news reporting, and second, it demonstrates the true meaning of a free press internationally.

Without the firewall, journalists may engage in self-censorship or propaganda or government officials may attempt to sell a particular policy, as has happened in past administrations. This is why it is so essential that the BBG continue to follow the VOA Charter which affirms its role in "serving as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news which is accurate, objective, and comprehensive." And the charter is over here on my left. The charter applies to all of BBG broadcasting entities.

Today we will examine the BBG's work in war zones, namely Afghanistan and Iraq, and consider listenership, which is the strongest indication of successful programming. If you do not have a large audience, you cannot have impact. That alone is not what is required, but you also have to have successful, strong programming. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the BBG has launched several programs that have cultivated a wide audience. In both countries, the BBG has created sources of credible news and information readily accessible to the local population, in some cases for the first time in their history.

In this sense, the role of broadcasting in war zones is particularly critical because it creates channels of communication with and among the population, which plays a role in winning hearts and minds.

This is why I hope we can take a closer look at two key questions about U.S. international broadcasting in Afghanistan and Iraq. First, who is listening? And second, what are we saying? Also, because we are looking at two different wars in two distinct stages, I would add, what lessons can we learn from our past experiences that can be applied to both countries today?

To answer these and other questions, we have governors chairing the BBG subcommittees which have oversight responsibility for the three broadcasting entities operating in Afghanistan and Iraq. We are lucky to have them here today because all three witnesses bring extraordinary experience to international broadcasting.

First, we have Joaquin Blaya, who chairs the Middle East Broadcasting Network Subcommittee of the BBG, which oversees all broadcasting targeted to the Middle East. Governor Blaya brings a wealth of experience to the board, chairman of Blaya Media, Incorporated. He has held a number of senior management positions with media companies. He served as the chair of Radio Unica, a Spanish language radio network, and as CEO of Telemundo Group, as well as President of Univision, the world's second-largest and largest Spanish language media companies.

The chair of the BBG Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Subcommittee is Jeff Hirschberg. Jeff has extensive experience in the public and private sectors, especially as it relates to the former Soviet Union. Jeff is currently Director of the U.S.-Russia Business Council, former director of the U.S.-Russia Investment Fund, and a former director of the Center for Democracy. He is also a board

member of Freedom House, the nongovernmental organization which supports the expansion of free press globally.

Finally, we have Steve Simmons, chairman of the subcommittee that oversees the Voice of America. He was chairman and CEO of Simmons/Patriot Media and Communications, LLC. At its height, the New Jersey company served approximately 350,000 cable subscribers in 20 States. In 2006, Steve was recognized by Cable World as U.S. Independent Cable Operator of the Year for Patriot's operational success and advanced technology.

I want to thank all three witnesses for being with us today. We look forward to the testimony.

I would also recognize other employees with the BBG that are here, the leaders of the BBG: Dan Austin, who is the director of Voice of America; Brian Conniff, the president of Middle East Broadcasting Network; Jeff Trimble, the Broadcasting Board of Governors executive director; Bruce Sherman, BBG's strategic planning and research; Tish King; and Susan Andross.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Senator Boxer's generous offer to let me chair this hearing and Senator Wicker's support in being here today.

I now turn it over to Senator Wicker for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER F. WICKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much, Senator Kaufman, for convening this hearing to evaluate the effectiveness of the Broadcasting Board of Governors' operations into Iraq and Afghanistan. This entails identifying the challenges the BBG has faced and continues to face in broadcasting to Iraq and the extent to which they have applied those lessons to their activities in Afghanistan.

I recognize and appreciate Senator Kaufman for his particular expertise in regard to this issue. His service as a member of the BBG during the Clinton and Bush administrations was characterized by expertise and competency. Arguably there is no one better to evaluate and oversee the BBG's ability to advance the Nation's public diplomacy in conflict areas. And I am delighted that Senator Boxer has allowed him to chair today.

Public diplomacy is defined as the U.S. Government's outreach to foreign populations. It is distinguished from the exclusive contact with foreign governments that has characterized traditional diplomacy. Public diplomacy represents an indispensable component of any viable foreign policy. This proposition ought to be and has been embraced by both sides of the aisle. Saying that is easy, however. Putting it into practice is considerably more difficult.

A May 2009 GAO report describes the U.S. Government as spending more than $10 billion on international communication efforts since September 11, 2001. But international public opinion polling has highlighted negative attitudes toward the United States despite our Government's public diplomacy efforts. It is my hope that this hearing will shed light on this phenomenon and identify steps that will effectively turn this dynamic around.

The BBG necessarily has to walk a fine line in order to justify its taxpayer dollars. It must demonstrate that it is effectively contributing to the U.S. national interest. It is not the job of the tax-

payer to ensure that international audiences are informed of current issues, no matter how laudable that might be. The BBG must demonstrate that it primarily serves the interest of the United States citizens and, consequently, justifies the $682 million budget.

At the same time, however, the BBG needs to cultivate a reputation for quality journalism. Foreign audiences will clearly reject broadcasts that they perceive as political propaganda. It is not an easy task to fulfill both of these requirements and to do so simultaneously

This problem is all the more difficult when broadcasting into war zones and particularly insurgencies. Any counterinsurgency effort will involve a proportion of the population that no public diplomacy strategy will reach or persuade. There will also be a percentage of the population that, depending on their circumstances, will act either for or against U.S. military and political objectives. We saw this in Iraq's Anbar Awakening, and General McChrystal's military strategy affirms this to be true in Afghanistan.

I am interested in knowing what role the BBG perceives itself as having in an effective counterinsurgency and how it goes about implementing this role. I am also interested in knowing what metrics the BBG has for evaluating its success in this role.

Of course, the BBG does not act alone. The Departments of State, Defense, and USAID each have their own substantial public diplomacy responsibilities in these war zones. It is clear that these agencies have separate roles and the BBG has justifiably emphasized its independence from these other agencies in order to avoid being seen as simply a propaganda tool. That said, it is also important that there be a comprehensive strategy clearly delineating each agency's respective responsibilities and competencies in developing appropriate mechanism coordinations between them.

I would be interested in hearing whether there have been specific Governmentwide strategies and coordination mechanisms developed for the Iraqi and AfPak context. I hope the witnesses will address this in their testimony.

I would like to conclude on a note of realism. In a 1998 "Today Show" interview, Matt Lauer asked Secretary of State Madeleine Albright about the possible use of force against Iraq. Secretary Albright famously replied, "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

Secretary Albright was correct then and her statement continues to be relevant. The fact of the matter is that the United States international interests and responsibilities frequently require it to adopt unpopular positions overseas and particularly in counterinsurgency situations. America's international prominence necessarily entails a degree of international unpopularity that we need to learn to live with. This does not at all undermine the need for an effective diplomacy strategy, and in fact, it reinforces it. But it is a fact that needs to be accounted for in our strategic planning and in our larger foreign policy development.

So, Mr. Chairman, I welcome our panel of witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony. Thank you, sir.

Senator KAUFMAN. Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Now we have the statements from the panel, starting with Jeff Hirschberg, followed by Steve Simmons and Joaquin Blaya.

STATEMENT OF HON. D. JEFFREY HIRSCHBERG, GOVERNOR AND CHAIR OF THE RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY SUBCOMMITTEE, BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Wicker. Thank you for the opportunity to be before you today.

For the last 7 years, the three of us have had the distinct privilege of supporting the efforts of U.S. international broadcasting. We are delighted to have done so.

First, in order to proceed, I want to recognize the most important ingredients to good programming, which is the professional skills and courage of our journalists. Without these dedicated individuals, there would be no competent organization.

It is our pleasure here today to speak to the role of United States international broadcasting in advancing United States national interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our hope is that by the end of this hearing, your questions and concerns will be satisfied.

Our Nation continues to face the threat of violent extremism. There is consensus inside and outside Government that we cannot prevail against the extremists through force alone and that it is of critical importance to engage audiences whose attention we and our adversaries both seek.

In our shared testimony today, which has been filed with the committee, we will outline our programs and our performance. Our performance measures track the agency's journalistic mission and focus on three things: audience reach, news reliability, and audience understanding.

Mr. Chairman, we recognize your service on the Broadcasting Board of Governors and you have expressed to us and remind us over the years, as you have today, that the BBG's independence is critical to preserving the credibility of our audiences. You protected the board's duty to safeguard our broadcasters' editorial integrity and the board does act as a firewall against any Government office that would seek to determine our broadcasters' on-air content.

This simple idea that truth serves the national interest has had profound consequences not just in World War II, but during the cold war when our news products from Voice of America and Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty broadcasts helped end Soviet totalitarianism.

This month, as has been stated before, marks the 10th anniversary of the independence of the U.S. international broadcasting under the auspices of the BBG, a period of remarkable growth where we have seen our audience size go from under 100 million to over 175 million people worldwide.

At the commencement of the BBG's independence in 1999, Vice President, then-Senator, Joe Biden, gave the keynote speech and highlighted the ongoing importance and mission of U.S. international broadcasting with these words. "Every day, U.S. international broadcasters provide news and information about America and the world to millions of people living in societies not yet free or that struggle to consolidate recently won freedoms. The news

that you provide, whether about America or about events in foreign lands, empowers your audiences."

Today in Iraq and Afghanistan, VOA and RFE/RL and our newer broadcasters, Radio Sawa and Alhurra Television, are serving citizens caught up in tribal and sectarian strife and violent extremism. They serve a host of critical functions by doing the following things: fostering respect for human rights; strengthening civil society, rule of law, and transparency through their programming; stemming religious and ethnic intolerance; combatting hate media; and communicating American policies, values, and culture to their audiences.

With respect to reaching Afghanistan, our U.S. Commander, General McChrystal, has stated that effective communication is vital to "the operational center of gravity; the continued support of the Afghan people." We at the BBG believe that we are constructively engaging the Afghan people.

VOA and RFE/RL join together in Afghanistan to produce a coordinated 24/7 stream of programming in Dari and Pashto, transmitted by a high-powered AM from Kabul and five local FMs in major cities across the country. Cross-border shortwave ensures a listenable signal nationwide. In addition, VOA broadcasts a daily hour-long TV program in Dari and Pashto over Afghanistan State Television. Together RFE/RL and VOA are the No. 1 broadcasting entity in Afghanistan in audience-reach, according to independent analysis.

VOA, according to its mission, focuses on coverage of news and policy debates concerning Afghanistan taking place in Washington, news in Afghanistan with a strong United States angle, and regional and international news.

RFE/RL slightly differently stresses its trademark local news coverage, capturing all aspects of the insurgency and microreporting on issues such as health, education, women's issues, and other topics.

Both of these broadcast entities together reach 56 percent of Afghan adults, 15 years of age and older, every week, a regular audience of nearly 10 million people, surpassing all other media, foreign and domestic.

RFE/RL's combined Dari and Pashto service is by itself the most popular media outlet in the country. It is also the service Afghans say they turn to first—first—for news and information and the ones Afghans said they most preferred for news about the recent elections.

More particularly, we are attracting the really hard-to-reach audience. On a daily basis, RFE/RL and VOA together reach 26 percent of those who say they strongly oppose the Afghan Government. So we are reaching all audiences.

But the BBG's impact goes well beyond numbers, and I would like to turn now to Steve Simmons, chairman of the VOA Committee of the board, to discuss the flavor of the programming and its impact.

STATEMENT OF HON. STEVEN J. SIMMONS, GOVERNOR AND CHAIR OF THE VOICE OF AMERICA SUBCOMMITTEE, BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. SIMMONS. Thank you, Governor Hirschberg.

It is good to be here, and I want to join in recognizing Senator Kaufman's service on the board for 9 years. We sat next to each other for most of those years, and it was a pleasure and a privilege to work with him on all of these issues.

As you heard, audience numbers in Afghanistan are extremely high. But impact also can be seen in personal stories of listeners, program interactivity, and in the depth of the ideas shared in the programming. Let me give you a few examples.

Showing the power of VOA and RFE/RL's combined reporting was their wall-to-wall coverage of the recent Afghan Presidential election, which there has been so much debate about in the newspapers and in our media here. During that election, RFE/RL interviewed all 41—yes, all 41—candidates, every one of them, in on-air forums in which Afghan citizens had the opportunity to call in with questions. In an unprecedented development, RFE/RL's Dari and Pashto service cohosted with the Afghan State Television the only Presidential election debate that President Karzai attended. The service director, Akbar Ayazi, served as the debate's sole moderator.

From Washington, VOA reported on the Obama administration's Afghan policy and the positions of Members of Congress and other top United States officials toward the election. VOA managing editors traveled to Kabul to report live and cohost call-in shows. VOA stringers added to RFE/RL local reports with coverage from polling stations and locations throughout the country.

RFE/RL programming routinely addresses Islam responding to the knowledge that Islam is the No. 1 issue for Afghans. These programs discuss the religious implications of suicide bombings and terrorism and the nature and aims of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, giving the Afghan people a deeper understanding of the conflict in which they are engaged.

Both RFE/RL and VOA closely monitor human rights in Afghanistan. When the Afghan Parliament passed a law restricting the rights of Shia women, VOA TV broadcast a special program featuring both opponents and supporters of the law.

During a recent VOA call-in show with the Afghan Minister of Education, a disabled student called saying he was unable to attend school because he did not have a wheelchair. The next day the Ministry of Education arranged for the caller to receive a wheelchair.

Again, these are just kinds of programs that impact the lives of our listeners.

Let me now address our newest programming to the critical Afghanistan/Pakistan border region which, as we know, is the epicenter of Taliban and al-Qaeda operations.

Propaganda plays a major role in the extremists' campaign for dominance. Radio is the dominant medium in the Afghan/Pak border region. Through radio, the insurgents pour out their disinformation and their lies and their threats. But radio is also the means by which BBG broadcasters can counter their propaganda, not with

propaganda of a different sort but with objective, comprehensive journalism that conveys factual, balanced news and information.

BBG broadcasts in Dari and Pashto blanket Afghanistan, and our Urdu programming serves Pakistan nationwide. For the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area, we initiated in 2006 a dedicated service by the Voice of America in the unique regional Pashto dialect called Deewa Radio. Senator Wicker asked about our role in this fight we are undergoing in that region, and this radio broadcast responding to administration priorities is one of the things we created to participate and hopefully help in that region.

This Radio Deewa station we created focuses on local issues and produces 9 hours of daily programming, including live news, current affairs, call-in shows, and music. It transmits its signal via AM, FM, and shortwave.

An early study by the U.S. Agency for International Development suggested Deewa had a wide following. We see robust audience reaction every day in some 400 listener phone calls to on-air discussion programs. We cannot possibly take them all, so the lights on the phones are just lit up as people try to call in to talk to the hosts and the people on the show and to have their voices heard.

The feedback indicates that local Pashto speakers, mostly in Pakistan, but on the Afghan side of the border as well, seek engagement. They want their voices heard. Deewa, which in English means light, is giving them a voice.

One listener in the Swat Valley said Deewa Radio is "the only source of information." Many listeners in the regions of Waziristan, Swat, and Bajaur have told the station that they plan their activities around Deewa's broadcasts.

Key to Deewa's success is what has worked so well in Afghanistan: news and information tailored to the audience's needs and interests. The station maintains a network of some 25 local stringers who file a steady stream of reports on such topics as Pakistan's military campaign against Taliban forces and those displaced by Taliban threats or combat.

Earlier this year, to complement Deewa, Congress endorsed new RFE/RL Pashto broadcasts for the border region. Working in cooperation with VOA's Deewa Radio, the new Radio Azadi will broadcast 6 hours daily. With reporters on both sides of the border and throughout Pakistan, the news service will reach out to combat the radical broadcasting going on in that area.

And finally, I should also point out that Radio Aap ki Dunyaa, VOA's Urdu language broadcast, reaches all of Pakistan, including the critical border region. So through Deewa, through our new RFE/RL broadcasts, and through the Aap ki Dunyaa Radio signal, we are putting, we think, a pretty strong flow of programming into the Afghan/Pakistan border region.

With that, I will turn to Governor Blaya, who will talk about broadcasting to Iraq.

STATEMENT OF HON. JOAQUIN BLAYA, GOVERNOR AND CHAIR OF THE MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORK SUBCOMMITTEE, BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. BLAYA. Thank you. I would like to recognize Senator Kaufman's contributions as the voice of conscience of the BBG for so, so many years.

Let me talk about broadcasting to Iraq. Our success in Iraq is reflected in part in huge audiences. Every week, 73 percent of Iraqi adults, some 9.5 million people, listen to or watch one of the four BBG broadcasters serving the country, including Alhurra television, Radio Sawa, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Iraq, and VOA Kurdish.

Alhurra is the fourth leading television channel among hundreds of channels available by satellite and locally with 32 percent daily and 64 percent weekly reach. It is also among the Iraqis' top choices for news and information on television.

Radio Sawa is the most listened-to radio station in Iraq with 23-percent weekly reach and is among Iraqis' top three sources for news on the radio.

Radio Free Iraq, with 10-percent weekly reach, is among the top five radio stations for news.

In addition, VOA Kurdish reaches 12 percent of its target audience weekly.

The challenges to broadcasting in Iraq have been significant.

Our progress is due principally to three factors. First, we set up local operation including news bureaus. Second, we secured local transmission for both radio and television, including FM and television stations in major cities in Iraq. And third, BBG broadcasters have sustained 24/7 news and information coverage pegged to developments and issues on the ground in Iraq and in sync with the needs and preferences of Iraqi audiences.

Local presence and feel, excellent domestic distribution and highly relevant news and other programming has been the formula that has won a wide Iraqi following.

At the same time, our broadcasters give Iraqis comprehensive regional and international news, including in-depth coverage of United States society, culture, and policies. Indeed, reporting on the United States is a competitive advantage for the BBG broadcasters with news from Washington on United States-Iraq policy and plans and particularly directly relevant to Iraqi citizens.

BBG's strategy stresses a multimedia approach and leverages the unique strengths of each of the four broadcasters to target discrete Iraqi audience segments with custom-tailored content.

Alhurra Iraq. Most Iraqis get their news from television and thus a strong television presence in Iraq is important for the BBG. Alhurra Iraq is a 24/7 news and information channel that targets Iraq news-seekers 25 years of age and older with rich, local content and coverage of the region and the United States.

More than 30 percent of Alhurra Iraq's schedule is specific to Iraq, including prime time broadcast hours from 7 to 10 p.m. when the channel's premier newscasts, Iraq's news program of record, airs.

Driving Alhurra Iraq's national coverage is its large Baghdad bureau and network of in-country correspondents. They speak the local dialect and grasp their fellow citizens' hopes and hardships. Their stories can be uniquely empowering.

When the Iraqi Government threatened to destroy the homes of Iraqis who lacked property deeds, Alhurra investigated with on-camera interviews of the responsible officials, who then reversed course, sparing thousands from homelessness.

When injured Iraqi soldiers were denied medical care and insurance, Alhurra broke the story, leading to the first-ever Iraqi hospital for wounded veterans.

And when a young boy lost his parents and his leg in a bombing, Alhurra told the story, prompting Iraq's Minister of Work and Social Affairs to place him in an orphanage with coverage of his medical costs.

Such stories might seem ordinary, but in Iraq, with no tradition of press freedom, they are, in fact, glimpse of a nascent fourth estate.

Alhurra's newest innovation is Al Youm, a live, 3-hour daily news magazine that originates simultaneously from Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Washington. It is patterned on the popular format of the "Today" show in the United States but designed to air in the evening. Al Youm combines the latest news from three continents with a mix of health, entertainment, sports, technology, business, and other features.

Al Youm bridges divides among the countries of the region and between the region and the United States. Indeed, it connects cultures in a way few Arab outlets are disposed to doing. Its reporting offers breadth of coverage seen nowhere else, like a recent news report on Darfur with views of officials in Khartoum and Cairo and a report from Jerusalem on Israel's program of asylum for Darfurian refugees.

In-depth coverage of the United States is built into Al Youm and carried forth across the Alhurra network. News reports and in-depth programs like "Inside Washington" provide Iraqi viewers with an unparalleled look at the United States political process, including interviews with the figures that impact policy, people as diverse as Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and New York Times Thomas Friedman.

Alhurra's coverage of the 2008 Presidential election showcased its U.S. reporting strengths. The network carried live reports and talk shows from the key primary States, wall-to-wall reporting from both Republican and Democratic political conventions, and live coverage of election day activities and election night returns.

Radio Sawa is Alhurra's companion network, and for Iraq, it also produces a dedicated programming stream that provides comparable Iraq-specific news as well as short information and interactive features tailored to the tastes of young Iraqis.

FM Radio is an intimate local medium. Sawa's local presence and feel have been essential to its staying power. Its transmitter network has grown from one in Baghdad in 2003 to 14 nationwide today. Its music, chosen for its specific appeal to Iraqis, keeps the station's sound fresh. And its local news originates from the same Baghdad hub that serves Alhurra Iraq.

Contrary to the behavior one might expect of young people tuning in first for music, Sawa listeners pay attention to the news.

Every day Sawa interacts with its audience posing a question through its Sawa Chat feature on topics such as family life, democracy, and the arts. Listeners call in to voice their opinions and their views are aired throughout the following day.

Radio Free Iraq is a news and information service focused on Iraq transition to democracy. It specializes in political reporting to complement the broad-based news and information and mass audience engagement of Alhurra Iraq and Radio Sawa.

Like Radio Sawa, RFI is a local broadcaster in Iraq. It airs 17 hours of programming daily nationwide on its own network of FM transmitters.

Typifying Radio Free Iraq's news reporting is its coverage of the ongoing dispute over Iraqi elections. Iraq is scheduled to have parliamentary elections this January 16, but a new election law has yet to be passed. RFI has been on top of the story, exploring the controversy over closed versus open party lists, seeking out popular opinion, and covering the debate in Parliament.

As one director of RFI put it: "In Iraq opinions are so intolerant of one another and there are so many news organizations that belong to political groups and deliver those groups' political agendas. We are committed to trying to present as many points of view as we can and put them in a civilized debate."

Voice of America Kurdish. It is the only broadcaster, indeed, the only Western broadcaster, to serve Kurdish-speaking Iraqis, which are anywhere from 15 to 18 percent of the population. They serve in their own language. VOA airs 4 hours daily of programming in two dialects to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, also reaching Kurds in neighboring countries of Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

VOA Kurdish provides its target audience with a service tailored to their needs and sensibilities as a minority within greater Iraq. The news is broad-based covering developments in Iraq, the Middle East and the world, but reflects the Kurdish agenda. Programs feature panel discussions with Kurds in the greater Middle East region and the diaspora. Music is both in Kurdish and American.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, BBG broadcasters are an independent, yet integral part of the United States Government communication effort that seeks to advance United States national interests in Iraq and Afghanistan and around the world. Our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has yielded important lessons for broadcasting effectiveness. First, we play a critical role especially in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan that lack adequate press freedom and credible alternative media. Second, we succeed when, A, we deliver the news our audiences want and need to make informed judgments about their societies and, B, when we deliver our content via the media our audiences prefer and they can easily access.

We will be very happy to entertain questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Mr. Hirschberg, Mr. Simmons, and Mr. Blaya, follows:]

JOINT PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, AS DELIVERED BY JEFFREY HIRSCHBERG, JOAQUIN BLAYA, AND STEVEN SIMMONS

Mr. Chairman, it is our pleasure to be here today to speak to the role of U.S. international broadcasting in advancing U.S. national interests in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is an opportune moment to address you. Our Nation continues to face the threat of violent extremism. In Iraq and Afghanistan, our Government has deployed a wide range of strategic assets to meet the challenges to U.S. national security and to the safety and well-being of the Iraqi and Afghan people.

There is consensus inside and outside government that we cannot prevail against the extremists through force alone, and that it is of critical importance to engage audiences whose attention we and our adversaries both seek.

We will in our shared testimony today address the success of U.S. international broadcasting in Iraq and Afghanistan, citing copious research and other impact measures.

It is also an opportune moment to appear before you as this month marks the 10th anniversary of the independence of U.S. international broadcasting under the Broadcasting Board of Governors. This has been a period of remarkable growth in the scope and impact of BBG operations. With generous support from Congress, our funding has increased from $400 million to over $700 million, and our global audiences have grown from under 100 million to nearly 175 million.

We recognize, Senator Kaufman, your service on the Board and your many contributions to the BBG's accomplishments.

You often reminded us that the BBG's independence is critical to preserving credibility with our audiences. We must have the latitude to do the news straight up. Audiences will readily detect a slant or a hidden agenda, and they will tune out as a result.

But independence is not enough. As you also consistently urged, one of the Board's key duties is to safeguard our broadcasters' journalistic integrity by being a firewall between them and any government office or private party that would seek to determine their on-air content.

U.S. international broadcasting rests on the principle that truth serves the national interest—not the absolute truth as professed by ideologues and extremists but the objective truth that stems from balanced, factual news reporting.

This simple idea has had profound consequences. Accurate, comprehensive news from VOA during World War II contributed to the defeat of German Nazism. Then, during the long cold war, the same news product from VOA and Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty broadcasts helped stymie and ultimately end Soviet totalitarianism.

At the commemoration of the BBG's independence in 1999, our Vice President, then-Senator, Joe Biden, gave the keynote speech and highlighted the ongoing importance and mission of U.S. international broadcasting with these words: "The struggle in which media play a critical part is never-ending. That struggle is the fight to protect and promote freedom."

He continued: "Every day, U.S. international broadcasters provide news and information about America and the world to millions of people living in societies not yet free or that struggle to consolidate recently won freedoms . . . The news that you provide, whether about America or about events in foreign lands, empowers your audiences."

Today, in Iraq and Afghanistan, VOA and RFE/RL, and our newer broadcasters, Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV, are serving citizens caught up in tribal and sectarian strife and violent extremism.

Being in practice a free, professional press in support of freedom and democracy is the shared mission of all BBG broadcasters.

We know we have succeeded when freedom and democracy have taken hold, as they did during the 1990s across what had been traditional target areas for U.S. international broadcasting—Central and Eastern Europe. That is our long-term desired effect.

En route to this goal, we serve a host of critical functions. These include:

Fostering respect for human rights;
Strengthening civil society, rule of law, and transparency;
Stemming religious and ethnic intolerance;
Combating hate media; and
Communicating what America stands for—our policies, values, and culture.

Our performance measures track our mission and focus on audience reach, news reliability, and audience understanding.

REACHING AFGHANISTAN

U.S. Commander for Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal, has described the current state of affairs in the country in these terms: "The situation in Afghanistan is serious . . . We face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans . . . " Effective communication, he argues, is vital to "the operational center of gravity: The continued support of the Afghan people."

What we at the BBG can say is that we are leveraging all our assets to support the mission of constructively engaging the Afghan people.

VOA and RFE/RL join together in Afghanistan to produce a coordinated 24/7 stream of programming in Dari and Pashto, transmitted via high-powered AM from Kabul and via five local FMs in major cities across the country. There is also cross-border shortwave to ensure a listenable signal nationwide. In addition, VOA broadcasts a daily hour-long TV program in Dari and Pashto over Afghanistan State Television.

RFE/RL and VOA are together the number one broadcasting entity in Afghanistan in audience reach.

VOA plays to its strengths as a U.S.-based broadcaster focused on coverage of news and policy debates concerning Afghanistan taking place in Washington, news in Afghanistan with a strong U.S. angle and regional and international news.

RFE/RL stresses its trademark local news coverage, capturing all aspects of the insurgency and microreporting on health, education, women's issues, among other topics at the top of the Afghan people's news and information agenda.

Showcasing the power of VOA and RFE/RL's combined reporting was their wall-to-wall coverage of the recent Afghan Presidential election.

RFE/RL interviewed all 41 candidates in on-air forums in which Afghan citizens had the opportunity to call in with questions. In an unprecedented development, RFE/RL's Dari and Pashto service cohosted with Afghanistan State Television the only Presidential election debate that President Hamid Karzai attended. The service director, Akbar Ayazi, served as the debate's sole moderator.

All in all, RFE/RL allowed listeners throughout Afghanistan to escape personality based elections and to examine the candidates in the context of the issues of the day.

From Washington, VOA reported on the Obama administration's Afghan policy and the positions of Members of Congress and other top U.S. officials toward the election. To enhance overall BBG coverage, VOA managing editors traveled to Kabul to report live and cohost call-in shows. VOA stringers added to RFE/RL local reports with coverage from polling stations and locations throughout the country.

Beyond special events coverage such as the Afghan elections, VOA and RFE/RL address every aspect of Afghan life day in and day out.

Among its many programming focus areas, RFE/RL routinely addresses Islam (which research shows is the number one issue for Afghans), the religious implications of suicide bombings and terrorism, and the nature and aims of the Taliban and al-Qaeda—in the station's commitment to giving the Afghan people a deeper understanding of the conflict in which they are engaged.

Both RFE/RL and VOA closely monitor human rights in Afghanistan. When the Afghan Parliament passed a law restricting the rights of Shia women, VOA TV broadcast a special program featuring both opponents and supporters of the law. Senator Barbara Boxer and Melanne Verveer, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues, were among those who participated.

The effect of BBG broadcasting in Afghanistan is that RFE/RL and VOA have won the loyal following of the Afghan people. Together they reach 56 percent of all Afghan adults (15 years of age and older) every week—a regular audience of nearly 10 million people—surpassing all other media, foreign and domestic.

RFE/RL's combined Dari and Pashto service is, by itself, the most popular media outlet in the country. It is also the service Afghans say they turn to first for news and information, and the one Afghans said they most preferred for news about the recent elections.

More particularly, though, when we look at whether we are attracting the really hard-to-reach audiences—namely, the insurgents—we see that, on a daily basis, RFE/RL and VOA together reach 26 percent of those who say they strongly oppose the Afghan Government.

But BBG impact goes well beyond the numbers. During a recent appearance on a VOA call-in show with the Afghan Minister of Education about new textbooks for Afghan schools, a disabled student called and said he was unable to attend school because he didn't have a wheelchair. The next day, VOA's program host got a note from the Afghan Ministry of Education saying it arranged for the caller to receive a wheelchair.

The upshot is this: BBG broadcasters are delivering the goods.

While the insurgency remains a force, it is also true that overwhelmingly Afghans do not support the Taliban, and hold the Taliban accountable for much of the chaos and violence in Afghan society. At the same time, Afghans remain broadly supportive of their government and of U.S. troop presence in the country.

We cannot claim our broadcasts are directly responsible for these attitudes. But we are hard pressed to imagine what the situation in the country would be like without the factual, relevant, and credible reporting RFE/RL and VOA produce.

BROADCASTING TO IRAQ

BBG broadcasters perform an independent but integral role in the overall U.S. mission in Iraq.

Despite abundant media, press freedom in Iraq reflects the country's status as a recovering war zone. Freedom House rates Iraq "not free" and places it 148 out of 195 countries worldwide. Reporters without Borders cites recent improvements for journalists but notes that since 2003 there have been 77 kidnappings, of which 23 ended in murder—including, we sadly recall, two correspondents of RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq. Domestic media tend to be tools of specific Iraqi sects and factions. Independent journalists risk their lives every day.

Our success is reflected in part in huge audiences. Every week, 73 percent of Iraqi adults—some 9.5 million people—listen to or watch one of the four BBG broadcasters serving the country, including Alhurra TV, Radio Sawa, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq, and VOA Kurdish.

Alhurra is the fourth leading TV channel among hundreds of channels available by satellite and locally with 32 percent daily, and 64 percent weekly reach. It is also among Iraqis' top choices for news and information on TV. Radio Sawa is the most listened-to radio station in Iraq, with 23 percent weekly reach, and is among Iraqis' top three sources for news on the radio. Radio Free Iraq, with 10 percent weekly reach, is among the top five radio stations for news. In addition, VOA Kurdish reaches 12 percent of its target audience weekly.

The challenges have been significant. At the start of the conflict in Iraq, we had no established broadcasting platform in the country—no local facilities, no in-country transmission, no significant national audience. Broad anti-Americanism deepened after the war began, posing significant credibility hurdles. At the same time, Iraqi and foreign media outlets proliferated, intensifying competition.

Our progress has been due principally to three factors. First, we quickly set up local operations, including news bureaus. Second, early on we secured local transmission for both radio and TV, including FM and TV stations in major Iraqi cities—important to Alhurra's early ability to gain market share while satellite dish ownership spread. And third, BBG broadcasters have sustained 24/7 news and information coverage, pegged to developments and issues on the ground in Iraq and in synch with the needs and preferences of Iraqi audiences.

Local presence and feel, excellent domestic distribution, and highly relevant news and other programming—this has been the formula that has won BBG broadcasters their wide Iraqi following.

At the same time, our broadcasters give Iraqis comprehensive regional and international news, including in-depth coverage of U.S. society, culture, and policies. Indeed, reporting on the United States is a competitive advantage for BBG broadcasters with news from Washington on U.S. Iraq policy and plans that are directly relevant to Iraqi citizens.

BBG strategy stresses a multimedia approach and leverages the unique strengths of each of the four broadcasters to target discrete Iraqi audience segments with custom-tailored content.

ALHURRA IRAQ

Most Iraqis get their news from TV, and thus a strong TV presence in Iraq is important for the BBG. Alhurra Iraq is a 24/7 news and information channel, and an off-shoot of the Alhurra network for the broader Middle East. Alhurra Iraq targets Iraqi news-seekers 25 years of age and older with rich local content and coverage of the region and the United States from the pan-Arab stream.

More than 30 percent of Alhurra Iraq's schedule is specific to Iraq, including primetime broadcast hours of 7–10 p.m., when the channel's premier newscast, Iraq's news program of record, airs.

Driving Alhurra Iraq's national coverage is its large Baghdad bureau and network of in-country correspondents. They speak the local dialect and intuitively grasp their fellow citizens' hopes and hardships. Their stories can be uniquely empowering:

When the Iraqi Government threatened to destroy the homes of Iraqis who lacked property deeds, Alhurra investigated with on-camera interviews of the responsible officials, who then reversed course, sparing thousands from homelessness.

When injured Iraqi soldiers were denied medical care and insurance, Alhurra broke the story, leading to the first-ever Iraqi hospital for wounded veterans.

And, when a young boy lost his parents and his leg in a bombing, Alhurra told his story, prompting Iraq's Minister of Work and Social Affairs to place him in an orphanage with coverage of his medical costs.

Such stories might seem ordinary. But in Iraq, with no tradition of press freedom, they are in fact a glimpse of a nascent Fourth Estate.

Complementing Alhurra Iraq's national coverage is programming from Alhurra's pan-Arab stream that also stretches the boundaries of freedom of speech and tolerance. Equality and Women's Views, weekly programs, address taboo topics like polygamy and spousal abuse. Eye on Democracy, also weekly, examines sensitive subjects like Islam and democracy and human rights in the Arab world.

Alhurra's newest innovation—both for the pan-Arab stream and Alhurra Iraq—is Al Youm ("Today"), a live, 3-hour, daily news magazine that originates simultaneously from Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Washington. Patterned on the popular "Today" show in the United States but designed to air in the evening, Al Youm combines the latest news from three continents with an eclectic and engaging mix of health, entertainment, sports, technology, business, and other features.

With every broadcast, Al Youm bridges divides among the countries of the region and between the region and the United States. Indeed, it connects cultures in a way few Arab outlets are disposed to doing. And its multisourced reporting offers breadth of coverage seen nowhere else—like a recent news report on Darfur with views of officials in Khartoum and Cairo, and a report from Jerusalem on Israel's program of asylum for Darfurian refugees.

In-depth coverage of the United States is built into Al Youm and carried forth across the Alhurra network. Alhurra is the only Arabic-language television network with correspondents dedicated to the White House, Congress, Pentagon, and State Department. News reports and in-depth programs like "Inside Washington" provide Iraqi viewers with an unparalleled look at the U.S. political process, including interviews with the figures that impact policy, people as diverse as Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman.

Alhurra's coverage of the 2008 Presidential elections showcased its U.S. reporting strengths. The network carried live reports and talk shows from the key primary states, wall-to-wall reporting from both Republican and Democratic political conventions, and live coverage of election-day activities and election-night returns.

Commenting on Alhurra's election coverage, the popular pan-Arab newspaper Al Hayat wrote, "With the heated elections race in the United States, Alhurra distinguished itself as the most professional and active satellite TV channel among all the Arabic-speaking satellite channels . . . "

RADIO SAWA

Radio Sawa is Alhurra's companion network, and for Iraq, it also produces a dedicated programming stream that provides comparable Iraq-specific news as well as short information and interactive features tailored to the tastes of young Iraqis and designed specifically for the station's contemporary Arabic/Western music format.

Radio use overall in Iraq has been declining in recent years in tandem with the rise of TV and as such, most Iraqi radio stations have lost audience. However, Sawa's listenership has dropped much less than others.

FM Radio is an intimate local medium. Sawa's local presence and feel have been essential to its staying power. Its transmitter network has grown from one in Baghdad in 2003 to 14 nationwide today. Its music, chosen for its specific appeal to Iraqis, keeps the station's sound fresh. And its local news originates from the same Baghdad hub that serves Alhurra Iraq.

While Iraqis turn to TV first for news, they also listen to news on the radio. Sawa's format is meant to attract younger audiences who would not otherwise consume news. And it works.

Extensive research to test what Sawa listeners do when the news comes on reveals that the vast majority either pay equal or greater attention—contrary to the behavior one might expect of young people tuning in first for music.

Attracting and holding audience for the information content is important to maximize the value of programs like Sawa's Straight to the Point, which includes interviews with Iraqi decisionmakers and senior officials answering questions about the most prominent security, political or social issue of the day.

Indeed, Sawa pushes the envelope on its format to incorporate the maximum amount of value-added content without alienating the audience.

Interaction with the audience plays a key role. Every day, Sawa poses a different question to its audience through its Sawa Chat feature on topics such as family life, democracy, the arts, etc. Listeners call in to voice their opinions, and their views are aired throughout the following day.

Sawa Chat exemplifies the open discussion of ideas and creates community around shared views. In doing so, it adds another component to Radio Sawa's profile of a station uniquely Iraq and yet one modeling a free press that conveys a popular, democratic spirit taking hold across Iraq.

RADIO FREE IRAQ

Radio Free Iraq (RFI) is a news and information service focused on Iraq's transition to democracy. It specializes in political reporting to complement the broad-based news and information and mass audience engagement of Alhurra Iraq and Radio Sawa.

Like Radio Sawa, RFI is a local broadcaster in Iraq. It airs 10 hours of programming daily nationwide on its own network of FM transmitters.

Typifying RFI's news reporting has been its coverage of the dispute over Iraq's elections. RFI has been on top of the story, exploring the controversy over "closed" versus "open" party lists, seeking out popular opinion, and covering the debate in Parliament.

In a similar vein, RFI's reporters have been deeply engaged in covering the bitter controversy over Iraq's efforts to pass a new oil and gas law. It has looked not only at the problems within Iraq but also the dispute between Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government over control of energy resources in northern Iraq. RFI has provided in-depth analysis on the energy issue from some of the best national, regional and international experts.

On this, as with RFI coverage generally, it explains how the leading issues of the day fit into the bigger picture in a way local Iraqi media, with more limited resources and partisan leanings, could not do.

As one director of RFI put it: "In Iraq . . . opinions are so intolerant of one another, and there are so many news organizations that belong to political groups and deliver these groups' political agendas . . . We are committed to trying to present as many points of view as we can, and put them in a civilized debate."

This is RFI's contribution to the BBG's aim of empowering audiences and, in turn, to Iraq's transition to more free and democratic society.

VOA KURDISH

VOA is the only U.S. broadcaster—indeed, the only Western broadcaster—to serve Kurdish-speaking Iraqis (15–20 percent of the Iraqi population) in their own language. VOA airs 4 hours daily of programming in both the Sorani and Kurmanji dialects to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, reaching as well Kurds in neighboring countries of Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

VOA Kurdish provides its target audience with a service tailored to their needs and sensibilities as a minority within greater Iraq. The news is broad-based, covering developments in Iraq, the Middle East, and the world, but reflects Kurdish interests. Programs feature panel discussions with Kurds in the greater Middle East region and in the diaspora. Music is both Kurdish and American.

Novel in the universe of BBG programs is the Kurdish service's children's program, Shining Star, which addresses topics ranging from the environment to education and hygiene. Kurdish children and their parents from all over the world contact the program to participate.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari have expressed their appreciation to VOA for taking the lead in presenting objective, balanced and comprehensive news and information for Kurdish audiences in the Middle East.

VOA Kurdish is also available via the Internet, and increasingly its stories are redistributed via the Web.

REACHING THE AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN BORDER REGION

The epicenter of Taliban and al-Qaeda operations lies in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. From there, the Taliban organize and launch offensives against the people of Afghanistan and U.S. and NATO forces. Also from there, they have begun aggressive, routine assaults on key Pakistani targets, including the attack on Pakistan's military headquarters in Rawalpindi last weekend.

Propaganda plays a major role in the extremists' campaign for dominance. Indeed, the Taliban aims to project power and control as much as actually to wield power and control. As Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff has written, "Each beheading, each bombing and each beating sends a powerful message or, rather, is a powerful message."

Taliban propaganda traffics in lies and outright distortions. Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, has told the story of a Pakistani Ambassador kidnapped by the Taliban who challenged his captors in dialogue to show him where in the Koran suicide bombings were justified. When they retrieved a copy, they handed it to him, because they were illiterate. They had heard suicide bombings justified by Taliban propagandists on the radio.

As Ambassador Holbrooke has urged: The insurgents' propaganda "needs to be dealt with head on. We can't concede the battle to the Taliban."

Radio is the dominant medium in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Through radio, the insurgents pour out their disinformation and hate. Radio is the means by which BBG broadcasters can and will counter their propaganda—not with propaganda of a different sort, but with objective, comprehensive journalism that conveys factual, balanced news and information.

BBG broadcasts in Dari and Pashto blanket Afghanistan, and our Urdu programming serves Pakistan nationwide. For the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area, we initiated in 2006 a dedicated service by the Voice of America, in the unique regional Pashto dialect, called Deewa Radio.

Deewa focuses on local issues and produces 9 hours of daily programming, including live news, current affairs, call-in shows, and music. It transmits via AM, FM, and shortwave, with text and audio available on the Internet. Of the 9 hours of programming, 3 were recently added in a surge to provide a morning program to complement Deewa's nighttime hours.

Data on Deewa's audience from the BBG's first audience survey in the region are just now coming in. An earlier study by the U.S. Agency for International Development suggested Deewa had a wide following. We see robust audience reaction everyday in some 400 listener phone calls to on-air discussion programs.

This initial feedback and other qualitative research indicate that local Pashto speakers, mostly in Pakistan but on the Afghan side of the border as well, seek engagement—they want their voices heard. Certainly the back-drop is Taliban propaganda, but also the relative isolation in which the region's inhabitants live with little opportunity for political expression. Deewa is giving them a voice.

One listener in the Swat Valley said Deewa Radio was "the only source of information" there. Many listeners in the regions of Waziristan, Swat, and Bajaur have told the station that they plan their activities around Deewa's broadcasts.

Key to Deewa's success is what has worked so well in Afghanistan—news and information tailored to the audience's needs and interests. The station maintains a network of some 25 local stringers who file a steady stream of reports such topics as the Pakistani military's campaign against Taliban forces and those displaced by Taliban threats or combat.

But it is not only political news that interests the audience. Focus group research in Pakistan among Deewa listeners shows they want a broad-based information service that touches on social and cultural issues and developments as well. The research also shows that Pakistanis who otherwise dislike the United States will listen to broadcasts under the VOA brand—provided they observe strict objectivity.

Those who are internally displaced as a result of Pakistan's military campaigns against the Taliban also find a voice in Deewa. A refugee in the Swabi Mansoor camp said during a recent program, "If Deewa was not here, (we, refugees) would have been disgraced, destroyed, unknown to the world. It is Deewa which talks about (our) problems . . . "

As a result of their uncompromising reporting, VOA stringers have been repeatedly threatened by Taliban militants—and some of the threats have been realized.

In July, the home of VOA Deewa reporter Rahman Bunairee was blown up by men declaring their allegiance to the Taliban and claiming retaliation against reporting by VOA. Mr. Bunairee escaped to Islamabad and eventually to the United States, where we now hope to continue his service to Deewa.

Deewa has done and will continue to do its excellent work. With the rise in the insurgency and its increased propaganda efforts, however, further BBG support for broadcasting to Afghanistan-Pakistan border region is on its way.

Earlier this year, to complement Deewa, Congress endorsed new RFE/RL Pashto broadcasts for the border region. Working in cooperation with Voice of America's Deewa Radio, the new Radio Azadi will broadcast 6 hours daily. With reporters on both sides of the border and throughout Pakistan, and with a bureau, security per-

mitting, in Peshawar or another city, the new service will reach out and begin to combat the radical broadcasting in Pakistan.

Once fully operational, Azadi will have the capacity to send headlines and breaking news to listeners via mobile phones and SMS text messages. Cell phone ownership is widespread in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and while less so in the border region, the new text messaging capacity will nonetheless let the BBG engage people well beyond the reach of insurgent broadcasters.

We at the BBG are deeply aware of what is at stake across Afghanistan and Pakistan and are committed to ensuring that the people of the region have continuous access to timely and accurate news about the events around them. Through our dedicated services, we provide the antidote to the violent messages and lies of the insurgency.

CONCLUSION

BBG broadcasters are an independent yet integral part of a global U.S. Government communication effort that seeks to advance U.S. national interests. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, there are scores of State and DOD public diplomacy and strategic communication activities. And yet U.S. international broadcasting has a distinct niche—objective journalism.

Our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has yielded important lessons for broadcasting effectiveness. First, we play a critical role in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan that lack adequate press freedom and credible alternative media. Second, we succeed when (a) we deliver the news our audiences want and need to make informed judgments about their societies, and (b) we deliver our content via the media our audiences prefer and can easily access.

This is a simple formula but one that requires deft, professional execution.

At the end of the day, to recall the words of Vice President Biden at the commemoration of the BBG's independence in 1999, what we seek is to empower our audiences in their struggle for freedom and democracy.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, our objective journalism arms our audiences against fear-mongering and propaganda of sectarianism and violent extremism. Consistent truth telling will, over time, trump fear and propaganda.

We would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Senator KAUFMAN. Great. Thank you very much for that testimony.

You know, when we first started broadcasting in the Middle East, U.S. international broadcasting, a lot of people said no one will listen to our broadcasting and no one will trust our broadcasting. Numbers like 56 percent in Afghanistan and 73 percent in Iraq are really quite extraordinary.

First, I would like your comment on, Is that truly extraordinary? And second is, Why do you think people listen to this broadcasting in such large numbers? And how important is it to have an audience of this size to fulfill your mission?

Mr. BLAYA. Well, as a domestic commercial broadcaster, generating audiences is the first indication that your programming is having an impact. The numbers for Iraq speak for themselves. The penetration that U.S. international broadcasting has in Iraq is beyond anyone's expectations. Distribution also has been a very important element of the success of our radio and television operations in Iraq. But fundamentally, we are providing people with the news and information that they want, with access to local information that they might not get from services that are sectarian or government-sponsored. I think the formula is the formula that has worked traditionally over half a century of U.S. international broadcasting.

Senator KAUFMAN. Mr. Hirschberg.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Let me add one more thing. When you take a look at the independent research and you go to a place like Afghanistan and you see that when the questions are asked, are our pro-

gramming and our broadcasts credible or mostly credible, you are in the 90th percentile and above combined on those two things as opposed to not credible or inherently not credible. They are either mostly credible or partly credible. That is an extraordinary comment upon the quality of the broadcasts and the reach and an indication as to why people listen because they find them credible and they find them independent.

Senator KAUFMAN. Mr. Simmons.

Mr. SIMMONS. Just to add to that, I also reinforce the point that Governor Blaya made about distribution. Our country has made a sizable investment in the transmission capability for our programming, and without it, we simply would not have this kind of an audience in Afghanistan that you referred to. So we have a medium wave, which is a large AM broadcast. We have FM broadcasting. We have television broadcasting. And I think the ability to access the population is a critical component of why our audiences are so high.

Of course, I completely agree with my colleagues on the need for—the programming itself is—and I will say a second thing that was not mentioned, which is research is also critical to having a large audience. We have an extensive research program at the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Just like when you run for office, you want to have good polling organization to look at what the issues are, we as broadcasters need to know what issues are of concern to the audience we are trying to reach. And then when we do our programming, are there things that they do not like or that we could change, whether it is in the format or the issues we cover. So I think research, which has been done extensively in both of these countries, is important.

And then third, of course, as my colleagues have said, is having good, objective journalism which in a lot of these places that we broadcast to around the world, especially in the ones we are talking about, has been hard to find, and we offer it.

Senator KAUFMAN. Just a broad thing. How does this broadcasting of the Broadcasting Board of Governors reflect the foreign policy of the United States? What is the process you go through?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. First of all, we are in contact with other branches of the Government, especially the State Department. We have a formal process at the BBG, as you know. Once a year, by statute, we consult with the State Department on the administration's priorities and where they would like to see us broadcast and where it may be not so important for us to broadcast. And we have a formal review process every year to determine which languages we broadcast in and which we should not broadcast in anymore and what the reach is of those language services, what the impact is of those language services, all in connection with the implementation of our strategic plan for 2008 to 2013.

It is an iterative process. It is more than just once a year. We are in constant touch with the State Department and other branches of the Government, and we do have people in our professionals on the BBG staff who do sit in on policy discussions at the National Security Council and other places in the Government.

Senator KAUFMAN. Can you spend a few minutes and just talk about how you maintain broadcasting quality?

Mr. BLAYA. Senator, I know this was, while you were at the BBG, always one of your main concerns, and you were the first person that described to me how it is that this was done. So I have it in front of me and I will go in details because of the importance that you have always placed on it.

First of all, the United States was the first country that broadcast in the languages of the audiences that it wanted to reach, versus a BBC that was all in English.

Second, it was essential that we have the native language capabilities, and that means up through the management chain, the regional division directors and editors all speak the native language.

The second point was the editorial controls and guidance, which were established years ago. We rely on the expertise and judgment of language service heads and line editors to ensure that the news met the highest standards of professional journalism.

Third, we have a performance review process which includes independent audience market research. We undergo rigorous annual review performed by an office separate from the language service itself. This review incorporates a wide range of research inputs produced independently by BBG global research programs.

Fourth, we have specific program evaluations. We commission, when circumstances warrant, leading schools of journalism, as we have recently done with Missouri and Washington University and other expert bodies, to conduct specific in-depth programming evaluations. Over the years, these extraordinary reviews have provided incredible information and assessments of selective services, including MBN Russia and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

Senator KAUFMAN. Thank you.

Senator Wicker.

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much. I appreciate the testimony so far.

This is a hearing about broadcasting into war zones. Our goal in the war zones is to be successful in our military efforts.

Put yourself in a town meeting in Dover or Tupelo and the taxpayers are asking about a budget of $682 million of taxpayer dollars and help us formulate an answer as to how we measure success in the use of the funds, particularly in Afghanistan and in Iraq. We have testimony today that truth serves the national interest. I think the taxpayers might be justified in saying show me how that concretely serves the national interest.

I have heard you say today we are giving the people the news and information they want, a laudable goal. How does that help Americans in Dover and Tupelo? How does that justify the expenditure?

"A broad penetration," "reach," "credible broadcasts." Has it benefited our war effort at all? In the time we have been in Afghanistan, have we seen positive political trends toward the United States? Have we seen positive military trends because of what the BBG is responsible for? Have we won any hearts and minds?

Mr. SIMMONS. With respect to—well, first of all, I think it is a good question and I think it is a question that should be asked about all of the programs that our Federal Government spends money on; $600-plus million is a lot of money.

I think that in terms of the situation in Afghanistan, we have seen the Taliban/al-Qaeda forces using the media to propagate information that is not accurate, using radio stations, illegal radio stations, to broadcast information that distorts what is happening on the ground and what is happening in their country, that distorts the role of the United States and distorts the role of the Karzai government. And I think by our efforts, we act as a counterweight to that.

I would point you to polling data. We can supply it offline to you and the committee that does indicate that the attitudes of the Afghan people toward what American forces are doing are positive and what the Taliban/al-Qaeda are doing are negative.

Senator WICKER. This would be what polling company?

Mr. SIMMONS. This is a polling that we research, that we hire researchers for.

Senator WICKER. Commissioned by the BBG.

Mr. SIMMONS. Correct, yes.

Senator WICKER. OK. Well, I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Simmons be allowed to supplement his answer with that information.

Senator KAUFMAN. Without objection.

Senator WICKER. Go ahead.

Mr. SIMMONS. So I think we play a role by doing that and providing accurate information in that war zone.

And in the border region, just quickly, there have been a number of stories about the same phenomenon going on on the Pakistan side of the border with the Taliban. We hope that Radio Deewa, which has now gotten increased distribution in the last few months, will play a similar role there as well.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Let me add to that. Just let me start with Alhurra television for a moment in Iraq before I go on to Afghanistan.

Prior to 2004, when it came to television in the Middle East, the United States was not on the playing field. We were up and running within 5 months of funding on a 24/7 stream for the 22 Arab-speaking countries and to Iraq and a separate stream for Iraq, as Mr. Blaya has testified about.

It would be unfortunate——

Senator WICKER. That was at the request of the State Department, no doubt.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. That was at our initiative.

Senator WICKER. Your initiative, OK.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. And Radio Sawa, prior to 9/11, was at our initiative as well, although RFE/RL to the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan in this go-round is a congressional initiative that was basically sponsored by Senators Lieberman and Kyl, the additional funding for that $10 million.

We were nowhere on the field then. Our competitors, just by way of example, are expending an extraordinary amount of money to compete our broadcasts. Al Jazeera has—although we do not know quite what the number is, but we expect it is north of $300 million—45 bureaus to do their broadcasts. We have four. The Russians have upped their spending on international broadcasting in

Arabic and other languages. It has been reported recently that the Chinese Government has committed $6 billion to communications.

The BBG does not do messaging. Our broadcasters do not do messaging. So if you are asking for a one-to-one correlation as to whether or not for every dollar we spend we can change hearts and minds, we cannot do that for you. We cannot give you that. That research is not available to us.

But what is available to us is that we know we have an impact. We know that people like our broadcasting. We know that people listen to our broadcasting. We know that people call into our broadcasting. We know that they participate. We know that we are engaging their publics in a way and through targeted research that has never been done before. So from that standpoint, we think that indirectly we do have that kind of impact that you are looking for.

Mr. BLAYA. Now, let me add to that, Senator, because if we did not exist, MBN would have to be created. And I will give you just three recent reports, for example, even though I will start from the very beginning that you do not talk about competition. You do not use your time to talk about your competitor, but in this case I will because it brings the point that Governor Hirschberg was describing home.

In a recent case, Samir al-Kuntar was convicted in an Israeli court for murder of an Israeli policeman, Eliyahu Shahar, a 31-year-old, Danny Haran, and Haran's 4-year-old daughter. He spent nearly 3 decades in prison before being released as part of the Israeli-Hezbollah prisoner swap. Al-Kuntar was considered a national hero by some Lebanese, and he was given a hero's welcome upon his return. Al Jazeera threw an on-air birthday party for the released Lebanese terrorist.

On one of the post popular shows that Al Jazeera has on a regular basis—it is called "Opposite Directions"—the host repeatedly claimed that 98 percent of Americans hate muslims without providing any source or statistics.

And I should stop there because I could give you a list of things that occur on a regular basis on the main voice in the Middle East, therefore, the importance of us providing the other side of the story and the news that people would never hear if we were not there.

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much.

Senator KAUFMAN. Senator Shaheen, can I just ask one point before you question?

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure.

Senator KAUFMAN. In these areas, where would people hear U.S. policy on any issues if U.S. international broadcasting was not there?

Mr. BLAYA. Well, let us go back to the 2008 election in which Alhurra and Sawa did extraordinary coverage of the whole electoral process in the United States, providing a window as to how democracy operates with extended coverage of local elections to the national stage, to the Republican and Democratic conventions, providing a window to many of the societies as to how a democracy operates and how we can have divergent points of view is an extraordinary case of allowing them access to something that they will never see in the worlds they live in.

In the case of the newest show of the Alhurra television network, Al Youm, which I covered earlier, as important as it is to provide news and information about the world and the United States, this show is serving as a unique platform in the region for voices of modernity, discourse, different opinions, for Arab nations to be able to talk among themselves on issues of interest, of women's rights, of freedom and democracy, of human rights, things that we take for granted in the United States but will not be seen. You will not see issues of women's rights in Al Jazeera. You will not see them in Arabiya. We serve as a unique platform in the region not only for us telling those audiences our perspective, but for them to tell their new perspectives and ideas to each other.

Senator KAUFMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for appearing here.

I would like to follow up a little bit more with what Senator Wicker has raised relative to how do you measure success of the broadcasts. You have talked about some of the anecdotes and about your own internal efforts to research among the population what the listening audiences are.

Are there other ways that you should be thinking about to measure success, and what are those? And are you looking at doing anything else in the future?

Mr. SIMMONS. Well, the measures that we look at are, first of all, what is the reach, how many people do we reach. So audience-measure is very important. Second, we look at what the audience thinks about our broadcasting, are we reliable, are we trustworthy. So I think in those two areas, we can have a pretty good measurement of how many people are listening and do they think we are trustworthy.

Third, in answer to yours and also Senator Kaufman's question, one of the Voice of America's mandates is we are to cover American foreign policy and we are to cover America and its institutions and its people. And there is so much misinformation about America in a lot of the places we broadcast to about what our policies are and who we are as a people, that we consider it important to convey programming that sets the record straight with our policy and sets the record straight with what the American people think.

For example, Governor Blaya pointed out Al Jazeera broadcasts. We are not 98 percent anti-Muslim. We run shows on VOA on a regular basis about how muslims live in America, and we profile them and try to make it sort of a reality show to show that there is not the kind of situation for them that is perceived abroad.

So those are some of the ways we measure impact. It is difficult to—and I will just close and hand it over to my colleagues. But it is difficult to, as Governor Hirschberg said, sort of say you are changing attitudes in a particular place because the attitudes toward America and what we are doing are affected by so many different things.

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure.

Mr. SIMMONS. I mean, if people do not like our attitude toward an Arab country or whatever policy, whatever we broadcast—I mean, they are going to continue to have that attitude.

Senator SHAHEEN. Let me just follow up on one of the things you said. Excuse me, Governor Hirschberg.

You talked about do people trust what they are hearing in the broadcast. How do you determine that, given the difficulty of polling research in places like Afghanistan where it is very hard to be in touch with your audience on the one hand and, on the other, to determine any sort of objective sample for who is listening?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Senator, I am delighted you asked the question. We are in touch with our audience. We are in touch with them and interact with them through our programming on a daily basis.

But the manner in which we measure not just impact and reach but understanding as well is through independent research. We contract with Intermedia and they contract with A.C. Nielsen, IPSOS, and other independent research organizations to conduct their research for us. If we did this ourselves internally, nobody would believe us. So we do have independent organizations that go out and research this for us. And the research measures things that we have already talked about and it informs our programming. If we need to change programming, modify it if we have to look for new audiences or reach audiences in different ways, our research does that as well. So it is independent of us.

Senator SHAHEEN. So who makes those programming decisions?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Our professional journalists make those programming decisions and the language services. As board members, we do not.

Senator SHAHEEN. You talked about the broadcast directed at the border regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. How much of greater Pakistan is listening to the programming?

Mr. SIMMONS. Well, the board took the initiative several years ago to create a program that would reach all of Pakistan. At the time, we had a very small audience. And we first created a radio network called Radio Aap ki Dunyaa, which in Urdu means Your World Radio. And it is an AM signal, and now it reaches all of Pakistan. It has about 6 million listeners that listen at least once a week. Radio is more popular in the rural areas. So that is where that is focused for the most part.

And then we said, well, we want to look at the urban areas, and we created a television program called "Beyond the Headlines" which runs every night five nights a week for half an hour on GEO, which is the most popular cable network in Pakistan. And that also reaches close to 6 million viewers at night.

So together they reach between 11 million and 12 million people every week.

We have recently—and by recently, real recently, in the last few weeks—agreed with the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation to carry the radio station not just on this AM network, but on FMs throughout the country. So I think the audience will increase.

So that is the mechanism and those are the audience figures. We do not have exact audience figures for the border region, which you asked about. We are the only international broadcaster now reaching that region in Pashto, which is the language spoken there. And we are doing research right now. So we will have that answer for you. But everything we get back is it is widely listened to and

widely respected. Again, it is the only international broadcaster that is really bringing this news comprehensively in a balanced way.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. My time has expired, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KAUFMAN. Are you using the same techniques in general that were used during the cold war and the Second World War?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. You mean the same techniques for——

Senator KAUFMAN. Same types of techniques.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. No. The world has changed. We have an Internet, which we did not have then. We have television which we did not have then. We have SMS which we did not have then. We have podcasting which we did not have then. We have Internet streaming which we did not have then.

The goal of the BBG is to deliver appropriate programming on multimedia independent platforms wherever we can do so. In some places of the world, we have the resources to do all it. In other parts of the world, we only have the resources to do one of those delivery platforms, and in some parts of the world, only one delivery platform is appropriate because the rest of it, for the most part, does not exist. So it really depends upon which country we broadcast to or which language service we are talking about.

Senator WICKER. May I interject?

Senator KAUFMAN. Sure.

Senator WICKER. How many of those exist in Afghanistan?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Radio is the most popular medium by far.

Senator WICKER. Internet at all?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. I think it is roughly 3 to 4 percent maybe. Not even that high? It is not even that large?

Senator WICKER. Cell phones?

Mr. SIMMONS. Cell phones are about—in Afghanistan, Internet is not a factor. So we cannot really use that mechanism. Almost 50 percent of the population is estimated to have a cell phone. We are right now working on methods to reach the audience that uses cell phones. One thing that we have to keep in mind is there is a very large illiteracy rate in Afghanistan. So we cannot do texting as much as we might think. So we are looking at, can we do audio streaming and that kind of thing in addition to texting.

Senator WICKER. And hardly any television.

Mr. SIMMONS. We do have television in Afghanistan. It is not as popular, as Governor Hirschberg indicated. Over 90 percent of the population owns a radio. About 49 percent own a television. So we do about an hour per night of television, which we just began a couple of years ago, called TV Ashna. It is popular, and we get a significant amount of viewing from it. But most of our listenership at this point in Afghanistan still comes from radio.

Senator KAUFMAN. Spend a few minutes, because I think Senator Wicker has asked a very, very important question, about what do you say when you are in a town meeting in Tupelo or any other town.

So during the cold war, there were questions about the effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting. What did we find after the cold war was over in terms of people's reaction to how effective

United States international broadcasting had been to bring about changes in the former Soviet Union?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Well, if you talk to Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, any number of the people that we have talked to over the years, you know the effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting because it has been widely credited with helping end the totalitarianism of that period. And indeed, in 1993, Boris Yeltsin gave Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty a special decree to broadcast in Russia as a result of that, and that, unfortunately, was revoked by President Putin some 10 years later. But, nonetheless, for the 10 years that it was there, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty had a special place in Russia. Voice of America had a special place in Russia and in the former Soviet Union as well, a very special place.

And not just anecdotally, but when you have the number of people that even today come up to governors of U.S. international broadcasting or our broadcast entities and say that—you have to be of a certain age now—but say that during those years they would miss everything but one of our broadcasts, you know the effectiveness it has had.

We are experiencing around the world today the same type of reaction to U.S. international broadcasting. You know, Senator Wicker, I am from Oshkosh, WI, not from Tupelo, MS, but I have to answer the same types of questions. And I look at U.S. international broadcasting and part of the problem with U.S. international broadcasting is it does not have a wide domestic constituency. That is because of Smith-Mundt, we are prohibited from broadcasting within the confines of the continental United States. But I think our constituencies in Congress and in the countries that we broadcast to, in the State Department, within the military who understand what we do are very high and very strong.

Senator KAUFMAN. Can you kind of tell us what the difference is between broadcasting like PSYOPs where you take a basic message that the Government has and put it out as opposed to the kind of broadcasting we do in terms of effectiveness and which one would be more effective in your opinion in Afghanistan and Iraq?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Well, I really would prefer not to comment on the Department of Defense's PSYOPs.

Senator KAUFMAN. No. I am not talking about the Department of Defense's PSYOPs, but just the concept of broadcasting propaganda.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Well, I think people lose their taste for it after a while once they recognize what it is. Our mission statement is very simple and it is in a sentence. For those that have not remembered it or need a reminder like I do, I am going to tell you what it is, and it is in one sentence. "To promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multimedia communication of accurate, objective, and balanced news, information, and programming about America and the world to audiences overseas."

We are a straight journalistic organization that provides objective news and information and balanced news and information in the American tradition. And we believe that when we do that, our research figures and our audience figures show the audiences to which we broadcast and communicate find us credible.

Senator KAUFMAN. And how would you characterize the movement of free press around the world? Are most countries getting freer in their press and do not need as much of what the U.S. international broadcasting does, or is it more?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. It is in retreat. Free press is in retreat around the world. In one of my other iterations, as you know, I am a trustee of Freedom House, and our latest analysis for freedom in the world in 2009, nations in transition, 2009, all shows a retreat of press freedom in the world; not enhancing press freedom in the world.

So in my personal view and I think in the view of all of us on this board, our existence is mission-critical to U.S. strategic and foreign policy interests, and it would be a shame to have it diminished in any way.

Senator KAUFMAN. How important is it to broadcast in the local language?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. In certain places in the world, it is absolutely critical because in the vernacular for the surrogate broadcasters, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, in some cases Mideast Broadcast News, and in some cases places in the world, Voice of America provides that function as well. And so does Office of Cuba broadcasting. But it is critical because those populations do not—there is no free press in most of these places, and they do not obtain from their own press, from their own media domestic sources balanced and objective news and information about their own populations. That was true in the Soviet Union. It is true today in other places of the world in which we broadcast.

Senator KAUFMAN. Governor Simmons.

Mr. SIMMONS. Just to quickly add that I completely agree with Governor Hirschberg. I would just add that there still is, we believe, an important role for English to be broadcast around the world, and in certain places we maintain our English broadcasts because there is an audience there. We think it is important to keep it on the Internet. So, yes, we need to emphasize and put most of our focus on the vernacular languages, but we still feel there is a role for English.

Senator KAUFMAN. Senator Wicker.

Senator WICKER. Thank you, and I appreciate your in-depth answers to all of these questions.

Let me just ask some brief questions, sort of a cleanup. Are we getting all of the cooperation from the Governments of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan with regard to access rights? Anyplace we have asked to broadcast which we are not getting full cooperation?

Mr. SIMMONS. I will speak about the Afghanistan/sort of Pakistan region, and I will let Governor Blaya speak about Iraq or the Mideast if you want to broaden it because the question was broad, a little bit.

We have gotten cooperation, but there have been challenges. For example, right now we have a transmitter that is vital to broadcasting to the border region. We have spent funds on it. We can have this transmitter turned on, Senator, in a matter of weeks, and the Minister of Information in Afghanistan is holding us up and

not allowing us to do this despite the agreement previously to allow us to do it.

Senator WICKER. A member of the Karzai administration.

Mr. SIMMONS. Correct. Exactly correct. And we have asked repeatedly. The State Department has asked repeatedly on our behalf. And it is very disappointing, given the sacrifice that this country is making in the Afghan theater in terms of resources and blood, to have this kind of lack of cooperation from a member of the Karzai government. So that is one area——

Senator WICKER. What justification do they offer?

Mr. SIMMONS. None really. It is just bureaucratic delay. We are not given any real rationale. It is sort of paper shuffling, to be honest. If there was an explanation, at least we could have a debate about it. I mean, it has been approved up until the stage of being turned on. So there was some discussion about them wanting to control everything that went out on the transmitter so that if there was anything "anti-Afghan"——

Senator WICKER. That would be different from what we have agreed to in every instance. Would it not?

Mr. SIMMONS. Yes. We cannot be at the whim of a bureaucrat to sort of tell us you cannot broadcast that. We have to be independent journalists, and we broadcast throughout Afghanistan, as we have talked about before, without that measure. For whatever reason, this is being thrust our way at this point with this particular transmitter.

Senator WICKER. Are there any informal fees that need to be paid or are being requested?

Mr. SIMMONS. I will let my brother——

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Absolutely not, not by us. So the answer to that is "No." The State Department is the transmitter——

Senator WICKER. So that is never raised by another government because they know that it is absolutely out of the question.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Well, they know that it is forbidden under the United States Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. In every one of the BBG contracts for transmission, whether it is from the International Broadcasting Bureau or any of our other entities, there is a statement in the agreements that no fees have been paid. So we get a commitment on that. That is not the problem here.

I must say the State Department has been extremely helpful to us. Ambassador Holbrooke has been personally very helpful to us, and right now we are just stymied. We cannot get that transmitter turned on.

Mr. SIMMONS. And I also might add that the Congress was generous, as has been mentioned before, in authorizing and appropriating $10 million for a service that is to use that transmitter. Enough said, but that is the situation there.

In Pakistan, generally in the border region—Pakistan now has opened up a lot for us. So under President Musharraf, we had a lot of regulations that were very difficult. It is still a difficult place in terms of freedom of information, but at least we are now able to lease these new FMs I talked about throughout Pakistan and broadcast news.

Otherwise, I think we, in Afghanistan, have had pretty good cooperation, aside from what we just talked about.

Do you want to talk about Iraq, Governor Blaya?

Mr. BLAYA. Well, Iraq and the Middle East is a different picture. In spite of the fact that they are closed societies and nondemocratic, through the magic of satellite, you have open distribution in the whole region for television and obviously through our FM stations in-country, as I described.

The one country in the Middle East, a major player in the Middle East, where we do not have access is Egypt. Not the over-the-air transmission, the satellite transmission on television, but the opportunity to originate locally through FM or AM stations within-country.

Senator WICKER. Well, I really did not expect that question to require that extensive of an answer, but I appreciate that.

Let me just ask: Voice of America had a seminar in Kabul, as I understand, on October 7. How out of the ordinary is that? I was surprised to learn that we did anything other than broadcasting, but I was told that Voice of America did a 2-day seminar on counternarcotics. Do we hold other seminars on other topics? Is my information correct there?

Mr. SIMMONS. We had a seminar financed by a State Department grant on narcotics, and we have—are you asking about programming on narcotics or seminars or——

Senator WICKER. Well, I was just surprised to learn that you were doing anything other than broadcasting; and holding this seminar, a 2-day seminar on counternarcotics, would seem to me to be a bit of an expansion of your mission. And so I thought I would let you respond to that on the record.

Mr. SIMMONS. Yes. My understanding, Senator, is that the seminar was actually to train journalists on how to cover the issue of narcotics. So it was related to media training.

Senator WICKER. Very well.

And then finally, public diplomacy is approached by three other agencies, State, Defense, and USAID and in different ways. I am told that under the statutes and the way that State is organized, the public diplomacy activities of State, DOD, and USAID are coordinated by Richard Holbrooke, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. To what extent are you all in on that discussion? Is Mr. Holbrooke and is his office part of the coordination effort that might include the BBG, as well as State, DOD, and USAID?

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. 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 is "No."

Senator WICKER. They suggest coverage and the area of the world where they would like you to be, but they do not suggest——

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. Content.

Senator WICKER [continuing]. The content.

Mr. HIRSCHBERG. That is correct.

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much.

Senator KAUFMAN. Thank you, Senator Wicker. I really appreciate you being here, and you have brought a lot to this discussion.

I just want to thank everyone for participating today. Hopefully we will do this again in another area of the world. Obviously, in

Afghanistan and Iraq, since we have our troops in harm's way, this is the most important thing that we can possibly be working on. I think it is really extraordinary that when you have two countries where you have 56 percent of the people in one country and 73 percent of the people in the other country listening to U.S. international broadcasting on a regular basis and getting both sides of every discussion, also programming about the United States and especially in an area of the world which, as was stated by the board, more and more it is becoming the case where there is no statement of our policy—many places in the world, they hear nothing about what American policy is; what American policy has done.

I have just got to tell a short story. And that is I was in China right after the missile hit the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, and people say, well, why is it important to be broadcasting into China? Obviously, China does everything to stop us from broadcasting.

But I was in China. I spoke to a lot of people and people in the government, and the constant refrain I had about the missile and the Belgrade Embassy was, OK, we understand accidents happen. But why did President Clinton never apologize? I said, President Clinton went on national television in the United States and around the world and apologized at great length, but no one in China ever heard the apology. In many of these places of the world, if it was not for U.S. international broadcasting, the people would never hear what any of our public officials have to say on absolutely anything.

So I think that, in addition to being the model of a free press in every country of the world that we broadcast into, people at least know what a free press is. In many places in the world, they have never had a free press. They have no understanding of free press. When you talk to their journalists, they have no idea what a free press is. So another important factor.

But I want to thank you for what you do, and I know what an incredible sacrifice all, past and present, BBG broadcasters have made. Blanquita Cullum cannot be here today, but we have had a number of folks over there who have made a contribution. So I want to thank you all.

I will leave the record open until 4 o'clock tomorrow, Friday, October 16, for any additional questions or statements that people want to make.

With that, I adjourn the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 3:55 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF JOAQUIN BLAYA, JEFFREY HIRSCHBERG, AND STEVEN SIMMONS, BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, WASHINGTON, DC, TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY

Question. The BBG's 2008–13 strategic plan calls on the BBG to cooperate more closely with U.S. Government agencies engaged in public diplomacy. This would mark a significant departure from past practice. Why did the BBG choose to make this change and what steps is the BBG taking to work more closely with U.S. public diplomacy?

Answer. U.S. international broadcasting has always been engaged with the broader U.S. Government public diplomacy community. Under USIA, the Voice of

America carried out its role under its charter that prescribed accurate, objective, and comprehensive journalism. Today, under the BBG, this journalistic mandate is prescribed for all BBG broadcasters. Yet the U.S. International Broadcasting Act did not intend that the broadcasters become "unmoored" from the broad objectives of American policy. The Secretary of State's membership on the BBG board, with the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs acting as her designee, provides for active participation by the State Department in BBG board meetings and decisionmaking. The Under Secretary receives all memoranda and other communications sent to board members.

The BBG also recognizes that U.S. international broadcasting is a vital USG public diplomacy program, albeit one with a distinct role: objective journalism. In any given country or market, especially in conflict zones, BBG broadcasting is but one of often many USG communications activities. It benefits the BBG, and the U.S. Government as whole, for the agencies carrying out these activities to know what one another is doing and how each is contributing to overall USG aims.

In furtherance of the strategic plan objectives, the BBG has become over the last several years actively engaged in interagency planning for public diplomacy and strategic communications and has taken the lead in sharing research data and analysis. The BBG has a seat at the table for the weekly Interagency Policy Committee meetings chaired by the National Security Council and is otherwise active in numerous governmentwide strategic coordination efforts. For the last several years, the BBG has cochaired an interagency research working group, has developed a Web-based, searchable database of BBG global audience and market data for governmentwide access, and has cosponsored communication research seminars on the priority countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan (with more planned for the future) to inform PD/SC strategy for practitioners and policymakers alike.

Question. Despite some recent improvements in program quality, Alhurra has been widely criticized for being ineffective at reaching Middle Eastern audiences. According to critics, the Alhurra brand is now so tarnished that the United States should stop spending tens of millions of dollars each year on this broadcasting outlet. How do you respond to these critics? How likely is it that this tarnished brand can penetrate an incredibly competitive media market in the short to medium term?

Answer. According to international research firms including ACNielsen, Alhurra has a weekly reach of more than 26 million people. Alhurra is penetrating the incredibly competitive media market across the Middle East. As noted in our testimony before the committee, Alhurra is the fourth leading TV channel in Iraq among hundreds of channels available by satellite and locally with 32 percent daily, and 64 percent, weekly reach. Alhurra is among Iraqis' top choices for news and information on TV. This is not an indication of a tarnished brand in a competitive marketplace. Research also states that audiences find the programs trustworthy, and increase their understanding of America. For example in Iraq, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of Alhurra's weekly audience finds the news to be credible. A majority of those who watch Alhurra have also reported that Alhurra has increased their understanding of U.S. policies (64 percent) and increased their understanding of current events (66 percent). These measures are derived from surveys taken by independent research organizations such as ACNielsen.

When the Middle East Broadcasting Networks were formed, there was a pressing need to revamp U.S. broadcasting to the 22 countries of the Middle East. At that time, VOA shortwave broadcasts to the region reached a very small audience (approximately 2 percent). Today, we are broadcasting 24/7 via radio and television and have transmission agreements to broadcast locally in countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Djibouti, and Cyprus, as well as via satellite on NileSat, ArabSat, and EutelSat.

Confusion over the reach of Alhurra may stem from citations from other research that is designed to measure the "most popular" stations in the Middle East, rather than to measure sustained viewership. These polls do not probe frequency of media use, and thus do not derive an audience measure. Instead, they ask what station the viewer tunes to first. In contrast, the BBG gauges audience reach and addresses actual media consumption. Millions of Arabs for whom Alhurra is not their first choice for international news nonetheless watch the channel. Indeed, BBG research shows that Arabs routinely consult multiple sources, far more than two, for news and information.

While it is a rare instance in which the programming of a U.S. international broadcasting entity, broadcasting in any medium, ranks among the most popular broadcasters in a particular market overseas, this happens to be the case for Alhurra in Iraq and for RFE/RL in Afghanistan. Alhurra figures among the top 20

stations in each of the 14 markets where the BBG has done research—except in Saudi Arabia, where it is 21st.

Question. At a time when other critical broadcasts are being cut (for instance, VOA Russia just days before the war with Georgia) could U.S. broadcasting agencies spend these resources more effectively on other activities, such as supporting independently generated content that could be broadcast on local satellite channels? Should we be spending our resources on putting more U.S. policymakers on programs that are widely watched throughout the Arab world, instead of creating a weaker competitor?

Answer. Having radio, television, and Internet programming on the air 24 hours a day provides a consistent source of accurate news and information and a place to turn for context and explanation of the United States and its policies. This opportunity is not limited to when we are able to book a USG official on air, or when the foreign-owned station will air it.

The BBG funds programming that must meet its journalistic standards, and that can be distributed via channels that it can control. Certainly the USG can, and does, fund the creation of independently generated programming that can be placed on local channels. We are not aware of any research that tracks the effectiveness of such programming, or the frequency with which such placements are made. We do not see this as an either/or proposition, but very different communications strategies. And there is room for both.

Alhurra and Radio Sawa have substantial audiences in the Arab world. Radio Sawa continues to be one of the top-rated radio stations in countries where it can be heard via FM transmitters. Alhurra is the third most popular pan-Arab news channels in the region, exceeding the audience of BBC-Arabic, Russia Today, France24 and all other nonindigenous pan-Arab news channels. Alhurra and Sawa news reports are increasingly picked up by prominent local media and utilized either on-air, in print, or posted on the Internet. Within 24 hours of Alhurra's interview with Secretary of State Clinton on November 3, there were over 30 media pickups by other press organizations in or covering the region, including by the BBC, AFP, Elaph, Alquds, Almanar, Assafir, Now Lebanon, Alwatan, Palestine Voice, and Iraq of Tomorrow. This is a strong impact indicator. In an important marketplace such as the Middle East it is important not only to have USG voices throughout the media, but also to control when the interview airs and the context of the interview. The media in the region is not truly independent; it is strongly influenced by Arab governments, either directly or indirectly. America needs its own voice in the Middle East.

There have been reductions in some areas of U.S. international broadcasting, such as to Russia, and increases in investment to the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. To a large extent, the changes to broadcasting to Russia reflect realignments of the agency's broadcast strategy, as well as market realities. The BBG has two broadcast services that provide programming in Russian: VOA and RFE/RL. Only a few years ago, these broadcasts were carried over a robust network of AM and FM "affiliate" stations—private stations with which the BBG cultivated a relationship to carry VOA and RFE/RL programs. These stations were key to delivering programming in a marketplace where shortwave broadcasts were drastically declining in popularity. During the Putin years, these affiliates were threatened with the loss of their broadcast licenses if they continued to broadcast the programming of VOA and RFE/RL. Some 90 BBG AM and FM affiliate stations were reduced to, literally, a handful. After an evaluation of the new broadcast realities, the agency proposed to migrate VOA toward an Internet delivery platform, (utilizing audio and video feeds) given the growth of that media in the region. RFE/RL continues to broadcast 19 hours daily via shortwave. Radio broadcasting in the Georgian language has been increased.

The agency believes it is important to adjust its broadcast strategies given changes in the broadcast marketplaces and media environments, to maximize the ability of our broadcast entities to reach their intended audiences, and to reflect changes in U.S. policy priorities. With respect to the most recent broadcast advances under the BBG—broadcasting to the Middle East, to Iran, and the AfPak region—the USG actively supported the new investment necessary to mount and sustain a communications link to these critical areas.

The BBG continuously assesses its resource allocation strategy against U.S. policy priorities. Changes are made to make the most of limited resources. International broadcasting continues to be one of the most cost-effective public-diplomacy tools given its realized and potential impact.

Question. The BBG has been described as an organizational jumble of broadcasting entities, each its own independent human resource offices, finance offices,

and management structures. What could the BBG be doing to streamline operations and spend more of its funds on broadcasting rather than administration? In addition to operating more efficiently, would a more streamlined operation also be more effective in terms of developing and implementing a U.S. broadcasting strategy? Would that also help improve morale among workers?

Answer. The U.S. International Broadcasting Act consolidated U.S. broadcasting entities within a single agency, but left intact the different federal and corporate grantee structures. Given that the federal agency (encompassing VOA and OCB) must follow government laws and regulations with respect to hiring, contracting, and other matters that the grantees may not be required to follow, some separate administrative functions are required.

Since becoming an independent federal agency, the BBG has streamlined engineering operations and services, as well as marketing and affiliate offices—both consolidated under the IBB. The agency has also streamlined certain broadcast services, by eliminating services in Eastern Europe where media freedom is well developed. In other streamlining efforts, the agency has reduced the number of broadcast entities that serve a single market. Such streamlining efforts recognize the underlying principle in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act that establishes professional broadcast "standards and principles" for all of the broadcast entities under the BBG. These principles, which utilize the VOA Charter as their foundation, provide for a uniformity of professionalism and journalistic standards for all BBG broadcasters, and allow for a broad-based journalistic role for all entities.

The agency has also encouraged the sharing of exclusive and other interviews and news stories among broadcast entities in order to leverage the ability to produce more powerful programming across the broadcast entities. This is a recent development that, over time, should promote a broader culture of partnership across the entities, and an appreciation of U.S. international broadcasting as a cohesive unit.

Whether further streamlining of operations and/or programming would improve employee morale is uncertain. To date, efforts to streamline programming or operations often result in concerns that the agency is seeking to weaken a specific broadcast entity, when in fact the strategic goal is to strengthen U.S. international broadcasting as a whole.

Question. The Middle East Broadcasting Network has come under scrutiny from the Inspector General and consumes an enormous budget. Why is this separate entity, which employs significant numbers of outside contractors, necessary? Could we not rely on the experienced staff of Voice of America, which attracts significant viewership in Afghanistan and Iran?

Answer. The Office of Inspector General is currently doing a routine inspection of MBN, just as it does with all BBG entities. MBN's current OIG inspection has been incorrectly written up in the press as if OIG were investigating an allegation or complaint. These reports are inaccurate.

Several years ago, OIG did a review to determine whether sufficient editorial processes were in place to ensure that programming aired was consistent with MBN's Journalistic Code of Ethics and they commended Alhurra for "taking significant steps to tighten its procedures and policies in order to protect its credibility that is critical to fulfilling its mission." Such reviews are not unique to MBN. OIG performed an inspection of VOA's Deewa Radio earlier this year to examine editorial procedures and safeguards.

When the Middle East Broadcasting Networks were formed, there was a pressing need to revamp U.S. broadcasting to the 22 countries of the Middle East. At that time, VOA broadcast via shortwave to a very small audience (less than 2 percent). After 9/11, calls for a strong response to engage significant audiences in the region were intense, and proposals to establish the new service under VOA or RFE/RL were evaluated. The BBG, the administration and Congress determined that the most effective means to meet the requirement most efficiently was to establish a new grantee.

MBN, a grantee organization similar to RFE/RL and RFA, operates under the same journalistic standards under the U.S. International Broadcasting Act. It is a full-service broadcaster to the region carrying out the act's program mandates with respect to presenting the policies of the United States, as well as providing local news and information to Middle Eastern audiences.

Television is a more expensive medium than radio, but it is currently the medium of choice for audiences seeking news in the region, with research showing that nearly 90 percent of the region's population relies on television to receive their news. As a public diplomacy tool with the ability to affect the perspectives of millions, television broadcasting to the Middle East is a cost-beneficial investment.

Question. As the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall approaches, we are reminded of the importance of Voice of America in keeping hopes of freedom alive in the Eastern bloc. The Voice of America still plays an important role, but the media landscape has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. What do you need to be as effective as possible in Iraq and Afghanistan, to maximize your reach, using, for example, mobile technology which is so important there?

Answer. As in broadcasting to other areas, broadcasting to Iraq and Afghanistan require sustained investment and an ability to reach audiences with quality programming in the vernacular language, transmitted through the media the audiences use and prefer. For the most part, this means providing transmission via radio and television. But the Internet and mobile devices will play an increasingly prominent role, and the agency is testing these markets and increasing its capability to utilize them. BBG programming can currently be heard via mobile device. But in certain markets, the use of mobile devices for audio use is still limited, too expensive, or both.

There are three main factors to maximizing reach via cellphones. First, good audience and market research is critical to know precisely who is using cell phones, to what extent, and how—as well as to understand the capabilities and services of local cell phone companies. SMS for personal messages is generally ubiquitous, but do users also receive news via SMS messages? Do they pay for such messages? If not, can news providers pay for and send them messages?

In Afghanistan, over 70 percent of the population is illiterate, so text messages are less relevant than voice messages. In Iraq, some 22 percent of cell phone users listen to the radio and 17 percent access the Internet on their phones. The phone is thus an enabler of parallel media as opposed to being an entirely separate channel in its own right. Second, adequate funding is required for sustained, daily message service, where and when messages are appropriate. The cost can run as much as two or three cents per message, and quickly adds up: one daily, headline service to 100,000 users would be $2,000–$3,000. Third, cooperation from local governments and telecommunications firms is necessary. It is not always possible for foreign entities to have unfettered access to local cell phone networks. VOA has not yet been able to implement service in Afghanistan with funding from the State Department for antinarcotics messages due to difficulties with Afghan cell phone companies. Negotiations there continue.

Question. What is your relationship to local independent media outlets, such as Moby Media and Tolo TV in Afghanistan which broadcast programs that hold government accountable and introduce ideas such as empowerment of women, often through narratives. Do you support local media, or are you in competition with it? In followup, how do you respond to claims that BBG outlets draw staff away from those local entities due to their higher pay? Is that the right effect of our engagement in these countries?

Answer. First, the BBG mandate is to provide accurate and objective information to significant audiences abroad. We are not in competition with local media, but we provide a Western journalistic model that is unique in these areas. Neither do we provide grant assistance directly to local media. BBG grants are limited to the radio and television organizations over which the BBG has supervision, and which fall under the journalistic requirements of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act. The BBG does facilitate some journalism training programs, often in coordination with USAID and State Department posts overseas. The agency also may provide assistance to local stations that carry our programming during a portion of their broadcast schedules. In these cases, we may make a small payment to the station to pay for air time, or we may provide a satellite downlink capability so that the station may pull down our programming for rebroadcast.

For example, the BBG has had discussions with Tolo TV in the past regarding the possibility of airing VOA programming on Tolo. Unfortunately, their price for time on the air (which was priced by the second) was prohibitive—up to $3 million to place a half-hour program. Such a price would have made Tolo the most expensive affiliate relationship the BBG has ever had. Overall, we have found that buying air time in Afghanistan can only be accomplished at inflated prices, partly because of competition from other USG agencies for air time.

BBG entities do not seek to draw staff away from local broadcasters in Afghanistan. However, we do have a critical requirement for journalists with local language skills and knowledge of the local political and cultural scene to enhance our broadcasts and the connection they make with audiences. Often, these skills are found in local journalists or broadcasters. In the case of BBG broadcasting to Afghanistan, the talents and knowledge of the RFE/RL and VOA staff have made our broadcasts the most listened-to in the country. It is true that VOA and RFE/RL have several

current employees who once worked for Tolo. About 4 years ago, RFE/RL hired a journalist from Tolo TV to work in Radio Azadi's headquarters in Prague. In addition, two former Tolo broadcasters are employed by VOA Afghan TV. VOA did not actively recruit either broadcaster. Each responded to VOA's broad solicitation for employment, and was selected.

The BBG provides occasional assistance to local broadcasters, especially in the area of journalism training. In Afghanistan, RFE/RL may provide assistance to media outlets if they request help and support. For example, RFE/RL has helped state radio in training their journalists. It has also provided internships to the faculty of journalism. In 2007, RFE/RL had a 1-year affiliation with Ariana TV, in which Radio Azadi programming was rebroadcast over the Ariana network. But this affiliation was ended due to the inconsistent quality of Ariana TV production.

VOA also provides some training opportunities overseas. Recent activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan have focused on training local VOA employees and stringers. In October 2009, VOA hosted a 2-day seminar on narcotics trafficking in Afghanistan, where 90 percent of the world's opium is produced. The series of workshops was designed to educate VOA journalists working in Afghanistan to fully understand the impact of narcotics addiction, treatment, and how illicit poppy cultivation is funding the Taliban insurgency. It also explained new and emerging U.S. policies to VOA journalists who are gearing up to do special television and radio series on Afghanistan's narcotics problem. The seminar brought together top Afghan officials, U.S. representatives and experts on the drug trade, including Ahmad Beg Qaderi, General Prosecutor from Afghanistan's Anti-Drug Force; General Daoud Daoud, Deputy Interior Minister of Counter Narcotics; Mark Calhoun from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Drew Quinn from the U.S. Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section. Along with two days of briefings, VOA journalists also visited the Nejat Center in Kabul, where treatment programs are available for Afghans suffering from drug addiction and HIV and AIDS. In October, the Afghan service aired special radio and television segments on Afghanistan's narcotics epidemic.

Another training session funded by the State Department is planned for November/December 2009 for VOA Afghan TV stringers in Dubai. Eleven stringers will travel from Afghanistan to Dubai for a week of training in camera and TV reporting.

In August 2009, Deewa Radio service chief Nafees Takar traveled to Islamabad and Quetta to conduct journalism training for 21 Deewa stringers. The stringers discussed VOA's journalistic standards and practices, received hands-on training on how to file a story and how to coordinate coverage efforts amongst themselves and with Deewa staff in Washington.

BBG programming in Afghanistan is not in competition with local media that utilize objective reporting techniques. We view our broadcasts as complementary to these broadcasters. However, it is still the case that even the more "objective" media in Afghanistan do not meet the standards of objectivity required of BBG entities. The focus and scope of much local Afghan media is on entertainment, while RFE/RL and VOA are more focused on news, information, and the discussion of ideas by serving as a platform for debate, and for interaction with listeners through call-in shows. Special programs on women's issues, youth, and religious tolerance provide ideas that are simply not a part of the Afghan media environment on any consistent basis. Besides being the most trusted and reliable radio, Azadi (RFE/RL) also offers public service broadcasting that helps to provide answers to the daily concerns of listeners and seeks to hold government, officials, warlords and other powerful individuals in government and society to account. In short, U.S. international broadcasting provides local coverage and perspective on daily events, but with an international standard of quality in terms of content, and with a higher standard of journalism. By contrast, local media may advocate personal, political, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and regional agendas which sometimes conflict with ideas such as the empowerment of women and other minorities, as well as the concept of Afghan national unity generally. RFE/RL and VOA follow a two-source rule. Local media may allow reports based on rumor, unreliable and unverifiable sources, and may suffer from an absence of editorial checks and balances.

Question. Why is U.S. policy to spend millions of dollars on our own broadcasts, as opposed to spending equivalent amounts in creating cadres of citizen journalists, training local journalists to report credible and quality programs, and providing financing to support real investigative journalism by local reporters?

Answer. As noted above, we do not view U.S. international broadcasting and support for indigenous broadcasters as being mutually exclusive. The United States has engaged in international broadcasting for over 60 years. These broadcast efforts help

build democratic institutions. BBG broadcasters also serve as an example of professional journalism in the countries to which they broadcasting.

In Afghanistan, new indigenous stations are developing. However, much of the local media, especially the privately owned outlets, generally advocate specific agendas. The point of these outlets is not objective journalism, but to advance the specific political, social, religious, ethnic, or cultural interests of particular politicians or warlords, or tribal or ethnic groups. In short, most local media outlets are owned by individuals, groups and parties with specific, partisan agendas. The reality of much Afghan media is that journalists, whatever their personal beliefs, when working for such outlets are not free to pursue objective news stories, regardless of their training. In such an environment of media ownership, providing journalism training to meet an objective standard is extremely valuable, but would be unlikely to compensate for the absence of an unbiased media, as many journalists would remain obliged to broadcast stories that serve their employer's interests, rather than a standard of objectivity and the broader goals of national unity and democracy.

In many areas, most media outlets are funded by the governments and organizations that trained journalists would be investigating. To serve the Afghan public with reliable, trustworthy news, requires media outlets such as RFE/RL or VOA that are committed to accurate objective journalism. This is accomplished through strict editorial policies and an international standard of quality journalism marked by impartiality. BBG journalists are helping citizens to have a better and clearer understanding of news and information and its impact on their daily lives. U.S. international broadcasting is able to stand above the partisan, tribal, ethnic and religious divides of Afghan society.

Question. You mentioned polling figures in your statements. Please provide an accounting of VOA, RFE/RL and MBN's annual expenditures on polling? In your written statement, you state that RFE/RL and VOA combined reach 26 percent of those who say they strongly oppose the Afghan Government. Please provide a sample of VOA and RFE/RL's polling questions used to determine that. In a followup, should we consider 26 percent audience a high figure? Does your reach fluctuate and, if yes, can you explain conditions that create such a fluctuation?

The BBG spent $10.4 million in fiscal year 2009 for audience and market research. That amount divides roughly equally into quantitative (polling via surveys) and qualitative (focus groups, in-depth interviews, etc.) studies. The approximately $5 million for polling covers all BBG broadcasters, including VOA, RFE/RL, and MBN as well as Radio Free Asia and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting. The BBG manages the research, with broadcast entity participation, to avoid duplication of effort. In countries where more than one BBG broadcaster operates, research is jointly fielded and shared. For example, all BBG survey research in Asia done for VOA also serves RFA. The BBG has undertaken no recent survey research in Cuba due to methodological and regulatory constraints. In contrast, qualitative research, which addresses programming content and presentation, is specific to each BBG broadcaster.

The audience reach figure among those who strongly oppose the Afghan Government is derived from correlating responses to questions regarding media habits and attitudes. The standard BBG question to gauge listening and viewing is: "Apart from today, when was the last time you heard (or watched) a program produced by ('x' station)?" Response categories are yesterday, last 7 days, last month, and last year. Attitudes are captured in political typologies developed by the Intelligence and Research Bureau of the State Department, involving the following questions:

- How much confidence do you have in the following groups of people? A lot, some, little or no confidence in—the National government?
- And how much confidence do you have in the following groups of people? A lot, some, little or no confidence in—Your provincial governor?
- As you look toward the future, which system do you think is best suited for Afghanistan?
  1. The restoration of the Taliban government;
  2. Constitutional government respecting Islamic principles;
  3. A decentralized, federal and secular democratic republic;
  4. A centralized and secular democratic republic; or
  5. A constitutional monarchy?
- Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the presence of the following groups in Afghanistan today? Taliban?
- How favorably or unfavorably inclined are you personally toward the Taliban? Very, somewhat, not very, or not at all?
- Who would you rather have ruling Afghanistan today: the current government or the Taliban?

The 26-percent audience number for Afghanistan of those who oppose the Afghan Government and listen to BBG broadcasts is a strong but not necessarily high number. It is supported by other indicators. Afghans have long cited RFE/RL's Radio Azadi as one of their top sources of news. In the July and August 2009 State/INR tracking polling in Afghanistan, Azadi was the No. 1 source among all sources, foreign and domestic.

The total weekly audience for BBG broadcasts in Afghanistan is 56 percent of adults, 15 years of age and older. This very high level is nonetheless down somewhat from previous years, due mostly, the BBG believes, to rising domestic radio competition. Since 2002, some 100 local FM stations have sprouted up across the country. InterNews has actively supported this development, launching some 35 local stations and supporting them with programming and station management assistance. Barring a cataclysmic event, like the return of the Taliban, Afghan indigenous media are likely to continue to prosper, further fragmenting the radio market and corresponding audiences. Such progress would be a positive sign, however, indicating gathering strength of indigenous media.

Question. You stated in your written statement that, "Every week, seventy-three (73 percent) of Iraqi adults . . . listen to or watch one of the four BBG broadcasters serving the country. . . . " Please explain how you arrive at that figure. You stated that Alhurra has a 32-percent daily reach; Radio Sawa has a 23-percent weekly reach, RFI has a 10-percent weekly reach, and VOA Kurdish reaches 12 percent of its intended audience.

Answer. BBG testimony also included Alhurra's weekly audience of 64 percent. That figure, combined with those of the other BBG broadcasters in Iraq, yields the combined, unduplicated weekly reach number of 73 percent.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RICHARD G. LUGAR

Question. At Thursday's hearing, the question was raised on the level of cooperation offered by the Afghani Government regarding U.S. broadcasting efforts. Mention was made by the panel that the Afghani Government has been sitting on a U.S. Government request to begin transmission into the border areas from Afghanistan and that one minister in particular was at issue. For the record, please provide the committee with a history of the transmission facility in question—when was the tower erected, what other facilities are on site, how much total money has the U.S. Government spent both in construction and upkeep costs of the facility. Please provide a map showing the location of the facility and the potential/intended broadcast coverage this facility could provide. Last, please outline the process and timeline by which the United States has sought to obtain official Afghani permission/license to operate the facility, including the ministry/minister with whom the final decision, according to your remarks at the hearing, has sat.

Answer. BBG has yet to receive a signed copy of the contract modification that formally permits the startup and operation of the Khost transmitter—a project that began in fall 2005. Radio Television Afghanistan is the expected station operator. BBG continues to hear encouraging information from the Afghan Ministry of Information, and there have been signs of progress.

Engineers from Radio Television Afghanistan—the state broadcaster also controlled by the Ministry—have been given tentative approval to perform the final commissioning of the Khost transmitter. But the Ministry of Information continues to block the contract for the operation of the Khost facilities by Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA).

The foundation for establishing transmission assets in Afghanistan dates back to 2002. A bilateral agreement between the United States and Afghanistan was signed on October 3, 2002. This agreement grants the United States the right to broadcast both Medium Wave from Pol e Charki (400 KW, 1296 KHz) and FM (100.5 MHz) from various provinces in Afghanistan. This agreement was amended on May 4, 2006, to include additional FM locations and granted the United States the right to construct, install, and operate a 200 KW medium wave transmitter (621 KHz) in Khost, Afghanistan. The agreement and the amendment grant the United States full use and exclusive rights to these frequencies.

Abdul Karim Khurram, Minister of Information and Culture of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, visited IBB/VOA Washington, DC, headquarters in May 2008 to discuss a number of issues related to the agreement. The Minister asked that the following language be added to the bilateral agreement.

"Afghanistan shall have the right to terminate the transmission of programs, after consultation on issues not exceeding 24 hours, that are deemed detrimental to the national interests of Afghanistan."

The BBG believed this language allowed the potential for Afghan Government to attempt to censor the content of the broadcasts. Lengthy negotiations continued, with the Minister finally agreeing to the existing language contained in the bilateral agreement.

Once this agreement was reached, a contract for the operation of the Khost facilities was sent to Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) for signature (June 2009). Minister Khurram objected to the signing of the contract. As of November 2009, the Minister continues to block efforts to resolve this issue, in spite of efforts by U.S. Embassy Kabul over the past 6 months to resolve the problem.

The Khost project was also a challenging one during its earlier construction phase. Security costs and concerns, as well as uncertainties of doing business in Afghanistan in an area of conflict, were factors in slowing the construction schedule. Initially, we expected to be on the air by the end of summer 2008. Key events in the site construction include the following:

Fall 2005: BBG launches the project to install a high-powered medium wave (MW) radio station, and seeks assistance from Radio TV Afghanistan (RTA) in locating a site in the border region and in operating the station. RTA could facilitate use of a site owned by the Afghan Government, and the acquisition of a frequency and broadcast license. The BBG had previously worked successfully with RTA in establishing and operating a large MW transmission station in Kabul and FM facilities throughout Afghanistan that currently broadcast BBG programming to Afghan audiences. RTA agrees to allow BBG to establish a new medium wave transmitter near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, and to operate the station for the BBG.

March 2006: BBG awards a letter contract to Harris Corporation to procure the medium wave transmitter, antenna, and other equipment to be sent to the site.

April 2006: RTA surveys potential sites and recommends the location for the MW station.

May 2006: Amendment of the country-to-country agreement between the United States and Afghanistan signed permitting the establishment of a new MW transmitting station. Meanwhile, VOA's Radio Deewa begins broadcasts to local populations through a new BBG constructed FM transmitter installed in Khost, Afghanistan, by RTA.

August 2006: Because of security and logistical concerns associated with constructing and operating a MW station in Khost and after consultations with RTA about locating a more easily secured site, the BBG gave serious consideration to moving the location for the station to a different site in Khost.

September 2006: Formal contract issued to Harris Corporation for the installation of a self-contained MW transmitting station, including onsite power generator. Harris selects Antensan as its major subcontractor to provide antenna tower materials and most of the onsite installation.

November-March 2007: Harris Corporation and Antensan survey eight potential medium wave transmitter sites identified by the Afghan Government for suitability related to size, topography, soil conductivity, and ability to secure. RTA requires BBG to focus on the site it recommended in April 2006. RTA designates the necessary personnel to operate the station at that location.

May-September 2007: Harris Corporation prepares a detailed statement of security requirements and costs for the project and begins negotiations with potential subcontractor, Olive Group, to provide security and other logistical support. BBG seeks security assistance from DOD. DOD commits to providing secure housing for the installation team at the Tani District Police Station and logistics support in the form of bottled water and MREs. BBG must make appropriate arrangements locally for adequate security required by the installation team.

September 2007: BBG confirms the level of assistance BBG can expect from DOD during the construction of the transmitting station at Khost. Assistance will include additional convoy security during transportation of equipment when DOD is already running a convoy between the same locations.

October 2007: Olive Group raises its estimates for security support requirements after meetings with U.S. military and local government officials. BBG must seek other, potentially more cost-effective alternatives to Antensan/Olive Group proposal in order to complete the project. BBG informs RTA that the project is at risk unless they can provide installation and security within the BBG's budget. RTA agrees to develop a feasible installation proposal.

November 2007: BBG completes shipment to Afghanistan of all equipment required for the medium wave transmitter installation. Shipments include the trans-

mitter, satellite receiver system (TVRO) and program feed equipment, transmission lines and power cables, antenna tower and foundation materials, electric power generators, and the antenna tuning system. RTA provides secure storage of equipment in Afghanistan until needed onsite.

January 2008: BBG arranges for local equipment installation and construction of site walls, guard towers and other buildings, with security to be provided by local guards and guaranteed by the Khost Province Governor, Tani District Governor, local tribal chiefs, and local police.

March 2008: BBG and Harris invite Antensan (headquartered in Germany) to discuss options for assisting the project, given Antensan's recent work on a NATO contract in Afghanistan. The subcontractor presents a proposal for security that offers to meet the initial contract terms. The proposal assumes RTA's role in operating and maintaining the site.

April 2008: Harris and Antensan firm up revised installation proposals within the BBG budget. BBG anticipates that this plan can be under fixed-price contract by early May with the site operational by late summer 2008.

October 2008: Three Harris Corp. subcontractor technicians, enroute to Khost to complete final technical operations to bring the station online, and two Afghan support personnel are reported missing. A local tribal group appeared to be responsible. Negotiations for release of the abductees take place through the Khost/Tani tribal leaders.

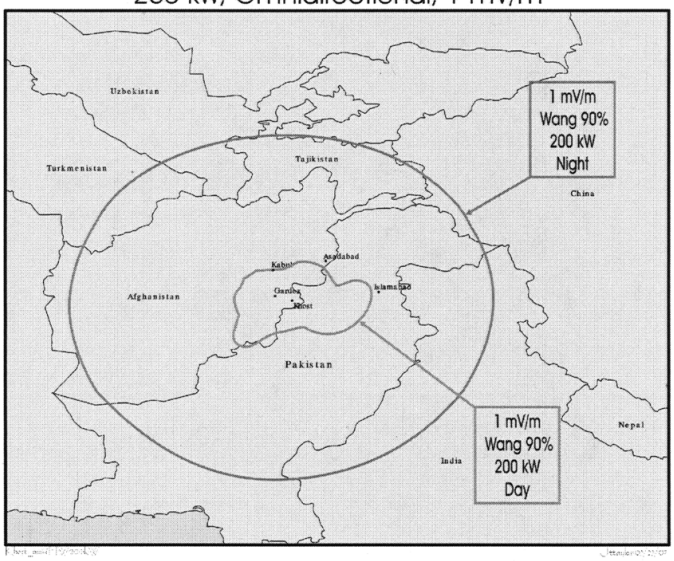
At the time of the abduction, the station was within 2 to 3 weeks of being operational. After the abduction, the next months were spent in reassembling a team to complete the installation, given the severe security situation. Antensan issued a contract to Allied Machinery for completion and commissioning of the fuel/generator/electrical systems.

The total cost of the Khost project to date is $4,896,627.

Please see the map, below, showing the location of the facility and the potential/intended broadcast coverage this facility could provide.

CALCULATED MEDIUM WAVE COVERAGE CONTOURS FROM KHOST, AFGHANISTAN

200 kW, Omnidirectional, 1 mV/m



Question. What specific lessons did the BBG learn in Iraq that it has applied in Afghanistan? Conversely, what did it learn not to do based on its experience in Iraq?

Answer. As mentioned in our testimony, at the start of the conflict in Iraq, we had no established broadcasting platform in the country—no local facilities, no in-country transmission, no significant national audience. In order to reach audiences who received news and information via FM radio and television, we had to establish and control the means of transmission. We quickly set up local operations, including news bureaus, and secured local transmission for both radio and TV, in-

cluding FM and TV stations in major Iraqi cities—important to Alhurra's early ability to gain market share while satellite dish ownership spread. Finally, BBG broadcasters have sustained 24/7 news and information coverage, pegged to developments and issues on the ground in Iraq and in synch with the needs and preferences of Iraqi audiences.

We know from our experience in Iraq, and through similar research in other broadcast markets, that a local presence and feel, excellent domestic distribution, and highly relevant news and other programming is a strong formula for U.S. international broadcasting. At the same time, broadcasts provide comprehensive regional and international news, including in-depth coverage of U.S. society, culture, and policies—especially those that are directly relevant to Iraq citizens.

In Afghanistan and in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, radio is the dominant medium. Since 2002, VOA and RFE/RL have broadcast a 24/7 radio stream in Dari and Pashto to Afghanistan, providing the local, international, and U.S. news in a similar vein as we do in Iraq. Knowing the importance of a local presence and feel, domestic distribution, and providing highly relevant news as the basis of a successful broadcast formula, the BBG initiated in 2006 a dedicated service by the Voice of America, to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area in the unique regional Pashto dialect, called Deewa Radio.

Deewa focuses on local issues and produces 9 hours of daily programming, including live news, current affairs, call-in shows, and music. It transmits via AM, FM, and shortwave, with text and audio available on the Internet. We see robust audience reaction everyday in some 400 listener phone calls to on-air discussion programs.

Key to Deewa's success is what has worked so well in Iraq and Afghanistan—news and information tailored to the audience's needs and interests. Some 25 local stringers file a steady stream of reports such topics as the Pakistani military's campaign against Taliban forces and those displaced by Taliban threats or combat.

Lessons-learned in other broadcast markets and throughout the history of U.S. international broadcasting, including Iraq, show that listeners, including those with an anti-American bias, will tune in to U.S. broadcasting if it observes strict objectivity.

In general, we succeed when (a) we deliver the news our audiences want and need to make informed judgments about their societies, and (b) we deliver our content via the media our audiences prefer and can easily access.

Question. In your testimony you stated "Alhurra is the fourth leading TV channel among hundreds of channels available by satellite and locally with 32 percent daily and 64 percent weekly reach." Your FY 2010 budget request said "Alhurra is one of the five most popular television services in Iraq, outpacing Al Jazeera."

- A. Reach, as I understand it is an advertising term most often used in radio, and sometimes expressed in terms of "effective reach" and sometimes more specific terms, as in "x minutes weekly reach." What do you mean by "reach"? Can you be more specific? Please provide the data to us, along with that of the leading competitors. What is your "effective reach"?
- B. Nielsen ratings, with which most Americans are familiar, measures audience size for television. Does "reach" translate to audience size? For example, last week Nielsen ratings leader NCIS had 20.7 million viewers. Can you put your numbers in terms we are more familiar with? How do you collect your data on "reach"?

Answer. First, we should note that all BBG research is conducted under rules set forth by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR—a global, not just European, association, to which all professional international survey research organizations belong) and also follows the guidelines formulated by the Conference for International Broadcasters' Audience Research Services (CIBAR), to which all BBG broadcasters subscribe as well as all other major public service internationals such as BBC, Radio France International, Radio Monte Carlo, Deutsche Welle, and France 24.

In international usage, "audience reach" refers to the percentage of the adult population or number of adults who tune in to a given station—that is, the percentage or number of adults that a given station "reaches." Reach is further defined by reference to the platform used—e.g., TV, radio, Internet, etc.—and the time period—e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. The question used to measure audience reach is the one noted above—"Apart from today, when was the last time you heard (or watched) a program produced by ('x' station)?"

Weekly reach has been the standard measure for the BBG, BBC, and the other government-supported international broadcasters for decades. These broadcasters are noncommercial, so there is no need to gather very specific time-period listening

or viewing such as day-part measures used for establishing advertising rates. Also, these broadcasters are typically complementary to more dominant domestic channels—that is, they are usually not the channels local audiences turn to first—and thus a weekly measure is appropriate. This said, the BBG gathers daily, monthly, and yearly audience-reach figures as well.

As you observe, "effective reach" is an advertising term—How many people in a targeted group are exposed to an ad during a specific time period? BBG audience-reach is a directly comparable measure in that, again, it shows the number of people who have heard or seen BBG content during the last week (or month, year, etc.). BBG research also calculates reach among special target groups, such as those under 30 or "best educated."

ACNielsen's reach figures are based on a "weekly cume,'" which is the unduplicated number of people, (each viewer is only counted once no matter how frequently s/he tunes in), who view the station or program at least once during the course of a week. Here again, the BBG measure is directly comparable. BBG numbers also refer to the unduplicated number or percentage of adults who watch or view at least once during the course of a week.

In fact, ACNielsen is the BBG's subcontractor for most countries in the Middle East (save Iraq and Syria, where it does not operate). The major difference between the Nielsen measure abroad for the BBG and that of Nielsen in the United States is that, for the BBG, Nielsen gathers information on length of viewing by asking the survey respondent how long they usually watch the station—viewing is not recorded electronically each time the viewer tunes in, as it is on the United States (or other developed research environments where use of diaries and other techniques is commonplace).

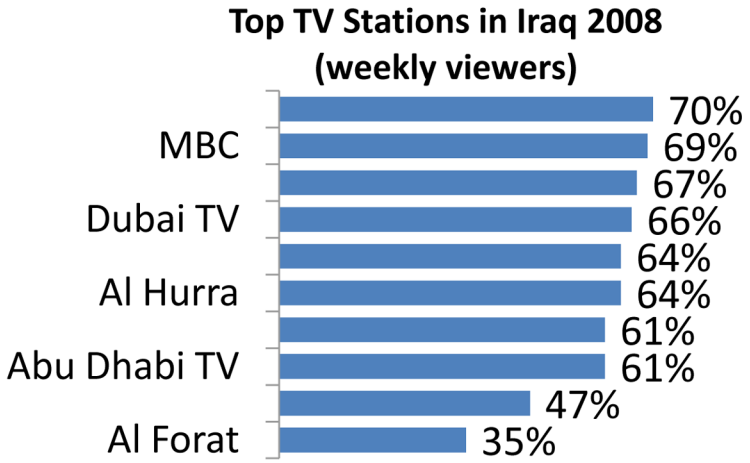
The basic audience-reach question has been standardized for use across all countries surveyed and is the accepted research "currency" among CIBAR members. If BBG were asked by BBC or Deutsche Welle for its reach number in a given country, it would expect to receive a response such as "the weekly reach of DW (in Arabic) in Iraq is 1.9 percent of adults aged 18 or older."

- C. What percentage of Iraqis watch TV from a terrestrial versus satellite broadcast?

Answer. Nearly all Iraqis have a satellite dish in their home: 96 percent have home access to satellite dish for television, whereas 27 percent have home access to cable TV.

- D. What are the figures for the other leading competitors?

Answer. The chart below lists the weekly reach measures (percent of adults 15+ in Iraq who watched each station in the past week—i.e., answered "yesterday" or "in the past 7 days" to the question, "Apart from today, when was the last time you watched X station?"). Al Sharqiya and Al Iraqiya are Iraqi stations that feature both local news and entertainment. MBC is a pan-Arab entertainment channel with daily news on regional and international events. Dubai TV and Abu Dhabi TV broadcast from the United Arab Emirates; both stations have an entertainment focus with some local, regional and international news. LBC is a Lebanese station that broadcasts entertainment and news. Al Forat's broadcasting caters to Iraq's largely Shia population, but its political affiliations restrict its appeal. Alhurra, Al Jazeera, and Al Arabiya are the only 24-hour news networks.



Base: n=1,563 adults (15 and over) in all but five provinces in Iraq, November 2008.

Question. What is the rest of the TV news market like in Iraq? You mentioned the large number of competitors for TV news in the Arab market. How would you measure the quality, freedom, and accessibility of competitors? Is free media taking hold in Iraq?

Answer. Attached is a detailed report prepared by the BBG's global; research contractor InterMedia for the Open Source Center based on BBG Iraq research (BBG selectively authorizes such use of its data for official government purposes). This study provides a comprehensive look at the Iraqi media environment, including TV.

In its 2009 report on global press freedom, Reporters without Borders rated Iraq 145th out of 175 countries, commenting that "freedom of expression is far from attained in Iraq." Freedom House, for its part, judges that the Iraqi media environment is "not free" and cites its two main challenges being "the country's ongoing security threats and government restrictions on investigating corruption and abuses of power." The BBG observes in its everyday journalistic practice in Iraq that media outlets often represent the interests of specific sects or factions. Thus, despite the fact that such outlets have proliferated since the fall of Saddam Hussein, access to impartial, reliable news from domestic sources remains sharply limited.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.— The report "InterMedia Open Source Center" mentioned above was too voluminous to include in this printed hearing. It will be maintained in the permanent record of the committee.]

Question. It seems as if many polls reflect negatively on the popularity and competitiveness of Alhurra. What independent research can you share with the committee regarding Alhurra's popularity and competitiveness? As you may know, an April/May 2009 University of Maryland/Zogby poll reported that Alhurra was picked by 0.5 percent of respondents as their favorite TV news source—fewer than the 2 percent who picked Al-Manar, and significantly fewer than the 55 percent who picked Al Jazeera. Can you help us with an apples to apples comparison?

Answer. We believe the response provided to question 2(a) from the committee responds to this question as well. We provide this information again here.

According to international research firms including ACNielsen, Alhurra has a weekly reach of more than 26 million people. Alhurra is penetrating the incredibly competitive media market across the Middle East. As noted in our testimony before the committee, Alhurra is the fourth leading TV channel in Iraq among hundreds of channels available by satellite and locally with 32 percent daily, and 64 percent, weekly reach. Alhurra is among Iraqis' top choices for news and information on TV. This is not an indication of a tarnished brand in a competitive marketplace. Research also states that audiences find the programs trustworthy, and increase their understanding of America. For example in Iraq, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of Alhurra's weekly audience finds the news to be credible. A majority of those who watch Alhurra have also reported that Alhurra has increased their understanding of U.S. policies (64 percent) and increased their understanding of current events (66

percent). These measures are derived from surveys taken by independent research organizations such as ACNielsen.

Confusion over the reach of Alhurra may stem from citations from other research that is designed to measure the "most popular" stations in the Middle East, rather than to measure sustained viewership. These polls do not probe frequency of media use, and thus do not derive an audience measure. Instead, they ask what station the viewer tunes to first. In contrast, the BBG gauges audience reach and addresses actual media consumption. Millions of Arabs for whom Alhurra is not their first choice for international news nonetheless watch the channel. Indeed, BBG research shows that Arabs routinely consult multiple sources, far more than two, for news and information.

While it is a rare instance in which the programming of a U.S. international broadcasting entity, broadcasting in any medium, ranks among the most popular broadcasters in a particular market overseas, this happens to be the case for Alhurra in Iraq and for RFE/RL in Afghanistan. Alhurra figures among the top 20 stations in each of the 14 markets where the BBG has done research—except in Saudi Arabia, where it is 21st.

Question. The Anennberg School study published in July 2008 conducted for the BBG about Alhurra contained some sharp criticisms and recommendations. What action have you taken based on this study's recommendations? Have you conducted any focus group work among Iraqi audiences?

The agency closely examined the recommendations in the Annenberg study. We believe a number of these are relevant to MBN's continued success and will pursue strategies to address the issues raised. We believe others are inconsistent with the agency's mission and statutory mandate.

The Annenberg report recommended that MBN increase its coverage of America, its values, and culture. Since that time, MBN has continued to expand its U.S. coverage to include stories from around the U.S. Programs like The Americans, Inside Washington and daily news reports about issues that portray American values are a daily staple on Alhurra. MBN/BBG has proposed further expansions of U.S. coverage that are under consideration.

In addition, Annenberg recommended that Alhurra connect more with its Arab audience. In March 2009, Alhurra launched Al Youm, a live 3-hour program that originates from five countries in three continents including Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem and Alhurra's headquarters in Springfield, VA. It brings together all areas of the Middle East (the Gulf, North Africa and the Levant) and the United States, allowing viewers to see how issues not only affect the people in their country, but those who live in the countries around them. Themes have included the global economic crisis, the impact of the Internet, child labor laws and cultural diversity and development. Initial reaction demonstrates that Al Youm is connecting with the audience.

The report also criticized Alhurra for a perceived bias in stories as pro-American and pro-Israeli. Since the report was issued, MBN has instituted a number of mandatory training programs for its journalists, led by the chair of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. MBN reporters from the region were brought to MBN's Springfield headquarters to benefit from the training.

Question. How do you determine the lifecycle of such a cost-intensive program such as Alhurra Iraq? Would you want to phase out, privatize, or perhaps transition the Alhurra operation to another market, corresponding to the end of the U.S. force deployment and the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom?

Answer. The agency evaluates the effectiveness of Alhurra-Iraq in the same manner as it does any of the programs or entities under its supervision. Television is an expensive medium relative to radio. Targeted programming to a single market such as Iraq adds a cost factor, requiring a strong physical presence in-country with staff and technical assets. The development of a democratic and stable civil society requires a free and fair press. Iraq's media has not developed to the point of filling that need. Alhurra-Iraq fills that void. We believe maintaining an effective method of communicating with Iraqis is essential during and after the military pullout of Iraq.

Alhurra-Iraq has been recognized for its work to bring accurate and objective reporting to the people of Iraq. In 2009, the Al Mada Institute for Media, Culture and Arts awarded Alhurra 12 accommodations for excellence in broadcasting including the best male and female correspondents; first through third place for best political talk show; and first and second place for best cultural show. Letters from the Multi-National Forces and the head of the Iraqi Election Committee thank Alhurra for balanced coverage of news in Iraq and fair reports on the Iraqi elections.

At this time, we have not considered transitioning or broadening the Alhurra-Iraq operation to another market.

Question. Has the Board considered restarting VOA Arabic service, or one in Punjabi?

Answer. MBN programming carries out the agency's broadcast mission in the Middle East, and serves the broad standards and principles for BBG broadcasting as set out in the Broadcasting Act, including the principle derived from the VOA Charter that "United States international broadcasting shall include a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions . . . " and "clear and effective presentation of the policies . . . of the United States Government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies."

Just as VOA broadcasting serves its traditional broadcast role in large parts of Africa, as well as providing those markets with significant and valued local news and information, so does MBN serve all of these roles, representing U.S. international broadcasting in the Middle East. There are no plans at this time to initiate a new Punjabi service.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR BBG BROADCASTERS | IRAQ

Weekly Reach (Total Media)
Apart from today, when is the last time you listened to this station? Apart from today, when is the last time you watched this station? Apart from today, when is the last time you visited this station's web site? (Unduplicated total audience on all platforms)
Percentage responding either "yesterday" or "in the last 7 days"

Reliability
How trustworthy do you think the news and information one can hear on this station is?
Percentage of weekly listeners/viewers who think it is "very trustworthy" or "somewhat trustworthy"

Increased Understanding
To what extent has your listening to this station increased your understanding of current events/ U.S. culture and society/U.S. policies
Percentage of weekly listeners/viewers who say "a great deal" or "somewhat"

	Weekly Reach	Reliability	Increased Understanding		
			Current Events	U.S. Culture	U.S. Policies
Radio Free Iraq	11.6%	44%	na	na	na
Radio Sawa	25.3%	65%	61%	39%	68%
Alhurra	64.4%	63%	67%	52%	64%
VOA Kurdish*	9.1%	85%	42%	35%	49%

*Weekly reach rates and reliability ratings for VOA Kurdish are among Kurdish speakers in Iraq only.
Source: InterMedia national survey of adults (15+) in Iraq, November 2008. Basrah, Qadisiyah, Babylon, Masyan and Wasit provinces were excluded from survey coverage.

BBG broadcasts across all platforms (radio, television and Internet) reach **72.7% of the adult population in the surveyed provinces of Iraq**, which projects to a **weekly total media audience of 9,504,000.**

Commentary by Iraqis, Arabs, and Kurds on VOA, RFE, and MBN Programming:

I would like to thank the staff of RFI. (The station) covers news throughout Iraq and tries to make listeners aware of everything happening. It is the number one station for Iraqi listeners.

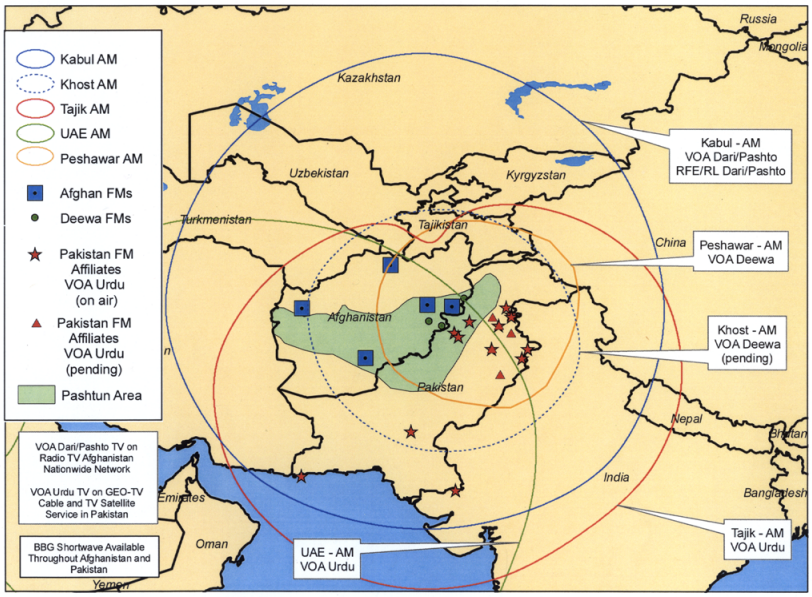
(VOA Kurdish) serves the future of Kurdish people. It is fast, relevant, and accurate and able to understand life from a Kurdish point of view. I trust everything it presents.

I like Alhurra because it takes me in one hour from one region to another, from a country to another; you get enough news for a month.

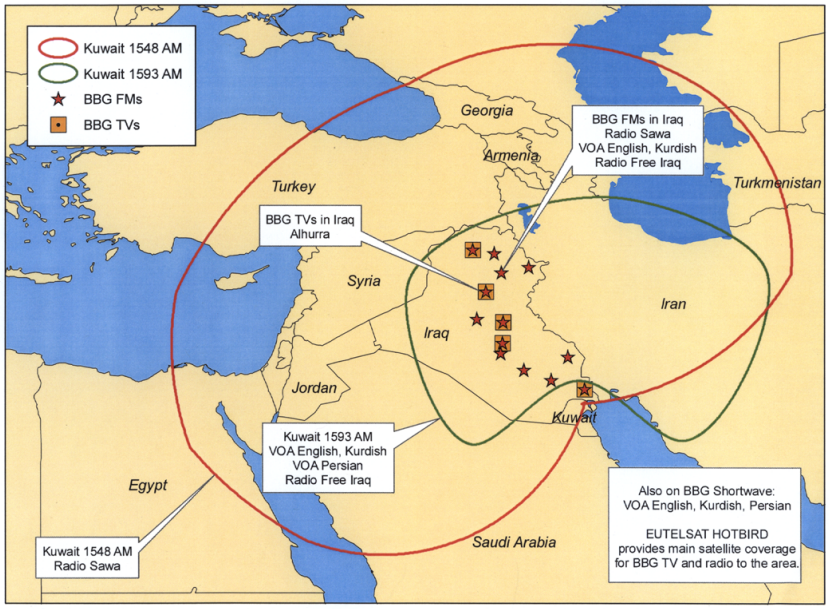
Alhurra is excellent; it broadcasts all the news with its details, it shows the opinion and its opposite in addition to interviews and analysis which people consider to be very important.

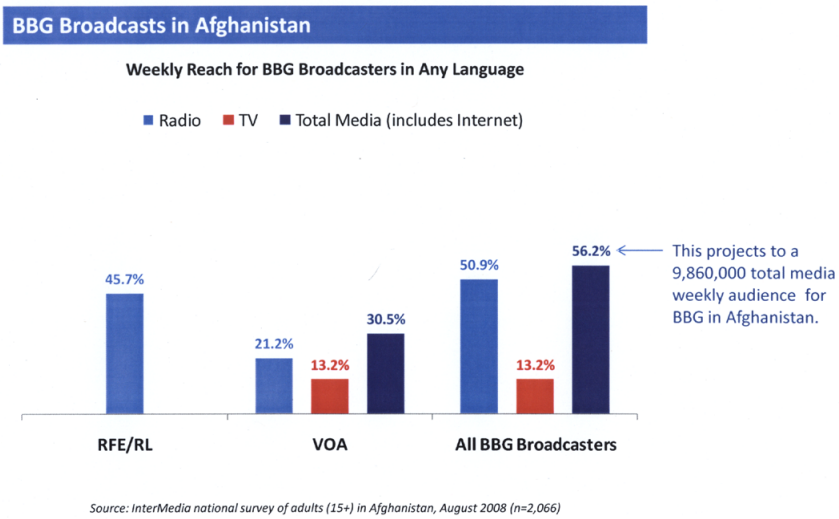
(Radio Sawa) tries to reach the American voice to the Iraqi street in a calm and smooth way; away from violence, using American songs targeting young people.

BBG Transmission Capabilities to Afghanistan and Pakistan



BBG Transmission Capabilities to Iraq





Source: InterMedia national survey of adults (15+) in Afghanistan, August 2008 (n=2,066)

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