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A 21st Century Vision for U.S. Global Media

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Executive Summary

- United States International Broadcasting (USIB) is at a critical juncture as it faces new, 21st century challenges. This paper proposes a new vision for U.S. International Broadcasting in the 21st century: a single, non-federal, congressionally-funded broadcasting organization that unites the current six entities into one with a revitalized mission employing the latest technologies in an "audiences-centric" communications strategy. This reform will be essential to maintain an effective U.S. presence in an often hostile international media milieu to project American and Western values in support of freedom and democracy.

- New challenges facing USIB include transformed geopolitics in an increasingly multi-polar world, a highly complex international media environment with heightened competition from countries that do not share U.S. democratic values, and new technologies that have transformed the way nations and peoples communicate with each other.

- USIB's Cold War role as a highly effective tool of U.S. "soft power" in the national interest has been widely acknowledged. Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) all made important contributions to the political, economic and social transformation of Eastern Europe and the USSR away from communist authoritarianism.

- The two-pronged Cold War communications strategy of "telling America's story" (VOA) and providing a "surrogate free press focused on domestic issues" (RFE and RL) is no longer relevant in the new international media environment. Moreover, two USIB organizations, VOA and RFE/RL, have now grown to six (adding the International Broadcasting Bureau, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network) with overlapping language services, duplicative management and support structures, and largely un-coordinated missions and operations. This hodge-podge of U.S. broadcast organizations, often competing among themselves, can no longer be defended on either mission-related or budgetary grounds and hampers a rational allocation of resources in line with American strategic priorities.

- The audiences-centric mission of the proposed new broadcasting organization is distinct from public diplomacy and from strategic communications. Those useful instruments of American soft power cannot be directly coordinated with USIB if the latter is to be viewed by intended audiences as a credible, objective source of news and analysis and thus justify taxpayer support as enhancing American national security.

A 21st Century Vision for U.S. Global Media

A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta

IN ANY GIVEN week, from North Korea to Iran and across the Middle East, from China to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar, through Africa and India to Russia, Belarus, Central Asia and Cuba, 165 million people—equivalent to more than half the U.S. population—tune into the radio and television programs of U.S. International Broadcasting (USIB) by satellite, Internet and in some cases cooperating local radio stations. After more than half a century, Congressionally-funded U.S. broadcasting remains the leading edge of American soft power—the principal means by which the United States speaks directly to less free and impoverished nations.

Yet while the content and methods of delivering America's 24/7 conversation with the world have kept abreast with the 21st century, the organization of U.S International Broadcasting has not. In an increasingly competitive global media environment, USIB remains a disparate and disorderly archipelago of largely separate cold-war-era entities.[1] The overarching collection of these entities—some of them official government agencies, most of them private, Congressionally-funded grantees—is inherently cost-inefficient, unsupple, sometimes duplicative, guided by a multiplicity of inconsistent mission statements, and arguably less attractive than it could be to the talented journalists crucial to its success.

USIB works, but not nearly as well as it could. Its Cold War organizational legacy inherently detracts from its credibility and thus from its potential reach and impact.

USIB is thus at a crossroads. It can through inertia seek to retain its legacy form as it evolved during the Cold War, or it can pro-actively adopt a dynamic new vision and structure attuned to 21st century audiences. Inaction is leading to a diminished U.S. capability to compete in the global sphere of information and ideas and threatens eventual irrelevance as more trusted and dynamic media organizations dominate. Shrinking budgets, a global political environment in flux, and a revolution in communications technology render the status quo untenable and an alternative approach both necessary and attractive. Reform will require abandoning defense of Cold War institutions and a new conceptual and structural approach by practitioners, overseers, the Administration, and Congress.

I. BROADCASTING IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

A strong U.S. global media presence serves the national interest since its purpose is:

- To provide accurate, credible news and information to peoples lacking free, reliable, and trustworthy domestic media at a time when global media freedom is—after a hopeful post-Cold War surge—enjoyed by only fifteen percent of the global population, a figure which is on the decline.[2]

- To circumvent censorship, an essential tool for dictatorial regimes.

- To ensure a competitive U.S. presence among international broadcasters in a diverse and often hostile international media climate.

- To support development of civil society and democratic institutions appropriate to local circumstances and to help societies reconnect with positive values of traditional cultures where these cultures are suppressed.

- To encourage respect for universal human rights.

- To improve global understanding of American society and the U.S. role in the world.

- To encourage critical thought in societies threatened by authoritarian governments, fanaticism, and terrorism.

In short, USIB's purpose is to communicate in the national interest with societies where information is controlled by repressive regimes, as well as with transitional societies with media that are partly free but suffer from uncritical, unprofessional, biased, or otherwise incomplete information services. It encourages the emergence of informed publics that are a necessary condition for the advancement of freedom and democracy throughout the world.

II. COLD WAR SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The history of USIB is a remarkable success story from the founding of VOA during World War II broadcasting to Nazi Germany, to support of RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) in divided Berlin in the post-war period, to the significant contributions of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty in bringing the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

There are numerous indicators of the impact of the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe (RFE), and Radio Liberty (RL) broadcasts to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. (BBC, Deutsche Welle, and other stations were important as well.) Large

Today's world and its challenges are very different. Yet relevant lessons can be drawn from the USIB Cold War experience.

audiences were motivated to hear uncensored news, analysis, and features, especially about their own countries where no free press existed. In Eastern Europe, over half the adult populations of Poland, Hungary Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria tuned in at least weekly, while in the USSR about a quarter of the adult population were regular (at least once a week) listeners.[3] These were "quality" audiences, with the highest listening rates among urban educated populations and widespread listening among Communist Party members and ruling elites, especially in Eastern Europe. Although beamed in from the outside by shortwave, Western radio successfully became a vital part of the domestic media scene in these countries from the 1950s onward.[4]East European audiences, especially, looked to the West for inspiration and a model for change. Western radio stations, most notably RFE, played the role of a domestic free press. In Poland, for example, RFE was jokingly but tellingly dubbed "Warsaw 4" (a fourth channel of domestic radio alongside the official three stations). Soviet audiences saw the West less as a change model and more as a "window to the outside world" and a source for information on their own country, especially dissident activities and writings for which Western radio provided a "megaphone" and without which they would have passed largely unnoticed.

Listeners to Voice of America were kept abreast of official U.S. policy, a topic of great interest to many in Eastern Europe and the USSR, as well as wide-ranging programs on American life, democratic practice, international news coverage, and entertainment programs of a genre not carried by their domestic media. VOA jazz and pop music programs were highly popular, especially among the youth of the region, and played an important role in breaking down mental barriers and stereotypes of the West as propagated by the regimes.

Western broadcasts were viewed as a serious threat by the Communist regimes. Party and Government leaders were provided printed broadcast synopses. The broadcasters were widely attacked in the government-controlled media and an extensive (and expensive) technical jamming effort targeted them, especially RFE and Radio Liberty, and to a lesser extent VOA.

No less noteworthy an indicator of impact is the numerous testimonials to the significance of RFE, RL, and VOA given by public figures from the formerly communist countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain. When asked in 1990 if RFE had contributed to the triumph of Solidarity in Poland, Lech Walesa responded "Is the Sun important for the Earth?" East German spymaster Markus Wolf wrote in his memoirs that "of all the various means used to influence people against the East during the Cold War, I would count Radio Free Europe and RIAS as the most effective." Czech dissident-turned President Vaclav Havel affirmed that RFE/RL's "influence and significance have been great and profound." Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose works were broadcast frequently on both VOA and RL, wrote of "the mighty non-military force which resides in the

airwaves and whose kindling power in the midst of communist darkness cannot even be grasped by the Western imagination."[5] Estonian President Lennart Meri testified to the dramatic impact of the first VOA broadcast in Estonian and later nominated RFE/RL for the Nobel Peace Prize.[6] And Russian President Boris Yeltsin said: "… during the 3–4 days of the [failed 1991] coup, Radio Liberty was one of the very few channels through which it was possible to send information to the whole world and, most important, to the people of Russia, because now every family in Russia listens to Radio Liberty…"[7]

By providing information and analysis unavailable from domestic media sources, USIB helped to shape listeners views on their own societies and on crucial international events. Additionally, and no less important, at the level of civic morale Western broadcasts helped to keep the "hope of freedom" alive behind the Iron Curtain so that when circumstances evolved to the point where change was no longer unthinkable the peoples of Eastern Europe were ready to seize the moment. Western broadcasting by itself certainly did not "win" the Cold War. Communism ended in Eastern Europe and the USSR as a result of myriad complex factors, not least of which were the internal contradictions and failures of the Communist system itself. But Western broadcasting and especially USIB were undeniably an important part of the "mix" of those factors. By denying controlled state media the monopoly of information and discussion they sought, USIB helped keep critical thinking alive and fostered an understanding of democratic alternatives.

Today's world and its challenges are very different. Yet relevant lessons can be drawn from the USIB Cold War experience:

- A substitute free media is possible through external broadcasting to countries where media freedom has been denied.

- External messages can reinforce and accelerate, but never replace, domestic forces striving for positive political and social change. The impetus for change in the final analysis must come from within, not from without.

- It is essential to avoid "propaganda" of any kind, whether from governments or any other source, as audiences quickly see through it, draining programs of credibility.[8] Credibility is paramount; hard to win but easy to lose. While VOA, RFE and RL were often charged, not only by communist governments but also by some Western critics, as being "propaganda" stations, audience research showed that they were successful not because they were "propagandistic" but because their large audiences found them to be credible, trustworthy and relevant.[9]

- Long-term sustainable resources are required. Political and social change in the Cold War was an extended process. Patience and long-term financial support were critical. USIB funding was significantly increased in the last years of the Cold War, which permitted capitalizing on the credibility it had built up over the years.

III. THE NEW INTERNATIONAL MEDIA WORLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY

A Transformed Media Milieu

As successful as the Cold War Broadcasting model may have been, it is not readily applicable to the current international media milieu.[10] There are important differences between the Cold War situation and the present:

- **Cold War:** Closed target societies, with total regime control of domestic media.
- **Present:** Both government and private media now co-exist in most countries. Total governmental control is rare; even North Korea is becoming exposed to outside information.[11] Private media are widespread, although they often focus on entertainment and steer clear of politics. Digital technologies have created information tunnels to other repressive societies, including Iran, China, and much of the Arab world.

- **Cold War:** TV, radio, and press were the only media platforms, and of these usually only radio—delivered by shortwave—could be directed from the outside.
- **Present:** Multiple media platforms are the new norm—the Internet, mobile telephones, and satellite TV and radio have joined the traditional platforms.

- **Cold War:** Word of mouth was linked to Western radio listening, amplifying broadcast content through limited personal networks.
- **Present:** Word of mouth is now electronic and has the potential to become "viral." Email, social media such as Twitter and Facebook, SMS messaging, ubiquitous mobile phone use, and extensive use of blogs provide new opportunities for lightning-fast content amplification.

- **Cold War:** A general mistrust of domestic media on many sensitive topics was widespread with somewhat more trust given to foreign media on some key issues, often involving a critique of official policies.
- **Present:** Widespread mistrust of most official media from any source, contrasts with greater trust in peer-to-peer communication and crowd-sourcing using new social media technologies.

- **Cold War:** Strong motivations of publics to turn to outside media sources, usually to available shortwave radio, to be informed on both domestic and international news.
- **Present:** Less clear motivations in making media choices, with many available options, both domestic and foreign. Radio is a less important platform than during the Cold War in many countries. Internet and satellite technology have now largely supplanted shortwave radio and the special receivers and antennas and listener patience it required.

- **Cold War:** Frequent heavy jamming hampered shortwave reception but also contributed to a "forbidden fruit" attraction of the broadcasts, strengthening listeners' motivation to hear information their governments went to great lengths to deny them.
- **Present:** Most, but not all, broadcast target areas are un-jammed, with China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran and North Korea being exceptions. These are the only areas where some international broadcasting still carries a "forbidden fruit" attraction. Little wholesale blockage of the Internet takes place anywhere. Selective filtering is more common, but circumvention technologies and techniques make this increasingly difficult. Regimes that choose to shut down or filter the Internet often have to contend with the costs of collateral damage to other vital systems—e.g., banking, business, security.

- **Cold War:** No access was possible to domestic media outlets, such as FM radio, for international broadcasters. Short wave (and limited medium wave, AM) transmission from abroad was the only viable platform.
- **Present:** Growing access worldwide to domestic media outlets, though this access is sometimes unreliable in practice. The best example is the former Soviet Union where the number of VOA and RFE/RL FM affiliates has dropped under government regulatory pressure from 97 to 0. The greater the need for local FM broadcasting affiliates, the less likely they are to be available.

- **Cold War:** Western radio had a clearly defined niche in a restricted media environment in the broadcast target countries, making it easier to differentiate it from other media to assess impact.
- **Present:** It is considerably more difficult to gauge the impact of a single medium in a highly complex media environment. Nearly all audiences, including many inside repressive countries, have media choices. A single dish, legal or illegal, can routinely bring in hundreds of TV channels and even Internet connections. New methods for determining audience preferences and assessing media impacts will need to be developed to determine the effectiveness of USIB.

Multi-Polar Geopolitical Environment

The global geo-political landscape has evolved dramatically since the end of the Cold War. While the United States remains the sole superpower, the world is now in many respects multi-polar rather than bi-polar. There is no more "bloc to bloc" broadcasting, and countering Soviet propaganda is no longer necessary. In terms of U.S. strategic priorities, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa have overtaken Eastern Europe and the former Soviet space.

Audiences and their expectations have also evolved. If there was a latent sympathy for the United States among peoples in Eastern Europe and a positive curiosity about the U.S. in the Soviet Union, the situation today, especially in the Islamic world, is quite different.[12] Many potential audiences are deeply suspicious of, or even hostile to, the U.S. Ironically this is due in no small part to the availability of extensive media choices in much of the world, which spotlight controversial American policies, advertise less attractive parts of American culture, and distort America's values and achievements in ways that advance the parochial goals of local actors. USIB faces an uphill struggle in communicating with much of the Islamic world, especially when broadcasts can be readily identified as sponsored by the U.S. government and dismissed as propaganda.

New Technologies Bring New Challenges

New technologies have dramatically altered media consumption patterns worldwide. Satellite television is now more important than radio in most areas, especially in the high-priority target area of the Middle East. Radio retains importance in Africa and some other areas, but worldwide it is rapidly losing audience to television. Shortwave radio is in steady decline both for broadcasters and listeners, which explains why nearly all of the world's premier shortwave broadcasters have gone out of business or dramatically downsized. A strategic role for reduced shortwave broadcasting to some areas may be to act as a "force multiplier" by targeting smaller committed audiences that can then move content to digital platforms. Radio's future in general may lie more in the area of delivering program streams on fixed and mobile Internet where they will share space with video and text content.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are taking on increasing importance for international broadcasters as was seen in the Arab uprisings of 2011–2012.[13] They were successfully employed to mobilize demonstrators. Equally important, they also allowed participants and onlookers to become citizen reporters who recorded dramatic events in video and audio on mobile telephones and posted content on Internet sites such as YouTube. Satellite TV broadcasters could then access them and transmit them back to in-country audiences, greatly amplifying the original message. But "the journalism of verification and the immediacy enabled by social media can sometimes collide,"[14] and their value for providing sustained news, information, analytical perspective as the ingredients of critical thinking appear highly limited.

Social media function as force multipliers in spreading messages from a few activists to many (which can rapidly and exponentially become many to many in a "viral" manner) forming additional and overlapping networks. Communications are no longer one-way but an interactive dialogue between sender and receiver and among receivers on various platforms. While the role social media played in

fostering political change in the Arab uprisings may have been exaggerated, as with all technologies they can be used for good or ill. Just as political activists seeking democratic change can use these new technologies to their advantage, they can also be effectively employed by repressive regimes for their own less noble purposes.[15] Social networks can promote either positive ends, such as undermining a dictatorial regime, or advance terrorist goals, such as those of Al Qaeda.

It is important to remember amidst all of the accolades for so-called "Twitter revolutions" that people make revolutions, not technology. Technology is a useful tool that can facilitate activist efforts to mobilize anti-government activities, but without committed individuals eager to overthrow a dictatorial structure and create a new political system no amount of new technology can bring about political change.[16] This lesson from Cold War broadcasting remains relevant today.[17]

International Broadcasting is in Flux

There is now a surfeit of global media providers on all platforms and a tendency for users to "channel-surf," spending only seconds or minutes on a given station rather than attentively following any single broadcaster. Heightened international competition, especially in the area of satellite television broadcasting, has already relegated USIB to the second tier of international television broadcasters. Many countries have expanded their international TV services, including China (CCTV), Russia (RT), Saudi Arabia (Al Arabiya), Germany (DW-TV), France (France24), Qatar (Al Jazeera), Japan (NHK), and Iran (IRIB). USIB lacks a dedicated global satellite TV channel in English, despite the huge surge in English language capability in most parts of the world and a hunger among young people to learn English. In its broadcasts to the tumultuous Middle East, USIB divides its video output among MBN's Alhurra in Arabic, VOA's Persian Broadcasting Network (PBN) to Iran, and shorter scheduled VOA satellite and Internet transmissions in English and other languages.

While this expansion of satellite TV broadcasting has been underway, many countries which share our democratic values are cutting back on their overall international broadcast services, especially radio. Radio Canada International, Radio France International, Radio Netherlands Worldwide, BBC World Service, and ABC Radio Australia have all suffered hefty budget cuts in recent years and in many cases elimination of entire broadcast services, especially shortwave.

In addition to satellite broadcasting, numerous international satellite TV services are now disseminated worldwide (and increasingly in the U.S.) through domestic cable systems. In general, foreign TV services have had more success in gaining placement on cable networks than the more limited and diverse USIB TV offerings. On balance, USIB and other Western public broadcasters are slipping behind the competition in terms of global media presence. While CNN International, Fox International, and CNBC International, among others, have had success in reaching international audiences they are commercial services with different content and goals than publicly-funded USIB.

Traditional state-sponsored international broadcasters are today supplemented by other media, including exile-staffed radios targeted at specific countries and financed by governments or privately. Examples are Belsat TV to Belarus (supported by the Polish government and Polish television TVP), satellite TV to Iran from Los Angeles (private), and external radios for North Korea (North Korea Reform Radio,

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Open North Korea Radio, Radio Free Chosun, all based in Seoul, South Korea) and Burma (Democratic Voice of Burma based in Oslo, Norway, and also on satellite TV), financed in part by the congressionally-funded National Endowment for Democracy. America Abroad Media has with private funding organized intra-country virtual "town meetings" in Arabic, Turkish, and other languages. There are also numerous religious broadcasters on the international airwaves. While it is unclear what impact these broadcast operations have, they are an added presence in the cacophonous global media milieu.

Complicating the task of meeting the challenge of bringing USIB into the 21st century as a state-of-the-art global media player is the difficult budgetary situation in which the United States finds itself. Financial resources are relatively more limited now than during the Cold War, when both VOA and RFE/RL could rely on generous budget support. In contrast, Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) congressional budget requests (and appropriations) have been falling in recent years in response to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines. The budget request for 2013 of $720 million is back at 2009 levels, having fallen from an actual $742 million in 2012 and $768.8 million in 2011.[18] Even more sobering is the prospect that the OMB guidance for 2014 may be considerably lower. This is at a time when the demands on USIB are expanding and competition is keener, especially in the high-priority and volatile Islamic world.

Moreover, Congress and the OMB are showing less tolerance for multiple legacy broadcast organizations with overlapping activities and management structures. Unlike the Cold War era, where a strong case could be made that VOA and RFE/RL were largely complementary, they and their more recent siblings Radio Free Asia, the Middle East Broadcasting Network (Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa) and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (Radio and TV Marti) are now often viewed with considerable justification as duplicative.[19] USIB broadcasters produce programs in 59 languages targeted on countries, which, with three exceptions, lack fully free media,[20] and a third of these languages (20) are carried by two of the broadcasters (VOA and RFE/RL or RFA). The different and often competing elements of USIB have strong patrons among America's politicians and pundits, who have little appetite for seeing favored broadcasters reduced, consolidated with the same language service of another USIB broadcaster, or eliminated. Anomalies abound. Funding for broadcasts to Cuba, for example, nearly matches funding for broadcasts to China, which is of major strategic importance, and that funding is divided between VOA and RFA.[21] The current structure impedes allocation of resources according to American strategic priorities.

A changed global political and media environment, new technologies, heightened friendly and adversarial competition, budgetary pressures, and outmoded legacy structures and their political patrons have coalesced to place USIB at a critical juncture. Major institutional reform is essential to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

IV. REACHING EXPANDED AUDIENCES WORLDWIDE IN SUPPORT OF FREEDOM

All USIB—if it is to serve the purposes for which it is funded and compete successfully in the fragmented and rapidly diversifying global information market place—must focus on intended audiences and be attuned to their culture, perceptions, and information deficits. It must be more than audiences-focused—it must be audiences-centric. And audiences are plural—within a given society, key elites and other social groups have different information needs from those of the general population, and reliable market intelligence is crucial in determining changing target audiences and communications strategies to reach them.

All audience groups in un-free, information-deprived, or information-biased countries have one thing in common—they search first of all for credible information about their own world, about local developments, that they cannot obtain from controlled or otherwise limited domestic media. Asked why he tuned in to RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal and not Pakistan state radio, a listener in North Waziristan replied that "he just wanted to know what was going on in his surroundings."[22] News—objective reporting of unfolding events—is a necessary but not sufficient response to this demand, for audiences also seek context that gives meaning to the news: feature stories, moderated discussions, news analysis, and informed commentary. Local perspectives require reports from local journalists, channeled through and edited by a core of in-house journalists with linguistic, cultural, and area expertise. Audiences also seek accurate and reliable coverage of international events, including coverage of the United States, in terms meaningful to them. They seek "empathetic objectivity"—programs that are balanced and objective but are responsive to their information needs.[23]

This need for an audiences-centric approach applies to all USIB. Two decades after the end of the Cold War, it is no longer possible to justify, let alone afford, two separate USIB content streams, one focusing on America's story and the other on domestic developments in foreign countries. That was indeed the original rationale for funding two broadcasters to a given country during the Cold War. VOA covered America and U.S. foreign policy, as part of what would later be termed public diplomacy, along with international events, from the perspective of the United States. RFE and RL as substitute free domestic radios—later termed surrogate radios—focused on developments in the countries to which they broadcast from the perspectives of the audience.

VOA director Henry Loomis once compared this approach to two blades of a scissors working together to create an effective cutting edge.[24] The dual capability was effective and justified during the Cold War, although even then the different missions were sometimes clearer in theory than in practice. The Eisenhower Administration sought to sharpen the distinctions in the late 1950s,[25] but over time VOA language services–which originally broadcast translated programs prepared centrally in English–gained autonomy to create their own programs covering local issues in order to attract audiences. In some cases, such as the Albanian service (the only USIB broadcaster in Albanian), a VOA language service was a unique provider of local news. In other cases VOA duplicated RFE and RL services—occasionally, as with its Czechoslovak service in the late 1970s and early 1980s, providing local news more effectively than RFE. Meanwhile, RFE and RL managers asserted more editorial supervision over their decentralized language services, which had always covered international and U.S.

issues of interest to their audiences. In short, the division between two functions—public diplomacy and surrogate broadcasting—became blurred operationally over time in response to audience demand for local coverage and perspectives.

Given this evolution, and the revolution in global media traced above, it is time to abandon what has become a false dichotomy between public diplomacy broadcasting and surrogate broadcasting and move beyond both terms in public discourse. The need today is to focus all USIB on a single mission—providing information to and facilitating communication in support of freedom with and among peoples in the context of their own situation and perspectives. That purpose is stated or implied in the current mission statements of the BBG ("To inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy"), RFE/RL ("to promote democratic values and institutions by reporting the news in countries where a free press is banned by the government or not fully established [providing] uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate"), RFA ("to provide accurate and timely news and information to Asian countries whose governments prohibit access to a free press"), and Radio and TV Marti. It is only partially expressed in the MBN mission statement ("to provide objective, accurate, and relevant news and information to the people of the Middle East about the region, the world, and the United States") and inadequately conveyed by the VOA Charter, which defines VOA's mission as "represent[ing] America, not any single segment of American society…present[ing] a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions…present[ing] the policies of the United States…and…responsible discussions and opinion on these policies." This sole focus on the United States in the Charter diminishes the valuable operations of many VOA language services that provide excellent coverage of local developments.

Providing information to, and facilitating connections among, peoples in support of freedom and democracy in the U.S. national interest is the rationale for public spending on USIB. While the justification for two distinct content streams—public diplomacy and surrogate broadcasting—has faded, what remains as important today as during the Cold War is the indispensability of objective journalism. The first point of the VOA Charter (incorporated in legislation in 1976) required VOA news to be "accurate, objective, and comprehensive." RFE/RL's Programming Policy Guidelines issued that same year required "accuracy and objectivity" in RFE/RL broadcasts.[26] Without objective journalism, broadcasts will lack credibility, lose their intended audiences, and will not merit taxpayer funding. As RFE's first audience research director pointed out in the mid-1950s: "Whatever influence we expect to exercise has to be grounded on credibility. Credibility is the prerequisite for everything else."[27] Today USIB is required by law to be "conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism" and to broadcast news "which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive."[28] That requirement is repeated in the current mission statements of all the broadcasters.

If USIB is to effectively support freedom and democracy in the U.S. national interest, all of its broadcasts must observe the highest standards of professional journalism in providing information and perspectives that are attuned to the needs and context of the audience. USIB must at the same time avoid four pitfalls.

First, USIB cannot be simply just news, a local news feed. It must complement news on breaking events and issues in the audience countries and the world at large with added value—explanatory

features, discussions, news analyses, and thoughtful commentary relevant to the audiences while avoiding any type of advocacy which would reduce credibility.

Second, USIB must avoid being a channel for public diplomacy, defined by the State Department as intended "to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics."[29] Efforts to use USIB for public diplomacy so understood, and in particular to defend current U.S. foreign policies, will dilute or negate influence gained by effective coverage of local events and drive away audiences not predisposed to accept U.S. government interpretations of international events. U.S. government editorials, currently mandated for VOA, are counter-productive in this context.

This is not to suggest that audiences-centric USIB broadcasts should ignore the United States. Indeed demand for information about the United States exists in most USIB broadcast areas. Covering America has been the essence of VOA's mission, but other USIB networks are no strangers to the American narrative, despite their focus on local news and trends in their broadcast areas. During the Cold War, one of the most successful programs of Radio Liberty's Russian Service—"Broadway 1776" (the address of RL's New York office)—followed the ups and downs of New York's growing Russian immigrant population as it learned to negotiate markets, a new and vibrant culture, and arcane institutions like local PTAs. It effectively told America's story through the eyes of its listeners.

Third, USIB must also avoid being a channel for strategic communications, defined by the Administration (in terms that seem to subsume public diplomacy) as "synchronization of our words and deeds and how they will be perceived by others, as well as…programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences."[30]

This is not to devalue the importance of traditional public diplomacy or new strategic communications that tell America's story. Both are important tools of American soft power. But they are functions properly conducted by the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs, whose mission is to "engage international audiences in sustained, meaningful interaction on the full spectrum of U.S. policy objectives,"[31] and by the Defense Department, and are distinct from audience-centric communication discussed here. They cannot be directly coordinated with USIB if the latter is to keep its distance from the Executive Branch and be viewed by intended audiences as a credible, objective source of news and analysis. Any effort to combine these different functions in a single organization with a coordinated strategy orchestrated by the National Security Council, the State Department, or the Defense Department would doom all of them to failure.

Fourth, USIB should avoid entanglement with commercial media networks, such as CNN International, Fox International and CNBC International. These for-profit organizations do not fill the same function as USIB and should not, in any way, be linked to it. These commercial media networks, despite claims of objectivity, often do present a point of view and broadcast style that would be detrimental were it to be identified with USIB. Co-mingling USIB with commercial broadcast operations would diminish its role of supporting freedom and democracy and compromise USIB's independent identity as congressionally-funded in the national interest.

V. REVAMPING OBSOLETE LEGACY INSTITUTIONS

Since the end of the Cold War, USIB has in practice evolved toward a single audiences-centric mission, while proliferating organizations responsible for carrying it out. At the beginning of the 1990s, USIB consisted of two organizations—VOA and Radio Marti as part of the governmental United States Information Agency (USIA) and RFE/RL as a private, non-profit grantee of the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB). In the subsequent decades the two organizations have become seven, the BBG, IBB, VOA, Radio and TV Marti, RFE/RL, RFA, MBN with Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, "an illogical patchwork, an archipelago of broadcasting organizations lacking clear individual missions and lacking a normal separation between management and oversight."[32] This proliferation of organizations (described further in the Appendix) resulted from ad hoc responses to foreign policy challenges, funding opportunities, and political compromises at the end of the Cold War and was perhaps unavoidable during a period of transition. It is singularly ill-suited for the challenges of the 21st century and unsustainable in the current U.S. budgetary environment.

The challenge today is to recast USIB as a single organization, funded by Congress but not part of the Executive Branch, that will produce and distribute efficiently on multiple platforms audience-centric programming in the U.S. national interest. This organizational structure would be similar to the BBC World Service (in its former more independent state), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), all of which are funded by government grants but are guaranteed operational independence. Distance from Government—a firewall—is essential to ensure the journalistic professionalism, free from bureaucratic interference, that is crucial to the credibility of the operation. Governance should be provided not by a federal agency (such as the Board for International Broadcasting, which oversaw RFE/RL prior to 1995, or the Broadcasting Board of Governors today) but by a non-partisan board of directors including individuals with journalism and foreign affairs experience who exercise oversight but delegate management functions to the executives it appoints (and rely on management for any staffing needs).[33] NED provides one possible model of governance.[34] Other modes of governance such as those of USIP and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars may be appropriate so long as oversight is separated from management and a structure of non-federal journalism is maintained.

A single new organization, Congressionally funded but non-federal, would avoid the reality and perception of duplication of resources and permit maximizing capabilities devoted to individual countries on a rational basis, reflecting U.S. strategic interests and priorities. It would replace the multiple management layers and duplicative support structures—e.g., finance, administration, human resources, public relations—of the current multiple organizations with a single inclusive structure. As a non-profit entity it would avoid the stigma of "official radio or TV" which other international broadcasters (apart from China and Russia) have avoided or are now abandoning. While VOA has for years provided quality objective journalism as required by its Charter, government broadcasting with civil service journalists has always been problematic. Successfully opposing consolidation of all USIB in a federal agency in 1994, then-Senator Joseph Biden labeled "U.S. Government journalist" an oxymoron.[35] A private organization would also enjoy greater flexibility (within the stipulations of its Congressional appropriation) to staff its

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media operations, redeploy its resources, take on new challenges, and contract for needed external services in response to changing priorities.

The proposed new organization would not abolish language services of the current five broadcasters but would incorporate them as building blocks supported by a central news operation, with the goal after a transition of one language service to a given country using a given technology. For example, the new organization's Middle East division would include RFE/RL's *Farda* radio to Iran, VOA's Persian News Network TV to Iran, and MBN's *Alhurra TV* and *Radio Sawa* to the Arab world. As these examples suggest, the new organization would preserve, not abandon, respected brands that have acquired equity over time in the broadcast region—the VOA brand in Asia, Africa and Latin America, RFE/RL brands in Eurasia, RFA brands in East Asia, and increasingly MBN brands in Middle East.[36] It is the vernacular identifications, not Washington labels in English, that are important to the audience. Most Afghan listeners to *Radio Azadi* have probably never heard of RFE/RL and it is *Parazit* (a popular VOA TV program to Iran, currently suspended), *OMG: Meiyu* (a VOA program for China), and *Deewa* (VOA to FATA Pakistan) that are meaningful to the audiences. The new organization will need a new "Washington" name to demark it from the past, but that name will be irrelevant to most listeners and viewers.

RFE/RL's institutional history is instructive in this regard. RFE and RL, albeit both based in Munich, functioned as two completely separate organizations with little contact for 25 years. Their consolidation into RFE/RL, Inc., in 1976 did not change the names of broadcast services—Radio Liberty's Russian Service remained *Радио Свобода,* and RFE's Polish Service remained *Rozgłośnia Polska Radia Wolna Europa.* Although the consolidation was controversial to some in Washington and traumatic to some of the staffs, it was irrelevant to listeners, who continued to tune in to what they considered to be "their" radio stations.

RFE/RL's history—grantee consolidation in 1976, termination of operations in Munich in 1995, and establishment of a recast downsized organization in Prague—also demonstrates that it is feasible to incorporate in a single structure personnel from different organizations with a variety of workplace practices, pay scales, and benefits. Most challenging, but not unprecedented,[37] will be the transition of current federal employees in IBB, VOA, and radio and TV Marti to non-federal status. Up-front funds will be required for a combination of buy-outs and grandfathering of benefits, with cost savings coming in future years.

The new organization will need to develop meaningful measures of impact so that it can demonstrate to its management, board of directors, the executive branch and the Congress the continuing utility of

USIB. This requirement goes beyond a head-count of listeners and viewers, many of whom are exposed to only brief audio or video clips while channel-surfing on local broadcast carriers. It will require an adequately funded sophisticated audience research program: quantitative survey research to measure audiences and behaviors, qualitative research to better understand them, and market intelligence to effectively target key audience segments. This research effort must be designed to drive a cutting edge USIB geared to differentiated audience needs in an evolving and chaotic global media environment.

The new organization will also require strong analytical research on its broadcast areas to enable it to communicate intelligently on local affairs and avoid a "one size fits all" approach to journalism. Crucial for RFE/RL's influence during the Cold War was in-depth knowledge of the political, social, and cultural environment of its target countries. While resources will not permit the extensive research capability created by RFE/RL, regional expertise must be provided by staff and links to specialists in academe and think-tanks. This will help distinguish future USIB content from much of the shallow and tendentious journalism pervasive in the global media scene.

VI. THE PRESENT MOMENT

We advance these proposals not in a vacuum but as a contribution to an ongoing policy discussion among Washington officials, USIB broadcasters, and others on reshaping USIB.[38]

In its Strategic Plan for 2012–2016 the BBG has set as its goal to become the "world's leading international news agency by 2016" with a weekly global audience of 216 million (up from the current independent audience research estimate of 165 million). It will be impossible to reach that goal without major reform. The Strategic Plan is an important step in the right direction, calling for "impact through innovation and integration" and creation of "one organization, many brands." It will be critical to marshal congressional and executive branch support for this comprehensive new global media vision, which builds on the successes of Cold War broadcasting but recognizes the inadequacy of the Cold War model for today's fundamentally transformed political, technological, and media worlds.

Practical considerations may argue for a step by step approach to reorganization, such as first consolidating the three grantee broadcast corporations—RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN—into a single nonprofit corporation with a single management structure overseeing their current language services.[39] That step would reduce duplicate management and administration and allow the resources saved to be devoted to enhancing language services. Pilot projects such as the BBG's virtual Global News Network[40] would improve sharing of scattered information sources. But unless these and other steps result in a single non-federal organization that also incorporates VOA and Marti language services, USIB will remain a house of too many rooms for bureaucratic and not mission-related reasons. Absent a single organization, duplicative managements and duplicative and competing broadcast services to individual countries will remain. It will be impossible to develop an overarching U.S. international communications strategy and allocate resources appropriately. All this will be increasingly difficult to justify to the Congress and the American people.

Once again, the history of RFE/RL is instructive. When RFE and RL were merged in 1976, language services were initially grouped into two separate legacy broadcasting units—RFE Division

and RL Division—which preserved many duplicate functions and perpetuated the misallocation of resources. The RFE Bulgarian Service, for example, remained three times larger than the RL Ukrainian Service for twenty years. It was only the pressure of relocation and downsizing in the 1990s that forced replacement of those legacy divisions by a single Broadcasting Division (and a single research division). The result was sharing and collaboration among all broadcast services and a positive effect on the quality and receptivity of the programs. A new organization today will require regional subunits with executive editors, but these must be truly regional—e.g., a Middle East division, an Asian division—and not extrapolations of the current multiple broadcast organizations, e.g., not a VOA Division or an RFA Division or an RFE/RL Division.

Additional studies and discussion will help fine tune the optimal model for the future of USIB, as well as ideas on how to most effectively implement reorganization. Least helpful in this discussion will be bureaucratic turf wars and lobbying by employees, veterans, or other partisans of the current broadcast organizations who look not to the future but to the past. Perpetuating the status quo is a recipe for dooming USIB.

Just as there was no "silver bullet" that brought an end to the Cold War, there should be no expectation that a transformed USIB will be sufficient to transform dictatorships or authoritarian states into democracies. That is not its task. But a new U.S. global media vision with a single mission and a corresponding single organizational structure can be a crucial and sustainable element of American soft power. It can effectively support freedom in unfree and information-poor societies precisely because it conveys American values through objective news reporting and analysis but does not try to sell America. Implementing the new vision will assure a U.S. presence and influence in a global information sphere that is increasingly fragmented and often hostile to U.S. interests. Such a new vision and structure for USIB would be an essential component of the U.S. national security objective of promoting a more democratic and peaceful world.

Appendix

THE EVOLVING STRUCTURE OF UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

The Voice of America was established in 1943 as the official United States government radio and first broadcast in German to Nazi Germany. Expanding into a major world broadcaster in English and many local languages, it operated after 1947 as part of the State Department and from 1953 to 1999 as part of the United States Information Agency.

Radio Free Europe began broadcasting to Eastern Europe in 1950 and Radio Liberty began broadcasting to the Soviet Union in 1953, both as substitute free media staffed by exiles. Both were non-profit organizations overseen and covertly funded through 1971 by the Central Intelligence Agency. Thereafter they were funded by open Congressional appropriation through the Board for International Broadcasting, a federal agency established solely to fund and oversee RFE and RL. The two radios were merged in 1976 as RFE/RL, Inc.

Radio Marti was established in 1984 within the United States Information Agency as a substitute free press for Cuba. It later added television broadcasts.

The International Broadcasting Act of 1994 established the International Broadcasting Bureau within USIA, including VOA, Radio/TV Marti, and the transmitter facilities of those stations and RFE/RL. The Act abolished the BIB and created within USIA the autonomous Broadcasting Board of Governors, responsible for the activities of all U.S. non-military international broadcasting.

Congress established Radio Free Asia in 1996, under BBG oversight, to serve as a substitute free press for China and other Asian countries under authoritarian rule.

With the abolishment of USIA in 1999, the BBG became an independent federal agency incorporating the IBB (with VOA and Radio/TV Marti) and also overseeing the non-profit organizations RFE/RL and RFA. Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV, broadcasting to the Middle East, were subsequently established as part of the non-profit organization Middle East Broadcasting Network, also under BBG oversight.

The BBG's current USIB organizational chart is available at
http://www.bbg.gov/about-the-agency/organizational-chart/

Notes

1. Included in USIB are the governmental Voice of America (VOA), the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB—Radio and TV Marti), the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) which provides administrative and technical services, and the congressionally-funded but privately managed grantees Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN-Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa). All of these organizations are under the Broadcasting Board Governors (BBG)—a federal agency headed by bipartisan presidential appointees responsible for overseeing all U.S. Government-sponsored, non-military international broadcasting. Details of this complex structure are provided in the Appendix.
2. *Freedom of the Press 2012: A Global Survey of Media Independence*, Freedom House, 2012 (which notes gains in media freedom in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia).
3. See *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds. Central European University Press, 2010, 142–144.
4. For an analysis of the role of Western radio in the Soviet media environment see R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR During the Cold War*. Hoover Institution Press, 2007, 41–46. The case can be made that RFE and other Western broadcasters were even more successful in Eastern Europe than in the USSR.
5. As cited in A. Ross Johnson. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond.* Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2010, 1, 185.
6. *Congressional Record,* October 19, 1999.
7. As cited in Parta, 2007, xv.
8. The term "propaganda" has become a synonym for "spin," for biased, nonobjective, counterfactual, dishonest journalism and for disinformation.
9. Parta, 2007, 36–39.
10. See R. Eugene Parta, "Western International Broadcasting: Cold War Impact on the USSR and Current Challenges in Middle East Crisis Areas" in *Building bridges: Security community and partnerships for change*. OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), Vienna, 2011, 29–35.
11. See Nat Krutchen and Jane Kim. "A Quiet Opening: North Koreans in a Changing Media Environment," InterMedia, Washington, DC. 2012.
12. George P. Shultz, Principal Reporter. A. Ross Johnson, ed. *Communicating with the World of Islam*. Report for the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands. Hoover Institution Press. 2008.
13. See Philip Seib, *Real Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era.* Palgrave/Macmillan, 2012.
14. "Truth in the Age of Social Media," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2012, 3.
15. See A. Ross Johnson, "Today's Liberation Technologies," *Hoover Digest*, 2011, no. 3; Evgeny Morozov. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom.* Public Affairs, 2011. Morozov argues that "to salvage the internet's promise to aid the fight against authoritarianism, those of us in the West who still care about the future of democracy will need to ditch both cyber-utopianism and internet-centrism….and to opt for policies informed by a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers posed by the Internet, matched by a highly scrupulous and unbiased assessment of its promises…"
16. Shawn M. Powers and William Youmans suggest that international broadcasters can use the new technology to aid the emergence of civil society in failed or failing states. ("A New Purpose for International Broadcasting: Subsidizing Deliberative Technologies in Non-transitioning States," *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 8, no. 1, article 13).
17. The "Liberation Technology" project at the Stanford University Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law has created a loosely organized global network of tech-savvy individuals exploring and shaping this new communications phenomenon. "Liberation technology" has been defined by Larry Diamond as "any form of information and communication technology that can expand political, social and economic freedom." (*Journal of Democracy,* 21, no.3, 69–83). While this definition accentuates the positive, the lively and often contentious dialog on the network (http://liberationtechnology.stanford.edu) is equally concerned with threats to Internet freedom from all sides, and the nefarious ends which the new technologies can also serve.
18. USIB budget figures through 2013 can be found on the Broadcasting Board of Governors website, www.bbg.gov.

19. Detailed comparison of program content for a specific week of two services broadcasting in the same language could establish the degree of duplication and the relative strengths of each service.
20. See the chart "BBG Worldwide Impact," *BBG 2011 Annual Report*, http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2012/06/BBGAnnualReport_LoRes_Part1.pdf
21. FY 2012 estimated spending for Radio and TV Marti is $29.3 million; for broadcasts to China, $17.1 million for VOA and $16.1 million for RFA (BBG data).
22. "Why Fighting Mullah Radio Is Not Easy," *Express Tribune* (Karachi), http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/10611/why-fighting-mullah-radio-is-not-easy/
23. Charles S. Dameron, "To Better Know One Another; The Meaning and Importance of Empathetic Objectivity in Government-Sponsored International Broadcasting," Honors Thesis, Dartmouth College, May 2011.
24. As cited in Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, 75.
25. Johnson, 2010, 124–126.
26. Memorandum from RFE/RL President Sig Mickelson, December 1, 1976, RFE/RL Corporate Collection, Hoover Archives. The Guidelines specified that "Objectivity requires that information neither be omitted nor slighted in broadcasting because it may seem favorable to the East or unfavorable to the West."
27. Johnson, 2010, 120.
28. 22 USC Sec. 6202
29. http://www.state.gov/r/
30. "Update to Congress on National Framework for Strategic Communication," http://mountainrunner.us/files/2012/03/President-response-to-NDAA-1055-of-2009.pdf, with comment by Matt Armstrong http://mountainrunner.us/2012/03/national-framework-strategic-communication-public-diplomacy/
31. http://www.state.gov/r/iip/
32. *Understanding the Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting*. McCormick Tribune Conference Series, 2007, 23.
33. The current BBG structure postulating a collective CEO of part time Presidentially-appointed Governors responsible for both directing a federal agency and overseeing non-profit grantees is widely criticized as dysfunctional. Former BBG Chairman James K. Glassman has depicted the BBG/ collective CEO as "structurally a mess" (comments at the Hudson Institute, September 5, 2012, http://c-spanvideo.org/event/207761); Helle C. Dale and Nick Zahn, "Time to Rethink the Broadcasting Board of Governors," Heritage Foundation Web Memo no. 3192, Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, March 16, 2011, p. 1, http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/wm3192.pdf..
34. See David Lowe, "Idea to Reality; NED at 25," http://www.ned.org/about/history#1.
35. *Congressional Record*, January 25, 1994.
36. USIB does not compete at a global level with other international broadcasters. It competes in numerous local markets worldwide. Here the brand equities that have been built over the years have significant value that should not be lost. The global audience for USIB is only an aggregate of dozens of local markets. If USIB seeks to establish a global brand to compete at that level with BBC, Al Jazeera, DW, RT, etc. it logically should be in television and in English. The counter-argument is that USIB would then be in competition with commercial US international broadcasters such as CNN International, Fox International, CNBC International, and Bloomberg International.
37. The Department of Energy, for example, successfully defederalized some of its Technology Centers.
38. Contributions include *Understanding the Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting.* McCormick Tribune Conference Series, 2007; Alan Heil, ed., *Local Voices/Global Perspectives: Challenges Ahead for U.S. International Media,* Public Diplomacy Council, 2008*;* Robert McMahon, "Channeling the Cold War. U.S. Overseas Broadcasting,*" Foreign Service Journal,* October 2009, 52–58; Kim Andrew Elliott, "America Calling: A 21st Century Model,*" Foreign Service Journal,* October 2010, 31–37*; Impact Through Innovation and Integration. BBG Strategic Plan 2012–2016,* http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2012/02/BBGStrategicPlan_2012-2016_OMB_Final.pdf; Jeffrey Gedmin, "Turn Your Radio On," *The American Interest*, October–November 2012. The issues are discussed on several on-line forums and blogs, including "BBG Strategy; Discussing the BBG Strategic Plan and the Future of International Broadcasting," published by the BBG Office of Strategy and Development (www.bbgstrategy.com); the Public Diplomacy Council website (www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org); " A Blog on Understanding, Informing, Empowering, and Influencing Global Publics, published by Matt Armstrong" (www.mountainrunner.us); "Kim Andrew Elliott Reporting on International Broadcasting" (http://kimelli.nfshost.com/); and "USG Broadcasts; BBG Watch," published by anonymous "former and current BBG and VOA employees and their supporters" (http://www.usgbroadcasts.com/bbgwatch/)
39. Deloitte Consulting LLP, *Broadcasting Board of Governors Grantee Merger Assessment*, November 10, 2011 (redacted), http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/11/Deloitte-Grantee-Consolidation-Assessment-Redacted.pdf
40. http://cryptome.org/2012/04/bbg-2013.pdf; http://www.innovation-series.com/2012/05/18/project-profile-global-news-dashboard/

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