

**Testimony of the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Delivered by S. Enders Wimbush  
Before the  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
April 6, 2011**

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

Just a few months ago in Tahrir Square, a nascent democratic movement that started in Tunisia blossomed on the streets of Cairo. Citizens took to the square to air their political and economic demands for change and justice.

The Arab-speaking world saw and heard the events unfold through reporters from Alhurra Television, on the scene and on the air, 19 hours a day, providing live coverage of these historical events. Radio Sawa's Egyptian stream expanded its newscasts to provide in-depth information on the latest news from Cairo, interviews with U.S. officials, demonstrators in the square, and noted analysts from U.S. and Middle Eastern human rights organizations and think tanks.

At the height of the demonstrations, pro-Mubarak protesters targeted international journalists, including those of Alhurra. They passed out flyers in the streets, naming Alhurra, saying "we are going to kick you out of Egypt." Thugs came to the Alhurra news studio in Cairo, threatening the journalists with bodily harm, and told them to leave. Alhurra's correspondents quickly relocated to another facility and continued reporting. For a time, as these threats against journalists continued, Alhurra was the only international satellite news network to broadcast live from Cairo.

Stories from the Square included a profile of Rami Gamal Shafik Ahmed, a young man who came out to protest in Tahrir Square to call for change. Rami was killed during the clashes; yet his family continued to protest each day to finish the fight he started.

From the beginning of the democratic movement in January, Alhurra and Radio Sawa's newsrooms received calls from Egyptian opposition leaders and citizen

protesters wanting to share information and their views. Representatives of Egyptian opposition parties – including Wafd, Ghad, and the Movement for Democratic Change – contacted the Alhurra newsroom. They wanted to appear on Alhurra because they knew people were watching and listening.

Alhurra's coverage was quoted around the world, including by CNN. The leading pan-Arab newspaper Al Hayat, wrote that "Alhurra was distinguished for its live and continuous coverage of the protest through its network of correspondents in the different Egyptian cities." Time.com commented on Alhurra's positive coverage, "exposing Yemenis to the support of the outside world."

Alhurra's coverage of Middle Eastern dissent continued in Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen. In Libya, a Radio Sawa correspondent accompanied the rebels as they advanced towards Tripoli and their eventual retreat under heavy fighting. In an attempt to deprive Libyans of an accurate portrayal of events happening in their country, Libyan authorities jammed the Alhurra signal on the popular Nilesat satellite system for almost a month. When the signal was initially jammed, Alhurra's newsroom received hundreds of phone calls an hour from Libyans saying they could not receive the channel's signal. In the meantime, state-controlled channels insisted that everything was normal and there was no insurrection.

On March 27<sup>th</sup>, in a cooperative transmission effort with the Department of Defense, direct broadcasts of Radio Sawa were beamed to Libya on an FM frequency from the "Commando Solo" airborne transmission platform. Commando Solo will provide approximately six hours per day of radio transmission from the aircraft. Prior to this breakthrough, Radio Sawa was only available in Libya via Internet streaming or satellite broadcast.

Using social media, Alhurra and Radio Sawa are soliciting citizen journalists to provide crowd source information to complement the reports provided by their correspondents. Audiences across the Middle East discussed the historic events across the region through social media. Comments to Alhurra and Sawa were discussed on the air. The networks regularly ask questions through Facebook, such as, 'will Libya become a democratic state or head into civil war,' and encourage viewers to share their opinions.

Over the last three months Alhurra has experienced an enormous increase in feedback from the audience. Using email, Facebook, and Twitter, Alhurra and

Radio Sawa have heard from their audiences in a way never previously experienced. Comments received from the audience include:

- Arabs discovered that Alhurra is one of the most credible channels. I'm sure that you will contribute to spreading the ideas of freedom and democracy.
- I would like to thank you for your honest view of the current revolution happening in Egypt.
- I watch Alhurra constantly because it is credible.
- "Thanks you for the most distinctive coverage and analysis of this great event and all the global and political developments on the subject."
- "Thanks for the genius Akram Khuzam who oversees and continues to convey to us everything from the field."

In a BBG flash survey of 500 respondents in Cairo and Alexandria from February 3 - 8, of the sources Egyptians said they were using for news and information about the protests and related developments, 98% cited TV, 76% friends and family, 52% radio, 51% newspapers, and 31% the Internet. Poll results indicate that Alhurra TV reached a large audience during this period, with 25% of respondents saying they had used the station to follow the events – far more than either BBC or CNN.

As the political events in Egypt and the Middle East unfolded, every BBG network provided reports on this aspirational story.

The Voice of America relayed the story around the world. RFE/RL and Radio Free Asia also carried the story, tailoring it to their audiences. In China, RFA focused mainly on China's reaction to the demonstrations, including the government ban on news of the unrest as well as Chinese cyber activists' calls for similar demonstrations. Similarly, Radio and TV Marti reported the story of Egypt and Libya to its listeners and viewers in Cuba.

The programming produced during these events is emblematic of the work that U.S. international broadcasting has done throughout its history. Over 60 years ago, our nation began laying the foundations to support the free flow of ideas around the world in support of democracy and freedom of thought. The Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty served American interests during the Cold War, bringing the power of a free press to populations under the thumb of ideologically driven information sources.

Today, the United States faces new threats, including that of violent extremism. We understand that we cannot combat extremism through force alone. It is critically important that we engage audiences in discussions about events on their soil and abroad, and provide the accurate news and information that supports freedom of thought and democratic development.

Throughout U.S. international broadcasting's long history, the tools and goals have been consistent: delivering consistently accurate, reliable and credible reporting that opens minds and stimulates debate in closed societies -- especially where local media fails to inform and empower its citizens.

The Subcommittee has asked whether America's foreign broadcasting is consistent with our nation's interests and commitment to freedom. We believe that it soundly is. The BBG's legislative mandate, spelled out in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, defines the BBG's role and function in the national interest and the support of freedom. The Act finds that "Open communication of information and ideas among the peoples of the world contributes to international peace and stability and the promotion of such communication is in the interests of the United States." It requires that BBG broadcasts shall include "news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive" and that broadcasting shall "be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism."

The Act recognizes that accurate news informs the public, allowing individuals to aspire to freedom, and to make decisions based on what is true – rather than on what their governments may tell them.

This simple idea – that the objective truth serves the national interest -- has had profound consequences. Accurate, comprehensive news from VOA during World War II contributed to the defeat of German Nazism. During the Cold War, the same news product from the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty broadcasts helped end Soviet totalitarianism.

Today, U.S.-sponsored broadcasts, available through radio, television, the Internet and mobile devices, allow populations to learn the facts; share their experiences on the ground through Twitter, SMS text, and cell phone video; and become participants in the global community that is providing a new voice to those who have had none.

In those early days of the VOA and RFE/RL, broadcasts focused on Europe and the former Soviet Union. Today, four of the five broadcast networks under the supervision of the Broadcasting Board of Governors -- the Voice of America (VOA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia -- provide programming for Muslim audiences.

Eighteen of RFE/RL's broadcast languages, almost two-thirds of the total, are directed to regions where the majority populations are Muslim, including to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the majority Muslim populations of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the North Caucasus in the Russian Federation.

BBG broadcast resources follow national security priorities.

- VOA's Persian News Network (PNN), the top international broadcaster to Iran, reaches 19.6 percent of the adult population watching at least once weekly, with the majority of those surveyed indicating the network has increased their understanding of events in the Middle East, Iran, and the U.S. The PNN website is one of VOA's most active. Its popular satire, *Parazit* (or "Static") attracts millions of Facebook page views, and was featured in the *Washington Post* and on the John Stewart show as a groundbreaking program.
- The Middle East Broadcasting Networks broadcast throughout the Middle East, to an audience of 35 million.
- VOA's Indonesian Service broadcasts to the largest Muslim majority country in the world and now reaches more than 26 million Indonesians each week.
- Broadcasting in a coordinated stream, VOA and RFE/RL provide news and information to Afghanistan and the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region in Dari and Pashto. RFE/RL and VOA together reach 65 percent of Afghan adults each week.

- Targeted programming by RFE/RL and VOA to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region – in the Pashtun dialect of the region – reaches a critical audience that would otherwise consume Taliban radio.
- 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: Alhurra TV, Radio Sawa, RFE/RL’s Radio Free Iraq, and VOA Kurdish.

Advancing press freedom is central to the broadcast mission. Our broadcasts serve as both an alternative to censored media and a model of a free press. Our journalists around the world endure hardships and take great risks to bring news and information that is vital to our audiences. As the State Department honors its diplomats who have died while serving their country, the BBG’s memorial to fallen journalists honors their cause. Our technical experts who combat censorship online and on the airwaves, play a continuous chess match of transmission interference circumvention.

BBG broadcasts serve a host of critical functions, including:

- 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.

A VOA broadcaster once said that the impact of U.S. international broadcasting is “being there, every day.” Audiences around the world depend on our consistent broadcasts. On Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest, she immediately sought to appear regularly on VOA and Radio Free Asia’s Burmese Service programs.

Listeners were able to engage Aung San Suu Kyi on topics of their choice in a weekly series. In the first installment, Ms. Suu Kyi answered questions from listeners on her time under house arrest, global sanctions against Burma, free speech and human rights, and democracy.

## Iran

In Iran, BBG networks continue to provide critical information to a population that must rely all too heavily on state-sponsored news reports. VOA's Persian News Network continues to grow in professionalism and its impact is seen in audience response. After Iran's disputed June 12 presidential election, citizen journalists in Iran sent cell phone videos and still photos directly to PNN, providing evidence of the chaos on the ground that could be shared with their countrymen throughout Iran. Those events triggered thousands of emails and phone calls to the network. In a flash poll taken in Iran shortly after the elections, 31 percent of those polled said they had followed the election controversy on PNN's "Newstalk" program.

Reporting on events within Iran, RFE/RL's Radio Farda continues to expose injustice, such as in its story on the plight of members of a Workers Union who were imprisoned for insulting the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. Radio Farda's medium wave signal has been jammed since shortly after its inception. More recently, it was the target of a denial-of-service attack to swamp Farda's incoming phone lines and disrupt calls from its audience.

Given the high priority of broadcasting to Iran, the Board has performed close oversight of program capabilities, with the knowledge that these broadcasts must continue to meet the needs of the Iranian people and U.S. national interests.

New leadership at PNN is building on the network's earlier engagement with Iranian audiences. Program adjustments and enhancements are underway that will provide more investigative news, greater insights into American life, coverage of Iranian history and culture, in-depth economic reporting, and programs that create and moderate debate between representatives of major Iranian political and social groups.

Through programming that honors Iran's past, we can discuss Iran's 2,500 year legacy – one that the Iranian government intentionally diminishes. Our future-oriented programming will connect us to the aspirations of the Iranian people to connect with the world around them. Enhanced economic programming will expose government corruption, commodity cartels, and Revolutionary Guard economic dominance. Of even greater interest would be discussion of Iran's huge economic potential should its leadership abandon its nuclear program and malign activities in the region, and its government's decision to nonetheless hobble this potential at the expense of its citizens.

## Ensuring Media Access

A prerequisite for success in PNN's transformation is achieving robust and secure satellite, radio and internet access for PNN's programming to Iran. The Iranian government routinely jams our satellite transmission as well as our radio programming, and takes a series of steps to inhibit access to our Internet materials.

The BBG also relies on satellite broadcasting to bring its TV and radio programming to audiences, such as in the Middle East and Iran. By and large, satellites are not jammed. However, there have been recent episodes of satellite jamming of Alhurra Television programming during the recent unrest in the Middle East, and more sustained satellite jamming of PNN by the Iranian Government.

Iran has employed two kinds of jamming techniques: Uplink jamming, which attacks all programming on the satellite transponder; and downlink or terrestrial jamming at or near the frequency of the receiving satellite antenna system. Iran has been using downlink jamming techniques for at least 10 years on a regular basis and is known to increase the intensity of jamming during and after internal political events in an effort to restrict outside influences.

Finding technical and diplomatic solutions to counter the Iranian government's measures is essential to achieving the BBG's mission.

## China

The BBG sponsors two broadcast networks that reach China – VOA and Radio Free Asia. Both provide radio broadcasts to China and both have a substantial web presence. VOA also provides five hours of weekly television broadcasts.

As is the case in Iran, the broadcasts face substantial transmission hurdles. The BBG is unable to place its programming on any media in China, and the Chinese government heavily jams our radio broadcasts.

In spite of this, China's firm control over access to information has been increasingly thwarted by the proliferation of cell phones and the Internet. The Internet is particularly worrisome to the Chinese, and authorities have been

working on ways to limit its scope. Nonetheless, the Internet offers opportunities for the BBG and other media to reach Chinese citizens.

Web traffic to VOA's Chinese Service increased by 117 percent in March 2011 compared to the same period in 2010, to reach more than 1.1 million monthly visits. This number does not include all proxy traffic. This more than doubling in web traffic is attributed to fast, unique and accurate reports about the Jasmine demonstrations in China and events in the Middle East and the U.S. response. VOA also reached eight million recipients in February for its daily Chinese news emails delivered to the PRC.

Audiences for VOA's China Service programming can hear programming by Correspondent Zhang Nan in Beijing, questioning the hidden costs associated with events of the National People's Congress, and reports by Correspondents Nan Wang and Suli Yi in Oslo covering the Nobel Peace Prize events for Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo.

A listener to Radio Free Asia might hear a report on the detention of longtime RFA supporter and interviewee Ran Yunfei. Ran, an activist and writer, was charged with "incitement to subvert state power." He was arrested after he published an article online detailing support for the Egyptian revolution which brought an end to the 30-year rule of former president Hosni Mubarak.

## Social Media

As events in North Africa and the Middle East indicate, the communications environment around the world is changing rapidly. BBG and State Department sponsored independent research confirms the gathering momentum behind the use of digital media as a source of news and information, as well as the accelerating decline of radio – and particularly shortwave radio – in many parts of the world.

In this changing environment, the BBG needs to respond to this new global challenge with the same innovation and creativity that marked the U.S. response to the Cold War. The digital age offers new channels to disseminate our journalism. But it also offers the opportunity to interact with audiences, to share news and opinions, rather than simply handing down the news. Building online communities with our audiences offer the promise to actively engage in discussion on issues of mutual concern and interest. The agency's web anti-censorship program, using proxy sites and downloadable software, can sustain this web community.

In response to government censorship of the Internet, the BBG has developed a robust anti-censorship program to combat web blockage. This anti-censorship program is a small, but increasingly important, part of the agency's mission to provide news and information to audiences overseas.

The agency's Anti-Censorship Team employs existing technology to overcome web censorship, explores ways for our audiences to get past state-imposed censorship of websites and e-mails, and provides unfiltered access to information.

Our most used anti-censorship tools are web-based proxies with e-mail notifications of changed web proxy addresses. BBG broadcasters send large amounts of e-mails daily to interested users (primarily in China and Iran) that include both news summaries and proxy links. To get the e-mails through censors, we change keywords and modify the apparent sender.

The agency also partners with numerous academic and non-government organizations working on freedom of access to the Internet to develop and implement circumvention tools.

Traffic to BBG digital platforms and interactive dialogue with audiences has increased as young audiences seek information unavailable through local media. As digital traffic has increased, trends for radio listening are downward.

In 2006, 24 percent of Chinese adults owned and used radio for news and information. Results of a 2009 survey indicated that only 8 percent of Chinese adults are weekly radio listeners – half as many as in 2007.

Ownership and use of shortwave radio is in further decline. The BBG's 2010 survey showed that only .1 percent of respondents listen to VOA in Mandarin. Only 0.4 percent of respondents reported listening to any shortwave radio broadcasts in the previous week. Survey results showed hardly any acknowledged listening to any international broadcaster. Twenty-two out of 8,635 respondents reported having ever listened to VOA, while 7 had ever listened to RFA or BBC.

In contrast, the trend for use of the Internet and mobile technology is increasing rapidly. China has the largest number of Internet users in the world.

VOA Mandarin streams had 432,000 views in January 2011, and China is a consumer of VOA's English and Special English websites and media content - these websites are not blocked by the Chinese government. VOA's English learning website, "goEnglish.me" is also unblocked.

A recent survey showed that 38 percent of respondents said they own a computer, up from 30 percent in 2008 and 20 percent in 2007. Twenty-eight percent of Chinese are weekly Internet users – representing a sevenfold increase in China's Internet population since 2003.

The growth of mobile technology will offer additional means for content delivery to Chinese audiences. Seventy-five percent or more of Chinese mobile subscribers are projected to have access to the Internet within five years. By 2015, more than 550 million people are projected to have 3G subscriptions in China.

## Conclusion

BBG networks play a critical role in countries that lack adequate press freedom and credible alternative media. 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 the agency to remain on top of media realities and trends, and position ourselves for the future.

Broadcasting is an independent yet integral part of a global U.S. government communications effort that seeks to advance U.S. national interests. In areas of critical U.S. foreign policy interest, there are numerous players in public diplomacy and strategic communications activities.

U.S. international broadcasting has a distinct niche – objective journalism. The power of a free press fuels and sustains the exchange of ideas and the struggle for individual thought and freedom.

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