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U.S. International Broadcasting: Background and Issues for Reform

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Summary

Since the beginning of modern U.S. international broadcasting during World War II, debates over the effectiveness, strategic direction, and necessity of broadcasting activities have persisted. Longstanding arguments over the structure and operation of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) have only added to these debates, prompting recurring efforts to reform the organization and its programs. Many Members of Congress have consistently shown concerted interest in U.S. international broadcasting, conducting oversight over the BBG and its individual broadcasters, and calling for increased resources and programming for certain regions, countries, and language services as well as streamlining of broadcast structures and resources. Interest in this area is expected to continue into the 115th Congress and with the start of a new Administration.

Headed by a Board of eight presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed members, and the Secretary of State, the BBG has responsibility for supervising, directing, and overseeing the operations of the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), the Voice of America (VOA), and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB, operating the Radio and TV Martí services to Cuba), as well as funding and oversight of the grantee broadcasters Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN).

Current Issues Facing the BBG and U.S. International Broadcasting

Although U.S. international broadcasters enjoy an audience in the hundreds of millions and seem to be effective in providing objective news coverage to populations that might otherwise not receive it, many observers perceive the BBG as a flawed structure that is inefficient, duplicative in its activities, and ineffective. A number of issues concerning the BBG and U.S. international broadcasting continue to spark debate in Congress, including

- BBG operations and changes to executive leadership;
- strategic direction and allocation of resources in U.S. international broadcasting;
- the effect of shifts in information communication technologies, especially the importance of the Internet and digital media, on U.S. international broadcasters;
- the need for greater efficiency of U.S. international broadcasting, including possible consolidation of the several U.S. international broadcast entities;
- continuing disagreements over the role of U.S. international broadcasting in advancing U.S. foreign policy goals and promoting democracy; and
- means to assess and improve U.S. international broadcasting effectiveness.

Reform Efforts in the 114th Congress

In December 2016, Congress adopted provisions within the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (S. 2943) that would make significant changes to the structure of U.S. international broadcasting, including abolishing the Board of Governors as head of the BBG agency, as well as significantly increasing in law the responsibilities and authorities of the BBG Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to direct international broadcasting activities and restructure U.S. international broadcasting overall. As of December 14, 2016, the bill has been presented to the President for signature. In addition, previously during the 113th and 114th Congresses, the House Foreign Affairs Committee considered two bills, more recently the United States International Communications Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 2323), which also would have significantly changed the structure of U.S. international broadcasting. Major provisions in each of these proposals are compared at the end of this report.

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Introduction

Modern U.S. government-funded international broadcasting began during World War II with the creation of the Voice of America, and continued throughout the Cold War period with Radio Free Europe broadcasting behind the Iron Curtain, and Radio Liberty targeting populations in the former Soviet Union. Over the decades, VOA expanded its broadcasting and language services into other regions of the world, including the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Later, new services for Cuba and East Asia were initiated. Most recently, in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, significant new resources and services were introduced to reach the peoples of the Middle East and Central and South Asia.

For almost as long as these services have been in existence, debates over the effectiveness, strategic direction, and necessity of U.S. international broadcasting have persisted. Since the creation of the Broadcasting Board of Governors in the 1990s, and its establishment as an independent government agency in 1999, arguments over its structure, as a government agency headed by a nine-member bi-partisan Board, have only added to these debates.

Many observers perceive flaws in the BBG's structure that create (1) weak leadership from the Board and overreaching interference by Governors in day-to-day operations; (2) overlapping management structures amongst the BBG, elements of the federal international broadcasting bureaucracy, and five separate international broadcasters; (3) duplicative programming and language services and a lack of focus on individual broadcaster missions; and (4) inefficient administrative and personnel management of the agency. Current legislation in the 113th Congress is intended, in large part, to address these perceived shortcomings.

In addition, a number of issues concerning the BBG and U.S. international broadcasting continue to spark debate, including

- problems with Board operations and the possible need to create a new position for executive leadership;
- recommendations for the strategic direction and allocation of resources in U.S. international broadcasting;
- the effect of shifts in information communication technologies, especially the importance of the Internet and digital media, on U.S. international broadcasters;
- proposals for improving the efficiency of U.S. international broadcasting, including possible consolidation of the several U.S. international broadcast entities;
- continuing disagreements over the role of U.S. international broadcasting in advancing U.S. foreign policy goals and promoting democracy; and
- assessment and improvement of U.S. international broadcasting effectiveness.

History of U.S. International Broadcasting[1]

The structure, purposes, and aims of U.S. government-funded broadcasting to foreign countries have evolved over seven decades, spanning World War II, the Cold War, the fall of communist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe, and the response to the threat of terrorism after the September 11 attacks on the United States. Paralleling these global political shifts, the technology

[1] Sources for this section and the following section, "U.S. International Broadcasting Structure," include BBG reports and budget documents, BBG and individual broadcaster websites, and archived CRS products.

and delivery mechanisms of broadcasting to local, regional, and global audiences have also evolved, requiring U.S. international broadcasting to adapt and innovate to effectively deliver programming and inform audiences.

Beginnings of U.S. International Broadcasting

The modern structure of U.S. international broadcasting had its beginnings in World War II. At the start of U.S. involvement in the war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established an agency for foreign intelligence and propaganda that operated at first without congressional authorization. This agency's Foreign Information Service broadcast news and propaganda to Europe. In 1942, the agency was formally created as the Office of War Information, which established the Voice of America (VOA) as well as overseas operations constituted by a United States Information Service (USIS). VOA broadcast to Europe throughout the war, with a mission to provide accurate news to foreign publics that could not otherwise obtain it. Although some called for VOA to cease operations after the end of World War II, VOA was preserved along with other U.S. government information programs, and transferred to the Department of State. From 1945 to 1953 VOA was housed under variously named offices at the State Department, including Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, the Office of International Information and Educational Exchange, and the International Information Administration. In 1953, President Eisenhower created the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), within which VOA remained until 1999, when USIA was abolished.

Post-War Broadcasting to Europe

In 1946, the U.S. government established Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), based in West Berlin and broadcasting at first to Germans in West Berlin and later to all of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany). For most of its existence, RIAS operated as a partnership between the U.S. government and the government of the former Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), providing radio and, beginning in the late 1980s, television programming to large audiences in Berlin and East Germany. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and German reunification in 1990, the U.S. government ceased funding for RIAS and the service was ended in the early 1990s.

While VOA was established as an official U.S. government broadcaster, the U.S. government also began support for Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), two radio services that started broadcasting to Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, respectively, in the early 1950s. RFE originally broadcast to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria in 1950, while RL started broadcasting to the Soviet Union in 1953. RFE and RL were technically independent services, each overseen by a private U.S. corporation, the National Committee for a Free Europe, and the American Committee for Freedom of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R. (later Radio Liberty Committee). Both were conceived, however, by the State Department, and from their beginning received substantial funding from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

RFE and RL initially broadcast programming to encourage the liberation of the populations of the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe from communist, totalitarian government rule. These broadcasts responded to propaganda from the Soviet and other communist governments. Both RFE and RL utilized émigré broadcasting professionals from the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe, and provided programming that concerned the domestic matters of each country, providing a surrogate "home service" that was intended to replace the communist government's news media. By the late 1950s, as the Cold War continued and the Iron Curtain

threatened to remain in place for the coming decades, however, RFE and RL transformed their programming focus from liberation to the encouragement of the gradual liberalization and democratization of the communist systems of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. RFE and RL also developed internal research departments that provided intelligence and analysis of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union based on media sources from the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc as well as Western Europe, and archives of Soviet and Central and Eastern European documents and other materials.

Bringing the Surrogates Under Greater Oversight

The CIA ended its funding for RFE and RL in 1971. In 1973, Congress formally created the Board of International Broadcasting (BIB) to oversee and fund both RFE and RL under the International Broadcasting Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-129). The President appointed the nine members of the independent bipartisan board. The term "BIB" also referred to the independent federal agency created to administer and provide federal funding to RFE and RL. RFE and RL combined to form a single independent corporation, RFE/RL, Inc., in 1976.

During this period, RFE/RL adapted its programming to its Soviet and European target audiences. RFE/RL had been characterized by critics as broadcasting one-sided propaganda to combat Soviet and Communist Bloc media. These services now transitioned more fully to the role of a surrogate broadcaster, providing an example of an independent broadcaster promoting journalistic integrity and democratic principles of a free media.

Satellite Television Broadcasting Begins

In 1963, USIA began producing television programming for the first time, combining it with its longstanding film service. With the advent of satellite television technologies, USIA created its WORLDNET satellite television service in 1983. WORLDNET transmitted its television programming through USIS posts and U.S. embassies, as well as over foreign television and cable networks. In 2004, WORLDNET was merged into VOA.

New Broadcasting Services for Cuba

In the early 1980s, Congress authorized the creation of separate services from VOA's Spanish language programming that specifically targeted the population of Cuba. In 1983, Radio Martí began broadcasting to Cuba, and was joined in 1988 by TV Martí. These services were organized under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), within the organization of USIA's Bureau of Broadcasting, which also oversaw VOA and WORLDNET broadcasting. Although Congress created the Martís as part of USIA with close links to VOA and not as an independent grantee organization like RFE/RL, the Martís were established to act as surrogate broadcasters in Cuba, similar to the surrogate role of RFE/RL in Europe and the Soviet Union.

Creating a Bipartisan Firewall for International Broadcasting

With the enactment of the United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (Title III of P.L. 103-236; USIB Act), Congress abolished the BIB and reorganized all existing U.S. international broadcasting services under a new Broadcasting Board of Governors within USIA. The USIB Act established BBG to be composed of nine presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed members, with the Secretary of State serving as a voting member ex officio and providing foreign policy information and guidance to the Board. By ensuring broadcasting independence while at the same time institutionalizing guidance from the Secretary of State, the USIB Act aimed to

produce U.S. international broadcasting that is both credible and supportive of U.S. foreign policy objectives.

A New Surrogate for East Asia

Recognizing that several of the most repressive regimes in the world ruled in East Asia, many observers and Members of Congress argued for several years for increased broadcasting to that region. Congress eventually authorized creation of Radio Free Asia (RFA) in 1994, and it began broadcasting in 1996, with a core mission to "provide accurate and timely news and information to Asian countries whose governments prohibit access to a free press."[2] RFA's target audiences are mandated by legislation and include countries in Asia where governments prohibit access to a free press, specifically the People's Republic of China and its regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam. RFA was authorized as a nonfederal, private nonprofit corporation that would operate under a BBG grant, much like RFE/RL.

BBG Becomes an Independent Agency

In an effort to streamline U.S. government entities and activities in international affairs after the Cold War, Congress enacted the Foreign Affairs Agencies Consolidation Act of 1998, abolishing a number of independent government foreign affairs agencies. The act abolished USIA, folding the public diplomacy authorities into the State Department. The BBG, which had been created in 1994 within USIA to oversee U.S. international broadcasting, was preserved as an independent government agency in the act.[3] The International Broadcasting Bureau, created under the 1994 USIB Act as the government entity carrying out VOA and other federal government nonmilitary international broadcasting, was also preserved, and placed directly under the supervision of the BBG.

New Middle East Broadcasting After 9/11

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government undertook a number of initiatives to improve communications with the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa and to counter violent extremism and ideological support for terrorism. The BBG began increasing VOA broadcasting to the Middle East in 2002, and overhauled VOA broadcasting by creating within VOA the Middle East Radio Network (MERN), focusing on reaching larger, younger audiences on FM frequencies, as well as new VOA Arabic Internet and television programming. The next year, BBG proposed removing Middle East programming from VOA, ending the VOA Arabic service, and creating a new network for broadcasting to the Middle East. The new network would be a nonprofit corporation, similar to RFE/RL and RFA, operating under federal funding from the BBG. Congress first funded the new network, named the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), in FY2004 appropriations, which supervises Alhurra television and Radio Sawa.

U.S. International Broadcasting Structure

An independent agency of the U.S. federal government, the BBG operates a global broadcasting organization, including five separate broadcasters with varied missions and programming, agency and personnel administration, and operations and management of international communications

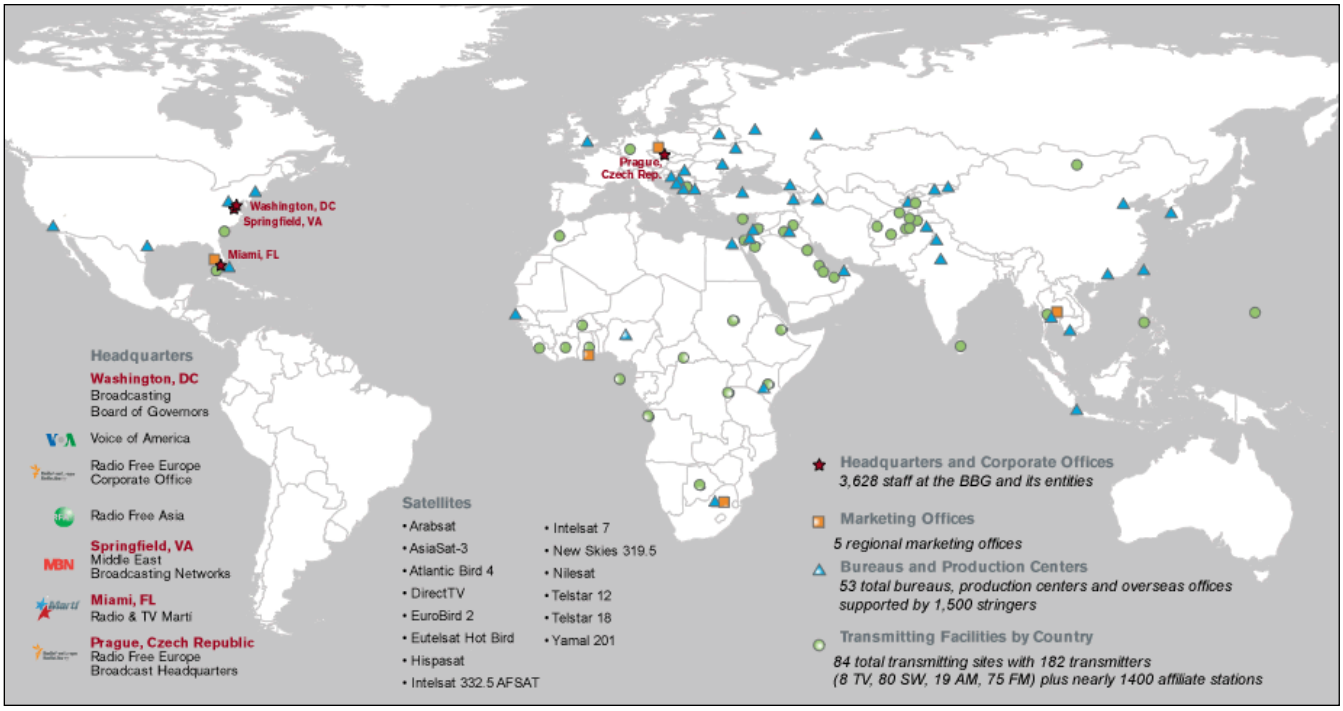
[2] See http://www.rfa.org/english/about/mission.html.

[3] See Title XIII of the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (Division G of P.L. 105-277).

technology and transmission, among other authorities. This section provides background information on the BBG, its broadcasters, its broadcasting missions, and activities.

Figure 1. Map of Worldwide U.S. International Broadcasting Facilities

Corporate offices, overseas bureaus, and transmission facilities



Source: Broadcasting Board of Governors, http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/map/.

Broadcasting Board of Governors

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is the name of both the independent federal agency that directs and oversees all U.S. government-funded nonmilitary broadcasting, and the nine-member board that provides executive leadership for the agency and each individual broadcaster under its authority. The BBG oversees strategic direction and performance research for U.S. international broadcasting programs. The Board membership is bipartisan, with eight presidentially appointed governors, no more than four of whom may be from the same political party, and who must be confirmed by the Senate. Appointed governors serve three-year terms. The Secretary of State serves as the ninth voting member ex officio, and provides information and guidance concerning U.S. foreign policy to the Board. The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs serves as the Secretary's representative on and chief State Department liaison to the Board. The Board is assisted in its duties by an Executive Director.

Within the BBG's agency structure, the Board oversees the operations of the International Broadcasting Bureau, which is responsible for maintaining the broadcasting network and providing technical support for U.S. international broadcasters. The BBG also oversees the two government agency broadcasters, VOA and OCB, as well as, RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN.

U.S. International Broadcasting Standards and Principles

The Board, as a bi-partisan body, serves in part as a "firewall" between the independence and objectivity of U.S. international broadcasters on the one hand, and other U.S. government entities and authorities, which might influence the broadcasters in ways that are politically motivated. Nevertheless, the broadcasters are required to consider U.S. foreign policy as they carry out their missions. Indeed, under the USIB Act, U.S. international broadcasting must adhere to a number of diverse broadcasting standards and principles. Section 303 of the USIB Act[4] requires U.S. international broadcasting, among other things:

- to be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States;
- to provide a balanced and comprehensive presentation of U.S. thought, institutions, culture, society, and government policies, and for VOA particularly, to represent America, not any single segment of American society;
- not to duplicate the activities of U.S. private broadcasters or government-supported broadcasting entities of democratic countries;
- to be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism, providing news that is consistently authoritative, objective, and comprehensive;
- to promote respect for human rights, including freedom of religion;
- to provide programming to meet needs which remain unserved by the media available to the people of certain nations, as well as to provide a variety of opinions and voices from within particular nations and regions prevented by censorship or repression from speaking to their fellow countrymen.

These broadcasters are shielded from undue influence from the State Department, as well as the Board itself:

> (d) PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF BROADCASTERS.—The Secretary of State and the Board, in carrying out their functions, shall respect the professional independence and integrity of the International Broadcasting Bureau, its broadcasting services, and the grantees of the Board.[5]

Nevertheless, as is noted in the broadcasting principles set out in the USIB Act, the Secretary of State maintains an advisory role on U.S. foreign policy interests in U.S. international broadcasting. The USIB Act ensures that such interests are represented at least in the strategic decision making of the BBG:

> **SEC. 306. ROLE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE.**
>
> (a) FOREIGN POLICY GUIDANCE.—To assist the Board in carrying out its functions, the Secretary of State shall provide information and guidance on foreign policy issues to the Board, as the Secretary may deem appropriate.[6]

[4] 22 U.S.C. § 6202.

[5] Section 305(d) of the USIB Act (22 U.S.C. § 6204(d)).

[6] 22 U.S.C. § 6205(a). See also Section 1(b)(3)(D) and (E) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956, as amended (P.L. 84-885; 22 U.S.C. §2651a(b)(3)(D) and (E)), which sets out the role of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in assisting the BBG in presenting the policies of the United States and to submit editorial materials to the BBG for broadcast on VOA.

International Broadcasting Bureau

The BBG has responsibility for supervising, directing, and overseeing the operations of the International Broadcasting Bureau. Until recently, a director, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, headed the IBB. Currently, as the BBG moves toward creating a new Chief Executive Officer position, an interim three-person IBB management team has been installed, with a Director of Global Operations, Director of Global Strategy, and Director of Global Communications. The IBB implements the BBG's strategic vision, and supports the worldwide broadcasting services of the Voice of America, as well as the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (Radio and TV Martí). It provides oversight over the grantee broadcasters. The IBB consists of the Offices of the General Counsel; Chief Financial Officer; Communications and External Affairs; Strategy and Development; Digital and Design Innovation; Performance Review; Contracts; Human Resources; Civil Rights; Policy; Security; and Technology, Services, and Innovation (TSI). The IBB provides technology and transmission services to each of the broadcasters under the U.S. international broadcasting umbrella overseen by the BBG. It also conducts audience and performance research and assessment and performs the financial, outreach, and administrative tasks of the agency. The IBB is responsible for maintaining its own broadcast and digital transmission networks, while also contracting with media affiliates that broadcast programming of U.S. international broadcasters. It also conducts media training programs, combats foreign government jamming of radio and TV transmissions, and TSI's Internet Anti-Censorship team supports broadcasters and targeted foreign populations with tools to circumvent government blocking of Internet access to news sites.

Federal Government Broadcasters

Voice of America

VOA broadcasts in 45 languages to an estimated audience of 165 million people on radio, television, and digital media. While continuing to broadcast primarily though radio and television, in recent years VOA has increased its presence on the Internet and digital platforms to expand its audience, especially targeting youth. According to its Charter, VOA "serve[s] as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news ... "; "present[s] a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions ... "; and "present[s] the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, [as well as] discussions and opinion on these policies."[7] The U.S. government is permitted VOA airtime on a scheduled basis to present editorial comments. These editorials represent the only nonindependent content on broadcasts under BBG supervision.

Cuba Broadcasting (Radio and TV Martí)

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) broadcasts Radio and TV Martí programs to Cuba from its facilities in Florida. These broadcasts seek to provide a reliable source of news and information that is otherwise unavailable to the Cuban people. According to the BBG, "Radio and TV Martí and *martinoticias.com* encourage freedom and democracy in Cuba by using their programs to promote human rights and individual freedoms."[8]

[7] Section 303(c) of the USIB Act (22 U.S.C. § 6202(c)).

[8] Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2015 Congressional Budget Request*, p. 51.

"Grantees" and "Surrogates"

As is explained in the History section, above, U.S. international broadcasting has grown and evolved over time to include a number of different entities with varied missions. Broadcasters are characterized in different ways, based on the type of entity they are or the type of programming they are tasked with producing and communicating.

There are two types of broadcasting entity under the supervision of the BBG. First, the "federal" entities are in fact part of the BBG as a federal agency: these are VOA and OCB (Radio and TV Martí). Next, the BBG makes federal grants to independent broadcasting corporations in order to carry out the mission of U.S. international broadcasting. Such entities operate under grant agreements that require them to broadcast under certain objectives, guidelines, and principles. The "grantee" broadcasters are RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN (Alhurra and Radio Sawa).

When considering types of programming, VOA is often considered to be the flagship "general" or "global" broadcaster in U.S. international broadcasting, providing world news and news about the United States and its policies. On the other hand, RFE/RL, for example, provides programming that is meant to inform foreign populations in place of an indigenous free media in countries and regions that do not possess it or where some sort of media repression is present. In this way, RFE/RL acts as a "surrogate" free media in those countries and regions. RFA is also a "surrogate" broadcaster.

OCB's Radio and TV Martí, as well as the MBN networks, Alhurra and Radio Sawa, appear to be a blend of entity and broadcasting types. While the Martís are often considered to be "surrogate" broadcasters, perceived to be providing information to the Cuban people in the place of a free Cuban media, technically OCB and these services were created as part of VOA, and are federal government entities within the BBG, unlike the other two "surrogates" that are "grantees," RFE/RL and RFA.[9] MBN, conversely, has a mission that seems to parallel VOA's, providing news and information "to the people of the Middle East about the region, the world, and the United States," including U.S. government policies. In this way MBN can be termed a "general" or "global" broadcaster, but, unlike VOA, MBN is a "grantee," and was in fact created as a grantee replacement for the federal VOA Arabic service.

Grantee Broadcasters

The BBG also has funding and oversight authority over surrogate radio grantees: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) which also operates services targeting populations in the Middle East and Central and South Asia; and Radio Free Asia (RFA). It also provides funding to another grantee, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, which operate Radio Sawa and Alhurra television, and have a more hybrid general/surrogate mission. These grantee broadcasters are independent corporations that operate under grants from the BBG.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a surrogate broadcaster that operates under a BBG grant. It broadcasts in 28 languages to countries in Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. RFE/RL provides content on country and regional issues in places where no free media exists or where the media "are engaged in a transition from totalitarian control," and where other government-sponsored or social-group-inspired repression threatens democratic principles.[10]

[9] See Section 244 of the Television Broadcasting to Cuba Act (P.L. 101-246; 22 U.S.C. § 1465cc); Section 3(b) of the Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act (P.L. 98-111; 22 U.S.C. § 1465a). The BBG does not characterize OCB and the Martís as "surrogates."

[10] Ibid., p. 67.

Radio Free Asia

Congress authorized creation of Radio Free Asia as a surrogate broadcaster in 1994, and it began broadcasting in 1996, with a core mission to "deliver accurate and timely local news, information, and commentary" to Asian countries "that prevent or restrict freedom of the press."[11] RFA's target audiences are mandated by legislation and include countries in Asia where governments prohibit access to a free press, specifically the People's Republic of China and its regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam. RFA broadcasts in nine languages and three dialects.

Middle East Broadcasting Networks

Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. provides news and information to the Arabic-speaking population of the Middle East. As an independent nonprofit corporation, MBN, like RFE/RL and RFA, operates under a grant agreement with the BBG. According to the BBG, MBN's mission is to provide news and information "to the people of the Middle East about the region, the world, and the United States," including U.S. government policies.[12] MBN, therefore, has a mission somewhat similar to VOA's, while also including what might be considered surrogate programming. MBN networks stepped into the programming shoes of VOA's Arabic service, which was ended as Congress initially funded what became MBN. MBN networks include

- Alhurra, which provides television news to the Middle East, and Alhurra-Iraq, targeting television programming to Iraq;
- Radio Sawa, which broadcasts popular music alongside news reporting to attract the Middle Eastern population under the age of 35; and
- Afia Darfur, providing radio news programming about Darfur not otherwise available to the people of Darfur.

Performance Measuring and Evaluating Language Services

The BBG uses a number of different metrics to measure the performance of their broadcasters, including quantitative measurements of total audience size and broadcaster website visits. As with any media network, the BBG uses audience size as a primary measure of performance. In FY2016, the weekly audience sizes for VOA, RFE/RL, and MBN increased over FY2015, while RFA's experienced a decrease (see **Table 1**).

[11] Ibid., p. 71.

[12] BBG website, http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/mbn/.

Table 1. Audience for U.S. International Broadcasters, FY2011-FY2016

Weekly audience in millions

Weekly Listening/ Viewing Audience	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
VOA	141.1	134.2	164.6	171.6	187.7	236.6
MBN	41.6	30.9	31.8	29.3	25.7	27.5
RFE/RL	24.3	23.4	17.9	23.3	23.6	26.9
RFA	11.9	10.7	10.8	7.8	7.5	6.4
OCB	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

Source: BBG *Fiscal Year 2016 Performance and Accountability Report.*

The BBG also relies on "audience reach" as a primary measure of performance. As used by the BBG, "audience reach" is percentage of an target adult population that watch or listen to a broadcast service on a weekly basis.[13] The BBG also uses data to measure qualitative aspects of its programming:

- **Program credibility**, measured as the percentage of audience respondents who listen at least once a week and consider programming "very trustworthy/reliable" or "somewhat trustworthy/reliable."
- **Understanding**, determined as the percentage of audience respondents who say the programming has increased their understanding of current events "somewhat" or "a great deal."
- **Uniqueness**, measured as the percentage of audience respondents who say the programming presents information they cannot get from other broadcasters.

In previous years, the BBG measured "quality"—a measure of the programming on the basis of content, balance, accuracy, and presentation—rather than "uniqueness."

Table 2. BBG Programming Performance Indicators

Percentage of respondents, FY2016

	Credibility	Understanding	Uniqueness
Voice of America	86	86	25
MBN	82	80	Not available
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	87	81	25
Radio Free Asia	86	Not available	Not available
Office of Cuba Broadcasting	Not available	Not available	Not available

Source: BBG *Fiscal Year 2016 Performance and Accountability Report.*

[13] According to the BBG, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio France International, and Deutsche Welle all rely on this metric as a primary measure of broadcaster performance.

Table 2 provides performance measurements under these three metrics for FY2013. The table exhibits positive results overall for all of the broadcasters. Some observers contend that these high numbers might reflect the BBG's reliance on regular audience members to determine credibility and understanding, with a relative dearth of outreach to those who do not watch or listen to U.S. international broadcasters precisely because they do not find U.S. international broadcasters credible or useful. Measuring broadcasting to Cuba is not possible, the BBG explains, as it cannot access audience members to conduct useful research.

In addition to performance evaluation of each broadcast entity, the BBG reviews each language service individually on an annual basis. Data included in the BBG's annual Language Service Review includes information on each of the performance criteria explained above, as well as data from independent sources on the stability, political freedom, and press freedom in the countries where the language service is broadcast. It also provides information on media outlets competing with the U.S. international broadcaster in the country, and whether the targeted country's government is prohibiting or inhibiting distribution of the broadcaster's programming. The Board is required "to review, evaluate, and determine, at least annually, after consultation with the Secretary of State, the addition or deletion of language services" pursuant to Section 305(a)(4) of the USIB Act.[14] The BBG annually suggests eliminating language services to countries where press and political freedoms have improved significantly.

BBG Funding Information and Trends

The BBG, as an independent government agency, submits its own annual budget request. **Table 3**, below, provides appropriations and budget numbers for the BBG, IBB, and U.S. international broadcasters from FY2015 to the FY2017 request.

Table 3. Broadcasting Board of Governors Budget Information, FY2015–FY2017

($ in thousands)

	FY2015 Actual	FY2016 Program Plan	FY2017 Request
International Broadcasting Operations			
Federal Entities			
Voice of America	210,379	218,511	224,412
Office of Cuba Broadcasting	28,070	27,606	27,100
International Broadcasting Bureau	61,267	60,260	63,093
Office of Technology, Services, and Innovation	180,611	181,361	182,300
Total, Federal Entities	*480,327*	*487,738*	*496,905*
Nonfederal Entities			
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	103,942	108,614	121,138
Radio Free Asia	42,230	38,765	38,000
Middle East Broadcasting Networks	109,408	109,670	112,100
Total, Independent Grantee Organizations	*255,580*	*257,049*	*271,238*
Total, International Broadcasting Operations	***735,908***	***744,787***	***768,143***
Broadcasting Capital Improvements	***8,000***	***4,800***	***9,700***
Total, Broadcasting Board of Governors	**743,908**	**749,587**	**777,843**

[14] 22 U.S.C. §6204(a)(4).

Source: Broadcasting Board of Governors Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request.

Key Policy Issues

The BBG recently reported worldwide audiences for U.S. international broadcasters of over 200 million people.[15] In a number of instances BBG-supervised broadcasters have been accused of broadcasting programming that does not comport with the broad foreign policy interests of the United States.[16] U.S. international broadcasters and the American and foreign journalists working for them, nonetheless, are often generally considered to be effective sources of news and information in the countries where they broadcast. Their programming increases in audience size and importance especially in times of crises where the American voice and U.S. government policy is most salient to targeted populations.

While the goals and objectives of U.S. international broadcasting have been broadly supported by policymakers for many years, the BBG as an agency has often been the subject of criticism, from its operations and structure to the individuals making up the Board's membership. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for example, gave this testimony in a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in January 2013:

> [W]e need to do a better job conveying a counternarrative to the extremist jihadist narrative.... [W]e have abdicated the broadcasting arena.... [W]e have private stations, CNN, Fox, NBC, all of that. They're out there, they convey information. But we're not doing what we did during the Cold War. Our Broadcasting Board of Governors is practically defunct in terms of its capacity to be able to tell a message around the world. So we're abdicating the ideological arena, and we need to get back into it. We have the best values, we have the best narrative. Most people in the world just want to have a good, decent life that is supported by a good, decent job and raise their families. And we're letting the jihadist narrative fill a void. We need to get in there and compete—and we can do it successfully.[17]

Several issues and recommendations for reform have been put forward to make the BBG more effective.

Board Operations and Creating a New Position for Executive Leadership

Some observers see certain fundamental flaws with the structure of U.S. international broadcasting, especially with the BBG itself. Because nominations and confirmations of new Board members are often held up for months and even years, some contend, the BBG has become a "political football" that leaves U.S. international broadcasting without consistent leadership and damages morale within the agency. It has been argued that a Board made up of part-time, rotating, volunteer members, however dedicated and talented, is not as effective as full-time executive leadership. A recent report described the workings of the Board, and the relationships among its

[15] Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Fiscal Year 2015 Congressional Budget Request*, p. 3.

[16] See, e.g., William Booth, "U.S. government's Radio and TV Marti call Cuban Cardinal Jaime Ortega a lackey," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-05-05/world/35456652_1_havana-church-cuban-cardinal-jaime-ortega-dissidents; Ariel Cohen and Helle C. Dale, *How to Save Radio Liberty*, Heritage Foundation, December 13, 2012, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/12/how-to-save-radio-liberty.

[17] U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearing on the Terrorist Attacks in Benghazi, Libya, 113th Cong., 1st sess., January 23, 2013.

members, as well as between its members and the broadcasters, as dysfunctional in certain aspects.[18] Several reports have recommended changes to the composition of the Board, some calling for more seasoned journalists or career broadcasters, and others calling for experts in foreign policy, democracy promotion, and human rights. Some recommendations call for reform of the Board's operations, requiring Board members to be more engaged in Board decisions through more stringent requirements for attendance at Board meetings, among other reforms. The BBG has recently undertaken a number of changes to Board meetings and operations to address these issues. An alternative proposed in recent years would replace the current Board with an executive board to include one representative from each of five major U.S. news organizations directing a consolidated U.S. international broadcaster that is organized as a government-funded corporation, rather than a government agency.[19]

One of the main criticisms of the Board has been the perceived interference by individual Governors, and the Board as a whole, with the fundamental operations of U.S. international broadcasting, instead of remaining focused on strategic direction and oversight. At the same time, some have argued, U.S. international broadcasting lacks a strong, centralized executive position akin to an individual government agency head that would exercise sufficient authority to effectively direct the BBG's broadcasting efforts. In November 2011, the BBG itself first set out plans to create a new chief executive officer (CEO) position to head the agency.[20] Such a position would centralize authorities to direct and oversee on a more comprehensive and detailed basis the day-to-day operations of all components of U.S. international broadcasting, including the nonfederal grantee broadcasters.

Creating such a position, the BBG states, would place executive authority in one officer who would handle supervising day-to-day operations, while the Board would be freed to focus on long-term strategic direction and oversight. Second, it would institutionalize a strong bureaucratic leadership position that could increase efficiency and effectiveness across several individual broadcasters. Some observers have questioned this reform proposal, claiming it does not do enough to coordinate the overall direction of U.S. international broadcasting.[21] The BBG has attempted to increase cooperation and resource sharing amongst the various independent broadcasters in recent years, to reduce different elements working at cross-purposes or in duplication. While the CEO position would further this process by creating a position to encourage this coordination, it would leave in place several broadcasters, each with its own organizational structure, its own management team, some federal entities and some independent corporations. The CEO, while relieving the Board of taking on operational responsibilities, might still face opposition from entrenched, stovepiped broadcasting units that would keep the CEO sidelined in many areas of broadcaster strategic direction and cooperation.

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[18] See, e.g., U.S. Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Inspection of the Broadcasting Board of Governors*, ISP-IB-13-07, January 2013, http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/203193.pdf.

[19] The news organizations are ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, and ABC. See Kim Andrew Elliott, *America Calling: A 21st Century Model*, Foreign Service Journal, October 2010, p. 35.

[20] Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Impact Through Innovation and Integration: BBG Strategic Plan 2012-2016*, November 2011, http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2012/02/BBGStrategicPlan_2012-2016_OMB_Final.pdf.

[21] Emily T. Metzgar, *Considering the "Illogical Patchwork": The Broadcasting Board of Governors and U.S. International Broadcasting*, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy Paper 1, January 2013, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/perspectives/CPDPerspectives_P1_2013.pdf.

Strategic Direction and Resource Allocation

The BBG has taken steps and proposed others intended to improve the effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting overall while realizing cost savings through streamlining language services and transitioning to new information communication technologies. The Board is tasked with determining whether or not to end a language service, based on whether the population targeted by that service enjoys access to the reporting of a free press, among other factors. A recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), however, points out that two-thirds of BBG-supervised services overlap in language with another service, providing the BBG with the opportunity to consolidate such services or their programming to realize cost savings that the BBG has not yet captured.[22] GAO has also found that the BBG does not take into account the international broadcasting activities of other democracies, including the United Kingdom's British Broadcasting Corporation World Service (BBC), Germany's Deutsche Welle, and France's Radio France International (RFI), as well as international media networks such as CNN. Indeed, U.S. legislation contemplates the winding down of U.S. government-funded efforts when they would overlap or make redundant other such communications.[23]

The BBG has agreed that further streamlining can be undertaken, but contends that there are a number of reasons why it has not occurred. First, the BBG has in several circumstances proposed the ending or reduction of certain language services, but has been directed by Congress to maintain such services at their current levels in annual appropriations legislation. Second, the legislation authorizing U.S. international broadcasting demands that there be such overlap in services by maintaining the bifurcated structure of VOA providing world news and news about the United States and U.S. policy, and the surrogate broadcasters providing more local news in the place of an indigenous free press. Third, the BBG argues that broadcasting by private media and other government-funded international broadcasters target different audiences and follow different communication missions, making the continuation of U.S. international broadcasting necessary to carry out the purposes of the USIB Act and other U.S. international broadcasting authorities.

Shifts in Information Communication Technology

Recent BBG plans to refocus resources and concentrate on new technologies for U.S. international broadcasting have also come under criticism. The BBG has continued to push for downsizing its capacity to broadcast radio programming, especially short-wave radio, while vastly increasing its information dissemination on the Internet, including through social media and cell-phone and other mobile device delivery. BBG cites declining use of short-wave radio in countries where such reductions are targeted, and explains that U.S. international broadcasting needs to keep pace with other media outlets moving to new and digital media to maintain relevance and audience levels. Some observers argue, however, that short-wave broadcasting is still the best option for providing mass communication that is most resilient to jamming efforts by repressive governments, and that can reach into places where Internet, television, and even FM radio reception is absent.[24]

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[22] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Broadcasting Board of Governors: Additional Steps Needed to Address Overlap in International Broadcasting*, GAO-13-172, January 29, 2013, http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-172.

[23] See Section 303(a)(4) of the USIB Act (22 U.S.C. §6202(a)(4)); Sections 502 and 1005 of the United States International Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (P.L. 80-402; 22 U.S.C. §§1462 and 1437).

[24] See, e.g., Helle Dale, *Sequestration Prompts Attempt to Silence U.S. Radio Broadcasting*, Heritage Foundation, April

It has been argued that a migration to primarily Internet-based and cell-phone delivery of content is dangerous given the ability of repressive regimes to track online traffic and block access to websites. Some observers contend that U.S. international broadcasting should maintain a mix of different dissemination technologies, including traditional media such as radio, to ensure the broadest reach and most effective penetration of target markets. Short-wave transmissions, however, can be jammed, and the BBG is often successful in employing Internet circumvention software to ensure access to online content.[25] In addition, although the BBG and VOA have proposed cuts to radio broadcasts in certain countries and for certain languages, overall U.S. international broadcasting does provide a mix of different dissemination technologies and approaches, tailored to the media consumption habits of target audiences. Market research from BBG has shown radio usage as very high, for example, in many African countries, where the BBG plans to maintain radio broadcasting, including short-wave broadcasting.

Possible Consolidation of U.S. International Broadcasters

As discussed, many observers have argued that creating a CEO to centralize executive leadership of the BBG and its broadcasters can only go so far toward improving strategic direction and efficient use of resources. Some have recommended, therefore, consolidating the BBG's various broadcasting entities into one organization to realize cost efficiencies and savings, reduce duplication of language services, and eliminate redundant upper management structures across the several broadcast entities. The result would be an entity that more closely resembles the BBC World Service, and other foreign international broadcasting systems. Such a consolidation would improve effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting, it is argued, by providing a single, full-service source for credible, truthful news and other information on local, regional, and international issues, while eliminating the need to tune to more than one station to access the news reporting broadcast to that country.

Others have called for such a consolidated broadcast entity to be de-federalized completely, in order to ensure credibility with foreign audiences wary of U.S. government-controlled messaging. U.S. international broadcasting would remain funded by the U.S. government, however, and some have called for such a de-federalized broadcaster to be placed under the guidance and funding of a strong U.S. foreign policy agency, such as the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, or the Department of Defense.[26]

Proponents of maintaining the current structure of several separate broadcasters counter that each broadcast entity is necessary to fulfill the overall mission of U.S. international broadcasting as it has been understood since its modern inception. While VOA's mission is to provide news and information in a fashion that explains the United States and U.S. government policies to the world, the surrogate broadcasters, RFE/RL, RFA, and OCB, as well as the MBN services, are intended to broadcast in the place of an indigenous free media. Any consolidation may purposely or inadvertently reduce effectiveness of an individual broadcaster's programming as a large consolidated entity prioritizes different regions or types of programming. Even in the case of consolidation, most observers seem to believe that maintaining the individual broadcaster brands

8, 2013, http://blog.heritage.org/2013/04/08/sequestration-prompts-attempt-to-silence-u-s-radio-broadcasting/.

[25] Congress recognized the BBG's effectiveness in this area when it transferred funds for Internet circumvention from the State Department to the BBG for FY2011. See Sec. 2121(g) of the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (Division B of P.L. 112-10).

[26] See A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, *A 21st Century Vision for U.S. Global Media*, Woodrow Wilson Center, Occasional Paper, November 2012, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/21st-century-vision-for-us-global-media.

is important to continue to benefit from longstanding goodwill toward such brands in different parts of the world.

Role of U.S. International Broadcasting in Advancing U.S. Foreign Policy Goals and Promoting Democracy

One of the primary purposes of U.S. international broadcasting is to provide for the free flow of information that presents a balanced view of issues important to foreign publics. VOA is tasked with comprehensive reporting on American life, culture, and explaining U.S. policy. The surrogate broadcasters, such as RFE/RL, are tasked with providing news reporting that fills the gaps in coverage in countries where no free media exist due to government repression or other factors. U.S. international broadcasters are required under U.S. law to provide complete and balanced coverage that examines all sides of important issues and related U.S. government policies, not just the official U.S. government position, and to provide an opportunity for debate on such issues and policies in their programming.[27] Nevertheless, in addition to standards requiring objectivity, U.S. international broadcasting is also required under law to "be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.... "[28] Thus, U.S. international broadcasting is required to advance U.S. foreign policy through informing foreign publics in a balanced and objective manner.

The BBG states that the mission of U.S. international broadcasting is to "to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy." Some observers, and representatives of U.S. international broadcasters, have explained that U.S. international broadcasting's benefit to U.S. foreign policy emanates from convincing foreign publics that the U.S. government is intent on informing and empowering repressed populations through a demonstration of a free media. They also argue that U.S. international broadcasters provide a necessary counterweight to certain U.S. public diplomacy efforts that represent a one-sided, advocacy approach to communication that does not always resonate with foreign audiences.

Concerns have long been expressed regarding the effectiveness of U.S. international broadcasting in promoting U.S. foreign policy goals and national security interests. While the State Department's public diplomacy activities often include advocating for U.S. policies and presenting such policies in the most favorable light, U.S. international broadcasters explain U.S. policies, but also must provide a forum for dissenting views and open discussion of those policies. The result sometimes is the denunciation of U.S. government policies on the programs of U.S.-government funded broadcasters, a development that leads some observers to question the effectiveness or usefulness of U.S. international broadcasting. It has been argued that instead of providing a balanced presentation of issues of importance both to target foreign populations and U.S. foreign policy goals, U.S. international broadcasting should act to counterbalance anti-American sentiment with its own partial programming.

Some observers have also recommended that U.S. international broadcasting and U.S. public diplomacy efforts could be better coordinated under a more unified communications strategy to ensure that U.S. government-funded communications are not perceived as acting at cross-purposes. Such enhanced coordination might involve more input from the Secretary of State and/or the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in U.S. international broadcasters' programming. Other recommendations include placing U.S. international

[27] 22 U.S.C. §6202(a), (b).

[28] 22 U.S.C. §6202(a)(1).

broadcasters fully under the direction of a new government agency or center for coordinating all U.S. public diplomacy and strategic communication.

Some argue that U.S. international broadcasters must remain completely independent of the State Department's public diplomacy advocacy and any other official foreign policy apparatus, other than the current broad guidance that the Secretary of State provides under law. A closer relationship, they contend, especially one in which the State Department directs U.S. international broadcasters to include certain programming, coverage, or messaging, would delegitimize U.S. international broadcasting among foreign audiences. If U.S. international broadcasters lose their credibility and journalistic integrity, it might render these broadcasters unable to provide the free flow of information and effectively promote democracy through demonstrating the operation of a free press in nondemocratic countries.

Broadcasting Effectiveness

Linked to arguments over U.S. international broadcasting's role in promoting democracy and U.S. interests are the methods by which such broadcasting's effectiveness are measured. Many observers find U.S. international broadcaster programming to be professional and of high quality, and the performance measurements used by the BBG parallel those used by other media networks. More general polling and research concerning opinions of the United States and the U.S. government in foreign countries, however, have continued to show low favorability among foreign populations, for example, in the Muslim Middle East and other majority Muslim countries such as Pakistan.[29] Global research regarding overall levels of democracy and political and press freedom has shown declines in many areas of the world targeted by U.S. surrogate broadcasters, including the Middle East and countries such as Russia and China that are key priorities in U.S. foreign policy.[30] Critics of U.S. international broadcasting performance state that BBG broadcasters have failed in some cases to effectively "move the needle" on advancing U.S. foreign policy and promoting democracy.[31] U.S. international broadcasting, however, is only one piece of the entirety of U.S. government efforts in foreign countries, and operates in an ever more crowded communications space in foreign countries. The BBG continues to maintain that evaluation based on measurement of quality, objective programming, credible in the eyes of an expanded audience, will ensure U.S. international broadcasting is fulfilling its mission in the overall prosecution of U.S. foreign policy.[32]

United States International Communications Reform Act of 2015

On May 14, 2015, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Edward Royce, with Committee Ranking Member Eliot Engel and 12 other co-sponsors, introduced the United States

[29] See, e.g., Pew Research Center, *Pew Global Attitudes Project, Global Indicators Database*, spring 2016, http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/.

[30] See, e.g., Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2016*, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016.

[31] See, e.g., U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Is Anybody Listening? Keeping the U.S. Connected*, committee print, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., June 9, 2010, S. Prt. 111-49 (Washington: GPO, 2010).

[32] See Broadcasting Board of Governors, *Impact Through Innovation and Integration: BBG Strategic Plan 2012-2016*, p. 1, http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2012/02/BBGStrategicPlan_2012-2016_OMB_Final.pdf.

International Communications Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 2323). The committee voted to report the bill favorably to the House on May 21.[33] The bill in its findings provision states that the BBG operates poorly under a flawed structure, that the BBG's internal operations and personnel decision making have deficiencies, and that U.S. international broadcasters lack clearly defined missions, leading to duplicative services and a lack of focus on maintaining the division between the "public diplomacy" mission of VOA and the "surrogate" mission of RFE/RL, RFA, MBN, and OCB. The bill seeks to restructure the whole of U.S. international broadcasting in order to address these problems. The following sections highlight some of the central provisions of this bill.

Creation of the U.S. International Communications Agency

The bill, if enacted and signed into law, would repeal the USIB Act in its entirety, although several similar provisions from that act are included in the new bill. Under the bill, the BBG would be abolished, and a new United States International Communications Agency (USICA) would be established. Under the bill's provisions, the BBG bipartisan structure of nine governors would be mirrored in a new USICA Board, but the USICA Board would retain only an advisory role in the new Agency. Most authorities held by the current Board would instead be exercised by a new USICA Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The USICA Board would retain the power to appoint and remove the USICA CEO, therefore maintaining the "firewall" role for the USICA Board in shielding U.S. international broadcasting from outside influence. The bill would effectively abolish the IBB, with its functions absorbed into the overall new USICA and subsumed under the authorities of the USICA CEO.

Mandating Coordination

Aiming to increase coordination and refocus the mission of the broadcast entities, the bill requires the USICA and the new grantee surrogate "Freedom News Network" (FNN) (see "Creation of the Freedom News Network," below), to coordinate operations and share resources and content to ensure efficiency. It also requires the USICA and FNN to regularly meet and coordinate with the Department of State to share relevant information, ensure U.S. international broadcasting is aligned with "broad" U.S. foreign policy interests, and reduce overlap in broadcast services.

Voice of America

Broadcasting standards and principles, contained in one section of the USIB Act, are restated in three places in the bill: one set for all broadcasters, one set for VOA, and one set for FNN. While the overall standards provisions applied to all broadcasters in the bill largely continue those set forth in current law, the principles applied to VOA provide a sharper focus on explaining the United States, U.S. government policies, and international news that affects the United States. The bill includes language stressing a public diplomacy mission for VOA, requiring it to report on the impact of U.S. foreign assistance and other U.S. "international philanthropy." The historic VOA charter is not included verbatim in this bill, but elements are integrated into the bill's new VOA principles. The VOA mission, as stated in the bill, emphasizes what is considered VOA's "public diplomacy" role as well as its role in providing objective, comprehensive news coverage. A new VOA director provision sets out that position's responsibilities, and places the VOA

[33] Previously, during the 113th Congress, Chairman Royce, with Ranking Member Engel and seven other co-sponsors, introduced the United States International Communications Reform Act of 2014 (H.R. 4490), which was nearly identical to the 2015 bill. H.R. 4490 passed the House but did not receive formal consideration in the Senate before the 113th Congress ended.

director under the supervision of the USICA CEO. The provision also sets out qualification requirements for the USICA CEO.

Creation of the Freedom News Network

H.R. 4490 would consolidate the grantee broadcasters, RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN, into one consolidated surrogate grantee broadcaster, the "Freedom News Network" (FNN). The brands of the existing grantees would be preserved, thus maintaining audience name recognition of surrogate programming. While the corporate boards of directors of the grantees currently are the same nine Governors who serve on the BBG, FNN's board would be composed of a separate group of individuals, to be appointed in its first iteration by the boards of directors of RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN, in consultation with "appropriate congressional committees," with the intention that FNN board membership would change over time in accordance with FNN's corporate charter and by-laws. While OCB's TV and Radio Martí are often considered surrogate broadcasters, the bill states that OCB will remain within the federal government as part of USICA. The bill contemplates that FNN would expand its programming into regions where no current individual surrogate grantee broadcaster currently operates, including sub-Saharan Africa.

The bill's mission provision for FNN sharpens the legislative vision of the proper focus for surrogate programming, directing the new grantee to promote democracy, civil society, free media, political freedom, and uncensored flows of information. Although these goals are spelled out in greater detail than in previous legislation, they do to an extent parallel concepts that the surrogate broadcasters already employ.

Eligible Broadcast Areas

The bill defines the eligible broadcast areas for U.S. international broadcasters supervised by the USICA, including those countries and regions that lack democratic rule and political and press freedom. Placing an eligibility test in legislation may be designed to encourage efficient elimination of language services when media and information freedom increase in a targeted foreign country.

Administration and Personnel Provisions

The bill mandates that no USICA employee other than the USICA CEO and the VOA director be paid at a rate higher than grade GS-15, step 10 of the General Schedule under section 5332 of title 5, United States Code. It also freezes the filling of positions rated grade GS-14 or GS-15 for five years, with exceptions. The bill would also require the USICA to report to Congress on the size of the workforce, the structure of the organization, contracting methods and practices, and language services performance.

Reform Provisions in the FY2017 NDAA

The House version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (H.R. 4909; NDAA)[34] includes two sections, Sections 1259D and 1259E, that would accomplish a number of reforms to the structure of U.S. international broadcasting and the BBG. The Senate version, S. 2943, did not initially include similar provisions. After S. 2943 passed the Senate, the House

[34] The Senate version, S. 2943, did not include these provisions. After S. 2943 passed the Senate, the House adopted an amended version of S. 2943 which included the provisions from H.R. 4909.

adopted an amended version of S. 2943, which included the provisions from H.R. 4909. On December 2 and 8, 2016, respectively, the House and Senate approved the conference report accompanying S. 2943, containing a similar version of certain of these BBG reform provisions in Section 1288.

The provisions ultimately included in the enacted 2017 NDAA would significantly broaden the role of the BBG CEO, and provide authority to the CEO to direct broadcasting and reform efforts in the BBG. Among other things, the provisions would

- replace the BBG Board with a permanent CEO position at the head of the agency;
- create in the BBG Board's place a successor advisory board without any executive powers but with a duty to advise the CEO and report to appropriate congressional committees;
- transfer all powers of the Board to the CEO and authorize the CEO to "direct" all U.S. international broadcasting activities within the agency's purview;
- provide the CEO with blanket personnel appointment authority and expanded, detailed procurement authority;
- authorize the CEO to change the name of the agency from "Broadcasting Board of Governors" (presumably to reflect new agency structure without a Board);
- authorize the CEO to establish a new grantee broadcaster and condition continued federal grants to existing grantees (RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN) on their agreement to merge into one surrogate broadcaster; and
- authorize the CEO to appoint the board of any grantee broadcaster, including a possible consolidated grantee broadcaster.

Table 4, below, compares Section 1288 of S. 2943, Sections 1259D and 1259E of H.R. 4909, and related provisions in the earlier BBG reform bill considered by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, H.R. 2323.

Table 4. Comparison of BBG Provisions in S. 2943, H.R. 4909, and Related Provisions in H.R. 2323

S. 2943	H.R. 4909	H.R. 2323
Sec. 1288(1) removes authorization for the Board of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) by restating Sec. 304 of the USIB Act, replacing establishment of the BBG Board with establishment of the Chief Executive Officer position	Sec. 1259D(1) removes authorization for the Board of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) by restating Sec. 304 of the USIB Act, replacing establishment of the BBG Board with establishment of the Chief Executive Officer position	Sec. 102 and 103 provide for establishment and authority of the Board of the United States International Communications Agency (USICA)
Sec. 1288(1) restates Sec. 304, establishes BBG CEO position	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304, establishes BBG CEO position	Sec. 104 creates USICA CEO position
Sec. 1288(1) restates Sec. 304(a), continues BBG as a federal agency	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304(a), continues BBG as a federal agency	Sec. 101 creates USICA as a federal agency
Sec. 1288(1) restates Sec. 304(b), provides that BBG CEO is appointed by President with advice and consent of the Senate	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304(b), provides that BBG CEO is appointed by President with advice and consent of the Senate	Sec. 104 provides that USICA CEO is appointed and removed by the USICA Board

S. 2943	H.R. 4909	H.R. 2323
Sec. 1288(1) restates Sec. 304(c), terminates position of the Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB)	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304(c), terminates position of the Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB)	Sec. 104(c) terminates position of the IBB Director upon USICA CEO appointment
Sec. 1288(1) restates Sec. 304(d), extending limited liability of BBG CEO to Boards of any grantee broadcasters	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304(e), extending limited liability of BBG CEO to Boards of any grantee broadcasters	none
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(i) amends Sec. 305(a) of the USIB Act, transferring all BBG Board authorities to BBG CEO	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(i) amends Sec. 305(a) of the USIB Act, transferring all BBG Board authorities to BBG CEO	Sec. 105 sets out duties and authorities for USICA CEO
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(ii) provides BBG CEO authority to "direct" as well as supervise U.S. international broadcasting	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(ii) provides BBG CEO authority to "direct" as well as supervise U.S. international broadcasting	Sec. 105 sets out duties and authorities for USICA CEO
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(iii) amends Sec 305(a), authorizes cooperative agreements as well as grants to grantee broadcasters, removes reference to grant limitations in Secs. 308 and 309 of the USIB Act	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(iii) amends Sec 305(a), authorizes cooperative agreements as well as grants to grantee broadcasters, removes reference to grant limitations in Secs. 308 and 309 of the USIB Act	Sec. 110 authorizes grants to Freedom News Network (FNN)
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(iv) amends Sec. 305(a), replaces reference to IBB with reference to the "Board," removes Sec. 308 and 309 limitations on requirements for obligating and expending International Broadcasting Operations (IBO) appropriations funding	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(iv) amends Sec. 305(a), removes Sec. 308 and 309 limitations on requirements for obligating and expending International Broadcasting Operations (IBO) appropriations funding	none
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(v) amends Sec. 305(a), expanding BBG CEO authority to procure, rent, or lease physical property for broadcasting and related activities	none	none
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(vi), (ix) amend Sec. 305(a), replacing reference to the "Board" with reference to the BBG CEO, and removing "staff," "temporary and intermittent," and Title V, U.S. Code limitations to BBG CEO authority to appoint personnel	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(v), (vi) amend Sec. 305(a), remove "temporary and intermittent" limitation and Title V, U.S. Code limitations to BBG CEO authority to appoint personnel	Sec. 105(a)(6), (10)(A) leave Title V, U.S. Code limitations in place for USICA Board and temporary appointments
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(vii) amends Sec. 305(a), changing reporting requirements to refer to the Board and the BBG CEO rather than IBB and the Board	none	none

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Sec. 1288(2)(A)(viii) amends Sec. 305(a), expanding CEO BBG authority to provide for transmission and relay capacity to grantee broadcasters	none	Sec. 105(a)(9) would authorize the CEO to "provide for the use of United States Government broadcasting capacity to the Freedom News Network"
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(x), (xi) amend Sec. 305(a), transferring authorities from the Board or IBB to the BBG CEO	none	none
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(xii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(20)" authorizing BBG CEO to condition grants to grantee broadcasters on such grantees' agreement to authorize BBG CEO to appoint grantee boards of directors and on consolidation of grantee organizations	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(vii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(20)" authorizing BBG CEO to condition grants to grantee broadcasters on such grantees' agreement to authorize BBG CEO to appoint grantee boards of directors and on consolidation of grantee organizations	Sec. 110 provides grant conditions for FNN
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(xii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(21)" authorizing BBG CEO to redirect grant and cooperative agreement funds to any grantee broadcaster (with timely notification to appropriate congressional committees), and to require amendments to correspond with existing grant conditions, including naming and replacing grantee boards of directors, for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Sec. 308(a) of the USIB Act	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(vii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(21)" authorizing BBG CEO to redirect grant and cooperative agreement funds to any grantee broadcaster, and to require amendments to correspond with existing grant conditions for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Sec. 308(a) of the USIB Act	Sec. 110(c) authorizes USICA CEO to make grant to a grantee other than FNN if FNN is not meeting its purposes and goals
Sec. 1288(2)(A)(xii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(22)" authorizing BBG CEO to change the name of the "Board," presumably meaning the current agency name, the "Broadcasting Board of Governors"	Sec. 1259D(2)(A)(vii) amends Sec. 305(a), adding new para. "(22)" authorizing BBG CEO to change the name of the "Board," presumably meaning the current agency name, the "Broadcasting Board of Governors"	Sec. 101 establishes the "United States International Communications Agency"
Sec. 1288(2)(B) amends Sec. 305, striking subsecs. (b) and (c), removing provisions allowing BBG Board to delegate authorities to IBB Director and requiring budget submissions to Congress	Sec. 1259D(2)(B) amends Sec. 305, striking subsecs. (b) and (c), removing provisions allowing BBG Board to delegate authorities to IBB Director and requiring budget submissions to Congress	Sec. 101(a) makes CEO authorities and duties non-delegable
Sec. 1288(2)(D) amends Sec. 305, placing responsibility for respecting journalistic integrity of the BBG with the BBG CEO alongside the Secretary of State	none	Sec. 103 states that the USICA Board is tasked with preserving journalistic integrity

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Sec. 1288(3) restates Sec. 306, establishing the "International Broadcasting Advisory Board" (IBAB) as a successor board to the previous agency head of the BBG; IBAB comprises five members, including the Secretary of State, tasked with providing advice on broadcasting issues to the BBG CEO and reporting on broadcasting to appropriate congressional committees	Sec. 1259D(1) restates Sec. 304(d) retains BBG Board members in an advisory capacity until expiry of their terms of appointment	Sec. 102, 103 provide for establishment and advisory authority of USICA Board
Sec. 1288(3) restates Sec. 306	Sec. 1259E(1)(B) strikes "Worldnet" (defunct) provision in Sec. 306	Sec. 134 repeals entire USIB Act
Sec. 1288(4) strikes IBB establishment provision	Sec. 1259E(2) strikes IBB establishment provision	Sec. 134 repeals entire USIB Act
Sec. 1288(5)(A) amends Sec. 308(a), providing BBG CEO authority to determine the RFE/RL board of directors as set out in new paragraph "(20)" of Sec. 305(a)	none	Sec. 134 repeals entire USIB Act; Sec. 110 authorizes grants to Freedom News Network (FNN)
Sec. 1288(5)(B) amends Sec. 308(d), transfers authority from BBG to BBG CEO to provide RFE/RL grants to another broadcaster in certain circumstances	none	Sec. 110 authorizes grants to Freedom News Network (FNN)
Sec. 1288(5)(C) amends Sec. 308(g), applying reduction of duplicative broadcasting activities requirements to the grantee broadcasters rather than the IBB, and placing authority to determine actions to reduce duplication with the BBG CEO	none	Sec. 110 authorizes grants to Freedom News Network (FNN)
Sec. 1288(6)(A) amends Sec. 309(f), placing responsibility with the BBG CEO rather than the BBG Chairman to consult with Congress regarding displacement of VOA broadcasts by grantee broadcasts	none	none
Sec. 1288(6)(C) amends Sec. 309, adding BBG CEO authority to provide RFA grants to another broadcaster in certain circumstances	none	Sec. 134 repeals entire USIB Act

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Sec. 1288(7) adds a new Sec. 310 to the USIB Act, subsec. "(a)(1)" authorizes BBG CEO to incorporate a grantee broadcaster organization and condition grants to such grantee on consolidation of existing grantee broadcasters; authorizes new/consolidated grantee broadcaster to perform any broadcasting activity currently under the authority of the BBG as determined by the CEO; authorizes BBG to choose name of new/consolidated grantee	Sec. 1259E(3) adds a new Sec. 310 to the USIB Act, subsec. "(a)(1)" authorizes BBG CEO to incorporate a grantee broadcaster organization and condition grants to such grantee on consolidation of existing grantee broadcasters; authorizes new/consolidated grantee broadcaster to perform any broadcasting activity currently under the authority of the BBG as determined by the CEO; authorizes BBG to choose name of new/consolidated grantee	Sec. 110 provides that grants to current grantee broadcasters (RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia (RFA), Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN)) can be conditioned on consolidation and submission of a consolidation plan; no CEO authority to incorporate a new grantee Secs. 212 and 213 set out mission and standards for FNN
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(a)(2)" overrides application of any state or local law that affects a consolidated grantee broadcaster that conflicts with the amended USIB Act	none	none
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(b)" states the mission of the consolidated grantee broadcaster to counter state-sponsored propaganda that undermines U.S. national security and foreign policy, provide news and analysis to populations where no indigenous media can, improve capacity of indigenous media to provide such services, and provide uncensored access to information over the Internet and through other communication mediums	none	Sec. 212 states that the mission of FNN is to provide news where free media do not exist, strengthen civil societies and promote democracy, increase indigenous media capacity in targeted regions, and provide uncensored access to information over the Internet and through other communication mediums
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(c)" provides that a new grantee will not be considered a federal entity, and that grantee personnel are not federal employees	Sec. 1259E(3), "Sec. 310(a)(2)" provides that a new grantee will not be considered a federal entity, and that grantee personnel are not federal employees	Sec. 110(d) provides that FNN is not a federal entity
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(c)" provides that grants to the new grantee can made under cooperative agreements under 31 U.S.C. § 6305	Sec. 1259E(3), "Sec. 310(a)(2)" provides that grants to the new grantee can made under cooperative agreements under 31 U.S.C. § 6305	Secs. 108 and 110 set out various cooperation requirements, in the grant agreement and elsewhere, for FNN and USICA
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(d)" provides that officers of the individual grantees and any new/consolidated grantee serve at the pleasure of the BBG CEO	Sec. 1259E(3), "Sec. 310(a)(3)" provides that officers of the individual grantees and any new/consolidated grantee serve at the pleasure of the BBG CEO	Sec. 108(d) provides that USICA shall have no involvement in FNN management or operations
Sec. 1288(7), "Sec. 310(e) states that the grantees should maintain their individual brands in the event of consolidation	none	Sec. 211(b) would require FNN to maintain the individual grantee broadcaster brands

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none	Sec. 1259E(3), "Sec. 310(b)(1)" authorizes BBG CEO to establish a new grantee broadcaster organization to assume the responsibilities of the Voice of America (VOA), currently a federal broadcaster; USIB Act and VOA-specific standards and principles would apply to new nonfederal grantee VOA	Under Sec. 121(1), VOA, and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) as part of VOA, remain federal government broadcasters; Sec. 123 sets out VOA's duties, responsibilities, and purpose
none	Sec. 1259E(3), "Sec. 310(b)(2)" sets out charter of new nonfederal grantee VOA	Sec. 122 sets out VOA priniciples
Sec. 1288(7) adds a new Sec. 310A to the USIB Act stating that the Inspector General for the Department of State will act in the same capacity for the BBG	Sec. 1259E(3) adds a new Sec. 311 to the USIB Act stating that the Inspector General for the Department of State will act in the same capacity for the BBG (Sec. 311 of the USIB Act already exists, as written this would create a second Sec. 311)	Secs. 107 and 224 provide that the Inspector General for the Department of State will act in the same capacity for USICA and FNN
Sec. 1288(7) adds a new Sec. 310B to the USIB Act, requiring the BBG CEO to "regularly" consult with and seek guidance from the Secretary of State on foreign policy issues	Sec. 1259E(1)(A) amends Sec. 306 of the USIB Act, stating that the Secretary of State will provide foreign policy guidance to the "Agency" rather than the "Board"	Sec. 106 states that the Secretary of State will provide foreign policy guidance to the "Agency," links provision to enhanced Department of State-USICA coordination requirements in Sec. 109
Sec. 1288(8) amends Sec. 314, adds definitions for "Board" and "Chief Executive Officer of the Board" to the USIB Act	none	none

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