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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Inspection

Broadcasting Board of Governors' Operations in Hong Kong

Report Number ISP-IB-05-64, August 2005

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KEY JUDGMENTS

- The Voice of America (VOA) Hong Kong News Bureau supervises VOA English correspondents in all of Asia including Jakarta, Seoul, Beijing, Islamabad, and New Delhi. When the situation requires it, the Hong Kong bureau chief is also responsible for assigning global coverage, editing, and producing scripts on Iraq, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, as needed, that are put out on the world wire with the Hong Kong bureau chief as the last editor for VOA news. The bureau carries out its responsibilities well. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) believes it is appropriate, productive, and effective for VOA to maintain two senior editors in the Hong Kong News Bureau to perform their current duties and those presented in the VOA Director's new initiative for Central News involving the Hong Kong News Bureau.
- In a phenomenon not shared by the VOA News Bureau in Hong Kong, the Radio Free Asia (RFA) News Bureau has been getting walk-ins from the mainland. RFA needs to provide clear guidance to the bureau on handling these cases and provide a modest representational budget to be tapped in dealing with these people so as not to impose a hardship on the generosity of staff.
- An employee from the Regional Technical Monitoring Office (TMO) in Hong Kong, along with his counterpart at the Regional TMO in New Delhi, both locally employed staff, either assist or lead in coordinating, and in effect negotiating, radio frequency use at the annual High Frequency Coordination Conference (HFCC) for Asia held under the auspices of the Asia Pacific Broadcast Union (ABU). OIG found that the use of TMO Foreign Service nationals (FSNs) at the ABU-HFCC is an acceptable intergovernmental process that helps to avoid anarchy on high frequency radio bands under the regulation of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

Louis McCall, Coordinator for International Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy Evaluations, Office of Inspections, conducted the inspection in accordance with quality standards for inspections prescribed by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

CONTEXT

The former British crown colony of Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty as a Special Administrative Region under the People's Republic of China in 1997 after nearly 157 years of British rule. As Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region China, the enclave continues to enjoy substantial democratic freedoms and a close relationship with the United States. Hong Kong has a population of 6.8 million, an educated citizenry, a vibrant economy, and has maintained its position as a hub of trade and transportation in the region. In previous years it was more difficult for Chinese citizens of Mainland China to visit Hong Kong. This has progressively changed. More and more Chinese from the mainland have the ability to make trips to Hong Kong as individuals, rather than as part of a group that could be more easily monitored. During the inspection, the government of China announced a new policy effective March 1, 2005. People from a particular city near Beijing and another one in Szechwan Province, with up to 40 million in combined population, would be able to make individual trips to Hong Kong. Altogether, over 100 million Mainland Chinese can now avail themselves of these trips to Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Basic Law, in Article 23, requires the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, or subversion. However, to date, Article 23 has not been implemented. On September 24, 2002, the government released its proposals for antiradicalism legislation. Article 23 was the basis for the proposed law and preexisted the antiradicalism proposal. Article 23 requires the government to enact an antitreason law, but it does not set limits on speech. There were some concerns that an antitreason law would limit or prohibit freedom of speech. To date, no antitreason legislation has been passed in Hong Kong. OIG found no indication that BBG establishments in Hong Kong practiced self-censoring because of Article 23 nor was there concern for the continuity of their operations because of Article 23. In this context the BBG operates three establishments in Hong Kong, a VOA News Bureau, an RFA News Bureau, and an IBB Regional TMO. These offices have separate functions and do not interact. The VOA News Bureau is a regional bureau. To a lesser extent, the RFA News Bureau is also a regional bureau. The Hong Kong TMO is also a regional office and is one of six such offices worldwide. The others are located in Accra, Helsinki, Manama, New Delhi, and Vienna.

In part, the BBG operations in Hong Kong are platforms for coverage of Mainland China. In reviewing the access of VOA and RFA journalists and their products to China there is a clear imbalance. On the one hand, China has dozens of correspondents in the United States and its broadcasts to the American people are unhindered. Alternatively, both RFA and VOA broadcasts experience jamming, the access of journalists is limited, and the number of such journalists is small.¹ The Chinese Branch of the VOA Hong Kong News Bureau is actively trying to get a visa to set up a Shanghai office. VOA English would also like to have a slot there.

¹OIG's *Inspection of the Broadcasting Board of Governors' Operations in China*, IBO-I-04-14, September 2004.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

VOA NEWS BUREAU MANAGEMENT

VOA's Hong Kong News Bureau is VOA's only remaining truly regional news bureau outside of Washington in that the overall bureau chief is the supervisor for VOA English correspondents in all of Asia including Jakarta, Seoul, Beijing, Islamabad, and New Delhi. The bureau chief serves as their reviewing officer for purposes of their annual performance evaluations while the deputy in the office actually rates those correspondents. However, the management of the bureau is divided in two parts in some respects because the bureau chief functions only as the administrator for the Chinese Branch portion of the office. In 1998 the VOA English News Bureau and the VOA Chinese Bureau were merged into one office. The VOA Mandarin and Cantonese language services in the office are supervised directly from VOA's China Division in Washington. There is coordination between the VOA English reporters and the Chinese Branch reporters of the bureau, when necessary. They also provide comprehensive support to other bureaus in Asia. Originally, management of the combined office was to rotate bureau chiefs between the English and Chinese bureaus. That has not happened.

Although both the VOA English bureau chief and deputy are experienced correspondents, they function as pure managers and editors. The bureau chief gives assignments to the VOA English correspondents in the region and those reports are edited in the Hong Kong bureau. When pressed by OIG as to why the jobs of the bureau chief and deputy could not be done from Washington since almost no reporting was involved, the bureau chief gave the following reasons:

1. Given the 12-hour time differential, natural human biorhythms make it difficult for Washington based staff to do the same jobs;
2. It is hard to get visas and be able to come out to the region on short notice;
3. Those that would come would be jet-lagged after their arrival, and the story they came for might even be old news by the time they arrive; and
4. One needs to be in the region.

In April 2005, VOA Director David Jackson further expanded the management role of the bureau chief and deputy. He announced that VOA proposes to hire writers in Hong Kong to produce Central News stories and that the two senior VOA editors already in Hong Kong (that is, the bureau chief and deputy) would supervise them. This would enable VOA to create an overnight English language web site staff that would permit VOA to keep its web site up to date 24 hours a day, seven days a week, a capability not currently available. The Director cited chronic staffing difficulties on the overnight shift in the Washington newsroom as one of the drivers behind this initiative. This would allow current Central News overnight staff to move to fill current vacancies in the Washington day and evening shifts, but two senior editors would remain on the Washington overnight desk to provide final U.S.-based oversight and editing of the Hong Kong Central News output, as well as facilitation between the Hong Kong News Bureau and VOA's language services broadcasting during those hours.

If necessary, OIG believes the Hong Kong bureau chief and deputy could also stand in to effectively perform the duties of the two senior Washington editors on the overnight desk from Hong Kong. In fact, during the inspection, the Hong Kong bureau chief advised OIG that responsibility had already been expanded occasionally to include global coverage for about a year. For various periods, the Central News overnight desk was not staffed, leaving the Hong Kong bureau chief responsible for assigning global coverage, editing, and producing scripts that are put out on the world news wire with the Hong Kong bureau chief as the last editor for news between 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Hong Kong time.

This included editing and assigning stories on Iraq, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa as needed. Given the above, OIG believes it is appropriate, productive, and effective for VOA to maintain two senior editors in the Hong Kong News Bureau to perform their current duties and those presented in the VOA Director's new initiative for Central News involving the Hong Kong News Bureau.

RFA NEWS BUREAU MANAGEMENT

The chief correspondent for the RFA News Bureau in Hong Kong has served in that position since 1997 and does his job well. He presides over a bureau, with a FY 2005 budget of \$631,000 that has two language services - Mandarin and Cantonese. He only does administrative work for the Cantonese service, but provides full service for the Mandarin service.

A concern of the chief correspondent and of staff interviewed by OIG was how to manage the walk-ins that come to the office from the Mainland. This is a phenomenon not shared by the VOA News Bureau in Hong Kong. According to the chief correspondent, for almost two years the bureau has been getting walk-ins from the mainland. Some have been previously interviewed by telephone and use their trip to Hong Kong to introduce themselves in person. Some have refused to identify themselves and some have been refused entry, in part out of concern for the safety and security of the bureau, which has no waiting room or reception area. The chief correspondent has tried to meet some of these unscheduled visitors in the lobby of the building or at a nearby coffee shop. The upside is that some of these visitors relate stories that can be confirmed and then turned into news reports. In that sense, walk-ins provide an opportunity for first hand information given the difficulty RFA has in gaining access to Mainland China. The walk-ins also give valuable feedback on the broadcast times when the RFA signal is heard clearest in their provinces. The downside is that the staff of the bureau are leery about the true identity and purpose of some of the visitors and don't want to meet with them. Dealing with walk-ins is also disruptive. However, OIG determined that the overall number of such cases is low, at about 10 instances per month. Given the relatively low number of instances, even with a possible increase as China continues to ease travel of its citizens to Hong Kong, OIG does not believe it would be necessary or cost effective to lease additional office space to use as a separate reception and interview area. However, RFA does need to provide clear guidance to the bureau on handling these cases and provide a modest representational budget for dealing with these people so as not to impose a hardship on the generosity of staff.

Recommendation 1: Radio Free Asia should provide policy and procedural guidance to its Hong Kong bureau on handling walk-ins and make provisions to fund expenses staff may be expected to undertake on behalf of Radio Free Asia in the implementation of such guidance. (Action: RFA)

Subsequent to the inspection, RFA notified OIG that it would implement policy and procedures to comply with this recommendation. RFA added that it was exploring a low-cost renovation that would allow for security access only into the work area of the bureau.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL MONITORING OFFICE MANAGEMENT

The regional TMO in Hong Kong has two locally employed staff. The newest employee was only hired in February 2005 and replaces an employee that died in September 2004. The senior supervisory monitor, who has been with the TMO since March 26, 1979, is knowledgeable, experienced, and confident. He was formerly the assistant to an American supervisor. The American supervisor left in 1997 when IBB decided that it would use local staff to run the TMOs. The current LES supervisor assumed that title in 1998. The Hong Kong region of the TMO includes the Far East, South East Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. The TMO has contract monitors in Perth, Auckland, Manila, and Kobe. There are also 19 remote monitoring systems in the region: China (4), Seoul, Kobe, Jakarta, Manila, Singapore, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Guam, Vientiane, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Melbourne, Darwin, Wellington, and Hong Kong. There is a proposal to set up an additional remote monitoring site in Burma.

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

VOICE OF AMERICA NEWS BUREAU PERFORMANCE

Prior to the arrival of the current bureau chief, there was only one VOA English editor, and the office only worked five days a week. The current bureau chief initiated a seven-day a week workweek. According to the bureau chief, VOA Asia region stories have increased three fold, and they are doing television or video journalism now as well. OIG examined a 2001 report on increased production that was the basis for getting more resources for the bureau. However, OIG did not verify the threefold increase in production claim because it would have been too time consuming to do so during the inspection. Later statistics were available that confirmed the additional improvement in the quantity of scripts produced. In addition, on the quality side, the Hong Kong News Bureau, in comparison with VOA Washington, has a higher percentage of actualities, that is, sound bites, accompanying its scripts. Nevertheless, the bureau chief is proud that she has greatly expanded the bureau's production with a smaller budget than that of her predecessor. The total budget for the VOA Hong Kong News Bureau is \$1.1 million. Also, impressive were the production and quality gains achieved under the bureau chief prior to getting additional staff, including additional technical support staff.

The bureau's technical staff of two broadcast technicians are very active in the region and in Hong Kong under the leadership of the bureau chief. They closed out the VOA Tokyo News Bureau in March 2004, but opened news bureaus in Seoul and Jakarta. The technical operations in Seoul were set up by Hong Kong technical staff in January 2005. This included installing equipment and an audio recording studio and getting the correspondent set up. The Hong Kong bureau's technical staff helped to do a technical install for the VOA Jakarta News Bureau that opened in April 2005. Hong Kong's technical staff will be the first line of technical support for Jakarta.

The technical staff of the VOA Hong Kong News Bureau have played an important role in facilitating the ability of the VOA Asia bureaus to do more in the area of video journalism. They put a television studio in the Hong Kong bureau early in 2004. Following the inspection, the technical staff went to Jakarta and installed a TV studio there too, like the one in Hong Kong, in addition to an audio studio there. The new VOA Jakarta News Bureau will eventually have a staff of about nine persons.

The technical staff supports other news bureaus in the region on all electronic equipment. Other bureaus in the region call the Hong Kong technical staff for help, but no one maintains a log of the help calls and solutions provided. The technical staff will first telephone another bureau in the region and try to solve problems that way. VOA Washington approves and funds, separately from the Hong Kong bureau's budget, trips to the other bureaus for technical support.

According to the VOA Director for the East Asia and Pacific Division, cooperation with Embassy Beijing and Consulate General Hong Kong by the Hong Kong News Bureau is very high. He described it as a "close constructive relationship." He added, "there is no interference with our editorial content," which he described as being very proactive.

RADIO FREE ASIA NEWS BUREAU PERFORMANCE

The RFA News Bureau in Hong Kong, which opened in 1996, shortly after the incorporation of RFA, interacts with Consulate General Hong Kong in the same way other private news organizations do in order to get interviews or to gain access to a notable visitor or to U.S. warships that visit Hong Kong. The bureau staff attend regular press gatherings and conferences hosted by the consulate. According to the RFA President, the consulate has been accessible and helpful.

The RFA Hong Kong News Bureau has developed over 100 regular mainland interviewees. Some cases of natural and human disasters in China, for example floods and mine explosions, have been reported first by RFA. This has had the effect of forcing the Chinese media to become more open and to respond more quickly with information on these kinds of tragedies. The RFA Hong Kong News Bureau is a vital alternative window on China and provides Mandarin and Cantonese news reports on China to China. A senior RFA official in Washington told OIG that the stringer-reporters working with the Hong Kong bureau are very good. The bureau also uses commentators such as the commentator for its labor

program. To ensure American editorial oversight, prerecorded commentaries are sent to RFA's Washington headquarters where editorial managers make the final decision on whether or not to broadcast their content.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL MONITORING OFFICE PERFORMANCE

The Senior Supervisory Monitor in Hong Kong and the Regional TMO in New Delhi, both local hires, either assist or lead in coordinating, and in effect negotiating, radio frequency use at the annual HFCC for Asia under the auspices of the ABU headquartered in Kuala Lumpur. According to the Senior Supervisory Monitor in Hong Kong, he has represented the United States since 1998. During the Washington survey phase of the inspection, IBB's Deputy for Engineering Operations and the IBB supervisor for TMOs advised OIG that its FSN technicians were negotiating radio spectrum frequencies at HFCCs. No U.S. embassy Environment, Science, and Technology officer or representative from the Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, International Communications and Information Policy (EB/CIP) attends. However, sometimes IBB Washington sends someone from the IBB Frequency Management Office to round out the delegation and provide an American citizen presence. Most recently, the Hong Kong and New Delhi TMOs sent representatives in January 2005 to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for the ABU-HFCC.

The conferences take one working week. English is the main language of the conference. The main purpose is to coordinate with frequency managers from around the region to ensure there are no "collisions." A collision would be co-channel interference. When they see what would be a collision in planning, they talk about it and work out clear channels. The ABU host mediates, if necessary. The meeting is for frequency coordination only and does not deal with jamming issues.

IBB is a member of the ABU-HFCC, a regional group registered with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which is charged with approving schedules for international broadcast frequencies. According to EB/CIP, the ITU in Geneva, Switzerland, is the recognized entity that approves high frequency broadcast service for international broadcasting. If a regional broadcasting coordination group (such as the HFCC) is acting on behalf of a government, it must be registered with the ITU as such.² The United States uses the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as the notifying route for international broadcast usage, and the FCC communicates directly to the ITU on a seasonal basis. IBB schedules negotiated at the HFCC are routed through the FCC to the ITU.³ According to EB/CIP, it is permissible to discuss and coordinate radio spectrum schedules as long as they come back through the FCC. The Department is not concerned that IBB coordinates radio frequency bandwidth schedules, so long as IBB does so within the protocol and no policy is involved. In short, OIG found that the use of TMO FSNs at the ABU-HFCC is an acceptable intergovernmental process that helps to avoid anarchy on high frequency radio bands under the regulation of the ITU.⁴

²The ABU-HFCC is a legal entity registered as a regional coordination group with the ITU in Geneva. According to its web site, HFCC activity is not in conflict with the International Radio Regulations of the ITU. In fact, HFCC management procedures were researched by a task force of the ITU, which recommended that HFCC's principles be incorporated into International Radio Regulations, which occurred during the 1997 World Radio Conference.

³The FCC is the administrative agency charged with informing the ITU with respect to U.S. international broadcasting matters. The FCC has written authority from the Department of State to notify the ITU with respect to U.S. international broadcasting high frequency radio services.

⁴ITU-Radio Rules of Procedure, Article 12, 12.10 §9 specifically encourages "administrations [governments] or broadcasters empowered to make changes to pursue a continual coordination process to resolve incompatibilities at meetings (regional or worldwide, bilateral or multilateral) or by correspondence."

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

VOICE OF AMERICA NEWS BUREAU MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The administrative assistant at the VOA News Bureau has 20 years of U.S. government experience of which 12 have been with the news bureau. She has a major role in the preparation of the bureau's financial plan and prepares some contracts. She has had adequate training from VOA and at the Bangkok Financial Services Center to go with her experience. The administrative assistant comes under the supervision of the bureau chief and her deputy, both of whom have warrants, as does the chief of the Chinese branch.

The administrative assistant, who is also the bureau's Class A Cashier with a \$5,000 accountability, consults with the VOA Financial Services Office as necessary. Unfortunately, OIG discovered that monthly and quarterly reconciliations are done by the bureau chief or her deputy only when the Class A Cashier requests them. There are no unannounced cash counts. OIG counseled the bureau chief on the reasons why reconciliations need to be initiated by management on an unannounced basis in compliance with the IBB Manual of Operations and Administration.⁵ The VOA Bangkok Financial Liaison Office does the certifications of funds availability and the Bangkok Financial Services Center at Embassy Bangkok sends electronic funds transfer payments to vendors for three leased apartments and for office space. Office space is paid with an annual payment to obtain a negotiated better rate. Residential leases are paid annually. A serviced apartment is leased for the rotational correspondents sent from VOA's Chinese Division as another cost saving measure over temporary duty hotel costs.

⁵The IBB *Manual of Operations and Administration*, Part VII, Office of Budget and Finance, section 717.1a Cash Verifications, states, "The cashier's fund is subject to unannounced verification at any time. Unannounced cash verification must be made of each imprest fund not less frequently than once every three months. Verification once a month is preferable. Unannounced cash verifications are made to ensure that the imprest fund is fully accounted for."

Adequate separation of duties exists in the bureau for procurement, receiving, and timekeeping. The administrative assistant, who is also the timekeeper, goes to the consulate every two weeks to key in time and attendance. Someone in the Chinese Branch does the administrative assistant's time and attendance and likewise goes to the consulate to key it in.

FSNs are hired through the Consulate General Hong Kong personnel office. Their pay and benefits are handled through the consulate. However, VOA Washington makes payments to stringers directly.

RADIO FREE ASIA NEWS BUREAU MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The administrative assistant who serves as the office manager for the RFA News Bureau in Hong Kong took up her duties in 1997. The office opened in 1996. She uses and is well versed in the RFA Financial Procedures Manual. RFA in Washington wires money to the bank used by RFA Hong Kong, and the administrative assistant then issues checks for things like the office lease. Salaries and stringer payments are paid directly from Washington into personal accounts. The office assistant formerly paid salaries, but since 2000 RFA pays them directly. Hong Kong labor law requires a penalty if payments are more than eight days overdue. However, payments are timely and are received within six or seven days.

OIG observed the need to improve inventory procedures. As of February 1, 2005, RFA eliminated the full time position encumbered by the regional technical support officer based in Hong Kong, the person who prepared the inventory. The last inventory was done in January 2005, just prior to the elimination of the position. Subsequent to the inspection, RFA informed OIG that the same person was converted to a consultant and would continue to prepare the inventory. OIG noted that the entry for a lost cell phone on the inventory did not indicate when the phone was lost. In its review, OIG noted that there was no system being used to note exceptions or to remove items from the inventory. Further, OIG noted that no one signs or certifies the inventory.

Recommendation 2: Radio Free Asia should provide guidance to its Hong Kong bureau to improve inventory controls in the form of an administrative directive that would also apply to its other bureaus. (Action: RFA)

BBG informed OIG in comments to the draft of this report that RFA had inventory and property control policies in place that had been provided previously to all Asian offices. On May 20, 2005, RFA redistributed to all RFA Asian offices a consolidated RFA Asian Inventory Policy.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL MONITORING OFFICE MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

With the exception of some minor inventory issues, there were no problems discovered in management controls involving the TMO. Salaries for TMO staff are taken care of from Washington by electronic funds transfer to Hong Kong staff. The same is done for payments to contract monitors. The general services office at Consulate General Hong Kong arranges for the lease of the office space as part of the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services agreement. The consulate's financial management office pays the lease annually. Shipping is done by commercial international courier service in urgent cases or via diplomatic pouch. IBB Washington sends the TMO senior supervisory monitor individual travel orders. He then presents his travel authorization to the general services office for tickets. The public affairs section seeks country clearance for them prior to their travel. The TMO has experienced no problems in getting country clearance or visas.

The TMO sends its inventory to its supervisory office in Washington. The TMO office needs to dispose of a lot of equipment. The last disposal was 10 years ago. OIG advised the TMO staff that the disposal could be accomplished through the general services office. The items are mostly obsolete receivers, computers, and furniture. The TMO needs to dispose of them to free up limited office space. The office, in a centrally located high-rise building separate from the consulate, is relatively small at only 850 square feet.

FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Radio Free Asia should provide policy and procedural guidance to its Hong Kong bureau on handling walk-ins and make provisions to fund expenses staff may be expected to undertake on behalf of Radio Free Asia in the implementation of such guidance. (Action: RFA)

Recommendation 2: Radio Free Asia should provide guidance to its Hong Kong bureau to improve inventory controls in the form of an administrative directive that would also apply to its other bureaus. (Action: RFA)

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Arrival</u>
VOA Asia Bureau Chief	Jennifer Janin	05/00
VOA Hong Kong Editor	Kathleen Dawson	10/01
VOA Senior Mandarin Correspondent	Hai Yang Zhang	08/04
RFA Chief Correspondent	James Zhu	10/97
Technical Monitoring Office Senior Supervisory Monitor	Danny Tong	03/79

ABBREVIATIONS

ABU	Asia Pacific Broadcast Union
BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
EB/CIP	Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, International Communications and Information Policy
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FSN	Foreign Service national
HFCC	High Frequency Coordination Conference
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LES	Locally employed staff
OIG	Office of Inspector General
RFA	Radio Free Asia
TMO	Technical Monitoring Office
VOA	Voice of America

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