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

Report of Inspection

The Broadcasting Board of Governors' Operations in and Broadcasting to Afghanistan

Report Number ISP-IB-06-02, February 2006

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
KEY JUDGMENTS	1
CONTEXT.....	3
RESOURCES ARE WELL MANAGED	5
BBG PROVIDED CRITICAL COVERAGE AND EXPANSION WITH OWN RESOURCES.....	9
BBG HAS MADE PROGRESS ON OBJECTIVES AND MILESTONES	13
BROADCASTS’ IMPACT DIFFICULT TO MEASURE	27
FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS.....	37
ABBREVIATIONS	39
APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF BBG’S AFGHANISTAN OPERATIONS.....	41

KEY JUDGMENTS

- Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) operations in and broadcasting to Afghanistan are driven by the agency's strategic plan and Administration policy. They are well conceived, well managed, and carried out in a challenging environment.
- BBG objectives are solid and, for the most part, mesh with interagency objectives. The agency has succeeded in meeting some goals and objectives but still needs to work on others, including measures of success and impact. BBG also needs to move from a short-term reactive vision to one that is more strategic in terms of the next steps in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan receives attention at the highest level of BBG and receives a share of agency resources that reflect its priority status. Coordination within the agency and with other agencies is good but could be improved. Afghanistan appears to be a resounding success for BBG based on the build out of its infrastructure, stringer networks, audience share, credibility, and a significant amount of anecdotal evidence regarding impact. BBG, Voice of America (VOA), and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) have strong faith in the impact of BBG's efforts.
- OIG recommends that BBG provide data that better measures the impact of its broadcasting to Afghanistan, and look into alternative measurement instruments to determine whether and how the instruments can measure agency performance.

OIG's Office of Inspections conducted this review between August and November 2005 in accordance with quality standards prescribed by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. Major contributors to this report were Dr. Louis A. McCall, coordinator of the International Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy Evaluations Unit, and Martha K. Goode, senior management analyst. Fieldwork was conducted in Kabul on October 20, 2005, by William Cavness, Deputy Team Leader for the inspection of Embassy Kabul, and William Belcher, senior security inspector. In Kabul, OIG met with VOA, RFE/RL staff at Radio Free Afghanistan's news bureau, and with IBB's local contractor for engineering issues. OIG also met with Embassy Kabul officers who are aware of or are supporting BBG/IBB operations in Afghanistan.

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CONTEXT

Afghanistan has an ancient culture and a long and storied history that includes the involvement of the great powers in its affairs over the centuries. In the modern era, the watershed event was the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation. The resulting resistance movement, the Mujahedeen, drew members from around the Muslim world, including Osama bin Ladin. Unfortunately, some of those who honed their fighting, tactical, and organizational skills as Mujahedeen went on to become today's Islamic terrorists and to form the nation's totalitarian Taliban regime, which gave sanctuary to bin Ladin and his al Qaida organization.

Some 50 percent of Afghanistan's nearly 30 million people speak Dari, while about 35 percent speak Pashto. There are several other important languages, including Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen, and a significant amount of bilingualism. U.S. broadcasts to Afghanistan have been in Dari and Pashto, and VOA Worldwide is available in English and Special English. VOA began broadcasting to Afghanistan in Dari via shortwave for a limited number of hours in September 1980, shortly after the Soviet occupation began. VOA broadcasts in Pashto followed, starting on July 4, 1982. RFE/RL began broadcasting to Afghanistan in September 1985 but discontinued broadcasting in October 1993 after the end of the Soviet occupation.

The United States renewed its focus on Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, terror attacks and the decision of Taliban leader Mullah Omar Muhammad to continue providing sanctuary to Osama bin Ladin and his Al Qaida organization. The United States began bombing terrorist strongholds in Afghanistan in October 2001, and BBG increased its VOA programming in Dari and Pashto, the two largest official languages in Afghanistan, from 1.25 hours to 3 hours a day. That same month, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives entered into an agreement with VOA to fund the VOA Dari and Pashto services' creation of a network of stringers in countries neighboring Afghanistan. On January 11, 2002, the Radio Free Afghanistan Act was signed into law.¹ RFE/RL resumed Dari and Pashto broadcasts

¹PL 107-148, codified at 22 USC 6215.

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to Afghanistan on January 30, 2002. The following month the first bilateral agreement was signed, permitting IBB to install and operate transmitters. On August 4, 2002, the Dari and Pashto broadcasts of VOA were meshed with those of RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan, creating the Afghanistan Radio Network, a 24-hour program stream on shortwave and FM using the same frequencies. The two broadcast entities also maintain separate programs (RFE/RL's Radio Azadi and VOA's Radio Ashna) and have developed strong presences in the Afghan media market, which has moved from state domination to include international and private-sector broadcasters. In the meantime, the IBB AM transmitter became operational on April 30, 2003.

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RESOURCES ARE WELL MANAGED

OIG found BBG resources devoted to Afghanistan were well managed and coordinated within BBG and the Department and with other agencies. There is also room for improvement.

COORDINATION IS GOOD BUT COULD IMPROVE

BBG Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson has taken personal responsibility for the success and coordination of operations in and broadcasting to Afghanistan and in July 2005 traveled to Afghanistan himself. BBG broadcasts to Afghanistan with VOA and RFE/RL providing program content through their respective Afghanistan services, which together make up the Afghanistan Radio Network. Transmission support for both is provided by IBB. The VOA director and RFE/RL's president have a good relationship for coordinating their efforts in Afghanistan. Although there is some professional rivalry, from mid-level management down to stringers, there is an air of cooperation and a determination to improve that cooperation with the support of senior management. Both organizations have a good relationship with IBB regarding program delivery, although some frustrating technical issues remain. In the RFE/RL Radio Free Afghanistan FY 2004 Evaluation Summary, Radio Free Afghanistan's service director said "the technical difficulties facing the service's programming -- from...AM problems in Kabul, from frequent technical interruptions in Kabul-to-Prague live transmission, to ongoing power outages everywhere -- pose a serious challenge to the service's effectiveness."²

The Department, BBG, USAID, Department of Defense (DOD), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and National Security Council all are stakeholders regarding Afghanistan. BBG coordinates with the other major participants through different officials at varying levels, but all BBG officials are not aware of all the others in their agency who have contact with other agencies on Afghanistan

²Radio Free Afghanistan FY 2004 Evaluation Summary, Subject: *Evaluation of Radio Free Afghanistan Programming, FY 2004*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Audience Research & Program Evaluation, Prague, Nov. 1, 2004, p. 5.

matters. This appears to be due to the Afghanistan program's history of several years as a prominent program with a relatively smooth and successful operation. The chairman is the key contact with the above agencies, but the IBB's director of the Office of Engineering and Technical Services has the most developed relationship with DOD regarding on-the-ground issues in Afghanistan. VOA officials from the West and South Asia Division regularly attend meetings of the Strategic Communication Sub-Policy Coordination Committee on Afghanistan, which are hosted by the Department. Meanwhile, the need to coordinate with USAID is less than it was at the beginning of BBG's expanded interest in Afghanistan. Even so, closer coordination could have promoted greater synergy and understanding of how each other's activities in Afghanistan could help or hinder each other's goals. In particular, this would have addressed the differences in the strategies for working with and nurturing Afghanistan's media.

Within Afghanistan, Embassy Kabul has been invaluable to BBG's efforts, working as needed with all levels of BBG, IBB, VOA, and RFE/RL. This assistance has included support for visits to Afghanistan, assistance with formalizing bilateral agreements, physical security consultations, and logistical support from the public diplomacy and administrative sections of the embassy. Embassy Kabul's Mission Performance Plan for FY 2007 also addresses the coordination of U.S. international broadcasting with USAID, DOD, and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group.



Figure 1: VOA mini studio

The VOA's stringer operation in Kabul is a simple one. VOA has occupied office space, without cost, in the RFE/RL building for three years. This includes a small broom-closet-sized studio in the building that was built by and is solely used by VOA. RFE/RL has its own larger studios, and technical and scheduling reasons prevent the two broadcasters from sharing studios. The VOA stringer coordinator does not consider RFE/RL a competitor. RFE/RL occupies most of the office space in the building, and the stringer office is 100-percent dependent on RFE/RL for technical services. VOA also uses the RFE/RL network server for Internet access. RFE/RL pays all the utility costs for the building, and VOA pays only for telephone service. VOA and RFE/RL do have separate administrative arrangements for paying vendors and stringers that differ in important ways. There are 45 RFE/RL core staff in Kabul,

including reporters, feature writers, and technical support staff. The RFE/RL staff in Kabul would like to relocate to a larger, more secure and practical office soon, as the current facility is cramped (the VOA mini-studio is under a stairway) and unsuitable for the scale of operations.

SECURITY AT THE VOA AND RFE/RL OFFICES

Security is a paramount concern at all U.S. government and corporate facilities in Kabul. The RFE/RL Kabul bureau and the VOA stringer office share space in a villa on a small walled compound in a Kabul residential neighborhood. Security in the area is good, since there are a number of international and diplomatic offices nearby. RFE/RL provides security in the building, and the RFE/RL administrative officer, a former Afghan army general, serves as security chief and has a close and effective relationship with the police. The VOA and RFE/RL offices receive embassy security advisories by e-mail.

OIG advised the RFE/RL bureau chief that the facility's fire extinguishers were well past their recharge dates and the building should have a first aid kit. Although all employees on the compound expressed satisfaction with security, OIG did suggest that RFE/RL request a courtesy consultation from the embassy's regional security officer. OIG made no security recommendations.

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BBG PROVIDED CRITICAL COVERAGE AND EXPANSION WITH OWN RESOURCES

At critical junctures in the transition of Afghanistan from Taliban rule to democracy, BBG has provided news coverage and discussion that helped unify the nation. The Taliban-controlled state radio service had been destroyed during the U.S. attack and, in the aftermath, Afghans had few sources of news. VOA filled this near vacuum, achieving an astounding 80-percent audience among males in a survey. (Women could not be surveyed.) Joined in 2002 by RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan, the two broadcasters carved out an important niche that has endured even as Afghanistan has developed its own media with USAID and Department assistance. In addition to the major BBG Dari and Pashto programming initiatives a recent BBG nationwide survey reveals that small but significant portions of the Afghan population listen to programming by BBG broadcasters in Urdu, Tajik, Turkmen, and other languages. International broadcasters and those of neighboring countries have also added to the media mix.

BBG broadcasts by VOA and RFE/RL were important in the pre- and post-conflict periods, although RFE/RL did not broadcast Radio Free Afghanistan until 2002. Since 2002, VOA and Radio Free Afghanistan (both as separate entities and later as components of the Afghanistan Radio Network) informed the Afghan public of the process, proceedings, and legitimacy of the June 2002 conference that ultimately led to a new, elected regime. At that time, USAID transferred \$187,820 to VOA to hire stringers, acting in conjunction with the Bureau of South Asian Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy (SA/PD). (This agreement was increased twice to provide \$378,533 in additional funds and ended on January 31, 2003.) Emergency Response Funds appropriated to OMB were transferred to BBG to establish a mediumwave transmitter in Afghanistan. Likewise, VOA and Radio Free Afghanistan, working under the umbrella of the Afghanistan Radio Network, yet maintaining their own identities and uniqueness, played similar roles during the run up to the December 2003 constitutional conference, the October 2004 presidential election, and the September 2005 national parliament elections. To enhance coverage of the national elections, BBG internally reprogrammed funds so that VOA could hire additional stringers for reporting and purchase additional FM

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radio stations for underserved but important portions of the country. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, VOA also sent correspondents from other bureaus, such as the VOA New Delhi News Bureau, to provide coverage for its Worldwide English service.

As detailed later in this report, the Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement affairs (INL) has also funded some of VOA's news coverage and programming in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in December 2001, VOA submitted to USAID an ultimately unsuccessful proposal that sought \$4.5 million in annual funding to increase radio and television programming for Afghanistan. That request aside, BBG does not use funding from outside sources for general coverage of news events or long-term enhancements to on-going operations and current programming. Rather, funding from outside sources is intended to fund coverage of a specific event, such as an election, as well as coverage of a specific topic, such as narcotics.

This situation of multiple funding sources has caused some VOA employees to express frustration over having to go outside the agency to obtain funds for their work. Other evidence of this concern comes from the VOA Pashto Action Plan, which twice referred to this situation. At one point, the plan said, "VOA Pashto and Dari [services] are forced to rely on uncertain, short-term, outside funding to maintain their stringer networks in Afghanistan and other countries. If BBG and VOA are committed to reaching Afghanistan on a long-term basis, more permanent, institutional funding is necessary."

Short-term funding needs were solved in the final days of FY 2003 by a transfer of \$357,000 in economic support funds from SA/PD to VOA to fund news coverage of the creation and implementation of a new Afghan constitution. Although the development was welcome, the VOA Action Plan said it "...perpetuates VOA reliance on outside funding for adequate news coverage of a vital region at a crucial moment in Afghanistan's history."

BBG has increased base resources dedicated to Afghanistan through the annual budget process and successfully sought an increase to its budget for broadcasting to Afghanistan in FY 2006. Although OIG found that BBG operations in and broadcasting to Afghanistan fared well in comparison with other language services in BBG's total budget, it is clear that BBG had too many competing priorities for the

VOA Afghan Service FY 2005 Budget	
Gross Operating Expense and Salaries*	\$3,345,295
INL Counter Narcotics	\$231,820
SA/PD FY 2004 Election Funds	\$31,965
Approximate Total	\$3,609,080
*BBG baseline for Dari and Pashto	
Source: BBG	

limited funding available to it. The 9/11 Commission's report noted that BBG "has begun some promising initiatives in television and radio broadcast-

ing to the Arab world, Iran, and Afghanistan," and asserted that BBG should get the money it requested. OIG supports increased additional base funding for BBG to allow BBG to increase its funds for Afghanistan initiatives. The FY 2005 budget for RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan was \$3,587,000. The VOA Afghan Service spent \$3,609,080 in FY 2005. The total FY 2005 estimated cost for the BBG broadcasts to Afghanistan is \$9.6 million for operations and \$.5 million for capital costs. Of this, \$400,000 came from interagency agreements with USAID and the Department. Annual operating costs for the FY 2001 - FY 2005 period total approximately \$66.6 million in the aggregate, including \$18.6 million in capital costs.

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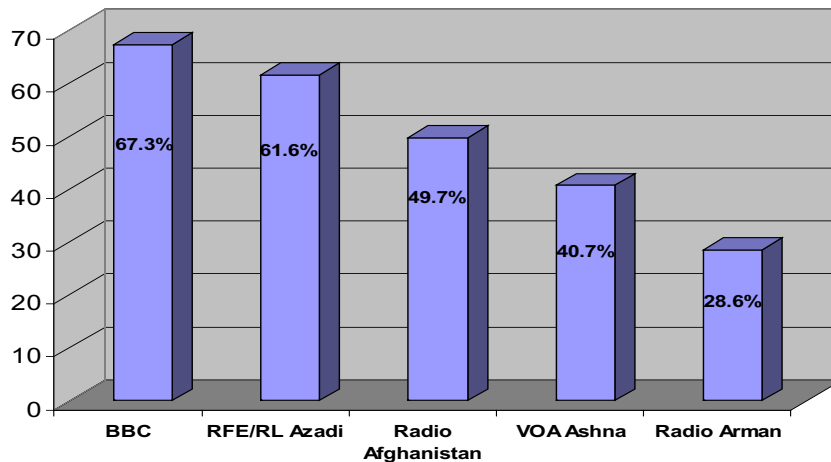
BBG HAS MADE PROGRESS ON OBJECTIVES AND MILESTONES

OIG also examined the extent to which BBG efforts in and for Afghanistan have met the goals, objectives, and milestones of the BBG strategic plan, the Afghanistan Radio Network FY 2004 Performance Plan, and the requirements of the Radio Free Afghanistan Act of 2002.

BBG HAS HAD SEVERAL SUCCESSES

BBG has achieved its Afghanistan-specific objective in its strategic plan and applied many general goals and objectives from the plan to Afghanistan. BBG has had outstanding success putting the broadcasting infrastructure in place, getting programs on the air, developing and deploying stringer networks, and building and maintaining audience shares that are among the highest of BBG's language services. Acting in a short time under adverse conditions, BBG has met or exceeded

Afghanistan Nationwide Weekly Audience



Source: InterMedia, Radio Free Afghanistan Service Review Presentation Dec. 2004

nearly all goals of its FY 2003, FY 2004, and FY 2005 Afghanistan Radio Network Annual Plans. Independent Department-sponsored audience research in 2005 showed U.S. international broadcasting to Afghanistan gaining a strong response from those asked to identify their "most important source of information."³

BBG HAS INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE

BBG's first strategic goal is to design a broadcasting infrastructure for the twenty-first century. Prior to the 9/11 attacks, BBG had only minimal activity regarding Afghanistan. VOA broadcasted to Afghanistan only over shortwave frequencies and only for one and a half hours a day. IBB is currently transmitting VOA and RFE/RL programming to Afghanistan via shortwave from IBB transmitting stations in three countries, providing 53 hours of programming daily. IBB has also installed a high-power mediumwave AM transmitter in Kabul and five FM transmitters around the country, with three more FM transmitters planned in FY 2006, and may further expand the AM network. IBB had to overcome huge challenges in what was then a war zone and where insurgent activity today affects



Figure 2: Transmitting station before repairs



Figure 3 : Transmitting station after repairs by BBG

logistics, security, and operations. U.S. military forces damaged or destroyed much of the Taliban-controlled state-broadcasting infrastructure, requiring DOD to use flying platforms for some broadcasting in the war's aftermath. Later, a bilateral agreement set up a temporary 1-kiloWatt (kW) FM transmitter for Kabul that became operational on May 15, 2002. What had been the main AM broadcast

³U.S. Department of State, Office of Research, August 2005 Nationwide Survey in Afghanistan.

facility of Afghanistan's state-run network, Radio Television Afghanistan (RTVA), had to be repaired by IBB before it could return to operation. Nonetheless, doing so was a quicker and less costly option for IBB, compared to constructing a new medium wave transmitter site.

Some problems remain, but IBB continues to improve on its performance in Afghanistan. IBB employed RTVA to run the IBB facilities, and the IBB's Germany Transmitting Station, which directly oversees the Afghan facilities, has contracted with a highly regarded Western-trained, local engineer, who will troubleshoot IBB's Afghan operations and ensure that IBB's transmitters there are always running. This arrangement represents a tremendous savings over using IBB Foreign Service officers and provides greater flexibility and mobility because costly and restrictive security requirements and procedures do not apply.

Nevertheless, IBB's transmitters are sometimes off the air due to Afghanistan conditions. Under the May 19, 2003, bilateral agreement, IBB's AM and FM transmitters were installed in pairs, with BBG donating one transmitter in each pair to RTVA. Subsequently, RTVA technicians cannibalized the IBB AM transmitter to gain the spare parts needed for the AM transmitter RTVA gained under the bilateral agreement. Afghanistan's unreliable power situation and the initial lack of a functioning generator for the AM transmitter also cut into broadcasting time. Even now the AM transmitter is off the air an average of two hours daily (based on a randomly picked two-week period July 18-31, 2005) for power reasons. The FM transmitters have also experienced occasional power problems; one reason was the lack of fuel, due to countrywide shortages, for the backup or primary generator. Afghanistan's mountainous topography and its underdeveloped power grid also challenged IBB broadcasting and the possibility of expanding it. Nonetheless, VOA TV has been providing a weekly TV show since November 2001 and plans to premier a daily TV program in spring 2006.

IBB HAS EXPANDED ITS NETWORK IN AFGHANISTAN

BBG's second strategic goal is to expand the U.S. international broadcasting system through regional networks and single-country priority initiatives. Afghanistan is a single-country priority initiative, and one of BBG's objectives under this goal is to harmonize Radio Free Afghanistan and VOA in the Afghanistan Radio Network. On August 4, 2003, BBG integrated the 12 hours that VOA and Radio Free Afghanistan each broadcasted daily into one 24-hour, integrated stream that

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began with dispersed segments. The two broadcasters' 12-hour segments are now presented in a continuous block, due to an agreement between VOA and RFE/RL, but the two broadcasters still must improve cross promotion and offer a smoother hand off between each other at the beginning and ending of their 12-hour blocks.

VOA and RFE/RL are committed to increased cooperation and their steps in that direction include having the director of the VOA Afghanistan Service visit RFE/RL headquarters in Prague during 2005. The new chief of Radio Free Afghanistan is also a former VOA employee, and his presence in Prague may facilitate increased cooperation.

Furthermore, VOA and RFE/RL have both expanded their journalistic presence outside of Kabul. Whereas VOA had only three stringers before the 9/11 attacks, it now regularly has 17 stringers in Afghanistan, plus four who were added during the September 2005 elections and another 19 funded by and dedicated to INL priorities. Some of the regular VOA stringers are tasked with doing some counternarcotics-related stories while some of the INL-funded stringers were also tasked with election coverage. RFE/RL has 125 staff countrywide, including 45 in Kabul. This also includes the eight employees who work for other language services (such as Tadjik and Uzbek) and are paid directly by their language service's office in RFE/RL.

The two broadcasters cover 20 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, endeavoring to have coverage with Pashto- and Dari-speaking stringers in each location and to have overlap between them. RFE/RL has a building in Kabul for its news bureau. There, RFE/RL provides space to VOA and has allowed VOA to construct its mini-studio. The expanded journalistic presence has increased news coverage. However, due to Afghanistan's many dangers, some stringers have been relocated.

OIG visited IBB's operations at the RTVA transmitter site, about 30 minutes by car from downtown Kabul. The site has two modern 400-KW transmitters, one operated for IBB and one for Afghanistan state radio. The site's small staff says it can handle most maintenance requirements and that its biggest concern is the fluctuation in the Kabul power grid. With the power supply varying between 8 kilovolts and 13 kilovolts, the staff often must shut down the BBG transmitter and restart it on power supplied by an old Soviet generator that is unreliable and needs voltage regulation equipment. The site's RTVA staff, which runs the IBB transmitter under contract with IBB, estimated that, following a manual start of the generator, it could take up to 20 minutes between shutting down the transmitter and getting it back on the air. However, the contract liaison with IBB's Germany Transmitting station said this transition takes as little as five minutes.



Figure 4: Old Soviet-era generator

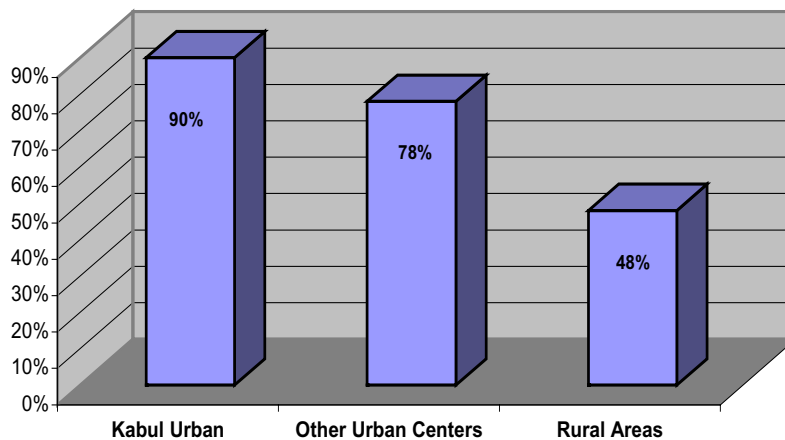


Figure 5: New USAID-supplied generator

In contrast, the RTVA staff showed OIG the new automatic-starting generator that USAID supplied to Afghan state radio. This excellent piece of equipment is used to keep the state radio network's transmitter on the air when there are power grid problems. The RTVA employees also said they wished the U.S. government would provide a similar generator for the IBB transmitter. This resulted from inadequate communication by USAID with the BBG. BBG believes USAID could have provided additional auto-start generator capacity for the BBG transmitter for a relatively small incremental cost, which the BBG might have been able to fund had it had timely knowledge of the project.

BBG Employs Modern Communications Techniques and Technologies

Regular Access To A Working Television



Source: InterMedia

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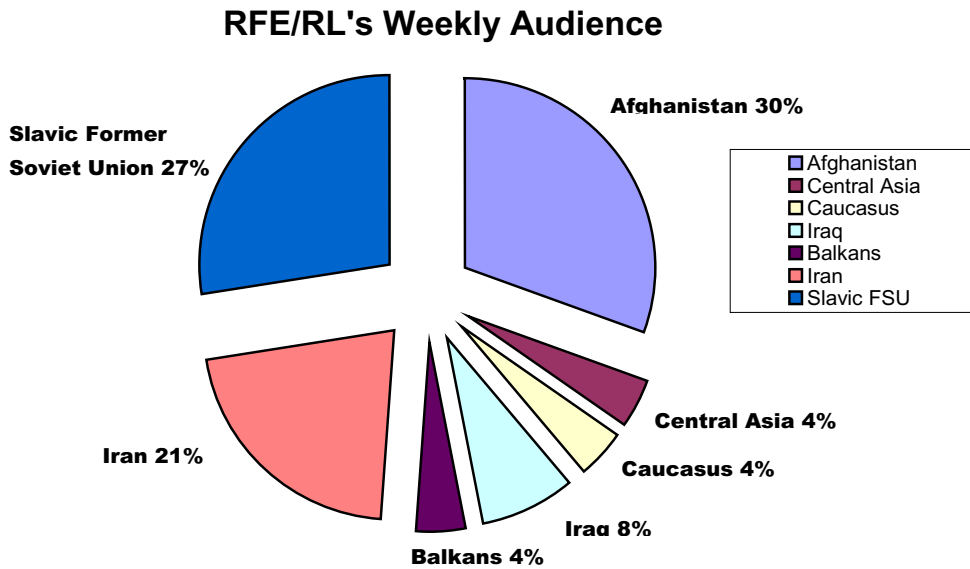
BBG's third strategic goal is to employ modern communication techniques and technologies. Both VOA and RFE/RL have set up Internet websites in Dari and Pashto, and BBG has a multi-entity group that is developing Internet performance measures. However, the audience in Afghanistan that can use this technology is small and elitist.

Television broadcasting is now part of the Afghanistan media mix, although VOA TV has had this initiative to itself due to its television experience and infrastructure. RFE/RL has a proposal before the BBG and fears that, if it does not move into television, its strong position in radio in Afghanistan will be eroded as the market moves to television. Given the cost of television, especially for a start up operation, OIG believes BBG has made the correct choice for now. However, BBG may be able to extend the VOA collaboration with RFE/RL in Afghanistan into television, with VOA taking the lead and being the custodian of the technology. Either way, the infusion of more TV programming into the Afghan mix will require much additional money. For now, BBG's expertise and greatest return on investment in Afghanistan is in radio.

One strategic plan objective under this goal is to use modern radio "formatics," or styles of broadcasting for particular audiences. In response, RFE/RL and VOA have re-branded their Afghan radio programs. The VOA brand is now Radio Ashna, which means "friend" in Dari and Pashto. RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan has re-branded itself as Radio Azadi, which means "liberty" in Dari and Pashto. More importantly, both services have applied some of the principles of formatics and given their broadcasts the equivalent of face-lifts that both broadcasters are pleased with. Both remain strong performers, despite increased competition from start-up private-sector stations and the growing popularity of TV, especially during prime time. During prime time, VOA takes over the BBG's Afghanistan Radio Network for the overnight block of 12 hours. This is one reason for the lower performance of VOA, compared to its historic high audience share, having had much of the field to itself.

VOA also may have been hurt in the audience survey by some brand confusion. There is evidence that some listeners were not aware that VOA and Radio Ashna are the same. Likewise, there is evidence that some VOA Radio Ashna programming was incorrectly attributed to RFE/RL's Radio Azadi. According to BBG's contracted audience research firm, VOA may in fact be stronger than the numbers indicate, a view echoed by VOA's director. If Radio Ashna's lower audience share is viewed in light of the BBG's threshold standard of a five-percent share, VOA is turning in a performance in Afghanistan that VOA's director says is "still astonishing." VOA notes Afghanistan is one of the five countries with the highest number

of weekly listeners for VOA. Radio Azadi's Afghanistan audience numbers are certainly larger than those of any other language service or single-country audience market within RFE/RL as reflected in the following chart.



Source: BBG Annual Language Service Review 2005 Briefing Book

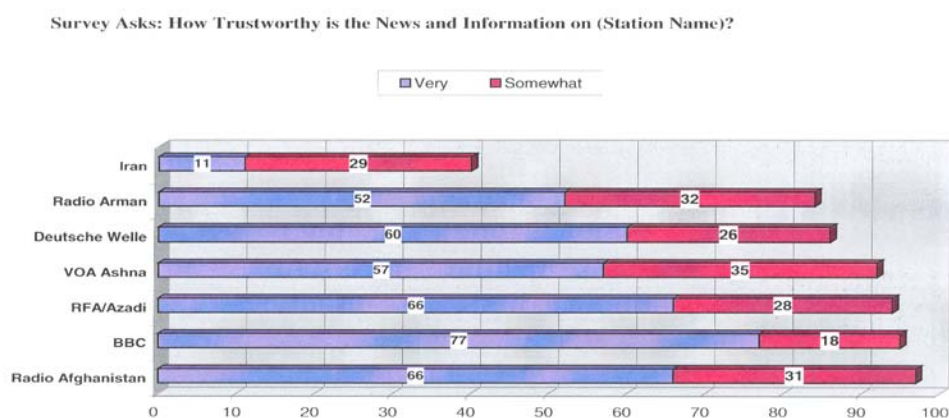
BBG IS PRESERVING CREDIBILITY AND ENSURING OVERALL PROGRAMMING EXCELLENCE

BBG's fourth strategic goal focuses on preserving credibility and ensuring overall programming excellence. One objective under that goal is to perform periodic program reviews. Both VOA and RFE/RL have had annual program reviews, totaling at least four a year with each having conducted program reviews in Dari and Pashto. Recent BBG-sponsored audience research also shows that respondents gave a high score to the credibility of RFE/RL and VOA, with RFE/RL's credibility rating being nearly unmatched by any competitor.⁴ Separate audience research sponsored by USAID found the service to have competitive rankings

⁴*International Broadcasting in Afghanistan: Audience Analysis & Market Profile*, InterMedia, Dec. 2004, p. 16.

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in such issue areas as international news, Afghan news, health, and Afghan elections and politics when compared with other international, national, and local independent stations.⁵ RFE/RL earned the top ranking in that comparison with regard to its coverage of Afghan elections and politics. VOA's credibility, while high, is somewhat lower than RFE/RL's, according to surveys. A BBG program review also noted that some listeners see VOA as a broadcaster that "reflects the policies of the U.S. government," whereas the British Broadcasting Corporation was seen as more impartial.⁶ A reason for Afghan perceptions may be that one service, Radio Azadi, does not broadcast editorials although the other service, Radio Ashna, does. The editorials may be perceived by some listeners as being less impartial.



Source: InterMedia

Although the reasons for the Afghan public's views on VOA Radio Ashna and the British Broadcasting Corporation have not been conclusively identified, the USAID report on Afghan media said, "VOA does not seem to suffer from a suspicion of propaganda."⁷ As for the British Broadcasting Corporation, it has more than twice the number of FM stations in Afghanistan, compared to BBG's network there.

One of the important features of VOA's Radio Ashna and RFE/RL's Radio Azadi are call-in shows and roundtable discussions. In fact, VOA has done live call-in shows in Dari for nearly 10 years and is the only international broadcaster with a live call-in show in Afghanistan. The VOA call-in shows run seven days a

⁵ *Afghan Media - Three Years After: Media and Alternative Sources of Information in Afghan Society*, Altai Consulting, Nationwide Research - Sept. 2004/March 2005, p. 60.

⁶ VOA Pashto Action Plan Follow Up Notes, Oct. 3, 2003, p. 2.

⁷ *Afghan Media* p. 60.

week, offering an hour in Dari and an hour in Pashto. They feature a guest, frequently government ministers or their deputies, and a discussion topic. (Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's brother has been a guest.) The call-in shows rarely have the same guests because some guests are not comfortable in both Dari and Pashto. These guests, and the unscripted free flow of interaction and tough questions, lend credibility to the service and are an example of accountable, transparent democracy. The managing editor of VOA's Pashto service calls these programs "the most important thing that we do."

An important caveat, when discussing the credibility of VOA TV's weekly programming for Afghanistan, is that the programming is not branded. It is essentially lifted in segments and appended to a local product without attribution. However, Afghans who were interviewed claimed to be able to identify VOA TV's weekly programming by recognizing the broadcasters' voices. The lack of branding has also come up in program reviews. The new satellite daily TV program will be branded and will remain whole and not be disaggregated.

BBG'S EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE THE TELLING OF AMERICA'S STORY

BBG's fifth strategic goal is to revitalize the telling of America's story, which is primarily the mission of the VOA charter. One objective under this goal is to "present targeted editorials that are relevant to local and regional concerns." VOA's Pashto service, for example, has used U.S. government editorials in up to 38 of its 42 weekly hours of broadcasting. The VOA Dari service has used editorials in a minimum of 32 of its 42 weekly broadcast hours. Recently, VOA's Dari and Pashto services have reduced their number of U.S. government editorials.

VOA's unique contribution to the combined broadcast stream of the Afghanistan Radio Network is that its headquarters is in Washington, D.C. Thus, in covering Afghanistan elections or the Afghan Parliament, VOA is well positioned to blend in coverage of U.S.-Afghanistan relations or vignettes of U.S. democracy in action. Such enhancements of its coverage can assist Afghan listeners in understanding the democratic process and the role of civil society. They also help the agency meet its strategic plan objective of being a model of free press and democracy in action.

THE RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN ACT OF 2002

When Congress established Radio Free Afghanistan, it wanted RFE/RL to provide surrogate broadcasting services in Dari and Pashto. Impressively, RFE/RL established Radio Free Afghanistan within a few months and has since established a large news bureau in Kabul and spread a network of stringers around the country. Stringers have been trained and are called in to Kabul from time to time for additional mentoring and training.

BBG PERFORMANCE GOALS AND BUDGETING

One of the initiatives of the President's Management Agenda is budget and performance integration. The initiative calls for federal resources to be allocated to

BBG Operating Costs for Broadcasting-Related to Afghanistan	
<i>Service</i>	<i>FY 2005 estimate</i> (dollars in millions)
RFE/RL Radio Free Afghanistan*	\$4.8
VOA Dari/Pashto*	\$4.0
VOA Interagency Agreements	\$0.4
BBG Research	\$0.2
FM Transmission	\$0.2
Total	\$9.6
*shortwave and medium wave Source BBG	

programs and managers that deliver results and for agency performance measures to be well defined and properly integrated into agency budget submissions and agency management and operation. However, the central administrative and technical support costs for the BBG

Afghanistan efforts cannot be identified precisely because the Department of State financial system that the BBG cross-services for does not automatically allocate central support costs. BBG did, in the initial round of OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool reviews, develop a submission for the South Asia and Near East Asia region that includes Afghanistan, and its performance plans have been updated for each following year. BBG has been able to mesh the performance plan and the program review for Afghanistan.

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That data, and the action plan developed during the program review process, were available in time for the board's annual language service review, which the board uses to set priorities. The board's priorities, as reflected in the budget, show Afghanistan's importance. For example, out of a FY 2005 global advertising budget of over \$300,000, the advertising program for Afghanistan received \$80,000. Likewise, the number of stringers in Afghanistan for VOA and RFE/RL or the number of staff in Washington at VOA or Prague at RFE/RL who work on Afghanistan in the language services reflect Afghanistan's importance.

From the BBG chairman on down, BBG officials say the work in Afghanistan has been successful and has produced results worthy of additional resources. However, performance measurement, although improved, remains incomplete and the environment in Afghanistan has emerging needs that do not always fit neatly into the annual budget cycle. BBG has used funds from other agencies and the budget request process to help fund its Afghanistan needs. The VOA Afghan Enhancement Proposal for TV, for example, was developed in July 2004, included in the Administration's FY 2006 request to Congress, and ultimately included in the conference bill for the FY 2006 appropriations. The FY 2006 conference report also included language supporting the increase in BBG's FM and AM capacity and programming in strategic, underserved regions that are important areas in the global war on terror. These areas are receiving other radio messages from broadcasters that do not always support the United States.

BBG Language Service Staff Primarily Devoted to Afghanistan Broadcasting

VOA Afghan Service Washington Staff and Contractors	35
VOA West and South Asia Division Staff for Afghan TV	1
VOA Radio Ashna Stringers in Afghanistan	36
VOA Radio Ashna Stringers Outside Afghanistan	5
RFE/RL Afghan Service Prague Staff	30
RFE/RL Radio Free Afghanistan/Radio Azadi Stringers, Technicians, and Support Staff In Afghanistan	125
RFE/RL Radio Azadi Stringers Outside Afghanistan	8
Total Afghanistan Language Service Staff	240

Data based on actuals during September 2005.

Pashto and Dari languages are combined in this table as one service.

Source: BBG

Recognizing that it is not always easy to seek funding in a tight fiscal environment, OIG supports BBG's request based on consultations with BBG, the Department, and Embassies Kabul and Islamabad.

BBG has expanded efforts to integrate performance and long-term budget planning in the formulation of its FY 2006 budget and the FY 2007 Budget Request and is now updating its five-year strategic plan, which it anticipates finalizing for the FY 2008 budget formulation cycle.

REACHING AFGHANS VIA TELEVISION

As confirmed by Department-sponsored research, Afghanistan is a radio-based culture, especially as a source for news.⁸ Under the Taliban, neither televisions nor independent news sources were permitted. However, recent surveys show that, especially in Kabul and other major cities, access to television is very high, reaching about 95 percent in urban Kabul.⁹ It is common that, where there is access to TV, many members of the radio listening audience switch over to the newer medium. This is happening in Afghanistan and the greatest impact is being felt on VOA's Radio Ashna audience. The USAID study found that, "Among media, radio has a clear lead. [However,] TV is rising as the leading medium when available and where there are a variety of channels."¹⁰ Research by a USAID contractor confirms that TV is most competitive with radio in Afghanistan during prime time.¹¹

As in other countries, younger audiences will increasingly turn to television for

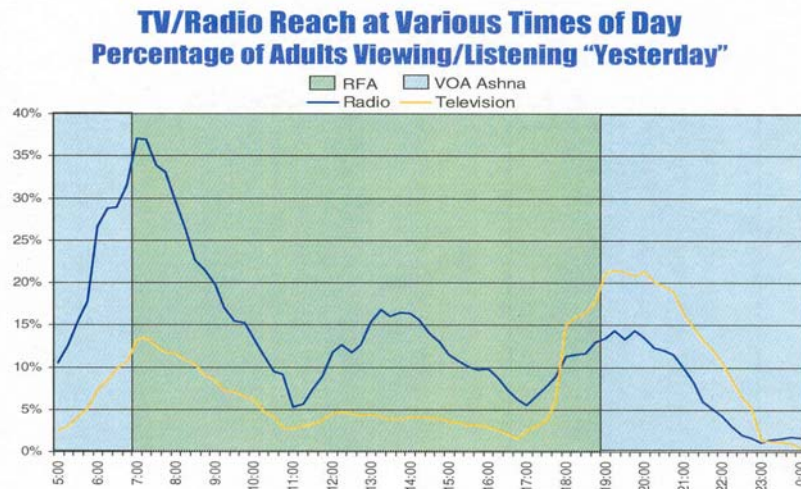


Figure 3: Afghan Radio and TV use over the course of a day
Source: InterMedia

news. In Afghanistan, the 15 to 39 age bracket makes up 40 percent of the population. However, VOA is constrained by its budget and has, therefore, put out only

⁸ *Afghanistan: Findings from a Nationwide Survey*, Office of Research, Department of State, July 2004, p. 16.

⁹ Radio Free Afghanistan Service Review Presentation, InterMedia, Dec. 2004, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Afghan Media* p. 90.

¹¹ *Afghan Media* p. 42.

a nominal TV product over the past three years, a weekly half hour of Dari and half hour of Pashto programming on Afghanistan state TV. To enhance its television programming, VOA hopes to add on a new TV program in April or May 2006 that is modeled on the *News and Views* program put out by VOA's Persian service. This new one-hour program will run seven days a week. The German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle already has a nightly news program on Afghanistan state TV. Since VOA has had difficulty marketing the new product to the state TV organization, VOA will distribute the new product via satellite to homes under a pending affiliate agreement with a private Afghan radio and television network. Satellite dish ownership now stands at 18 percent in Kabul and is increasing.

In the meantime, the current weekly program, which appears on state TV in bits and is unbranded, in part for technical reasons, is still distributed. Embassy Kabul has worked with an IBB contractor for the Office of Marketing and Program Placement to distribute tapes of the VOA weekly TV program to TV stations in cities beyond Kabul, including privately owned stations. In October 2005, the VOA director of the West and South Asian Division went to Afghanistan to seek input and ideas for the new daily TV program and to develop private-sector TV station affiliates so that VOA would not have to rely strictly on Afghanistan state TV. In the meantime, Afghanistan state TV has shown interest in broadening its affiliation to take on more content from VOA. At the invitation of Embassy Kabul, the VOA director for the West and South Asia Division and the director of IBB's Marketing and Program Placement Regional Office also met with U.S. representatives of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, stationed throughout Afghanistan. Those representatives expressed great interest in placing VOA/RFERL programs on the radio and TV stations in their provinces. However, VOA cannot compete with local content in any future TV programming in Afghanistan unless it has its own facilities in Kabul, including TV studios. If VOA does not do what is required to compete well in TV programming, as the Afghan market gradually moves more and more to TV, then both it and RFE/RL may see their strong audiences built up through radio diminish along with the opportunity to influence those audiences.

Recommendation 1: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should review Voice of America's objectives in Afghanistan and, if required, provide Voice of America's Kabul news bureau with adequate studios for radio and television work and equip and train the bureau's video journalists. (Action: BBG)

BBG agrees with this recommendation.

VOA INTERNET-READY WHEN AFGHANS ARE READY

Afghanistan is a pre-industrial society where only a third of the population is literate and there is little computer and Internet access. According to recent research, 72 percent of Afghans have never even heard of the Internet.¹² However, Internet cafes are opening in Kabul. Due to the small audience in Afghanistan for the Internet, VOA and RFE/RL are correct in directing their limited Afghanistan funds primarily toward radio for the time being. According to VOA director David Jackson, VOA has a website -- when Afghanistan is ready for it. VOA's websites for Afghanistan are in Pashto and Dari. RFE/RL does the same.

¹²Radio Free Afghanistan Service Review Presentation, InterMedia, Dec. 2004, p. 5.

BROADCASTS' IMPACT DIFFICULT TO MEASURE

OIG also reviewed the contribution of BBG's Afghanistan broadcasting efforts toward the global war on terror, Muslim outreach, and promoting democracy and women's rights in the new Afghanistan. All of the government officials interviewed see BBG's Afghanistan effort as successful, and BBG Chairman Tomlinson described the efforts as "one rare case when you can point to results." He said, "You can see the needle moving. We are getting there." Although BBG has improved its activity measures and has clear goals, it has few metrics for measuring the results of its activity--to show how the needle has moved and by how much. The ideal, in terms of the Program Assessment Rating Tool, is to show what is achieved with a certain amount of dollars and have some confidence about what will be achieved with additional dollars. This gets to the question of why U.S. international broadcasting is making a priority effort in Afghanistan and measuring how those efforts have contributed to results. At the time of this review, BBG was conducting its first nearly nationwide audience research survey in Afghanistan. Previous surveys were limited in their coverage of Afghanistan. Nationwide surveys that track responses over time for certain questions would aid analysis.

Recommendation 2: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should have its research program generate comparable statistics over time from nationwide surveys. (Action: BBG)

BBG concurs with this recommendation, noting that it strives to generate comparable statistics from the nationwide survey when the security environment and funding permit. The agency hopes the situation in Afghanistan will improve and permit a full national sample.

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN, ITS RESULTS AND VALUE

U.S. international broadcasting is one tool for the Administration to pursue U.S. interests in Afghanistan, the region, and the Muslim world. One of the U.S. government's goals, made clear in the United Nations-backed Bonn Agreement of 2001, is to promote the establishment of a democratically elected representative government in Afghanistan. Speaking about the war on terror before the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush said: "We are fighting to deny the militants control of any nation. The United States is fighting beside our Afghan partners against the remnants of the Taliban and its al Qaida allies... We are denying the militants future recruits by advancing democracy..."¹³

The BBG mission statement calls for the agency "To promote and sustain freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information about the United States and the world to audiences overseas."¹⁴ The BBG strategic plan says, "The nature of Terrorism and the tools it uses make U.S. international broadcasting a natural, strong counter-weapon in America's arsenal."¹⁵ BBG Chairman Tomlinson, meanwhile, said the impact of BBG Afghanistan programming on the global war on terrorism is "as great as any place in the world" and that "the war on terror is at the top of BBG priorities."

During his July 2005 trip to Afghanistan, Tomlinson spoke with Afghanistan President Karzai and representatives of Embassy Kabul about expanding U.S. government broadcasts in southern Afghanistan and along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Afterward, he consulted with the Department and the National Security Council and submitted an enhancement proposal to OMB. The proposal affirmed that, "Programming to this audience will contribute toward dispelling anti-Americanism and promoting democratic values, and even help strengthen Afghanistan's national government."¹⁶

¹³*Fact Sheet: President Bush Remarks on the War on Terror*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Oct. 6, 2005.

¹⁴*Marrying the Mission to the Market, Strategic Plan for U.S. International Broadcasting 2002-2007*, Broadcasting Board of Governors, p. 2.

¹⁵*Marrying the Mission to the Market*, p. 24.

¹⁶Kenneth Tomlinson memorandum of August 24, 2005.

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Indeed, a substantial portion of the Afghanistan Radio Network's programming is focused on antiterrorism. If that causes Afghans to think about and heed these messages, U.S. international broadcasting will be able to take some credit for limiting the pool of potential suicide bombers and for promoting a strong and democratic Afghanistan.

Since BBG's mission is to promote and sustain democracy and BBG takes credit for advancing freedom and democracy, BBG must develop metrics that provide better information regarding BBG's impact. It must also develop metrics for its claims of dispelling anti-Americanism. Without question, this is difficult and involves many external variables outside of BBG's control.

The United States is also in Afghanistan to champion human rights in general and women's rights in particular. U.S. efforts in this regard are a demonstration to the world, and in particular to the Muslim world, of what the United States is all about in terms of freedom. Under the Taliban, women and girls endured extreme oppression. Their situation has changed greatly; girls are being schooled and women are running for Parliament and being appointed to head government ministries.

BBG has done its part. A focus on women's issues is in the VOA action plans. RFE/RL hosted First Lady Laura Bush in Prague and made it possible for her to address the women and girls of Afghanistan. VOA and RFE/RL have female stringers, and at least one female stringer has interviewed President Karzai. On the broadcasters' services, many news items, features, and call-in program topics deal with women's issues. VOA Director David Jackson said there is a strong woman-oriented element in VOA programming for Afghanistan because of the capable women who oversee it. The VOA director for West and South Asia Division and the VOA chief of the Afghan Service are women, as is the RFE/RL associate director for broadcasting in Prague who oversees the Afghan service. There is evidence that this broadcasting is, directly and indirectly, having an impact. One Afghan said in an interview, "I learned on Radio Azadi that a man who beats his wife would not go to paradise. We talked it over with my wife, and I swore never to beat her again."¹⁷

¹⁷*Afghan Media*, p. 85.

BBG'S INFORMATIVE, CONTENT-BASED PROGRAMMING

An examination of the program clocks for Radio Ashna and Radio Azadi indicates that both services are heavy on content. Some music is broadcast by both, but it is used to round out programming, appeal to younger people, and demonstrate appreciation for Afghan culture. VOA has also developed a popular poetry program that has a dedicated following. VOA reports that its daily program mix for Afghanistan is 50 percent news, 25 percent call-in programs, and 25 percent cultural programming, but no entertainment as such. RFE/RL reports that its daily program mix for Afghanistan is 75 percent news and information, 10 percent content such as features, and 15 percent music and entertainment. Among the many new private radio stations springing up is one that emphasizes music, Radio Arman. Radio Arman was assisted in its start up by USAID and is drawing strong audience share in Kabul while trying to expand beyond the city. OIG believes that the heavy content orientation of Radio Ashna and Radio Azadi, interspersed with some lighter programming, is successful, as confirmed by audience research. It meets BBG's objectives and fills a need for the Afghan people.

Afghan President Karzai has told Radio Ashna and Radio Azadi that he listens to their programs. Upon returning from a visit to Afghanistan as part of a congressional delegation, Congressman Howard Berman said during a hearing on the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002 that "Radio Free Afghanistan, which is a product of this committee, is now up and running, and Chairman Karzai told us how these broadcasts mean so much to his country because, when he travels around to remote pockets of that country for the first time, people know who he is because of the radio." Berman also quoted Karzai as saying that his countrymen know he is their leader, "not the local warlord, and that is a big difference, and they know that because of the radio."¹⁸ Although it is difficult to measure the BBG contribution, it is clear that the U.S. government has put significant U.S. funds and effort into transforming Afghanistan into a peaceful, pro-U.S., democratic country that does not protect terrorists. VOA and RFE/RL are contributing to that outcome by informing the Afghan people about events in Afghanistan, the region, and the world, which improves the stability and strength of Afghanistan's central government and presents a true picture of the American people.

¹⁸The Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002. Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Seventh Congress, Second Session, March 14, 2002, Serial No. 107-80, p. 8.

BBG CONDUCTS ITS ANTI-NARCOTICS EFFORT IN CONCERT WITH DEPARTMENT

In 2004, Afghanistan was the source for about 87 percent of the world's production of raw opium. The brown heroin produced from that opium is destined primarily for European markets; only about 8 percent of it ends up in the U.S. Under an August 2004 interagency agreement with INL, BBG is to receive \$350,000 in no-year money for broadcasting in Dari and Pashto to support counternarcotics activities. The agreement was to end on September 30, 2005, but BBG gained permission to use the remaining unspent funds after that date. Broadcasting was to include in-depth news stories, interview programs, documentaries, public health features, and call-in shows relating to narcotics production, commerce, consumption, and treatment. VOA was the vehicle for this broadcasting. Using the INL grant, VOA established a network of 19 stringers besides its regular stringers, who would work in and around Afghanistan to cover narcotics issues, with support from editors and broadcasters at VOA Washington. Training was provided to the stringers, using money from the grant. VOA's Dari and Pashto services, during November 2004 through September 30, 2005, aired 1,328 reports and panel discussions on drug issues.

Prior to providing the grant to VOA, INL financed some episodes of a popular weekly soap opera that dealt with drug abuse and were broadcast in Dari and Pashto by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Under the grant to the BBG, VOA has also produced some dramas dealing with drugs. From 2004 to 2005 there was a 20-percent decrease in the acreage of land in Afghanistan that was planted with the opium poppies. INL and the Afghan government conducted many anti-drug activities in the period, primarily public exhortations by provincial governors and religious leaders, and they deserve full credit for this outcome. INL believes VOA was also a contributor to the outcome of decreased acreage planted with opium poppy. However, heavy rains and other favorable conditions, resulting in higher yields, canceled out that reduction in acreage planted and left Afghanistan's annual opium production virtually unchanged. There are indications that the sale of opium and heroin has helped fund Taliban insurgents. It likewise weakens the central government and diverts farmers from more productive crops, at least in terms of the legitimate commerce that can build Afghanistan's economy. INL Acting Assistant Secretary Nancy Powell told a congressional hearing that VOA is

"broadcasting anti-drug messages in both Pashto and Dari that link the drug trade to conflict, crime, corruption, and warlordism."¹⁹ Anecdotal evidence of the impact of such broadcasts can be seen in the statement of one farmer near Jalalabad who said, "We discussed the ban on poppy growing a lot among farmers. Some of us heard on the radio that it was contrary to Islam and that the prophet condemned its cultivation as well as the use of drugs. Therefore, we decided to stop, but now our economic situation is precarious."²⁰ As this indicates, VOA's radio campaign, in cooperation with INL, can be a contributor to the war on drugs but only as part of a comprehensive approach to this complex problem.

**BBG's Principal
Performance Measures**

Overall Weekly Audiences- all adults listening at least once a week.

Program Quality-using broad categories of criteria for content (12 elements) and presentation (13 elements), an averaged statistic summarized on a scale of from 1-4 (with 1 as worst and 4 as best).

Signal Strength-for radio signal monitoring by IBB staff of shortwave and medium wave signals in or near target areas.

Cost Per Listener (or Audience Head)-expressed in dollars and cents and derived by dividing total cost of creating and delivering programs by regular weekly audience.

Awareness-expressed as a percent of the sampled population's "total awareness," that is the prompted or unprompted acknowledgement of BBG station names.

Source: BBG strategic plan, *Marrying the Mission to the Market*

**BBG'S ENHANCED
AND ALTERNATIVE
MEASURES**

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires government agencies to set goals and report annually on program performance. BBG now meets those requirements. As mentioned earlier, BBG has improved on its activity measures (its process measures) and its output measures (the direct products and services delivered by a program) but needs to do more to measure results or outcomes.

¹⁹Statement of Nancy J. Powell, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Department of State, Committee on House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs, Congressional Quarterly, July 12, 2005.

²⁰*Afghan Media* p. 89.

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Two of the four types of program evaluation identified by the Government Accountability Office are outcome evaluation and impact evaluation. The Government Accountability Office describes outcome evaluation as assessing "the extent to which a program achieves its outcome-oriented objectives. It focuses on outputs and outcomes...to judge program effectiveness..." Impact evaluation is described as assessing "the net effect of a program by comparing program outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program." The Government Accountability Office says, "This form of evaluation is employed when external factors are known to influence the program's outcomes, in order to isolate the program's contribution to achievement of its objectives."²¹

BBG deserves full marks for improving its measures of process and output and for the results and outcomes achieved. It is possible to review these results for Afghanistan, in documents such as the BBG Annual Language Service Review and program reviews, and see impressive measurable results. These measures can be compared with baselines, IBB standards, or the performances of other language services and by looking at targets for weekly audience, program quality, awareness, signal strength, and cost per listener.

Credibility is one measure of impact. Both Radio Ashna and Radio Azadi have demonstrated credibility, which gives greater weight to their messages. However, BBG has not ventured into measuring impact results or outcomes to show whether the "needle" has moved and how BBG activity and outputs in Afghanistan contributed to those impacts and outcomes. Given the importance of Afghanistan in the global war on terror and the Administration's goals there, such measurement would assist decisionmaking and budgeting. In one case, relatively simple adjustments can be made. For example, BBG's several offices of research need to modify or add questions to the audience research surveys conducted by contract research firms, so they can elicit data that better measures impact. Currently, a standard question at the end of the survey questionnaire asks if the respondent is favorable or unfavorable to the United States.

²¹Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships, United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-05-739SP, May 2005, p. 4.

Recommendation 3: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should have its several offices of research modify or add questions to the audience research surveys administered by contract research firms to elicit data that better measures impact. (Action: BBG)

BBG agrees with this recommendation, with the understanding that this is an ongoing and complex process involving many factors. For the near future, the agency said credibility is the first and best measure of impact in this difficult target area.

BBG is correct in asserting that there are many external variables over which it has no control. Policy, especially when misunderstood, is a major external factor. In the Afghanistan environment external factors are insurgent bombings and threats, unintended negative consequences arising from the pursuit of insurgents, events in other parts of the Muslim world, or a host of other variables. During this review, for example, allegations were made regarding the October 1, 2005, desecration of the bodies of dead Taliban fighters. This resulted in a condemnation by President Karzai and reassurances by U.S. spokespersons that such actions do not reflect American values. Meanwhile, Islamic clerics in Afghanistan and observers in the United States warned of a possible anti-American backlash. Nevertheless, techniques exist that can isolate and measure the positive impact of Afghanistan Radio Network broadcasts.

One such technique with merit is conceptual mapping, a measurement method and performance scoring method based on the comparison of "concept maps." Concept maps reflect a person's thinking, with symbols such as the plus or minus symbol being used to reflect positive or negative associations that the person has with a specific concept or idea. A person's relationship with a number of ideas can then be represented in a chart that shows which ideas they hold in high or low regard. One reference defines concept map as a "a graphical representation where nodes (points or vertices) represent concepts, and links (arcs or lines) represent the relationships between concepts...The concepts and the links may be categorized, and the concept map may show temporal or causal relationships between concepts."²² Although the method has fuzzy aspects, models and equations exist for

²²Concept Mapping: A Graphical System for Understanding the Relationship between Concepts. ERIC Digest. Eric Plotnik, ED407938, 1997, p. 1.

quantitative evaluation.²³ This method is suitable for complex real-world environments where multiple changes have measurable impact.²⁴ Conceptual mapping is also robust enough to deal with assigning causality.²⁵

Recommendation 4: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should instruct its several offices of research to look into alternative measurement instruments, such as cognitive mapping, to determine whether and how these methods can be applied to the measurement of agency performance. (Action: BBG)

BBG concurs with this recommendation and said it and its offices of research will investigate research techniques, including cognitive mapping, to improve the agency's research efforts and procedures.

²³A Performance Scoring Method Based on Quantitative Comparison of Concept Maps by a Teacher and Students, Makio Takey, Hitosshi Sasaki, Keizo Nagaoka, and Nobuyoshi Yonezawa. *Concept Maps: Theory, Methodology, Technology*, Proceedings of the First International Conference on Concept Mapping, A.J. Cañas, J.D. Novak, F.M. González, editors, Pamplona, Spain 2004.

²⁴Specification of a test environment and performance measures for perturbation-tolerant cognitive agents, Michael L. Anderson, Institute for Advanced Computer Studies, University of Maryland, American Association for Artificial Intelligence, 2004.

²⁵The use of causal mapping in the design of management information systems, Robert T. Hughes, Abdullah Al Shehab, and Graham Winstanley, School of Computing, Mathematical and Information Sciences, University of Brighton, United Kingdom.

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FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should review Voice of America's objectives in Afghanistan and, if required, provide Voice of America's Kabul news bureau with adequate studios for radio and television work and equip and train the bureau's video journalists. (Action: BBG)

Recommendation 2: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should have its research program generate comparable statistics over time from nationwide surveys. (Action: BBG)

Recommendation 3: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should have its several offices of research modify or add questions to the audience research surveys administered by contract research firms to elicit data that better measures impact. (Action: BBG)

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
DOD	Department of Defense
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
kW	Kilowatt
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
RFA	Radio Free Afghanistan
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RTVA	Radio Television Afghanistan
SA/PD	Bureau of South Asian Affairs' Office of Public Diplomacy
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America

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**APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF BBG'S
AFGHANISTAN OPERATIONS**

Year	Month and Day	Key Events
1942	Feb. 24	VOA's inaugural broadcast is beamed to Europe
1949, 1951		RFE and RL are established as nonprofit corporations to broadcast news and current affairs programs behind the Iron Curtain.
1979		Soviet Union occupies Afghanistan with over 179,000 troops.
1980	Sept. 28	VOA Dari broadcasts to Afghanistan begin.
1982	July 4	VOA Pashto broadcasts to Afghanistan begin.
1989		Soviet Union withdraws troops from Afghanistan.
1993	Oct.	RFE/RL discontinues broadcasts to Afghanistan.
1996	Oct.	VOA Dari and Pashto services provide intensive coverage leading up to and following the capture of Kabul by the Taliban.
1999		In a survey, 64 percent of Afghan men say they heard VOA in Pashto or Dari in the past seven days.
2001	Sept. 11	Foreign terrorist attacks on the United States.
	Sept.	VOA's Dari and Pashto increased to three hours daily (from 1.25 hours). VOA increased Afghanistan coverage, adding four stringers each in Dari and Pashto to report from neighboring countries and increasing trips inside Afghanistan.
	Oct. 7	U.S.-led bombing in Afghanistan begins.
	Oct.	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives signs a series of agreements with VOA for more than \$300,000 for salary and communications support to reporters on the ground in the region and Afghanistan, expanding VOA's Dari and Pashto broadcasts on humanitarian relief efforts and medical and health information.
	Dec. 5-7	Bonn Agreement signed and endorsed by U.N. Security Council
	Dec. 22	The Afghanistan Interim Authority officially takes over as the repository of sovereign authority in Afghanistan.
2002	Jan. 11	The Radio Free Afghanistan Act is signed into law as P.L. 107-148, codified at 22 USC 6215. The Act required RFE/RL to provide surrogate broadcasting services in Dari and Pashto to Afghanistan.
	Jan. 30	RFE/RL begins three hours of Dari and Pashto programming on Radio Free Afghanistan (RFA) with a plan to go up to three hours each in March.
	April 24	BBG and Afghanistan's Ministry of Information and Culture sign an agreement for IBB to install and operate a 1-kW FM transmitter in Kabul.
	May 15	IBB FM transmitter begins broadcasting in Kabul.
	June 19	President Hamid Karzai sworn in as head of the Transitional Authority.
	Aug. 4	VOA Radio's Ashna Dari and Pashto broadcasts are meshed with RFA in a 24-hour program stream on shortwave and FM.
	Oct. 3	United States and Afghanistan Radio sign an agreement for BBG to install two high-power AM transmitters for nationwide coverage and for BBG to provide transmitters and equipment for up to five FM operations.
2003	April 30	IBB AM transmitter in Kabul becomes operational.
	May 19	BBG, Radio TV Afghanistan agree to lease and renovate RTVA's 400-kW mediumwave facility and an FM facility in Kabul and up to four other cities.
	Sept.	Department transfers \$357,000 to VOA to cover implementation of constitution.
	Dec. 14	Constitutional conference is convened.

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	Dec. 29	FM transmitter in Khandahar becomes operational using site-generated power.
2004	Jan. 4	New Afghan constitution adopted.
	Feb.	RFE/RL and VOA set schedule of each entity on air for 12 uninterrupted hours.
	March 21	Broadcasting under name Radio Ashna, VOA revamps its 12-hour Dari and Pashto radio stream for a more contemporary format.
	July	Three IBB shortwave transmitters, relocated to IBB Kuwait Transmitting Station from Spain in May 2002, begin broadcasting from Kuwait to enhance RFE/RL and VOA broadcasts to Afghanistan.
	July 11	IBB FM transmitter in Mazar-e-Sharif becomes operational.
	July 22	9/11 Commission calls for increased funding for U.S. broadcasting in Afghanistan.
	Aug.	Department grants \$350,000 to VOA for enhanced reporting on drug trafficking in Afghanistan.
	Aug. 15	IBB FM transmitter in Herat becomes operational.
	Sept. 23	IBB FM transmitter in Jalalabad becomes operational.
	Sept. 29	Hamid Karzai discusses upcoming presidential elections in an exclusive interview with Radio Free Afghanistan.
	Oct. 9	Karzai wins presidential election.
2005		VOA TV provides a 60-minute (30-minutes in Pashto and Dari) weekly TV feed of news and cultural features to Afghan state TV.
	May 23	President Karzai tells White House press conference of his countrymen's reliance on VOA, RFE/RL, and other international broadcasters.
	Sept. 18	Afghanistan holds parliamentary elections and provincial elections, completing the last phase of the Bonn Agreement.

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