

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency supervising all US government-funded non-military international broadcasting whose mission is:

**To promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multimedia communication of accurate, objective and balanced news, information and other programming about America and the world to audiences overseas.**

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# BGG HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Goals, Challenges, and Accomplishments Around the BGG

November 2008

Note: This is the first issue of a monthly newsletter that will highlight selected Implementation Strategies of the BGG Strategic Plan, new programming and transmission initiatives, market trends, successes, best practices, and other items of interest in fulfilling our mission.

## Implementation Strategies 2008-2013

[From the BGG Strategic Plan](#)

1. Enhance Program Delivery Across All Relevant Platforms
2. Build on BGG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World
3. Help Audiences In Authoritarian Countries Understand the Principles and Practices of Democratic, Free, and Just Societies
4. Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies
5. Facilitate Citizen Discourse
6. Engage the World In Conversation About America
7. Develop And Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of U.S. International Broadcasting
8. Optimize Broadcasting Operations
9. Preserve Credibility and Ensure Overall Programming Excellence
10. Broaden Cooperation Within U.S. Public Diplomacy

## Implementation Strategies at Work

### Build on BGG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World

#### VOA Brings Muslim-American Experience to Pakistanis

VOA Urdu launched a special series of TV programs called *Muslims' America* that highlight Muslim-Americans and the Muslim-American experience. Produced in Urdu and English, the program airs weekly and has placements on the Urdu web page and Facebook.



Parnaz Azima, host of Radio Farda's *The Other Voice*

#### Radio Farda Raises Awareness of Women's Issues in Iran

RFE/RL's Radio Farda launched a new program devoted to women's issues. Entitled *The Other Voice*, the weekly

journal investigates issues of importance to women and analyzes related current events.

### Help Audiences in Authoritarian Countries Understand the Principles and Practices of Democratic, Free, and Just Societies

#### RFA Reporter is First Tibetan to Travel with US President to China

Tibetan RFA listeners responded to Tseten Dolkar's coverage of President Bush's trip to the Beijing Olympics. It was a first for a Tibetan broadcaster to travel with the White House Press Corps to China and report live from Tiananmen Square.

### Facilitate Citizen Discourse

#### Radio Marti Connects Cubans in Hurricanes' Wake

Radio Marti implemented emergency coverage for Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, surpassing government media in its reporting and becoming a leading source of hurricane news across the country. Average citizens called to discuss their experiences – unusual in a closed society where active opposition members are typically the only people who talk to U.S.-sponsored media.

## Briefs

BBG Governor Ted Kaufman has been named to replace Vice President-elect Joe Biden as Senator from Delaware. Governor Kaufman will resign from the Board before taking up his new duties in January. Governor Kaufman joined the Board at its inception in 1995 and has been a dedicated guardian of the BBG's journalistic independence and a passionate advocate of the mission of U.S. International Broadcasting.

The BBG press release is available at [www.bbg.gov](http://www.bbg.gov).

The Office of Senator Joe Biden also released a [statement](#).

## Transmission Updates

- The Voice of Kashmir signed an agreement to place VOA Urdu's Radio *Aap ki Dunya* on 3 FM stations – the first affiliation between a U.S. international broadcaster and a private Pakistani FM station. The Voice of Kashmir in Rawalakot is currently airing the program airing 4 hours a day.
- In September, the Government of Kuwait agreed to a no cost arrangement to share 5 SW transmitters and associated antennas with the BBG. This arrangement will facilitate transmissions to Africa and other key audiences from this centrally located country.
- An agreement with MGM Networks Latin America places VOA Spanish-language news and cultural affairs programming on MGM's popular movie channel, seen in more than 16 million homes across Central and South America.

## Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies

### RFE/RL Uses Internet, Blogs in Georgia Coverage

RFE/RL established Internet audio, photo and video galleries for its coverage of the Georgian/Russian conflict. Special correspondent Goga Aptsiauri blogged up-to-the-minute accounts from Gori, where he was one of the few journalists present. Correspondent Tea Absaridze set up a similar blog from the occupied port city of Poti.

### Develop and Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of U.S. International Broadcasting

#### Governors Meet with Staff

As a regular part of their meeting

schedule, BBG Governors visit language services and other offices. They recently visited the IBB offices of Performance Review, Civil Rights, and Policy on Oct. 22, met with the staff of MBN's new Darfur Service on Oct. 21, and visited VOA's Georgian and Russian services on Aug. 12.



Zahrat Abuzaid, at MBN on detail from VOA, with Governors Blaya and Kaufman

## Reporting the US Election to a Riveted World

### Global interest creates opportunities for better and more interactive broadcasting

Live simulcasts of Obama's victory speech on November 4<sup>th</sup> provided a culmination of extensive BBG reporting on an election that has captured world attention. For all the BBG entities, this election was an opportunity to explain and discuss the democratic process, as well as to experiment with better ways of providing coverage.



Jim Malone (left) and Doug Bernard cover the elections for VOA

The party conventions found BBG broadcasters working together in new ways to enhance their programming. VOA, OCB and Alhurra shared resources, equipment and personnel, allowing each to offer comprehensive reporting, interviews and analysis.

Coordination between VOA and OCB technical staffs allowed TV and Radio Marti to broadcast live from both conventions with no interruptions.

Election coverage was also notable for the degree to which broadcasters used online resources to enhance delivery and promote interactivity

VOA launched a special election website, [USAVotes2008](http://USAVotes2008), with interactive features such as blogs and discussion forums. Within its first week, the site attracted visitors from some 150 countries.

While the election fostered new means of reporting and delivering the news, it was also a chance for first-class reporting and analysis. On Election Day, Alhurra and VOA provided live coverage and special programming as correspondents reported local results and worldwide reactions.

Throughout the election, RFE/RL, OCB and RFA catered to the needs and interests of their audience, explaining the democratic process to listeners whose home media does not provide such information. OCB also featured coverage of Congressional races involving Cuban-Americans.

With the election now over and inauguration some two months away, the next challenge for broadcasters will be to keep global audiences tuned in to coverage of the American political process and its impact. ■

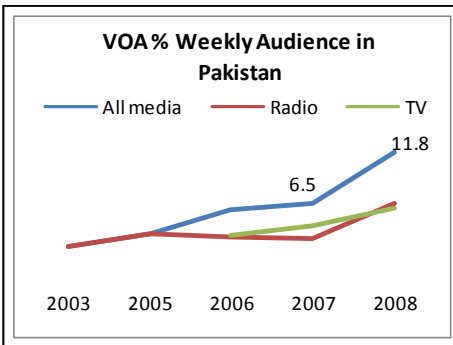
## New Pakistan Research Shows Significant Growth in VOA Audience

VOA's success in reaching key audience and implications for the future

New Intermedia research on VOA's Pakistan broadcasting reveals positive news – VOA audiences have nearly doubled since 2007. In a changing Pakistani media environment, listeners all over Pakistan are increasingly turning to VOA, creating new opportunities for VOA Urdu and Pashto to reach key demographics.

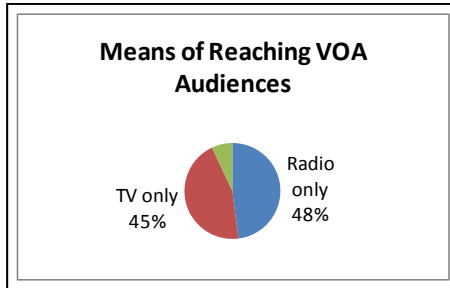
VOA's weekly audience in Pakistan is 11.8%, nearly double that of last year, and approaching that of the BBC, which reaches 12.9%.

One possible cause of this rapid audience growth is the rise in radio and TV use in Pakistan. Radio use has nearly doubled in the past year, fueled by FM radio's increasing popularity. An increasingly tuned in Pakistani public may be exploring all its media options, including VOA broadcasts.



Another possible explanation for the increase in VOA's audience is the past year's momentous political events, coupled with VOA's increase in live broadcasting and local coverage. With government crackdowns on local media, audiences may be turning towards VOA and other international broadcasters for their information. 93% of listeners cite domestic news as an important topic in VOA broadcasts.

Interestingly, TV and radio audiences come from different segments of the population—only 7% of VOA's audience tunes in on both media. This creates a unique opportunity to target programming and content to specific audiences.



The Pakistani public is becoming savvier about the media options that exist and using more advanced technology to access them. This may mean continued increases in VOA's audience, but it may also mean that Pakistan's media environment will become more competitive. To maintain its recent gains, VOA will have to continue providing the news content its audiences prefer and securing sufficient affiliates through which to distribute it. ■

## Cracking China's Great Firewall

How the BBG approaches the Chinese media market

China is one of the BBG's top priorities, but also one of the most difficult markets to penetrate. Reaching Chinese audiences requires persistence, creativity and luck.

The BBG's most effective delivery method is shortwave radio, where VOA and RFA reach 0.3% of Chinese adults weekly, about three million people. With a total usership of 1% and falling, however, shortwave is hardly the future of BBG broadcasting to China.

VOA and RFA hard news programming is not allowed on domestic channels due to a ban on using news directly from any foreign news agencies. However, there has been some success distributing "soft" news or features programming. Stations typically carry these programs unbranded, and are usually not under formal affiliate agreements.

Print reports are distributed similarly, with the help of the embassy. VOA materials are also incorporated into widely distributed English-language instructional resources.

The most obvious opportunity to grow the  
*(Continued on page 4)*

# Briefs

## New Broadcast Initiatives

- RFE/RL entered Belarusian television, offering a new half-hour program called *This Week with Svaboda (Liberty)*. The program, broadcast on the Warsaw-based BelSat TV channel, provides a new way to reach Belarus, the only European country that does not permit local RFE/RL radiobroadcasts.
- VOA is launching a new FM radio station in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which will air a variety of news, talk, sports and music programs 24 hours a day.
- VOA Korean launched 3 new programs in July: *World Today*, providing daily analysis of international news stories; *Market Economy*, providing real life examples of free market operations; and *American Life Style*, providing snapshots of American life.
- On October 6, VOA English launched *In Focus*, a 30-minute magazine-style television news and information program for Africa. The program is aired via satellite and carried by stations in Accra, Ghana, Kampala, Uganda, and Nairobi, Kenya.

## Budget and Funding

Congress has passed a continuing resolution (CR), which will fund the BBG through March 6, 2009. CRs are used to keep the government running when Congress has not finished its appropriations work by Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year, and are typically based on the last year's appropriations levels.

# Briefs

## Press Clips

- Farsi language news organization TABNAK is concerned that deficiencies in Iranian state-run media are driving Iranians towards U.S. international broadcasts, noted The National Review Online blog [The Corner](#) on Sept. 13.
- RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin discussed the challenges of broadcasting in Iran, including intimidation of correspondents and funding shortfalls, with [Middle East Quarterly](#) for its Fall 2008 issue.
- Scotland's [Sunday Herald](#) on Sept. 14 mentioned VOA as a successful model for reaching the Pashto-speaking tribal regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan by radio.
- VOA was cited in [Newsweek](#) on Nov. 1, [The Hill](#) on Oct. 28, the LA Times' [Babylon and Beyond](#) blog on Nov. 5 and, along with Alhurra, in the [Washington Times](#) on Nov. 4 for its efforts to bring US election coverage to the world. Florida's [Sun Sentinel](#) said on Oct. 26 that Cubans are following the election on Radio Marti.
- Calls have been pouring in to VOA's Persian News Network in response to the election of Barack Obama, according to NPR's [All Things Considered](#) on Nov. 15.

audience in China is through television. 98% of Chinese own a TV. Though satellite TV is less popular than terrestrial or cable, its use is growing, and while the government restricts satellite dish ownership, it does not interfere with signals.

VOA currently broadcasts on television in Mandarin and Cantonese.

To utilize this potential opening on satellite, IBB switched to the AsiaSAT3 satellite, a more popular satellite service in China. AsiaSAT3 reaches more people and will make it easier for stations that carry non-news VOA programming to distribute content.

The greatest opportunity to reach China may be through its expanding and innovative Internet community. When the PRC relaxed its firewall during the month of August for the Olympics, VOA and RFA saw spikes in web visitors from inside China.

The episode revealed the eagerness of many in China to consume information through the internet, but also demonstrated the power of Chinese censorship technology – not only can it be turned on and off at will, but VOA found that, despite allowing site access, the PRC blocked specific pages with “sensitive” content.

Both VOA and RFA take advantage of whatever gaps exist in government web censorship. For example, while its

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*The greatest opportunity to reach China may be through its expanding and innovative Internet community.*

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website is blocked, VOA's streaming content, which use a different URL, are not. In addition, both VOA and RFA circulate daily e-mails to millions of Chinese with links to proxy servers, as well as news and information.

China remains one of the world's most challenging markets for the BBG. Access to nearly every delivery medium is blocked, and direct broadcast technologies that the BBG controls –

shortwave and AM – are relatively little used in China.

Despite these roadblocks, the importance of the Chinese audience and the technological sophistication of the Chinese public make it a key testing ground for a creative and multimedia approach to U.S. international broadcasting. RFA and VOA are being persistent in finding and creating new opportunities to reach the Chinese audience. ■

## MBN Launches Radio Program for Darfur's Displaced People

[News coverage and information on refugee and IDP issues will go to Darfur and eastern Chad](#)

A new shortwave radio program targeted towards Darfur and eastern Chad focuses on the latest news and information from Sudan and on the plight of displaced peoples.

The Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN) launched *Afia Darfur*, (*Hello Darfur*), on September 29. The program features interviews with American officials, human rights experts, Sudanese experts and NGO representatives.

*Afia Darfur* also incorporates interviews with internally displaced people living in Darfur, providing them with an opportunity to speak out about the humanitarian crisis.

In its premiere episode, *Afia Darfur* featured segments on the ICC investigation of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Darfuri refugees in Chad and Central African Republic, and the traditions of the Dajo ethnic group, as well as an interview with Dr. Samantha Nutt of War Child Canada about the organization's work with Darfuri children suffering psychological trauma.

*Afia Darfur* runs for 30 minutes daily on shortwave radio, with twice daily repeats. It is funded by a grant from the State Department to the BBG. ■