

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency supervising all US government-funded civilian 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

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BGG Highlights is a publication of the Broadcasting Board of Governors Public Affairs Office. For more information, please contact Jessica Stahl, Office of Public Affairs. Phone: 202-203-4400; E-mail: jstahl@bbg.gov

BGG HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Goals, Challenges, and Accomplishments Around the BGG

May 2009



Top: VOA's Paula Wolfson (r) speaks with: (l to r) John Prendergast, Enough Project; Walter Isaacson, Aspen Institute; Michael Brown, GWU Elliott School; and David Gollust, VOA correspondent by video.

Below: Niharika Acharya of VOA Hindi reports about online reactions during VOA's global town hall event marking President Obama's first 100 days in office.



Broadcasters Discuss, Analyze Obama's First 100 Days

VOA global town hall headlines BGG special coverage of presidential milestone

President Obama's approach to foreign policy has been defined by engagement and pragmatism, according to a panelist at VOA's global town hall meeting - one of many ways BGG broadcasters marked Obama's first 100 days in office.

[VOA's live town hall](#) allowed worldwide audiences to join a discussion of President Obama's progress so far on key foreign policy challenges.

The event, co-sponsored by the George Washington University, brought in an array of panelists from Washington, DC and by phone and video from other locations, including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Beijing.

Many panelists agreed that Obama has shown a willingness to engage with foreign leaders, including unfriendly regimes, to pursue foreign policy goals. Such engagement is not always popular with Obama's domestic constituents, according to Dean Michael Brown of GW's Elliott School, but it sets the stage for future progress.

"Engagement can actually be a very subtle and sophisticated strategy," said Brown of Obama's approach to Iran and others.

Former State Department Spokesman Jamie Rubin praised the administration's approach to Iran, noting the President has been careful not to advocate regime change.

"He's made clear that he's speaking both to the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the

people that live in that country," Rubin said.

Much of the discussion focused on Afghanistan and Pakistan, which Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy called "the number one security dilemma."

According to Senator Ted Kaufman (D-Del), military steps must precede softer policies of engagement in this region. He said economic development cannot be carried out while the Taliban still controls an area.

But Kamran Shahid of Pakistan's Express News said Pakistanis want Obama to back off from military tactics and trust the government's ability to negotiate.

"Regardless of how many drones you send, you cannot bomb an ideology," he said, speaking by phone from Lahore, Pakistan.

Streamed online and carried on radio, the two-hour broadcast was also carried live on 7 TV satellite paths, in English and Persian. Reporters from Pakistan's Express News TV and Kenya's Citizen TV participated in the program, which they are airing.

Coverage of President Obama's first 100 days in office and its meaning for BGG audiences was also prominent on Alhurra and Radio Sawa. Radio Marti prepared a number of special reports on President Obama's major policy announcements thus far, including those on Cuba policy.

Briefs

Transmission Updates

Technicians shipped four shortwave transmitters from IBB's closed Delano station to the Philippines Transmitting Station, where they will replace older units. Other useful components from Delano will go to IBB transmitting stations in Botswana and Sri Lanka.

On April 28 the CEO of Sunrise FM Pakistan visited VOA to sign an agreement to carry more than 3 hours a day of VOA Urdu programming, Aap ki Duniya, on their five-station network (Islamabad, Jhelum, Sargodha, Sahiwal, and Hassan Abdul).

The full 24/7 RFE/RL-VOA Azeri audio stream is now available on Azerbaijan's most popular satellite, TurkSat. The signal is strong, and audience feedback has been enthusiastic.

A number of independent stations in Kyrgyzstan are carrying RFE/RL programming, replacing the loss of Kyrgyz State Radio and Television (UTRK) last fall.

Vision FM in Abuja, Nigeria, FR3 Radio in Bamako, Mali, TV7 in Lome, Togo, and Magic FM in Riau, Indonesia have all signed VOA affiliation agreements.

New Programming

On May 4, VOA's Persian News Network launched *Straight Talk (Roya Khat)*. Each week, over 5 consecutive days, the program examines in-depth a topic of interest to the youth audience. It is designed to be heavily interactive, with the audience invited to participate with topics that interest them through the PNN Web site, e-mails, SMS, blogs and phone calls to the show.

World Press Freedom Day Highlights Ongoing Barriers to Media Freedom

BBG broadcasters cover imprisoned journalists, embattled bloggers

World Press Freedom Day is observed May 3 as a celebration of the principles of press freedom, and as a reminder of how far we still must go to achieve them. Freedom House marked the day by releasing its [Freedom of the Press rankings](#), an annual survey of the state of press freedom around the world.

Christopher Walker, Freedom House's director of studies, [told RFE/RL](#) that the past year's global financial crisis has helped repressive governments consolidate control by drying up funding for independent media.

North Korea once again holds Freedom House's dubious honor of being the world's worst offender.

Also towards the bottom of the Freedom House ranking is Iran, where World Press Freedom Day passed inauspiciously with the hunger strike of imprisoned American journalist Roxana Saberi.

VOA's Persian News Network and RFE/RL's Radio Farda reported extensively on Saberi's January detainment, closed trial in April, and surprise release in mid-May.

Both broadcasters carried interviews with Saberi's father and her lawyers, who provided updates on her legal situation and physical condition.

PNN also interviewed Saberi herself after her return to the US—the journalist's only Persian-language interview. In the interview, Saberi said that she was subjected to "extreme psychological pressure" and that she was "very scared."

But Saberi told PNN she wants to introduce the beauty of Iran to outsiders and hopes to return to the country some day.

"There are different people, different groups, and this is the beauty of Iran."

With the rise of new forms of online reporting, the definitions of "journalist" and "journalism" are shifting. World Press Freedom Day reflected this ongoing shift, with a new emphasis on the rights and safety of bloggers.

The Committee to Protect Journalists used World Press Freedom Day to release a special report on the [10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger](#). The organization named Burma the worst country to be a blogger, with Iran, Syria and Cuba coming in at positions 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon said that "governments are quickly learning how to turn technology against bloggers by censoring and filtering the Internet, restricting online access and mining personal data," according to the organization's website. "When all else fails, the authorities simply jail a few bloggers to intimidate the rest of the online community into silence or self-censorship."

Both the Persian News Network and Radio Marti recently aired special reports on the state of blogging in their target countries.

Radio Marti's five-part series highlighted the growing role bloggers are playing in Cuban society through personal stories, art work, short documentaries and general commentaries.



Roxana Saberi is interviewed by PNN's Setareh Derakhshesh in her only Persian-language interview since returning to the US.

The series featured interviews with prominent Cuban bloggers including: Yoani Sanchez, whose blog was named one of the best in the world by Time Magazine in 2009; Claudia Cadelo, who began her blog Octavo Circle after Cuban rocker Gorki Aguila was imprisoned; and Manuel Aguirre Lavarrere, whose blog focuses on racial relations in Cuba.

PNN discussed the state of blogging in Iran with Iranian bloggers/journalists Roozbeh Mir Ibrahim and Soheil Asefi. They explained that blogs have risen in popularity in Iran because they can bypass traditional censors. Blogs are seen as the most open and transparent way of exchanging

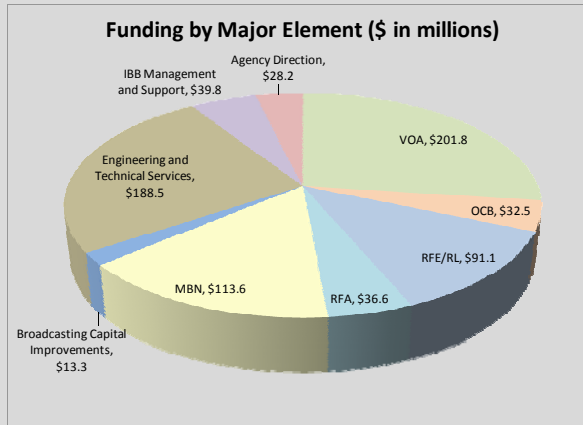
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FY 2010 Budget Request to Congress

The Administration's [FY 2010 budget request to Congress](#) includes \$745.5 million for BBG, an increase of 3.9% from FY 2009.

It includes enhancements to expand local and regional coverage on VOA's Radio Deewa, establish an RFE/RL Russian-language Web site for Central Asia, continue the expansion of digital audio and video capability for VOA, RFE/RL, and RFA, and establish a television and radio equipment replacement program for MBN.

The FY 2010 request includes the closure of VOA Croatian, Greek and Hindi services and the reallocation of program funding for radio rebroadcasts of television programming and one hour of original radio programming at VOA's PNN. The request also proposes a transition of TV Marti's two 30-minute newscasts to news updates on the half-hour, conversion of Radio Marti to a 24/7 news and information format, closure of the VOA Paris finance office, and the consolidation of the IBB West and East Africa regional marketing offices.



information, which has been important in advance of upcoming presidential elections.

Reports indicate that a spate of harsh attacks on bloggers have recently decreased Iranian blogging. Ibrahim told PNN, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has a phobia about people, and youth in particular, being well-informed about news and ideas. Every day a new way to filter news and informative Web sites or blogs is created."

Alhurra TV's *Al Youm* also focused on the impact of the Internet and blogging on freedom of the press, and responded to comments on the topic left by viewers on its Facebook page.

H1N1 Virus: Providing Facts, Dispelling Misconceptions

BGG broadcasters keep audiences informed of swine flu risks and necessary precautions

Since the outbreak of the H1N1 virus, commonly known as swine flu, BBG broadcasters have been providing audiences the latest news on its spread, and the health information they need to stay safe.

VOA Spanish and Radio and TV Marti, broadcasting to the region nearest the outbreak epicenter, have devoted extensive coverage to the health crisis, with reports from Mexico, the US and around the world.

TV Marti introduced a one minute brief entitled, "Informe para tu salud" ("Be informed for the sake of your health"), which offered CDC information on the symptoms and precautions to be taken.

VOA has been reporting on regional preparedness and prevention efforts in Latin America and worldwide, and used its Spanish-language call-in show to discuss the outbreak.

MBN has similarly reported on the status of the disease, including the first confirmed case in its broadcast region, found in Israel. The networks also discussed the ethnic and social repercussions of Egypt's pig slaughter.

Broadcasters devoted airtime to providing reliable information and dispelling misconceptions about the disease.

At RFE/RL, reports have repeatedly stressed that the virus is not transmitted by eating pork, and some pieces discussed the economic impact of policies implemented on the basis of this misconception - such as bans on imports of pork by Russia, Ukraine, former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

RFA, broadcasting to a region that has struggled with lack of transparency in recent bird flu outbreaks, created [a special online quiz](#) to clarify the facts about the H1N1 virus.

Briefs

Threats to Journalists

The government of Ethiopia suspended the licenses of two VOA Amharic stringers on April 23, claiming that the reporting of the Amharic service was biased and opposed to the Meles Zenawi administration. The licenses were returned April 27, following a series of telephone protests by members of the Foreign Correspondents Association in Addis.

VOA Somali Service stringer Muqtar Atosh was arrested April 26 in the town of Baidoa by the security chief of Somalia's hard-line Islamic insurgent group Al-Shabab. Although he was identified as a VOA stringer, Muqtar was arrested not for the reporting he did for VOA but for reporting he did for a local radio station, Juba FM. Muqtar is the head of the station, which also carries VOA programming. Station operations were disrupted and the station was temporarily closed. Muqtar was released April 28.

A Taliban-owned FM station in Pakistan, "Radio Shariat," is broadcasting warnings aimed at listeners of VOA Deewa Radio broadcasts to the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Region and Radio Ashna of VOA's Afghanistan Service. Radio Shariat, located in the border area of Bajaur in Pakistan, says the two VOA programs have "an agenda against Islam," are trying to show that "Taliban are terrorists," and calls listening to the VOA broadcasts "haram" (a sin).

Briefs

Press Clips

On May 21, the [Dubai Business Journal](#) featured Alhurra's new show, *Al Youm*, in a piece called "There is no secret agenda," which included quotes from BBG Governor Joaquin Blaya and *Al Youm* Executive Producer Fran Mires.

[Asia Times Online](#) reprinted an RFE/RL article on the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a land bridge in the region, based on an RFE/RL interview with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher.

On May 15, [Reuters](#) quoted heavily from an Alhurra interview with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, in which the Prime Minister calls for majority rule in Iraq.

The Obama administration isn't looking to cut broadcasts to Cuba anytime soon, according to a May 12 [Associated Press](#) story about the impact of the administration's budget request on the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

[UPI columnist Marc Ellenbogen](#) recounted his visit to RFE/RL's new headquarters in Prague to hear Secretary Clinton speak. In his May 7 piece, he speaks highly of the building's personnel and the journalists he encountered.

On May 6, [Forbes columnist Gordon G. Chang](#) asked why China can block VOA and RFA but the US does not retaliate by blocking Chinese media.

Implementation Strategies

From the BBG 2008-2013 Strategic Plan

Build on BBG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World

Alhurra Discusses Parenting, Childhood Development

Alhurra's *Al Youm* focused on parenthood and the challenges of raising children, with reports from Dubai, Cairo and Jerusalem. Discussions included how to balance work and family, the impact of the political environment on a child's education, and the effects of video games.

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

RFA Cambodian Covers Khmer Rouge Tribunal

RFA Cambodian began gavel-to-gavel webcasts of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal along with extended radio coverage. During proceedings the head of the S-21 torture center, Duch, said that S-21 was only responsible for keeping, interrogating and killing prisoners, not for making arrests.

VOA Khmer Reporter Interviews Former Khmer Rouge Leaders

VOA Khmer's Sok Pov travelled to the jungles of northern Cambodia, where Khmer Rouge have taken refuge, to find and interview 5 former Khmer Rouge leaders who could face arrest if the tribunal widens its prosecutions. Pov was helped by local chiefs who recognized him from the radio and guided him to the villages and farms where the leaders were living.

Employ Modern Communications Techniques and Technologies

VOA Russian Captures Online Market

VOA Russian's original articles were reposted on 22 major Web sites in Russia and neighboring countries in April, including some of the most influential sites in Russia. A story about Russian author Dmitry Orlov's recipe for surviving the economic crisis had over 3,000 YouTube views in two days.

VOA Tests "Backpack" Journalism

VOA reporter Bart Childs recently traveled to remote regions of West Africa with two HD cameras and a briefcase of other

equipment to report on a linguist who is documenting dying languages. Using the equipment he carried with him, Childs was able to shoot, edit and immediately post his stories to [VOAnews.com](#).



Bart Childs' vlog, which he recorded, edited and posted from remote areas in West Africa.

Engage the World in Conversation about America

Radio Marti Informs Cubans of Changes in US Policy

Radio Marti provided extensive coverage of President Obama's announcement of shifts in Cuba policy, featuring reactions from Cuban dissidents, members of Congress, and Fidel Castro. A public service announcement detailing the changes was broadcast during all Radio Marti newscasts for 36 hours.

Develop and Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of US International Broadcasting

Governor Blaya Visits Alhurra in Dubai

BBG Governor Joaquin Blaya visited the Dubai set of Alhurra's *Al Youm*. He visited with staff and did interviews with local media to raise awareness of the program.



Governor Blaya and Executive Producer Fran Mires on the Dubai set of *Al Youm*.