Beyond Tinkering Reform of the Broadcasting Board of Governors Requires Full Integration Into the U.S. Foreign Policy Apparatus

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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee:

My name is James K. Glassman. I am currently executive director of the Bush Institute, a policy institute that is part of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, which recently opened in Dallas and includes a library and museum. The Bush Institute aims to remove constraints on human potential across many endeavors, from fighting cervical cancer in Africa to improving the quality of public school principals in America. We also work to advance the cause of dissidents and freedom advocates in oppressed nations, mentor Egyptian women in their efforts to build civil society institutions and work with American organizations that serve veterans of the post-9/11 war and their families. I am speaking today not as a representative of the Bush Institute but as a private citizen.

Between 2007 and 2009, I had the unique honor of serving my country in two critical foreign policy roles: first as chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, or BBG, and then as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. In that latter role, I represented the Secretary of State on the BBG board.

I congratulate the committee for holding this important hearing. Now is the time to think big about reforming not just the BBG but the entire public diplomacy effort of the U.S. government, which, at this crucial time in history, is not being deployed as extensively or effectively as it could be. The BBG, as the largest single public diplomacy program, is the right place to start. You said last week, Mr. Chairman, that "it is time for broad reforms; 'tinkering' and 'Band-Aid' solutions are not an option because the stakes are too great."¹ I completely agree. My testimony offers recommendations that are broad and deep. They may be controversial, given my position as a former chairman of the organization, but I believe they are absolutely necessary.

'Congress Needs to Reexamine the Legislation'

My own interest in public diplomacy – that is, informing and persuading foreign publics with the aim of achieving America's national security goals – began in 2003 when I was appointed to the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, a congressionally mandated bipartisan panel headed by Edward Djerejian. I served on the committee that examined U.S. international broadcasting and received the assignment from Ambassador Djerejian of the writing the full report itself.²

¹ http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-royce-announces-hearing-reforming-broadcasting-board-governors ² "Changing Minds, Winning Peace: A New Strategic Direction for Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World," Submitted to the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, Oct. 2003, at

http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf

At the time, a decade ago, my eyes were fresh. I knew little about public diplomacy, but from my experience both as a media entrepreneur and a think tank fellow, I knew something about mission, strategy, organization, and evaluation. I was shocked – there is no better word for it – to find that international broadcasting, so important to American foreign policy, operated outside the government's foreign policy apparatus. As the report stated:

Broadcasting represents nearly half the spending on public diplomacy, and it must be part of the public diplomacy process, not marching to its own drummer with its own goals and strategy, sources of funding and board. Congress needs to reexamine the legislation that created the BBG to ensure that broadcast operations support the strategic mission of U.S. public diplomacy... [B]roadcasting must fit into the overall public diplomacy strategy of the United States.

With this in mind, here is a summary of my testimony to you today:

- 1. The BBG is far from "defunct." It is performing an important function, but its mission is contradictory and confused.
- 2. Clarify the mission, and the structure becomes evident.
- 3. The mission should be to achieve the specific strategic goals of U.S. national security and foreign policy. For that reason, the BBG should be part of the State Department or of a reconstituted USIA controlled by that department.
- 4. Journalistic standards of truth-telling are essential to effective achievement of the mission, but, primarily, the BBG should not be in the journalism business but in the foreign-policy business.
- 5. BBG reform must fit within reform of the nation's overall public diplomacy and strategic communications effort which is urgent.

The BBG's Problem Is a Confusion in Mission

The BBG's primary mission today is *not* to achieve the specific goals of U.S. foreign policy. For example, one cannot imagine the Secretary of State instructing the BBG's governors that the broadcasts of Radio Farda and Persian News Network must be geared toward persuading their Iranian audience to pressure the regime to drop efforts to build nuclear weapons. Or, if the Secretary did give such instructions, it is unlikely the governors would feel constrained to follow them.

The confusion is this: Is the BBG a journalistic organization, like CNN or PBS, or is it a foreign policy agency, like, for example, the U.S. embassy in Ankara or the former U.S. Information Agency? The law is confusing and contradictory.³ On the one hand, it says that "international broadcasting is, and should remain, an essential instrument of United States foreign policy,"⁴ but on the other it establishes an organization steeped in the values of independent journalism. It states: "The Secretary of State and the Board, in carrying out their functions, shall respect the professional independence and integrity of the International Broadcasting Bureau, its broadcasting services, and the grantees of the Board."⁵

The fact is that the BBG has done an admirable job of trying to reconcile the contradiction. It does take foreign policy goals into consideration in allocating resources. It is represented on interagency groups involved in public diplomacy. Its strategic plan, one of the best in the federal government, is built on national security

³ http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2010-title22/html/USCODE-2010-title22-chap74-subchapIII-partB.htm

⁴ http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/6541

⁵ http://uscodebeta.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title22-section6204&num=0&edition=prelim

priorities. It has, for example, recently been increasing its broadcasting in the Sahel in response to requests from the U.S. Africa Command. It has been part of planning for major – and secret – contingencies.⁶ But it is not, with the exception of emergencies, part of the chain of command. No one in the State Department, Defense Department, or White House, for instance, orders the chairman of the BBG to increase broadcasting about the fate of Afghan women to influence talks with the Taliban or to produce documentaries about Chinese cyberattacks. The BBG's role in U.S. foreign policy is constructive but independent and almost voluntary, like the role, say, of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The reason for the reticence toward giving the BBG a clear and direct part to play in strategic foreign policy stems from fastidiousness about its journalistic function. That's understandable. From the nation's founding, Americans have been averse to government meddling in the journalistic process. Unlike most countries, we don't have a Ministry of Information. Still, a major responsibility of public diplomacy is informing and influencing the world with the written, spoken, and visualized word, and the BBG is a unique and valuable asset. With the BBG, however, we want to have our cake and eat it too; that is, we want to persuade foreign publics to support our policies, but we want the organization that does that work to have the independence, balance, and lack of bias of an idealized media organization.

The founding statute, the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, creates a firewall that restricts State Department personnel from directly contacting or influencing BBG journalists. But, more important, the law and the culture at the BBG stress the same kinds of principles that journalists in the commercial sphere adhere to (or are supposed to). For instance, the BBG's activities must "be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism" and present a "clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies" and "a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions" and "news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive."⁷

As BBG chairman, I was often asked by members of Congress why we were broadcasting opinions that opposed U.S. policy in, say, Iran, China, or Israel. The first answer is that the law tells us to do that. The second is that broadcasts that might seem negative or in opposition to U.S. policy help enhance long-term credibility. John Houseman, the first director of Voice of America,⁸ explained:

Inevitably, the news that the Voice of America would be carrying to the world in the first half of 1942 was almost all bad news. We would have to report our reverses without weaseling. Only thus could we establish our reputation for honesty, which we hoped would pay off on that distant-but-inevitable day when we would be boasting of our own invasions and victories.⁹

It is completely understandable, however, that members of the Congress and the public have a difficult time comprehending why taxpayer resources are expended on airtime for opponents of drone flights over Pakistan or our embargo against Cuba. As this committee addresses questions of structure, it needs, first and foremost, to make a clear decision about mission.

⁶ The law does refer to the BBG being responsible for "the capability to provide a surge capacity to support United States foreign policy objectives during crises abroad."

⁷ http://uscode.house.gov/download/pls/22C71.txt

⁸ This is the same John Houseman who, 31 years after launching VOA, won an Academy Award for portraying the grumpy but lovable Professor Kingsley in the movie "The Paper Chase." Houseman was a movie producer, born in Romania.

⁹ http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-a-2002-05-08-48-actor-66282682/540764.html

The BBG is Far From Defunct

This hearing takes its title, "The Broadcasting Board of Governors: An Agency 'Defunct," from a statement by the former Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton. The relevant text, from a hearing before this committee on Jan. 23 mainly concerned with the Benghazi attacks:

Our Broadcasting Board of Governors is practically defunct in terms of its capacity to tell a message around the world. So we're abdicating the ideological arena, and we need to get back into it. We have the best values. We have the best narrative.... And we're letting the jihadist narrative fill a void. We need to get in there and compete, and we can do it successfully.¹⁰

Let's be clear. By no stretch of the imagination is the BBG defunct, if the meaning of that term is "dead," "no longer existing," or even "moribund." The Secretary's statement was made shortly after the release of a report on an inspection of the BBG by the Office of Inspector General. That report notes, "The BBG is one of the world's largest newsgathering and reporting operations, with 50 news bureaus and offices worldwide. The five broadcast entities it supervises employ more than 3,500 journalists, producers, technicians, and support personnel full time in Washington, Miami, and Prague. It employs approximately 1,500 freelancers around the world."¹¹

The BBG broadcasts in 59 languages – more than twice as many as any other democratic-nation broadcaster¹² -- in more than 100 countries.¹³ On June 20, the BBG announced its total audience was more than 203 million, a new record and a 23 percent gain from 2010.¹⁴ The agency's fiscal 2013 budget is \$720 million.¹⁵

The Jan. 23 OIG report began with a "Key Judgments," and the first item was this:

U.S. Government broadcasting is characterized by journalism of the highest caliber and a widespread devotion to supporting democracy and freedom. This ongoing achievement is due to the commitment of the broadcast entities and professional staff.¹⁶

Hardly the sort of judgment that would be rendered about a "defunct" organization.

In addition, the BBG is using advanced technology to thwart censorship and deploy the best broadcasting signals in its history into such countries as Iran, North Korea, China, Afghanistan, and Libya. Voice of America's Persian TV, radio, and Internet programs reach an estimated 22 percent of Iran's adults, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reaches 5 percent of adults weekly on radio and Internet. Programming that has recently won awards includes a Radio Free Asia documentary on human trafficking titled "An Invisible World: The Lives of Slaves in Modern Asia," with focus on China, and an 18-part series on RFE/RL's Radio Farda titled "Solitary Confinement" that recounts the depredations faced in Iranian prisons by dissidents. "Defunct,""

¹⁰ http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/02/26/hillary-clintons-unfinished-business-at-the-broadcasting-board-of-governors

¹¹ "Inspection of the Broadcasting Board of Governors," Office of the Inspector General, United States Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors, January 2013, at http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/203193.pdf

¹² The BBC, for example, broadcasts in 28 languages.

¹³ "Broadcasting Board of Governors: Additional Steps Needed to Address Overlap in International Broadcasting," U.S. Government Accountability Office, Jan. 2013, at http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651621.pdf

¹⁴ <u>http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2013/06/20/bbg-broadcasters-earn-record-breaking-audience-topping-200-million-a-week-worldwide/</u>.

The independent survey firms that the BBG engages use the international broadcasting standard for audience measurement, counting those who respond to surveys of whether they have listened or viewed in the past week.

¹⁵ http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/203193.pdf

as the blogger Kim Andrew Elliott has written, "is a wildly inaccurate description of U.S. international broadcasting."¹⁷

Structural Changes Would Improve Effectiveness

There are, however, serious problems that must be addressed. No organization can function without an accountable chief executive officer, but the BBG has none. Instead, the head of the agency is the nine-member board collectively. That can be a recipe for disaster, with individual governors, who work part-time, creating their own fiefdoms and acting without oversight.

During my own tenure as chairman, I had a committed, responsible, and cooperative board, but that is not always the case. The recent OIG report concluded in its inspection of the current board:

Board dynamics are characterized by a degree of hostility that renders its deliberative process ineffectual. Board meetings are dominated by one member whose tactics and personal attacks on colleagues and staff have created an unprofessional and unproductive atmosphere.¹⁸

The current BBG also suffers from the absence of a chairman since the resignation of Walter Isaacson a year and a half ago. There are three other vacancies due to resignations, and the OIG report comments on high absentee rates.

To its credit, the board developed a reform plan under Chairman Isaacson and included in its fiscal 2014 budget request a legislative proposal to establish a CEO. The governors would then serve as a traditional board of directors, providing advice and oversight and making a limited number of high-level decisions, with executive authority residing in a full-time leader. All this is not new. Proposals to restructure the BBG date back at least to 2006, when Booz Allen was engaged to examine Voice of America and the International Broadcasting Bureau (the BBG's support-services and management arm).¹⁹

Elsewhere, I have called the BBG "structurally a mess,"²⁰ but, while I support a rationalization of the BBG structure under a CEO,²¹ this reform should not occur in a vacuum. It is a basic management principle that structure follow mission, and when the mission of the BBG is resolved, the structure will be evident.

The BBG Must Be Part of the Foreign Policy Apparatus

I discussed the conflict that is at the heart of the current mission in a previous section. It is the obligation of Congress, not the current BBG board or management, to resolve that conflict. It is simply unfair to call the BBG "defunct" or even "dysfunctional" when Congress and the executive branch themselves have not provided the BBG with a clear sense of what they want it to do and be.

²⁰ http://www.examiner.com/article/bbg-that-runs-voice-of-america-is-structural-mess-says-former-chair-glassman

²¹ A study by the Heritage Foundation states the case for reorganization well, though I do not agree with all of its judgments. See "Time to Rethink the Broadcasting Board of Governors, Web Memo, Helle Dale and Nick Zahn, March 16, 2011, at

http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2011/pdf/wm3192.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.kimandrewelliott.com/?id=14095

¹⁸ http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/203193.pdf

¹⁹ "Review of the Voice of America and the International Broadcasting Bureau," Booz Allen Hamilton for U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, July 2006. The report was supposed to be confidential, but it is posted publicly at http://www.technewslit.com/USIAAA/BAH Vol 1.pdf

The 1994 International Broadcasting Act, which set the stage for the current BBG, called for an organization that adhered both to the "broad foreign policy objectives of the United States" and to the "highest professional standards of broadcast journalism."²² But, as a 2012 Hudson Institute study put it,

In the absence of strong central leadership, however, the broadcasting services' day-to-day operation tilts toward one of these objectives at the expense of the other – that is, toward journalism conducted without reference to U.S. foreign policy goals.²³

My own view is that the BBG must be fully integrated into the foreign policy apparatus of the United States Government. There should be no equivocation or confusion about its role. The 1998 act created the modern BBG primarily by eliminating the U.S. Information Agency and folding most of its functions into the State Department.²⁴ The main VOA function that did not end up at State was international broadcasting, which was consolidated into a separate body, the BBG, which in turn was further endowed with protections for its role as an independent journalistic organization.

The best way to remove any confusion about the BBG's mission is to put it back into the State Department – either as its own Office of International Media Outreach (the term "broadcasting" is hopelessly outdated in an Internet age), under an assistant secretary (playing something close to the CEO role that the current board envisions), or as part of a reconstituted USIA. In either of these cases, this new BBG agency should have an advisory board composed of members with expertise in media technology and in disseminating ideas in general.

There is no doubt that high journalistic standards would need to be maintained for this new BBG. Propaganda simply does not work in an age of intense media awareness and competing sources of information. The Hudson Report, whose lead author was Douglas Feith, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, says it well, "We recognize that without credibility as a source of reliable information, U.S. broadcasting can achieve none of its stated objectives."²⁵

In fact, I would go one step further. During my tenure at the State Department, I started an approach called Public Diplomacy 2.0, which held that the best way to communicate with foreign audiences (and thus persuade them) was not through traditional means of broadcasting U.S. policy positions – a technique I called "preaching" – but rather through using our convening power to develop a broad and deep international conversation, thus creating an amenable environment for our messages. Social media is the perfect vehicle for such an approach, which was pioneered by my predecessor Karen Hughes, when she set up the Digital Outreach Team at the State Department, whose members go into online chat rooms and similar venues, identify themselves as U.S. government employees, and engage in conversations, often pushing back against inaccurate information about American policy.²⁶

Activities of what we now called U.S. international broadcasting will almost certainly become more controversial in the future for not strictly adhering to the "telling America's story" or "explaining America's policy" model – which is all the more reason for the BBG to be directly part of the foreign policy apparatus.

²² http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2012/01/BroadcastingAct.pdf

²³ "Organizing for a Strategic Ideas Campaign to Counter Ideological Challenges to U.S. National Security," Douglas Feith, William Galston and Abram Shulsky, Hudson Institute, April 2012, at

http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2012_04_Feith_Galston_Shulsky_Paper.pdf

²⁴ http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/203193.pdf

²⁵ http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2012_04_Feith_Galston_Shulsky_Paper.pdf

²⁶ http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1734850&download=yes

My preference is for all current broadcasting functions to be subsumed within the State Department, including those of the so-called "grantees" – the non-profit organizations funded with taxpayer money that are under BBG control: RFE/RL, Radio Free Asia, and Middle East Broadcasting (Radio Sawa and Alhurra, the Arabic language networks). The distinction in functions among BBG entities has largely evaporated, and the five separate networks (the other two are VOA and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting) and their own language operations should be seen as brands, adapted to meet the needs of their target audiences. In some cases – as currently in China and Iran – several brands are covering the same market. (A recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office urges the elimination of some of this overlap as a cost-saving measure.²⁷)

At any rate, as the Hudson report says, it should be made "clear to the various broadcasting services that they are in the public sector and are part of the U.S. foreign policy team."²⁸ And being part of the team does not simply mean performing in a manner "consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States," as the law states, but instead following actual strategic directives – for example, to convince the Pakistanis that they face an existential threat from Al Qaeda or to encourage Cubans to protest the imprisonment of political dissidents. Again, such objectives need to be accomplished with honesty, sensitivity, and subtlety – not, for example, with a radio editorial or a statement of policy beamed by the President of the United States. As the Djerejian Group put it,

[A]ll broadcasting must fit into the overall public diplomacy strategy of the United States. It is critical, however, that news and opinion programs be accepted as credible and reliable. The truth is our ally.²⁹

A Full Reform of Public Diplomacy Is Needed

Clarifying the mission and structure of the BBG is an exercise that requires context. The BBG is part of something bigger: the achievement of America's national interest through the use of soft power, or non-coercive means of persuasion. Joseph Nye, the father of the term, makes it clear that the objectives of soft power are far from squishy. The goal is not simply to get people to like us. "Soft power," he writes, "is not just a matter of ephemeral popularity; it is a means of obtaining outcomes the United States wants."³⁰

In examining the BBG, this committee should broaden its sights and encompass the government's soft power function as a whole – a function we generally call public diplomacy or strategic communications and extends not just to the State Department but to the Pentagon, the intelligence community, and at least a dozen other agencies. In her statement to this committee in January, Secretary Clinton focused on the BBG in describing her frustration with America's "failure to tell a message around the world." I can understand the sentiment. "We have the best values," she said. "We have the best narrative.... And we're letting the jihadist narrative fill a void. We need to get in there and compete."

All true, but it is absurd to single out the BBG, which is only ambiguously part of the public diplomacy apparatus, for this failure. It is also disingenuous to point outward in assigning blame when the responsibility "to get in there and compete" should lie within the State Department and the White House.

²⁷ http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651621.pdf

²⁸ http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2012_04_Feith_Galston_Shulsky_Paper.pdf

²⁹ http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf

³⁰ http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/rdenever/PPA-730-27/Nye.pdf

In the waning years of the George W. Bush administration, the President assigned the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (first, Karen Hughes; then, me) to be the interagency lead for coordinating public diplomacy and strategic communications, with emphasis on countering violent extremism.³¹ We built a structure across government to get this job done, centered at State. But, more important, we had a clear mandate from the White House, backed by support from the National Security Council, to wage a war of ideas against the "jihadist narrative" to which Secretary Clinton would later refer.

I am not assigning blame myself, and I am certainly not saying that the Bush Administration was waging this war of ideas perfectly, or even well. What I am doing is repeating what the bipartisan Djerejian Group concluded 10 years ago:

First and foremost, public diplomacy requires a new strategic direction informed by seriousness and commitment that matches the gravity of our approach to national defense and traditional state-to-state diplomacy. This commitment must be led by the political will of the President and Congress and fueled by adequate financial and human resources.³²

This effort can be structured with the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy as the lead or with a special office within the White House providing direction or through the resurrection of USIA. But whatever the choice, international broadcasting, whose budget is roughly the same as that of the State Department's public diplomacy activities as a whole, must be part of overall apparatus, taking direction from its leader.

Most crucially, public diplomacy must have a major strategic component – that is, it must try to achieve specific goals, not just try to make foreigners like us better. I have discussed the concept of "Strategic Public Diplomacy" at length in my testimony three years ago before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Some of the conclusions may be worth repeating here:

Make public diplomacy a top priority. The entire government should know that the President sees public diplomacy as a critical part of America's overall national security strategy.
Make a distinction between what I call Strategic Public Diplomacy –that is, PD with clear objectives that can be achieved in a definable period, such as war-of-ideas goals – and long-term ongoing public diplomacy, which may be shaped strategically (with emphasis on exchanges with Muslim-majority nations, for example) but which is more general in its effects....
Establish a culture of measurable results. All public diplomacy programs must be assessed and evaluated to see how well they "move the needle." Measuring can be difficult and expensive, but, without it, we can't tell whether work is succeeding or failing.³³

Nye divides public diplomacy into three temporal categories: in the short term, it should correct inaccuracies about the U.S. and explain policy; in the long term, it should help key foreign audiences learn about America and its culture, mainly through exchanges; in the medium term, it should provide support to other national security elements to achieve specific two-to-five-year goals, such as preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. U.S. international broadcasting can help across this spectrum of time, but it is the medium term that has been most neglected in current public diplomacy and that needs the most support.

³¹ A good discussion of the benefits and pitfalls of interagency coordination in this sphere is available here: http://www.au.af.mil/info-ops/iosphere/iosphere_summer06_josten.pdf

³² http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf

³³ http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/GlassmanTestimony100310p.pdf

Mr. Chairman, you said in your letter inviting me to testify that this hearing is an opportunity to "explore meaningful and significant reform."³⁴ Now is the time.

You can certainly improve the BBG with structural changes that are long overdue – introducing a CEO, reducing the board's authority to a traditional corporate role, breaking down the distinctions among the entities, and treating language services as brands.

With only these changes, however, you will be back here planning another reform in a few years. It is the *mission* of the BBG that needs clarifying. The BBG must be part of the foreign policy team in a direct way, contributing to the achievement of discrete national-security goals. With such a mission, it cannot continue to sit outside as an independent agency but must become integrated into the foreign policy apparatus.

Thank you.

 $^{^{34} \ {\}rm http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-royce-announces-hearing-reforming-broadcasting-board-governors}$