

## **Public Policy and Funding the News**

A Project of the USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership & Policy

[www.fundingthenews.org](http://www.fundingthenews.org)

734 West Adams Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-7725  
213-821-0060  
[www.communicationleadership.org](http://www.communicationleadership.org)

# U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING: AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR ETHNIC AND DOMESTIC NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

Shawn Powers

The news media landscape is rapidly changing, and advances in technologies and the ways in which information is received and spread call for adjustments in policies. Just as advances in science and health require governments to adjust their laws accordingly, so do advances in information technology. The advent of the Internet, a global infrastructure able to disseminate information from anywhere in the world to anywhere, usually within just a few seconds, calls into question the value of laws written in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the intent to limit the direction of news and information broadcast by particular organizations.

The American approach to public service broadcasting, which is severely underfunded when compared to the rest of the world, is also legally separated from U.S. international broadcasting, a firewall that inhibits effective collaboration between either. Indeed, the problem is worse, as U.S.-funded international broadcasting is prohibited from disseminating its journalistic features within the U.S., a ban that prevents effective use of its significant journalistic resources by both public and private news networks in the United States. including a large sector of ethnic media that could surely benefit from the 60 languages that American international broadcasting reports in. For comparison, the BBC, the world's most respected news institution, houses all of its international and domestic news services in the same newsroom, therefore maximizing the benefits of a diverse and large staff while limiting costly redundancies. This paper argues for further collaboration between government funded international broadcasting and its domestic counterparts — both public and private — and thus for policies that match the reality of today's information ecology.

## BACKGROUND ON U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

The United States government invests \$671.3 million per year in its foreign reporting via its international broadcasting services. It is overseen by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a politically appointed committee whose main task is to maintain a “firewall” between the broadcasters’ programming and government’s policies. The United States currently broadcasts in 60 languages via 6 networks: the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio and TV Marti, Radio Sawa and the Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN). Combined, the networks broadcast over 3,000 hours of news programming each week. Importantly, the broadcasters are responsible not for promoting particular foreign

policies, but rather for high-quality journalism: “The mission of the BBG and its broadcasters is to broadcast accurate, balanced, and comprehensive news and information to an international audience. The mission to promote freedom and democracy is achieved through journalistic integrity and through the dissemination of factual news and information.”<sup>i</sup> More broadly, US broadcasters are legally obligated by the Voice of America Charter to “serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.”<sup>ii</sup>

Recently, several U.S. government broadcasters have made waves with their reporting. RFA was named Broadcaster of the Year by the 2009 New York Festivals for winning the largest number of awards among participating broadcasters. VOA’s Persian network, Persian News Network (PNN), played an instrumental role in Iran in the aftermath of the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, providing the most accurate and timely coverage of the protests and civil disorder. Direct visits to PNN’s Website from inside Iran shot up 800 percent in June 2009. In the wake of the election crisis, news networks wanting details on what their sources inside Iran were reporting called on PNN and Radio Farda, RFE/RL’s Persian radio service. Both national and international news organizations, including Al-Jazeera, ABC, NBC, and the Washington Post looked to the VOA for real-time updates on the situation in Iran. According to the Financial Times, PNN and Radio Farda had “taken the lead in providing information” in Iran’s post-election crisis.<sup>iii</sup> Both NBC’s *Nightly News* and ABC’s *World Tonight* featured clips from PNN. The BBG estimates that a third of Persian adults tune in to U.S. broadcasting at least once a week.

This success is especially surprising in light of the overall decline in funding for U.S. international broadcasting. In the decade following the Cold War, the budget for U.S. international broadcasting was cut by 40 percent. In 1999, when Congress abolished the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the budgets for international broadcasting were slashed even further, down to \$420 million. In the following three years programming to 17 different countries was cut, including Australia, China, Japan and South Korea. On July 26, 2008, 12 days before Russia invaded Georgia, the BBG shut down VOA Russian radio in order to save resources. Then, in September, the Board abolished VOA radio services in Serbian, Bosnian, and Macedonian and in the Hindi service to India, each for financial reasons.<sup>iv</sup> Following the attacks on 9-11, Congress acted quickly to re-energize American broadcasting abroad, but this time focusing on the Arab world. Accordingly, the majority of budget gains have been dedicated to establishing MBN in an effort to engage Arab audiences with news and cultural programming.

Yet, despite an extensive network of journalists spread around the world working for U.S. international broadcasters, domestic news organizations have largely been hesitant to draw from this significant government investment. In 1948, Congress enacted the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (often referred to as the Smith-Mundt Act, H.R. 3342), authorizing the State Department to conduct international broadcasting efforts to “to provide for the preparation, and dissemination abroad, of information about the United States, its people and its policies, through press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and other information media, and through information centers abroad.”<sup>v</sup> Smith-Mundt established the programming mandate that

continues to serve as the foundation for U.S. overseas information programs and also brought the Voice of America into the Department of State. Smith-Mundt's most controversial component is contained in section 501, which prohibits the dissemination of the government's international broadcasting programming domestically. According to section 501, material produced for foreign production can be released domestically "for examination only." The Smith-Mundt ban on domestic propaganda has been broadened over the years by subsequent legislation. The Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1972 amended the Smith-Mundt Act to include a ban on disseminating within the United States any "information about the United States, its people, and its policies" prepared for dissemination abroad. In 1985, the Zorinsky Amendment added a new prohibition: "no funds authorized to be appropriated to the United States Information Agency shall be used to influence public opinion in the United States, and no program material prepared by the United States Information Agency shall be distributed within the United States."

Smith-Mundt's ban on domestic dissemination is unfortunate given how most U.S. news organizations are cutting back on their foreign coverage. For example, CBS News no longer stations a single full-time correspondent in Iraq and no American news network has a full-time correspondent in Afghanistan. The Boston Globe closed all of its foreign news bureaus in 2007. Television news networks have reduced the number of foreign bureaus by more than 50 percent over the past two decades and the number of foreign correspondents working for U.S. newspapers dropped 25 percent between 2002 and 2006.<sup>vi</sup> According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of American newspapers publish less foreign news than they did just three years ago and most of them have smaller news staffs.<sup>vii</sup> Yet, at the same time, VOA and its fellow surrogate broadcasting networks have increased spending of foreign reporting, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Part of the motivation for the ban on domestic dissemination actually came from the private sector. Broadcasters at the time were concerned about losing their audiences to government programming. Today, in practice, the ban is all but irrelevant. The Internet and Direct Broadcast Satellite (DSB) systems make U.S. government broadcasts and news reports widely accessible throughout the United States. According to international media experts Allen W. Palmer and Edward L. Carter, "With the arrival of the Internet and the goal of universal access, the Smith-Mundt prohibition of domestic dissemination of the U.S. government's international propaganda materials appears to be particularly arcane and problematic."<sup>viii</sup> Alvin Snyder, former director of WORLDNET, argued that technology had already rendered the ban on domestic dissemination useless 15 years ago: "with technology making access to information so effortless nowadays, such a ban is irrational."<sup>ix</sup> Today, 40 percent of VOA's Internet traffic comes from within the United States. Transcripts for most of the programs can be found online as well, and broadcasts can be watched via YouTube and other online video sites.<sup>x</sup>

Importantly, the current law prohibits only the intentional domestic dissemination of programming by the U.S. government. Not only is it legal for Americans to tune into VOA's or RFA's websites and programming, but also for anyone outside of the government to disseminate USIB programming within the U.S. *Gartner v. USIA* (1989) ruled that while the VOA cannot intentionally distribute its materials within the United

States, any U.S. media operation could, of its own accord, use VOA material.<sup>xi</sup> Noting the absurdity of Smith-Mundt's ban on domestic dissemination, in his explanation of the Gartner decision, U.S. District Judge Donald O'Brien wrote: "It would be easy to conclude that the USIA's position is inappropriate or even stupid, but it's the law."<sup>xii</sup> Despite this, domestic news organizations have been slow to pick up stories and programming from U.S. international broadcasters, though there have been a few exceptions.

In 1991, C-SPAN started using its satellite subcarriers to transmit audio signals, thereby providing an additional service to subscribers. It signed up the BBC World Service and arranged to carry other English-language broadcasts from Korea, Japan, France, and Israel, among others, as well as Radio Beijing and Radio Havana. According to General Counsel Bruce D. Collins, C-SPAN decided it was safe to pick up the VOA as well. C-SPAN engineers invested considerable resources to be able to receive and rebroadcast a clear VOA satellite signal. Through C-SPAN ingenuity, VOA English-language programs were made available to some 6 million cable households. "C-SPAN long ago stopped thinking of itself as a television network," said Collins. "It thinks of itself, as do most information providers these days in the digital world, as an information network. And as information moves from analog to digital it's all going to be much easier to distribute."<sup>xiii</sup>

Other U.S. news organizations seem to have maneuvered around the ban on domestic dissemination. In 2008, New Jersey's The Star-Ledger bought out nearly half of its 330 newsroom employees in an effort to avoid shutting down or exploring a sale. According to Editor & Publisher, 40 of those former employees have since started up their own news site, NewJerseyNewsroom.com. The site has an arrangement with VOA that allows it to use that outlet's content. The Raleigh Chronicle, The Greensboro Telegram and Wicked Local Plymouth (MA) have each reprinted stories from the VOA's Website as well. KCHN-AM rebroadcasts VOA Russian programming in Brookshire, Texas. According to Kim Andrew Elliot, with "U.S. newspapers cutting down on foreign correspondents and bureaus, might be tempted to tap the VOA Website, generally unencumbered by copyright issues, for their foreign coverage."<sup>xiv</sup> VOA's copyright policy states that news organizations are free to use its material free of charge: "You are welcome to use any material that is published by voanews.com, or you may link to any of the Web pages that Voice of America has published on the Internet. There is no need to request further permission." And, according to Snyder, "today, however, hundreds of cable operations are eager to receive and retransmit free government programs."<sup>xv</sup>

When VOA first signed on in February 24, 1942, the announcer promised that the listener would hear the truth, the good news as well as the bad. Thirty years later, as head of a government panel, then-CBS vice chairman Frank Stanton conducted a wide-ranging study of U.S. overseas information programs and advocated revoking the domestic dissemination ban. If VOA tells the truth, he argued, shouldn't everyone be able to hear it?<sup>xvi</sup> According to Stanton, "yesterday's fear that such programs will 'brainwash' the American public is senseless. We get a steady stream of government views in speeches, briefings and press releases, and we are capable of reaching our own conclusions. In today's information-rich environment, it is easier to separate fact from fiction. More

information from the government, not less, can only help.” Former VOA Director David Jackson agrees, adding that a removal of the Smith-Mundt restrictions on VOA could help silence critics who claim the contents of VOA shows must be suspicious if the American people aren’t allowed to see them.

Addressing the concern that VOA’s programming has a pro-U.S. tilt, Jackson argues that everyone working in the VOA headquarters in Washington is a trained and experienced journalist, adding, “U.S. officials can no more tell them what to write than they can tell journalists at the Washington Post what to write.” Reflecting on the role of VOA’s reporting in light of the increasingly troubled private news business, Alex Belida, managing editor for VOA News, suggests: “Commercially funded, serious, news-oriented journalism outlets might soon become things of the past, possibly leaving publicly-funded news organizations like VOA alone to provide serious news that people ought to know. VOA, as we have said here before, is unique in that it has a legal charter obliging it to present accurate, objective and comprehensive news. In fact, we often tell visitors who come to our offices in Washington that we believe VOA is one of the few remaining practitioners of what one might call ‘pure journalism’ in a media world that is increasingly characterized by commentary, attitude, argument, gossip and celebrity.”

Moreover, fears that the government would use the U.S. international broadcasters to spread propaganda among Americans overlooks the fact that, to a very large extent, the government already spreads its message through a number of mediums. As an example, in 2005, the Bush administration issued a report acknowledging that 20 agencies had produced and distributed hundreds of pre-packaged video news segments to local television stations around the country, many without any acknowledgement of the government’s role in their production.<sup>xvii</sup> Alternatively, U.S. international broadcasting is typically focused on local news from the country in question. According to Martha Bayles, “contrary to what many assume, these channels do not merely broadcast U.S. government propaganda. Nor do they follow CNN and other ‘global’ media in hopscotching between hot spots. On the contrary, these channels maintain a consistent, steady presence, outwitting the censors and keeping brave reporters on the ground, so that the people living in those countries can know what is going on, even when the whole world is not watching.”<sup>xviii</sup> In a somewhat ironic turn of events, in 2006, the VOA ended its English-language broadcasts, making all of its English-language reporting available exclusively through the World Wide Web, the medium that Americans are most likely to use to access VOA stories.

It is important to note that international broadcasting from other governments is increasingly available throughout the United States. Russia’s Russia Today is available via the Internet and on cable systems throughout the East Coast. China’s state-run CCTV is also available throughout the U.S. and on a few major cable providers. The same is true for Japan’s NHK World, France’s France 24 and Iran’s Press TV. Qatar’s Al Jazeera network, much more controversial than any U.S.-funded broadcaster, is available via the Dish Network for a small fee. Its sister station — Al Jazeera English, which is less sensational and more polished — is available in over 17 million American homes and was the network of choice for Americans (via the Internet) for news about Palestine in January 2009 as tensions rose between Hamas and Israel. If the official broadcasters of

other governments are both available and being accessed by Americans, shouldn't Americans be able to access its own government's take in current events as well?

Richard W. Carlson, former president and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and a former VOA director, has called for a partnership between U.S. public media and international broadcasting. Noting the large costs of redundancy that result from keeping the two operations entirely separate, he calls for greater collaboration in order to streamline costs while also improving the overall quality of news. According to Carlson, "more than one-third of the programming that ends up in the PBS national schedule has overseas funding," from co-productions and alliances in Asia, Europe and Latin America. Yet, the American voice continues to be left out.

## HOW COULD IT HELP?

Recently, a small private community radio station in Minneapolis contacted the VOA to see if it could provide them with news materials about the increasingly dire situation in Somalia. The radio station's hope was to be able to provide fair, accurate and timely information to the large Somali diaspora that lived nearby. Importantly, the producers were concerned that Somali audiences were turning more and more to terrorist propaganda that was streaming into Minneapolis via the World Wide Web. Over the last year, al-Shabab, an al Qaeda linked Somali militia, had successfully recruited two dozen or more Somali-Americans to return home and fight, and the community station was hoping that VOA's programming could help combat the powerful disinformation campaign that was taking place.

Despite the fact that the Somali diaspora is a group that is at risk of becoming increasingly radicalized, due to Smith-Mundt, the VOA was required to reply with: "Our programming is not for domestic consumption." They couldn't even explain that, while their programming is not for domestic distribution, the private broadcaster had every right to rebroadcast VOA material as it saw fit. "Rebroadcasting propaganda from al-Shabab's sophisticated media center, an operation that rivals or even surpasses al Qaeda's, would have been an easier task for the Minneapolis station," had they wanted to do so, as the First Amendment provides substantial protections for the news broadcasts.<sup>xix</sup>

There are other examples of where U.S. international broadcasting reporting would have been helpful had private newspapers and networks considered them as a resource. In July 2009, the Christian Science Monitor, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and Reuters each inaccurately reported a poll result claiming that a plurality of Hondurans supported the coup against President Zelaya. The reporting was based on a single source, the Honduran newspaper La Prensa. The VOA, however, got it right, reporting: "According to the latest Gallup poll, 46 percent of the population disapproved of the coup d'etat against President Manuel Zelaya, while 41 percent justified it." The Voice of America report is particularly relevant because it interviewed Carlos Denton, president of CID-Gallup Centroamérica, giving its reporting added depth. Moreover, it preceded both the Wall Street Journal and Christian Science Monitor reports, and was

thus available for consultation when they went to print. The VOA has a universal two-source rule, meaning that nothing can be broadcast or published without two confirmed, credible sources.<sup>xx</sup>

Moreover, the U.S. funds a number of surrogate broadcasters in the Middle East, Asia and Europe that could be a tremendous resource for ethnic media here in the U.S. MBN's Alhurra — the U.S.-funded international broadcaster in the Middle East — provides another potential resource for the ailing domestic news organizations. Alhurra's reporting in Iraq is considered exemplar by many. Indeed, Alhurra Iraq is more popular in Iraq than the region's most popular news network, Al-Jazeera. Radio Free Afghanistan has broken a number of stories from parts of Afghanistan where the other American networks won't dare send correspondents. Over the past year, the Christian Science Monitor and CNN have used Alhurra as a source for updates on Iraq. In 2008 Alhurra broke footage of Iraqi police abuse in Basra, Nasiriya and Diwaniya that was picked up by the Middle East Times and Wired. In 2007, Alhurra debunked a myth that gunman in Baghdad had killed an Iraqi journalist, Dia al-Kawwaz. The BBC relied on Alhurra's reporting for its coverage of the story.

Some go as far as to credit VOA's mandarin broadcasts as responsible for promoting non-violence in China during a bout of recent protests. According to Tsewang Dhondup, the reason why there were so few casualties during the demonstrations that swept across Tibet in 2008 was due to VOA's airing of the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach that aims for genuine autonomy rather than independence. Such reporting is a tremendous resource for the growing ethnic media — the fastest growing news media sector in the United States — that find themselves relying on foreign government reporting for much of their news.<sup>xxi</sup>

Of course, U.S. international broadcasters have a different mission from that of privately run news networks. But that doesn't mean their reporting is automatically biased in favor of the U.S. government. For example, in February 2009, RFE/RL broke news about David Plouffe, President Obama's election campaign manager, being paid \$50,000 by a non-governmental organization linked to Azerbaijan's unsavory regime for a speech he made there on February 9, driving the Washington Post, The New York Times and Politico to report the story. "Government press releases, speeches, briefings, tours of military facilities, publications are all propaganda of sorts," argues Michael G. Gartner, former editor and co-owner of the Ames Daily Tribune (Iowa). "Propaganda is just information to support a viewpoint, and the beauty of a democracy is that it enables you to hear or read every viewpoint and then make up your own mind on an issue." To those who fear that American citizens would be brainwashed by USIA material, Gartner offered some advice: "Bring them up press releases from other government agencies and then bring them up VOA material and ask them which they think is the straighter."<sup>xxii</sup>

Recent political controversies surrounding U.S. broadcasting actually indicate that, in practice, the broadcasters are far from agents of American government propaganda. Indeed, in May 2007 Congress held hearings after Alhurra aired an unedited speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, considered a terrorist by the Department of State, which would be a violation of its governing charter. Particularly in light of



America's low approval ratings abroad, Congress is sometimes critical of its balanced approach to the news as many feel that their role is to better the image of the United States, not simply carry the news. Naturally, journalists working for the VOA and other international broadcasters resent such political pressure. As Alhurra's Director of News Daniel Nassif notes: "We are not a gauge for a popularity contest in the Middle East. Our mission by law is to provide accurate and objective news to the region. Alhurra's role is to report U.S. policy accurately to an audience that has often not received accurate and objective reports, but our role is not to advocate policy."<sup>xxiii</sup> Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), for example, has expressed concern over the fact that U.S. broadcasting to Iran includes experts that at times defended the regime's policies. Coburn was especially disturbed with the VOA's policy of avoiding use of the term "terrorist" altogether, a policy not even most private American news networks abide by.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Moreover, the ban on domestic dissemination isn't good for international broadcasters, either. The ban is often cited in critiques of American broadcasting efforts abroad, with critics asking: If the news isn't good enough for Americans, then how can we trust it? By its very nature, the ban calls into question the credibility of the broadcast news in an industry where credibility is everything. Amending Smith-Mundt to allow for the domestic dissemination of USIB would not only add to its credibility abroad, but by increasing access to VOA and others' journalism it would provide for increased scrutiny and oversight of the broadcasters, likely improving the quality of the overall product. Matt Armstrong argues that Smith-Mundt's ban on domestic dissemination "reinforces the sound bite mentality to pass through the filter of American commercial media that continues to deprioritize international affairs."<sup>xxv</sup>

Most importantly, the ban on domestic dissemination is in and of itself a barrier to effective monitoring of American broadcasting abroad. Rather than have easy access to U.S. government news reports disseminated around the world, experts working to either research broadcasting topics or monitor and improve the content of the news face challenges accessing broadcasting materials. As some argue, today, "transparency is the new objectivity," and due to archaic legislation, U.S. international broadcasters face challenges adjusting to 21<sup>st</sup> century media ecology that their competitors do not. Not only would greater collaboration between domestic news media and international broadcasters help enhance the quality of news in the newspapers, it would further encourage international broadcasters to produce high-quality journalism here and abroad.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## MOVING FORWARD

Today, legislation attempting to restrict the flow of information in and out of the United States is simply unworkable, and more importantly, resembles efforts by governments typically trying to hide from the scrutiny of international media. Current legislation stands as a barrier to collaboration between U.S. international broadcasting and the private and public domestic news media. Indeed, the current approach to news and information is stuck in a muddled conception of how information travels and is consumed today. In an era marked by convergence, transparency and networks, the

current information policy on the US government is antiquated and counterproductive.

Foreign language broadcasting, during World War I and II and the Cold War, targeted areas where there were large populations of ethnic groups that weren't able to receive a free flow of information about their homelands. Today, those diasporas are increasingly transnational, spread out throughout the world and connected via electronic media. Yet, there is still a huge need for high quality news to be reported from parts of the world that are often overlooked by the private, profit-driven mainstream press. In the past, the VOA, RFE/RL, RFA and other international broadcasters provided this service to groups in foreign countries. But today, as those groups are increasingly difficult to isolate geographically, the information needs to be ubiquitous, available to anyone anywhere. A recent study found that over 50 percent of the BBC World Service's foreign language programming wasn't being consumed within the target country, but rather outside of it, including the diaspora within the UK. The explanation is simple: diasporic groups want news about their homeland, their former friends and families, and the mainstream press is simply not spending the resources and time on events going on in Somalia, Burma, Nigeria, or most of the developing world.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In 2008, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen proposed the United States Broadcasting Reorganization Act of 2008 (H.R. 7070) calling for the creation of a United States International Broadcasting Agency and the abolition of the prohibition of the dissemination of USIB programming domestically. In addition, the legislation calls for the creation of an office of the ombudsman to ensure the highest level of quality control.<sup>xxviii</sup> Smith-Mundt is the foundation for American public diplomacy and information policy abroad, and for the most part, remains relevant. Its ban on the domestic dissemination of news is outdated, often subverted via the World Wide Web, and certainly hampers the overall mission of providing high-quality news and information throughout the world.

Yet, amending Smith-Mundt is not enough to alleviate the current problem. As is noted above, it is not illegal for American domestic media, both public and private, to pick up and air stories that were produced and written by the VOA or its sister networks. The New York Times and Wall Street Journal routinely use RFE/RL as a source, for example. The restriction on active dissemination merely applies to U.S. news sources, not anyone else. Thus, the problem is not simply a legal one, but also a cultural one. Most journalists think of U.S. international broadcasters as agents of propaganda and thus shy away from using its journalists as sources. This impression is due to a number of factors, the most important of which is the lack of easy access Americans have had to the content of its government's news programming abroad. Yet, more could be done to encourage collaboration. The international broadcasters need to have a more accessible Internet presence, with their content searchable with much more ease. Moreover, the BBG should have a comprehensive list of news reporters it has placed throughout the world so that the domestic news media could more easily be able to draw from the BBG's journalistic resources. Again, such moves towards transparency aren't simply helpful to the domestic news media, but also for American international broadcasting. By publicly mapping its journalists and resources abroad, the BBG could better consolidate overlap between its multiple strands of reporting abroad, for instance between RFE/RL's and the VOA's

overlapping Persian and Mandarin services.

One area where further research needs to be done is examining precisely how the various U.S. international broadcasters, particularly those broadcasting in foreign languages, can make themselves more available as a resource to ethnic media. In addition to the legal and cultural barriers outlined above, the majority of ethnic media in the U.S. do not have an online presence, and thus no easy way to connect with and use U.S. international broadcasters as a resource. Research on ethnic media is, at this point, behind that of national and international media organizations, partially because they lack a robust online presence that is commonplace with most of the mainstream press. This oversight in research has important policy implications as ethnic media are used as the primary source of news and information by over 60 million — 20 percent — of Americans.<sup>xxix</sup> More work needs to be done identifying leaders in ethnic media, assessing the quality of information provided, as well as their journalistic and technological needs moving forward.

To conclude, as the quality of news, especially international news, continues to decline, and as the domestic news media — both public and private — continue to face financial challenges, there is one untapped resource that remains off of the radar of most domestic news media, despite its long history of providing timely and accurate information: U.S. international broadcasting. In fact, few have argued for removing restrictions to ease collaboration between the two, despite the fact that it would cost zero additional government resources and likely improve the quality of information produced by both American international broadcasting and its domestic news media. This oversight is largely due to cultural and political stigma against what is seen as government propaganda, an impression that, accurate or not, is no longer relevant in a world where Americans are bombarded with propaganda from foreign governments all of the time. Territory-based restrictions on the flow of information no longer make sense in a world where identities, languages and politics increasingly transcend national borders. It is time to adjust our information policies to reflect today's new reality, and soon, as both the domestic news media and U S international broadcasting are falling behind their international competitors.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> Broadcasting Board of Governors. "About the Agency." (2009)

<sup>ii</sup> Voice of America Charter, signed into law on July 12, 1976.

<sup>iii</sup> Bozorgmehr, Najmeh. "Tehran Tries to Block Online Chatter." *Financial Times*, June 17, 2009.

<sup>iv</sup> Snyder, Alvin. "Eulogy to Rebirth? US International Broadcasting Struggles to Find its Way—With the Help of Al Jazeera." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 15, Fall 2005.

<sup>v</sup> The US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (often referred to as the Smith-Mundt Act, H.R. 3342).

<sup>vi</sup> Miller, Alisa. "Invest in International News." *Good Magazine*, March 18 2008.

<sup>vii</sup> Perez-Pena, Richard. "As Papers Struggle, News is Cut and the Focus Turns Local." *The New York Times*, July 21 2008.

<sup>viii</sup> Palmer, Allen W., and Carter, Edward L. "The Smith-Mundt Act's Ban on Domestic Propaganda: An Analysis of the Cold War Statue Limiting Access to Public Diplomacy." *Communication Law and Policy* 11, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>ix</sup> Snyder, Alvin. "U.S. Shouldn't Muffle Voice of America." *Knight-Ridder News Service*, Apr 27 1994.

---

<sup>x</sup> Snyder, Alvin. "Part Two: Clocking Government Internet Traffic: Let the Races Begin." *Center on Public Diplomacy Blog*, Feb 18 2009.

<sup>xi</sup> Decision by United States District Court of the Southern District of Iowa, Central Division, *Gartner v. United States Information Agency*, October 12, 1989.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Snyder, 1995.

<sup>xiv</sup> Elliot, Kim Andrew. "VOA domestically disseminated again." Kim Andrew Elliot Discussing International Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy, June 18, 2008.

<sup>xv</sup> Snyder, 1994.

<sup>xvi</sup> Snyder, 1995.

<sup>xvii</sup> Palmer, Allen W., and Carter, Edward L. "The Smith-Mundt Act's Ban on Domestic Propaganda: An Analysis of the Cold War Statute Limiting Access to Public Diplomacy." *Communication Law and Policy* 11, no. 1 (2006):

<sup>xviii</sup> Bayles, Martha. "When the revolution isn't broadcast." *The Boston Globe*, June 28 2009.  
[http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2009/06/28/when\\_the\\_revolution\\_isnt\\_broadcast/](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2009/06/28/when_the_revolution_isnt_broadcast/)

<sup>xix</sup> Armstrong, Matt. "Censoring the Voice of America." *Foreign Policy*, Aug 6 2009.

---

<sup>xx</sup> Naiman, Robert. "CSM, WSJ Respond on Claim of Plurality for Honduran Coup." *The Daily Kos*, Wed Jul 15, 2009, <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2009/7/15/753782/-CSM,-WSJ-Respond-on-Claim-of-Plurality-for-Honduran-Coup>

<sup>xxi</sup> Novick, Rebecca. "The Will to Survive: One Man's Harrowing Escape from Tibet." *The Huffington Post*, July 30, 2009.

<sup>xxii</sup> Cited in Snyder, 1995.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Nassiff, Daniel. "Interview with the Middle East Quarterly." *Middle East Quarterly* XV (2), Spring 2008, pp. 63-69.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Armstrong, Matt. "U.S. Public Diplomacy Update: nothing new to report." *MountainRunner Blog*, May 2, 2008, [http://mountainrunner.us/2008/05/the\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_update\\_br.html](http://mountainrunner.us/2008/05/the_public_diplomacy_update_br.html)

<sup>xxv</sup> Armstrong, Matt. "Rethinking Smith Mundt." *Small Wars Journal* (2008): 1-20.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Powers, Shawn. "Public Diplomacy and Legitimacy in the Age of Transparency." *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, July 23 2009. [http://usepublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newswire/cpdblog\\_detail/pd\\_legitimacy\\_in\\_age\\_of\\_transparency/](http://usepublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/pd_legitimacy_in_age_of_transparency/)

<sup>xxvii</sup> Andersson, Matilda. "Mapping Digital Diasporas." *World Agenda*, 2008. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1641\\_wagus08/page5.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1641_wagus08/page5.shtml)

---

<sup>xxviii</sup> Link to legislation: <http://www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c110:1:./temp/~c110IFk2uo:e0>:

<sup>xxix</sup> New America Media. “Ethnic Media Here To Stay and Growing -- A National Study on the Penetration of Ethnic Media in America.” June 9, 2009, [http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=cef90deffc1b85bfb7253499cd65040b](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=cef90deffc1b85bfb7253499cd65040b); Ramesha, Hamsa. “A New Frontier for Ethnic Media.” News21.com, July 31, 2009; Sefsaf, Wendy. “Measuring Ethnic Media’s Online Capacity.” SSRC’s Media Research Hub, 2009.