

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

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The news media landscape is rapidly changing in the wake of technological progress and the altered ways in which information is received and disseminated require adjustments in the contemporary media regulatory framework. Just as advances in science and health sectors 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 instantaneously from anyone to anywhere in the world, calls into question the value of laws written in the first half of the 20th century with the intent to limit the direction of news and information broadcast by particular organizations.

Currently, U.S. public service broadcasting, which is severely underfunded in comparison to the rest of the world, is also legally separate from U.S. international broadcasting, a technical firewall that inhibits effective collaboration between the two entities. As a result, U.S. funded international broadcasting is prohibited from disseminating its journalistic features within the U.S., a legal ban that hinders the use of its significant journalistic resources by both public and private news networks, including a large sector of ethnic media that could surely benefit from the 60 languages that American international broadcasters report in. This chapter argues for further collaboration between government funded international broadcasting and its domestic counterparts—both public and private—and for an adjustment in policies in order to accurately and intelligently adapt to the reality of today’s information ecology.

BACKGROUND ON US INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

The United States government invests \$671.3 million per year in foreign reporting via its international broadcasting services. 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 foreign policies, oversees the operation. 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 3000 hours of news programming each week. Importantly, the broadcasters are tasked not with promoting particular foreign policies, but rather to produce 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.”¹ More broadly, US broadcasters are legally obligated by a charter to “serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news...News will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.”²

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. This hesitation is, in large part, due to the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (H.R. 3342, often referred to as the Smith-Mundt Act), 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.” The Smith-Mundt Act established the mandate that continues to serve as the framework and foundation for U.S. overseas information programs, often referred to as U.S. public diplomacy programs. The Act’s most controversial component is contained in section 501, prohibiting 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.” Moreover, over the years, subsequent legislation has broadened the Smith-Mundt Act’s ban on domestic propaganda. 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.”³

Today, the prohibition has little practical relevance. The Internet and Direct Satellite Broadcast (DSB) systems make U.S. government broadcasts and news reports widely accessible throughout the United States to those willing to seek out the website or satellite signal. 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.”⁴ Alvin Snyder, former director of Worldnet TV 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.”⁵ Today, 40 percent VOA’s Internet traffic comes from within the United States. Transcripts for some of the

programs can be found online as well, and broadcasts can be watched via YouTube and other online video sites.⁶ In fact, U.S. international broadcaster video programs can increasingly be viewed live on the Internet from the official, government-run websites by anyone in the world, including Americans. For example, anyone can visit <http://www.alhurra.com/streamingIr.htm> and watch a live stream of Alhurra, one of the more controversial U.S. government-funded broadcasters.

While some have argued that today's broad dissemination of U.S. international broadcasting programs violates the Smith Mundt Act, the current interpretation of the law only prohibits 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 it is also perfectly legal for anyone outside of the government to disseminate the programming within the U.S. *Gartner v. USIA* (1989) ruled that while the VOA and its sister networks cannot intentionally distribute its materials within the United States, any U.S. media operation could, of its own accord, use programs and related materials produced by U.S. international broadcasters.⁷ Noting the absurdity of the Smith-Mundt Act's ban on domestic dissemination in his explanation of the *Gartner* decision, Judge Donald O'Brien wrote: "It would be easy to conclude that the [U.S. Information Agency's] position is inappropriate or even stupid, but it's the law."⁸ Kim Andrew Elliot, an audience research analyst for the U.S. International Broadcasting Bureau, the research arm of the BBG, describes the situation as one of "don't ask, don't tell," whereby domestic news outlets are free to use U.S. international broadcasting programming and stories as long as no official correspondence takes place between government editors or content producers and the non-government organizations responsible for re-broadcasting the materials.⁹

Due to the legal ambiguity surrounding the situation, 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 in order to provide an additional service to subscribers. It signed an agreement with the BBC World Service and arranged to carry other English-language broadcasts from Korea, Japan, France, and Israel, as well as Radio Beijing from China and Radio Havana from Cuba. According to General Counsel Bruce D. Collins, C-SPAN decided it was legally acceptable to pick up the VOA as well. C-SPAN engineers invested considerable resources in order to receive, capture and rebroadcast a clear VOA satellite signal to over 6 million American households."¹⁰

In 2008, New Jersey's *The Star-Ledger* bought out nearly half of its 330 newsroom employees in an effort to avoid shutting down the newspaper. 40 of those former employees went on to launch their own online news website, NewJerseyNewsroom.com, which has since become quite successful. While focusing mostly on local content, the site has an informal arrangement with the VOA whereby it routinely reproduces VOA news on its website.¹¹ *The Raleigh Chronicle*, *The Greensboro Telegram* and *Wicked Local Plymouth* (MA) have also routinely reprinted stories from the VOA's website as well. KCHN AM 1050 rebroadcasts VOA Russian programming in Brookshire, Texas. According to Elliot, "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.”¹² 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, “hundreds of cable operations are eager to receive and retransmit free government programs.”¹³

The Smith-Mundt Act’s restrictions on domestic dissemination are especially unfortunate in light of the decreasing level of resources, time and space that most privately operated American news organizations dedicate to foreign reporting. 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 2006.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Yet, at the same time, VOA and its sister networks have increased spending of foreign reporting, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.

WHY FACILITATE BETTER CROSS-FERTILIZATION?

In 2009, 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. 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. They pointed to the fact that in recent years, al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda linked Somali militia, had successfully recruited fifty or more Somali-Americans to return to the homeland and fight for the Islamist insurgency. And the situation was only getting more complicated. The well-oiled al-Shabaab propaganda arm had recently taken credit for recruiting the first American-born suicide bomber to Somalia for training before he went on his final mission, blowing up the United Nation’s peacekeeping headquarters in Mogadishu. Back in Minneapolis, the small, community radio station was hoping that by rebroadcasting some of the VOA’s programming they could help combat the powerful disinformation campaign that was taking place on behalf of Somali Islamic extremists.

Despite the risk of the Somali diaspora’s increasing radicalization, due to protocol developed in response to the Smith-Mundt Act’s ban on domestic dissemination, the VOA replied: “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 they saw fit. As a result of the legal ambiguity and complexity surrounding the Smith Mundt Act, “the same professional journalists, editors, and public diplomacy officers whom we trust to inform

and engage the world are considered more threatening to Americans than terrorist propaganda -- like the stuff pouring into Minneapolis” via al-Shabaab.¹⁶ Even worse, “rebroadcasting propaganda from al-Shabaab's sophisticated media center, an operation that...surpasses al Qaeda's, would have been an easier task for the Minneapolis station” than rebroadcasting VOA news from Somalia.¹⁷ Clearly, the current legal regime governing the distribution of USIB is outdated and potentially dangerous given the contemporary media ecology and political exigencies.

Parts of the U.S. international broadcasting establishment are well known for their high quality reporting from places where private news organizations struggle to access and maintain bureaus. For example, in the past year several U.S. government-supported broadcasters have received accolades for their reporting in less than ideal circumstances. In 2009 RFA was named Broadcaster of the Year by the New York Festivals for its in depth reporting in China, Vietnam and Burma.¹⁸ VOA's 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 growing discontent that followed the election, news networks wanting details of the domestic situation inside Iran 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.¹⁹ Both NBC's *Nightly News* and ABC's *World Tonight* featured clips from PNN. The BBG estimates that a third of Persian adults tune into US broadcasting at least once a week, a statistic that indicates that the reporting also resonates with audiences within Iran.

There are other recent examples where consulting U.S. international broadcaster's reporting would have been helpful had private newspapers and networks considered them as a resource. In July 2009, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The 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% of the population disapproved of the coup d'etat against President Manuel Zelaya, while 41% justified it.” The Voice of America report was not only correct, but also more in-depth, as it interviewed Carlos Denton, president of the organization responsible for the poll, giving its story added nuance compared to its privately operated counterparts. Moreover, it preceded both *The Wall Street Journal* and *Christian Science Monitor* reports, and was thus available for consultation at the time they went to print.²⁰ Yet, the mainstream American media failed to utilize the VOA's more in-depth and accurate information.

Moreover, the United States 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 US funded international broadcaster in the Middle East—provides a potential source for the ailing domestic news organizations for news from the region. Alhurra's reporting in Iraq is considered especially reliable, and in fact is

the “go to news channel” in Iraq. Indeed, Alhurra Iraq is more popular than the regions’ most popular news network, Al-Jazeera.²¹ In another example, Radio Free Afghanistan has broken a number of stories from parts of Afghanistan where private American networks can’t afford to send correspondents. Recently, however, some private U.S. news organizations have begun to draw upon government-operated international broadcasters. In 2009 the *Christian Science Monitor* and CNN occasionally used Alhurra as a source for news 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 Magazine. In 2007, Alhurra challenged a story about a gunman in Baghdad killing an Iraqi journalist, Dia al-Kawwaz. The BBC then followed and verified Alhurra’s reporting of the story. Alhurra was also first to break news of the hanging of Saddam Hussein in January 2007. Such reporting provides a potential resource for the 3.5 million Arabs living in America, who crave accurate reporting from the Middle East, but are often forced to rely upon other, oftentimes more dubious sources of news for information from their respective homelands.

In China, US international broadcasters are reporting the news in ways that the challenge the sensationalist approach that so many American private news networks employ when covering Chinese affairs. Some media analysts even go as far as to credit VOA’s Mandarin broadcasts for promoting non-violence in China during a bout of protests in 2008. 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, which argued for genuine autonomy rather than independence. Again, such reporting could be a tremendous resource for America’s ethnic media—the fastest growing news media sector in the United States—that find themselves relying on foreign government news outlets, such as China’s CCTV, for many of their stories.²²

Reflecting on the role of VOA’s reporting in light of the increasingly troubled for-profit news business, Alex Belida, Director of VOA’s Persian News Network, 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. The VOA...is unique in that it has a legal Charter obliging it to present accurate, objective and comprehensive news....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.”²³

The potential benefits of better cross-fertilization between international broadcasters and their domestic counterparts are not unidirectional. The Smith-Mundt Act’s restrictions on domestic dissemination aren’t good for international broadcasters, either. By its very nature, the Act’s mandates call into question the credibility of the broadcaster’s news in an industry where credibility means everything. The restrictions are 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?” Former VOA Director David Jackson agrees, arguing that a removal of the Smith-Mundt restrictions on

U.S. international broadcasting could help rebut critics who use the ban on domestic dissemination to argue that foreign listeners should be suspicious of programming that the US government seemingly deems unsuitable for American consumption.²⁴ Moreover, the Act's restrictions further both the impression and perhaps the reality that Americans don't care about international affairs. Public Diplomacy commentator Matt Armstrong argues that the Smith-Mundt Act's ban on domestic dissemination inhibits "both domestic knowledge of international affairs and inculcating against foreign propaganda is lost...This reinforces the sound bite mentality to pass through the filter of American commercial media that continues to deprioritize international affairs."²⁵

Amending the Smith-Mundt Act to allow for the domestic dissemination of U.S. international broadcaster news reports would not simply amplify its credibility abroad. Increasing access to the VOA and its sister networks' content would provide for increased scrutiny and oversight of the broadcasters, which would likely improve the quality of the overall product. The current ban on explicit domestic dissemination is in and of itself a barrier to effective monitoring of American broadcasting abroad. Experts researching international broadcasting or monitoring broadcast content can face challenges accessing news materials. If, today, "transparency is the new objectivity," then due to archaic legislation, US international broadcasters face challenges adjusting to 21st century media ecology that its competitors do not. Not only would greater collaboration between domestic news media and international broadcasters help enhance the quality of news in the domestic news sphere, but it would further encourage international broadcasters to produce high-quality journalism able to withstand domestic and foreign scrutiny alike.²⁶

PROPAGANDA?

When VOA first signed on in February 24, 1942, the broadcaster promised its listeners that they would hear the truth, good news as well as bad. Thirty years later, CBS vice chairman Frank Stanton lead a Center on Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) panel that conducted a wide-ranging study of U.S. overseas information programs. The panel strongly advocated revoking the domestic dissemination ban. If VOA tells the truth, he argued, shouldn't everyone be able to hear it?²⁷ Of course, despite the recommendation, restrictions on domestic dissemination remain, largely due to fears of the programs potential to "propagandize" the American public. Yet, according to Alvin Snyder, "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," adding, "In today's information-rich environment, it is easier to separate fact from fiction. More information from the government, not less, can only help."²⁸ Former VOA director David Jackson addresses the concern regarding the VOA's alleged a pro-US or administration tilt, arguing that everyone working in the VOA headquarters in Washington is a trained and experienced journalist, noting: "U.S. officials can no more tell them what to write than they can tell journalists at the Washington Post what to write."²⁹

Fears that the government would use the U.S. international broadcasters to spread propaganda among Americans overlook the fact that, to a very large extent, the government already spreads its message through a number of mediums, sometimes covertly. In 2005, for instance, the Bush administration issued a report acknowledging that twenty agencies had produced and distributed hundreds of pre-packaged video news segments to local television stations around the country, many of which aired on local news without any acknowledgement of the government's role in their production.³⁰ "Government press releases, speeches, briefings, tours of military facilities, publications are all propaganda of sorts," argues Michael G. Gartner, editor and co-owner of the Iowa-based *Ames Daily Tribune*. "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 U.S. international broadcasters, 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."³¹

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 biased in favor of the standing administration. For example, in February 2009, RFE/RL broke the news that a non-governmental organization linked to Azerbaijan's unsavory regime had paid David Plouffe, President Obama's election campaign manager, \$50,000 for a speech he made in Baku. Its coverage prompted *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Politico* to report and follow the story. U.S. international broadcasting typically focuses on local news from foreign countries, which is why RFE/RL was first to break the Plouffe story as it was a major event in Azerbaijan. In contrast, such local news stories are, for the most part, off the radar of the mainstream American press. According to cultural critic Martha Bayles:

"These channels do not merely broadcast US 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."³²

Recent political controversies surrounding U.S. broadcasting actually indicate that, in practice, these broadcasters are far from agents of American government propaganda. In May 2007 Congress held hearings after Alhurra aired an unedited speech by Hassan Nasrallah, head of Hezbollah and identified as a terrorist by the Department of State. The story explicitly violated Alhurra's governing charter, which states that the broadcaster "will not permit its programs to be used as a platform for terrorist organizations."³³ Particularly in light of America's low approval ratings in the region, Congress has been notoriously critical of Alhurra's efforts at producing a balanced approach to the news as many Congressmen feel that the broadcaster's role is to better the image of the United States in the Middle East. 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.”³⁴ Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), for example, has expressed concern over the fact that US broadcasting to Iran includes experts that at times explained the rationale behind the regime’s policies. Coburn was especially disturbed with the VOA’s policy of avoiding use of the term “terrorist” altogether, a policy almost no other private American news network abides by.³⁵ Needless to say, the content of U.S. international broadcaster’s stories are not dictated by the day-to-day whims of policymakers in Washington, D.C.

It is important to note that international broadcasting from other governments is increasingly available throughout the United States as well. Moscow’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 US and on a few major cable providers. Ditto 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. In January 2009 as tensions rose between Hamas and Israel, it was the network of choice for Americans (via the Internet) for news about Gaza. If Americans can access foreign state-funded broadcasters, shouldn’t they also be able to tune into their own government’s programming?

MOVING FORWARD

Today, laws attempting to restrict the flow of information in and out of the United States are simply unworkable, and more importantly, resemble efforts by governments typically trying to hide from the scrutiny of the international media. The status quo regulatory framework 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 of the U.S. government is antiquated and counterproductive.

Foreign language broadcasting during World War I, II and the Cold War targeted areas home to 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 and connected via electronic and digital media. Yet, there is still a huge need—more so than ever—for high quality news coverage from parts of the world the private, profit-driven mainstream press often overlook. 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, this 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 consumed within the broadcast’s target country, but rather outside of it, including

by the diaspora living within the UK. The explanation is simple: diasporic groups in the UK and other Western countries want news about their homeland, their friends and families. 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.³⁶

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 separate, he argues 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.

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 called for the creation of an office of the ombudsman to ensure the highest level of quality control.³⁷ Smith-Mundt is the foundation for American public diplomacy and information policy abroad, and for the most part, remains relevant largely because of the bureaucratic hurdles it places before both domestic and international broadcasters. In reality, in the Internet age, the law fails to fulfill its mandate of prohibiting domestic propaganda. Instead, it 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 previously noted, 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*, for example, occasionally use RFE/RL as a source. The restriction on dissemination merely applies to U.S. broadcasters, not the privately operated press. Thus, it is not simply a legal problem, but also a cultural one. Many journalists consider 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 to American international broadcasting. By publicly mapping out its journalists and resources abroad, the BBG could better consolidate overlap between its numerous organizations, for instance between RFE/RL’s and the VOA’s overlapping Persian and Mandarin services.

More work needs to be done to identify precisely how the various US international broadcasters, particularly those broadcasting in foreign languages, can make

themselves more available as a resource to American 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 the robust online presence common among most of the mainstream press. This oversight in research has important policy implications as over 60 million—about 20 percent—of Americans rely upon ethnic media as their primary source of news and information.³⁸ Further research is needed to identify leaders in ethnic media, assess the quality of information provided, as well as uncover their journalistic and technological needs moving forward.

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. Regrettably, few have argued for removing the Smith-Mundt Act’s restrictions in order to facilitate 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 stems largely from the cultural and political stigma surrounding international broadcasting. The perception persists that it is government propaganda, an impression that, accurate or not, is no longer relevant in a world where information sovereignty is a thing of the past. Americans are bombarded with so-called “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 boundaries. 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

¹ Broadcasting Board of Governors, "About the Agency," 2009, <http://www.bbg.gov/about/index.html>

² Voice of America Charter, 1976, <http://author.voanews.com/english/about/VOACharter.cfm>

³ Presidential Decision Directive 68, Submitted by President Clinton to the Congress on December 30, 1998, Pursuant to Section 1601 of the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, as Contained in Public Law 105-277.

⁴ Allen W. Palmer and Edward L. Carter, "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 (2006).

⁵ Alvin Snyder, "U.S. Shouldn't Muffle Voice of America," *Knight-Ridder News Service*, April 27, 1994.

⁶ Alvin Snyder, "Part Two: Clocking Government Internet Traffic: Let the Races Begin." *Center on Public Diplomacy Blog*, February 18, 2009, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/alhurra_locates_the_arab_street/

⁷ Decision by United States District Court of the Southern District of Iowa, Central Division, *Gartner v. United States Information Agency*, October 12, 1989.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kim Andrew Elliot, "An arrangement to do wheelies on the graves of Smith and Mundt," *Kim Andrew Elliot Reporting on International Broadcasting*, April 29, 2009, <http://kimelli.nfshost.com/index.php?id=6418>

¹⁰ Alvin Snyder, *U.S. Foreign Affairs in the New Information Age: Charting a Course for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University, 1995).

¹¹ Elliot, "An arrangement to do wheelies on the graves of Smith and Mundt," 2009.

¹² Kim Andrew Elliot, "VOA domestically disseminated again." *Kim Andrew Elliot Discussing International Broadcasting*, June 18, 2008, <http://kimelli.nfshost.com/index.php?id=4147>

¹³ Snyder, "U.S. Shouldn't Muffle Voice of America," 1994.

¹⁴ Alisa Miller, "Invest in International News," *Good Magazine*, March 18, 2008.

¹⁵ Richard Perez-Pena, "As Papers Struggle, News is Cut and the Focus Turns Local." *The New York Times*, July 21, 2008.

¹⁶ Matt Armstrong, "Censoring the Voice of America," *Foreign Policy*, August 6, 2009.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Radio Free Asia. "Broadcaster of the Year in 2009." July 7, 2009, <http://www.rfa.org/english/awards/festivals-07072009145031.html>

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