The New Faces of VOA

GRAPHIC 1: VOA LOGO AND TITLE PAGE

NEXT YEAR, THE VOICE OF AMERICA CELEBRATES ITS 70TH ANNIVERSARY. AND WITH US HERE TONIGHT IS ONE OF THE BROADCAST PIONEERS WHO HELPED BUILD THE AGENCY FROM SCRATCH IN 1942, MR. WALTER ROBERTS. WE HONOR HIM TONIGHT.

GRAPHIC 2: WALTER

WALTER WAS A RESEARCH ASSISTANT AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL WHEN HE WAS FIRST RECRUITED INTO GOVERNMENT SERVICE, AND HE IS NOW THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL VOA TEAM THAT WAS THERE AT THE BEGINNING—AT THE TIME OF OUR FIRST BROADCAST TO GERMANY IN THE EARLY DAYS OF WORLD WAR II.


RECENTLY, AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR SPECIAL ENGLISH BROADCAST SERVICE, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS WALTER HAS MADE TO THE VOICE OF AMERICA, WHICH TODAY IS THE LARGEST U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTER, OPERATING IN 44 LANGUAGES AND REACHING AN ESTIMATED WEEKLY AUDIENCE OF 123 MILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD.

GRAPHIC 3: VOA LOGO

WE ARE ONE OF FIVE CIVILIAN U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS WORKING UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS, AN INDEPENDENT FEDERAL AGENCY CREATED IN THE 1990S AS A FIREWALL TO PROTECT OUR BROADCASTERS FROM ANY EFFORT BY OTHERS IN GOVERNMENT TO INTERFERE WITH OUR CONTENT.
IN ADDITION TO VOA, THE NETWORKS UNDER THE BOARD’S UMBRELLA INCLUDE RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY, HEADQUARTERED IN PRAGUE; RADIO FREE ASIA, BASED HERE IN WASHINGTON; ALHURRA TV AND RADIO SAWA, OUR ARABIC LANGUAGE NETWORKS BASED IN SPRINGFIELD VA; AND RADIO AND TV MARTI, BROADCASTING TO CUBA FROM ITS BASE IN MIAMI. WHILE THE FOCUS OF OUR CONTENT VARIES, WE ALL SUBSCRIBE TO THE SAME PRINCIPLE: GOOD JOURNALISM, ACCOMPANIED BY THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS, EMPOWERS AND ENLIGHTENS PEOPLE EVERYWHERE.

(GRAPHIC 4: WALTER’S ARTICLE)
IN 2009, WALTER WROTE AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE ORIGINS AND IMPORTANCE OF VOA. THE PIECE, WHICH APPEARED IN THE ONLINE JOURNAL, AMERICAN DIPLOMACY, REVEALED HIS SKILLS AS A STORYTELLER AND, MORE IMPORTANT, HIS DESIRE TO GET IT RIGHT. WORKING WITH COLLEAGUES AND RESEARCHERS AND LOTS OF MUSTY FILES, WALTER DISCOVERED THAT VOA’S FIRST BROADCAST WAS ON FEB 1, 1942, NOT ON FEB 24, THE DATE THE AGENCY HAD CELEBRATED FOR YEARS. WE’VE REWRITTEN OUR HISTORY AND TONIGHT, WE THANK WALTER FOR THE CORRECTION!

ALTHOUGH NEARLY 70 YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE HIS EARLY DAYS AT VOA, WALTER HAS NEVER STOPPED BEING AN ADVOCATE FOR INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND THE AGENCY HE HELPED BUILD. IN HIS RECENT ARTICLE, HE WROTE, “THE VOICE OF AMERICA IS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE A VITAL FUNCTION OF 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN DIPLOMACY.” HE WAS, AND IS, RIGHT.

(GRAPHIC 5: MULTI MEDIA)
TODAY, THE AGENCY HAS GROWN INTO A 24/7 MULTIMEDIA ENTERPRISE, DELIVERING PROGRAMS ON RADIO, TELEVISION, THE INTERNET, AND ON MOBILE DEVICES. WE’VE GOTTEN AWAY FROM THE “BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME” SCHOOL OF BROADCASTING AND NOW USE EXTENSIVE RESEARCH TO DETERMINE THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS OF AUDIENCES IN REGIONS OF THE WORLD THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THE UNITED STATES -- AND THAT WOULD BENEFIT FROM ACCURATE, CREDIBLE NEWS AND INFORMATION.
WE ARE A FULL SERVICE NEWS MEDIA OPERATION, MEANING THAT WHILE WE CERTAINLY REPORT ON THE UNITED STATES AND OUR POLITICS, OUR CULTURE AND OUR PEOPLE, WE ALSO PROVIDE OUR OVERSEAS AUDIENCES WITH NEWS ABOUT THEIR OWN COUNTRY AND REGION.

WHAT’S MORE, THANKS TO THE GROWING USE WORLD WIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA LIKE FACEBOOK AND TWITTER AND YOUTUBE, WE NO LONGER JUST PUSH NEWS OUT TO OUR AUDIENCES, WE ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM.

(GRAPHIC 6: WEEKLY USE OF SHORTWAVE)

WHEN WALTER AND HIS COLLEAGUES STARTED AT VOA, ONE OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES THEY FACED WAS THE ACQUISITION OF SHORTWAVE RADIO TRANSMISSION FACILITIES, WHICH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT DID NOT HAVE IN 1942. TODAY, SHORTWAVE LISTENERS ARE A RAPIDLY SHRINKING SLICE OF THE VOA AUDIENCE. AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THIS CHART, THE DAYS OF SHORTWAVE RADIO BROADCASTS PRODUCED OFFSHORE AND BEAMED TO INFORMATION-DEPRIVED MASSES YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE ARE WANING.

TECHNOLOGY NOW MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR ALMOST ANYONE WITH INEXPENSIVE SOFTWARE AND A COMPUTER TO BECOME AN INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTER OR PUBLISHER, TO REACH ACROSS BORDERS AND OCEANS AND INTO THE HOMES AND TELEPHONES AND MOBILE DEVICES OF MILLIONS THROUGH THE INTERNET AND OTHER DIGITAL PATHWAYS.

BECAUSE OF THESE CHANGES, THE VOICE OF AMERICA, LIKE MANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS, IS RE-EVALUATING EVERY ASPECT OF HOW WE DO BUSINESS. WE DON’T HAVE A CHOICE.

THIS PAST YEAR, VOA HAS FOCUSED ON USING THE INTERNET AND RELATED DIGITAL PLATFORMS TO EXTEND OUR REACH, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNGER AUDIENCES WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO USE FACEBOOK OR TWITTER THAN A SHORTWAVE RADIO.

(GRAPHIC 7: STEVE HERMAN)

IN JAPAN LAST MONTH, OUR CORRESPONDENT STEVE HERMAN MADE ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA.

MOMENTS AFTER THE DEADLY EARTHQUAKE STRUCK OFF NORTHWESTERN JAPAN, STEVE POSTED FIRST ON FACEBOOK:
“THERE’S BEEN A MAGNITUDE 8.8 IN NORTHERN JAPAN. EXTENSIVE TSUNAMI DESTRUCTION, BUILDINGS ON FIRE IN MANY CITIES.”

BRIEF, AND TO THE POINT. THAT WAS JUST THE START. HIS TWITTER ACCOUNT CAME ALIVE: “LOUD EXPLOSION AT FUKUSHIMA NUKE PLANT.” BETWEEN TWEETS, STEVE WAS BUSY PHOTOGRAPHING THE SCENE, SHARING THE PICTURES ON PICASA AND FACEBOOK AND CONTINUOUSLY FILING UPDATES FOR THE WEB AND RADIO. STEVE IS MULTIPLATFORM, AND THIS IS ONE OF THE NEW FACES OF VOA.

(Graphic 8: Internet Screenshot)

(Graphic 9: Russian Crowd Map)
AN EXAMPLE: VISITS TO THE RUSSIAN SERVICE WEBSITE ROSE DRAMATICALLY DURING LAST DECEMBER’S BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND ENSUING GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT.

VOA RUSSIAN POSTED EYEWITNESS REPORTS BY CITIZEN JOURNALISTS ON A SPECIAL “CROWDSOURCING MAP.” THE REPORTS, RECEIVED THROUGH EMAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES, WERE CAREFULLY SCREENED AND VERIFIED BY VOA JOURNALISTS.
IN ADDITION TO AGGREGATING COMMENTARY ON THE INTERACTIVE CROWDMAP, THE SERVICE ALSO FILED DAILY REPORTS ON TOPICS BEING DISCUSSED IN THE “TWITTERVERSE.” A DIVERSE ARRAY OF TWITTER USERS RE-TWEETED THE RUSSIAN SERVICE’S COVERAGE OF EVENTS. POSTS ON THE FACEBOOK PAGE OF ALEKSANDR GRIGORIEV, THE RUSSIAN SERVICE CORRESPONDENT COVERING THE ELECTIONS IN MINSK, WERE VIEWED OVER 25,000 TIMES. VOA CONTENT ALSO WAS CARRIED BY POPULAR BELARUSIAN WEBSITES AND BY PROMINENT RUSSIAN BLOGGERS.

(GRAPHIC 10: BLOGS)
OUR 44 LANGUAGE SERVICES NOW SHARE CONTENT THROUGH A GROWING NUMBER OF OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA SITES. WE HAVE BLOGGERS IN ENGLISH, RUSSIAN, CHINESE, FARSI, AND VIETNAMESE, AMONG OTHERS. THE ENGLISH DIVISION’S “STUDENT UNION” BLOG, FOR EXAMPLE, PROVIDES THE SHARED EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN AND FOREIGN STUDENTS AT U.S. UNIVERSITIES. WE ALSO OFFER AUDIO AND VIDEO PODCASTS, AND CONTINUE LAUNCHING NEW MOBILE WEBSITES WITH TEXT, AUDIO, VIDEO, AND PHOTOS.

(GRAPHIC 11: GO ENGLISH and CLASSROOM)
ONE OF OUR NEW ONLINE ENGLISH TEACHING TOOLS, GOENGLISH.ME, IS NOW AVAILABLE IN MANDARIN, FARSI AND RUSSIAN, AND HAS ALREADY ATTRACTED MORE THAN 65,000 REGISTERED USERS AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NON-REGISTERED VISITORS EACH MONTH. THE CLASSROOM, A NEW VOA ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM BEGAN OFFERING LESSONS ON FACEBOOK IN FEBRUARY. THOUSANDS OF USERS HAVE BEEN TAKING THE LESSONS, WHICH ARE OFFERED SEVERAL TIMES A DAY AND ALLOW STUDENTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO INTERACT IN REAL-TIME WITH TEACHERS WHO USE MATERIALS FROM VOA PROGRAMS. THESE ARE THE NEW MULTIMEDIA FACES OF VOA.

(GRAPHIC 12: WAVEBAND CHART)
BUT THE KEY TO OUR STRATEGY IS FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY. WE CONTINUE TO BROADCAST ON SHORTWAVE AND MEDIUM WAVE RADIO IN AREAS WHERE THESE DELIVERY SYSTEMS ARE POPULAR AND EFFECTIVE, SUCH AS PARTS OF AFRICA.
AND ASIA. WE ALSO SUCCESSFULLY USE LOCAL FM AFFILIATES OR DEDICATED FM TRANSMITTERS. **IN BURMA, AUDIENCE RESEARCH SHOWS A QUARTER OF THE POPULATION LISTENS TO VOA WEEKLY, ALMOST ALL OF IT ON SHORTWAVE.**

OUR HAUSA SERVICE HAS ONE OF VOA’S LARGEST SHORT WAVE RADIO AUDIENCES: 36 PERCENT OF THE HAUSA-SPEAKING POPULATION IN NIGERIA LISTENS TO VOA AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK.

AND THROUGH AN INTER-AGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE DEPARTMENT, WE RECENTLY LAUNCHED *SUDAN IN FOCUS*, A 30-MINUTE ENGLISH RADIO PROGRAM OFFERING AUDIENCES IN NEWLY INDEPENDENT SOUTHERN SUDAN ACCURATE NEWS ABOUT THEIR COUNTRY, THE REGION, AND THE CONTINENT.

WE ALSO BROADCAST NINE HOURS OF RADIO TO AUDIENCES IN THE VOLATILE PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN BORDER REGION, WHERE OUR DEEWA RADIO STRINGERS HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN THREATENED BY TALIBAN MILITANTS, AND SOME OF THE THREATS HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED BY ATTACKS. **BUT THE BROADCASTS ARE EFFECTIVE, WITH RESEARCH FROM 2010 SHOWING DEEWA WAS THE MOST POPULAR INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTER IN THE REGION, REACHING 22-PERCENT OF ADULTS EVERY WEEK.**

**(GRAPHIC 13: TV USE)** IN ADDITION TO THE 20 RADIO BROADCAST STUDIOS AT OUR WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS, VOA IS ALSO HOME TO 6 TELEVISION STUDIOS. **WHAT BEGAN AS A TV PILOT PROJECT IN 1998 NOW PRODUCES SOME 300 HOURS A WEEK OF ORGINAL TELEVISION, RANGING FROM TRADITIONAL NEWS SHOWS TO CALL-IN AND INTERVIEW FORMATS. THE RESULT: SINCE 2002, VOA’S WORLDWIDE WEEKLY TV AUDIENCE HAS GROWN TO 56 MILLION TODAY FROM JUST 10 MILLION THEN.**

**(GRAPHIC 14: PARAZIT)** OUR PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK, PNN, IS ONE OF THE TOP INTERNATIONAL TV BROADCASTERS IN IRAN, AND PNN’S WEEKLY SATIRICAL SHOW, PARAZIT, HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A CULTURAL PHENOMONON. **THE WASHINGTON POST CALLED PARAZIT, “THE DAILY SHOW” OF IRAN, AND MANY VIEWERS SEND PICTURES OF “PARAZIT PARTIES” HELD ON FRIDAY NIGHT WHEN THE SHOW GOES ON THE AIR.**
THE CO-CREATORS OF THE SHOW, KAMBIZ HOSSEINI AND SAMAN ARBABI, HAVE BEEN FEATURED ON CNN, FOX, NPR, PBS, AND WERE STUDIO GUESTS ON COMEDY CENTRAL’S THE DAILY SHOW, WITH JON STEWART.

PARAZIT’S FACEBOOK PAGE IS THE MOST POPULAR IN IRAN, WITH MORE THAN A QUARTER-MILLION FRIENDS, MORE THAN ANY OTHER FACEBOOK PAGE IN IRAN, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE LEADING OPPOSITION FIGURES.

IN ADDITION TO SATELLITE VIEWERS, ABOUT ONE MILLION FACEBOOK USERS ROUTINELY VISIT THE SITE EACH TIME A NEW PARAZIT SEGMENT IS POSTED. PNN ALSO RECENTLY LAUNCHED A NEW 30-MINUTE TV NEWS ANALYSIS PROGRAM CALLED OFOGH (HORIZON) AND, AT LAST MONTH’S NOROUZ HOLIDAY, SUCCESSFULLY HOSTED AND TELEvised A FARSI-LANGUAGE PLAY AT OUR HEADQUARTERS THAT WAS BANNED IN IRAN. THESE ARE SOME OF THE NEW FACES OF VOA.

(Graphic 15: AFGHAN AND PAK TV)

IN AFGHANISTAN, VOA’S TV ASHNA DOMINATES URBAN MARKETS, WHERE ALMOST HALF OF ALL ADULTS WATCH THE NIGHTLY NEWSCAST AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK. LATE LAST YEAR, WE LAUNCHED ANOTHER 30-MINUTE YOUTH-ORIENTED TV SHOW TO AFGHANISTAN CALLED KARWAN, OR CARAVAN IN ENGLISH.

IN 2010, VOA AND EXPRESS 24/7, A 24-HOUR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CABLE NEWS CHANNEL IN PAKISTAN, LAUNCHED A JOINT TV PROGRAM, WHICH FOCUSES ON KEY ISSUES IN THE OFTEN FRACTIOUS BUT CRITICALLY IMPORTANT U.S.-PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP. OUR LONG-RUNNING “BEYOND THE HEADLINES” NIGHTLY TELEVISION SHOW, BROADCAST IN URDU, IS SEEN ON THE NATION’S LARGEST CABLE OUTLET, GEO TV.

BOTH IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN, OUR MISSION COULDN’T BE MORE CLEAR: COUNTER THE MULLAH RADIOS, THE VIRULENT ANTI-AMERICANISM AND, IN SOME CASES, THE UNBELIEVABLY SENSATIONALIST COMMERCIAL MEDIA WITH REPORTING THAT IS CREDIBLE, ACCURATE AND FAIR.

(Graphic 16: TIBETAN)
VOA ITSELF IS OFTEN A VENUE FOR NEWS EVENTS. LAST MONTH, VOA’S TIBETAN SERVICE HOSTED A TELEVISED DEBATE AT THE NEWSEUM FEATURING THE THREE CANDIDATES VYING TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER OF THE TIBETAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE. THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE DEBATE WAS BROADCAST ON SATELLITE TO CHINA AND PUT ON THE SERVICE’S WEBSITE.

IN THE COMING YEAR, VOA IS COMMITTED TO BUILDING ON OUR EFFORTS TO INCREASE OUR AUDIENCE REACH IN CRITICAL PARTS OF THE WORLD THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PLATFORMS THAT BRING TOGETHER MULTIPLE MEDIUMS.

(GRAPHIC 17: CITIZEN GLOBAL)

THIS MONTH, VOA AND CITIZENGLOBAL, AN INNOVATIVE MULTIMEDIA CROWDSOURCING PLATFORM, ARE LAUNCHING A JOINT WEBSITE AIMED AT GIVING VOICE TO THE VICTIMS OF THE HORRIFIC CRISIS IN CONGO, WHERE RAPE HAS BECOME THE WEAPON OF CHOICE IN THE CONTINUING WAR THERE. THE SITE WILL SHOWCASE VOA REPORTING, AND ALLOW VICTIMS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES AND PERSPECTIVES. VOA WILL PROVIDE THE JOURNALISM PART OF THE STORY - INTERVIEWING RAPE VICTIMS, THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES IN THE REMOTE VILLAGES OF EASTERN CONGO, AND TALKING WITH SOLDIERS, POLICY EXPERTS AND OTHERS.

THE CITIZEN GLOBAL PLATFORM WITH ITS CUTTING EDGE CROWDSOURCING CAPABILITY WILL ENABLE USERS TO UPLOAD AND WATCH VIDEO, OFFER COMMENTS ON THE SITE AND CREATE A GLOBAL DIALOGUE ABOUT THE SUBJECT. IT IS ANOTHER OF THE NEW FACES OF VOA.

(GRAPHIC 18: VOA LOGO)

AS I SAID EARLIER, WE STRIVE TO REACH AUDIENCES BY WHATEVER MEDIUM THEY PREFER—RADIO, TELEVISION, INTERNET AND, INCREASINGLY, SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. SINCE I CAME TO VOA FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN 2006, I HAVE THOUGHT OFTEN ABOUT HOW WE CAN BETTER REACH OUR AUDIENCES, AND WHAT CHANGES WE NEED TO MAKE TO STAY RELEVANT AND USEFUL. BUT WHAT I, AND THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE ME AND WILL COME AFTER ME, WON’T CHANGE ARE THE VALUES BEHIND OUR BROADCASTS, PODCASTS, AND WEBCASTS.
THOSE VALUES ARE THE SAME BEDROCK PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM THAT WALTER AND HIS COLLEAGUES BROUGHT TO THE FIRST VOA BROADCAST IN 1942.

SINCE THOSE DAYS, WE HAVE BEEN IN COMPETITION WITH THOSE WHO USE MEDIA TO MISLEAD AND MANIPULATE, TO PROMOTE AGENDAS OF NARROW SELF-INTEREST, EVEN HATE. WALTER ROBERTS AND OTHERS WHO FOLLOWED HIM KNEW THAT WELL. TODAY WE CONTINUE TO FACE CHALLENGES BY THOSE WHO TRY TO PREVENT THE FREE-FLOW OF INFORMATION.

(Graphic 19: Proxy Screenshot)
FROM THE COLD WAR DAYS OF FIGHTING SOVIET EFFORTS TO JAM SHORTWAVE BROADCASTS TO THOSE BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN, TO THE LATEST MANIFESTATION OF THAT JAMMING -- INTERNET CENSORSHIP -- VOA HAS A LONG AND OFTEN SUCCESSFUL HISTORY OF OVERCOMING, OF CIRCUMVENTING, THE CENSORS. CONSIDER CHINA, A MASTER AT SHORTWAVE JAMMING AND, IN MORE RECENT YEARS, EXPERT IN THE ART OF BLOCKING AND FILTERING THE INTERNET. FOR US AND OUR ENGINEERING COLLEAGUES AT THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING BUREAU, THIS HAS BECOME A CONSTANT GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE.

THROUGH THE USE OF PROXY SERVERS AND OTHER DEVICES, WE ENABLE CHINESE INTERNET USERS TO GET AROUND THE “GREAT FIREWALL” AND READ, SEE AND HEAR OUR CONTENT ONLINE AND, IN YEARS TO COME, THROUGH MOBILE DEVICES. THE NUMBERS AREN’T GREAT – THERE WERE JUST OVER 1-MILLION VISITS TO THE VOA MANDARIN SERVICE WEBSITE IN MARCH. PROXY SERVERS BROUGHT IN AN ADDITIONAL 920-THOUSAND VISITS FROM CHINA. BUT THE NUMBERS ARE GROWING, AS IS OUR CONFIDENCE IN OUR ABILITY TO STAY A STEP, IF NOT TWO, AHEAD OF THE CENSORS. WE ARE TAKING SIMILAR MEASURES IN IRAN AND, AS OTHER AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES SEEK TO BLOCK THEIR PEOPLE’S ACCESS TO DIGITAL MEDIA, SHARPENING OUR ABILITY EVERYWHERE TO KEEP INFORMATION FLOWING FREELY. STAYING STATE-OF-THE-ART IN TECHNOLOGY IS IMPORTANT, BUT THERE ARE OTHER, MORE PROSAIC AND PRACTICAL STEPS THAT WE AS BROADCASTERS AND, IN SOME CASES, GOVERNMENTS CAN TAKE
TO PROMOTE BETTER, MORE RESPONSIBLE USE OF BOTH OLD AND NEW MEDIA.

(GRAPHIC 20: TRAINING)
ONE SUCH STEP IS SIMPLE: MORE RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TRAINING. JOURNALISTS ACROSS THE WORLD OFTEN WANT TO BE BETTER, TO BE MORE PROFESSIONAL. BUT A LACK OF ESTABLISHED TRADITIONS, A SHORTAGE OF FORMAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES, AND A SIMPLE LACK OF RESOURCES OFTEN STAND IN THEIR WAY.

FOR THIS REASON, VOA IS WORKING IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES TO ORGANIZE TRAINING WORKSHOPS THAT PROMOTE RESPONSIBILITY IN MEDIA. OUR STAFFS CAN DO THIS WELL. WE ARE WORKING JOURNALISTS OURSELVES, AND WE CAN TRAIN OTHERS IN THE CRAFT OF JOURNALISM AS WELL AS IN A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

(GRAPHIC 21: LOGO)
THERE IS ANOTHER AREA OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION THAT I FIRMLY ENDORSE – IMPROVING THE MEDIA REGULATORY CLIMATE. IT IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH TO TRAIN JOURNALISTS ON HOW TO BEST SERVE THE PUBLIC.

THEY ALSO NEED A LEGAL ENVIRONMENT THAT PROVIDES A DEGREE OF PROTECTION FOR JOURNALISTS, THAT ALLOWS TRUTH AS A DEFENSE IN CIVIL OR CRIMINAL DEFAMATION PROSECUTIONS, WHICH ALL TOO OFTEN EMPLOY COURTS TO DO WHAT CENSORS COULD NOT—PUT JOURNALISTS BEHIND BARS OR OUT OF BUSINESS.

JUST LAST MONTH, ONE OF OUR CONTRACT JOURNALISTS IN ANGOLA WAS JAILED FOR ONE YEAR BECAUSE OF HIS REPORTING FOR VOA ON ALLEGATIONS OF IMPROPER CONDUCT BY A DISTRICT JUDGE.

THERE IS ANOTHER AREA IN WHICH I BELIEVE WE CAN PROMOTE RESPONSIBILITY. AND THAT IS IN RIGIDLY ENFORCING THE LINE THAT DIVIDES GOVERNMENT-FINANCED EFFORTS TO INFORM PEOPLE FROM GOVERNMENT-FINANCED ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE AND EVEN MISLEAD A POPULATION WITHOUT REVEALING THAT GOVERNMENT’S INVOLVEMENT OR MOTIVES.

THE VOICE OF AMERICA AND ITS SISTER NETWORKS DO NOT DO PROPAGANDA. AND NEITHER DO OTHER INTERNATIONAL
BROADCASTERS WHO RECOGNIZE THAT CREDIBILITY WITH AN AUDIENCE IS THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL THEY HAVE, THAT REPORTING NEWS ACCURATELY AND FAIRLY AND COMPLETELY IN ORDER TO HELP PEOPLE REACH THEIR OWN DECISIONS IS AN END, NOT A MEANS.

IF WE DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN HONEST, FAIR REPORTING AND ANALYSIS AND “INFLUENCE OPERATIONS” THAT ARE DISGUISED AS JOURNALISM, WE SHOW THE WORLD WHAT IT MEANS TO BE RESPONSIBLE. WE ALSO GIVE THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, WHO KNOW PROPAGANDA WHEN THEY SEE IT, A CLEAR CHOICE OF WHOM TO BELIEVE, AND WHOM TO IGNORE OR REJECT.

WHEN WALTER ROBERTS AND HIS COLLEAGUES PUT THE VOICE OF AMERICA TOGETHER IN EARLY 1942, THEY HAD A CHOICE. THEY COULD SEEK TO ANSWER THE PROPAGANDA MACHINES OF NAZI GERMANY AND IMPERIAL JAPAN WITH PROPAGANDA—TODAY WE MIGHT CALL IT STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS—OF THEIR OWN. AND IN THOSE DARK DAYS OF WORLD WAR 2, WHEN THE UNITED STATES WAS LOSING THE WAR IN EUROPE AND LOSING THE WAR IN ASIA, THE TEMPTATION TO FIGHT LIES WITH SOMETHING SHORT OF THE WHOLE TRUTH WAS STRONG. BUT THEY CHOSE A DIFFERENT PATH.

IN THE FIRST VOA BROADCAST TO GERMANY, ANNOUNCER WILLIAM HARLAN HALE OPENED BY TELLING HIS AUDIENCE, “DIE NACHRICHTEN MOEGEN GUT FEUR UNS SEIN, ODER SCHLECT. WIR SAGEN IHNEN DIE WAHRHEIT.”

THE NEWS MAY BE GOOD, HE SAID, THE NEWS MAY BE BAD. WE SHALL TELL YOU THE TRUTH. IN EACH OF THE YEARS SINCE, WE HAVE SOUGHT TO DO JUST THAT. THANK YOU, WALTER. THANK YOU ALL.