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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Inspection

Voice of America
News Bureau
London, United Kingdom

Report Number ISP-IB-09-46, July 2009

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PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

PURPOSE

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instance of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on-site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

Office of Inspector General

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel
Acting Inspector General

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KEY JUDGMENTS

- The Voice of America (VOA) London News Bureau is doing an excellent job with a reduced staff. Its modern studio and motivated staff have the capability to expand their efforts, without additional personnel, to make full use of the platform provided by the bureau to other interested VOA language services.
- Some of the VOA London News Bureau's security procedures and standards could be improved.

The inspection took place in Washington, D.C., between January 12 and 26, 2009, and in London, United Kingdom, between February 3 and 4, 2009. (b) (6)
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CONTEXT

The VOA London News Bureau is one of 14 VOA news bureaus overseas. Previously, the London bureau was deemed a “super” bureau with two news editors and a correspondent having a large multi-continent area of operations including Europe, Russia, Africa, and the Middle East. It also had a supervisory role over a number of other VOA news bureaus. Over time, due to an increasingly tight fiscal situation faced by VOA Washington, the London bureau downsized the editing function; the two editors relocated to Washington and the correspondent, rather than one of the editors, became the bureau chief. (It is not the intent of this OIG report to review that determination by VOA and the BBG). The bureau moved to its current Fleet Street location in 2002.

The correspondent still covers a wide area of operations for VOA. The technical staff also provide support to other VOA overseas bureaus. With the installation of a studio, the London bureau is developing a role of studio host to other VOA language services who wish to take advantage of London’s multilingual media market, its situation as a world transportation cross roads, and its large resident diasporas to interview in person or remotely persons of interest.

The London bureau’s budget totaled \$781,231 in FY 2008. The staff includes one U.S. direct-hire (the correspondent, who is also the bureau chief), three broadcast technicians, and a program assistant. Other than the correspondent, all are locally employed (LE) staff. In addition, the journalistic capabilities of the bureau are supplemented by several “stringers” from a variety of locations and countries, who submit reports and actual audio or video clips. These individuals are not employees; rather, they are paid at set rates depending on the format and content for news items used.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

Since her arrival in late 2006, the bureau chief balances her dual responsibilities as bureau chief and correspondent well. When she is called out of country, as she was to the Middle East during the inspection, she arranges for a contract employee or a stringer to fill in for the journalistic work. She is not staffed under Embassy London Chief of Mission authority, unlike her LE staff, and has a relationship with Embassy London that is typical of other media representatives. Because at least two LE staff have embassy badges and can access the embassy with camera gear, Embassy London's public affairs section invites them to opportunities to interview official visitors.

During consultations in Washington, the bureau chief took a proactive approach and advised the various VOA language services of the London bureau's studio and video journalism capabilities hoping to attract more usage of the bureau. The studio is used on average about five times a week and could expand beyond the current usage without an increase in staff. The bureau chief has adjusted the schedules of the bureau's broadcast technicians to accommodate other VOA language services.

Morale is good under the bureau chief's leadership, but staff is keen to expand their efforts to include greater involvement in news gathering and content creation. The ability to expand is constrained, in part, by the bureau's budget, set by VOA Washington, rather than by opportunities missed by the bureau chief.

The priorities of the VOA London News Bureau, which are reactive and related to the global news cycle, are established in close consultation with the VOA's Chief of Correspondents, VOA Central News, and the VOA Director.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

SUPPORT TO OTHER VOA LANGUAGE SERVICES

The London bureau provides regular support to the VOA Persian News Network. Indeed, most requests for support come from the VOA Persian News Network. This support is done in coordination with the VOA Persian News Network in Washington and a VOA Persian News Network stringer in London, and is primarily for television programs. London draws upon its sizeable Iranian diaspora, as well as London-based media specifically directed at Iran. The bureau also gets requests for support from the VOA Afghanistan Service and from the VOA Africa Television (English and French). As a former colonial power with a large presence in Africa, the United Kingdom, and London in particular, remains a meeting place for notables from Africa at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or for purely unofficial agendas. More rarely, there are requests for support from the VOA Tibetan service. The VOA Turkish, Armenian, and Albanian services also received support.

The London bureau has the capacity and capability for other VOA language services to use its studio to book a remote guest. The London bureau studio can handle, without additional staff, up to five additional bookings a week over the current scheduling, depending on the timing of each booking. There is also scope to do video journalism pieces for other VOA language services, but the nature of that work outside of the bureau's office would require additional staff without jeopardizing other priorities. During its inspection of VOA Central News, the OIG team noted that while the BBG wanted "VOA to move into a multimedia world at a rapid pace, the realities of bureaucratic structure and funding have produced a disjointed constellation of autonomous, but not self-sufficient, operations trying to achieve this massive change."¹

Recommendation 1: Voice of America should take additional steps to apprise its various language services of the studio platform that is available in London to supplement their programs and advise them regarding how interested language services can schedule those facilities. (Action: VOA)

¹ Inspection of Voice of America Central News, Report Number ISP-IB-08-06, October 2007, page 25.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The three broadcast technicians at the London bureau consider the smooth running of the studio operations to be their primary function. This includes one large modern television studio, one smaller television studio, one small radio studio, and a remote controlled camera on the roof of the bureau's building where it leases one floor. This also includes the facilities for editing, which the technicians do themselves, or make available for use by stringers. A secondary focus is the technical support of other overseas VOA bureaus. Due to budget reductions which limit travel funds, the technicians respond to crises at other VOA news bureaus primarily with remote consultation and troubleshooting. Although the technicians make some trips, they would prefer to make regular visits to other VOA news bureaus for consultation, maintenance, and training staff in radio and television editing.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The London bureau, consistent with VOA policy, attempts to incur the minimum International Cooperative Administration Support Services (ICASS) bill possible for its four LE staff. ICASS bills are e-mailed to them by the embassy financial management office, and are then sent to VOA Washington. VOA Washington signs the ICASS bill after reviewing it and sends it back to the London bureau and to Embassy London. The bureau chief has a \$100,000 contracting warrant that is current.

The LE staff program assistant, with previous reporting experience, functions as the office manager, and has been with the London News Bureau since 1985. She interacts with VOA Washington and with the VOA Paris finance center office for financial work. She is also the alternate certifying officer when Paris cannot perform that function. The London bureau does not have petty cash. Both the bureau chief and the program assistant each have purchase cards with appropriate limits. Purchases over \$500 require approval by VOA Washington. The use of petty cash, with a subcashier and a cash advance is avoided by taking in receipts (for example for the use of taxi cabs) and having reimbursement checks processed from the Department's Charleston Global Financial Services center or by electronic funds transfers (EFT) to the bank account of the person involved. Almost all staff is paid by EFT, including freelancers and stringers. There are a couple of stringers (in Cyprus and Switzerland) who get paper checks because of technical problems. The use of petty cash would not be necessary if all expenses normally paid out of petty cash could be charged to a purchase card with an accountability audit trail.

Recommendation 2: The Voice of America London News Bureau, in coordination with Voice of America, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and Embassy London, should establish a petty cash advance and a subcashier. (Action: VOA London, in coordination with VOA, BBG, and Embassy London)

The London bureau gross operating expense totals were \$781,231 in FY 2008 for local salaries, rents, utilities, taxes, and service charges. The bureau was challenged when exchange rates moved unfavorably against the U.S. dollar. The VOA office in Paris provides a monthly spreadsheet showing the rate at which the bureau is spending its budget allotments. The VOA office in Paris performs the role of certifier for the London bureau. When the bureau chief is out of country, paperwork is sent to

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The London bureau, located on the sixth floor of a commercial building, has shatter-resistant window film installed on its exterior windows. Although interior office partitions are made of tempered glass, the OIG team informally recommended that those interior glass partitions have shatter-resistant window film installed on them based on the standard in 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook-6 H-112.4p.

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent agency. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the inspected unit's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

Seven persons connected with the VOA London News Bureau have individual access privileges. The landlord has a system in place to provide a record of who has accessed the facility afterhours, but it is not utilized.

Informal Recommendation 1: The Voice of America London News Bureau should arrange for its landlord to provide a readout of afterhours access to its offices tied to the personal codes of staff with access privileges.

The London bureau's interior office space makes much use of tempered glass room dividers. These panels have not had shatter-resistant window film installed.

Informal Recommendation 2: The Voice of America London News Bureau should have shatter-resistant window film installed on the interior glass panels in the office space.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIAL

Name	Arrival Date	
Bureau Chief	Sonia Pace James	09/2006

ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
Department	Department of State
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
LE	Locally employed
OIG	Office of Inspector General
VOA	Voice of America

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and resources hurts everyone.

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