



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AND THE BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

ISP-IB-13-26

Office of Inspections

May 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: IBB – Richard M. Lobo

FROM: OIG – Harold W. Geisel 

SUBJECT: Review of Broadcasting Board of Governors' Operations in Baghdad, Iraq

Executive Summary

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) found no serious management issues at the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) grantee's news bureau of Radio Free Iraq (RFI) or the Middle East Broadcast Network (MBN) grantee operations in Baghdad. Employees at both offices were troubled, however, by uncertainty over budgets, salaries, and a possible merger of operations. RFI employees were most concerned with the rumored closure of their bureau, and MBN employees were vocal about the need for new office space, an unclear budget, and some gaps in communication with officials at MBN headquarters. The broadcasting news bureaus are to a large degree implementing many of the goals of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) Strategic Plan 2012-2016, *Impact through Innovation*. The staff did not express any security concerns.

Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

In connection with the OIG inspection of Embassy Baghdad, an inspector reviewed BBG operations in Iraq, focusing on interviews with RFI and MBN news staff. The RFI bureau chief was not in Iraq during the inspection, but this memorandum incorporates information from email communication with him. The inspector also exchanged email communication with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and MBN senior staff. The survey phase of the inspection took place in Washington, DC, between January 24 and 30, 2013, and the on-site inspection in Baghdad, Iraq, between February 2 and March 10, 2013.

Issues regarding Merger of the Broadcasting Entities-RFI and MBN

BBG identified the proposed merger of RFI and MBN and security at both bureau sites as the main issues for the inspection. The employees of the bureaus had heard rumors about such a pending merger but said they had no concrete information about a timeline or other details, such as those in BBG's FY 2013 Budget Request. Interviews with the staff also revealed that none had heard anything specific regarding a reduction of RFI or MBN positions. The threat of reductions in force may adversely affect morale and encourage some employees to seek employment elsewhere. A generally accepted management principle is to keep employees fully informed of changes that will impact operations. At the time of the inspection, given the uncertainties with the passage of BBG's FY 2013 budget in Congress, it is possible that the senior staff at RFE/RL, MBN, and BBG could not share any information with the news bureau personnel. BBG senior managers plan to work with RFE/RL and MBN to develop a strategic merger plan based on the budget request. BBG will also ask RFE/RL and MBN to consult with affected employees earlier in the budget process, providing clear information on the possible outcomes should Congress support the merger.

Informal Recommendation 1: The Broadcasting Board of Governors should direct Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Middle East Broadcast Network to implement a strategic merger plan based on its FY 2013 Budget Request, with details on budgets, staffing, and milestones and distribute this plan to affected employees in English and Arabic.

Middle East Broadcast Network Issues

The main concern at MBN was the inadequacy of the bureau space. The basement space is physically unattractive, susceptible to flooding, and lacking both a room for cameramen and a conference room, so that morning strategy meetings are held standing up in the foyer. MBN management at headquarters has been exploring bureau relocation options for about 2 years.

The inspector put MBN management in touch with personnel in Embassy Baghdad about the possibility of having the news bureau within the international zone. The inspector encourages MBN management to continue exploring these relocation options for a merged MBN-RFI bureau.

The MBN staff brought to the attention of the inspector two important issues: better communication with MBN headquarters personnel and long-term salary. MBN senior officials at headquarters are aware of these issues and are addressing them accordingly.

Implementing the Broadcasting Board of Governors' Strategic Plan 2012-2016

The RFI and MBN news bureaus are implementing several goals of BBG's 5-year strategic plan although they are unfamiliar with the details of the plan. For example, all the stations are active in media training, which supports goal #11, *Spur Development through Targeted Media Initiatives and Training*. RFI trains Iraqi journalists in multimedia reporting in collaboration with the Institute of War and Peace, and Alhurra TV has trained journalism students at Baghdad University and provided them hands-on internships in the bureau. MBN has

trained women political candidates on using the media in a joint project with a nongovernmental organization in Erbil.

Alhurra TV's programs geared to women and Radio Sawa's youth-oriented music format fulfill many aspects of goal #3, *Seize Targeted Growth Opportunities*. RFI has the Youth Mesopotamia and Open Windows programs styled for youth and women and cites its dialogues on democracy and combating extremism. These programs also support goal #4, *Prioritize Support for Democracy and Countering Pockets of Extremism*.

Security Issues

The chiefs of RFI and MBN are satisfied with the security profiles of their offices, which are located in secure compounds with professional armed guards. The embassy regional security officer does not engage with RFI and MBN but is available for advice about the physical security of their locations.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter further, or your staff may contact Robert Peterson, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections, by email at [\(b\)\(2\)\(b\)\(6\)@state.gov](mailto:(b)(2)(b)(6)@state.gov) or by telephone on 202-663-[\(b\)\(2\)\(b\)\(6\)](tel:(b)(2)(b)(6))

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