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Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives

July 2003

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives

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GAO-03-772

July 2003

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-03-772, a report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Prompted by a desire to reverse declining audience trends and to support the war on terrorism, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the agency responsible for U.S. international broadcasting, began developing its new strategic approach to international broadcasting in July 2001. This approach emphasizes the need to reach mass audiences by applying modern broadcast techniques and strategically allocating resources to focus on high-priority markets. GAO was asked to examine (1) whether recent program initiatives have adhered to the Board's new strategic approach to broadcasting, (2) how the approach's effectiveness will be assessed, and (3) what critical challenges the Board faces in executing its strategy and how these challenges will be addressed.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to the BBG on (1) revising its strategic plan to include measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames; (2) including audience size and other key effectiveness measures as program objectives in the strategic plan; (3) revising its annual performance plan to track the Board's revised strategic plan; and (4) revising the strategic plan to include a clear vision of the Board's intended scope of operations. The Board stated that it largely concurred with our report recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-772

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

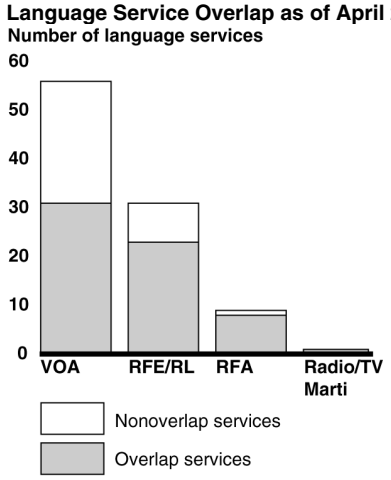
What GAO Found

Consistent with its new plan to dramatically increase the size of U.S. international broadcasting listening and viewing audiences in markets of U.S. strategic interest, the Broadcasting Board of Governors has launched several new projects, including Radio Sawa in the Middle East, Radio Farda in Iran, and the Afghanistan Radio Network. These projects adhere to the Board's core strategy of identifying a target audience and tailoring each broadcast product to market circumstances and audience needs.

The Board's plan lacks measurable program objectives designed to gauge the success of its new approach to broadcasting, detailed implementation strategies, resource needs, and project time frames. A number of key effectiveness measures could provide a starting point for developing measurable program objectives and related performance goals and indicators under the Board's annual performance plan. These measures include audience size in specific markets, audience awareness, broadcaster credibility, and whether the Voice of America (VOA) effectively presents information about U.S. thought, institutions, and policies to target audiences.

The Board has identified a number of market and internal challenges—such as technological innovation and better coordination of its seven separate broadcast entities—that must be addressed to make U.S. international broadcasting more competitive. It has also developed a number of solutions to address these challenges. However, the Board has not addressed how many language services it can carry effectively (with the number rising nearly 20 percent over the past 10 years) and what level of overlap and duplication in VOA and surrogate broadcast services would be appropriate under its new approach to broadcasting. Resolving these questions will have significant resource implications for the Board and its ability to reach larger audiences in high-priority markets.

Language Service Overlap as of April 2003



Language Service Overlap

- 31 of Voice of America's (VOA) 56 services overlap with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), and Radio/TV Marti.
- 23 of RFE/RL's 31 services overlap with VOA.
- 8 of RFA's 9 services overlap with VOA.
- Radio/TV Marti's Spanish service overlaps with VOA's Spanish service.

Source: GAO analysis.

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Abbreviations

ARN	Afghanistan Radio Network
BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
PART	Program Assessment Rating Tool
VOA	Voice of America

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Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

July 15, 2003

The Honorable Henry J. Hyde
Chairman
The Honorable Tom Lantos
Ranking Minority Member
International Relations Committee
House of Representatives

Millions of foreign listeners and viewers turn each week to U.S. international broadcasting to obtain news and information about the United States and the world. However, the United States' share in several broadcast markets has been declining or static for decades due to increasing competition and an outdated approach to broadcasting. Prompted by a desire to reverse this trend and a sense of urgency created by the war on terrorism, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG or the "Board"),[1] the agency responsible for nonmilitary U.S. international broadcasting programs, initiated a new strategic approach to international broadcasting in July 2001. The new strategy emphasizes the need to reach large audiences by applying modern broadcast techniques and strategically allocating resources to focus on high-priority broadcast markets, such as the Middle East.

The BBG and the Department of State share an annual budget of about $1 billion for public diplomacy activities designed to inform, engage, and influence foreign audiences. The BBG manages and oversees the Voice of America (VOA), WorldNet Television and Film Service, Radio/TV Marti, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio Sawa, and Radio Farda (collectively referred to as the broadcast entities). This report focuses on the BBG's public diplomacy efforts. A planned follow-on report will assess the Department of State's public diplomacy efforts.

[1]Congress created the BBG when it passed the United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (title III of P.L. 103-236), which sought to reorganize and consolidate U.S. international broadcasting efforts in light of the end of the Cold War and administrative efforts to meet deficit reduction targets. The Board is composed of nine voting members. Eight members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate for 3-year terms. The ninth member of the Board is the Secretary of State. Under the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-277), the BBG was removed from the U.S. Information Agency and established as an independent entity.

As agreed with your staff, this report examines (1) whether recent program initiatives have adhered to the Board's new strategic approach to broadcasting, (2) how the approach's effectiveness will be assessed, and (3) what critical challenges the Board faces in executing its strategy and how these challenges will be addressed.

To accomplish our objectives, we met with individual Board members and senior managers from each broadcast entity (including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty officials in Prague) to discuss a range of management issues including the Board's new 5-year strategic plan (titled "Marrying the Mission to the Market" and issued in December 2002), which defines the Board's new approach to broadcasting. We met with foreign ministry officials in London and Berlin and broadcasting officials from the British Broadcasting Corporation in London and Deutsche Welle in Cologne and Berlin to compare their respective approaches to public diplomacy and international broadcasting with the Board's activities. We also met with several private sector audience research firms to discuss a range of performance management and measurement issues. Finally, we administered a survey to 34 senior program managers across all 7 BBG broadcast entities to obtain their views on strategic planning, current operations, program challenges, and various program options.

Results in Brief

Consistent with its new strategic approach to broadcasting, the Board has initiated several new programs focusing on attracting larger audiences in priority markets and supporting the war on terrorism. Launched in March 2002, Radio Sawa in the Middle East replaced VOA's Arabic-language service and represents the Board's first attempt to implement the new tailored approach to broadcasting. Based on extensive research of the target audience, Radio Sawa incorporates brief news bulletins in a popular music format aimed at young listeners. A new initiative in Afghanistan called the Afghanistan Radio Network and a language service to Iran called Radio Farda also have adhered to the Board's new broadcasting approach and support the Board's efforts in the war on terrorism. Estimated start-up and recurring costs for these three projects through fiscal year 2003 total about $116 million. As funds become available, the Board intends to launch other high-priority projects using its new broadcasting approach, such as an Arabic language television network in the Middle East.

While the Board's new approach to broadcasting is based on the need to reach large audiences in priority markets, there is not a single long-term strategic goal or related program objective to gauge the Board's success in

increasing audience size. Further, the strategic goals that are included in the plan (for example, employing modern broadcast techniques, assuring broadcaster credibility, and telling America's story) are not supported by measurable program objectives and do not provide a basis for assessing the Board's performance in these key areas. While we recognize that measuring impact is complex, we identified a number of key effectiveness measures that could form a starting point for creating measurable program objectives that support the full range of the Board's strategic goals. These measures include audience size in specific markets; audience awareness of BBG broadcasting; the credibility of U.S. language service broadcasts; and whether VOA language services effectively present information about U.S. thought, institutions, and policies to target audiences.

The Board's key challenge in executing its strategy is how to generate large audiences while dealing with a number of market, organizational, and resource issues. The Board identified several shortcomings in U.S. market competitiveness including outdated programs and delivery systems. It plans to overcome these problems by promoting, among other things, new formats and technologies. Topping the list of organizational challenges is the disparate structure of the agency, which consists of seven separate broadcast entities and a mix of federal agency and grantee organizations that must be collectively managed by a part-time Board of Governors. To overcome this challenge, the Board proposes treating the broadcast services of the separate entities as a "single system" under the Board's direct control and ongoing oversight. While the Board's solutions to many of its challenges may suffice, our analysis revealed that a number of other program options could be considered in the future if the Board's efforts falter or prove ineffective. One option would be to further consolidate all entities into one organization to streamline the management structure, simplify budget and programming decisions, and reduce duplicative staff and functions. Finally, the Board has concluded that the agency's resources are currently spread across too many language services. We found strong support among BBG managers for cutting the number of language services to focus resources on a limited number of priority markets. However, the Board has not established a strategic vision for how many languages should be pursued and what level of overlap and duplication among its many entities is appropriate.

This report makes several recommendations to the Board to help improve agency operations and measurement of program performance. The Board provided written comments on a draft of this report and largely concurred with our report recommendations.

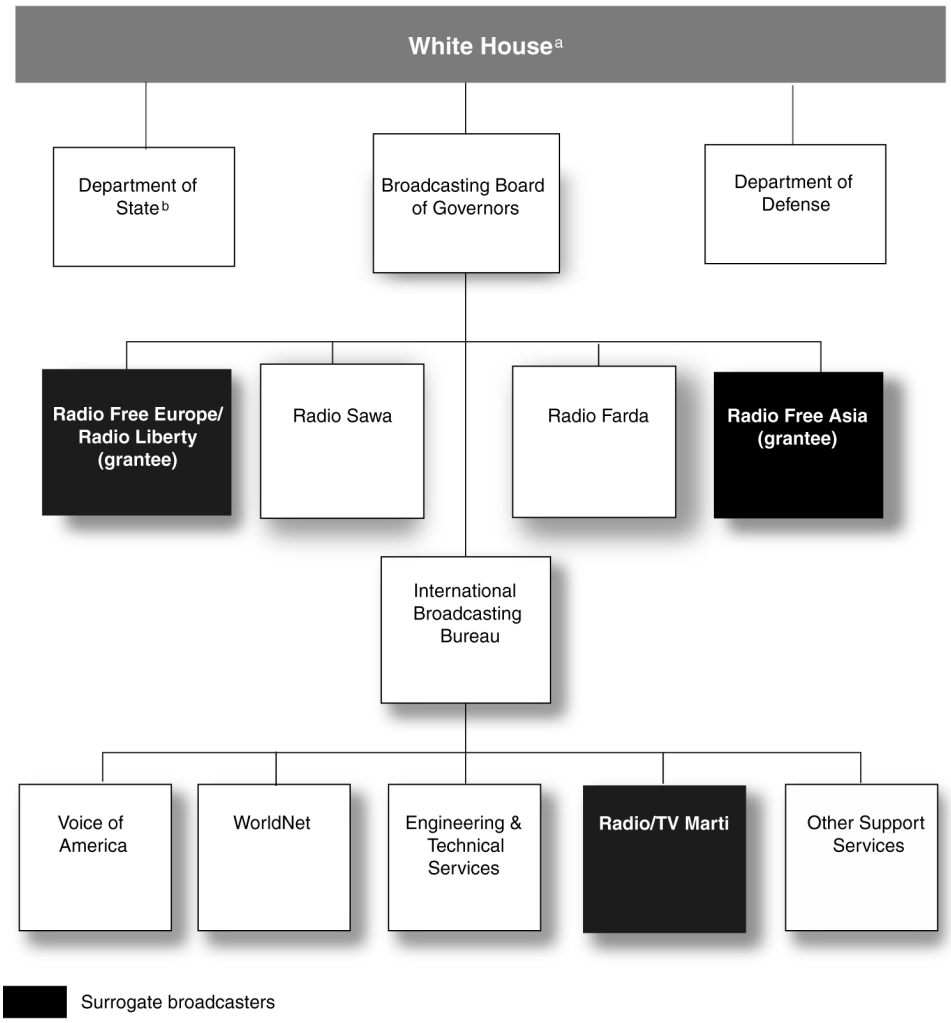
Background

U.S. international broadcasting efforts support the three key objectives of U.S. public diplomacy, which are to engage, inform, and influence overseas audiences. As a news organization, the BBG must maintain its journalistic independence while also serving U.S. strategic interests as a member of the public diplomacy apparatus. To fulfill this latter role, the BBG seeks input from the Department of State and the larger public diplomacy community in formulating its broadcast plans and making annual decisions on the deletion and addition of language services. The Secretary of State serves as a member of the Board, further strengthening coordination efforts. Within the BBG, VOA, Radio/TV Marti, and WorldNet Television, are organized as federal entities, while Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia operate as independent, nonprofit corporations and are funded by Board grants. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and Radio/TV Marti function as "surrogate" broadcasters where a local free press does not exist. Congress created the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB)[2] in 1994 in an effort to streamline and consolidate certain broadcast operations.

Figure 1 illustrates the Board's placement in the U.S. public diplomacy hierarchy and its current organizational structure.

[2]The IBB currently provides transmission services to all U.S. broadcast operations. It also provides management oversight and support services such as audience research and marketing to VOA, WorldNet Television, and Radio/TV Marti.

Figure 1: U.S. Public Diplomacy Community



Source: GAO analysis.

[a]Relevant White House Offices include the National Security Council and the Office of Global Communications.

[b]While not considered a major public diplomacy player, USAID activities contribute to U.S. public relations and media development efforts.

Each U.S. broadcast entity is organized around a collection of language services that produce program content. In some instances, both VOA and a surrogate broadcaster run "overlapping" services due to the different missions pursued by VOA and the surrogates. For example, both VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty have their own Russian language service.

The BBG currently has a collection of 97 language services—with a 55 percent overlap between VOA and the surrogates broadcasting in the same language.

The Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting

Each broadcast entity has its own legislated mandate. VOA's mandate is to (1) serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive source of news; (2) represent America, not any single segment of American society, and therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions; and (3) present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively and also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.[3] In contrast, the role of the surrogate broadcasters (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and Radio/TV Marti) is to temporarily replace the local media of countries where a free and open press does not exist. WorldNet Television and Film Service provides production and distribution support for television broadcasts developed by VOA and the Department of State. The Board's public diplomacy mandate also includes helping to develop independent media and raising journalistic standards where possible.

The Board's New Strategic Approach

The Board's new approach to broadcasting represents an ambitious attempt to reach larger audiences in key markets. To do this, it seeks creative solutions that prioritize the use of limited resources and marry the mission of U.S. international broadcasting to the needs and wants of target audiences. The Board's new strategic plan was issued in December 2002; however, development of its new approach to broadcasting began in July 2001. The plan was developed to address declining audience share in key markets such as Russia and historically static performance in key strategic regions such as the Middle East. For example, the BBG had a 21 percent market share in Russia in the early 1990s that has declined to about 4 percent of the adult listening audience in recent years. In the Middle East, the VOA's Arabic service has for decades reached less than 2 percent of potential listeners.

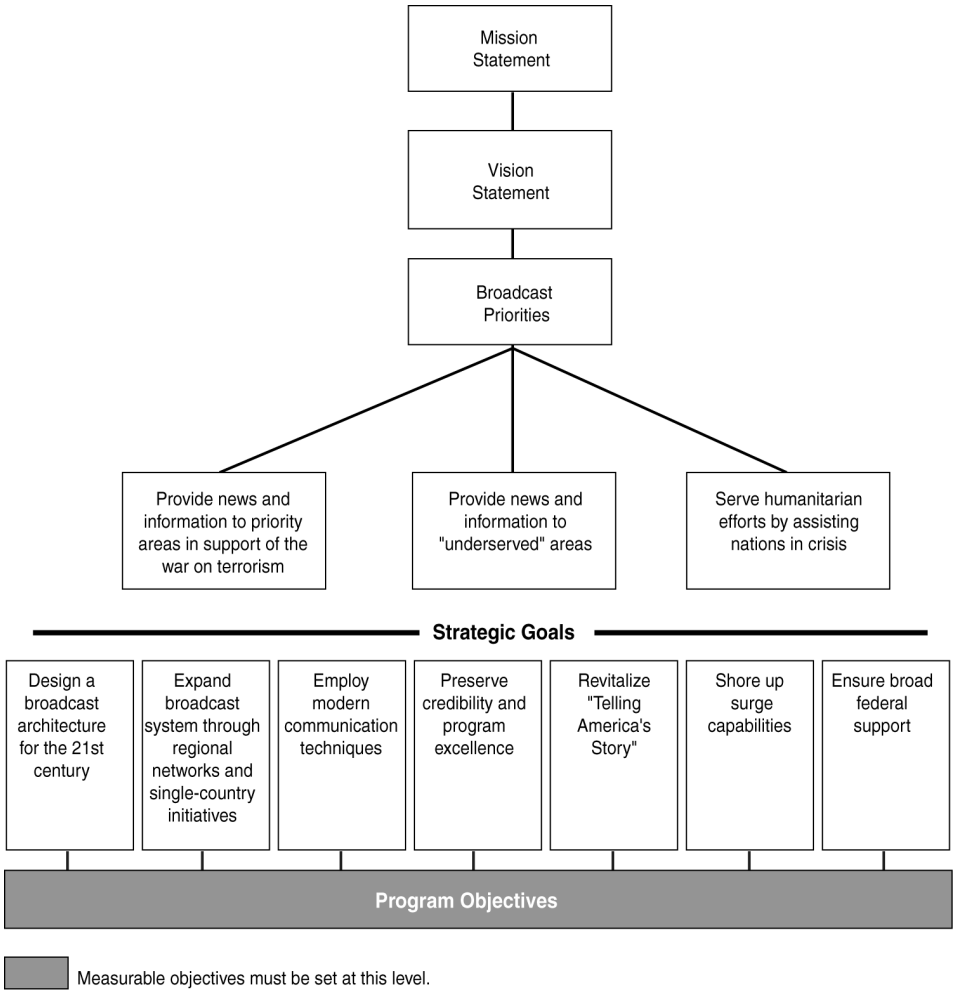
[3]VOA also serves as a surrogate broadcaster in information-deprived countries in Africa since Congress has not established a separate surrogate entity for this region.

The Board's new plan outlines a strategic vision for U.S. international broadcasting that is designed to move the organization toward a market-based approach that will generate the large listening audiences in priority markets that the Board believes it must reach to effectively meet its mission. Early implementation of the plan has focused on markets relevant to the war on terrorism;[4] however, the Board intends that many elements of its new approach will be applied to many of its language services over time. The Board's vision is to create a flexible, multimedia, research-driven U.S. international broadcasting system. This system will incorporate regional networks and single-country operations to reach large audiences by programming the distinct content of VOA and the surrogate services through state-of-the-art formats and distribution channels controlled by the Board.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the Board's new strategic plan and shows the links among the Board's mission statement, vision statement, broadcast priorities, strategic goals, and program objectives. Appendix I provides a complete list of the goals and objectives.

[4]One of the Board's key objectives is to provide support to the war on terrorism through anti-terrorism broadcasting. The Board views recent initiatives in the Middle East, such as Radio Sawa, as examples of its new approach and as a major initiative supporting the war on terrorism.

Figure 2: The Board's New Strategic Plan



Source: GAO illustration of strategic plan.

Strategic plans play a critical role in the management of agency operations. Guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) makes clear that agency strategic plans, annual performance plans, and annual performance reports form the basis for a comprehensive and integrated

approach to performance management.[5] In the Board's case, its performance management is augmented by an ongoing series of program reviews of individual language services conducted each year[6] and an annual comparative review of all language services. Program reviews are in-depth assessments of performance conducted by a team of management, audience research experts, technical staff, and language service staff. The comparative review of language services represents an intensive 4-month review by the Board designed to evaluate the need for adding or deleting language services and strategically reallocating funds to the language services on the basis of priority and impact. This year, the Board asked eight language services to prepare individual performance plans that capture key elements of the Board's new strategic approach to broadcasting, including the need to identify a target audience and establish specific audience goals.[7] These performance plans will become the focus of future program reviews and form the final link in a planned performance management system that will integrate the Board's strategic plan, performance plan, annual language service review, budget preparation process, and program reviews into a unified whole. The strategic plan forms the heart of this system since it should provide the performance goals and measures that drive the Board's entire operations.

[5]OMB guidance notes that agency strategic plans may include multiyear strategic goals that are not subject to direct measurement. However, these goals must be supported by measurable program objectives that provide a long-term basis for assessing whether an agency's strategic goals are being met. Annual progress toward achieving agency program objectives should be tracked through the performance goals and indicators in an agency's performance plan under the Government Performance and Results Act. See Circular No. A-11, Part 6, *Preparation and Submission of Strategic Plans*, *Annual Performance Plans*, *and Annual Program Performance Reports*; Office of Management and Budget (Washington, D.C.: June 2002).

[6]These two components of the Board's performance management system were addressed in detail in our last report on U.S. international broadcasting. U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Strategic Planning and Performance Management System Could be Improved*, GAO/NSIAD-00-222 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2000).

[7]These languages fall in the Near East Asia and South Asia region targeted for evaluation as part of OMB's new Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) exercise, which is designed to support the budget and performance integration component of the President's Management Agenda. Under the PART process, approximately 20 percent of agency programs were supposed to be covered during the formulation of the fiscal year 2004 budget, with other programs to be annually added to the assessment in future years.

Projects Supporting War on Terrorism Adhere to Board's New Approach

Consistent with the plan's theme of "marrying the mission to the market," the Board has applied its new audience-focused broadcasting approach to recent initiatives supporting the war on terrorism. The first project under the new approach, Radio Sawa in the Middle East, was launched in March 2002 using many of the modern, market-tested broadcasting techniques and practices prescribed in the plan, in an effort to attract a larger, younger population. Follow-on program initiatives also adhere to the Board's modern approach to broadcasting, though application is tailored to the specific circumstances of each target market. These initiatives include the Afghanistan Radio Network (ARN) and the new Radio Farda service to Iran. Estimated start-up and recurring costs for these three projects through fiscal year 2003 total about $116 million. As funds become available, there are plans to extend application of the Board's new approach to other high-priority markets, such as Indonesia. In addition, the Board hopes to further expand its presence in the Middle East through the launch of a Middle East Television Network. Future initiatives are expected to require additional reallocation of funds and possible supplemental spending by Congress.

Application Tailored to Market Circumstances

The Board has tailored the use of its modern, audience-focused approach to broadcasting, taking target audiences and market circumstances into consideration when developing and implementing new program initiatives. Table 1 provides a brief description of recently implemented projects supporting the war on terrorism.

Table 1: The Board's Recently Implemented Initiatives

Initiative	Launch date	Project description
Radio Sawa	March 2002	A modern Arabic-language network that broadcasts music, news, and information to young people in the Middle East via a combination of FM, medium wave, short wave, digital audio satellite, and Internet transmission resources. The network uses four 24-hour, seven-days-a-week regional programming streams.[a]
ARN	August 2002	The network combines the distinct news and information program content of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Radio Free Afghanistan[b] and VOA's Dari and Pashtu language services into a closely coordinated, single programming stream targeting the broad Afghani population. The network currently broadcasts 24 hours, seven days a week on FM and the Internet.
Radio Farda	December 2002	Radio Farda integrates the distinct music, news, and information content of VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty into a single programming stream targeting youth in Iran. It broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week via medium wave, digital audio satellite, and the Internet. It also broadcasts 21 hours a day via short wave.

Source: Broadcasting Board of Governors.

[a]Radio Sawa's four programming streams are directed at Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf countries (i.e., Kuwait, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, etc.) and reflect regional tastes and interests.

[b]Radio Free Afghanistan was launched by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in December 2001 in an effort to build a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. This service was congressionally authorized.

Radio Sawa

The first program under the Board's new approach, Radio Sawa in the Middle East, was launched using modern, market-tested broadcasting techniques and practices, such as the extensive use of music formats, to improve performance in this priority market and lend support to the war on terrorism by targeting youth audiences. Although music remains a large part of the programming on Radio Sawa, the proportion of news and information to music is steadily increasing, peaking at 5-hours a day during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Radio Sawa replaced the poorly performing VOA Arabic service, which had listening rates at around 2 percent of the population. The Board has survey research indicating that Radio Sawa is reaching 51 percent of its target audience and is ranked highest for news and news trustworthiness in Amman, Jordan. Despite such results, it remains unclear how many people Radio Sawa is actually reaching throughout the Middle East because audience research has been performed only in select markets and has not yet included audiences in key markets like Saudi Arabia.

Afghanistan Radio Network

The Afghanistan Radio Network was launched in August 2002 to more effectively use and strengthen the impact of BBG broadcasting resources targeted to Afghanistan, a key market for the war on terrorism. ARN utilizes broadcasting concepts outlined in the Board's new strategic approach, such as tailoring content to the target audience and integrating programming streams across entities. Unlike Radio Sawa, ARN is not primarily designed to reach a youth audience but a broader Afghani audience. Programs are designed to be locally focused and are high in educational, news, and information content. BBG service to Afghanistan has in the past yielded some of the Board's highest listening rates (in 1999 around 80 percent of adult male heads-of-household). Recent BBG research indicates that the Board is reaching about 45 percent of all male and female adults in the listening regions of Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Radio Farda

Radio Farda was launched to strengthen the impact of BBG broadcasting resources targeted to Iran, another key market for the war on terrorism. Based on audience research and an analysis of specific market factors in Iran, the Board tailored the plan's elements to Radio Farda. Radio Farda uses modern broadcast techniques to attract a youth target audience. Although it uses music formats, Radio Farda also strives to provide substantial news and information. The Board claims that increases in the volume of e-mail and phone calls from the region indicate that the service is gaining popularity among the target audience in Iran.

Other New Initiatives

The Board is planning other program initiatives in support of the war on terrorism, and plans indicate that the Board will selectively apply its new broadcasting approach to these projects. Future initiatives include enhancements to the VOA Indonesian and Urdu services and creation of a Middle East Television Network, which represents the single largest enhancement to the Board's operations in the coming year. Still in the planning stages, the Middle East Television Network will be an 18- to 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week, U.S.-controlled satellite TV service presenting what the Board sees as American-style news and information programs in the Arabic language to counter the lack of depth and balance in the Middle Eastern media. As television is the most important medium in the region for news and information, the Board expects to significantly increase its audience size with this initiative.

Projected Costs of the New Strategy Are Significant

Certain elements of the Board's new plan will require substantial levels of investments. Such elements include broadcasting round-the-clock, using audience research and music formats extensively, and reaching audiences on Board-controlled AM and FM frequencies. Other elements do not require as substantial capital investments, such as identifying target audiences and redesigning program content to appeal to these audiences. Just as Radio Sawa, ARN, and Radio Farda incorporate the Board's new broadcasting approach to varying degrees, the Board has stated in its strategic plan that it will apply certain high-cost elements of its new approach on a case-by-case basis. It cannot afford to broadly apply all elements to all language services, and some markets do not require such changes for U.S. international broadcasting to remain competitive. Table 2 provides a cost summary of recently implemented high-priority projects.

Table 2: Costs of BBG New Initiatives

Dollars in millions

	Sawa	ARN	Farda	
One time capital costs (paid in FY 2001 or 2002)	$10.5	$19.6	N/A	
Additional expected capital costs (paid in FY 2003)	$21.6	$1.8	$1.0	
Annual operating expenses (paid in FY 2002)	$11.7	$9.6	N/A	
Projected annual operating expenses (paid in FY 2003)	$20.6	$13.4	$6.2	
Total project costs (through FY 2003)	**$64.4**	**$44.4**	**$7.2**	**$116.0**

Source: GAO analysis of BBG data.

N/A = Not applicable.

The estimated price tags for other priority initiatives, such as the Middle East Television Network and the expansion of the VOA Indonesian service, are also significant. For example, the Board estimates that it will cost about $62 million to initiate the Middle East Television Network and an additional $37 million annually for recurring operational costs. Expanding VOA Indonesian radio and TV programming is estimated to cost an additional $3.4 million. Cost estimates for the VOA Urdu service program expansion are not yet available because the Board has not finalized its plans for this project.

Some of the Board's recent priority projects have been funded in part by reallocation of program funds under the Board's annual language service review process. For example, the Board funded Radio Farda by reprogramming more than $5.6 million in fiscal year 2003 funds and also helped pay for Radio Sawa by reprogramming approximately $4.1 million in fiscal year 2001 funds from other language services.

Effectiveness Is Difficult to Assess Absent Measurable Program Objectives

The Board's new approach to broadcasting is based on the need to reach large audiences in priority markets, but its strategic plan does not include a single goal or related program objective designed to gauge progress toward increasing audience size. In addition, the plan's seven existing strategic goals (for example, to employ modern communication techniques or to revitalize efforts to tell America's story) are not supported by measurable program objectives that would allow the Board and others to gauge the agency's progress in implementing its strategic goals.[8] While the plan lacks a range of measurable program objectives, key effectiveness measures that could be incorporated in future versions of the Board's strategic plan include audience awareness of U.S. broadcast efforts, audience perceptions of the credibility of U.S. broadcasts, and whether VOA effectively presents information about the United States and its policies to target audiences. Efforts to assess the effectiveness of the Board's new approach to broadcasting may also be hampered by the lack of details on how the Board intends to implement each of its program objectives. Missing from the plan are specifics on implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames.[9] The Board has acknowledged that

[8]Our observations on these missing elements are mirrored in OMB's summary report on this year's implementation of the Program Assessment Rating Tool. OMB's report in the President's fiscal year 2004 budget request notes that "the [BBG] program scored poorly in strategic planning, primarily because the long-term and annual goals are vague and do not include time frames and measurable targets."

[9]These findings mirror several of the observations we made in GAO/NSIAD-00-222.

its strategic plan needs to be significantly improved, and major changes are planned for the next iteration.[10]

Plan Lacks Focus on Audience Size and Other Measurable Program Objectives

The absence of "audience size" as a strategic goal and related measurable program objectives represents one of the most significant oversights in the Board's strategic plan. The strategic plan references the importance of reaching a large audience in priority markets as the key driver behind the Board's new approach to broadcasting and notes that audience size is the most readily available and accurate impact measure it has. Despite the central importance of audience size to the Board's new approach to broadcasting, the plan is silent on how these data should be incorporated as a measurable program objective or series of program objectives to gauge the Board's effectiveness in this key area. The Board has traditionally reported audience size in its annual performance plan; however, this reporting lacks any contextual meaning since it is not tied to a program objective(s) defining the Board's multiyear vision for what it would like to accomplish in this area. In addition, the Board's practice of reporting audience size goals and accomplishments at the entity level in its annual performance plan obscured important performance data at the regional and language service level.

We also found that the plan's existing strategic goals are not supported by measurable program objectives. The strategic plan has 17 program objectives,[11] any of which can be used to illustrate the lack of performance goals and expectations. For example, under the goal of employing modern communication techniques and technologies, one objective is to accelerate multimedia development and infuse more television and Internet into the mix. The Board's plan only makes broad assertions about the need to "do more with TV where market realities demand and resources permit" and that the Board "will ensure that all entities have world-class Internet presences."

[10]We recently reported that a "program logic model" can help information dissemination agencies systematically identify their program activities, inputs, outputs, outcomes, and program impact. By specifying what is expected at each step, a logic model can help agencies define the most appropriate set of program goals and measures. As such, the model could be used by the Board as a tool to help prepare its next iteration of the strategic plan. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Program Evaluation: Strategies for Assessing How Information Dissemination Contributes to Agency Goals*, GAO-02-923 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 2002).

[11]See appendix I for a list of the Board's strategic goals and program objectives.

Under the goal of progressively building out the U.S. international broadcasting system, the Board lists the successful launch of Radio Sawa as a program objective. Again, the plan makes broad statements about the need to attract and build a significant audience in the Middle East and present news that is objective, comprehensive, fresh, and relevant. However, it does not provide details on expected performance levels. Specifically, the plan does not establish short- or long-range target audience figures for the Gaza strip, West Bank, and 17 countries in the Middle East and Africa to which Radio Sawa will eventually broadcast.

A Range of Effectiveness Measures Could Be Incorporated in the Board's Plan

Our survey of senior program managers across all broadcast entities and discussions with other program staff and outside parties, suggested a number of other effectiveness measures the Board could incorporate when developing measurable program objectives designed to support the plan's strategic goals.[12] These measures include audience awareness; broadcast entity credibility; and a measure of VOA's ability to communicate a balanced and comprehensive projection of American thought, institutions, and policies so that audiences receive, understand, and retain this information.

Audience Awareness

The strategic plan does not include a measure of audience awareness to answer a second key question of effectiveness: whether target audiences are even aware of U.S. international broadcasting programming available in their area. Board officials have stated that such measures would help the Board understand a key factor in audience share rates and what could be done to address audience share deficiencies. The Board could develop this measure since it already collects information on language service awareness levels in its audience research and in national surveys for internal use.

Broadcaster Credibility

The strategic plan does not include a measure of broadcaster credibility, which can identify whether target audiences believe what they hear. Reaching a large listening or viewing audience is of little use if audiences largely discount the news and information portions of broadcasts. Our

[12]These measures represent a starting point, since each strategic goal in the plan needs to be supported by measurable program objectives. Once strategic goals are lined up with measurable program objectives, a related set of performance goals and indicators should be included in the Board's performance plan to track annual progress toward implementing the plan's program objectives.

survey of senior program managers and discussions with BBG staff and outside groups all point to the possibility that U.S. broadcasters (VOA in particular) suffer from a credibility problem with foreign audiences, who may view VOA and other broadcasters as biased sources of information. InterMedia, the Board's audience research contractor, told the Board that it is working on a credibility index for another customer that could be adapted to meet the Board's needs which, when segmented by language service, would reveal whether there are significant perception problems among key target audiences. However, to develop this measure, the Board would need to add several questions to its national survey instruments.

Measure of VOA Mission Effectiveness

Finally, the strategic plan does not include a measure of whether target audiences hear, understand, and retain information broadcast by VOA on American thought, institutions, and policies. The unique value-added component of VOA's broadcasting mission is its focus on issues and information concerning the United States, our system of government, and the rationale behind U.S. policy decisions. Tracking and reporting these data are important to determining whether VOA is accomplishing its mission. InterMedia officials noted that developing a measure of this sort is feasible and requires developing appropriate quantitative and qualitative questions to include in the Board's ongoing research activities.

Plan Lacks Specifics on Implementation Strategies, Resource Needs, and Project Time Frames

We found that each of the plan's program objectives lacked a detailed description of implementation strategies, resource needs, and project time frames. Typically, each program objective consists of an overview of the problem followed by a general assertion that operations must be improved. For example, the "action plan" for the accelerated use of television and the Internet is limited to the following statements:

- "Appropriate Television – VOA has seen significant audience impact in several key markets through television broadcasts—the Balkans, Iran, and Indonesia. We can and will do more with TV where market realities demand this and where resources permit. The first step is to cement the establishment of VOA-TV from the former Worldnet.

- Higher Quality Web Presence – We have seen spotty progress towards the goal of having all language services create high quality news-oriented websites. Some are outstanding. The content of others is thin and visually uninteresting. Bottom line: We will ensure that all entities have world-class Internet presences."

This level of planning begs key questions such as:

- What is the overall strategy for implementing the enhanced use of television and the Internet? Who will be responsible for implementing the component parts of the strategy? How much will it cost? How long will it take to implement?

- How will the Board manage workforce planning issues such as transitioning staff from radio-based skills to the skill set required to significantly augment the Board's multimedia operations?

- How will the long-planned merger of VOA Television and WorldNet impact the Board's strategic approach to television?

- How will the Middle East Television Network factor into the Board's plans and what are the resource, staffing, and training implications of this proposed network?

Answers to such questions will provide the Board, BBG managers, OMB, and the Congress with specific information needed to manage ongoing program implementation and assess progress against meaningful short- and long-term criteria. This level of planning also will reveal any potential gaps or inconsistencies in planned implementation steps across the Board's many program objectives.

Board Plans to Address Many Challenges, but Scope of Operations May Limit Its Impact

The key strategic challenge the Board faces is how to achieve large audiences in priority markets while dealing with (1) a collection of outdated and noncompetitive language services, (2) a disparate organizational structure consisting of seven separate broadcast entities and a mix of federal agency and grantee organizations that are managed by a part-time Board of Governors, and (3) the resource challenge of broadcasting in 97 language services to more than 125 broadcast markets worldwide. The plan does address the challenge of revamping its current broadcast operations by identifying a number of solutions to the competitive challenges the Board faces. It also provides a new organizational model for U.S. international broadcasting that stresses the need to view the broadcast efforts of the separate entities as part of a "single system" under the Board's direct control and authority. The Board has stated that it cannot sustain all its current broadcast operations and have the desired impact in high priority markets at the same time. Despite a clear articulation of U.S. international broadcasting's resource challenges,

the Board and Congress have not been able to substantially reduce the total number of language services or a reported 55 percent overlap in VOA and surrogate language services.

Board Has Identified Solutions to Market Challenges

The Board's strategic plan does an adequate job of identifying the market challenges for U.S. international broadcasters and potential solutions to these challenges. The task of reaching a significant audience today is a far different proposition than reaching an audience a decade ago. Priority markets have multiplied and media environments have advanced virtually everywhere with an explosion of local radio and television outlets that compete aggressively for audience share. Broadcast and computer technologies have made quantum leaps, with satellite television and the Internet becoming preferred information modes for millions. The Board has concluded that because many people can now pick and choose their information sources, U.S. international broadcast operations must be improved to remain competitive in a new media environment.

The Board's strategic plan includes a frank assessment of the market challenges that must be addressed to make U.S. international broadcasting more competitive. These challenges include:

- *Branding and positioning.* Language services lack a distinctive contemporary identity and a unique reason for listeners or viewers to tune in.
- *Target audiences.* Few language services have identified their target audience—a key first step in developing a broadcast strategy.
- *Formats and programs.* Many language services have outmoded formats and programs with an antiquated, even Cold War, sound and style.
- *Delivery and placement.* Three-quarters of transmitted hours have poor or fair signal quality, and affiliate broadcaster strategies have stressed quantity over quality.
- *Marketing and promotion.* Audience awareness levels are low across the world and audiences often do not know where to tune in or what to expect once they do.

- *Technology.* The Board is not maximizing the use of multimedia to reach audiences, stimulate real-time interaction, and cross-promote broadcast products.

These challenges are addressed by a number of proposed solutions in the form of strategic goals and program objectives listed in the plan. With regards to the marketing challenges, 12 of the 17 program objectives are designed to directly or indirectly overcome these challenges. For example, the Board's strategic goal of employing modern communication techniques and technologies is supported by the following program objectives:

- accelerate multimedia development and infuse more television and Internet into the mix;
- adopt modern radio principles and practices including the matching of program formats to target audiences;
- control the distribution channels that audiences use;
- go local in content and presence;
- tailor content to audiences; and
- drive innovation and performance with research.

Full implementation of these and other solutions to market challenges in high priority markets will depend on available resources, which in turn will be driven in part by the Board's effectiveness in addressing its organizational and resource challenges.

Plan Proposes a "Single System" for Broadcasting and Increased Leadership for the Board

The plan identifies a number of internal challenges or obstacles which, if not addressed and corrected, will hamper the Board's ability to effectively implement its new strategic approach to broadcasting. First, the Board believes that it needs to do more to consolidate and rationalize its organizational structure to better leverage existing resources and generate greater program impact in priority markets. As the strategic plan notes, "the diversity of the BBG—diverse organizations with different missions, different frameworks, and different constituencies—makes it a challenge to bring all the separate parts together in a more effective whole." Second, the Board believes that it must clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board, the IBB, and the broadcast entities to ensure

that a rational management process is in place and that internal communications flow in a logical manner.[13]

The Board's response to these internal challenges is largely contained in the two program objectives listed under the strategic goal of designing a broadcast architecture for the 21st century. The first program objective is to create a unified broadcasting system by treating the component parts of U.S. international broadcasting as a single system. This is an important distinction since it places the Board in the position of actively managing resources across broadcast entities to achieve common broadcast goals. A good example of this strategy in action is Radio Farda, which draws on the unique content of VOA's Persian service and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Persian service to create a new broadcast product for the Iranian market. Board officials acknowledge that the new single system approach will take years to implement throughout the BBG and require hands-on management by the entire Board to ensure that resources are adequately managed across entities. Also, the Board's experience with implementing Radio Sawa suggests that it can be difficult to make disparate broadcast entities work toward a common purpose. For example, Board members and senior planners said they encountered significant difficulties attempting to work with VOA officials to launch Radio Sawa and there are now plans to constitute Radio Sawa as a separate grantee organization. While this move is understandable under the circumstances, it also contributes to the further "balkanization" of U.S. international broadcasting.

The second program objective consists of realigning the BBG's organizational structure. This objective highlights the need to reinforce the Board's role as CEO and to reaffirm the IBB's role as central provider of transmission and local placement services. The plan notes that by law the Board is the head of the agency with a host of nondelegable responsibilities including taking the lead role in shaping the BBG's overall strategic direction, setting expectations and standards, and creating the context for

[13]The Board's concerns over organizational and management issues mirror the results of a retreat of senior BBG managers held in July 2001, which served as a springboard for the development of the Board's strategic plan. The retreat represented a "no holds barred" look at current activities and future operations. One retreat exercise focused on identifying the key "restrainers" blocking the Board from moving toward a future vision for U.S. international broadcasting as articulated by the group. A tabulation of votes revealed that senior managers believed that a "flawed BBG organizational structure" and "very poor internal communications" were the two top restrainers the Board faces.

innovation and change. As it consolidates its role as the collective CEO for U.S. international broadcasting, the Board will seek to create better and stronger linkages among entities, uniting them in a common purpose and program. At the same time, the Board plans to assume the role of helping the broadcasting organizations develop radio formats to package and better present the broadcasters' content. According to the plan, this becomes a major responsibility, as professional formatting is vital to the BBG's competitiveness and effectiveness.

Plan Does Not Discuss Several Organizational Options

We found significant support among BBG staff and outside experts we interviewed and surveyed for a select number of solutions not included in the Board's plan. However, these are complex issues that deserve detailed review and careful weighing of the pros and cons. Implementing these solutions is largely beyond the Board's control. However, the Board can play a key role in identifying and endorsing creative solutions for Congress to consider if the Board's planned solutions to organizational and leadership challenges falter and are ineffective. A list of these options is offered for informational purposes and as a reference point for the Board, OMB, and Congress in pursuing solutions to acknowledged operating challenges. (See app. II for relevant survey responses we received from senior program managers.) Table 3 summarizes the Board's planned action compared with these potential alternatives.

Table 3: Planned Actions and Additional Options

Planned action	Potential alternatives
"Single system" approach to broadcasting	Consider whether U.S. international broadcasting should be consolidated into a single entity to streamline and rationalize operations. (See survey question 20.1.)
Reinforce the Board's role as CEO	Consider whether a full-time CEO or Chief Operating Officer (COO) for international broadcasting is needed to manage day-to-day operations that may put too great a stress on a part-time Board. In either case, it is presumed that the Board would have direct hire and fire authority over such a position.[a,b] (See survey question 20.2.)
Reinforce the IBB's central support role	Consider an alternative to the current support services arrangement giving VOA, Radio/TV Marti, and WorldNet the same flexibility as grantees to manage their nontransmission support services. Grantee organizations (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia) directly control most nontransmission support services such as affiliate relations, marketing, and computer services. In contrast, nontransmission support services for VOA, Radio/TV Marti, and WorldNet were largely consolidated within the IBB as part of the 1994 International Broadcasting Act. (See survey question 4.3.)
No parallel action	Consider whether VOA, the IBB, and Radio/TV Marti should be reconstituted as grantees to place them on the same footing as the surrogate broadcasters, who enjoy more liberal workforce rules and fewer restrictions. It has been argued that the flexible environment grantees have is more conducive to a fast-paced business such as broadcasting. (See survey questions 20.8 and 20.9.)

Source: GAO analysis.

[a]Certain Board members and senior BBG planners view this option as problematic given the perception that attracting talented individuals to serve on the Board is dependent, in part, on the Board having a central and unambiguous role in managing the operations of U.S. international broadcasting.

[b]The utility of appointing federal agency COOs was recently explored at a roundtable of senior private and public sector executives sponsored by GAO. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Highlights of a GAO Roundtable: The Chief Operating Officer Concept: A Potential Strategy to Address Federal Governance Challenges*, GAO-03-192SP (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 4, 2002).

Plan Does Not Directly Address the Board's Scope of Operations

The Board has concluded that if U.S. international broadcasting is to become a vital component of U.S. foreign policy, it must focus on a clear set of broadcast priorities. Trying to do too much at the same time fractures this focus, extends the span of control beyond management capabilities, and siphons off precious resources. The Board has determined that current efforts to support its broadcast languages are "unsustainable" with current resources given its desire to increase impact in high priority markets. Currently, the Board broadcasts in 66 languages, through 97 language

services (resulting from a 55 percent overlap between VOA and surrogate language services) to more than 125 markets worldwide. The plan notes, "it is a daunting challenge to obtain the impact the Board desires across all its language services given what is essential to spend in high priority services."

Despite this recognition, the plan fails to answer such questions as, when is it appropriate to broadcast VOA and surrogate programming in the same language, and what level of duplication in roles and target audiences should be allowed between VOA and surrogate broadcasters. These types of questions have been raised before. For example, in our September 1996 review of options for addressing possible budget reductions at the U.S. Information Agency, we concluded that any substantial reduction in funding for U.S. international broadcasting would require major changes in the number of language services and broadcast hours.[14] Our report noted that the BBG planned to extensively review its language services to determine their continued need and effectiveness. Our September 2000 report on U.S. international broadcasting noted that the Board concluded it was essential to revisit the issue of broadcast overlap between VOA and the surrogate services in light of evolving foreign policy, geopolitical, and budget realities in the new century.[15] Finally, the Board considered the issue of role and target audience duplication among VOA and surrogate broadcasts in a July 2000 language service analysis, which sought to identify where broadcast services shared similar roles (that is, to supply international/regional news, local news, information on American policies and perspectives, etc.) and the same target audiences (that is, elites, mass, youth, women, and diaspora). This analysis confirmed that surrogate broadcasters, consistent with their mission, carry substantially more local content than VOA. Likewise, the analysis confirmed that VOA alone provides news and information on what the Board labeled the "American political perspective." However, the Board's analysis also revealed that a significant degree of overlap existed in other content areas (such as "political/democracy building") and in target audiences between VOA and the surrogates.

[14]See U.S. General Accounting Office, *U.S. Information Agency: Options for Addressing Possible Budget Reductions*, GAO/NSIAD-96-179 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 23, 1996).

[15]See GAO/NSIAD-00-222.

Reducing the Number of Language Services and Broadcast Overlap Has Broad Support

Our survey of senior program managers revealed that the majority supported significantly reducing the total number of language services and the overlap in services between VOA and the surrogate broadcasters.[16] Eighteen of 24 respondents said that too many language services are offered, and when asked how many countries should have more than one U.S. international broadcaster providing service in the same language, 23 of 28 respondents said this should occur in only a few countries or no countries at all. Finally, when we asked respondents what impact a significant reduction in language services (for the purpose of reprogramming funds to higher priority services) would have, 18 of 28 respondents said that this would have a generally positive to highly positive impact.

The BBG's annual language service review process addresses the need to delete or add languages. The process prioritizes individual language services based on such factors as U.S. strategic interests, political freedom, and press freedom data. Such assessments have been used in an attempt to shift the focus of U.S. international broadcasting away from central and eastern Europe to allow greater emphasis on Russia and Eurasia; central and South Asia; China and east Asia; Africa; and selected countries in our hemisphere such as Colombia, Cuba, and Haiti. This system has been used to re-deploy resources within the BBG. For example, the Board has reallocated more than $9 million through the elimination or reduction of language services since its first language service review in January 2000. In total, the Board has eliminated 3 language services[17] and reduced the

[16]We did not ask program managers for their views on the duplication of roles and target audiences among broadcast entities since this issue surfaced after our survey was released.

[17]VOA Portuguese to Brazil was eliminated as a direct result of language service review. VOA Arabic and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Persian service were eventually eliminated as the result of decisions made during language service review and were replaced by Radio Sawa and Radio Farda, respectively.

scope-of-operations of another 25 services since January 2000.[18] In terms of the total number of language services, the Board had 91 language services when it concluded its first language service review and 97 language services at the conclusion of this year's review. Congress has contributed to this situation by authorizing additional language services over the years. However, the Board, through its required annual language service review and strategic plan, is responsible for analyzing, recommending, and implementing a more efficient and economical scope of operations for U.S. international broadcasting.

Conclusions

The Broadcasting Board of Governors' strategic plan embodies, defines, and guides the Board's new approach to U.S. international broadcasting, which aims to dramatically increase the size of listening and viewing audiences in markets of U.S. strategic interest while focusing on the war on terrorism. Early initiatives such as Radio Sawa, Radio Free Afghanistan, and Radio Farda represent the first wave of projects incorporating, to varying degrees, the market-driven techniques on which the Board's new approach to broadcasting are based. Effective implementation of the Board's new approach to broadcasting rests, in part, on a rigorous plan that reflects the Board's best strategic thinking on a host of critical issues. However, the Board's plan lacks measurable program objectives, detailed implementation strategies, resource needs, and project time frames. We identified a number of key areas that could provide a starting point for developing multiyear program objectives that focus on the Board's actual effectiveness. These measures include audience size by language service, audience awareness, broadcaster credibility, and whether VOA effectively presents information about U.S. thought, institutions, and policies to target audiences. Implementation of these and other program objectives could be tracked through a related set of performance goals and indicators in the Board's annual performance plan. The Board has identified a number of

[18]Cutting language services can be challenging due to congressional concerns that the proposed elimination or reduction of language services is not supported by a clear rationale. For example, at OMB's direction, the Board's fiscal year 2004 budget request was reduced by $8.8 million to reflect the proposed elimination of broadcasts in nine foreign languages assessed as low priority/low impact services in connection with the Board's 2001/2002 language service review. However, Senator Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has expressed the view that the U.S. should not withdraw broadcasting services in certain countries until there is assurance of a free and fair press in those countries. In this regard, that Committee has approved S.925 which contains a provision that would prohibit the BBG from eliminating the foreign language broadcasts proposed for elimination in the BBG's fiscal year 2004 budget request.

market and internal challenges and proposed solutions to address them. If the Board falters in its efforts to correct some significant organizational challenges, a number of alternative solutions do exist. Finally, the Board needs to evaluate how many language services it can effectively carry and what level of overlap and duplication in VOA and surrogate broadcast services is appropriate. Resolving these key questions will have significant resource implications for the Board and its ability to reach large audiences in markets of priority interest to the United States.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve overall management of U.S. international broadcast operations and maximize their impact on U.S. public diplomacy efforts, we recommend that the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors:

- revise the BBG's 5-year strategic plan to include measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, resource requirements, and project time frames;
- include audience size, audience awareness, broadcaster credibility, and VOA mission effectiveness as measurable program objectives in the strategic plan;
- revise the BBG's annual performance plan to include performance goals and indicators that track the Board's progress in implementing the multiyear program objectives established in the Board's revised strategic plan; and
- revise the Board's strategic plan to include a clear vision of the Board's intended scope-of-operations and the appropriate level of overlap and duplication between VOA and surrogate language services.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

The Broadcasting Board of Governors provided written comments on a draft of this report. The Board stated that overall our report is fair and accurate and it largely concurred with our report recommendations. The Board noted that it intends to create a new strategic goal (that is, maximizing impact in priority areas) and recast the plan's seven existing strategic goals as operational goals that would support the Board's single strategic goal. These operational goals would be descriptive in nature and generally not measured directly. However, the Board intends to develop measurable multiyear program objectives and related performance

indicators under its new strategic goal that will be tracked on an annual basis through the BBG's performance plan. The Board's response notes that possible performance indicators include audience reach, share, awareness, credibility, programming quality, mission, added-value, and delivery. Finally, the Board noted that it is currently undertaking an in-depth assessment of the utility and practicality of integrating overlapping language services and expects to include this assessment in its fiscal year 2005 budget submission. We believe these planned actions are significant and if fully implemented should materially improve the Board's performance management process and provide OMB and Congress with more meaningful data on the actual impact of Board activities.

The comments provided by the Board are reprinted in appendix IV. The Board also provided technical comments which we have incorporated in the report as appropriate.

Scope and Methodology

To obtain comparative information on all our objectives, we conducted fieldwork in the United Kingdom and Germany. We met with foreign ministry officials in London and Berlin to discuss their approaches to public diplomacy. We also met with broadcasting officials from the British Broadcasting Corporation in London and Deutsche Welle officials in Cologne and Berlin to discuss their respective approaches to international broadcasting.

To examine the status of the BBG's new strategic approach, we conducted interviews with Board members and senior managers from the broadcast entities including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty officials in Prague. We also reviewed the Board's new 5-year strategic plan titled "Marrying the Mission to the Market" as well as other agency documentation, including entity mission statements and budget requests.

To identify how the Board plans to measure the effectiveness of its new strategic approach, we reviewed current performance management documentation, such as language service and program review documents, audience research summaries, and annual performance plans and reports. We also met with Board officials and with several private sector audience research firms to discuss a range of performance management and measurement issues.

To obtain information on various challenges the Board faces in executing its new strategy, and to identify program options for overcoming key

challenges, we administered a survey to 34 senior program managers across the 5 broadcast entities in existence at the time our survey was implemented. We also conducted interviews with Board members and the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the Department of State.

We conducted our work from May 2002 through April 2003 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to other interested members of Congress, the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the Secretary of State. We will also make copies available to other parties upon request. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me on (202) 512-4128. Other GAO contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix V.

Jess T. Ford
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Challenges Facing U.S. International Broadcasting

The Board's strategic plan provides both a candid assessment of the challenges facing U.S. international broadcasting and a series of proposed solutions to address these challenges in the form of strategic goals and related program objectives. Table 4 is an overview of each challenge described in the Board's strategic plan. Table 5 is a list of the proposed solutions the Board identified.

Table 4: Board-Identified Challenges

Challenge	Description from strategic plan
Marketing	
Branding and positioning	Many BBG broadcasters lack a distinctive contemporary identity.
Target audiences	Identifying a target audience is essential to a broadcasting strategy—yet only a few BBG language services have set targets.
Formats and programs	The formats and programs of too many BBG language services are outmoded.
Delivery and placement	Broadcasts are frequently hampered by poor audibility. Placement, where available, is sometimes hindered by poor partner station choices with poor broadcast times.
Marketing and promotion	Audience awareness of BBG programs is generally low across the world.
Technology	The BBG must use multimedia to its advantage. While radio is the backbone, TV is usually dominant and there has been substantial growth in Internet use in many markets.
Internal	
Consolidate and rationalize the overall enterprise	The diversity of the BBG—organizations with different missions, different frameworks, and different constituencies—makes it hard to bring all the separate parts together into a more effective whole. Fifty-five percent of VOA's language services overlap with the surrogates, presenting a chronic resource allocation challenge for the Board.
Roles and responsibilities	Since its inception, the Board has worked to sort out the respective roles and responsibilities of the BBG, the IBB, and the broadcasters.
Resource allocation	Appropriate performance measures are needed to establish a direct link between performance and budget. Language service review has made great strides in this area for the broadcast language services; however, the Board now needs to broaden this exercise to encompass support elements as well.
New requirements to ensure market competitiveness	The Board will need substantial new budget outlays to fund a variety of requirements including the strengthening of multimedia programming, conducting research, carrying out marketing and promotion efforts, and securing language-qualified staff.
Journalistically independent, yet a government agency	The BBG must work with other federal agencies to ensure the level of diplomatic and other types of support needed to function effectively.

Source: BBG strategic plan.

Table 5: Proposed Solutions—Strategic Goals and Objectives

Goal I – Design a broadcasting architecture for the future.
• Create a worldwide U.S. international broadcasting system. • Realign the BBG organizational structure.
Goal II – Expand the U.S. international broadcasting system through regional networks and single-country priority initiatives.
• Launch the Middle East Radio Network and make it a success. • Harmonize Radio Free Afghanistan and VOA into the Afghanistan Radio Network. • Pioneer anti-terrorism broadcasting. • Reach the two continental giants: Russia and China.
Goal III – Employ modern communication techniques and technologies.
• Accelerate multimedia development and infuse more television and Internet into the mix. • Adopt modern radio principles and practices such as matching program formats to target audiences. • Control the distribution channels that audiences use. • Go local in content and presence. • Tailor content to the audience. • Drive innovation and performance with research.
Goal IV – Preserve our most precious commodity—credibility—and ensure overall programming excellence.
• Maintain the firewall.[a] • Update and enforce journalism standards. • Perform periodic program reviews of all language services.
Goal V – Revitalize "Telling America's Story" to the world.
• Be a model of a free press and democracy in action. • Concentrate on those aspects of America that research indicates are of interest to target audiences. • Present targeted editorials that are relevant to local and regional concerns. • Use formats, presentation techniques, and on-air presence that will appeal to audiences. • Maximize interactive use of the Internet as a ready reference source for presidential speeches and other vital documents.
Goal VI – Shore up surge capacity.
• Upgrade existing shortwave transmitter and support systems to ensure backbone of U.S. surge capability. • Develop a rapid-response capability—low power, portable AM and FM.
Goal VII – Ensure broad federal support.
• No associated program objective.

Source: BBG strategic plan.

[a]The term "firewall" refers to the Board's independent status in separating and protecting the professional independence and integrity of U.S. international broadcast elements from the policy-making institutions in the U.S. government's foreign affairs community.

Survey Development

To determine senior managers' views of current operations, obtain information on the challenges associated with U.S. international broadcasting, and obtain information on the expected impacts of the BBG's new "Marrying the Mission to the Market" initiative, we conducted a survey of these managers. Our survey questionnaire was administered from January 15 to March 11, 2003, to the directors, program-related managers, and regional language chiefs at the five BBG broadcasting entities in existence at the time our survey was implemented.

The questionnaire was developed between September 2002 and January 2003 by social science survey specialists and other individuals who were knowledgeable about international broadcasting issues. In late October, we obtained an external expert review of the questionnaire from InterMedia, a private consulting group that conducts research into international broadcasting issues. We also obtained a series of comments and feedback from key Board planners and staff in November and December 2002.

We pretested the questionnaire in December 2002 with four senior managers of BBG broadcasting entities to ensure that the questionnaire was clear, unambiguous, and unbiased. Initially, we had considered surveying a broader section of managers of BBG broadcasting entities, such as language service chiefs and managers of support services. However, after conducting the pretests, we concluded that our questions were appropriate only for directors, program-related managers, and regional language chiefs. In addition, we decided that it would be inappropriate to survey members of the Board of Governors because many of the questions asked about decisions and strategies for which they were directly responsible.

We developed our study population of top managers, program-related managers, and regional language chiefs based on information that the BBG provided and input from BBG management. In those instances where managers had taken office during or after the time period to be evaluated in our survey (Oct. 1, 2001, through Sept. 30, 2002), we also surveyed their predecessors. In all, we sent the survey to the 34 individuals we identified as our study population and received 30 responses, resulting in an 88 percent response rate. All data from the completed surveys were double-keyed and verified during data entry.

The results of our closed-ended questions to our survey are provided in appendix III.

Survey of Program Managers of U.S. International Broadcasting Entities

United States General Accounting Office

Survey of Program Managers of U.S. International Broadcasting Entities

The United States General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of Congress, has been asked by the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee to study the activities of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). This request was prompted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the question of what can be done to improve our image and audience understanding of U.S. foreign policy. As part of this work, we are surveying entity heads, senior program managers, and regional language chiefs in the International Broadcasting Bureau, Voice of America (VOA), Worldnet Television, Radio/TV Marti, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), and Radio Free Asia (RFA).

This questionnaire asks you to assess various program elements during fiscal year 2002 for the language services for which you were responsible. It also asks you to consider whether any external factors impeded the ability of your language services to achieve their mission, and rank any factors that contributed to or impeded that mission. Furthermore, the questionnaire asks for your reaction to the BBG's new strategic planning initiative "Marrying the Mission to the Market" that was introduced in November and December 2002. Finally, the questionnaire asks about current operations, recent changes in programming, and program options.

We believe that you can make an important contribution to our study of U.S. international broadcasting, and ask that you respond to this questionnaire so that we may provide the most complete information to Congress. The questionnaire should take between 30 to 45 minutes to complete, depending upon the length of your answers to the open-ended questions.

The information you provide may be attributed to the types of officials we are surveying in your organization. GAO will not otherwise disclose individually identifiable data from this survey unless compelled by law or requested by a member of Congress.

Please complete this questionnaire as soon as possible and fax it to Melissa Pickworth at (202) 512-2550 or e-mail it to her at pickworthm@gao.gov. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please contact Melissa Pickworth at (202) 512-3158.

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Section 1: Assessment of Program Elements in Fiscal Year 2002 (October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2002)

Mission of All U.S. International Broadcasting Language Services
"To promote and sustain freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information about the United States and the world to audiences overseas."

Q.1) During fiscal year 2002, how effective or ineffective were the following factors, which we are calling **distribution factors,** in terms of how they helped your language services achieve their mission? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Very effective	Generally effective	As effective as ineffective	Generally ineffective	Very ineffective	Not applicable	No basis to judge / Don't know
Distribution Factors							
1) Number of hours of transmission.	6	14	5	4			1
2) Transmission strength and quality.		13	6	6	2		3
3) Use of affiliates.	2	7	5	4	2	8	2
4) Monitoring of affiliate rebroadcasting.		3	2	7	7	8	2
5) Coordination with IBB Affiliates and Marketing office.	4	8	2	4	5	7	
6) Use of shortwave radio.		9	8	6		6	1
7) Use of AM/FM radio.	5	10	3	1	1	10	
8) Use of television.	2	9	6	1		8	3
9) Use of the Internet.	5	14	6	2	1		1
10) Use of e-mail.	3	16	3	2	1	2	1
11) Use of new/emerging technology (e.g., digital SW or Web-enabled cell phones).	2	4	3	1	3	14	2
12) Use of audience and market research to help identify audiences and media/format preferences.	4	11	6	5	3		

Comments, if any. (*Please provide highlights of what worked well, areas needing improvement, and suggestions on how operations can be improved.*)

2

Q.2) During fiscal year 2002, what impact did the following **strategic planning elements** have on your language services' ability to achieve their mission? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Highly positive impact	Generally positive impact	No impact	Generally negative impact	Highly negative impact	Not applicable	No basis to judge / Don't know
Strategic Planning							
1) BBG strategic planning.	**3**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**1**		**7**
2) BBG/IBB technology planning.		**11**	**10**	**2**	**1**		**6**
3) BBG/IBB workforce planning.			**14**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**8**

Comments, if any. (*Please provide highlights of what worked well, areas needing improvement, and suggestions on how operations can be improved.)*

Q.3) During fiscal year 2002, how effective or ineffective were the following **performance management system elements** in terms of how they helped your language services to achieve their mission? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Very effective	Generally effective	As effective as ineffective	Generally ineffective	Very ineffective	Not applicable	No basis to judge / Don't know
Performance Management System							
1) BBG's Annual Comparative Language Service Review process.		**7**	**6**	**4**	**6**	**4**	**3**
2) Your entity's annual program reviews of individual language service.	**6**	**10**	**3**	**4**		**6**	**1**
3) Quantity of research for your entity's annual program reviews.	**3**	**10**	**8**	**3**	**1**	**4**	**1**
4) Quality of research for your entity's annual program reviews.	**3**	**9**	**6**	**6**	**1**	**4**	**1**
5) Timeliness of research support for your entity's annual program reviews .	**3**	**8**	**7**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**2**

Comments, if any. **(***Please provide highlights of what worked well, areas needing improvement, and suggestions on how operations can be improved.)*

3

Q.4) During fiscal year 2002, did the following **organizational structures** have a positive or negative impact on your language services' ability to achieve their mission? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Highly positive impact	Generally positive impact	No impact	Generally negative impact	Highly negative impact	Not applicable	No basis to judge / Don't know
Organizational Structures							
1) Management oversight by the board of governors.	**2**	**8**	**8**	**7**	**3**		**2**
2) Use of multiple broadcast entities (VOA and surrogates model).	**3**	**5**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**11**	**2**
3) Organizational placement of the IBB and its support services role.	**1**	**7**	**4**	**9**	**5**	**1**	**3**
4) New regional network approach (combining VOA and surrogate program streams on one frequency).	**2**	**3**	**6**	**3**	**2**	**9**	**5**
5) Intra-agency coordination/guidance/leader -ship (the board, entity directors and senior managers, and the IBB).	**1**	**11**	**9**	**4**	**3**		**2**
6) Firewall to protect journalistic independence.	**7**	**8**	**6**	**7**			**2**
7) VOA and Radio/TV Marti's status as federal entities.	**2**	**4**	**4**	**6**	**3**	**7**	**4**
8) RFE/RL and RFA's status as grantees.	**7**	**2**	**4**	**3**		**10**	**4**

Comments, if any. (*Please provide highlights of what worked well, areas needing improvement, and suggestions on how operations can be improved.)*

4

Q.5) During fiscal year 2002, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the **allocation of resources and organizational capacities** with regards to your language services?
(Please check one box in each row.)

	Very satisfied	Generally satisfied	As satisfied as dissatisfied	Generally dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No basis to judge / Don't know
Allocation of Resources and Organizational Capacities						
1) Program funding levels.	**2**	**4**	**8**	**12**	**4**	
2) Staffing levels.		**7**	**8**	**8**	**7**	
3) Level of staff skills and knowledge.	**1**	**11**	**12**	**4**		
4) Level of staff training.	**1**	**13**	**10**	**4**	**2**	
5) Condition of technology and equipment.	**4**	**8**	**9**	**4**	**5**	
6) Ability to compete in terms of content with broadcasting competitors such as the BBC.	**9**	**6**	**3**	**3**	**9**	
7) Ability to compete in terms of signal delivery with broadcasting competitors such as the BBC.	**2**	**3**	**2**	**8**	**13**	**2**
8) Ability for crisis response and surge capability.	**3**	**10**	**4**	**8**	**3**	**2**
9) Managerial flexibility: ability to re-deploy resources.	**4**	**8**	**5**	**4**	**8**	**1**

Comments, if any. (*Please provide highlights of what worked well, areas needing improvement, and suggestions on how operations can be improved.)*

5

Section 2: Assessment of External Conditions in Fiscal Year 2002

Q.6) To what extent, if any, do you believe the following **external conditions** (1) were present in the countries to which your language services broadcast, and (2) - if present - impeded the ability of your language services to achieve their mission in fiscal year 2002?
(Please check two boxes in each row unless your answer to question 6A below is "No extent." If your answer to any of the items in 6A is "No extent," please continue to the next row.)

	6A) Extent to which external conditions were present in countries to which your language services broadcasts				6B) Extent to which external conditions impeded the ability of your language services to achieve their mission			
	No extent ***(Continue to the next item)***	Moderate extent	Great extent	No basis to judge	No extent	Moderate extent	Great extent	No basis to judge
1) A perception of U.S. international broadcasting as a propaganda tool of the United States.	**1**	**17**	**11**		**6**	**11**	**6**	**1**
2) Impact of U.S. foreign policy on foreign perceptions.		**13**	**13**	**2**	**1**	**14**	**4**	**3**
3) A generally negative image of the United States.	**3**	**19**	**6**		**1**	**15**	**3**	**2**
4) Fear of listening because of repressive regimes.	**8**	**14**	**7**		**4**	**9**	**4**	**2**
5) The jamming of U.S. international broadcasts by foreign governments.	**10**	**7**	**7**	**5**	**3**	**4**	**6**	**3**
6) Potential audience's lack of technology (no SW radios, satellite dishes, etc.).	**7**	**15**	**6**	**1**	**2**	**15**	**4**	**1**

Comments, if any.

6

Section 3: Assessment of External Conditions in Fiscal Year 2002

Q.7) Think back over the main categories of factors and elements you were asked to address in questions 1 through 6 of this survey. The following table summarizes the categories and issues within the categories:

A) Distribution
Number of hours of transmission, transmission strength and quality, use of affiliates, use of technology, use of audience and marketing research.
B) Strategic Planning
BBG and IBB strategic, technology, and workforce planning.
C) Performance Management
Language Service Review process, entity annual program reviews, and research for annual program reviews.
D) Organizational Structure
Management oversight by the Board of Governors, use of multiple broadcast entities, organizational placement of the IBB, new regional network approach, intra-agency coordination/guidance/leadership, firewall issues, status of some entities.
E) Resource Issues and Organizational Capacities
Current program funding and staff levels, staff skills, knowledge and training, technology and equipment, ability to compete and respond to crises, managerial flexibility.
F) External Conditions
Perceived credibility of U.S. international broadcasting, image of the United States, lack of free media and civil liberties, jamming of U.S. broadcasts, potential audience's lack of technology to hear broadcasts.

7a) During fiscal year 2002, what factor made the greatest contribution to your broadcasting entity's ability to meet its mission?
(Please enter the letter corresponding to the factor from the list above.) **A 13**
E 6
C 5
B 1

Comments, if any.

7b) During fiscal year 2002, what factor represented the greatest impediment to your broadcasting entity's ability to meet its mission?
(Please enter the letter corresponding to the factor from the list above.) **E 13**
D 5
A 4
F 4
B 2

Comments, if any.

7

Section 4: New Strategic Planning Initiatives

Q.8) How familiar or unfamiliar are you with the BBG's new strategic planning initiative, "Marrying the Mission to the Market," which was introduced in November and December 2002? *(Check one box.)*

1	❑ Extremely familiar	**8**
2	❑ Very familiar	**5**
3	❑ Generally familiar	**12**
4	❑ Somewhat familiar	**1**
5	❑ Not familiar ➔ *(Skip to Question12)*	**1**
6	❑ No basis to judge ➔ *(Skip to Question 12)*	**3**

Q.9) To what extent, if any, do you believe the new strategic planning initiative, "Marrying the Mission to the Market": *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Very great extent	Great extent	Moderate extent	Some or little extent	No extent	No basis to judge
1) Is well structured?	**2**	**4**	**13**	**5**		
2) Addresses issues of critical importance to U.S. international broadcasting?	**2**	**5**	**7**	**8**	**1**	
3) Is likely to succeed in most aspects?		**4**	**9**	**8**	**1**	**1**
4) Will be embraced by middle management?		**4**	**7**	**11**	**2**	
5) Will be embraced by the rank and file?		**3**	**5**	**9**	**7**	

Comments, if any.

8

Q.10) In your opinion, what impact will the BBG's new strategic planning initiative, "Marrying the Mission to the Market," likely have on the following aspects of U.S. international broadcasting? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Highly positive impact	Generally positive impact	No Impact	Generally negative impact	Highly negative impact	No basis to judge	Don't know/ no opinion
1) Distribution Number of hours of transmission, transmission strength and quality, use of affiliates, use of technology, use of audience and marketing research.	**3**	**9**	**7**		**2**	**4**	**3**
2) Strategic Planning BBG and IBB strategic, technology, and workforce planning.	**3**	**6**	**4**	**5**	**3**	**6**	**1**
3) Performance Management Language Service Review process, entity annual program reviews, and research for annual program reviews.	**2**	**9**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**1**
4) Organizational Structure Management oversight by the Board of Governors, use of multiple broadcast entities, organizational placement of the IBB, new regional network approach, intra-agency coordination/guidance/leadership, firewall issues, status of some entities.	**2**	**3**	**8**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**2**
5) Resource Issues and Organizational Capacities Current program funding and staff levels, staff skills, knowledge and training, technology and equipment, ability to compete and respond to crises, managerial flexibility.	**2**	**4**	**4**	**8**	**4**	**3**	**2**
6) External Factors Perceived credibility of U.S. international broadcasting, image of the United States, lack of free media and civil liberties, jamming of U.S. broadcasts, potential audience's lack of technology to hear broadcasts.	**1**	**5**	**7**	**6**	**4**	**2**	**3**

Comments, if any.

9

Q.11) Overall, do you think that the BBG's new strategic planning initiative, "Marrying the Mission to the Market," will likely have a positive or a negative impact on U.S. international broadcasting's ability to achieve its mission?

1	❑ Very positive	**2**
2	❑ Generally positive	**8**
3	❑ As positive as negative	**9**
4	❑ Generally negative	**5**
5	❑ Very negative	**2**
6	❑ No basis to judge	**2**
7	❑ Don't know / No opinion	

Section 5: Assessment of Current Operations and Recent Changes to Service Delivery

Q.12) The International Broadcasting Act says that language services need to reach "significant" audiences. In your opinion, to what extent are your language services actually reaching significant audiences? *(Check one box.)*

1	❑ Very great extent	**5**
2	❑ Great extent	**8**
3	❑ Moderate extent	**10**
4	❑ Some or little extent	**6**
5	❑ No extent	
6	❑ No basis to judge	**1**

Comments, if any**:**

Q.13) Given the resources currently available to U.S International Broadcasting entities, which of the following best describes the number of language services offered by U.S. international broadcasting entities? *(Check one box.)*

1	❑ Too many language services	**18**
2	❑ Just the right number of language services	**5**
3	❑ Too few language services	**1**
4	❑ Not sure	
5	❑ No basis to judge	**3**

Comments, if any:

10

Q.14) In the post-Cold War era, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) has made shifts in resources. Do you believe that the BBG: *(Check all that apply.)*

1	❑	Has made shifts that result in good use of resources	**5**
2	❑	Needs to make further shifts in resources	**11**
3	❑	Should have left resources allocated as they were	
4	❑	Has made shifts that result in a poor use of resources	**13**
5	❑	Other (*please explain in the comments)*	
6	❑	Not sure	**2**
7	❑	No basis to judge	**2**

Comments, if any:

Q.15) Based on your experience in broadcasting, how would you assess the current level of funding for U.S. international broadcasting relative to its mission: *(Check one box.)*

1	❑	More than adequate	**1**
2	❑	Adequate	**4**
3	❑	Less than adequate	**23**
4	❑	Not sure	**2**
5	❑	No basis to judge	

Comments, if any:

Q.16) In how many countries do you think there should be more than one U.S. international broadcaster providing service in any particular language? *(Check one box.)*

1	❑	In most countries	**1**
2	❑	In many countries	**4**
3	❑	In a few counties	**12**
4	❑	In no countries	**11**
5	❑	Not sure	
6	❑	No basis to judge	**1**

Comments, if any:

Q.17) One current model of service delivery uses the same program stream, coordinates coverage, and has common production values. To what extent do you believe this model might be applicable to the countries served by your broadcasting entity? *(Check one box.)*

1	❑	Very great extent	**1**
2	❑	Great extent	**5**
3	❑	Moderate extent	**7**
4	❑	Some or little extent	**3**
5	❑	No extent	**5**
6	❑	Not sure	**1**
7	❑	No basis to judge	**5**

Comments, if any:

Q.18) In your opinion, do VOA editorials have a positive or a negative impact in promoting U.S. foreign policy interests?

1	❑ Very positive	
2	❑ Generally positive	**3**
3	❑ As positive as negative	**7**
4	❑ Generally negative	**10**
5	❑ Very negative	**4**
6	❑ No basis to judge	**2**
7	❑ Don't know / No opinion	**4**

Comments, if any:

Q.19) In your opinion, do VOA editorials have a positive or a negative effect on the credibility of U.S. international broadcasting?

1	❑ Very positive	
2	❑ Generally positive	**2**
3	❑ As positive as negative	**5**
4	❑ Generally negative	**11**
5	❑ Very negative	**7**
6	❑ No basis to judge	**2**
7	❑ Don't know / No opinion	**3**

Comments, if any:

12

Section 6: Program Options

Q.20) In your opinion, what impact would the following **program options** (identified by various contacts in our review) likely have on the ability of U.S. international broadcasting to achieve its mission? *(Please check one box in each row.)*

	Highly positive impact	Generally positive impact	No impact	Generally negative impact	Highly negative impact	No basis to judge/ no opinion
1) Consolidate VOA, the IBB, and the surrogates into one broadcasting entity headed by the Board of Governors.	**6**	**5**	**2**	**6**	**7**	**4**
2) Appoint a single individual as CEO for U.S. international broadcasting, and give that individual direct reporting responsibilities to the board.	**8**	**5**	**4**	**7**	**5**	**1**
3) Significantly reduce the overall number of language services in order to reprogram funds to higher priority services.	**9**	**9**		**4**	**6**	**2**
4) Use language service audience goals tailored to local circumstances (e.g., 5 percent audience share in one market versus a 10 percent share in another market).	**8**	**10**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**3**
5) Set language service audience goals by target audience (e.g., mass versus elites, under 30 versus over 30, men versus women, etc.).	**11**	**13**	**2**	**1**	**3**	
6) Eliminate VOA editorials.	**10**	**6**	**7**	**2**		**4**
7) Revamp/re-invent VOA editorials.	**3**	**10**	**9**			**5**
8) Defederalize VOA (e.g., give VOA grantee status).	**11**	**7**	**6**		**1**	**4**
9) Defederalize IBB (e.g., give IBB grantee status).	**9**	**5**	**3**	**7**	**1**	**4**
10) Establish closer strategic coordination between the BBG and the State Dept.	**2**	**4**	**4**	**8**	**8**	**3**
11) Establish closer strategic coordination between the BBG and the White House.	**2**	**6**	**4**	**7**	**7**	**3**
12) Establish closer cooperation with other international broadcasters.	**6**	**11**	**9**	**1**		**2**
13) Establish a national strategic communications plan that provides guidance to all agencies involved in public diplomacy.	**4**	**10**	**3**	**5**	**5**	**2**

Comments, if any.

13

Section 7: Background Questions

Q.21) Which organization do you work for?
(Please check one box.)

1	❑	IBB	**2**
2	❑	VOA	**10**
3	❑	WorldNet Television	**4**
4	❑	Radio/TV/Marti	**3**
5	❑	RFE/RL	**5**
6	❑	RFA	**3**
7	❑	Other, please specify	**1**

Q.22) Which of the following categories most closely matches your level within your organization?

1	❑	Director of broadcasting entity (VOA, IBB, RFA, etc.)	**7**
2	❑	Program Manager	**14**
3	❑	Regional Language Director	**6**
4	❑	Other, please specify	**2**

Q.23) Please briefly describe the language services for which you are responsible:

Q.24) Other comments *(Please continue on additional sheets, if necessary. Also, please feel free to attach any relevant documents you wish.)*

Note: If you would like to send us any documents, please send them to:

Melissa Pickworth
Room 4440
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G St. NW
Washington, DC 20548

Contact information: If you would like us to contact you directly about an issue related to this survey, please provide your name and telephone number below. Any contacts we have with you will be strictly confidential.

Name: _____

Telephone number: _____

Thanks for your assistance!

14

Comments from the Broadcasting Board of Governors

BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE HONORABLE
COLIN L. POWELL
Secretary of State
Ex Officio

June 27, 2003

Mr. Jess T. Ford
Associate Director
International relations and Trade Issues
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Ford:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your draft report, "U.S. International Broadcasting, New Strategic Approach Focuses on Reaching Large Audiences but Lacks Measurable Program Objectives." In responding to it, let me first note that we have been impressed by the professionalism and the constructive spirit with which the GAO conducted this review. We believe that as the Broadcasting Board of Governors reshapes U.S. international broadcasting to meet the quickly changing needs of the 21st century and specifically, needs imposed by the War on Terror, we have both a proud story to tell and room to improve. The draft report captures this. I am sure this organization will benefit from having gone through the review and from the openness that both sides displayed.

Overall, we consider the report to be fair and accurate in its description of the Board's strategic initiatives. We do, however, find it somewhat unbalanced in its seeming over-emphasis on criticism of the Strategic Plan's degree of conformance to the documentation norms of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA). Ours is a journalistic organization. We believe in the power of clear speaking, and that is what the BBG Strategic Plan does. The document shows where we want to go and why and how we will get there. More detailed comments on these points are attached.

We appreciate that GAO has spelled out some options for future directions. To the report's suggestions on how best to manage day-to-day operations in U.S. international broadcasting, we would add that the Board needs to retain its own staff and chief of staff to ensure the integrity of its oversight role.

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We concur in varying degrees with GAO's recommendations:

1) *"Revise the BBG's 5-year strategic plan to include measurable program objectives, implementation strategies, resource requirements and project time frames."*

   Comments: Concur, with reservations. Our strategic plan maps out the future directions of a young agency that is largely remaking itself to meet rapidly changing conditions overseas. The variables with which we must contend are many and often unpredictable. As a result, our document is a framework and in GPRA terms it does not always have numerical specificity. Yet its thrust is clear. That said, we believe that we can make our Strategic Plan GPRA-compliant by subordinating the existing goals to a single restated Strategic Goal, with supporting effectiveness measures, and linking these to the performance plan. Developing and fine-tuning these new measures will take some time, but the general idea of what we envision is spelled out in Appendix B.

   To the extent that the constantly changing requirements of international conditions and the need to reallocate funds from existing programs to fund new higher priorities permit, we will codify this in the strategic plan. We remind that unlike virtually every other federal agency, the automatic corrective that governs our strategic planning process is the annual language review, mandated by law. It is heavily research-driven. (Appendix A)

2) *"Include audience size, audience awareness, broadcaster credibility and VOA mission effectiveness as measurable program objectives in the strategic plan."*

   Comments: Concur in the main. Audience size will be inculcated into the plan as one of a number of effectiveness measures which support a new overarching Strategic Goal - "Maximize impact in priority areas with high-quality programming consistent with mission." As we have noted elsewhere in this response, credibility and VOA mission effectiveness are integral components of the existing programming quality performance indicator in the annual performance plan. We will make this more explicit to the readers of the strategic and annual plans (Appendix A). We will examine audience awareness as a possible indicator, but we believe that by itself it is not directly a broadcasting impact measure, but rather a subordinate outcome indicator for marketing and program placement operations. It may be most useful as part of a ratio. (Appendix B) Broadcaster credibility and VOA mission effectiveness will be looked at carefully. They make sense on their face, but the difficulty is in getting reliable data on which to base them.

3) *"Revise the BBG's annual performance plan to include performance goals and indicators that track the Board's progress in implementing the multiyear program objectives established in the Board's revised strategic plan."*

   Comments: Concur.

4) *"Revise the Board's strategic plan to include a clear vision of the Board's intended scope of operations regarding the total number of language services and the appropriate level of overlap and duplication between VOA and surrogate language services."*

Comments: Concur, but with clarifications. First, the Board does not accept the premise that there are "duplicate" services. While VOA and RFE/RL or RFA broadcast in some of the same languages (i.e., they overlap), the missions and program philosophies remain distinct. Certainly there are degrees of separation, and combining services in some cases makes sense. Not every market requires the same mix of services. The Strategic Plan states clearly the Board's philosophy of creating single-country and regional networks, and combining existing overlap services in ways that will increase the overall impact of each ("making 2+2=5"). The Board is currently undertaking an in-depth assessment of the utility/practicality of integrating current overlap language services and expects to forward the findings of this assessment as part of the FY 2005 budget submission. We anticipate that whatever the results might be, actual implementation would be phased in over a period of up to two years. That said, we must note that it is impractical to state in the Strategic Plan a target total number of language services. There is no fixed number, since international conditions, legislative mandates, and resultant language priorities change each year. The Board believes that the current examination, described above, together with the annual language review process and its engine, a freshly produced, research-driven set of broadcast priorities, will best guide.

We also have some specific comments on and corrections to the Report. Please consider our full response.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please let me know if we can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson
Chairman

Attachment: Comments on GAO Draft Report and Notes on Text
Appendix A: Restated Strategic and Operational Goals
Appendix B: Developing Further Indicators To Measure The Impact Of U.S. International Broadcasting
Appendix C: Brief Description of the BBG Programming Quality Index

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Diana Glod (202) 512-8945.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the person named above, Michael ten Kate, Melissa Pickworth, and Janey Cohen made key contributions to this report. Martin De Alteriis and Ernie Jackson also provided technical assistance.

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