


Nov 04, 2016 by [Kim Andrew Elliott](#)

Good Things About the Lugar Report on International Broadcasting ^[1]

Paul Foldi and his colleagues on (fellow Hoosier) Senator Richard Lugar's staff have prepared the report: "[U.S. International Broadcasting -- Is Anybody Listening? -- Keeping the U.S. Connected](#) ." This is an uncommonly thorough and thoughtful report about the challenges to U.S. international broadcasting.

[Philip Seib](#) and [Shawn Powers](#) have already written about the report. I think the report contained three especially good things:

1) It calls for the much-delayed confirmation of the eight new members of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, held up by some of Senator Lugar's fellow Republicans, especially Senator Tom Coburn. "The Board has not had a formal Chairman since June 2008 when the incumbent left to become the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy for the remainder of the Bush Administration. The Obama Administration did not formally submit candidates for a new Board until November 2009, but [Senate] action on them is still pending as this report was going to print. This is especially unfortunate because the changing circumstances that have confronted the BBG since the current Board members were emplaced in 2002, both technical and geopolitical in nature, require immediate attention; attention the current Board is understandably reluctant to address given the nominations waiting in the wings."

The report also states: "In the medium term, Congress must decide whether it is time to consider another management structure if Board staffing difficulties persist." The "staffing difficulties" are caused, at present, by Congress, specifically by Senate delays. In international broadcasting, credibility is the most important commodity. Credibility requires independence. In the Western democracies, public broadcasting entities funded by license fees or by government grants maintain their independence by being governed by a bi- or multi-partisan board with fixed and staggered terms. Return to politically-appointed management of U.S. international broadcasting will change the tone of U.S. international broadcasting, which will be detected by the audience, which will tune elsewhere.

2) The report defends the need for balance in the reporting of US international broadcasting. "[I]n order for the BBG to be credible to its audience and draw in not just those who already agree with U.S. policy, its networks must be permitted to present both sides of an argument." This is in contrast to Senator Coburn, who has said: "The U.S. taxpayers should not subsidize content presenting a balance between the truth and the regime's malicious propaganda. U.S. broadcasts should be the balance to the propaganda being broadcast by the regime and others."

3) The report acknowledges, though briefly, the 800-pound gorilla of U.S. international broadcasting, which is the amount of duplication between entities: "VOA is intended to provide

its listeners with news and information about the United States, the world and the particular region to which it is broadcasting. The surrogates are intended to focus their reporting on the news from inside the countries they are broadcasting to. In reality, each does a little of both to the point that some are questioning whether one or the other is necessary."

I have more comments  about the Lugar report's specific recommendations at my website.
