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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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You asked about this. It was Walter Isaacson.

New BBG chief wants more money to combat "enemies" such as China and Russia Posted By Josh Rogin Tuesday, October 5, 2010 - 4:43 PM

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) has a new chairman in Walter Isaacson, and the former CNN and Time magazine chief is calling for even more money for the BBG to combat the public diplomacy efforts of America's "enemies," which he identifies as Iran, Venezuela, Russia, and China.

The BBG, which oversees a \$700 million annual budget to run such organizations as the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Free Asia, funds breakthrough reporting in some of the most dangerous parts of the world, but at the same time is facing increased competition from other governments' forays into international broadcasting.

Isaacson said that other countries are stepping up their international broadcasting efforts and that the Congress must allow the U.S. government to do the same.

"We can't allow ourselves to be out-communicated by our enemies," he said. "You've got Russia Today, Iran's Press TV, Venezuela's TeleSUR, and of course, China is launching an international broadcasting 24-hour news channel with correspondents around the world [and has] reportedly set aside six to ten billion [dollars] -- we've got to go to Capitol Hill with that number -- to expand their overseas media operations."

Isaacson said that combating internet censorship would be a major focus of the BBG under his leadership and that China and Iran were the prime targets.

"China, Iran, and other countries block democratic impulses using their later technologies, and Beijing has deployed armies of cyber militias to go after their country's cyber dissidents," he said. "The BBG is at the forefront of combating this. Through constant innovation and technical evolution, our engineers are opening up the Internet gateway for audiences in China and Iran."

"We know where we stand in the fight for Internet freedom," Isaacson said. "Wherever there is a firewall, it's our duty to storm it, to denounce it and to circumvent it."

Isaacson was speaking at last week's 60th anniversary celebration for Radio Free Europe, which he credited as contributing to the end of the Cold War. He made it clear the BBG's outlets will stick to reporting the news objectively, even if that conflicts with the foreign policy of the Obama administration.

"It's sometimes said that our international broadcasting is in a difficult position because by law and by tradition it's tasked with two separate missions that might conflict: first of all, covering the news with the highest journalistic standards and secondly, being a part of America's public diplomacy by accurately conveying its policies and values to the world," Isaacson said.

"Let me say to you, my fellow journalists, that I will stress and we will stress the primacy of the first of these missions, our mission of being credible journalists, because in fact, it's the only way to carry out the second mission. You can't do it unless you're credible and telling the truth, and in the end, the truth is on our side."

Pressed by The Cable to explain exactly what that means, especially in light of reports that the Obama administration sought to influence BBG reporting after the disputed Iranian presidential elections, Isaacson promised he wouldn't hesitate to air views that contradict American foreign policy on BBG stations.

He said that the goals of American foreign policy and the objectives of credible journalism overlap about 90 percent of the time -- as for the other 10 percent, a choice must be made.

"I feel it's the role of the BBG to always make the choice on the side of credible journalism, just as you would in the private sector," Isaacson said. "We can never compromise our credibility. And in doing so, that will probably help further the foreign policy interests of the United States. But if it's ever a real conflict, our goal one is to protect our credibility."