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Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy Research, Evaluation, and Learning Summit

BBG CEO and Director John F. Lansing

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BBG CEO & Director

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Shawn, for the introduction. My BBG colleagues and I appreciate the invitation to participate in these conversations.

*Following an
introduction by Shawn
Powers, Executive
Director of the ACPD*

As always, it's great to hear from Under Secretary Goldstein, who is also a member of our Board.

The BBG and all U.S. International Media are a strong champion of research and evaluation. But we hold ourselves accountable to a higher standard than simply measuring audience reach.

We believe we owe it to our stakeholders to measure the impact we make around the world through our unduplicated weekly audience of more than 280 million people.

The accountability of our media is in service to a global effort, funded by U.S. taxpayers – to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy. We operate in parts of the world where freedom of the press is either highly regulated or simply non-existent.

We see a full assessment of the impact of U.S. International Media as an integral component of our role in supporting, through professional journalism, the National Security Strategy's "Information Statecraft" and "Champion American Values" pillars. We conduct research using a variety of methods in order to understand our audiences in over 100 countries.

Our research program provides us with market intelligence, including demographic information, media usage, and audience feedback on particular programming efforts.

In order to build on our research, we developed an ambitious customized Impact Model. We go beyond reach and counting heads when defining impact. To us, how the audience uses the information we provide is our ultimate objective... Are we enabling positive changes in the lives



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of our audience members; within the local media sector; and among governments? The model draws indicators from a variety of sources:

- Through Qualitative Research we measure just how trustworthy our content is – in other words, how credible are we for audiences that often lack access to any credible and objectively truthful information. (And by the way, our content is deemed trustworthy by almost 80% of our consumers world-wide.)
- We also seek out anecdotal evidence, including whether our content prompts action or helps people to form opinions on important topics.
- Another Impact Measurement – Do our audiences share the content we create?
- Through Digital Analytics – We track web traffic and social media engagement.
- And we look at other sources, such as affiliations with local media outlets, content co-creation with partners, and high-profile news pickups.

We don't let the feedback gained from the Impact Model lay dormant—we put it to work. We use it to assess our ability to meet audience demand and determine where to make refinements to our strategic roadmap. With our Impact Model in hand, everyone from leadership to editorial and support staff can inform their decisions that drive USIM forward.

The work of the BBG and U.S. International Media has never been more critical. With the attack on our free and fair elections by the Kremlin, the stakes are rising rapidly.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce was prescient at a hearing in 2015 when he warned of Russian media manipulation in Europe: “[T]his Russian campaign, what one witness describes as the ‘weaponization of information,’ seriously threatens U.S. security. Russia has deployed an information army inside television, radio, and newspapers throughout Europe.”

Senator John McCain took it a step further in 2016 when he said that Russia's meddling in the 2016 presidential election amounted to an “act of war!”

So, what was formerly a benign “media landscape” for U.S. International Media has now transformed in to an “Information Battlefield” where the truth is under constant assault.



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In fact, I would argue that the very idea of an objective, verifiable, empirical fact IS the very target of Russia's campaign. And it is the greatest threat to free and open societies everywhere. Their motivation? In a world where facts cannot be trusted – The BIGGEST LIAR WINS! Chaos is king in the Kremlin.

So what are we doing about it?

About a year ago, the BBG launched *Current Time*, a 24/7 Russian-language digital network led by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in cooperation with Voice of America. We're reaching out to Russian speakers in Russia, throughout the former Soviet space, and around the world to give them access to balanced, accurate, topical, and trustworthy information.

In Russian, *Current Time* means "The Real Deal."

We are still in the process of conducting full audience surveys following the launch of the network, but we have seen tremendous interest from partner stations and cable systems throughout the region.

At present, *Current Time's* dynamic reporting and fresh feature coverage is available on leading digital platforms, 77 distribution networks, and 47 affiliate stations in Russia and nearly 30 other countries, including the Baltics, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Central Asia.

In 2017, *Current Time* garnered more than 400 MILLION ONLINE VIEWS – half of which came from Russia – and averaged more than 33 MILLION VIDEO VIEWS per month.

Here's a soon after launch video. (video plays)

The BBG is undertaking an effort now to create a 24/7 Persian-language network across all platforms – much like *Current Time* – to grow our Persian audience even further and improve our impact.

Authoritarianism is on the rise around the world. From Russia to Cambodia to Venezuela, our journalists face growing threats – including arrests and physical intimidation. The information battlefield is nothing short of a war for truth over lies and manipulation. And winning that war requires that we measure our progress and hold ourselves accountable to remaining believable and credible.



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Our North Star can be summed up by our founding leader, Edward R. Murrow, when he famously said: *“TO BE PERSUASIVE WE MUST BE BELIEVABLE; TO BE BELIEVABLE WE MUST BE CREDIBLE; AND TO BE CREDIBLE WE MUST BE TRUTHFUL.”*

My staff and I look forward to connecting with you at this summit – sharing our experiences and learning from yours. Thanks again.