



U.S. AGENCY FOR
GLOBAL MEDIA

330 Independence Avenue SW | Washington, DC 20237 | usagm.gov

SECURITY ISSUES

WHAT WAS FOUND

Soon after Michael Pack became the first Senate-confirmed CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) in June 2020, the agency's new senior management learned that previous senior management had repeatedly failed to adhere to national security protocols and essential federal government personnel security practices for at least a decade. The actions – and, in many cases, inactions – of the individuals responsible for producing this crisis placed U.S. national security in danger and imperiled USAGM's ability to fulfill its legal mandate of advancing U.S. foreign policy.

Specifically, new USAGM senior management became aware that both the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) had conducted multiple assessments of USAGM between 2010 and 2020. Those assessments, identified myriad deep-seated and persistent security problems that were either initially caused by or left largely unaddressed by previous senior management. Indeed, previous senior management and the now-defunct Broadcasting Board of Governors had not remediated these problems. In August 2020, at CEO Pack's direction, USAGM released [OPM's most recent assessment](#), which had been completed the previous month, in July 2020.

The aforementioned assessments revealed that, by the time CEO Pack started his tenure, at least 1,500 employees at USAGM – around 40 percent of the agency's entire workforce – had been improperly vetted, including dozens of individuals given security clearances at the confidential level or above and/or access to federal government systems and facilities despite having invalid background investigations, adjudicative actions, and government access cards.

Because of this record of egregious security violations and deficiencies, USAGM became one of only two federal agencies in the past 20 years to have its delegated suitability-determination authority revoked by OPM. Likewise, due to repeated failures stemming from an unacceptable level of systemic and institutional negligence, ODNI revoked USAGM's authority to adjudicate security clearances. Such severe remedies in such stark terms against an entire federal government agency is virtually unprecedented.

Moreover, USAGM had cleared the more than 1,500 employees even though the agency's delegated authority to conduct investigations lapsed back in 2012—due to what was already a list of numerous and egregious security violations and deficiencies. This delegated authority was never reinstated and USAGM management failed to take decisive action to resolve this issue during the entire ten-year period of assessments, despite the fact that the issue was repeatedly brought to its attention by career USAGM security professionals.

In the face of all this, USAGM under previous senior management continued to issue invalid access, security clearances, and suitability determinations. The agency was taking fingerprints, but neglecting to submit them to the appropriate authorities – or, in other instances, failing to take fingerprints, altogether. It was accepting aliases and fake social security numbers. It was not requiring the disclosure of foreign travel and foreign contacts. And on many occasions, USAGM was hiring individuals who left entire fields of background-check forms blank. Even the number of employees with secret and top-secret clearances was unknown.

The violations and deficiencies impacted every known element of personnel and information security. The damage done to U.S. national security cannot be easily calculated. The disregard for the many warnings ranks among the worst holistic federal government security failures in the modern era.

U.S. national security is jeopardized every time there is a single security violation. In this case, an entire agency – one that reaches more than 350 million people around the world on a weekly basis – allowed for lax and even non-existent security protocols for an entire decade. USAGM's longstanding failure to effectively vet its personnel, ranging from interns to contractors to grantees to full-time federal employees, made it vulnerable to those with nefarious intent toward the United States. The

thousands of individuals that USAGM improperly cleared over the past ten years possessed access not only to high-level federal government employees and sensitive information, but also to the powerful tools of U.S. civilian international broadcasting that shape America's global narrative.

WHAT WAS DONE—AND WHY

CEO Pack immediately directed USAGM to work closely with its federal partners to ensure that OPM's and ODNI's findings were swiftly and appropriately addressed. Because of the nature of the findings, he further requested meetings with the Chairmen and Ranking Members of USAGM's Congressional committees. He also ordered a comprehensive inquiry into USAGM operations because he was concerned that the failures identified by OPM and ODNI compromised the agency's ability to fulfill its mission, undermined the work of the federal workforce, and threatened U.S. national security. At CEO Pack's further direction, USAGM has initiated a system in consultation with agency partners that will cure the aforementioned security violations and deficiencies. Decisive action was required to protect the United States, the integrity of USAGM, and the safety of the agency's journalists at home and abroad.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE MOVING FORWARD

USAGM must further implement the system set in place in consultation with agency partners to efficiently and effectively remediate these security failures. Continuing to move forward, USAGM must follow the law and guidance of OPM, ODNI, and other federal entities.