

**CENTER FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY

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JEFFREY GEDMIN: Thank you very much for having me here and for the introduction. I did note in the introduction that you said despite its name, it broadcasts in the following places. Harry, we have to talk about its name and introductions like that.

I'm delighted and honored to be here. When I look around the audience I see friends and I see a number of people who have tremendous experience and expertise, so I'm a little bit humble in telling some of you anything about international broadcasting, but I have some thoughts to share and I want to hear from you in the discussion and see what's on your minds.

It's an honor to be a part of this series. Thank you very much. It's a great report. I've read the report. It's an important idea to stimulate discussion on this. It's great to be in Washington this week from Prague, and I would have to say it is bittersweet, and it is bitter because of the passing -- because of the death of Tom Lantos earlier this week. Anybody who cares about soft power, anybody who cares about human rights or democracy promotion will have to get used to life without that fixture.

We did something recently with Tom Lantos on Capitol Hill, with Gary Kasparov on press freedom in Russia, and it just doesn't happen without Tom Lantos. I can tell you more and more and more, and you know that better than I, but I just wanted to recognize that at the top.

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Let me begin with the following. We're in Prague. We have our corporate headquarters here. We have bureaus in 20 countries, but the operational headquarters is in Prague. We have 550 people in Prague. Every morning at 10 a.m. we have an editorial meeting. We are in, if you know Prague or if you know RFE/RL that intimately, we're in the old communist parliament. Vaclav Havel gives it to us for a nickel, a euro a month, which is a charming footnote to that chapter in history.

Every morning the service directors of all these languages from all these countries gather around a big round table, big windows, fifth floor, overlooking the spectacular city, and we have a daily editorial meeting, to get the big view of who's doing what inside the company. About six months ago, and it was right before General Petraeus delivered his report on the surge in Iraq, our reporters were talking a little bit about what do we do, what's our competitive advantage, how can we contribute to our broadcast region on this important subject. Somewhere in the middle of that conversation the gentleman who is responsible for Chechnya raised his hand. He's a very soft-spoken, deep person, if I could put it that way. He's a person of real intellectual and political heft. He says, you know, can I just tell you what my audience is interested in? My audience is not interested in what's going wrong in Iraq, because they know that and they have no illusions. He said, my audience is interested in what, if anything, is going right. I thought it was interesting.

I took him aside after the meeting and I said, I don't know anything about Chechnya. Tell me more. Very quickly he distilled it this way; He said, you know, for me and my service and my audience the principal thing that we deliver is not journalism, accuracy, objectivity, truth. We do all that. The principal thing that we deliver is hope. And he says, you're from the United States and you're living a very good life in Prague. I think it's hard to understand, but for many of

the folks that we're broadcasting to, our friends, our families, our colleagues, that is the one indispensable commodity that we have to offer.

I would say -- now I've been at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty less than a year, so there's a lot I don't know. I've been there 11 months, but I would tell you that there are two things that have impressed me and I've learned above anything else. Number one, exactly that fact -- that we're in the journalism business, the accuracy business, the objectivity business, the information business, the commentary business. But the value that's difficult to talk about or quantify of giving hope through these services to literally millions of people, about 30 million people in our broadcast area.

The second thing that I've learned, which has humbled me terribly, is the incredible risk that our journalists take to do what they do. And I was probably a little under-informed or naïve. In 11 months on the job, less than one year for me, we've had two journalists killed in Iraq. We've had one kidnapped. Our bureau chief from Baghdad is in Prague right now because the death threats and the stalking got to be too much. We had two journalists go missing for three weeks in Turkmenistan. We've had partners in Russia who have found their offices bugged, have found themselves hauled into black sedans at midnight and harassed. We had one reporter, perhaps ill-advisedly but understandably, who went back to Iran to visit a 95-year-old mother who was having surgery. She was detained for eight months, interrogated almost daily. By the way, her profession is literary translator, and her politics I would say are soft center or soft left. She's not a notorious regime-changer.

We've had -- it's daily. I'll stop actually. Yesterday I woke up, turned on my little Blackberry. We have a journalist in Croatia who does brilliant work in tracking and reporting, objectively, fair-mindedly on war crimes. He's under death threat. We're bringing him to Prague. It's not the first time. One could go on and on.

In Iraq -- we had recently two journalists come up and visit us for training. Two young guys in broken English. I had an interpreter. I don't speak Arabic. I said, look, you've lost two, you had one kidnapped, your bureau chief is here, you're about 30 years old. Why do you do this? You know what they said spontaneously? They both smiled, no kidding. They smiled. They said, we love it. I said, well, you've got to tell me more. You're risk-takers. You love it. They said, we love being journalists. It's our country. And Radio Liberty is the only opportunity in Iraq to do this kind of journalism that is fair-minded and independent, that is not beholden to a political party, an ethnic group, a religious group, a tribal group, a foreign power.

I said, wait a second. A foreign power? This is funded by the U.S. Congress. You're being financed by a foreign power. And they said, yes, but this foreign power stands by the integrity of what we do, and stands by journalistic truth and accuracy and objectivity. They said, there's no other opportunity in this country. Size of France, right, 25 million people. That's it. I think for me it's impressive. It's great to be part of a team, an organization like that.

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Before I continue, let me make some basic assumptions about the broader topic. These are my assumptions. Number one, that thanks to groups like CSIS and certainly people like Joe Nye, soft power is acknowledged as an essential element of U.S. foreign policy, an essential

element of any kind of broader smart power. I don't think there's any debate or discussion or controversy or contention. There may have been 10 years ago, or six or seven or eight. Not any more.

Second, as your fine report notes, the sources of so-called soft power are plentiful, and some of the most important ones don't flow from government. They're private. They're humanitarian, and they have powerful effect around the world, consistent and consonant with American interests.

Finally, and this is not an assumption; this is a contention. This is a suggestion that U.S. broadcasting ought to be viewed consistently and confidently and unapologetically as an absolute, essential part of any conversation about soft power. Now that's a self-interested argument, but nevertheless let me enlarge that for you a little bit.

First of all, broadcasting, international broadcasting strikes me as uniquely American as we Americans are uniquely pragmatic. It was set up during the Cold War and it was very simple. Practical problems and very concrete practical solutions. If you've lived abroad, and most of you have, the world envies American pragmatism. I think that's at the root of what we've done in setting up broadcasting. Second of all, American idealism; not naiveté, not indiscriminate interventionism, not kind of silly utopianism, but still the idea that the United States has a role, responsibility and opportunity to somehow make the world a better place. Third, American values, I mean, good heavens, near and dear to every man, woman, child, dog, tree, fireman in this country are the basic ideas of free speech, free press, free flow of information, and seeing all this as the oxygen that fuels and feeds civil society. Without that it doesn't exist. Period, full stop.

Next, which is very important to me, I'm leading an organization of mostly non-Americans. So you know, they like us, at least a lot of them do, but they're not Americans. So I can talk all day about American values and they say, I'm from Uzbekistan, I'm from Russia, I'm from Iraq. I think we are at our best when American values fuse, as they often do, with universal values. And any time I would ever have anybody in my organization say that we're promoting American values -- which we are -- I always give them this little booklet that I have from my general counsel here, John Lindbergh in the first row, the United --it's blue, it's small. Look at article 18, right, John? The United Nations Universal Charter on Human Rights, drafted by a Canadian, a Lebanese, a Chinese, and it says that the free flow of information, ideas across borders, it ain't uniquely American. It's not George W. Bush, it's not Jimmy Carter, it's not Ronald Reagan, that it should be and is a uniformly universal value.

Last but not least, I think that this is really all happening in the best of American tradition because of pragmatism, idealism, American values, universal values. But because what we do is American confusion at its best. And anybody who deals with anybody from other countries knows that we're always asked, wait a second, is this charity, or is this self-interest, right? Because it seems like you guys have double standards or contradictions or you're somehow hypocritical. My answer to that always is, we do have double standards, we do have contradictions, we are hypocritical, but it doesn't mean we're insincere, actually. There's a big difference. And in fact, it's not charity, international broadcasting, but it's not national interest narrowly defined either. It's a much broader, much more generous definition of self-interest, a kind of enlightened self-interest.

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Now what does this mean? Let me talk more practically a little bit. Broadcasting. I say this very quickly because I think many of you know this, and perhaps in some ways know it better than I. What are we talking about? In broadcasting we're talking about radio and television from Marti to Cuba. We're talking about the great and famous Voice of America. We're talking about Radio Free Asia, that covers countries like North Korea, China and Burma. We're talking about Al-Hurra television and Radio Sawa that reaches the Middle East. And we're talking about my group, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. All of that together, to give you some context, the radio, the television, the Internet, the dozens of countries from Africa to Asia to the Middle East in terms of budget is about \$700 million.

Now I'm here to kind of sell and spin a little bit, but it's really not hard. I did some quick arithmetic with the help of a colleague yesterday. The sum total of American U.S. broadcasting, if you consider the challenge in al-Qaeda and the war of ideas and American image and anti-Americanism, is about -- I'm told we have problems. I live here but I'm based in Prague now. I'm told we have problems with the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, right? Going to replace the bridge. Well, U.S. broadcasting is about a third of the amount of money we'll spend to replace the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Or, I'm from Vienna, Virginia, grew up in Vienna. We've talked forever about a Metro extension out there. If my arithmetic is right, it's less than one-fifth what it will cost us to build the Metro extension out to where I grew up, Vienna, Virginia. Or, let me be even more specific. My group, my company, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, it is a mighty sum of \$80 million U.S. I like hard power, by the way. I think it plays a central role in American foreign policy. But I like soft power too. \$80 million, if I have it right, it's about four Apache helicopters.

Now let me tell you, pitching to you as taxpayers, let me tell you a little bit about what you and what we get. I'm a taxpayer also. We have 28 language services. We broadcast to Russia, Belarus, all the Central Asian republics. We dip down through the Middle East. We've got Afghanistan, we've got Iraq, we've got Iran. What are we doing in terms of delivery? We've got radio, as the name suggests, the old Cold War name suggests. We've got some television in some markets, and we have a lot of web and we have a lot of Internet. And increasingly Internet that has text and audio and video.

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What is the method? There's a strange term that I know everybody in this room has probably heard of or worked with. The method is surrogate broadcasting. What we do as a group, I'm speaking now of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. What we do is broadcast to our region, to our countries in their languages the news, the information -- I'd like to say the responsible discussion and commentary that they would have if they had a free and independent media. Or in some markets, transitional markets, if they had a fully established free and independent media. It's a big difference between us and Voice of America, and I think they're both absolutely important.

Voice of America, if I could put it in my shorthand, has always been about us, about America, about American foreign policies, American society and culture and music and art and sport and theater and politics. But surrogate broadcasting, like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,

also Radio Free Asia, has always been about them, what they need that they can't get otherwise. It certainly was during the Cold War.

The mission is the same as it was during the Cold War. In the abstract, it's promoting democratic values and democratic institutions through accurate, quality, fair-minded journalism. And above all, if I may say, it works. I've given you kind of this cost argument, but money alone is not the point here. It works.

We certainly think it worked during the Cold War, where between the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe, at any given time, with imperfect measures, we think anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of these populations were relying on our services for information about their countries. We know that the Soviet Union intimidated people who listened, tried to jam it. We know that Walesa and Havel and Sharansky all said that it was a source of information, but also intellectual nourishment, of moral inspiration. And today we haven't won the war yet in some of these countries, if the war is building democracy. But the evidence is kind of staggering.

We have a service that works in Afghanistan. We have 67 percent of the market in Afghanistan. No market, no listener, no Radio Free Europe, no Radio Liberty. Sixty-seven percent. We get bags of mail. I've said to my colleagues, if I'm ever called to testify, Harry, before Congress on Afghanistan, I'm going to do it like Miracle on 34th Street. We get hundreds of letters every week, bags of mail. It's like Santa Claus. From kids and professors and taxi drivers and farmers and guys in huts saying, this is great, I can't live without it. It's the music, it's the commentary, it's the information, it's about the economy, it's about daily life. I can't live without it. Both languages we broadcast in Afghanistan.

By the way, you know, we have security problems in Afghanistan and you can't make light of these sorts of things, but it's still a little bit amusing. We had two journalists that we pulled out recently, brought to Prague to cool things off a little bit, who were being threatened by the Taliban. They were being threatened with beheading, as they do. You know what they wanted? They didn't want us to stop broadcasting. They wanted equal time. We're coming after you, beheading you if you don't give us regular time on your show. Well, we must be reaching somebody. We must be having some effect.

The smaller countries can be heard to measure. You can measure it in different ways. In Belarus we have a poor, underdeveloped delivery system. You have Europe's last dictatorship. They block the Internet. We can't have a bureau there. They go after our journalists, but good heavens, do our Belarusians have fun. They do a game called reporter for a day. If in Minsk there's a demonstration, they get the word out, get your cell phone, your little camera, take a picture, send it in, it's on our web in real time and reaching hundreds of thousands of people. Or they do editor for a day recently. All the things that we take for granted, very simple things.

Example: They invited the wife of a dissident, a jailed dissident to be editor for a day. She said great. So she planned a program. It was on the radio, it was on the Internet. Know what she wanted to talk about? Something important to her personal experience, breast cancer. She said there's no outlet here. You may have dozens of programs and books and self-help and therapy and doctors and discussion and debate. Not here. We don't have an outlet to talk about those kinds of health problems. They did a brilliant job.

Sometimes the market test, as I've already suggested, can be real but quite grim. Voice of America had a reporter that shared working with us as a freelancer, a young guy. He's 26 years old, named Saipov. All he did was human rights. He was an ethnic Uzbek, okay, and doing work in Kyrgyzstan, and before Christmas shot point-blank, killed, leaving a widow, leaving a baby. He was just a human rights reporter. Not a great and famous dissident, not a regime-changer. No mischievous activity beyond basic reporting. By all accounts it was the Uzbek security services that ordered and carried out the hit, with the full cooperation green light of the Kyrgyz security services. It's a terrible thing to say but I say it. It means we're reaching people, and the people who want to cut off this oxygen from civil society, they know it. They're afraid of it, they react to it.

Let me tell you in conclusion, the organization works because it has journalistic independence, but it also has sensible and wise political oversight. The organization works just as the other entities in U.S. broadcasting work. There's a board, called the BBG. These broadcast governors are nine in total. It's bipartisan. They are appointed by the president of the United States. They are confirmed by the Senate. In the case of our entity, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, each one may have a different mission, each one may have a different tradition or different culture, but in our case, apart from support, representation, wise counsel, their job is supposed to protect our journalistic independence so that neither the State Department nor the White House nor the Pentagon nor anybody can come in and say, kill that interview, run this program, steer this left, turn it right. It's a fantastic idea actually. It's a fantastic idea.

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Finally, how does this kind of line up in broader ways with U.S. foreign policy? I'll give you a thought. Take two of our bigger, more important countries, Russia and Iran. They're both tough markets for us. In the case of Russia, we depend heavily on partners, called affiliates, on the ground to get our programming out. Three years ago we had 26. Today we have six.

And what Vladimir Putin and his associates do, the same thing they're doing with their own broadcasting and own journalists and the NGO community, many of whom are represented in this room, they tend not to use -- tend not to use -- the old brazen tactics of the Soviet Union. They tend to use their own soft power. They send the health inspector to an office. They find a piece of cheese that has been left out for two hours too long. That's a fine. They send the fire inspector. He didn't find anything. Want to be safe, send him again. Send him again. Send him a fourth time.

We've lost affiliates. Putin himself -- the Kremlin, I should say -- itself is devising terribly shrewd Internet strategies, anticipating he who -- he who can't go into television, or can no longer operate in radio will consider Internet as a primary platform. The Kremlin itself is developing ingenious Internet strategies, according to the adage, if you can't beat them, join them. They're financing direct and indirectly dozens of groups to populate and overpopulate the landscape for the following purpose. As my colleague, a terrific analyst, Daniel Kimmage, puts it, they're trying to create the illusion of choice. There is choice. You want sports? You want music? You want women's magazines? You want travel? You want cuisine? You've got it all. It's not the Soviet Union. It's not a monopoly. But when it comes to political idea of freedom, liberalism, democracy, that's not on the menu. That's not what they're providing. And for us who want to provide it, it becomes increasingly difficult.

I think in a moment in Russia, where 70-some percent apparently are fond of Mr. Putin, you have to think carefully how deep that is. You have to think carefully how wide that is. And for us in our business, you have to think about the 28 or 30 or 32 percent who are not in love with Putin-ism, who are not in love with authoritarianism and increasingly have no place to go.

Think about Iran for a second. In the case of Iran, they block our Internet, they jam our signals. We don't have a bureau inside the country of course. Even still, as best we can tell, imperfect, incomplete, polling, focus groups in Dubai and Istanbul, we reach about 13.5 percent of the population. We hit nerves with good journalism about terrific stories that Iranians can't access otherwise.

I'll give you two examples. This summer there's fuel rationing in Iran. It was an under-reported issue in Ahmadinejad's Iran. We could activate informally and discreetly people on the ground inside the country who could do these simple things we take for granted, like grab a microphone and go to a gas line and say, what are you doing? What do you think? What's your impression? Who should be blamed for this? Do you have a problem with this?

One fellow said to one of our reporters, you know, I've been waiting five hours for gasoline for my car, and this government is sending my tax money to Hezbollah? Sounds like an American actually.

We did another story. This is about four months ago, on dog prisons. Dog prisons. The clerics were insisting that the police in Tehran, this not being consistent with their vision and version of Islamic law, go after pet owners in public parks, bust the kids, and take away the dogs. Now we reported that the police were not very happy about this, and it was a pretty important social fissure. We also reported that a lot of Iranians in Tehran thought that was absolutely crazy. We reported on it, we got it on the radio, we interviewed people, we put it on the web, got European press to pick it up that played back in Iran.

Now I can't prove cause and effect, but they rescinded the decree. They stopped going after these kids and their dogs. It hit a nerve. It was useful. If they had a free and independent media, we wouldn't play a role. That's the other thing about us, by the way. We are in the business to go out of business. I don't know whether that's good or bad from my perspective. I think it's good for American taxpayers. We are in the business of going out of business when the job is done. We don't broadcast in Poland any more. We don't broadcast in the Czech Republic any more. We don't broadcast in the Baltics any more.

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I think broadly, and let me leave you with this thought. These things line up very nicely with broad U.S. foreign policy objectives. Has nothing to do with Democrats, has nothing to do with Republicans, has nothing to do with U.S. policy objectives. In particular, if I may say, in the case of Russia and Iran, because we don't know what to do about Russia and Iran. I've got an historian friend who says to me that one of the simple lessons in history for great nations is when you get stuck, keep playing. I think we're rather stuck with Iran and Russia right now. I don't know if a change in the White House is going to mean a breakthrough, but if you believe that, it sounds plausible to me, what my historian friend tells me. One way to keep playing -- it's not the

only way, but one way is through soft power, smart power, broadcasting. It opens up another front, it buys time, it supports the right people, it's an expression of the right ideas and ideals.

And last but not least, a very final point, it is fantastically effective, but also fantastically affordable. I'm pitching here a little bit. Think about the Iranian service alone of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. It's 24-7, it's radio, it's web, it reaches a large audience. It's effective. It costs about \$5 million a year. Do you know what the Iranians spend to jam us? We don't know. But we figure it's at least \$6 million, and maybe as much as \$26 million.

So I realize that's self-indulgent to say. I realize that's promoting my own group, but it does seem to me that there's a pretty good case to be made that it is soft power, it is very smart, it is very cost efficient, and above all, it seems to me pretty bloody effective.

So I'm going to stop with that, and as I said, because the wealth of expertise in the room, I'm very eager to hear from you about this or anything related. So thank you. I'll sit over here.

(Applause.)

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