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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Audit

Review of Radio Sawa Support to the Transition in Post-Saddam Iraq

Report Number IBO/IQO-A-05-02, October 2004

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
PURPOSE	3
RESULTS IN BRIEF	5
SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	7
BACKGROUND	9
FINDINGS	11
Equipment Requirements Went Unmet.	11
USAID Dissatisfied With Lack of Progress Reports.	12
Some Radio Sawa Stringers Were Not Fully Qualified.	12
Stringer Training Is Ad Hoc	13
Stringers Were Not Told To Report on the U.S. Humanitarian Response.	14
Audience Research Did Not Meet Terms of the Interagency Agreement	15
Prior Interagency Cooperation Has Succeeded.	16
CONCLUSIONS	19
ABBREVIATIONS	21
APPENDIX	
A: Partial Listing of Stories Provided by Radio Sawa’s Iraq Stringers, May 2003-February 2004.	23
B: Partial Listing of Stories on Humanitarian Assistance Broadcast on the Program “ <i>The World Cares</i> ” and Aired on Radio Sawa	25
C: Agency Comments.	27

SUMMARY

In May 2003, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) entered into a 12-month inter-agency agreement with the Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) to develop, produce, and deliver Radio Sawa broadcasting to keep Iraqis well informed about U.S. post-war humanitarian concerns and reconstruction efforts. The agreement was part of OTI's effort to respond to the emerging and urgent needs of the Iraqi people and to support democratic change by more widely disseminating information considered integral to sustainable development for the Iraqi people amid an environment of conflict and disorder.

Critical tasks for USAID were ensuring that the United States provided timely humanitarian assistance to the Iraqis and preparing to mobilize significant development resources and technical assistance. Equally critical was communicating the positive message of this assistance throughout that country. To make certain that accurate and balanced information was broadcast about the situation on the ground, USAID worked with media outlets outside Iraq, including Radio Sawa, which has the capacity to broadcast directly to the Iraqi people.

The interagency agreement between Radio Sawa and USAID was carried out in Iraq in a period of great turmoil and at considerable personal risk to Radio Sawa's Iraq-based staff. Despite security concerns, logistical challenges, and ongoing operation and maintenance changes, IBB, in an effort independent of the inter-agency agreement, installed FM transmitters on unique frequencies in Iraq, to provide greater fidelity and quality for portions of an Iraq audience that had relied on medium-wave and short-wave radio. Radio Sawa stringers were located at one time or another in Baghdad, Amarah, Karbala, Basra, Nasiriyah, Najaf, Hillah, Diwaniyah, Ramadi, Fallujah, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Kirkuk. They had to operate and live in that same environment, but without the extensive security measures that IBB engineers were able to call upon in a matter of days. The fact that the IBB Kuwait transmitting station staff was reluctant to volunteer to assist with the FM installation in Iraq reflected these concerns. As one IBB staff member in Kuwait said, "The war is still on and conditions are neither safe [nor] stable."

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Compared to other radio stations in the region, Radio Sawa has a dominant audience share in Iraq, as confirmed by the most recent analysis (May 2004) of an audience research firm contracted by BBG's Office of Research. That analysis showed 55 percent of Iraqis listen to Radio Sawa on a weekly basis, compared to other international broadcasters. (Radio Sawa competitors Radio Monte Carlo and the British Broadcasting Corporation's Arabic service had ratings of 46 percent and 36 percent, respectively.) The survey also showed that 28 percent of Iraqis consider the news and information broadcast on Radio Sawa as "somewhat reliable."

PURPOSE

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated a review of Radio Sawa's support to the transition in post-Saddam Iraq in September 2003. The first objective of this review was to determine whether USAID funds transferred to BBG were used effectively to enhance the dissemination of humanitarian and other information in Iraq. The second objective was to determine whether BBG successfully launched the three program components of the interagency agreement: establishing a stringer network, airing programs that address humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, and conducting audience research. Additionally, OIG compared the cooperation between USAID and BBG on this agreement with their cooperation in the management and execution of their successful interagency agreement for broadcasting to Afghanistan, initiated two years earlier.

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RESULTS IN BRIEF

USAID officials told OIG that BBG did not use the transferred funds to enhance the dissemination of reports of humanitarian and related information to Iraq, as expected. Therefore, the full-funding agreement, as initially planned, was not completed. BBG partially met the principal requirements of the interagency agreement: setting up a Radio Sawa stringer network in Iraq, broadcasting humanitarian programming, and initiating audience research. BBG did not provide periodic performance reports or purchase specific equipment. According to USAID officials, requests for information from BBG went unanswered, as did requests for written performance reports on the status of the implementation of the interagency agreement.

USAID officials told OIG that some of the stringers hired were not qualified or lacked adequate training and skills. These officials also told OIG that they based their expectations for the Iraq initiative on the level of cooperation and success achieved by their successful Afghanistan initiative with the Voice of America (VOA) two years earlier. This time, however, USAID officials told OIG they were generally not pleased with BBG and Radio Sawa's implementation of the Iraq transfer agreement.

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SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

OIG conducted this review from September 2003 through May 2004. OIG interviewed officials from the USAID's Office of the Controller; the Iraq Team from the Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI); the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance; the USAID Office of Inspector General; the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; BBG/IBB officials; Radio Sawa officials in Washington, D.C., and Amman, Jordan; and personnel at the Radio Sawa Middle East Program Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Due to the instability and violence in Iraq and the need for the Radio Sawa stringers there to focus on reporting news, both OIG and BBG agreed that the OIG team would not travel to Iraq during the course of its fieldwork in the Middle East. The Radio Sawa staff director instead arranged to have Radio Sawa's senior stringer in charge in Iraq, an American citizen, meet with OIG in Amman, Jordan, where the Iraq-based Radio Sawa staff went periodically to gain the cash to pay staff and for local expenses and to pick up supplies, with the assistance of the Radio Sawa office in Amman. OIG also reviewed and analyzed relevant program and budgetary documents.

OIG had independent quality assurance panels of experts in Arabic Languages conduct listening surveys covering two days of the Radio Sawa Iraq broadcast stream.¹

The audit review was performed in accordance with government auditing standards and included such test and auditing procedures as necessary under the circumstances. Major contributors to this report were Louis A. McCall, Assistant Inspector General for International Broadcasting Oversight; Lenora R. Fuller, audit manager; and Michele W. Anderson and Carmen Mina, auditors.

¹ According to Radio Sawa, a stream is a unique, 24/7 radio station broadcast on one or more transmitters to a specific geographical part of the Middle East. Streams are tailored for the linguistic, cultural, and information situation in each area.

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BACKGROUND

When the regime of Saddam Hussein failed to cooperate with inspections regarding the possible presence of weapons of mass destruction,² the United States launched Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 20, 2003. Approximately three weeks later, U.S. troops entered Baghdad. The city and the regime of Saddam Hussein fell shortly thereafter. On May 1, 2003, President Bush declared that major combat operations had concluded. With the Saddam Hussein regime out of power and the state-controlled media infrastructure in tatters, the United States needed a way to tell Iraqis about the humanitarian aid being provided and to assist them in the transition to a democratic society. The United States needed to counter the anti-American, pro-Saddam Arabic media with timely, reliable information. Otherwise, deliberate disinformation and rumors would undermine humanitarian assistance efforts and drive a wedge between the Iraqis and the U.S.-led coalition forces and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).

To address the communication deficiencies in post-conflict Iraq, USAID/OTI entered into an interagency agreement with BBG/IBB to use Radio Sawa of the Middle East Radio Network to fill the information void, much as USAID did by cooperating with the VOA in Afghanistan in 2001 following the U.S.-led defeat of the Taliban regime.³ USAID has worked closely with VOA over the years to address information and communication deficiencies in conflict situations through numerous interagency agreements.

Pursuant to Section 632(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended,⁴ and the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of 2003,⁵ OTI's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance allocated \$692,000 to BBG/IBB to enhance humanitarian news and information in Iraq. The project specifically was to allow Radio Sawa to reach critical audiences with vital information until it could set up a Baghdad News Bureau and a network of stringers. This was intended to support the U.S. foreign policy priority of providing assistance to the Iraqi people after the war and ensure that the policies of the United States and its allies would be presented clearly and effectively.

² U.N. Res. 1441, November 8, 2002.

³ IBB/VOA, *Humanitarian Broadcast Initiative to Afghanistan* (June 2003), submitted to USAID/OTI, documents that agreement.

⁴ Pub. L. No. 87-195.

⁵ Pub. L. No. 108-7

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FINDINGS

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS WENT UNMET

At the time of OIG's visit to Amman, Jordan, OIG found that the stringers in Iraq did not receive the equipment needed to perform their assignments, such as tape recorders or high-quality cell phones. USAID officials said there was an allowance for the purchase of such equipment in the interagency agreement, but as late as February 2004, they still did not know if the recorders were ever purchased. The senior stringer in Baghdad expressed frustration to OIG when he did not find a shipment of new recorders waiting for him in Amman, as expected.

According to USAID officials, the agreement also stipulated the purchase of a specific type of satellite cellular telephone, one considered best for remote field operations. Instead, Radio Sawa officials chose to procure a much cheaper satellite-based model that lacked the quality and performance of the brand stipulated in the interagency agreement. The stringers complained of dropped calls, the need to be outdoors to make or receive calls, and other performance problems. The senior stringer chose to use a lightweight wireless telephone that he said was provided by USAID, that functioned well, and was not the property of Radio Sawa.

BBG acknowledges that the agreement stipulated the purchase of a specific type of satellite cellular telephone and other equipment. However, it said all other equipment was procured with BBG-appropriated funds, rather than funds transferred from USAID under the agreement. BBG further stated that it compared the phones specified in the agreement with the phones that were purchased and that Radio Sawa determined that the latter would suit the needs of its stringers more effectively. BBG advised OIG that the tape recorders arrived in Amman after the stringer's meeting with OIG and were then sent to the Baghdad office, once a safe method of shipment was secured.

Nevertheless, the stringers complained that the Radio Sawa wireless telephones did not work well. The acting director of Radio Sawa's Middle East Program Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, who was also an engineer, confirmed this

during OIG's visit to that facility. He indicated he would go to Iraq, following the departure of OIG from the Middle East Program Center, to identify the problem and how it could be fixed.

USAID DISSATISFIED WITH LACK OF PROGRESS REPORTS

USAID officials said requests for information from BBG went unanswered, as did requests for written performance and financial reports on the status of the implementation of the interagency agreement. USAID officials told OIG that BBG did not provide monthly progress reports summarizing the humanitarian programming broadcast on Radio Sawa. USAID officials also told OIG that they did not know, until receipt of the final report, for certain whether Radio Sawa was providing humanitarian reporting.

BBG pointed out to OIG that the agreement required BBG's Office of the Chief Financial Officer to provide monthly financial reports, but that interim progress reports were discretionary. The BBG does acknowledge that it could have been more proactive in providing written interim progress reports, but said that Radio Sawa did, on occasion, provide detailed oral reports to the appropriate USAID official. According to BBG, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer did provide the required financial reports to USAID, and BBG provided a final closeout report.

SOME RADIO SAWA STRINGERS WERE NOT FULLY QUALIFIED

Radio Sawa's challenge was to create a network of language-qualified freelance reporters in key locations throughout Iraq. The stringers were to provide thorough coverage of critical events and developments inside Iraq. USAID/OTI wanted, and the agreement with BBG required, reports on humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, political developments, human rights, and other relevant social issues.

Interviews with Radio Sawa personnel indicated that some of the stringers lacked the experience to provide high quality, usable news reports. Some were unfamiliar with U.S. policies, and others lacked adequate journalistic skills. The reports Radio Sawa received from stringers were often discarded by editors because of their poor quality. Some reports, according to Radio Sawa editors, were written with overloaded, inflammatory, or unsuitable language.

To gauge the productivity of Radio Sawa's stringers in Iraq, OIG compared their output with that of Radio Free Iraq stringers working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. OIG found Radio Sawa's stringers performed poorly, compared with Radio Free Iraq stringers, who averaged two aired reports a day. Radio Sawa's output from its Iraq stringers was a fraction of that. Based on records examined by OIG at the Middle East Program Center, and interviews with the editors, on most days, only one or two of the 15 stringers in Iraq contributed reports that were aired. Radio Sawa staff said some reports from stringers in Iraq contained inappropriate statements, and some stringers lacked the language and standard skills required to do radio reporting. Radio Sawa's Iraq stringers received no formal training, and no training plans have been developed, as required under BBG's agreement with USAID.

BBG advised OIG that, although Radio Sawa was new in the region, it was able to establish a stringer network in an environment that had suppressed any semblance of acceptable journalistic standards. BBG stated that talented and trained journalists were in short supply in Iraq. Despite these difficulties, Radio Sawa's stringer network in Iraq had grown from four stringers in April 2003 to 27 stringers as of September 1, 2004. BBG also disagreed with OIG's assessment that some Iraqi stringers had poor language skills. BBG said that newscasts are delivered in modern classical Arabic, and the use of colloquial Iraqi Arabic terms is permitted because it provides a local sound for the station. Accordingly, BBG said that OIG's comparison of Radio Sawa stringers to those of Radio Free Iraq was inappropriate because the personnel assets of the two broadcasters were unevenly matched.

OIG convened two separate panels of highly credentialed Arabic language experts and scholars to listen to Radio Sawa broadcasts and assess the communication and pronunciation skills of the broadcasters and stringers. The panels found that one stringer switched between classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic when presenting the news.

STRINGER TRAINING IS AD HOC

Radio Sawa staff said no written guidance, such as a stylebook or handbook outlining editorial guidelines, was provided to the stringers in Iraq. No formal or structured broadcast training had been provided either. This contrasted with the training Radio Free Iraq reported it provided to its Iraq-based stringers. USAID

officials said they received no reports on training provided to Iraqi stringers. However, Radio Sawa's senior stringer in Amman said that he did train one Radio Sawa stringer in Iraq by telephone over the course of a month. In addition, the senior stringer in Baghdad told OIG that he would like to terminate several of the Radio Sawa stringers in Iraq because they lack good language skills. OIG also learned that Radio Sawa's Washington staff has provided feedback to the stringers in Iraq by telephone and e-mail.

BBG stated that Radio Sawa had difficulty implementing sustained training for journalists, who were relatively new to U.S. international broadcasting for security reasons. According to BBG, Radio Sawa compensated by bringing some stringers to Amman, Jordan, for unspecified amounts of training.

STRINGERS WERE NOT TOLD TO REPORT ON THE U.S. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

According to USAID, the expected humanitarian crisis in Iraq — millions of refugees and internally displaced persons — did not materialize, as feared. Nevertheless, the need for humanitarian and reconstruction aid remained. Also, the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration told OIG that it sees Iraq as still in a humanitarian crisis. USAID officials, in testimony before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, said funds were given to Radio Sawa to support its reporting on humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. The statement of work outlined in the interagency agreement explicitly states that "themes covered by the reporters will include humanitarian assistance, country reconstruction, political developments, human rights and relevant social stories." However, USAID officials said that, until recently, no written progress reports had been forthcoming to validate the existence of such programming. Radio Sawa directed its senior stringer in Iraq to travel to Amman, Jordan, to meet with OIG and he stated that he was unaware of any instruction to provide humanitarian news coverage. He said that he had included such news coverage at his own initiative.

BBG and Radio Sawa officials said a six-minute program called *The World Cares*, which focused on humanitarian news for the Iraqi audience, exemplified the humanitarian reporting that aired in the Iraq stream of Radio Sawa from April 1 through June 24, 2003. After *The World Cares* went off the air, news about humanitarian and reconstruction issues was integrated into the regular news stream. Other

programming such as *Challenges*, which contains elements of news and non-news information about humanitarian and reconstruction issues, began in August 2003 and is currently being aired on the Iraq stream. The program runs Monday through Friday for approximately six minutes. Although Radio Sawa reported on humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, communication on this matter between Radio Sawa and USAID/OTI and between Radio Sawa in Washington, D.C., and its stringers in Iraq was deficient.

BBG advised OIG that the contract with USAID calls for Radio Sawa to provide “culturally relevant stories and human interest stories.” According to BBG, Radio Sawa’s program *Challenges* provides this kind of information. BBG claimed that the Radio Sawa senior stringer interviewed by OIG in Amman, Jordan, was not fully aware of USAID’s requirements on humanitarian reporting because he had recently rejoined Radio Sawa. BBG also said the OIG team did not go to Iraq because it could not receive a country clearance and that, had OIG traveled to Iraq, the information it gathered on Radio Sawa programming would not have been so limited.

At the onset of the review, it was mutually agreed that the OIG team would not enter Iraq. The Baghdad senior stringer was sent to Amman, Jordan to meet with the OIG instead. OIG never planned to enter Iraq and did not request CPA clearance to do so.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH DID NOT MEET TERMS OF THE INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT

Under the terms of the interagency agreement, the IBB Office of Audience Research was to develop and implement a strategic audience research plan to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the new programming. Qualitative sampling of audience reaction was supposed to involve focus groups or other audience surveys and begin four months after the start of the new program, if conditions permitted. Under the agreement, IBB’s Office of Audience Research was to allow USAID to provide up to 20 percent of the questions for any focus groups or surveys and was to have the opportunity to comment on methodological plans and draft questionnaires or discussion questions before these were finalized.

USAID officials said they did not know of any audience research having been conducted beginning four months after the start-up of the program as specified in the statement of work. They also said they were neither given an opportunity to

provide questions for focus groups or surveys, nor to review methodological plans, draft questionnaires, or discussion questions. USAID officials told OIG they received a phone call from BBG one day before the first audience poll was to take place. This was their first opportunity to review the methodology or provide input, but it was too late to do so.

In addition, the agreement specifically stated that audience research would evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the new programming. During fieldwork, OIG interviewed one of the contractors used for the research. The contractor said that the research that was completed measured audience size, not reaction to the content of the new programming. It is difficult to determine whether Radio Sawa's Iraq broadcast stream covered the efforts of the Coalition Provisional Authority and U.S.-led forces to respond to humanitarian needs and reconstruct post-Saddam Iraq effectively because BBG did not conduct reviews to measure this. IBB still has not developed an audience research plan to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the new programming.

BBG acknowledged that, due to an oversight on its part, USAID was not contacted in a timely manner to enable it to participate in developing the survey that was conducted in Iraq.

PRIOR INTERAGENCY COOPERATION HAS SUCCEEDED

USAID/OTI and BBG have a long history of successful cooperation in providing assistance during and after conflicts, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Initiative being the most recent example. USAID officials said, on the basis of experience, that they had expected the same level of communication, feedback, and comprehensive reports from Radio Sawa as they received from VOA under the Afghanistan initiative. USAID officials said this lack of communication was very troubling. They thought that, as Radio Sawa was under VOA (or so USAID believed), the offices used to assist VOA with the Afghanistan Initiative would also assist Radio Sawa and, presumably, produce a similar product in terms of quality and thoroughness.

However, there was limited or no communication between IBB and Radio Sawa's mid-level or on-line staff regarding the program components of the inter-agency agreement. In addition, some relevant, key managers and offices were not asked to contribute to the process. One USAID official said Radio Sawa officials had a rather "ad hoc management approach" to the agreement. As a result, full

funding of the agreement was not completed, according to USAID officials, who expressed disappointment in how the agreement between USAID/OTI and Radio Sawa was implemented and administered. Some \$292,000 of a total \$692,000 was held back as a result. (Funding authority under the agreement expired April 30, 2004.)

BBG said the Afghanistan Initiative agreement had different requirements than the Iraq agreement, including differences in the required weekly reporting of stories broadcast and in the progress of hiring stringers. BBG, however, acknowledged that its Office of Development, which provided a strong liaison with USAID during the Afghanistan Initiative, did not do so during the Iraq Initiative, due to personnel issues that have since been resolved.

Although not contained in the original interagency agreement, USAID subsequently made clear its desire for regular progress reports, besides the financial reports. Further, BBG admits that it should have been more proactive in providing such reports. USAID also expressed consternation at the fact that Radio Sawa did not use BBG's Office of Development, nor did it appear to USAID that Radio Sawa was even aware of that resource.

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CONCLUSIONS

OIG observed that BBG, from the Board level to Radio Sawa management, was satisfied with the Iraqi stream of Radio Sawa, having received survey results indicating that Radio Sawa had achieved a dominant audience share in Iraq. However, under the terms of the agreement, USAID provided only partial funding to BBG/IBB because of the agency's inability to demonstrate that funds were used effectively by Radio Sawa to meet the objective of delivering humanitarian news and information to the people of Iraq.

Although BBG launched the stringer network as planned, the lack of skilled, trained stringers who were properly equipped to report the emerging news about humanitarian and reconstruction efforts and other information made some stringer reporting unusable. Additionally, BBG did not properly coordinate the audience research part of the interagency agreement with USAID.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
OIG	Office of Inspector General
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/OTI	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives
VOA	Voice of America

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Partial Listing of Stories Provided by Radio Sawa's Iraq Stringers, May 2003 - February 2004⁶

<i>Humanitarian Assistance</i>	<i>Reconstruction Efforts</i>	<i>Political Developments</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>
Rising price of food and the smuggling problem.	Captain Steven Opton, U.S. Army, on Iraqi reconstruction.	Director of USAID on democratization in Iraq.	Interviewed several families searching for relatives in mass graves.
The cutback in food coupons provided to Iraqis each month.	Problems facing agriculture, including security, lack of electricity and fertilizer, and obstacles to marketing produce.	Problems with influence peddling in the bureaucracy.	Drug addiction issues in the town of Samawa.
Housing shortage in Karbala. Housing problems in the cities of Hilla and Nasiriyah.	Challenges faced by the court system in reestablishing a process for justice for ordinary people.	Corruption of the governing bureaucracy in the city of Nasiriyah.	Lack of security and how it affects women.
	Deterioration of the port of Basra due to looting during the war, lack of maintenance, and problems involved in resuming active use.	Challenges facing the transfer of power from the CPA to the Iraqi people.	How the deterioration in security is affecting hospitals and schools, including the lack of medicine.
	The challenge of Iraqi reconstruction firms and their share of reconstruction and development contracts in Iraq.		Lack of medicine and the sale of outdated medicines in the black market.
	Reconstruction and modernization of Iraqi universities' infrastructure and programs.		Status of the Iraqi health system.
	Reconstruction challenges in the province of Anbar.		

⁶These were identified by BBG and Radio Sawa management as stories provided in response to the interagency agreement with USAID.

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APPENDIX B: Partial Listing of Stories on Humanitarian Assistance Broadcast on the Program “The World Cares” and Aired on Radio Sawa ⁷

<i>DATE</i>	<i>TOPIC</i>
4/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UNICEF Sends its First Food and Medicine Convoy to Iraq• Greece Sends 250 Tons of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq• France Sends Truckloads Of Humanitarian Aid to Northern Iraq• Iraq Red Crescent Refuses To Receive Any Humanitarian Aid• United Nations (U.N.) Gets \$1 Billion for Iraq Aid• UN Sends Staff to Oversee the Humanitarian Efforts• Neighboring Arab Countries Providing Aid to the Iraqi People• UN Intensifies its Efforts by Sending Food• United States Sends Wheat to Iraq• Kuwait and United Arab Emirates Send Iraq Humanitarian Aid• United Arab Emirates’ Red Crescent Helps in Iraq• Turkey’s Red Crescent Helps in Iraq
5/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coalition Troops Oversee Security Issues in Iraq• Jordan Confiscates Dozens of Antiques Stolen From Iraq’s National Museum• UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) Allocates \$280 Million for Iraqi Refugees• Aid to Iraqi Hospitals• US Increases Number of Troops in Charge of Security in Iraq• Austria’s Program to Treat Iraqi Children• UN Security Lift Sanctions on Iraq• UN World Food Program Provides Iraq 500,000 Tons of Food Monthly• Bremer Talks About Establishing Security in Iraq• World Health Organization’s Activities in Iraq
6/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Britain Launches Investigation About Claims That British Soldiers Mistreated Iraqi Prisoners of War• Arab League Expresses Concerns About Mass Graves Found in Iraq• Water Pollution in Iraq• International Red Cross Helps Iraqis Recover• UNICEF Helps Improve Water Supplies and Drainage in Iraq• UNHCR Uses Former Iraqi Intelligence Buildings to Shelter 300 Palestinian Families in Iraq• Italy Sends Antibiotics to Iraq

⁷These were identified by BBG and Radio Sawa management as stories provided in response to the interagency agreement with USAID.

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APPENDIX C: Agency Comments



BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

September 7, 2004

The Honorable Cameron Hume
Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

The Department of State, Office of Inspector General (OIG), recently issued a draft report titled, *Review of Radio Sawa Support to the Transition in Post-Saddam Iraq (IBO-A-04-09)*. The draft report contained no recommendations, but invited the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) to respond with comments. We appreciate the opportunity to respond, and believe that the draft report contains a number of insights that the BBG and Radio Sawa should address. At the same time, we are disappointed that the draft report fails to acknowledge the success Radio Sawa has achieved in Iraq during a period of open conflict, and also contains a number of inaccuracies that we hope will be corrected.

Implementation of the USAID/BBG Interagency Agreement

The OIG report presumes reporting requirements in the interagency agreement between the BBG and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), that are not reflected in the agreement.

The agreement required BBG's Office of the CFO to provide to USAID monthly financial reports by the 10th working day of the month. The agreement also stated that "[D]uring performance of the activities described in the attached Scope of Work, USAID and the Recipient Agency [BBG] may exchange progress reports. Promptly after performing the activities described in the attached Scope of Work, the Recipient Agency shall provide to USAID a final report regarding the funds allocated under this agreement." (Emphasis added.) Thus, under the agreement, monthly financial reports were mandatory while interim progress reports were discretionary.

The Office of the CFO provided to USAID each month the required financial reports, which included information on the status of obligations, by line item, of the financial plan. Of ten monthly reports submitted, seven were on time or before the due date, and three were one to four working days late. A final financial report was submitted in May 2004.

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As for the interim progress reports, although such reports were discretionary, the BBG acknowledges that it could have been more proactive in providing written interim progress reports. Radio Sawa management did on occasion provide detailed oral reports to the OTI official responsible for negotiating the contract (when he was available in the U.S.), and in March 2004, Radio Sawa provided OTI with a 34-page final report (as required) citing humanitarian and other reports broadcast to Iraq.

The OIG report cites the Afghanistan Humanitarian Initiative as a recent example of appropriate coordination between BBG and USAID. We note, however, that (in addition to the fact that the operating environments for journalists in Afghanistan and Iraq were quite different) the requirements stipulated in the Afghan Initiative were very different than for the Iraq agreement. For example, the Afghan agreement required weekly email reports detailing the stories that had been filed and broadcast and the progress of hiring new stringers. The financial plan required for the Afghanistan stringers also was much more detailed. Finally, reporting on the Afghan Initiative benefited from a strong liaison role played by the BBG's Office of Development. Typically, this office would make progress reports on a regular basis to USAID's grant administrator. Due to changes in personnel during the time of the Iraq grant, the Office of Development was unable to guide this process. These personnel issues have now been resolved and we expect the Office of Development to ensure satisfactory communications pursuant to any future agreements with USAID.

Humanitarian Reporting

For nearly three months prior to the receipt of USAID funding, and in response to USAID urging, Radio Sawa broadcast significant reporting on humanitarian relief activities by the international community and aid organizations funded by the U.S. via the current affairs program, "The World Cares." The program dealt solely with humanitarian support from the international community. Examples of programming include reports on shipments of wheat from the U.S. to Iraq, aid provided to Iraqi hospitals, and the United Nations World Food Program in Iraq. After this program ended as a special feature, humanitarian reporting was melded into Radio Sawa's newscasts. Radio Sawa stringers continued to take the initiative to develop stories on humanitarian and reconstruction projects that highlighted the role played by USAID-funded assistance organizations and others in bringing relief to the Iraqi people. For example, Radio Sawa interviewed USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios a number of times, in the field and in Washington, resulting in five separate stories, including three on Iraq and two about U.S. assistance programs in Jordan and the West Bank/Gaza.

Radio Sawa's humanitarian and reconstruction reporting would have benefited from the establishment of the "hot line" with USAID that was envisioned at the commencement of the grant period to provide timely information on humanitarian aid programs. Although this was discussed at the time the agreement was signed, it was never provided by OTI.

Because the OIG informed Radio Sawa that the OIG was unable to travel to Iraq, Radio Sawa directed one of its senior stringers to travel to Amman, Jordan to meet with the OIG

in October 2003. This stringer was not fully informed of the humanitarian news coverage instructions related to the USAID grant, and was unable to provide OIG with a complete picture of Radio Sawa's humanitarian news coverage. The reason this stringer was "unaware of any instruction to provide humanitarian news coverage," was that the stringer had been embedded with U.S. troops, covering a different aspect of the ongoing conflict. Soon after, he left Radio Sawa's employ to work with the Coalition Provisional Authority. When the stringer met with the OIG in Amman, he had recently rejoined Radio Sawa, and as a result, was not yet in a position to know about USAID grant instructions to Radio Sawa regarding humanitarian news coverage.

The contract with USAID also called for Radio Sawa to provide "culturally relevant stories and human interest stories that will allow ordinary Iraqis from different walks of life to discuss their lives, problems and expectations of government." Radio Sawa's program "Challenges," which began during the USAID contract period and continues to the present, provides exactly this kind of information.

OIG was unable to secure clearance from the Department of State for any of its team members to travel to Iraq during the course of this review. We believe OIG's information gathering with respect to Radio Sawa's programming would have benefited from an "in-country" review of Radio Sawa's success in meeting the key objective sought by USAID – accurate, undistorted and timely news and current affairs reporting on a range of topics.

Stringers

The OIG report takes issue with the training of Radio Sawa stringers. Unfortunately, the security reasons that prevented the OIG team from traveling to Baghdad to talk directly with the stringers there, also prevented Radio Sawa's director of network news and editors – as well as two trainers – from going to Iraq to provide planned field training. Radio Sawa compensated by bringing some stringers to Amman for training. In a wartime environment, it is difficult to implement the kind of sustained training that is desirable for journalists who are relatively new to U.S. international broadcasting.

It was especially difficult for Radio Sawa to surge its employment in Iraq, where talented and trained Iraqi journalists were in short supply, and training new journalists was a difficult task. The OIG's comparison of Radio Sawa stringers to those of Radio Free Iraq (RFI) is particularly inappropriate, given the uneven personnel assets available to the two broadcasters at the start of the war.

Since 1998, RFI has worked to develop a stringer presence on the ground in Iraq. For a significant number of these years, RFI has had approximately six stringers in Northern Iraq, and another six stationed in the region, covering stories about Iraq. These, for the most part, are experienced stringers who have benefited from ongoing training by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The OIG report mentions that RFI reported it provided two weeks of training to its stringers in Iraq. The BBG was not able to verify this statement. RFE/RL has informed the BBG, however, that from February 2002 to

August 2004, it was able to provide training to approximately 15 stringers in Prague for periods of between two to seven days. Radio Sawa is a newer organization that did not have the benefit of this long-standing presence in the region or in Iraq. Although Radio Sawa worked diligently to establish its stringer network, it did so in the environment of an ongoing conflict in a country where, for nearly 35 years, the Baath Party ruthlessly suppressed any semblance of acceptable journalistic standards. Despite these difficulties, Radio Sawa's efforts have yielded success. On April 15, 2003 (shortly after the fall of Baghdad), Radio Sawa had four stringers based in Iraq, and as of September 1, 2004, the number of Radio Sawa stringers based there has grown to 27.

The OIG report also indicates that some Iraqi stringers had poor language skills. Radio Sawa newscasts are delivered in modern classical Arabic, which is the language used by Arab media organizations, and reviewed by editors in Washington and Dubai for accuracy in content and grammar. However, use of colloquial Iraqi Arabic terms by some Radio Sawa Iraqi stringers is permitted as it provides a local "sound" for the station.

Nonetheless, Radio Sawa has been able to build a large network of stringers and news tipsters in Iraq to contribute to the volume of breaking and comprehensive news that it provides. The stringers provide timely information that is always double-checked by Radio Sawa's staff in Washington and Dubai.

Research

The BBG acknowledges that its Office of Research, which is responsible for contracting for audience research globally, including in Iraq, did not contact USAID in a timely manner to enable USAID to participate in developing the survey that was conducted in Iraq. Once the Office realized its oversight, it immediately contacted USAID (as noted in the OIG report) to acknowledge and apologize for its error. Unfortunately, by that time it was too late to include USAID questions in the Iraq survey. The Office of Research subsequently attempted to contact USAID on a number of occasions to ascertain USAID's interest in participating in future surveys.

Equipment

The OIG report states, "[A]ccording to USAID officials, the agreement also stipulated the purchase of a specific type of satellite cellular phone considered best for remote field operations. Instead, Radio Sawa officials chose to procure a much cheaper satellite-based model valued at one-tenth of the cost and lacking the quality and performance capabilities of the brand stipulated in the interagency agreement."

While the financial plan originally included funds from OTI to purchase the telephones, Radio Sawa ultimately purchased all equipment, including the telephones, with BBG appropriated funding. Radio Sawa did not use OTI funds for the purchase of the telephones or other equipment. The OTI funds were used for stringers, research, assessment travel, administrative support, and the OIG audit. OTI was kept informed of Radio Sawa's use of OTI's funds through the monthly financial reports.

At the time the financial plan was submitted to OTI prior to the war, Radio Sawa was considering using (and listed in the financial plan) Thrane and Thrane satellite phones (TT-3080A), which cost about \$8,000 each. However, upon further research and comparison with Thuraya satellite phones, Radio Sawa determined that the latter would suit the needs of Radio Sawa stringers more effectively for the following reasons:

- Coverage – At the time, Thuraya was the only GPS phone that could ensure coverage throughout Radio Sawa’s reporting region. These phones were the standard for all media outlets covering Iraq and the Middle East, and remain largely so today.
- Size – The TT-3080A phones are suitcase-sized, weigh about 50 pounds, and require line of sight communications with the satellite. This technology is not well-suited to a reporter who needs to travel quickly and report from the field. Thuraya phones are the size of a normal cell phone.
- Setup and Complexity – The TT-3080A requires a technical setup that is almost uniformly too complex for a reporter in the field. The Thuraya phones operate like any cell phone, and are more useful when mobility is essential.
- Cost – A TT-3080A phone costs about \$8000. A Thuraya phone costs around \$900. TT-3080A phone usage costs two to three times the rate per minute of Thuraya phone usage.

The OIG report further states that, “[T]he senior stringer chose to use a different model that was provided by USAID and which was not the property of Radio Sawa.” USAID did not provide phones of any type to this stringer or any other Radio Sawa stringer. In fact, the stringer was using a cell phone provided by the Coalition Provisional Authority. These phones operated with a U.S. area code and facilitated effective communications. Radio Sawa later provided this stringer with an Iridium satellite phone, in addition to a Thuraya phone.

The OIG report refers to a shipment of recorders that was not waiting for the stringer when Radio Sawa sent him to Amman to meet with the OIG. We note that the recorders were not purchased with OTI funds. Radio Sawa ordered the recorders in October 2003, and they arrived in Washington in November 2003, after the stringer’s meeting with the OIG in Amman. The recorders were then sent directly to the Radio Sawa office in Baghdad, once a safe method of shipment had been secured, and were received there in February 2004.

Conclusion

The OIG report illustrates a number of areas where the BBG can make improvements in administering USAID grants and in its communications with USAID on the implementation of grant requirements. However, the report lacks acknowledgement of the fact that Radio Sawa’s contract with USAID was carried out in a period of great turmoil and considerable personal risk to Radio Sawa’s Iraq-based staff.

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The shortcomings cited by the OIG should not obscure the overall success of Radio Sawa in becoming the must-listen-to station in Iraq for the Iraqi people before, during and after the war. Radio Sawa built a large audience of news-hungry listeners, who trust its news and current affairs programming.

The Board would appreciate the correction of a number of factual errors in the report and the inclusion of certain qualifying facts and circumstances from Radio Sawa that address some of the OIG criticisms. We look forward to discussing the issues raised in our response.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson
Chairman

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