

**DECLARATION OF THOMAS YAZDGERDI**

I, Thomas Yazdgerdi, declare the following under penalties of perjury:

1. I am a member of the Senior Foreign Service at the Department of State and am the President of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA). AFSA is both a professional association and the exclusive employee representative for the U.S. Foreign Service. It represents approximately 18,000 active-duty members of the Foreign Service at the Department of State, the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM), and other U.S. foreign affairs agencies. As AFSA President, I regularly communicate with our members through AFSA-wide messages and often hear directly from our members. Similarly, AFSA staff is in daily contact with members serving domestically and overseas.

2. On March 14, 2025, President Trump issued the Executive Order (EO), *Continuing The Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy*, with the intent of effectively eliminating the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM). An article published on the White House website the next day states that the EO “will ensure that taxpayers are no longer on the hook for radical propaganda.”

3. Since then VOA has gone dark. AFSA members, across our constituent agencies, have advised that operations ceased on March 15, 2025. For example, the postings on the VOA news site, <https://www.voanews.com>, are dated

on or before March 15.<sup>1</sup> AFSA members have further advised about specific concerns raised by specific posts across the globe. Below, are eight examples from cables recently sent by various overseas missions to Department of State leadership (the specific cable is identified by its number).

4. None of the cables contain classified information. Like all cables at this level, they have been classified Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU). The Foreign Affairs Manual defines SBU information as “information that is not classified for national security reasons, but that warrants/requires administrative control and protection from public or other unauthorized disclosure for other reasons.” See 12 FAM 541. Such information is typically produced in response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, unless FOIA exempt.

5. I reasonably believe the information disclosed herein evidences violations of law, rule, or regulation, gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. The disclosures are therefore protected under the federal whistleblower laws. See 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(8) (Prohibited Personnel Practices).

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the following front page stories accessed on April 15, 2025: Starmer: ‘Sooner or Later’ Russia Must Yield to Peace (March 15, 2025), available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/starmer-sooner-or-later-russia-must-yield-to-peace/8011681.html>; *VOA Kurdish: Syria’s Interim Constitution Raises Fears of Sectarian Division* (March 15, 2025), available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/voa-kurdish-syria-s-interim-constitution-raises-fears-of-sectarian-division-/8011267.html>; and *US to Expel South Africa Ambassador as Relations Deteriorate* (March 14, 2025), available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-government-shutdown-likely-averted-democrats-fracture/8011226.html>.

6. **Botswana (25 Gaborone 144):**

With U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) likely scaling back operations significantly, Post has lost its most potent interagency partner in the fight against Chinese media influence in Botswana. ... Absent USAGM content via the Voice of America (VOA) or another similar source, Xinhua News Agency and Sputnik will be the primary sources of re-distributed international news wire content in Botswana, including those that broadly shape narratives about the United States.

7. **Cuba (25 Havana 150):**

Radio and TV Martí have long been regarded as vital sources of uncensored news for Cubans, countering state-controlled narratives. ... Meanwhile Castro's cronies amplified messages that celebrated the closure of Radio and TV Martí as a victory for the regime and signals a change in U.S. priorities away from the island.

8. **Kosovo (25 Pristina 278)**

RFE/RL and VOA have advanced U.S. strategic interests and countered adversarial narratives in the Balkans. The space created through withdrawal of these outlets will most likely be filled by foreign actors such as China, Russia, and others, undermining U.S. influence and policy.

9. **Kuwait (25 Kuwait 278)**

USAGM's broadcasts into Iran counter the regime's propaganda, offering an uncensored perspective on U.S. foreign policy and Iran's destabilizing role in the region. The programming has been vital in providing uncensored, independent news to Iranian audiences, directly challenging Tehran's tightly controlled state narratives. The closure of this critical platform would not only weaken the effectiveness of U.S. messaging on pivotal issues critical to the Maximum Pressure campaign, including Iran's regional provocations, the activities of groups such as Hamas, Hizballah, and the Houthis, as well as broader U.S. policy objectives, but also limit efforts to promote democratic values and human rights. The Iranian regime's repeated grievances about USAGM Kuwait broadcasts underscore its impact in undermining the credibility of the regime's propaganda and allow it an unchallenged stranglehold on information accessible to the Iranian people. By abandoning this broadcasting capability, the United States

would relinquish a powerful tool for influencing regional narratives and, in doing so, strengthen adversarial voices that seek to challenge U.S. policies and objectives.

...

USAGM's closure will clear the path for adversarial nations, particularly China, to seize the opportunity to enhance their state-run media presence. With the end of U.S. broadcasts not only in Iran but throughout the Middle East, we will witness a shift toward pro-China and pro-Iran messaging throughout the region, expanding their influence and further eroding U.S. influence.

...

As regional tensions intensify, particularly between Iran and Israel, the shutdown of the USAGM station marks a pivotal shift with potentially far-reaching implications across the Gulf region, reducing U.S. influence over critical media narratives. While the Iranian regime would benefit from the removal of a significant source of pressure on its authority, adversaries like China are poised to exploit the larger strategic vacuum, with China also likely to expand its own regional presence. If the current trend continues, U.S. soft power in the region could face serious erosion, and the message of U.S. commitment to media freedom and our capacity to maintain stability would be undermined.

#### 10. **Nigeria (25 Lagos 160)**

For over four decades, USAGM had served as a counterweight to foreign influence and propaganda operations, building a network of 40 affiliate radio and TV stations across Nigeria. Each week VOA content reaches 19 million Nigerians ...

While the move to reduce spending by scaling back USAGM operations will save taxpayer dollars, it will also enable outlets like China Global Television Network (CGTN), Russia's RT, and the emerging Russian-led, UAE-based Viory network to expand their reach.

... China may capitalize on the USAGM retreat to expand its soft power reach in Nigeria, while Russia's influence, which has waned, may be revitalized in the absence of USAGM from Nigeria. Without VOA's trusted reporting from the American perspective, the United

States has lost not only a tool to counter adversaries in the information space, but also an effective mechanism for advancing U.S. interests directly into the homes of millions of Nigerians.

**(25 Abuja 508)**

VOA Hausa, with an annual budget of around \$3.3 million, reaches 16.9 million weekly listeners out of a potential 60 million Hausa speakers in West Africa. It is a targeted, cost-effective tool to counter the messaging of these competitors and extremists, delivering a distinct U.S. perspective to Hausa-speaking communities, as well as access to credible Islamic voices of moderation and opposition to terrorism. In countering our adversaries, whether competitors such as China and Russia or extremist groups, VOA Hausa is an indispensable asset increasing America's diplomatic strength and helping secure our interests against extremists. As ten Northern Nigerian civil society organizations wrote to Ambassador Mills to ask for reconsideration of VOA Hausa's closure, "VOA Hausa is a beacon of hope and a source of credible information" for millions of Nigerians and Africans across the continent.

... The reduction in USAGM operations, including VOA Hausa, risks ceding critical ground to China and Russia, who are intensifying Hausa-language media efforts to sway West Africa's Hausa speakers. ... Without VOA Hausa's \$3.33 million budget sustaining its 10 million weekly listeners, local Nigerian media affiliates may turn to these strategic competitors for content, amplifying foreign influence over a demographic pivotal to regional stability. Similarly, VOA Hausa's outreach plays a key role in neutralizing extremist messaging. The vacuum caused by no VOA Hausa counter-messaging will be filled by bad actors' narratives and will erode U.S. influence in Nigeria's Hausa-speaking north, where VOA's credible reporting countered both extremist propaganda from groups like Boko Haram and the strategic messaging of adversarial states.

**11. Pakistan (25 Islamabad 450)**

Shuttering VOA's Pashto service will leave a critical news and information gap along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where military, jihadist, and extremist narratives and disinformation dominate the media landscape.

**12. Serbia (25 Belgrade 322)**

The potential shuttering of USAGM outlets would leave a significant void in objective, fact-based coverage of China in Serbia's media space—just as one of Serbia's fastest-growing cable news operations, Telekom Srbija's Newsmax Balkans channel (an affiliate of U.S.-based Newsmax), was poised to strike an agreement with USAGM to share reporting resources, significantly expanding the audience for USAGM-produced content among the Serbian mainstream.

... China and other adversaries will fill the void left by USAGM content "in weeks, not months," one prominent foreign affairs reporter told us.

**13. United Kingdom (25 London 714)**

The closure of VOA Persian and Radio Farda eliminates key partners in communicating USG priorities and messages to the Iranian people and regime, and it cedes media space to the foreign malign influence of the Iranian regime.

... A 2023 survey from the GAMAAN Institute (the non-profit the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran) found that nearly 35 percent of Iranians inside Iran "often or sometimes" watch VOA Persian, while nearly 30 percent "often or sometimes" listen to Radio Farda.

...

Iranian state-run propaganda outlets rejoiced at the news of the closure of VOA Persian. Iranian state TV broadcast a show ... welcoming the shutdown .... Describing the two outlets as a "waste of U.S. taxpayers' dollars," the show said their shutdown will serve as a "lesson" for the Iranian opposition that "the United States is not trustworthy."

...

A former Iran International journalist said, "I am heartbroken. It's very bad news for journalists and very good news for the Islamic Republic."

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: April 16, 2025

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tom Yazdgerdi".

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THOMAS YAZDGERDI