

The Lowy Institute of International Policy

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Introduction

I would like to warmly thank the Lowy Institute for inviting me. I am honoured to take part in the Distinguished Speaker Series and to have been given an opportunity to address you.

Thank you, Dr. (Michael) Wesley for the introduction.

When I accepted Dr Wesley's invitation to speak I wondered what examples of recent events I might use to illustrate my theme of the importance of global broadcasting, its reliance on networked journalism and the need for partnership to help support it.

The events of the last few months have given me plenty of illustrations.

From Tahrir Square, to Pearl Square from Green Square in Tripoli to Fukushima in Japan we have seen an extraordinary concentration of global crises – crises that are significant in their own rights, but which also have the potential for widespread global impact – on matters like security and energy.

Those stories have tested international news organisations to the full – in matters of logistics and of course safety. But they are also testing us in new ways. The intense use of social media by many caught up in those stories is utterly transforming the way news organisations respond and is requiring unprecedented transformation in traditional newsrooms. Few more so than the BBC. I hope to give some insights into how we are responding and what the development of international networked journalism might mean.

The BBC's international role has been key since the BBC was set up in the 1920s.

Its motto, then and now, is “Nation shall speak peace unto Nation”.

That motto remains unchanged over 80 years on.

The BBC World Service began life as The Empire Service in 1932. It opened with a two-hour transmission for Australia and New Zealand.

The service was originally conceived as a means of the Empire being held together.

The director general Sir John Reith delivered an address and told the new overseas listeners that radio was "a connecting and co-ordinating link between the scattered parts of the British Empire."

But he warned them to keep the expectations low: “The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good”.

The first head of the Empire Service, Capt CG Graves, wrote in his diary in 1937 that he “blushed” when he thought of the

opening broadcasts: "But you must remember that all we had to spend on them was £10 a week."

But the English language service was soon added to as the power of radio to influence people became recognised. The first of the BBC's language services, Arabic, was added in 1938. Other languages soon followed.

But although our broadcasting was *in* those languages it was not, in the early years, *of* those languages. By which I mean that the language broadcasting of news was not built on reporting from those countries or primarily reflective of those countries. The production process was a centralised one where news bulletins and features were written in English then faithfully translated into the vernacular and broadcast by announcers.

Post-war Britain had a phrase for how its elite would guide the country and the world – "the man in Whitehall knows best". And in international broadcasting the man in Bush House, just a mile from Whitehall, London's seat of administration, also knew best and broadcast it, long-distance through shortwave, to the world. It was a World Service but it was a service to the world not from the world.

It was not until well after Britain shed its empire that the External Services became the World Service, just over 20 years ago. And around that time an internal revolution took place. The language services increasingly recruited journalists and expected teams to find and report their own stories about their part of the world, as well as translating the international stories from the English newsroom.

The story of the last twenty years has been one of growing journalistic confidence in those international teams. Stories are now generated from within our language services and our English language newsgathering teams, who will be familiar to many in the audience through our reporters appearing on ABC airwaves and through BBC World News on our valued platform partners - Foxtel or Austar. We are proud to have such a long term partnership with Foxtel, and look forward to extending this into the future.

Some examples of the role played by the BBC's language teams:

When the Chilean miners were first lost underground the BBC Spanish team, BBC Mundo, literally set up camp with the families of the missing men and put us in a uniquely strong position for the whole BBC to hear from those families throughout the unfolding events.

When the BBC was reporting from Cairo our reporting was illuminated by the BBC Arabic team, many of whom come from Egypt. Their understanding of what was happening in the square fed through into all of the BBC's reports. And as current events in Libya unfold we have a team of Libyan journalists, based in the UK, who scrutinise every piece of video or eyewitness claim we receive to be able to assess its authenticity.

In this increasingly networked world, where an event thousands of miles away can rapidly impact on your life, for instance on the price of your petrol, audiences want to get all angles and all the connections. At the BBC we believe we have an unrivalled internal network to be able to relay that global story. By making sure we have the right skills, the right languages and the right internal culture to ensure we share our knowledge, we can create that global network.

But we can no longer do it within our own walls. We need to network with our audience and we need to network with our partner news organisations. We can no longer be fortress BBC. And that requires some dramatic changes in our mindset. We need to change to serve our audiences better and we need to change, as we can no longer afford not to.

The BBC's international news services, Global News, which is made up of World Service radio, BBC World News TV, and our international news website bbc.com, is undergoing a fundamental change to the way it operates and how it serves its audiences.

We have been undertaking a restructure of the World Service, following the UK government's Spending Review which cut our funding by 16%.

We have made decisions to stop programmes and services that were valued by our audiences. We closed 5 language services, and stopped radio broadcasts in a 7 languages and there will be a withdrawal from most short wave and medium wave radio distribution. For instance BBC Caribbean will broadcast its last ever programme this week. BBC Russian will also stop its radio transmissions.

The platform on which World Service historically has been strongest - short wave radio - is under great pressure as FM radio, TV and mobile phones offer compelling alternatives to audiences, even in less developed markets. We expect that by March 2014 short wave broadcasts in languages other than English will be limited to a small number of lifeline services or where there is no alternative means of listening to the World Service.

We will be losing over 650 staff in three years – a quarter of the workforce. These have been painful decisions.

To deal with that reductions and still serve our audiences well, our aim is that different parts of the operation UK and international services, radio, online and TV will work closely together - providing services in English and 26 languages, offering a uniquely global editorial agenda and bringing the BBC's distinctive expertise, perspectives and content to the UK and to the largest worldwide audience of any international news provider.

The announcements have caused controversy and our parliament is investigating the scale and impact of the cuts.

But while we wait for their deliberations, we are moving ahead in transforming our journalism and our teams. Many, who are under threat of losing their jobs, have responded magnificently to recent events. And so have our audiences.

Networking with audiences

Our audiences now want to be participants in telling their story, they want to connect and share their opinions about issues and events that concern them.

The conversation we have with them is no longer one way. It's not even two ways. It's a network, based on sharing, trust and word of mouth.

And what better way to do that than to engage with our audiences, open up our space for dialogue and exchange, and share and create strong partnerships.

Our partnership with them is crucial -- they trust us and, by involving them, by becoming open, they will trust us more.

To maintain and strengthen that partnership with them, we need to respond fast to their needs and demands. Our audiences have embraced new technology and social media and are using these tools to keep themselves informed and transform their lives, as demonstrated by events Iran, and recently in North Africa and the Middle East.

With the increasing use of mobile technology, Twitter, Facebook, Skype, the audience is performing a role that in the past only powerful media organisations could.

Now in real time, a resident in northern Japan can tell audiences around the world from his room about the destruction of his city; a doctor in a hospital in Bahrain can convey the drama of what is happening in Pearl Square via her mobile phone, from a room in her hospital surrounded by troops.

Audiences are using the web to exchange information and give their opinions. But why should audiences want to share their stories or views with a news organisation rather than just sharing them with friends via social media or simply posting for all to see on the web? I believe the answer lies in the careful transition news organisations need to make with their audiences. We hope that the traditional trust our audiences have in the BBC will make them want to share information with us.

And we are not the open internet. We have standards. By which I don't mean we are censors. But we do check facts carefully and we do make sure that opinions are expressed courteously and respectfully. We believe in a safe global digital public space. We want that space to be welcoming and open but it isn't an anything-

goes free-fire zone like much of the wild web. And our audiences seem to like it that way. And if their story or view is selected by the BBC to be prominently displayed it can get far more notice than in more obscure parts of the internet.

Just in the last month we monitored 52,000 tweets, blogs and news outlets sharing BBC content across the publicly accessible internet.

One of our most successful programmes, World Have Your Say, an award winning, global interactive programme is now a fully multimedia programme on radio, BBC World News TV and online. The agenda is set by audiences and the programme offers them an open forum to discuss what matters to them, according to house rules co-created with the audience.

In the last few weeks, audiences from around the world have debated events in North Africa and Middle East. Two weeks ago a record was set when the programme received calls from 60 countries in its special programme on Japan.

But social media is a tool, not a replacement. The ability of our journalists to be there where events happen, to report from the ground and produce insightful independent reports remains our key strength. Our audiences value that and that's when they turn to us in great numbers.

Often, presence on the ground, when reporting danger and conflict zones, means personal risks for journalists.

In the last few weeks, a team of BBC Arabic journalists was arrested and tortured by pro - Gaddafi forces in Libya. As one of them was being beaten he was told by the Libyans that they didn't like his reports. In a fully global world, where your interrogators

can look up your recent reports, the professional journalist can be even more exposed to threat.

And professional journalism, whether created by ourselves or, increasingly, by our broadcast partners, is the lifeblood of our news.

Broadcast partners

As shortwave audiences fall a smaller proportion of our audience listens directly to the BBC. Increasingly they hear us, or see us or view us online, via a partner.

We now supply news and other programmes to around 2000 partner radio stations around the world.

Through our partners we reach 53 million listeners a week over the world.

In Africa we have built up a network of FM partner stations. We work to build capacity of partners, and link training to output. The benefit is twofold. We bring them our global perspective and they bring us the regional context. We offer training to journalists, and know how.

Here in Australia - we have partnerships with over 60 radio broadcast organisations (amongst which ABC and SBS are of course key).

Our partnership with ABC is strong, and we are exploring opportunities to extend this partnership both domestically and internationally to include programme content/breaking news and resource sharing. We have regular co-productions of documentaries, which enliven our respective networks.

But partnership does not mean just providing to others. Partnership needs to be two-way.

And this is what we are doing:

Yesterday, the BBC and Radio Australia signed a memorandum of understanding to explore a number of new areas of joint activity, including in English Language teaching. As the BBC and Radio Australia share editorial values and approach, it means that we can distribute content from both organisations on existing transmission sites, operated by BBC or Radio Australia. For instance we have agreed to share the BBC transmission facility in Singapore with Radio Australia. We will also investigate potential partnerships with Universities and educational organisations to deliver joint English Language Teaching content.

Both the BBC and Radio Australia plan also to create mutual benefit by increasing our ability to share stories and news gathered by stringers/reporters of each other's organisation. Sharing reporters will not only reduce costs, but will broaden perspectives.

Mike McCluskey, head of Radio Australia, and I have agreed to develop and recommend these proposals to our boards to take them forward.

This is a significant step in our relationship, which we believe will lead to a very fruitful collaboration between Radio Australia and the BBC.

Our experience, in collaborating with ABC here in Australia, is a positive one.

When the floods hit Australia, BBC World News – our international news channel ran the special coverage of events by ABC - opting directly into their programming at one point, and aired ABC material on several occasions. Information and content from ABC was world class, and we gave ABC credit on air for the reports we ran. It's already a good relationship and we intend to strengthen it, as with all of our Australian partners.

And it is not only through bilateral arrangements that we are co-operating closely with the ABC. Our engagement in the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association is also a true example of evolving and effective partnerships. The BBC has been an active member of the organisation.

The CBA News Exchange was established recently, which offers its members material that they can share - and it proved very useful in the aftermath of the Japan earthquake.

We believe that the BBC is better off no longer going it alone so we are building on this partnership approach in other countries. Last week the BBC Urdu Service launched a partnership project to produce a series of one-hour TV/radio debates in association with Pakistani TV channel broadcaster Express NEWS. The programmes, *KyaKarein? [What to do]* are a series of discussions held in universities across Pakistan focusing on the immense issues facing the country. This is a new format for TV in Pakistan, where young people will be taking centre stage and engaging them in a conversation about their concerns and their future.

And this isn't a partnership just with another broadcaster.

It's much more than that – by choosing to have debates in leading universities and colleges in Pakistan- the BBC has opened up a forum for debate and has provided a space for free public discourse.

Another example comes from one of our bigger language services- BBC Arabic TV has just launched the Alexandria debates - in cooperation with one of the world's greatest cultural institutions, the Alexandria Library in Egypt. The Alexandria Debates is an interactive programme that engages with audiences on issues of concern to the Arab World. In the first episode a panel of experts from Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Sudan debated with an audience of young Arabs from across the region to discuss recent events.

And just last week, we broadcast a debate from Johannesburg produced in conjunction with the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute on the subject "Is homosexuality un-African?" It was an electrifying programme, the most dramatic moment of which was when a lesbian South African couple kissed in front of the Ugandan politician who has brought forward legislation exposing homosexuals, under certain circumstances, to the death penalty. It was a fiery programme, but it was one that was conducted with respect. We were told subsequently by many of the participants that no indigenous broadcaster in Africa could have brought such a diverse range of views together. So our role is again to provide the protected space and to set standards.

Research shows that the BBC does indeed promote higher standards in local media. Independent consultancy Human Capital spoke to media and political leaders in four countries. Many saw state broadcasters as being mouthpieces for government. For them commercial news organisations were known for having partisan political or business interests. In those circumstances the

BBC is seen as an indispensable reference point and an example of the highest editorial principles.

In the current circumstances, in the aftermath of events in Egypt, the BBC has put forward proposals, both for increasing our broadcasting and also to support transformation in media organisations. State broadcasting in Egypt, for instance, will be going through huge change and we believe the BBC can play a role in that and, with our colleagues in the BBC World Service Trust (the BBC's international development charity), we are putting forward proposals to be able to respond.

At times like this partners can help – with establishing a new nature of social discourse, promoting media independence, fairness and inclusion. The BBC has a wealth of experience in such partnerships.

In the early 1990's the BBC World Service launched the “Marshall Plan of the Mind” an ambitious project funded by the British Government's Know How Fund to help countries of the Warsaw Pact move from Command to Free Markets economies through innovative and informative media programming. For instance, project produced a ground-breaking soap opera for Russian radio depicting the real lives of people and how the new economic changes affected them.

Over nearly a decade Marshall Plan of the Mind developed innovative projects, which helped support communities; providing programming that addressed marginalised groups and tackled human rights issues and lifted the lid on taboos.

BBC World Service Training set up centres of best practise journalism in Eastern Europe. All of these centres provided vocational education through intensive training courses for young aspiring journalists. Many have gone on to be successful in their countries media industries.

Of course, the success of media development in Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union is mixed. For many individuals trained and for some institutions, lasting change in practice occurred. For many countries, companies and individuals, it did not.

So in our efforts to create truly open societies, where freedom of expression and information takes root and citizens are free to participate through the media in democratic debate about how the state is run, we must examine both the lessons learnt.

As broadcasters perhaps we also need to be a little humble. It is people who bring about change and create open societies - rather than the media and in this, I include social media has a crucial and pivotal role in allowing free discourse to take place. Our role as the BBC is to facilitate that debate and to set benchmark professional standards for quality journalism, which is accurate, objective and fair minded. Simple, but often hard to achieve.

The background to what is happening today across North Africa and Middle East is somewhat different from that in Eastern Europe, and former Soviet Union 20 years ago. But the role of media in societies in transformation is undeniable.

Providing training, co-producing debates with broadcasters in developing countries, collecting stories from the audience and, above all, listening to our audiences far more - this is a very different world from the early days of the BBC internationally. Of

stiff voices in stiff collars declaiming to an empire thousands of miles away that could not Twitter back.

But of course much stays the same. The same commitments:

to accuracy in an ever changing world,
to impartiality in an ever more opinionated world and
to the highest standards and a belief in civility in a world where
those values can seem debased

And, curiously and encouragingly, those standards are still attractive – maybe even more so in the era of online flame wars.

The BBC can no longer dictate the agenda, but we can still aspire and inspire. And we can do it best by being true partners with our audiences and with our friends.