

# CV

## NAME

Richard Lobo

## DATE OF BIRTH

October 1936

## CAREER

Richard Lobo was born in Tampa, Florida. He holds a degree in Journalism and Radio/TV/Film. Lobo served as chairman of the Florida Public Broadcasting Service, Inc. from 2008 to 2010 and was also president and CEO of WEDU (PBS) Tampa/St. Petersburg/Sarasota from 2002 to 2010. Lobo previously was president and general manager of WTVJ, Miami (1988-1993), station manager of WNBC-TV, New York (1980-1983), and VP and general manager of NBC stations in Cleveland (1983-1985) and Chicago (1985-1988). He was director of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting in the mid-1990s and served on the National Association of Broadcasters Board of Directors (1991-1993). His work as a journalist has been recognised by a string of awards including an Emmy and the Leadership Award of the Chicago Latino Committee on the Media (1986). Richard Lobo is a Presidential appointee and was confirmed by the US Senate to serve as Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau in September 2010.

## MEDIA USE

As a news junkie, starts in the morning with NPR, four newspapers and cable news channels; at work watches CNN, checks various news sites on mobile phone, goes to voanews.com several times a day. Ends the day by watching cable news and 'The Daily Show' with Jon Stewart

## FAVOURITES

Reading, movies at the cinema and shows on and off Broadway, getting out and about with his golden retriever



# ENGAGE AND CONNECT

**Richard Lobo** is the man who has interviewed Fidel Castro, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, Robert Kennedy and Nelson Rockefeller - now the seasoned journalist, news director, bureau chief and station manager is at the helm of the **International Broadcasting Bureau**. The IBB is part of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the independent federal government agency that oversees all US civilian international broadcasting operating in a wide range of conflict zones. How has his first year in office been?

**T**hrilling, exciting and very fast moving. My arrival here at the BBG corresponded with the appointment of our new board of governors, a very powerful group of volunteer citizens with impressive track records both in media, industry and government. They immediately took a fresh and very comprehensive look at US international broadcasting and subsequently tasked us with attempting to implement a very aggressive plan to grow our audience around the world.

And the events that unfolded so rapidly in the Middle East during the past year have been an astonishing series of opportunities for us.

## How has the Arab Spring impacted US international broadcasting?

Alhurra is one of the success stories, as is Radio Sawa. Both had incredible audience growth, Alhurra's weekly audience in Egypt jumped to nearly 8m viewers and recent research has shown our Alhurra audience has grown exponentially in Egypt since the uprising there.

We have been in the market of course across North Africa, we had an emergency broadcasting operation going during the entire NATO led effort in Libya, we now have an FM in Benghazi and soon will be in Tripoli so we are seeing very good progress outside Egypt.

The ability to measure audiences in countries like Libya has traditionally been difficult and we now are going to get over there to determine what our reach and our impact are in those places.

## How successful have you been in replacing shortwave audiences?

We are having good response on other platforms. The secret is to go where the audience is. We have had important successes with FM broadcasts and TV affiliates in key markets. We have had a terrific amount of success with getting satellite programming into Iran - we have to be creative in places like Iran where our satellite TV is frequently jammed. In addition, we have got some very successful websites up in almost all the languages that we have going here, and social media has played an important role for us. The legacy media platforms still attract the biggest chunk of our audiences and will for the time being but we have to plan for a transition from radio to TV and the new platforms.

## How do you overcome jamming?

It is an ongoing struggle in some countries. One of our success stories is a weekly TV programme produced by the VOA's Persian News Network called 'Parazit' - political satire which is hugely popular in Iran and on social media around the world. It is fed by satellite into Iran, so in spite of the

jamming we are having good success there. We are also using internet circumvention tools to try to get through the firewall in Iran. We are working with our partners in the DG 5 in a unified effort to end satellite uplink jamming in Iran and need all involved, including the satellite companies to voice their opposition to the interference.

## How do you get around Internet firewalls?

Over the past eight or nine years we have had a great deal of success working with private sector companies that have developed software and tools to break down some of these firewalls, using proxy servers, VPNs, in order to find audiences and enable them to reach the internet. We provide freedom for these audiences by getting them to the rest of the world, in China, Iran and other places.

We beta-test many of these things before we employ them, so we find them relatively safe right now and we are trying to make sure we protect anyone using this equipment. We just received an additional \$10m to pursue our efforts to combat censorship and firewalls that are up around the world, so we are moving very aggressively on that front.

## What are you doing for mobile?

Our office of new media are working on innovations in that area, and we have created an

“ We probe the use of cellphones in our national survey research in nearly 60 countries every year ”



Innovation Commission here at the Agency where industry leaders share cutting edge ideas. We are aiming for audience engagement and crossover between radio, television, web and mobile. We'd like to see more mobile providers engaging with our networks to share content and leverage our distribution systems through partnerships. Partnerships are key to our strategy. And the content and programmes we provide are key to keeping subscribers loyal.

VOA is looking to start a pilot project in the northern Nigerian city of Zaria in partnership with a mobile provider to provide phone owners with health information on low cost phones. The information draws on radio call-in programmes with doctors. The objective is to eventually include development of a SIM application with health information that is locally relevant. We would like to see more partnerships around mobile health the world over. Research has shown the demand for health related content exists in the developed world as much as the developing world.

In many countries where we work, the mobile web is the best place to focus our energies. And our content is smart phone or simple phone ready. We probe the use of cellphones in our national survey research in nearly 60 countries every year in great depth and it's astonishing how young audiences/users are. In places like Afghanistan where the illiteracy rate is about 72%, our RFE/RL Radio Azadi service uses intelligent voice recognition to reach audiences with audio messages as opposed to text messages. There are various ways to leverage mobile phones even in the most underdeveloped markets to reach audiences but at the same time, one has to look carefully at the research to understand what the actual opportunity is.

**What is the main thrust of your new strategic plan?**

The BBG's new five-year plan is designed to grow and reform US

international broadcasting - the words driving this are 'innovation' and 'integration'. Right now, we have five different broadcast entities that have been operating kind of semi-autonomous. We are trying to bring them together as much as possible in many different ways, and we want to be able to share some of the great content that they produce each day across all platforms and across all different entities in the Agency.

We think there are streamlining opportunities and efficiencies for us in reorganising our staff here at the headquarters. And we are also studying the feasibility of perhaps consolidating the three grantees: RFE, RFA and MBN. At the same time we want to make sure that we emphasize the growth of new media and social media in our strategic thinking. And we are trying to take notice of the fiscal realities here in trying to do more, more efficiently, with fewer resources. In November we announced an updated global audience of 187m, an increase of 22m from last year. We aim to build on that success by driving further innovation as well as integration across our media properties and delivery platforms.

**Does this mean a global newsroom for all US international broadcasting?**

Let's be clear - this is a virtual newsroom that is going to be charged with gathering and collating all the great content that is produced on a daily basis, finding the most compelling material, translating it and making it available on all different platforms, to all of the other entities in international broadcasting - not only here, but to our partners globally and also the outside world.

We don't see ourselves as competitors to CNN or AP or Reuters. We are staying true to our mission, trying to serve the countries that don't have press freedom. We want to 'engage and connect' with our audiences. We want to establish citizen journalists, we want to do crowd-sourcing. We



▲ Alhurra's Tarek El-Shamy reporting from Tahrir Square

want to find ways to give these people a voice in their country's activities and we want to be able to share it around the world. We see supporting freedom and democracy as a derivative benefit of doing great journalism and delivering fair, accurate and balanced news.

**What's the outlook?**

I think my primary wish is for more dollars, to use across the board. We have terrific opportunities for audience growth in Africa as radio is still a very powerful medium in many parts of Africa, and we could certainly use more short wave and FM outlets there. I was in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait earlier this year and marvelled at the number of news stations available to people in that part of the world. We have to find ways to compete, by getting away from the legacy platforms.

We are way behind the curve in TV and satellite distribution, and an investment in all the new media. This is a great institution. It is one of the things that this US government funds that most people in this country don't know about. I think it is important that we let people know that we are more active and more relevant than ever.

We are going to keep our eye on the people that need us most desperately.

**Richard Lobo, thank you.**

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