

BBC World Service and US State Department: new partners, new bias?

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One of the best-known broadcasters, the BBC World Service, has applied for a grant from the US State Department. The company says it needs the funding to develop anti-jamming technology, but some fear the US might use the deal to promote its agenda.

Viewers of the BBC World Service might be surprised to learn that starting in May, the news they receive could be influenced by the US.

"The cuts in the BBC budget are so draconian that they are looking for money any place they can get it and I am sure the State Department was aware of this," said Brian Drolet from Deepdish television. "I think what you can interpret from this is that the United States feels comfortable with the political line and the interpretation of world events that are coming from the BBC."

The World Service says it will use the money to prevent its programs from being blocked in countries like Iran and China. But there is concern that cash from the US government will come with strings attached.

"The minute you actually start taking the money, there is bound to be a certain element of 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'," said director of Institute of Economic Affairs Mark Littlewood. "It is a strange arrangement, and I would worry that the more complicated we make the BBC World Service, the less pure its message can be."

This will not be the first time the BBC has accepted money from organisations with their own agendas. In 2008, the corporation faced accusations of pro-Europe bias after it was revealed it had taken out US\$230 million in loans from the EU. The loans were given by the European Investment Bank, which strives to promote EU policies.

Member of European Parliament Gerard Batten has a long-running beef with the BBC.

"It is institutionally politically biased, certainly in favour of things like the European Union, mass immigration, and a whole other host of 'politically correct' ideas that I think it peddles to the public," he told RT.

Batten says taking this money would expose hypocrisy at the heart of the BBC.

"The EU bans sponsorship of any news and current affairs TV programs across the EU," Batten said. "Now that would appear then, that if the US State Department is going to fund BBC that would appear to be in breach of the directive."

The deal with the US State Department will be formally announced on International Press Freedom Day at the beginning of May, something its skeptics are sure to find deeply ironic.

It is the worldwide reach of the BBC that has made the US State Department decide it is worth the investment. However, that brings into question what the World Service is. Is it a news broadcaster for countries that do not have reliable sources of news? Or is it now a propaganda tool for both US and UK foreign and defence policy?

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