

Elez Biberaj
Acting director, Voice of America

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The undersigned Voice of America journalists are compelled to express our profound disappointment with the actions and comments of the chief executive officer of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which endanger the personal security of VOA reporters at home and abroad, as well as threatening to harm U.S. national security objectives.

Michael Pack's actions risk crippling programs and projects for some countries that are considered national security priorities. He has ordered the firing of contract journalists, with no valid reason, by cancelling their visas, forcing them back to home countries where the lives of some of them may be in jeopardy. Now the purge appears to be expanding to include U.S. permanent residents and even U.S. citizens, with Mr. Pack recklessly expressing that being a journalist is "a great cover for a spy."

We have watched in dismay as USAGM executives have been dismissed for, in their words, attempting to educate the new CEO on avoiding legal violations, as well as guiding him on the firewall that protects VOA's legally mandated editorial independence.

Just as concerning are Mr. Pack's public comments, including bantering with a podcast host about turning off the air conditioning and banning masks inside VOA's headquarters, as part of his effort to "drain the swamp."

Mr. Pack has made a thin excuse that his actions are meant to protect national security, but just as was the case with the McCarthy 'Red Scare,' which targeted VOA and other government organizations in the mid-1950's, there has not been a single demonstrable case of any individual working for VOA -- as the USAGM CEO puts it -- "posing as a spy."

Many of us have repeatedly put ourselves in harm's way abroad for our audiences of several hundred million people in nearly 50 languages. In line with strictly upholding the VOA charter, which was signed into law in 1976, we insist on competent and professional oversight for VOA and our sister media organizations, including the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio/TV Marti.

Given these concerns we fear that the current USAGM leadership is failing not only the news organizations of USAGM (one of the world's largest broadcasting entities) and our audiences, but also our stakeholders, including the American public.

Signed,

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Immigration reporter

Peter Cobus
Hub editor

Steve Herman
White House bureau chief

Mike O'Sullivan
Los Angeles bureau chief

Brian Padden
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Aru Pande
Editor

Carol Pearson
Senior health reporter

Anita Powell
Southern Africa correspondent

Bill Rodgers
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Esha Sarai
Education reporter

Jeff Seldin
National Security correspondent

Chris Simkins
National Affairs correspondent

Ayesha Tanzeem
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