



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

November 3, 2023

John Lippman  
Acting Director  
Voice of America  
330 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20237

Dear Mr. Lippman:

As a Senior Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and its Oversight and Accountability Subcommittee, I write to you regarding recent reporting that Voice of America (VOA) is barring its reporters from referring to Hamas terrorists, as terrorists,<sup>1</sup> and in fact has searched for, edited, and replaced the word “terrorist” in a story on October 30.<sup>2</sup>

I am deeply concerned that the outlet is compromising its central work to – according to its mission and values – “present a comprehensive, reliable and unbiased description of events.”<sup>3</sup> That clearly did not happen here.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, conducted a brutal and barbaric murderous rampage in southern Israel, slaughtering hundreds of innocent civilians – including dozens of American citizens – and also kidnapped at least 200 others currently being held as hostages in Gaza. Israelis ranging from the Prime Minister to the wider population have deemed this terrorist attack Israel’s 9/11.

By any objective metric, those who perpetrated the attack are terrorists. Notwithstanding this obvious fact, according to documents obtained by *National Review*, VOA reporters were instructed to “avoid calling Hamas and its members *terrorists*, except in quotes” and informed that “This practice conforms with the VOA News Standards and Best Practices guide and current

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Quinn, *Voice of America Staff Ordered Not to Call Hamas ‘Terrorists’*, *National Review*, October 23, 2023, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/10/voice-of-america-staff-ordered-not-to-call-hamas-terrorists/>

<sup>2</sup> Jimmy Quinn, *Voice of America Removes the Word ‘Terrorist’ from Story on Hamas Music Festival Attack*, *National Review*, October 31, 2023, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/10/voice-of-america-removes-the-word-terrorist-from-story-on-hamas-music-festival-attack>.

<sup>3</sup> VOA Mission and Values, *The Journalistic Code*, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.insidevoa.com/p/5831.html#:~:text=VOA%20has%20a%20legal%20obligation,sites%20at%20the%20earliest%20opportunity>.

usage by the wires and major U.S. news organizations, bearing in mind that the language including terrorism is often used to demonize individuals and groups with whom the speaker disagrees. *Useful alternatives are militant group or militants or fighters.*” (emphasis in the original). This is despite the fact that VOA’s *News Standards & Best Practices* do not rule out the use of the word “terrorist”, leaving its use for editors to determine “with extreme care”.<sup>4</sup> If VOA does not intend to use the word for Hamas terrorist, who could possibly qualify for the term?

Perhaps worse, the suggestion later in the VOA internal discussion – “We don’t really know why [Hamas] did it. Better to say it follows Israel’s decades-long occupation” – is as willfully biased as it is facially inaccurate. Given that Hamas is a self-avowed jihadist organization, and its rabidly antisemitic covenant calls for the destruction of Israel, the only reason one might profess such agnosticism is either a total unawareness or lack of subject matter expertise.

In light of the atrocities on October 7, VOA’s picayune resistance to demonizing demons is mindboggling. Private, left-of-center news organizations increasingly have to manage a growing, and loud, portion of their readership, which is unabashedly antisemitic and pro-Hamas. While VOA can seek to reach audiences that may not be reflexively endorsing of United States support for Israel, its purpose is to persuade with the facts, not generate advertising revenue from their clicks.

While I am aware that the firewall prevents you from impacting editorial content decisions – a critical distinction that fundamentally distinguishes American international broadcasting from state-run media outlets operated by our adversaries – VOA’s leadership is nonetheless responsible for both the direction of the organization and the intentional application of such obvious editorializing that undermines a key part of your mission: “VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively.”<sup>5</sup>

With that in mind, please provide to me and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, a copy of the email sent by Associate Editor for News Standards, Carol Guensberg, referenced by National Review, and a copy of any attached guidance, along with all replies to the email and attachments by no later than November 9, 2023.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa  
Member of Congress

cc: Carol Guensburg, Associate Editor, News Standards, Voice of America  
Amanda Bennett, CEO, U.S. Agency for Global Media

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<sup>4</sup> *News Standards & Best Practices*, Voice of America, October 2022, accessed November 2, 2023, page 13, <https://docs.voanews.eu/en-US-INSIDE/2022/10/28/80470000-c0a8-0242-d92f-08dab8fb57be.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> VOA Charter, 22 U.S.C. 6202(c)(3).