



Culture, Media and Sport Committee

05 June 2025

Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Rt Hon John Healey MP, Secretary of State for Defence
Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

By email

Dear Secretaries of State

World Service Funding

I am writing to share the concerns of my committee regarding recent reports that the FCDO may be reducing its contribution to the BBC World Service in the forthcoming Spending Review.

About one third of the BBC World Service budget is from the FCDO. We welcomed the news last October that the FCDO would put in £137million for 2025-26, an uplift of £32.5m. We note the World Service said it would still have to make [£6million of savings](#).

We are aware that the FCDO contribution for 2026-27 onwards may be constrained as 80% of the FCDO's contribution to the World Service is from the Overseas Development Assistance budget,¹ and that is under pressure due to the Government's commitment to [increase defence spending](#) to 2.5% of GDP in future. Reports in the media suggest that the FCDO has ask the World Service to consider two scenarios—either the FCDO contribution stays flat in cash terms or it falls by 2% in cash terms.²

We recognise the importance of prioritising national security at a time of considerable global instability. When this Committee, alongside colleagues from Foreign Affairs and International Development committees, took evidence on the World Service, Government Ministers told us that “the World Service bolsters UK security”.³ We agree.

It does this by providing trusted and impartial news, with journalism that aspires to the editorial principles of accuracy, impartiality and transparency. It reaches over 400 million people each week in 42 languages from Arabic and Burmese to Ukrainian. It is the only international news media organisation still broadcasting inside Afghanistan. The World

¹ [Correspondence to the Committee from the BBC](#), 15 April 2025

² The Guardian, [Ministers demand BBC World Service plan for cuts as aid budget slashed](#), 11 May 2025

³ [Correspondence to the Committee from Ministers Chapman and Peacock](#), 3 March 2025



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Service projects a positive view of the UK and its values to these audiences. Research shows that BBC viewers and listeners around the world are more likely to be supportive of democracy.⁴

Importantly, it provides audiences with a counter-narrative to that put out by hostile states, often in places where impartial news might not be taken for granted. It is at the forefront of struggle against mis- and dis-information. Indeed, in the [2023 Integrated Review Refresh](#) the FCDO found extra funding to the World Service in recognition of its role in countering disinformation.

Given sufficient resources, the World Service could expand. It could continue projects such as documenting the number of [Russian soldiers](#) that have died as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It could expand its services for audiences previously served by [Voice of America](#) and Radio Free Europe.

Without sufficient resources, it could lead to more situations where the World Service withdraws or reduces its services and Russian state media fills the vacuum, as in Lebanon when the BBC Arabic radio service was withdrawn.⁵ Our security is not enhanced by making it easier for Russian or Chinese state backed media, combined budget of around £8billion,⁶ to become the dominant voice around the world.

Ahead of the Spending Review, I invite you to reassure us that the Government is not seeking to make a 2% cut to its funding of the World Service, at a time when it is vital to our strategic priorities and that the Government will not require cuts that will lead to the BBC having to close one or more language service.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Caroline Dinenage MP
Chair, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

⁴ BBC & Tapestry research, [Global Influence and Impact Research](#), 2025

⁵ Oral evidence, Tuesday 19 November 2024, [Q21 and Q28](#)

⁶ Oral evidence, Tuesday 17 December 2024, [Q5](#)