



US budget cuts for Radio Free Asia, VoA give China a free hand in Cambodia

The Khmer Movement for Democracy is alarmed by the news that the US administration is cutting budgets for media organisations including Radio Free Asia and Voice of America.

The decision to reduce the activities of the United States Agency for Global Media to the legal minimum also ends the budgets for Radio Free Europe, which broadcasts in Russia and eastern Europe, and Radio Marti, which broadcasts news in Spanish into Cuba.

The networks together are estimated to reach 427 million people, most of whom have little or no access to objective news reporting.

The executive order signed by President Trump refers to the “non-statutory components” of USAGM. The KMD notes that RFA was congressionally established by statute in the 1994 International Broadcasting Act.

VoA was started in 1942 to counter Nazi propaganda. Its charter, signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1976, says the “long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world.”

This is particularly the case in Cambodia, where virtually all the Khmer and English language media are under government control.

There is therefore no regular objective source of published information and no critical questioning of the narratives promoted by the Hun family regime.

VoA has been an essential source of information on the development of the Chinese naval base at Ream in Cambodia, which poses a direct threat to US interests in the region.

RFA has been a crucial vehicle for investigative reporting on the cyber-scam compounds in Cambodia and Southeast Asia, which have increasingly targeted US victims online.

Both outlets have faithfully reported the opposing versions of these stories presented by the Cambodian government.

Reporters on the ground have risked their freedom and their lives to make information available. Those who work in the US may now be at risk of deportation if their work visas are no longer deemed to be valid.

The KMD notes that the affected networks have enjoyed bipartisan support in the US for decades. It urges the immediate and full resumption of funding as a matter of US national interest. Governments worldwide which openly consider the US as an enemy will now face no challenge to their narratives in light of these cuts. The KMD urges a rethink on the real implications for the US if its messages are no longer heard in the authoritarian world.

