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A Presidential Commission created by Congress to provide bipartisan oversight of the international broadcasting, information, and educational exchange activities of the United States government.

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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN A CHANGED WORLD

As Americans seek a consensus on the nation's purposes in the post-Cold War world, many ask how the United States Information Agency should best serve U.S. interests. The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy believes there is a compelling case for public diplomacy, and that the following reprint from its 1993 report can contribute to the dialogue on these issues.

Seldom are historical watersheds so immediately self-evident. The Cold War is over. The American people have elected new leaders. The world has changed fundamentally, transforming the policy agenda at home and abroad.

What distinguishes this from previous political and economic turning points is the emergence of a new information age. Satellite television, digital signals, and fiber optic cables are replacing mid-century communications technologies, radically altering the scope and speed of change.

We live in an age not only of information-based economics but of information-based politics, an age in which diplomats and policymakers must learn to operate in "real time."

Do we need U.S. international broadcasting, educational and cultural exchanges, and the public affairs activities of U.S. missions in such a world? The Commission is convinced the answer is yes. The case for public diplomacy is compelling.

Do we need the U.S. Information Agency in such a world? Again the answer is yes. But USIA needs to adapt and make clear its priorities and purposes.

The Commission believes the case for public diplomacy in the post-Cold War world rests on four basic realities.

First, diplomacy in the information age is public diplomacy. With instant global communication, what people see and hear affects immediately how governments act. Rarely, and seldom for long on issues that matter, can governments rely on exclusive information.

The consequences for diplomacy are profound. When the President and the world learn simultaneously about an attempted coup, a currency devaluation, a missile attack, or an outbreak of famine, public opinion becomes instantly central to diplomacy, not just one more factor to consider.

Because the communications revolution has compressed time and distance, the rules have changed. Traditional diplomatic and military instruments of statecraft are still necessary, but they are no longer sufficient.

Today, governments must win the support of people in other countries, as well as their leaders, if their policies are to succeed. They must cope not only with

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"One of the most effective things we can do in international affairs is what is called public diplomacy."

President Clinton

pressures from their own constituencies, but with the consequences of public pressures on other governments. Frequently, they must mobilize coalition support for their policies. And because what they say at home will be instantly reported abroad, their policy explanations must be consistent and persuasive to both domestic and foreign audiences.

All this is far more than a matter of public relations or getting a "good press." It is a political necessity.

Public diplomacy in this new age cannot be just an accidental byproduct of what is reported in the commercial media or private exchanges of people and ideas. Just as in foreign policy, defense, trade, and intelligence, U.S. presidents and the American people need an agency of government dedicated to the task of communicating the nation's interests and ideals abroad.

Second, public diplomacy is essential to peaceful change and democratic reform. The U.S. has an immediate, vital stake in aiding the democratic reforms that are changing the world. If these reforms fail, the long-term costs will be enormous. If they succeed, we will live in a safer world with reduced defense burdens, expanded trade, and additional jobs for American workers.

For countries that lack democratic institutions and entrepreneurial cultures, ideas and practical information are as important as economic assistance. USIA's visitor programs, academic and professional exchanges, English teaching, radio and television broadcasts, and other activities offer cost-effective ways to respond effectively to intense interest in the American democratic experience.

These are not new programs invented to provide a justification for USIA's post-Cold War role. America's democracy assistance efforts have deep historical roots, famously in Germany and Japan after World War II, and earlier in Asia and Latin America. The logic of helping to build democratic institutions abroad,

then and now, goes beyond short-term humanitarian aid and economic assistance to vital long-term interests.

Third, educational and cultural exchanges are central to information age public diplomacy. Satellite TV and jet travel compress time and distance; they also can create the illusion of understanding.

Attitudes on most issues develop slowly and incrementally. What do citizens and opinion leaders in other countries understand about the United States, its values, its people, and its policies? How do they feel about their own and other countries? What languages do they speak? Have they visited the United States on an exchange or visitor grant? Who did they meet and what were their experiences while here? Conversely, and just as importantly, what do Americans understand about the cultures, traditions, and languages of other nations?

Academic, professional, and cultural exchanges -- investments in mutual understanding -- are essential in the new information age for Americans and non-Americans alike. These activities, widely appreciated for reasons that go beyond international politics, provide perspective and intellectual depth to what is left out of superficial familiarity and instant communication.

Educational and cultural exchanges have intrinsic long-term value. They also bear directly on America's short-term vital interests -- our ability to compete in global markets and to communicate policies credibly and effectively. U.S. foreign and economic policies will be understood best, and misunderstood least, by those whose views are based on personal observation of American society and contact with a broad cross-section of Americans.

Fourth, public diplomacy is necessary in an interdependent world. Today national boundaries matter less. Democratic ideas, television, financial markets, narcotics, fax machines, terrorism, electronic mail, AIDS, refugees, environmental disasters, dual

use technologies, rock music, weapons of mass destruction, soap operas, and high speed computer networks all ignore national frontiers.

In this kind of world, domestic needs and foreign affairs cannot be separated.

USIA's mission. The United States government has engaged in foreign information programs, international broadcasting, and publicly funded educational and cultural exchanges since before World War II. These activities evolved within different organizations throughout the 20th century as the U.S. became a world power and as communications technology advanced.

Over time, organization charts changed and mission statements varied in thematic emphasis, but core purposes remained constant:

- To explain and advocate U.S. policies in terms that are credible and meaningful in foreign cultures.
- To provide information about the United States, its people, values, and institutions.
- To build lasting relationships and mutual understanding through the exchange of people and ideas.
- To advise the President and other policymakers on the conduct of public diplomacy and on foreign public opinion and its implications for proposed policies.

Casual observers occasionally identify USIA exclusively with the Cold War and ideological struggle. There are those who would now either dismiss USIA as irrelevant or seek to invent a new mission for the Agency. The Commission believes both would be a mistake.

USIA's mission does not depend on transitory historical episodes, on U.S. interests in a few countries, or on single goals, no matter how compelling, such as democracy-building or anti-communism. In the new information age -- with its instant communications, global issues, and porous borders -- USIA has a permanent mission, relevant to all international contingencies.

The Commission also believes the mission of public diplomacy can best be fulfilled by keeping the management of overseas information programs, international broadcasting, and educational and cultural exchanges within a single federal agency, reporting directly to the President and receiving policy guidance from the Department of State.

The purposes and interdependence of these public diplomacy activities overseas lead inevitably to their co-location here at home. Much U.S. government radio and television programming is now placed on foreign stations for rebroadcast; USIA's posts accordingly play a greater role in international broadcasting. Academic exchanges often create an atmosphere in which difficult policy issues can be addressed more constructively. Participants in the International Visitor program, many of whom have been identified by American embassies as future policymakers, engage in broad cultural and professional learning experiences while on visits to the United States. USIA's libraries and computerized reference services provide information to users in all professions, government officials and media elites prominently among them. VOA and USIA TV supplement USIA's field operations with English teaching and features on democracy.

USIA's programs defy easy categorization along media or information or cultural lines, as many U.S. ambassadors and public diplomacy professionals have observed. They are and should be part of a long-term communications process with the people and governments of other countries.

While the basic mission and organizational structures have continuing value, U.S. public diplomacy does need to adapt. Strategic planning, at both the White House and agency levels, has been *ad hoc* and secondary to preoccupation with short-term budget cycles. Congress and the Administration must address the need for new program priorities, long-term planning, additional

"In the information age, public diplomacy takes on special importance."

Secretary of State
Warren Christopher



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resources, consolidation of assets, inter-agency coordination, and sustained leadership at the top.

Resources. The United States substantially underinvests in public diplomacy compared with other national budget priorities and the public diplomacy spending of many other countries.

USIA's budget today is smaller in real terms than it was 25 years ago. The Agency is unable to respond to many new opportunities and in some instances to maintain basic programs. Inflation, budget earmarks, costs of operating in new countries, and strategic dislocations in the U.S. public diplomacy budget are requiring USIA to cut valuable activities.

In recent years, bipartisan support for public diplomacy has increased in Congress, with resource shortfalls stemming more from national budget considerations than lack of appreciation for activities that serve vital U.S. interests. Looking ahead, the Commission is well aware that federal budget realities will create added pressures on all foreign affairs funding.

Nevertheless, the Commission is convinced increases for public diplomacy are a sound investment — to develop new information technologies; to support democratic reforms in countries where democracy hangs in the balance; to encourage free market values and U.S. access to foreign markets and resources; and to raise awareness and provide information on new security threats and global challenges that can affect every American.

At the same time, there are strategic inefficiencies in the distribution of available public diplomacy resources:

- Long-term reductions in budgets for field staffing and programs "unprotected" by earmarks and dedicated appropriations.

- A Cold War legacy of emphasis on international shortwave broadcasting, which must be viewed in conjunction with the exchanges and field programs now possible in many formerly closed societies.

- Underinvestment in television compared with radio.

- Excess shortwave transmitter capacity in Eastern Europe and western areas of the former Soviet Union.

- Emphasis on numbers of international exchange grants without adequate funds for management and programs that provide a quality exchange experience.

- Inefficient allocations of funds among agencies that assist emerging democracies.

We urge the Administration to look comprehensively at these issues. If resources are to be spent wisely, new program priorities, consolidation of certain assets, and redirection of funds are essential.

It is important that special treatment be avoided and all categories of public diplomacy looked at coherently. To identify the best mix of programs and resources for U.S. public diplomacy, broadcasting priorities must be determined together with field programs, educational exchanges, and private sector initiatives.

There is a powerful case to be made for public diplomacy — on both moral and national interest grounds. But it must be voiced in terms of clear priorities, tough choices, and new ways of doing business. Continued support in Congress will depend on upfront distinctions between important and marginal programs, and candid assessments of Cold War activities that should be trimmed or eliminated. Without this, support will be withdrawn in indiscriminate ways.