

The Past and Future of Public Diplomacy

by Carnes Lord

When the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, and soon afterwards the Soviet Union itself, collapsed virtually without a shot fired in defense of the old order, many in the West were at a loss for a plausible explanation. That the legitimacy of communist rule had already been profoundly eroded not only in the satellite countries but in the Soviet homeland itself prior to the events of 1989–91 could hardly be doubted. Yet the possibility that the overseas information programs of Western governments, especially those of the United States, might have been instrumental in that development has rarely been entertained by our academic and media experts. This is no doubt due in part to the long-standing contempt and disregard for government “propaganda” among opinion-forming elites in the West, but it also reflects deeply rooted yet very questionable assumptions about the sources of political legitimacy, the character of historical change, and indeed human nature itself. Many in the West are simply unable to accept that ideas rather than economic circumstances can have inspired a political revolution.

The causes of the Soviet collapse are still far from clear.¹ Yet it is fair to say that the contribution of Western information programs, or more precisely, that broad array of activities now generally termed “public diplomacy,” has still not been adequately assessed, and is almost certainly undervalued. This is a function partly of a persistent failure to understand the character and history of these programs, and partly of a failure to appreciate the specific policies of the Reagan administration and their impact on the leadership as well as peoples of the Soviet bloc.²

¹ See “The Strange Death of Soviet Communism,” *National Interest*, Spring 1993, especially Stephen Sestanovich, “Did the West Undo the East?” pp. 26–34.

² The importance of Soviet leadership perceptions and their neglect by most Western analysts is emphasized by Sestanovich, who notes (p. 28, n. 1) that even a comprehensive survey such as Daniel Deudney and

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It is not possible here to do full justice to the recent history of American public diplomacy, or to assess in more than provisional fashion its role in the collapse of the Soviet system. Empirical research and sophisticated analytical studies are needed in a field that is today even more of an academic and policy orphan than it was in the past.³ Nonetheless, it seems worthwhile to revisit what in many respects must count as the golden age of Cold War American public diplomacy, the years 1981–86. As an engaged participant during this period,⁴ I cannot claim total objectivity. What I hope to do is to provide insight into the thinking of senior Reagan administration officials, an appreciation of what they actually did, an assessment of the impact of these actions, and (not least important) a sense of the limitations of the overall enterprise. Finally, some comments will be offered on the implications of the Reagan-era story for U.S. public diplomacy in the post–Cold War world.

The American government is currently in the process of the most drastic restructuring of its public diplomacy apparatus since the late 1970s. This offers a rare opportunity to refocus attention on public diplomacy, but unfortunately, so far at least, the debate over the future of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and its relationship to the State Department has overshadowed consideration of the substantive issues. While an excellent case can be made for the reintegration of USIA into the State Department, this step would be an unfortunate one if it were taken to signal the stigmatization of public diplomacy as a mere relic of the Cold War. At the same time, it is also clear that changes are necessary. While the organizational dimension is indeed important, what is really needed is a reconceptualization of public diplomacy in the broadest sense, one that promises to take us beyond the simplistic and ideologically driven positions that have too often obstructed sensible discussion of this inherently controversial subject.

G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change," *International Security*, Winter, 1991–92, totally ignores the failure of the Soviet INF campaign of the early 1980s. Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), is a journalistic account emphasizing internal Soviet developments; note also Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For the broader argument that information and information technologies are a revolutionary force in the contemporary world, see, for example, Walter B. Wriston, *The Twilight of Sovereignty: How the Information Revolution Is Transforming Our World* (New York: Scribner's, 1992); Howard H. Frederick, *Global Communication and International Relations* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1993); and John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Information, Power, and Grand Strategy: In Athena's Camp," *The Information Revolution and National Security: Dimensions and Directions*, ed. Stuart J.D. Schwartzstein (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), pp. 132–80.

³ Consider this comment by one of the few eminent Washington figures who has followed public diplomacy matters over the years: "The search for a style of public diplomacy adequate to our needs and in tune with our character has led us on a wandering path, usually avoiding propaganda, sometimes neglecting long-range objectives, often failing to think strategically about either immediate or long-range concerns. That illusive style, coupled with the huge and growing importance of the challenge, calls for a scholarship and analysis that is currently almost nonexistent." David M. Abshire, "Foreword," in David I. Hitchcock Jr., *U.S. Public Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1988), p. v.

⁴ I served on the staff of the National Security Council, Feb. 1981–Dec. 1983, with responsibilities centering on public diplomacy and particularly international broadcasting, and Feb. 1989–May 1991 as assistant to the vice president for national security affairs.

Origins of American Public Diplomacy

International information programs have been a permanent tool of American foreign or national security policy since World War II.⁵ The Voice of America (VOA) has engaged in overseas radio broadcasting in a variety of languages since 1942, and other elements of wartime propaganda and psychological operations soon found an institutional home in USIA. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (RFE-RL) were created in the early 1950s under Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sponsorship to act as “surrogate” domestic radio services for the Soviet bloc. Educational and cultural programs are a second component of U.S. public diplomacy. Begun in the late 1930s as part of an effort to counter German penetration of Latin America, these initiatives included educational exchanges, speakers programs, artistic and cultural tours and exhibits, and overseas libraries. They were administered by the State Department until a reorganization in 1978 transferred them to USIA (which then became for a short time the United States International Communications Agency).⁶

The third component of public diplomacy may be labeled “political action.” This term is not an entirely satisfactory one, in part because of its long association with covert intelligence activities. Although some public diplomacy practitioners resist any linkage between the activities it encompasses and the other components of public diplomacy, political action nevertheless remains a useful general term for a wide array of official and quasi-official operations designed to influence the outlook and behavior of key individuals and organizations abroad. A classic case was the CIA’s support for noncommunist labor unions in France and Italy following World War II, which is generally credited as a key factor in the struggle against local communist and Soviet influence throughout Western Europe. More recently, many of these functions have been taken over by the semiofficial National Endowment for Democracy, and CIA’s role has receded if not disappeared. Usually overlooked, but arguably belonging in this category as well, are statements and symbolic actions of high-ranking officials that are calculated to shape political processes or outcomes in foreign countries.⁷

⁵ See Clayton D. Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade Against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

⁶ See Frank A. Nincovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁷ It is too often forgotten that CIA activities in postwar Italy were only one aspect of a multifaceted political action campaign designed to ensure a Christian Democratic victory in the elections of 1948; the U.S. ambassador was an energetic participant, but prominent Americans such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Senator Herbert Lehman of New York, and Justice Owen Roberts of the Supreme Court were also mobilized to intervene. For a brief account see William E. Daugherty and Morris Janowitz, eds., *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 319–26. On CIA political action see further Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1991), ch. 9. For the reverse phenomenon—foreign attempts to influence the American political process—see the recent analysis by Jarol B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

In the early years of the Cold War, public diplomacy was widely viewed in straightforward and unapologetic terms as a form of psychological warfare. Under the impact of the experience of total war, those responsible for U.S. policy tended to conceive of public diplomacy as part of an arsenal of capabilities that could and ought to be used in the developing worldwide struggle against the Soviet Union and international communist movement. Public diplomacy programs thus emerged as an independent dimension of national strategy fully comparable to diplomacy, military force, and economic power. This sort of thinking led the Truman administration to create a Psychological Strategy Board and develop a national strategy and plans for the conduct of psychological warfare against the East; it underlaid the establishment of USIA as an agency separate from the State Department at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration; and it contributed to the institutionalization of political action and unconventional warfare in the CIA and (to a lesser degree) in the military in the 1950s.

It is worth noting that none of these activities were politically controversial at the time, but reflected a broad consensus among American elites that “propaganda” (as it was still widely called) was a legitimate and important tool of policy and topic for serious academic study.⁸ To be sure, naive idealism and inflated expectations sometimes accompanied the practice of public diplomacy in those years. In an era of rigid alliance systems and nuclear stalemate, public diplomacy seemed to offer the West an offensive strategic option that was otherwise lacking. Yet the difficulty of bringing about near-term change in the closed societies of the East was initially underestimated, while the efficacy of propaganda as a stand-alone weapon of political warfare in the Third World (a key lesson drawn by many from the CIA’s overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1953) was sometimes overrated. At the same time, public diplomacy could be something of a two-edged sword. When the Soviets put down the Hungarian revolution of 1956, which was widely reported to have been encouraged by RFE’s Hungarian service, official thinking in the West began to take a more reserved stance toward its claims. With the deepening American involvement in Vietnam, the idea that the “hearts and minds” of the world’s masses could be won to the cause of the West came to seem not only problematic but morally repellent.

Public Diplomacy in the 1970s

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the cultural revolution it ignited in the United States, the traditional programs and assumptions of Cold War public diplomacy faced a serious challenge from within the policy elite itself. CIA sponsorship of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was exposed on the floor

⁸ For a relatively late example of academic attention to this issue, see “Propaganda in International Affairs,” a special issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Nov. 1971.

of the U.S. Senate in 1971; the radios were saved only by the questionable expedient of reconstituting them as a private corporation under oversight arrangements provided by a new Board for International Broadcasting (BIB). A few years later, a Senate investigation of CIA-sponsored covert action in effect created a presumption of illegitimacy concerning the agency's political action efforts. There was little place for public diplomacy in the starkly geopolitical world view of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who dominated American foreign policy in the first half of the decade. For them, East-West conflict in the ideological realm could only complicate America's grand strategy, which called for an easing of tensions with the Soviets through nuclear arms limitation, recognition of the status quo in Europe, and improved commercial relations.⁹

Partly in reaction to such attitudes, the Carter administration paid more attention to public diplomacy. Soviet endorsement of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act (the pan-European security agreement signed in 1975) had unexpectedly stimulated dissident activity in the Soviet bloc and elevated the international profile of human rights violations by governments everywhere. The Carter administration responded to these trends by making human rights a central concern of American foreign policy, and in the process set out to rehabilitate public diplomacy as a legitimate activity of the U.S. government. One result was a major reorganization of USIA.

Unfortunately, the Carter administration's performance in this area was inconsistent, reflecting its own divided counsels; and in some respects it actually accelerated the retreat from ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union begun during the Kissinger era. In the area of human rights policy, the Carter administration frequently seemed more interested in criticizing governments friendly to the United States than in condemning Soviet behavior. Even when it took a more neutral approach, however, the administration only succeeded in blurring important distinctions, especially the basic one between traditional authoritarian rulers (the Shah of Iran, notably) and the totalitarian regimes of the communist world.¹⁰

The USIA reorganization also reflected a distorted vision of American purposes and priorities. The transfer of educational and cultural programs from the State Department to the newly renamed International Communications Agency (ICA) reinforced a developing tendency to look on public diplomacy as a kind of service disinterestedly provided by the United States to the rest of the world, with little if any relationship to the strategic requirements of the nation. More important than conveying a particular message to foreign audiences was the careful husbanding of the "credibility" of the public diplomacy effort

⁹ In an extreme though revealing formulation, Kissinger aide Helmut Sonnenfeldt told a group of American diplomats in 1975 that it lay in the American national interest to foster a more "organic" relationship between the Soviet Union and its East European satellites, as a way to remove dangerous irritants in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1992), pp. 664–65.

¹⁰ For an influential contemporary statement, see Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary*, Nov. 1979, pp. 34–45. See also the symposium on human rights and American foreign policy in *Commentary*, Nov. 1981.

by maintaining its distance from U.S. foreign policy. Following this logic to its end could only lead—and did lead—to the regular use in public diplomacy programs of individuals and materials critical of American society, culture, and government. At the same time, the new ICA charter promulgated a mission for the agency that perfectly reflected the spirit of the age. Not only was ICA to tell America's story to the world; it would also convey information about the world to Americans. This so-called “second mandate” was never seriously implemented, but it underscored the extent to which public diplomacy had ceased to be viewed as a strategic weapon of American global policy. Even more, it showed how uncertain the policy elite had become about the nation's own ideological legitimacy and mission.¹¹

The War of Ideas Resumed

Ronald Reagan came to the presidency uniquely equipped to engage in ideological struggle. A former actor and radio personality, he understood instinctively the power of modern communications media and the importance of theater in contemporary politics. He had had firsthand exposure to communist political warfare as president of the Screen Actors' Guild in postwar Hollywood. While governor of California he successfully led one of the most ideologically supercharged states in the nation, and as president, his personality and speaking and acting skills would justly earn him the title “the Great Communicator.” With Reagan, for perhaps the first time since Roosevelt, public diplomacy was securely anchored in the Oval Office.¹²

Reagan's choice for director of USIA was Charles Z. Wick, a Hollywood impresario and personal friend with no background in government service. In spite of some early missteps and a notorious volatility in personnel matters, Wick's energy, imagination, and ready access to the president did much to rebuild the morale and sense of purpose of an agency that was widely viewed in Washington as a bureaucratic backwater.¹³ A second key appointment was that of Frank Shakespeare, a broadcasting industry executive and former director of USIA in the Nixon administration, as chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting.

Much of what the Reagan team set out to do amounted to a fundamental revolution in bureaucratic culture. For a number of reasons, including the slow pace of political appointments and the administration's initial focus on domestic

¹¹ For a contemporary account see especially Kenneth L. Adelman, “Speaking of America: Public Diplomacy in Our Time,” *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1981, pp. 913–36. Consider also Gifford D. Malone, *Political Advocacy and Cultural Communication: Organizing the Nation's Public Diplomacy*, Exxon Education Foundation Series on Rhetoric and Political Discourse, vol. 11 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), pp. 49–61.

¹² Fundamental for the domestic side of presidential communication is Jeffrey B. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹³ That Wick has been the most effective USIA director of the last twenty years is a judgment that would probably be endorsed by most career personnel at the agency. Note, for example, Allen C. Hansen, *USIA: Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1989), p. xi.

issues, this revolution only gradually gathered momentum, and early changes (such as the revival of USIA's former name) were often largely symbolic. Of greatest practical significance were early steps to increase the budgets for both USIA and BIB and to launch an ambitious technical modernization of the overseas radios. Also of considerable importance, though not widely appreciated at the time (or indeed since), were Shakespeare's efforts to overcome management problems at RFE-RL and restore a measure of control and accountability over these radios.

For those without firsthand experience of RFE-RL, it is natural to picture "the radios"—as they had long been known—as a relic of the early Cold War and thus an important tool in the Reagan administration's efforts to reengage the Soviets on the ideological front. Yet this was far from the case. While much of value continued to be done at the radios, it was also obvious that there was a deficit of energy, initiative, and sense of mission.¹⁴ This stark judgment needs immediate qualification. Many of those at the working level of the radios were conscientious and professional—and not a few, passionate patriots devoted to the well-being of their homelands. The language services also varied widely. The Polish service was large, culturally sophisticated, and intensively engaged in the political crisis attending the rise of the Solidarity movement. The Czech and Hungarian services were widely regarded as mediocre and compromised by a leadership that had gotten too close to the reform communist elements in these countries. The Russian service was hamstrung by ideological and intergenerational conflict, while the services for the non-Russian Soviet republics tended to be undermanned, professionally weak, and marginal in their impact, especially given the technical constraints on short-wave broadcasting east of the Urals.

Exactly whose responsibility it was to fix the radios' problems was far from clear. Legally, RFE-RL was a private corporation, with its own corporate board controlling basic management decisions such as the hiring and firing of personnel. At the same time, since virtually all of the organization's funding was provided by the U.S. Congress, some mechanism was needed to provide accountability to the American taxpayer. This mechanism was the Board for International Broadcasting, a presidentially appointed part-time board of private citizens supported by a small staff located in Washington. While the BIB's legislative charter made general provision for policy oversight of the radios, the precise extent of its authority was uncertain, as was the degree of supervision that could properly be exercised by agencies of the executive branch.¹⁵

¹⁴ Demoralization stemming from internal conflicts, tensions with Washington, and the effects of a decade of detente politics ran deep. The isolation of the Munich headquarters was a problem. Most of the top management was out of sympathy with the outlook of the new American administration and had few contacts within it. Many of the younger staff, unlike the first generation of émigrés at the radios, had grown up in a communist milieu, knew little about the United States, and derived their political ideas in the main from European—and particularly West German—journalism, with its social-democratic bias and frequently critical slant on American politics and culture. An inside account of these years is now available in the memoir of RFE director George Urban, *My War Within the Cold War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ This controversy can be followed to some degree in the published annual reports of the Board for International Broadcasting for the late 1970s and early 1980s.

One of the new administration's priorities was therefore to strengthen Washington-level oversight of RFE-RL. This was achieved in 1981 when Congress passed an amendment abolishing the corporate board of RFE-RL and reassigning its functions to an expanded BIB. Shakespeare, the newly empowered BIB chairman, then moved quickly to replace the senior management of the radios and begin a process of organizational renewal.

What did the new administration want to do? It is probably true, as a former USIA official has stated, that the president and his men had no "grand scheme" in mind other than a general predisposition to strengthen USIA and the radios. But it is misleading to say that the administration "made no attempt to set forth a conceptual framework or a statement of mission for its information agency."¹⁶ By mid-1982, the administration had developed the outlines of an international broadcasting strategy. Formalized in a classified presidential document, National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 45, it began by affirming that international broadcasting constitutes "an important instrument of the national security policy of the United States," and stated that improvement in programming as well as the technical quality of U.S. broadcasting is a requirement "of the highest priority." It directed the Voice of America (VOA) to "take steps to strengthen existing mechanisms for relating program content to current U.S. foreign and national security policy objectives" and to ensure that commentary and analysis incorporated "vigorous advocacy of current policy positions of the U.S. government." In addition, it directed for the first time that technical cooperation and joint planning between U.S. international broadcasters—emphatically including RFE-RL—should be undertaken on a regular basis. It also focused attention on the role of U.S. international broadcasting in crisis and war, and called on the relevant agencies to review existing guidance and make recommendations for closer integration of the broadcasting effort into political and military contingency planning.¹⁷ In short, the Reagan administration deliberately set out to revive the strategic approach to public diplomacy that had marked the early years of the Cold War.

No single document fully articulated the administration's conceptual vision, but much of it can be found in an NSC-sponsored study undertaken in 1983. Issued in summary form as NSDD 130 in early 1984, it addressed only the information component of public diplomacy, but the principles laid down had a broader bearing.¹⁸ It noted that public diplomacy is "a key strategic instrument for shaping fundamental political and ideological trends around the globe on a long-term basis and ultimately affecting the behavior of governments."

¹⁶ Malone, *Political Advocacy*, pp. 63–64. This monograph remains the single best general account of the recent evolution of American public diplomacy policy and institutions, but its focus is almost exclusively on USIA and the State Department. Another recent discussion by a career USIA officer is Hans N. Tuch, *Communicating with the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990).

¹⁷ National Security Decision Directive 45, "United States International Broadcasting," July 15, 1982. This document was declassified in 1991 and is available in Christopher Simpson, *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995), pp. 155–57.

¹⁸ National Security Decision Directive 130, "US International Information Policy," Mar. 6, 1984. This document, also declassified in 1991, is available in Simpson, *National Security Directives*, pp. 393–97.

In an effort to counter the tendency to view public diplomacy through the prism of American journalism, it made clear that the fundamental purpose of international information programs is to “affect foreign audiences in ways favorable to U.S. national interests,” and stressed that “the habits, interests, expectations and level of understanding of foreign audiences may differ significantly from those of the domestic American audience, and require different approaches and emphases in the selection and presentation of information.”

At the same time, the document made clear that public diplomacy programs should be understood to be “a strategic instrument of U.S. national policy, not a tactical instrument of U.S. diplomacy,” and hence should not be sacrificed to a perceived need to improve government-to-government relations with particular countries. Reflecting this strategic perspective, it also emphasized the potential contributions of the Department of Defense in the information area, and called for the revitalization of psychological operations (PSYOP) within the U.S. military establishment as well as for coordinated information planning across all affected agencies.¹⁹

The idea of a coordinated national-level approach to public diplomacy was fundamental to the administration’s outlook from the beginning. To the extent that public diplomacy was to serve as a genuine strategic instrument, it stood in need of more intense and coordinated support from the White House and senior levels of the major national security agencies than had been the case for a long time. In order to ensure this support on a continuing basis, another presidential directive established a mechanism within the National Security Council system for managing public diplomacy matters. Issued in early 1983, NSDD 77 created an interagency Special Planning Group chaired by the national security adviser for the “overall planning, direction, coordination and monitoring of implementation of public diplomacy activities.”²⁰ Four subordinate committees assisted this effort at the working level. A Public Affairs Committee cochaired by the White House communications director and the deputy national security adviser was established for the high-level coordination of public affairs activities on sensitive or urgent national security issues, including speeches and interviews by senior administration officials. This critical group attempted to ensure careful and rapid coordination among the diverging bureaucratic elements dealing with public diplomacy and (primarily domestic-oriented) public affairs, and directly linked public diplomacy to the Oval Office. An International Information Committee chaired by the deputy director of USIA was to have

A reinvigorated program set the stage for major strategy initiatives.

¹⁹ On this subject generally see Frank R. Barnett and Cames Lord, eds., *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations: Rethinking the U.S. Approach* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988).

²⁰ National Security Decision Directive 77, “Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security,” Jan. 14, 1983. Printed texts of this unclassified document may be found in Simpson, *National Security Directives*, pp. 265–67, and in Richard F. Staar, ed., *Public Diplomacy: USA Versus USSR* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), pp. 297–99. This volume has other material that is very helpful for understanding the thinking of administration officials involved with public diplomacy in this period.

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general responsibility for overseas information programs, while an International Political Committee under State Department leadership would supervise the administration's political action efforts. Finally, an International Broadcasting Committee under NSC leadership was responsible for the radio modernization project and related activities.

This elaborate mechanism was far from perfect in practice, but provided an institutionalized framework for public diplomacy, instilled a dynamism that had long been lacking, set the stage for major initiatives in support of the administration's international security strategy, and greatly enhanced American performance in a series of engagements with the Soviet adversary—engagements that can now be seen as crucial events in the end game of the Cold War.

Initiatives

Broadcasting, as indicated above, was an early target of the administration's reformist energies. Three major initiatives received the president's seal of approval within his first year in office. First, the administration committed itself to the modernization and expansion of VOA and RFE-RL, including diplomatic support for the acquisition of new transmitting sites and facility agreements as well as for the promotion of U.S. broadcasting interests in arenas such as the World Administrative Radio Conference (responsible for the allocation of scarce radio frequencies). Secondly, the administration signalled its intention to launch a major effort to overcome jamming of broadcasts aimed at the Soviet bloc. Thirdly, it decided to create a new surrogate radio for broadcasting to Castro's Cuba.

When Reagan took office in 1981, some of the shortwave radio transmitters used by the Voice of America were survivals of World War II, and the broadcast studios for all the radios looked like movie sets from the 1950s. Transmitter power and reliability were significant problems. The combination of heavy jamming and a relatively weak signal sharply limited listenership in the Soviet Union, especially in major cities and the potentially volatile non-Russian republics. A long-overdue technical modernization program—eventually costing over \$1 billion—created the infrastructure for a strengthened international broadcasting effort. At the same time, a combination of political and technical solutions would be sought to the troublesome problem of jamming.²¹

²¹ All U.S. overseas broadcasting uses frequencies that are internationally approved, and intentional interference with such transmissions is generally recognized as contrary to international law. Nevertheless, the Soviets and their East European allies had routinely jammed Western broadcasts for many years. Jamming is never entirely effective, and it is very expensive (the cost of Soviet jamming alone was thought to exceed the combined annual budgets of VOA and RFE-RL); that the Soviets persisted in this practice was therefore striking testimony to the importance they placed on the ideological struggle—and their awareness of their own vulnerabilities in waging it. In 1973, apparently in order to underline their commitment to East-West detente, the Soviets had ceased jamming VOA and other Western broadcasters, but RFE-RL remained a key exception. In 1980, with the rise of Solidarity, jamming of VOA was resumed, and the jamming of Western broadcasts to Poland by the Soviets and some of their East European allies became intense after the imposition

The launching of Radio Marti was another major public diplomacy initiative undertaken early in the administration. In September 1981, Reagan established a presidential commission charged with developing a plan for surrogate broadcasting to Cuba. The administration's support for this project was based on more than visceral opposition to Cuban communism. It reflected growing concern over Cuban sponsorship of revolution in Central America and the Caribbean, the Cuban military presence in Africa, and the Soviets' use of Cuba itself as an outpost for military and intelligence activities. The strategic calculus was that providing Cubans with better access to information—particularly about the actions of their government abroad—would generate difficulties for the Castro regime at home and limit its ability to support Soviet global interests. In the fall of 1982, the president's commission recommended the establishment of a medium wave station on the AM band to ensure the widest possible coverage of the Cuban population. In spite of fierce opposition from the National Association of Broadcasters, which feared Cuban retaliation against U.S. commercial broadcasters, Congress passed implementing legislation for Radio Marti in 1983.²² The station began broadcasts to Cuba in May 1985 and soon established itself as a popular and credible alternative to the official Cuban media. Controversy later ensued over the creation of TV Marti, the first surrogate television station sponsored by the U.S. government. The intense opposition of the Cuban regime underlined the seriousness with which it viewed this threat to its political legitimacy. Unfortunately, however, the Cubans were able to devise technical countermeasures to TV Marti that have effectively neutralized much of its potential value, raising continuing questions about its cost-effectiveness as an instrument of American policy.

A fourth initiative in the broadcasting area should also be mentioned. In 1983, USIA entered the age of television with WORLDNET, a global satellite broadcast capability that for the first time afforded senior American officials rapid, direct, and routine access to foreign television audiences.²³ Interactive video-conferences with foreign journalists were a particularly effective use of this new medium. USIA also began to exploit the medium wave radio band as a way to broaden listenership for American public diplomacy, particularly among the younger generation.

Two other early initiatives laid the groundwork for all of the administration's later public diplomacy activities. "Project Truth," as it came to be called, represented the initial attempt by USIA to restore an anti-Soviet focus and

of martial law in Poland in December 1981. Although the United States clearly occupied the legal and moral high ground on jamming, little serious thought had been given to this problem in the American national security establishment for many years, and the time seemed ripe for a major effort. The outcome surely confirmed this. The abandonment of jamming by the Soviets in Nov. 1988 was no doubt in considerable part a function of economic exigency as well as the new "openness" in internal Soviet communications championed by then general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev; on the other hand, the United States had sharply upped the ante in a game the Soviets knew they were very unlikely to win.

²² Under a last-minute legislative compromise, the station was administratively subordinated to VOA, but would function in practice little differently from a classic surrogate broadcasting operation. See generally *Final Report of the Presidential Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba*, Sept. 30, 1982.

²³ For a brief account, see Hansen, *USIA*, pp. 109–14.

mission to U. S. international information programs. The effort tended to be described in defensive terms as an effort to counter increasingly sophisticated Soviet propaganda and political action campaigns. Soviet “disinformation” or “active measures” operations, which were generally orchestrated by Soviet intelligence, were especially troublesome, and became a key target.²⁴ But Project Truth also provided the organizational vehicle for offensive public diplomacy against the Soviet empire. Soviet activities in Poland and Afghanistan were prime targets; so, too, was the emerging record of Soviet arms control violations, particularly the use of chemical and biological weapons by the Soviets and their proxies in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. The full significance of Project Truth, however, transcended its power to advertise particular communist misdeeds. When Reagan spoke publicly of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” whose last chapter was even then being written, he broke all the rules that had governed official American commentary on East-West relations for at least a quarter of a century. Though derided at the time by his domestic and international adversaries, the president spoke these and similar words with deliberation, and to great effect. By couching the U.S.-Soviet conflict not merely in political or ideological but in moral terms, Reagan tapped a profound vein of anticommunist sentiment in the East. At the same time, he issued a formidable challenge to communist elites everywhere, putting them on notice that the United States in effect no longer recognized the legitimacy of their rule. To the extent that American public diplomacy as a whole came to be infused with this spirit, it represented a strategic threat of an altogether different order than the one to which the Soviets had become accustomed over the years.

The flip side of this moral assault on communist regimes was “Project Democracy,” as it was originally known. Launched by President Reagan himself in a historic speech to the British Parliament on June 8, 1982, this program was designed to “foster the infrastructure of democracy” around the world through support for such institutions as a free press, free trade unions, an independent judiciary and rule of law, competitive political parties, and regular elections. It was conceived as a joint effort by USIA, the Agency for International Development (AID), and the State Department, and was designed to support private sector organizations involved in leadership training and democracy building abroad. While Project Democracy had bipartisan support on Capitol Hill and elsewhere (particularly the AFL-CIO, which had long been active overseas through its Free Trade Union Institute), the original legislative package failed to pass in Congress. Nevertheless, important groundwork had been laid, and in the fall of 1983, the most significant innovation of Project Democracy came to fruition. This was the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a new agency to serve as the primary vehicle for supporting democratic development abroad.²⁵

²⁴ See, for example, Richard H. Shultz Jr. and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), and Martin Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987).

²⁵ For a contemporary perspective on these developments by some of their key movers, see the remarks of Bill Brock, Frank J. Fahrenkopf Jr., Charles T. Manatt, and Lane Kirkland, in *Commonsense*, Dec. 1983; see also Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy*; ch. 10.

Project Democracy represented the core of the political action component of public diplomacy in the Reagan administration. Here too, the welter of individual programs tended to obscure a larger picture. With Reagan's Westminster speech, the administration signalled a fundamentally new approach that dragged political action once and for all out of the shadows of the intelligence world and into the light, where it could be openly defended by senior officials and endorsed by the Congress. This meant that the U.S. government as a whole would have to commit itself more forcefully than in the past to the articulation of democratic principles and the assertion of democratic legitimacy. And it meant that political action would no longer be defined primarily by what the United States was *opposing*. This is a point not sufficiently appreciated by those who accused the Reagan administration of blind anticommunism. American public diplomacy in the Reagan years rested on a faith in the principles of liberal democracy and a confidence in the democratic future that spoke not merely to the oppressed of the Soviet empire, but to people everywhere.

Engagements

The initiatives just discussed provided the conceptual framework and the material and organizational infrastructure for public diplomacy in the Reagan era. But it is impossible to assess the impact of American public diplomacy in this period without some review of the key policy arenas in which the United States and the Soviet Union were ideologically engaged. Some of these engagements were of largely symbolic significance, but many bore on issues of central strategic importance for East-West relations in what would prove to be the decisive and concluding phase of the Cold War. As such, they contributed directly to the strategic defeats that eventually brought down the Soviet empire.

The first arena was Poland. The rise of the Solidarity labor union movement there was the first crack in communist control of Eastern Europe since the "Prague Spring" of 1968. Beginning in the summer of 1980, the Polish crisis intensified over the next eighteen months until it was temporarily frozen by the imposition of martial law and a crackdown by Polish security forces under General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The Polish revolution received incalculable moral support from Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church, and probably would not have occurred in the way that it did had it not been for the inspiring figure of a Polish pope and the activist antiregime policies he pursued throughout the communist world.²⁶ Solidarity also received material assistance from the American labor movement and (according to generally reliable accounts) the Central Intelligence Agency. In terms of immediate impact on the course of

²⁶ The concern with which the Soviets viewed the pope's role in Poland almost certainly explains the assassination attempt against him in May 1981 by a Turk with ties to the Bulgarian secret service. The Soviet propaganda apparatus labored overtime to distract world attention from the Soviet hand in this atrocious crime. For a detailed and authoritative account, see Paul B. Henze, *The Plot to Kill the Pope* (New York: Scribner, 1983).

events, however, nothing compares in importance to the role played by international broadcasting, especially the Polish service of Radio Free Europe.²⁷

Surveys taken in 1980 indicated that two-thirds of the adult population of Poland tuned into RFE during moments of tension; eleven million Poles (42 percent of the population) listened on an average day in 1981, and seventeen million at least once a week. In spite of jamming estimated to be 80 percent effective after 1981, these numbers changed little in the years following.²⁸ That RFE came to be *the* communications medium of choice for the Polish people was more than a function of its provision of accurate and comprehensive news, important as that was. It also reflected what may fairly be called RFE's operational role in the Polish resistance. Simply by reporting on local political developments, RFE provided political intelligence that was otherwise unavailable as well as vital moral encouragement to Solidarity supporters throughout Poland. In addition, RFE became the primary clearinghouse for oppositional literature of all kinds. Manuscripts that might otherwise have circulated clandestinely among a few hundred Poles were smuggled to Munich and broadcast to millions. The relative ease of telephone contact between antiregime Poles and RFE headquarters in Munich was also an important factor contributing to RFE's intimate involvement in the Polish revolution. While it is difficult to know how all of this affected the calculations of the Polish government or its Soviet masters, a good case can be made that the penetration of Poland by RFE and other foreign media was a major factor in the Soviets' decision not to intervene militarily in the country as they had in Czechoslovakia in 1968—a fateful signal of weakness that virtually guaranteed further development of the reform movement in Poland and Eastern Europe in the years immediately ahead.

The second critical engagement was the battle for West European public opinion over the issue of the deployment of American intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe. This struggle was itself part of a larger propaganda war over nuclear weapons and arms control that had been going on for many years, though often in very one-sided fashion. It was a war in which the Soviets were highly practiced, and enjoyed many assets missing on the American side. A well-developed network of international front groups (such as the venerable World Peace Council) provided a mechanism for promoting Soviet positions on these issues at several removes from the Soviet government, while Moscow itself was adept at orchestrating international “campaigns” utilizing Soviet journalists, academics, diplomats, intelligence personnel, military officers, and high-ranking officials. Antinuclear and pacifist sentiment in the West was by no

²⁷ Soviet complaints about the radios' role were especially vociferous in this period; but their reaction to this threat did not end there. The bombing of the Munich headquarters of RFE-RL in Feb. 1981, which severely injured four employees and caused several million dollars worth of damage, may be regarded as a calling card of Soviet bloc intelligence. In 1979, Georgiy Markov, a Bulgarian defector who worked for RFE, was murdered in London with a poisoned umbrella; Soviet involvement has since been confirmed by a senior KGB official (*New York Times*, June 13, 1991).

²⁸ These figures are taken from the Board for International Broadcasting annual reports for 1982, 1983, and 1986, respectively.

means a creation of Soviet propaganda, but the degree to which it could be channeled and manipulated by the Soviets was not insignificant. In Western Europe especially, the Soviets were able to play on differing European and American perspectives on nuclear deterrence as well as European resentment of the U.S. military and political role on the continent. In the late 1970s, the Soviets had impressively demonstrated their capabilities in a campaign opposing NATO's planned deployment of enhanced radiation warheads (the so-called "neutron bomb"). President Jimmy Carter personally reversed the U.S. decision to proceed with this deployment in response to popular protests throughout Western Europe—protests that clearly would never have happened on the scale they did without a Soviet stimulus. NATO governments recognized that another defeat of this sort, with its demonstration that the USSR had acquired a virtual veto over NATO nuclear policy, could have grave consequences for the future of the alliance.

In 1979, NATO had decided to deploy two modern theater nuclear systems, beginning in 1983: the Pershing II ballistic missile and the Ground Launched Cruise Missile (GLCM). The alliance was careful to justify this decision as a response to prior Soviet deployment of its new intermediate-range SS-20 missile targeted mainly against Western Europe. Still, the decision was a controversial one, and bound to reactivate the European peace movement. The task facing the Reagan administration was made all the more severe by the president's early commitment to a major buildup of American military forces, including nuclear systems such as the controversial MX intercontinental missile, as well as his pronounced lack of enthusiasm for arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. These positions were far from popular in opinion-forming circles abroad or for that matter in the United States. Accordingly, the Soviets would have a relatively easy time painting the administration as eager for a new arms race and a threat to peace. Rising to the challenge, they proceeded to launch their most ambitious and effective propaganda campaign of the Cold War.²⁹

The failure of this all-out Soviet offensive to pressure NATO governments to halt INF deployments was a major victory for American public diplomacy. It was achieved by an effort of unprecedented intensity and degree of coordination throughout the U.S. government, including the White House and National Security Council staff.³⁰ The effort demonstrated the administration's recognition of the centrality of public diplomacy to U.S. security policy as a whole, and signalled the coming of age of public diplomacy in the Reagan era.

**U.S.
propaganda
prevented the
Soviets from
pressuring
NATO to end
INF
deployments.**

²⁹ A detailed account, with particular attention to Soviet political-organizational activities in the Federal Republic of Germany, may be found in Alex R. Alexiev, "The Soviet Campaign Against INF: Strategy, Tactics, and Means," *Orbis*, Summer 1985, pp. 319–50; see also Tuch, *Communicating with the World*, ch. 12.

³⁰ In an unusual step, the administration brought back to Washington to head up this effort the recently appointed U.S. ambassador to Ireland, Peter H. Dailey.

The INF fight had important lasting consequences. Above all, it helped institutionalize a focus on defense and arms control public diplomacy in the relevant policy agencies of the U.S. government. The Defense Department created a new office to handle public diplomacy matters; its flagship product, *Soviet Military Power*, an authoritative and detailed annual report based on freshly declassified intelligence data, soon developed a large and appreciative worldwide audience. The State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency began producing extensive analyses of the history of arms control negotiations and treaty performance. It was at this time that the United States first undertook to publicize in sustained fashion the record of Soviet misbehavior under existing arms control regimes. Particularly powerful was the emerging evidence of Soviet and Soviet proxy violations of agreements relating to chemical and biological warfare.

Other important episodes in the propaganda battles of these years will be mentioned only briefly. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was a political and public relations disaster of the first order. It frittered away much of the political capital the USSR had accumulated in the Islamic world, and shattered the sense of historical inevitability so central to communist ideology. But American public diplomacy significantly raised the costs of the Afghan adventure.³¹ U.S. support for the government of El Salvador in its struggle against a well-organized communist guerrilla movement and in opposition to the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua was not popular at home or abroad, and became a major focus of Soviet international propaganda and political action. Though also suffering significant defeats in this arena, the administration was much more effective on the whole than when its predecessor was faced with similar challenges in Southeast Asia two decades earlier. A better coordinated and more persistent effort was undertaken to make available information and analyses in support of government policy, and the promotion of democracy was made a central and credible policy theme, especially after the U.S.-inspired Salvadoran elections of 1983. In contrast to Vietnam, U.S. officials also displayed a clear understanding of the fragility of public opinion at home and the necessity for a coordinated information effort that would encompass both domestic and international audiences. The Office of Public Liaison in the White House took the lead in devising and implementing an ambitious public affairs campaign on Central America, and the Department of State was also very active in this area.³²

³¹ Extensive (so-called) cross-reporting on the Afghan situation was undertaken early on by RFE-RL, which also established a bureau in Peshawar, Pakistan, to support this coverage. In 1984, a new service—"Radio Free Afghanistan"—was created within RL broadcasting in Dari and Pashto, the two major languages of the country.

³² The Office of Public Liaison, aggressively led by Faith Ryan Whittlesey, developed information packets and staged briefings, speeches, and other events for a variety of influential domestic audiences and organizations. In what would prove a politically controversial move, an Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean was created within the State Department in July 1983 under Ambassador Otto Reich to promote the administration's policies, primarily within the United States. Though later attacked by critics of the

Assessing the Reagan Record

It is notoriously hard to evaluate the impact of public diplomacy programs, given the diffuse nature of their audiences and the difficulty of tracing the link between opinion and behavior. Nevertheless, modern methods of audience research and opinion polling, anecdotal material, and inference from known facts suggest strongly that these programs can have significant real-world effects—and did have such effects during the Cold War.³³ But it is important to make some distinctions. The impact of public diplomacy programs can be long-term and strategic, or it can be very operational, as was the role of RFE during the Polish revolution. Such programs can shape the outlook of the general population, but they can also have a more surgical impact on elites. There has been a tendency to underestimate the effects of public diplomacy on the elites—and especially the political leadership—of communist states. Given rising levels of elite education in these societies as well as the greater familiarity of leadership elements with the ugly realities underlying the systemic crisis of communism (and the corresponding successes of Western-style capitalism), it is plausible to assume that elite audiences in these countries were at least as susceptible to Western appeals as the mass of the population. In fact, it is only on the basis of such an assumption that one can make sense of the extraordinary passivity of the *nomenklatura* throughout the Soviet bloc in the face of the progressive collapse of the various bastions of Soviet power at the end of the 1980s. Indeed, it is only on such an assumption that one can explain how Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded in imposing his style of leadership on a political system he would soon lead into oblivion.³⁴

There can be little doubt that U.S. public diplomacy operations played a vital strategic role over many years in providing an alternative vision of reality to millions within the communist orbit. It is a mistake to identify this role simply with tub-thumping anticommunist polemic or patronizing democratic tutorials. It is also wrong to equate it with the mere provision of “information,” important as this function surely is wherever governments systematically deny their citizens access to the most basic facts. The most vital service these operations performed over the years was rather to provide nourishment to national cultures at risk

administration as an improperly partisan use of government resources, this office performed an important service to considerable effect—for example, by helping document the full extent of the Cubans’ (and Soviets’) role as silent partners in supporting revolutionary activity in the region; and in any event it was hardly without precedent, being largely modeled on Carter administration efforts to promote the Panama Canal and SALT II treaties. Whether such a function should have been identified as “public diplomacy” at all is a separate, if secondary, question.

³³ The end of the Cold War and the further opening of former communist societies has in fact made these effects easier to trace. As a senior research analyst for RFE-RL remarked in 1991: “Only now, when we can visit the countries, are we learning that the impact before the revolution was far greater than even the best estimates we had. We underestimated ourselves seriously”; many veterans of the Soviet and East European dissident movements have echoed such claims. See Kevin J. McNamara, “Reaching Captive Minds with Radio,” *Orbis*, Winter 1992, pp. 23–40.

³⁴ On this issue see Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., “The Nature of the Beast,” *National Interest*, Spring 1993, pp. 46–56.

of extinction at the hands of totalitarian simplifiers. The reemergence of national identities and traditions throughout the former Soviet bloc at the end of the Cold War was surely a tribute to the resistance of the human spirit to the universal and homogeneous tyranny that the communists sought to impose. But it also reflected in significant part the deliberate nurturing of cultural memory in the East by Western public diplomacy.

When one looks at the particular achievements of the Reagan administration, it is important to stress once more the key role of institutional renewal in the public diplomacy agencies, and their rehabilitation as an integral part of U.S. national security policy. A beleaguered and defensive bureaucracy was infused with money, high-caliber personnel, and a mandate, and for the first time in many years was admitted to an administration's inner councils. It is also important to underline the personal involvement in public diplomacy operations, not only of the president himself, but of other senior administration policy officials. High-energy ambassadors such as Evan Galbraith (France) and Faith Ryan Whittlesey (Switzerland) were an unsung yet important asset in the promotion of administration policies.³⁵ This aspect of Reagan-era public diplomacy was, if not unprecedented, unusually intense, and made all the more effective by the systematic exploitation of television as an overseas communications medium.

It is in this perspective that one should assess the administration's accomplishments in public diplomacy. No more than any earlier American president could Reagan promise to liberate Poland; but he could and did make clear that the United States valued Polish freedom more than the stability of the status quo in Europe, and was willing to challenge Soviet interests there in concrete ways. All of this underpinned and enhanced the impact of American public diplomacy efforts in Poland. In the case of the INF struggle, the Reagan administration's unswerving hard line on defense and arms control policy helped to reestablish the credibility of America's commitment to the security of Europe, and in so doing, more than made up for the difficulties it undoubtedly created in some sectors of European opinion.

But all of this should not be understood to diminish the achievements of American public diplomacy. The role of the radios in particular was certainly of unique importance in the unravelling of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. Yet perhaps even more important, elusive though it may be, was the impact of the very fact of the administration's recommitment to the ideological struggle. As demonstrated in the battle over INF, the United States had now closed off perhaps the most promising avenue of Soviet attack against the NATO alliance and the American global position, and launched a counteroffensive that threatened to exploit key vulnerabilities of the Soviet system itself. That must have been profoundly demoralizing to a leadership that sensed the enormity of the

³⁵ See Evan G. Galbraith, *Ambassadeur de choc* (Paris: Stock, 1986); *Ambassador in Paris: The Reagan Years* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1987).

material and technological challenge posed by the West, and feared that the torch of history was about to pass from its hands.

Limitations

All of this having been said, it would be pointless to pretend that public diplomacy in the Reagan years succeeded in overcoming all of the problems—ideological, conceptual, organizational, human, and material—that successive American administrations have had to grapple with over the years, or that it was uniformly successful on all fronts. Public diplomacy allowed the administration to play catch-up in areas such as Central America and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), but not to dominate the play. In part, this was a function of inadequacies in the policies themselves and in the overall strategies the administration used to pursue them. In part, it reflected entrenched institutional and ideological resistance. The difficulties Ambassador Galbraith experienced with the State Department in trying to promote SDI in France were symptomatic of a much larger problem.³⁶ As a general proposition, it may be said that the Reagan administration never fully came to grips with the challenge of pursuing an agenda of radical reform in the absence of a highly centralized and disciplined system for management of the federal bureaucracy.³⁷ What is more, the senior ranks of the administration itself were far from fully committed to the public diplomacy agenda or prepared to incur significant political costs on its behalf. Guerrilla warfare against USIA from Capitol Hill, abetted by some agency bureaucrats, was never effectively countered, contributing to a culture of extreme congressional micromanagement of public diplomacy programs that has persisted to this day.³⁸ This reflected to some degree the inexperience of Wick and the weakness of many of his early appointees, but it also signalled an unwillingness at senior levels of the State Department and the White House to engage in an area that was felt to be something of a political tar baby.

The administration thus ended up ceding much unnecessary ground on the fundamental issue of whether its public diplomacy programs were being inappropriately “politicized.” This convenient label was used to stigmatize virtually every change the administration wanted to make in the status quo, and extended to cover not merely partisan political activities but any effort to shape (supposedly “objective”) information or cultural programming to reflect national strategic objectives. Resulting sensitivities on this score, particularly within USIA, made considerably more difficult the task of coordinating admini-

³⁶ See Dean Godson, *SDI: Has America Told Her Story to the World?* Report of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis Panel on Public Diplomacy (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1987), pp. 31–48. (This panel was chaired by Evan Galbraith.)

³⁷ This argument is elaborated in Carnes Lord, *The Presidency and the Management of National Security* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

³⁸ See, for example, Paul P. Blackburn, “The Post–Cold War Public Diplomacy of the United States,” *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1992, pp. 79–80.

stration public diplomacy policy as a whole.³⁹ Though other factors were also at work, this was clearly a major reason for the increasing ineffectiveness of the NSDD 77 interagency apparatus. In the second Reagan term, the combined impact of the Iran-Contra scandal and improved prospects for cooperative relations with the Soviet Union eventually proved lethal for the public diplomacy enterprise as a strategic dimension of administration policy.⁴⁰

The importance not merely of a coordinated but a fully integrated public diplomacy effort needs further emphasis.⁴¹ In principle, public diplomacy cuts across every substantive area of national policy. Moreover, if it is done in a truly effective manner, public diplomacy must remain very close to policy. Ideally, it should be seen as an integral dimension of policy, and policy officials should have a major if not exclusive role in its formulation. Finally, public diplomacy is time sensitive, and increasingly so in our technologically driven global media environment. For all these reasons, the requirements for intragovernmental coordination of public diplomacy are more stringent than for most areas of foreign or security policy, and the need for top-level attention greater. During the Reagan administration, this sort of coordination remained more an aspiration than a reality. In succeeding administrations, it ceased even to be an aspiration.

Public Diplomacy and the Future

What are the implications of all this for the future of American public diplomacy? To begin with, the end of the Cold War brought a halt to the expanding budgets and ambitious modernization efforts of the Reagan years, and in the eyes of many, eliminated much of the rationale for them. The Bush administration committed itself to a gradual phase-out of RFE-RL, in spite of protests that doing so was premature given the political situation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; but VOA has also suffered an apparent decline in its legitimacy and a downward budget spiral. In response to this

³⁹ I recall a meeting at the White House in 1983 between the director of the VOA and a senior NSC official to discuss the possible use of VOA in a sensitive terrorist-related situation; the former began the meeting by brandishing a blown-up copy of the Voice's "charter" supposedly enjoining any compromise of its journalistic mission. With regard to the various controversies over the alleged conservative bias of certain USIA political appointees, the simple point needs to be made that conservative ideas and personalities were conspicuous by their absence from American information programming prior to 1981, with the (partial) exception of RFE-RL.

⁴⁰ A study carried out toward the end of the Reagan administration involving extensive interviewing of senior officials claims that "almost everyone consulted believes NSDD 77 has not worked." Hitchcock, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, p. 22. In truth, the situation was even bleaker. The new NSC regime established under Frank Carlucci in Jan. 1987 essentially shut down the NSDD 77 apparatus as part of its effort to provide reassurance that the White House would no longer play an "operational" role in national security affairs.

⁴¹ The point is forcefully made by then chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Dante B. Fascell, *International Communications Policy: Preparing for the Future* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1986), pp. 11–12; cf. Henderson, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, pp. 23–24.

situation, some attempts have been made to redefine the fundamental mission of American overseas broadcasting and public diplomacy generally in terms of global democracy building. Yet this rationale remains a fragile one, given the manifest absence of a domestic policy consensus on the scope and meaning of America's commitment to democratize the world. Moreover, little analysis seems to have been done of the relationship of public- to private-sector activities in this area or to the potential dangers associated with an ambitious public diplomacy effort that centers on it. With a few conspicuous exceptions, those who have tried to develop new visions of American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era have paid little attention to public diplomacy as such.⁴²

Rather than entering into these grand debates, it is probably more productive to focus on achieving improvement in this nation's capacity to conduct effective public diplomacy of any sort. Indeed, one might argue that the most important roles public diplomacy will have to play for the United States in the current international environment will be less grand-strategic and more operational than during the Cold War. Support of national policy in military contingencies is one such role, and probably the most important. Surprisingly little attention was given to such a role in the past. During the Cold War, the possible contribution of U.S. broadcasting assets in the eventuality of a war on the central front in Europe seems to have been virtually ignored.⁴³ The performance of psychological operations and public diplomacy in the Gulf War was, though not ineffectual, certainly uneven.⁴⁴ Much more could be done to develop fully integrated interagency approaches to the information dimension of a variety of scenarios of contemporary conflict.

More generally, there is a need to reconceptualize public diplomacy in terms of the requirements of unforeseen crises and contingencies of the post-Cold War era. For instance, a way should be found to create a reserve of area and language expertise in the government that could be quickly mobilized for public diplomacy and other national information requirements.⁴⁵ Infrastructure (e.g.

⁴² See Joseph S. Nye Jr. and William A. Owens, "America's Information Edge," *Foreign Affairs*, Mar./Apr. 1996, pp. 20–36, as well as Nye's *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

⁴³ An excellent discussion is Henry S. Rowen, "Political Strategies for General War: The Case of Eastern Europe," in Barnett and Lord, *Political Warfare*, pp. 169–207. By 1981, planning for the use of RFE-RL facilities and personnel in a crisis or wartime scenario was vestigial at best, though it could have been safely assumed that the radios would be a priority target of Soviet sabotage or special operations even before an actual outbreak of hostilities.

⁴⁴ See Col. Jeffrey B. Jones, "Psychological Operations in Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom," *Special Warfare*, July 1994, pp. 22–29, as well as Carnes Lord, "PSYOP and the Revolution in Military Affairs," *War in the Information Age*, ed. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. and Richard H. Shultz Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997). The systematic neglect of public diplomacy during the Bush administration allowed Saddam Hussein an early advantage in the propaganda struggle in the Muslim world, and helps explain the uncertain trumpet so often sounded by senior officials in making the administration's policy case to the domestic audience.

⁴⁵ A similar idea is proposed in *Making Intelligence Smarter: The Future of U.S. Intelligence*, report of an independent task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), p. 5.

new short-wave radio transmitters) should be configured for multiple uses and maximum flexibility. Above all, internal organization, doctrines, processes, and technologies for public diplomacy should be rethought so as to improve integration with national policy and interagency operations in the field.

That, in turn, brings us back to the organizational issues that dominate current discussions of the USIA. As we have seen, larger conceptual and ideological questions are embedded in this debate, though rarely articulated. The terms of the debate were essentially set by the influential Stanton report of the mid-1970s, prior to the creation of USIA in its present form.⁴⁶ This report argued for the reintegration of USIA's policy information function into the State Department, and the establishment of separate agencies for broadcasting and for education and cultural exchange. Generally speaking, those supporting such an approach tend to be hostile to the idea of government-sponsored "propaganda" and are concerned to safeguard the credibility of U.S. overseas radio operations and cultural programs. Those opposing it have pointed to the success of USIA as institutional keeper of the public diplomacy flame, and question whether it makes sense to cut loose either overseas broadcasting or cultural programs from effective policy oversight.⁴⁷ This position probably reflects mainstream opinion today among career officers at State as well as USIA. Recently, ideological battle lines have become blurred with the championing of reintegration by the conservative Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the Clinton administration's commitment to dismantle USIA and transfer at least part of its functions to State.

A good case can be made that the reintegration of USIA into the State Department is the single most important step required for improving the operational effectiveness of the nation's public diplomacy—provided a number of conditions hold. Chief among them is that State genuinely embrace the public diplomacy mission as an integral aspect of the conduct of American foreign policy. There are signs that the Foreign Service has moved in recent years toward a greater appreciation of the importance of public diplomacy for the effective performance of its own core functions, but the jury remains out.⁴⁸ The key point is that public diplomacy considerations will only play significantly in policy formulation if they are advanced by policy agencies and personnel. Recurring efforts to seat the director of USIA on the National Security Council

⁴⁶ *Report of the Panel on International Information, Education and Cultural Relations: Recommendations for the Future* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1975).

⁴⁷ Thoughtful statements of the pro and con positions just outlined are Malone, *Political Advocacy*, and Henderson, *U.S. Public Diplomacy*, respectively. See also Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., *Rhetoric and Public Diplomacy: The Stanton Report Revisited* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987).

⁴⁸ See particularly Malone, *Political Advocacy*, pp. 105–21. In a speech entitled "The Importance of Public Diplomacy" delivered in May 1997, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns unintentionally exposed the current administration's view by systematically confusing public diplomacy with domestic public affairs. It is worth emphasizing, however, that public diplomacy flourished at State during the Reagan years largely owing to the influence and efforts of senior Foreign Service officers such as Lawrence Eagleburger and Mark Palmer.

as *the* remedy for the chronic bureaucratic feebleness of public diplomacy are perhaps the most striking manifestation of a larger failure on the part of well-intentioned friends of public diplomacy to understand the nature of the discipline itself and the dynamics of its role within the national security establishment.

A second condition is that broadcasting and cultural programs remain firmly linked with information programs and with the larger concept of public diplomacy. Clearly, there is a legitimate requirement for considerable autonomy in the operation both of government-sponsored educational and cultural programs and of overseas broadcasting. But there can be no justification for putting these programs on a par with those of private-sector information or cultural organizations which enjoy presumptive protection under the First Amendment from any government efforts to control their contents or operations. Nor is it sensible to require that the same standards be used to judge the quality and legitimacy of these programs as those operative in the commercial media or the academy.⁴⁹

Contrary to a commonplace of the debate on these issues, one of the enduring attractions of official public diplomacy programs for peoples around the world is precisely that they *are* official. People want to know what the U.S. government thinks about matters of interest to them, and they tend to assume that such programs reflect official attitudes, whether they do in fact or not. Those in positions of authority thus cannot escape a responsibility for ensuring that U.S. public diplomacy conforms to American policy and advances palpable national interests.

It is in this context that one needs to evaluate important recent changes in the management of American overseas broadcasting. In a little-advertised step that could nevertheless have far-reaching consequences, Congress in 1995 disestablished the BIB and created a Broadcasting Board of Governors, with ill-defined but potentially extensive powers over all U.S. government overseas broadcasting, including the Voice of America. There is surely much to be said for a more unified approach to managing overseas radio and television operations given shrinking budgets, the blurring of their mission after the Cold War, and rapid changes in communications technologies. However, early reports indicate that the new board has moved aggressively to consolidate its authority in ways that go well beyond the oversight mission that supporters of the legislation originally envisioned. The board's intention appears to be to create a virtually independent quasi-official broadcasting entity on the model of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Such an outcome would only validate the arguments of those who long resisted any change in the relationships of the major U.S. broadcasters to one another or to other government agencies, and raise fundamental questions concerning the value of these assets to the government

⁴⁹ For an elaboration of this argument, see Carnes Lord, "In Defense of Public Diplomacy," *Commentary*, Apr. 1984, pp. 42–50.

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and the taxpayers. It can only be hoped that this situation will be revisited as part of a comprehensive congressional-executive conversation over the transfer of USIA to the Department of State and the future of public diplomacy—a conversation both needed and long overdue.



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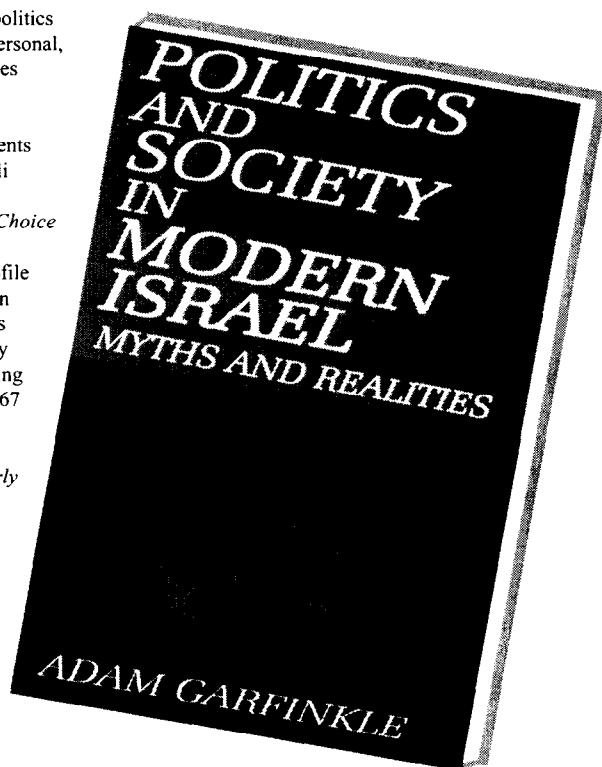
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