

**U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY'S NEGLECTED
DOMESTIC MANDATE**

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“Ignorance of the world is a national liability.”¹

Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton

When public diplomacy scholars and practitioners talk about the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy—which isn’t very often—they generally refer to former President Jimmy Carter’s idea that public diplomacy should have dual mandates: one focused on helping people abroad understand U.S. policies, ideas and values (the foreign mandate) and the other focused on enhancing Americans’ understanding of other nations’ policies, ideas and values (the domestic mandate). In fact, the “second” or “reverse” mandate as it came to be called was part of the mission laid out by Congress for U.S. public diplomacy more than half a century ago.

The objectives of the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act (named “Smith-Mundt” for its Congressional sponsors) passed in 1948 were to “enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.”² This Act, which led to the establishment of the United States Information Agency (USIA), provided for the “preparation and dissemination *abroad*, of information about the United States, its people, and policies through the press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and other information media, and through information centers and instructors *abroad* [*emphasis added*].”³ There were no instructions, however, for how “mutual understanding” was to be achieved at home.

As a result, the second mandate got lost in the day-to-day operations of the USIA, which focused its resources on communicating with foreign publics in efforts to enhance their understanding of America. It re-emerged in 1977 in a directive from Carter in which he said the agency should have “two distinct but related goals”—“to tell the world about our society and policies” and “to tell ourselves about the world.”⁴

In reemphasizing Congress' original intent that U.S. public diplomacy's efforts should be focused on mutual understanding, Carter explained in a memorandum to the USIA director that “the principal function of the Agency should be to reduce the degree to which misrepresentations and misunderstandings complicate relations between the United States and other nations.” He said, “While it is in the interest of the community of nations, as well as the United States, that other nations and other peoples know and understand U.S. policies and values, it is also in our interest—and in the interest of other nations—that Americans have the opportunity to understand the histories, cultures and problems of others, so that we can come to understand their hopes, perceptions and aspirations.”⁵

Despite this new directive, the ideal of mutual understanding remained just that—an ideal. The domestic mandate was rejected by the USIA during Carter's years in the White House and continued to be ignored by subsequent administrations. Although there are a number of reasons for the neglect (as discussed below), historian Nicholas Cull observed that perhaps most significant in the slight of the second mandate during the Carter administration was that it “had the bad luck to be born into troubled times,” including a revolution in Iran and a renewed Cold War with the U.S.S.R.⁶ In reflecting on the continuing disregard of Carter's credo, veteran U.S. public diplomat Hans N. Tuch lamented, “One can only wish that others who directed the U.S. government's public diplomacy had read it and taken it to heart.”⁷

This paper examines the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy in an effort to shed light on the need for greater consideration of domestic publics in U.S. international relations. It begins by looking at the status of the second mandate today and the potential consequences of its neglect. It then reviews public diplomacy's evolving mission and mandates, identifying factors that have influenced thinking and practices related to public diplomacy efforts targeting Americans. Finally, it raises some fundamental questions that will have to be addressed before the future of U.S. public diplomacy's domestic mandate can be resolved.

The neglected publics

The view that public diplomacy should focus primarily, if not exclusively, on people abroad is not unique to the United States. A comprehensive review of the public diplomacy literature, which found considerable disagreement among public diplomacy scholars and practitioners on a range of matters related to public diplomacy theory and practice, also found broad agreement that “public diplomacy involves foreign, as opposed to domestic, publics.”⁸ The only question raised with regard to the publics of public diplomacy has been whether efforts should be directed to foreign “masses” or to more narrowly targeted “elites” or “influentials.”⁹

Of course, such findings do not mean that public diplomacy scholars and practitioners and government leaders fail to recognize the importance of mutual understanding in international relations. For example, in his inaugural address, President Barack Obama said in addressing conflicts in the Middle East that “to the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward based on mutual interest and mutual respect.”¹⁰ He later stressed the need for mutual understanding among nations and peoples in his widely-quoted Cairo speech, in which he called for “a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground.”¹¹

Despite such words, however, there is little evidence to suggest that the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy will expand in the future. As an example, the Obama administration's new "National Strategy for Strategic Communication" cited the need to "do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples—not just elites—around the world."¹² The strategy stated, "It is vital that the United States is not focused solely on one-way communication, which is why we have consciously emphasized the importance of 'engagement'—connecting with, listening to, and building long-term relationships with key stakeholders."¹³ But there was no indication of how any of this might be accomplished. There also was no mention of domestic publics in the report, which addressed communication and engagement with "foreign audiences."¹⁴

Somewhat ironically, in describing the roles and responsibilities of the various government units involved in public diplomacy and strategic communication, the document indicated that domestic publics were outside the purview of public diplomacy, while also referencing public diplomacy's role in promoting *mutual* understanding among world citizens:

The Department of State distinguishes between Public Affairs, which includes outreach to domestic publics, and Public Diplomacy (PD), which seeks to promote the national interest of the United States through understanding, engaging, informing, and influencing foreign publics, and by promoting mutual understanding between the people from other nations around the world.¹⁵

Earlier this year, the Department of State released what it described as a "new global strategic framework" for "a new approach to public diplomacy for the 21st Century," which included "informing and influencing foreign publics and strengthening the relationship between the people and government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world."¹⁶ According to the new framework, these

strategic goals would be accomplished in part through the expansion of people-to-people relationships and by better informed policy-making.¹⁷ While such efforts clearly involve domestic publics—American citizens and American policy makers—there was no mention of domestic publics in the new plan.

In this respect, the framework mirrors earlier U.S. government plans for conducting public diplomacy. For example, the *National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication* released in 2007 made the expansion of education and exchange programs a priority, while identifying three “strategic audiences” for public diplomacy, all foreign: 1) “key influencers”; 2) vulnerable populations,” including youth, women and girls, and minorities; and 3) “mass audiences.”¹⁸

When domestic publics are included in official U.S. plans for public diplomacy, such references concern the participation of Americans in carrying out public diplomacy efforts intended to enhance foreign publics’ understanding of America, or *their* understanding of *us*. For example, the 2010 *National Security Strategy*, which discusses the importance of U.S. “engagement”—defined as “the active participation of the United States in relationships beyond our borders”¹⁹—states:

The United States Government will make a sustained effort to engage civil society and citizens and facilitate increased connections among the American people and peoples around the world ... Time and again, we have seen that the best ambassadors for American values and interests are the American people—our businesses, nongovernmental organizations, scientists, athletes, artists, military service members, and students.²⁰

The conclusion drawn from such statements is that while U.S. officials may view domestic publics as important to public diplomacy’s success, they do not view domestic publics—i.e.,

American citizens, American institutions (in positions to contribute to the enhancement of U.S. citizens' awareness and understanding of global affairs) and American policy makers—as strategic “publics” of public diplomacy. Rather, these domestic publics are viewed as strategic “partners” or “multipliers” who can contribute to public diplomacy's success in influencing *foreign* publics' awareness of and attitudes and behaviors toward the United States.

Certainly, much has been gained by involving domestic publics in U.S. public diplomacy efforts directed at people overseas. History suggests that some of the most successful public diplomacy initiatives are educational and cultural exchanges that involve American citizens and non-governmental American institutions.²¹ However, while the U.S. citizens participating in such ventures undoubtedly gain a greater understanding of other nations and peoples, the involvement of a limited number of Americans as “ambassadors” in public diplomacy initiatives directed to foreign publics does not accomplish the objective of the “second mandate.” As USIA veteran Leon Picon observed, although “‘educational exchange’ implies a two way street, a flow in two or more directions ... [i]t has more generally been used in our programs to mean sending Americans overseas to teach and bringing foreigners here to learn.”²²

Consequences of neglect

Why does it matter that the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy have been neglected? Because, as foreign affairs expert Richard Haas observed, “there is no way the United States can protect itself and promote its interests if it pulls back from the world.”²³ At a time when the need for collaboration and cooperation among nations and peoples has never been greater, America's leadership role in the world is threatened by Americans' apparent disinterest in and lack of understanding of global affairs.

A decade after the end of the Cold War, the American Academy of Diplomacy reported that “in recent years Americans have increasingly turned inward, focusing almost exclusively on domestic concerns to the neglect of an interest in foreign affairs that was prominent, if not pre-eminent, during the 40-plus years of the Cold War.”²⁴ A recent Pew Research Center study—*America’s Place in the World 2009*—reached a similar conclusion, finding that “a rise in isolationist sentiment [among the American public]—already apparent in polling conducted during George W. Bush’s second term—has continued in Barack Obama’s first year in office.”²⁵

According to this quadrennial survey of foreign policy attitudes, the U.S. general public “is in a decidedly inward-looking frame of mind when it comes to global affairs,” with nearly 50 percent of Americans (an all-time high up from 42 percent four years ago) saying “the United States should ‘mind its own business internationally.’”²⁶ When asked about problems at home versus problems abroad, 76 percent of the Americans surveyed agreed, “We should not think so much in international terms but concentrate more on our own national problems and building up our strength and prosperity at home.”²⁷

The costs of such attitudes were addressed by Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes in *America Against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked*, in which they argued that Americans’ general lack of interest in foreign countries and foreign events results in ignorance of an increasing global interconnectedness among nations and peoples. Not only do “Americans underestimate their interdependence with the rest of the world,” Kohut and Stokes reported, but “[i]ndividualism inclines Americans to believe that they do not need the rest of the world.”²⁸ The consequence, they said, “is that Americans will ignore the lessons of history, which teach that hubris, and the inattentiveness to others that so often accompanies it, can lead to trouble.”²⁹

Potentially the greatest trouble involves national security. Reactions to the events of 9/11, for example, illustrated a lack of familiarity with and understanding of U.S. foreign relations. Many Americans—including government leaders—asked, but were unable to answer, the question: “Why do they hate us?” Former President George W. Bush said, “I’m amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about, that people would hate us ... Like most Americans, I just can’t believe it. Because I know how good we are. We’ve got to do a better job of making our case.” The attacks on American soil also illustrated a “fundamentally altered international environment for the United States” in which both friends and foes turned against America.³⁰ Although levels of anti-Americanism abroad have improved significantly since Barack Obama became president, the nation’s reputation remains low in certain parts of the world, even among former allies.³¹ Understanding why is important. As Julia E. Sweig wrote in *Friendly Fire: Losing Friends and Making Enemies in the Anti-American Century*, “Our security and well-being depend on understanding the sources of anti-Americanism among U.S. friends, allies and dependents.”³²

Since 9/11, U.S. public diplomacy officials have focused considerable efforts on reaching youth in the Middle East with the hope that future leaders may better understand and support the United States and its policies. Yet, there has been considerably less attention on American youth who will lead this country in the next generations. According to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), only about 1 percent of college students study abroad annually. Such statistics raise the question of whether future U.S. leaders will be prepared to protect and lead the nation in a “flat” world.³³ As the NAFSA reported:

We can no longer afford to be complacent about our lack of knowledge of the world. We cannot expect to be able to defend our nation against enemies we do not understand or to build friendships and promote peace in regions of the world if we cannot communicate in their languages or understand their cultures.³⁴

Similar concerns have been raised about the nation's ability to compete successfully in an expanding global economy. For example, in citing a critical need for more business employees with cross-cultural understanding and foreign language skills, international education expert Michael McCarry said, "The question is where those new global professionals will come from."³⁵

Other consequences relate to the impact of perceived—and sometimes real—disregard for foreign public opinion by U.S. foreign policy makers. Whether through ignorance of or disinterest in the cultures, ideas and values of other nations, U.S. leaders invite trouble when they ignore the views of people abroad on issues of common interest and concern. For example, America's withdrawal from the Kyoto Treaty and refusal to participate in the International Criminal Court during the George W. Bush administration hurt U.S. international relations and diminished the nation's leadership role on matters related to climate change and international law enforcement. As communications scholar Rhonda Zaharna pointed out, "The U.S. preference for unilateral actions suggests a view of itself as an autonomous entity capable and willing to act independently of its environment."³⁶

Another consequence of neglecting the domestic dimensions of public diplomacy is that U.S. diplomatic practices may be outpaced by other nations that have more readily adapted to the demands of a new time. For example, there is broad support among public diplomacy scholars and many practitioners for the concept of a "new" public diplomacy that emphasizes principles of mutuality and dialogue. The "old" public diplomacy paradigm is described as one-way and asymmetric in the sense that it is designed to influence the attitudes of foreign publics but not necessarily the attitudes of people within the sponsoring nation. The "new" public diplomacy, on the other hand, moves away from "peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign

audiences.”³⁷ As diplomacy scholar Jan Melissen explained, the new public diplomacy is not just about promoting policy to people abroad but is also about involving and consulting foreign publics in the policy development process.³⁸

Notwithstanding the fact that “engagement” has become a buzzword of the Obama administration, other nations have embraced “new” public diplomacy concepts, as well as the idea of a domestic mandate for public diplomacy, far more readily than has the United States. For example, the British Council, the cultural affairs arm of the British government, published a report in 2004 on the centrality of mutuality in UK cultural relations. In discussing the Council’s “unique contribution” to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, it cited the “web of transnational civil society relationships” as “the most powerful possible contribution that we can make to a “safe, just and prosperous world.”³⁹ According to the report, “mutuality provides a way of eschewing one-way traffic in cultural relations, of giving equal value to differing cultures, and of ensuring that benefit accrues to all parties in the building up of long-term, sustainable relationships built on trust.”⁴⁰

At the same time, the Council distinguished mutuality as a *principle* of public diplomacy practices directed at foreign publics and mutual understanding as a *goal* of public diplomacy involving domestic publics. For example, the Council’s report pointed out that its goal was not to carry out a “reverse mandate” with UK publics. Rather, “Our aim here is better knowledge, in the UK, of the world in which we work and the partners with whom we work... Participation by and from the UK isn’t necessarily on the same terms as participation by and from overseas: the most important trick in making this aspect of mutuality work in practice is to design ways of upgrading the receptive involvement of the UK without moving our work to the UK.”⁴¹

Other countries also have begun to use domestic objectives in public diplomacy as a means of achieving national strategic goals that have international implications. As an example, in an effort to create greater social cohesion and encourage acceptance of the Asian population within New Zealand, government officials displayed cultural exhibits featuring Asian art that had been well-received abroad at home as well. In citing the benefits of such initiatives, diplomacy scholar Simon Mark observed, “The domestic impact of positive international recognition for a state’s culture and its cultural success can contribute to a state’s sense of itself, its sense of being a distinctive national community.”⁴²

These types of efforts suggest that initiatives involving domestic publics as targeted strategic publics of U.S. public diplomacy could play a role not only in improving Americans’ understanding of diverse cultures and peoples, but also in addressing domestic issues and conflicts that have implications for America’s reputation and relations abroad. They also suggest the United States is behind the curve when it comes to recognizing the potential impact and value of incorporating principles of mutuality in public diplomacy practices. As the Curb Center at Vanderbilt reported, “Nothing has emerged in the years since the 9/11 attacks to suggest that the U.S. has magically developed the patience required to work slowly toward trust relationships with critics and potential adversaries around the world. In other words there appears to be no recognition of the need for mutuality.”⁴³

Finally, the continued neglect of the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy holds significant consequences for the future of public diplomacy itself. Most importantly, the lack of attention to American publics means that public diplomacy will continue to operate without a domestic constituency to support its work. The history of U.S. public diplomacy illustrates the impact here, showing that the lack of a domestic constituency contributed to U.S.

public diplomacy's demise after the Cold War and has impeded its advancement since 9/11. Matthew Lauer, former executive director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, explained why: "If people don't know what public diplomacy is, they don't care."⁴⁴ Going forward, the development of a domestic constituency that better understands global society—and the reasons for U.S. engagement in that society—will be critical to ensuring that public diplomacy is widely recognized and valued as a crucial national resource.

U.S. public diplomacy's evolving mission and mandates

In considering the status and scope of a domestic mandate for U.S. public diplomacy, it is helpful to understand both how the second mandate came to be and how it came to be neglected. A retrospective look at U.S. public diplomacy's development reveals a number of factors that have influenced thinking and practices related to domestic publics, including an ever-changing public diplomacy mission and mandates rewritten by successive administrations; tensions between public diplomacy's information and engagement functions; the unintended consequences of well-intentioned "anti-propaganda" legislation; divergent perspectives regarding a policy advisement role for public diplomats; and the "revolving door" leadership of public diplomacy in the post-9/11 period.

Tensions from the start

U.S. public diplomacy is generally described as having two dimensions: information and engagement. The information dimension, historically viewed as a "propaganda" function, is widely viewed today as an advocacy function with the goal of advancing U.S. foreign policy. The engagement dimension, on the other hand, has long been viewed as a relational function with the goal of enhancing mutual understanding between the United States

and other countries and peoples.⁴⁵ Questions about whether and how these two dimensions can peacefully and productively co-exist have plagued public diplomacy from its beginning.

The idea that U.S. public diplomacy should be guided by principles of mutuality and reciprocity can be traced back to 1938, the year in which a Division of Cultural Relations was established in the Department of State. This new division, which in part was a response to “the international threat of Nazism growing every more apparent” in Latin America, provided for the “temporary detail” of U.S. employees with “special qualifications” to the American republics and the Philippines for the “interchange of scientific, technical, cultural, and educational knowledge and skills among their peoples.”⁴⁶ According to a State Department order, the new Division would manage the:

exchange of professors, teachers, and students; cooperation in the fields of music, art, literature and other intellectual and cultural attainments; the formulation and distribution of libraries of representative works of the United States and suitable translations thereof; the participation by this government in international radio broadcasts; encouragement of a closer relationship between unofficial organizations of this and of foreign governments engaged in cultural and intellectual works of the United States and the improvement and broadening of the scope of our cultural relations with other countries.⁴⁷

Two principles guided the Division’s work:

First, the educational relations activities of the United States [should] be reciprocal and there must be no imposition of one people’s culture upon another; Second, the exchange of educational interests [should] involve the participation of people and institutions concerned with those interests in the respective countries, that is, the program should stem from established centers of education and culture and should be educational rather than propagandistic.⁴⁸

According to Randolph Wieck, author of *Ignorance Abroad: American Educational and Cultural Foreign Policy and the Office of Assistant Secretary of State*, the Division sought to apply these principles by avoiding working with government agencies and working with private foundations and other organizations to keep educational and cultural relations free from politics.⁴⁹ The aim of political independence became more difficult during World War II, however, when the cultural programs were called on to support a new Office of War Information (OWI), which was charged with influencing domestic and foreign public opinion concerning America's involvement in the war effort. According to Wieck, the wartime cooperation between the OWI and cultural affairs "created a blurring of the delineation between emergency propagandistic information activities, and slower, long-range cultural relations," setting up a conflict between the "informationalists" and the "culturalists" that would continue into the next century.⁵⁰ When the war ended, the OWI was disbanded and a number of its staff moved into a significantly smaller information and cultural affairs unit in the Department of State.

U.S. education and cultural programs were expanded in 1946 with the passage of the Fulbright Act as an amendment to the 1944 Surplus Property Act that provided for the sale of surplus U.S. war material to countries in which it was stored.⁵¹ The amendment called for part of the revenues obtained from such sales to be used to support educational exchanges between the United States and countries with surplus American materials. Under the Act, the Department of State would oversee the program, which would be administered by a Board of Foreign Scholarships. This arrangement reportedly was intended to shield the exchange programs from political interference.⁵²

According to former Senator J. William Fulbright, for whom the legislation was named, the adoption of the legislation was "one of the vital steps taken by the United States in the post-war period to

increase its participation in world affairs and to contribute to the cause of peace by breaking down some of the mental barriers of isolationism.”⁵³

In later reflecting on the legislation, Fulbright explained the dual objectives of the programs, which included both domestic and foreign dimensions: “The educational exchange program seeks at home to promote a wider interest and deeper comprehension of other societies and abroad to create a climate of public opinion in which the actions, motives, and policies of the United States will be fairly interpreted.”⁵⁴

“Anti-propaganda” legislation

These aims were reflected in the passage two years later of the Smith-Mundt Act, which provided for the establishment of worldwide information and education programs. Under this new Act, information and cultural affairs were reorganized into two new offices within the Department of State—the Office of International Information and the Office of Educational Exchanges. The goals were to “promote the better understanding of the United States among peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations.”⁵⁵ As noted earlier, the Act authorized the dissemination abroad of information about the United States through “press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and other information media, and through information centers and instructors.”⁵⁶

As described by Congress, the new programs were “anti-propaganda” initiatives intended to address ideological threats to the United States in the post-World War II environment. At the same time, Congress wanted to ensure that U.S. government “propaganda” intended for foreign audiences did not lead to the indoctrination of U.S. citizens at home. The solution was to include in the Act a prohibition on the domestic dissemination of public diplomacy materials prepared for foreign publics.⁵⁷

Although the ban did not preclude public diplomacy efforts to enhance Americans' understanding of foreign affairs, it was widely interpreted to mean that U.S. public diplomacy's focus should be on foreign publics. At the same time, there was considerable confusion about how Congress' objective of mutual understanding could be achieved, particularly if the dissemination of public diplomacy materials within U.S. borders was banned. According to USIA veteran Allen C. Hansen, when the Smith-Mundt Act was passed, the goal of mutual understanding "was so vague as to be subject to personal interpretation."⁵⁸ As a result, the domestic mandate was simply ignored.

In 1953, President Eisenhower moved the information functions of public diplomacy from the State Department to the executive branch, creating the independent USIA. In an effort to address confusion over U.S. public diplomacy's purpose and to clarify the new agency's mission, he issued a "Statement of Mission for USIA" that focused solely on foreign publics:

1. The purpose of the U.S. Information Agency shall be to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communications techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace.
2. The purpose of paragraph 1 above is to be carried out primarily:
 - a. By explaining and interpreting to foreign peoples the objectives and policies of the United States Government.
 - b. By depicting imaginatively the correlation between U.S. policies and the legitimate aspirations of other peoples of the world.

- c. By unmasking and countering hostile attempts to distort or to frustrate the objectives and policies of the United States.
- d. By delineating those important aspects of life and culture of the people of the United States which facilitate understanding of the United States and which facilitate understanding of the policies and objectives of the Government of the United States.⁵⁹

For the next 46 years, the USIA represented America in all corners of the world through information, culture and arts programs, international news operations (e.g., Voice of America), libraries, publications, speakers programs, and exhibits. The agency's first mission, which according to veteran USIA officer Richard T. Arndt "flowed from a unidirectionalist and informationist mindset,"⁶⁰ was reflected in the agency's motto, which was later engraved on a sign outside the USIA's Washington, D.C., headquarters: "Telling America's story to the world."

Perceived conflicts between the information and cultural affairs units were addressed in a compromise decision to not move the education and culture programs to the USIA. Although Secretary of State John Foster Dulles wanted the new agency to house both information and exchange programs, he ultimately agreed—reportedly in deference to Fulbright, who feared the education programs would lose their credibility if they were too closely associated with the "propaganda" units—to leave the education programs in the State Department in a new bureau called the International Educational Exchange Service. In explaining why the USIA was not "entrusted with the bulk of the American foreign cultural program," diplomacy scholar Ronald I. Rubin said that despite efforts "to remove the disagreeable taint of propaganda from the information program" by stressing the objective nature of the

USIA's work, the attitude that cultural programs should be "non-political" reflected "the American understanding of the USIA."⁶¹ Despite the official separation, however, USIA officers did play a role in supporting exchange programs in the field.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, which expanded U.S. engagement abroad, reintroduced the idea of mutual understanding in U.S. public diplomacy. The preamble of the Act, called the "Fulbright-Hays Act" for its Congressional sponsors, stated that it is "an act to provide for the improvement and strengthening of the international relations of the United States by promoting better mutual understanding among the peoples of the world through educational and cultural exchanges."⁶² The purpose of the Act was:

To strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.⁶³

In commenting on the objectives of the legislation, Hansen explained that "[e]ducational and cultural exchange programs were never designed to support specific U.S. foreign policy objectives. The return on the U.S. investment in these programs is expected to come from increasing understanding and the promotion of peaceful pursuits on a cooperative basis among nations."⁶⁴

Fulbright, who co-sponsored the bill, expressed similar views to Congress; "I utterly reject any suggestion that our educational and cultural exchange programs are weapons or instruments with which to do combat... there is no room and there must not be

any room, for an interpretation of these programs as propaganda, even recognizing that the term covers some very worthwhile and respectable activities.”⁶⁵

A policy advisement role for public diplomacy

In 1963, in an effort to clarify the USIA's mandate, President John F. Kennedy sent a memorandum to the agency's director, in which he reframed the agency's mission. Although the statement did not resolve the tensions between information and culture, it did introduce the idea of a domestic mandate involving U.S. government officials:

The mission of the U.S. Information Agency is to help achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives by a) influencing public attitudes in other nations, and b) advising the President, his representatives abroad, and the various departments and agencies on the implications of foreign opinion for present and contemplated U.S. policies, program and official statements.⁶⁶

The inclusion of a policy advisement role for public diplomats was met with great enthusiasm among USIA officials, especially USIA Director Edward R. Murrow, who said the agency had joined “the other personal advisers of the president in discussions of policy while it is being formed.” He said, “We are therefore no longer mere publicists grinding out our appointed quota of press releases. We have become psychological advisers to the president and, in turn, each ambassador in his individual country teams.”⁶⁷

Enthusiasm waned, however, as it became clear in subsequent years that the consideration of foreign public opinion was not to become a staple in U.S. foreign policy making.⁶⁸ Although the USIA director continued to sit in on cabinet-level meetings during the Johnson administration, the USIA's participation in foreign policy was significantly diminished during the Nixon administration. As

Cull reported in *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, by excluding the agency's participation in National Security Council meetings, Kissinger "ended its hard-won policymaking and advisory role."⁶⁹

During the Ford administration, the USIA's purpose continued to be debated in a number of reports focused on the future of U.S. public diplomacy. There were some calls for greater mutuality in U.S. international relations, including a study by agency veteran Barbara White, who recommended the merger of the USIA and the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.⁷⁰ White urged government leaders to "recognize communication as a long-range-process whose results are cumulative; concentrate more on facilitating communication and less on direct output; prefer dialogue and mutuality to one-way communication; stress parallelism of common interests; [and] work where possible through local institutions."⁷¹

But USIA Director James Keogh outlined a different path, defining the USIA's mission as:

1. Conveying an understanding of what the United States stands for as a nation and as a people and presenting a true picture of the society, institutions, and culture in which our policies evolve;
2. Explaining U.S. policies and the reasons for them; and
3. Advising the U.S. government on the implications of foreign opinion for the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy.⁷²

A revived second mandate

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter reemphasized Congress' dual objectives for U.S. public diplomacy with a reorganization that integrated the education and cultural programs into the USIA and added a domestic mandate to the agency's mission.⁷³ The reformed public diplomacy operation, which temporarily was renamed the "International Communications Agency (ICA)," was to have "two distinct but related goals," Carter said in a speech to Congress:

1. To tell the world about our society and policies, in particular our commitment to cultural diversity and individual liberty.
2. To tell ourselves about the world, so as to enrich our own culture as well as to give us the understanding to deal effectively with problems among nations.⁷⁴

To achieve these goals, Carter laid out five tasks for U.S. public diplomacy practitioners:

1. To encourage, aid and sponsor the broadest possible exchange of people and ideas between our country and other nations.
2. To give foreign peoples the best possible understanding of our policies and intentions, and sufficient information about American society and culture to comprehend why we have chosen certain policies over others.
3. To help insure that our government adequately understands foreign public opinion and culture for policymaking purposes, and to assist individual Americans and institutions in learning about other nations and their cultures.

4. To assist in the development and execution of a comprehensive national policy on international communications, designed to allow and encourage the maximum flow of information and ideas among the peoples of the world.
5. To prepare for and conduct negotiations on cultural exchanges with other governments.

Despite the new policy, however, the domestic publics implicated in Carter's directive—government leaders, individual Americans and American institutions—were neglected as the USIA continued to focus its work overseas. When USIA veteran Fred Coffee later was asked why, he said, "There were never enough resources to do both."⁷⁵ Others have suggested that a *domestic* mandate simply didn't resonate with *Foreign Service Officers*.⁷⁶ According to USIA veteran and author of *Practicing Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Odyssey* Yale Richmond, "the 'mutuality' aspect troubled some USIA officers, who preferred to focus on influencing other nations, and didn't care much about informing the American public of the world beyond our borders."⁷⁷

Arndt similarly noted that the second mandate "counterbalanced the agency's long-standing motto of 'telling America's story.'" Under different circumstances he said, "a focus on listening might have laid the groundwork for a different agency, but in the climate of the late 1970s, it provoked derision from die-hard insiders, unidirectionists, and hard-line story-tellers in USIA."⁷⁸

Hansen also agreed that the second mandate "caused considerable consternation among foreign service officers and others who were expected to carry out this new objective because the Agency was given neither additional funds nor additional staff to do so." As a result, he recalled, "Only one small unit [the Office of Private Sector Programs] was charged with attempting to fill the second mandate."

The lack of guidance on how the second mandate was to be achieved, combined with limited funding and a shortage of personnel, he said, made implementation “problematical.”⁷⁹

“Furthermore, Hansen continued, “difficult as it is to measure the successes and failures of overseas information programs with specific objectives, measuring the success or failure of the ‘reverse flow,’ with its nebulous goal of ‘learning about other nations and their cultures,’ would be even more difficult.” The result, he said, was that “the second mandate was never really implemented.”⁸⁰

Back to a focus abroad

When Ronald Reagan entered the White House, his administration revamped the USIA’s mission once again, emphasizing the promotion of foreign policy among foreign publics. Although the president retained both a policy advisory role for public diplomacy and a focus on exchange programs, according to USIA veteran George B. High, “Reagan-era PD was not about mutual understanding.”⁸¹

The specific tasks associated with public diplomacy’s new mission during the Reagan administration were to:

1. Strengthen foreign understanding and support for United States policies and actions;
2. Advise the President, the Secretary of State, members of the [National Security Council] and other key officials on the implications of foreign opinion for present and contemplated United States policies;
3. Promote and administer educational and cultural exchange programs for the purpose of facilitating international understanding and the national interest of the United States;

4. Unmask and counter disinformation attempts to distort or to frustrate the objectives and policies of the United States;
5. Cooperate with private American institutions and interests to increase the quality and reach of United States public diplomacy;
6. Assist in the development of a comprehensive policy on the free flow of information and international communication;
7. Conduct negotiations on information and educational and cultural exchanges with other governments.⁸²

Post-Cold War debate

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was little discussion about—or apparent interest in—U.S. public diplomacy's domestic mandate. In fact, as U.S. leaders turned their attention homeward, there also was declining interest in the agency's foreign mandate as U.S. officials began to question the need for an international communications agency. Many believed the USIA had accomplished what they perceived to be its mission, i.e., defeating communism. Others thought a “propaganda” agency was simply improper in times of peace. Still others saw a continuing need for an official entity to manage U.S. relations with people abroad.

In the decade after the end of the Cold War, as the USIA's future was debated, the agency streamlined its operations and revamped its mission. The new mission addressed a need for mutual understanding among U.S. and world citizens:

To promote the national interest and national security of the United States of America through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics; and to broaden dialog between American citizens and institutions, and their counterparts abroad.⁸³

The USIA's fate was decided in 1999, with a decision by the Clinton administration to dissolve the agency and integrate the information and cultural divisions of the USIA into two new bureaus in the State Department—International Information Programs and Educational and Cultural Affairs—headed by a newly-appointed under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs. The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, which provided the legal foundation for the merger, included the Smith-Mundt Act's prohibition on the dissemination of public diplomacy materials within U.S. borders, while exempting domestic communication to U.S. citizens about U.S. foreign policy via public affairs channels.⁸⁴

Going forward, defining the mission of U.S. public diplomacy fell to those who occupied the new under secretary's post, presumably in consultation with the secretary of state and the president. To date, none of the seven people—six women and one man—who have held the position has articulated a domestic mandate for U.S. public diplomacy.

“Revolving door” leadership

Former White House advisor Evelyn Lieberman, who became the first under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs near the end of Clinton's second term, spent her short tenure in office supervising the integration of the information and cultural units of the USIA into the State Department. Upon her departure, the post sat vacant well into the second year of George W. Bush's presidency.

Shortly after 9/11, advertising executive Charlotte Beers was named to lead public diplomacy in the “war on terror.” She laid out three values-based “strategic goals” that she said would guide future U.S. public diplomacy efforts:

1. representing American values and beliefs and creating an exchange of common values;
2. demonstrating the opportunities that result from democratization, good governance, and open markets; and
3. supporting the education of the young.⁸⁵

Eighteen months later, Beers was succeeded by Patricia Harrison, a State Department cultural and educational affairs officer, who served a brief stint as acting head, before Margaret Tutwiler, a veteran of foreign affairs, took office in 2003. Tutwiler said that under her leadership the strategic goals of U.S. public diplomacy would be to:

1. focus on those areas of the world where there has been a deterioration of the view of our nation;
2. listen more, not only to foreign audiences, but to our own public diplomacy personnel overseas;
3. do a better job of reaching beyond the traditional elites and government officials; and
4. pursue new initiatives and improve older ones in the hope of reaching younger, broader, deeper audiences.⁸⁶

Tutwiler resigned after only six months in the job, creating a leadership vacuum that continued until the fall of 2005, when Bush political advisor Karen Hughes assumed leadership of U.S. public diplomacy. Hughes described the new mission of U.S. public diplomacy, as defined by the president, as “developing a long-term strategy to make sure that our ideas prevail—ideals, by the way, which belong not only to America, but are shared by civilized people the world over.”⁸⁷ The strategic framework for accomplishing this mission, Hughes said, would be:

1. to foster a vision of hope and opportunity rooted in the president's freedom agenda;
2. to isolate and marginalize extremists; and
3. to foster a sense of common interests and values among diverse cultures and faiths.⁸⁸

In June 2007, these ideas were incorporated into a *National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, which outlined the strategic priorities of U.S. public diplomacy and provided an action plan for addressing them. According to the plan, which included no mention of domestic publics or public diplomacy's policy advisory role:

Public diplomacy is at its core, about making America's diplomacy public and communicating America's views, values and policies in effective ways to audiences across the world. Public diplomacy promotes linkages between the American people and the rest of the world by reminding diverse populations of our common interests and values.⁸⁹

Following Hughes' resignation, broadcasting executive James Glassman was named to the under secretary's post, taking office in late 2007. Shortly after his swearing in, Glassman announced yet another new mission for U.S. public diplomacy: "to tell the world of a good and compassionate nation and at the same time to engage in the most important ideological contest of our time—a contest that we will win."⁹⁰ He identified three areas on which U.S. public diplomacy would focus during his brief tenure (before the next election):

1. leading the war of ideas;
2. building on our current public diplomacy strengths in educational and cultural affairs; and
3. bringing fresh and vital technologies to bear on all our efforts.⁹¹

In early 2009, Barack Obama nominated business executive Judith McHale to serve as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. In March 2010, McHale announced a new “framework” for U.S. public diplomacy, in which she defined a new mission for U.S. public diplomacy in the 21st century:

To support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.⁹²

The “strategic imperatives” identified in the framework were to: 1) shape the narrative; 2) expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships; 3) combat violent extremism; 4) better inform policy making; and 5) deploy resources in line with current priorities.⁹³

Collectively, these post-9/11 mission statements reflect a reactive, conflict-driven approach to public diplomacy based on a perceived need to convince people abroad of the goodness of America, as reflected in the nation’s values and ideals. Although education and exchanges were cited in several of the statements, there was no indication that one of the goals was to improve mutual understanding among U.S. and world citizens by improving the global literacy of Americans. The current mission of public diplomacy, as stated in McHale’s framework, hints at the possibility that domestic publics may be included in future public diplomacy initiatives designed to strengthen U.S. relationships with people abroad, as well as to improve policy makers’ understanding of foreign environments. However, the absence of a domestic mandate targeting U.S. citizens, coupled with vague strategies for “shaping the narrative” and relationship-building, indicate a continuing focus primarily, if not exclusively, on publics abroad. In other words, U.S. public diplomacy remains essentially a one-way street.

The domestic mandate going forward

This review of U.S. public diplomacy's evolving mission and mandates raises some fundamental questions that must be sorted out before the future of a domestic mandate for U.S. public diplomacy can be resolved. Perhaps most important is the question that has dogged public diplomacy scholars and practitioners and policy makers for decades: What is the purpose of public diplomacy? Related to this is whether public diplomacy should have a domestic mandate at all.

Clearly, the ever-changing public diplomacy mission statements produced by successive presidents, USIA leaders, and under secretaries of state for public diplomacy and public affairs have contributed greatly to the confusion surrounding public diplomacy's purpose over time and helped to confirm the need for a mission that transcends administrations and revolving door leadership. Because public diplomacy's mission, principles and practices have shifted with the priorities of successive administrations and the political whims of national leaders, there is no "permanent consensus as to what public diplomacy consists of and what direction it should take."⁹⁴

The second mandate originally envisioned by Congress and later revived by Carter clearly has been ignored by those in positions to lead public diplomacy efforts both during and after the Cold War and post 9/11. The scant attention paid to the domestic dimensions of public diplomacy by practitioners and scholars also suggests that domestic publics, with perhaps the exception of government leaders, are perceived to be beyond the scope of public diplomacy. As an example, a recent report by the Brookings Institution acknowledged that in order for U.S. public diplomacy to be successful in engaging effectively with the world, better "domestic outreach is needed." According to the report, "American citizens, as well as our government, need to understand the world better." However, it continued, "This is a mission that extends far beyond public diplomacy."⁹⁵

But, if not public diplomacy, then who is responsible for improving Americans' understanding of world affairs? The interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication indicated that "outreach to domestic publics" is the job of public affairs. According to the State Department's official website, the "Bureau of Public Affairs (PA) carries out the Secretary's mandate to help Americans understand the importance of foreign affairs" through the following activities:

- Conducting press briefings for domestic and foreign press corps;
- Pursuing media outreach, enabling Americans everywhere to hear directly from key Department officials through local, regional and national media interviews;
- Managing the State Department's web site at state.gov and developing web pages with up-to-date information about U.S. foreign policy;
- Answering questions from the public about current foreign policy issues by phone, email, or letter;
- Arranging town meetings and scheduling speakers to visit communities to discuss U.S. foreign policy and why it is important to all Americans;
- Producing and coordinating audio-visual products and services in the U.S. and abroad for the public, the press, the Secretary of State, and Department bureaus and offices;
- Preparing historical studies on U.S. diplomacy and foreign affairs matters.

Beyond town halls and a speakers bureau, however, there is little here to suggest that public affairs is proactively involved in “help[ing] Americans understand the importance of foreign affairs” or promoting mutual understanding between U.S. and world citizens. Rather, the domestic outreach of public affairs more often involves responding to requests for information about U.S. foreign policy from the news media and others. For example, in writing about the distinction between public diplomacy and public affairs, Ken S. Heller and Liza M. Persson defined the role of public affairs as “enabling the right of a people of a democratic nation to be kept informed about the actions and motives of their government.”⁹⁶ While the core commitment of public diplomacy is “to shape the global mental environment,” they said, public affairs’ “core commitment is to fulfill both a pragmatic and democratic need for accurate and timely information” about how the resources of the federal government are used.⁹⁷

Some have suggested that the responsibility to enhance mutual understanding among nations and peoples should be shared with the private sector and/or government entities below the federal level. For example, public diplomacy scholar Jian Wang argued that efforts to develop mutual understanding are “best carried out at the subnational level, such as in sister-state, sister-cities or sister-church programs” because there is greater chance that both parties are open to being persuaded to different points of view.⁹⁸ According to Wang, “The sub-national-level activities are more conducive to building authentic understanding by engagement, collaboration and interaction because the objectives of such programs are not to ‘maximize, optimize or satisfy given preferences’ as inherent and entrenched” in other modes of communication, such as information advocacy or strategic persuasion.⁹⁹

In terms of “sharing,” other private and quasi-private entities also have been identified as having significant and expanded roles to play in improving Americans’ understanding of world

affairs, including the Peace Corps, U.S. Agency for International Development, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foreign affairs councils, colleges and universities, businesses and the news media.¹⁰⁰ Although beyond the scope of this work, the contributions of such entities to improved relations among the world's citizens warrants serious consideration as the domestic dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy are refined.

Another question raised by this review that has baffled public diplomacy officials and policy makers for decades is this: Is there room in public diplomacy's mission for both information goals and engagement goals? And, if so, how can the information and engagement units peacefully and productively co-exist? For example, are education and cultural programs a subset of public diplomacy or are they—should they be—a stand-alone entity? Do the “apolitical” historical goals of education and cultural programs require independence from government—or should they be viewed as part of the nation's political public diplomacy apparatus?

In addressing such questions, public diplomacy scholar John Robert Kelley pointed out that “nowhere [in the public diplomacy literature] is there to be found any suggestion of how public diplomacy's core elements relate to one another.”¹⁰¹ One possible solution (offered elsewhere by the author of this monograph) focused on re-conceptualizing public diplomacy as “relationship management” such that all public diplomacy activities would be “designed to—and judged by—whether they contribute to the establishment and maintenance of positive, supportive relationships with strategic publics.” This holistic approach “would help to reconcile the problems associated with the view of public diplomacy as encompassing separate components with discrete assumptions, objectives and strategies.” In addition, “[a]n integrated approach in which information, advocacy and engagement are viewed as strategies for relationship-building would also provide for a more coherent public diplomacy mission.”¹⁰²

Others have proposed structural solutions as a way to address perceived conflicts in the information and engagement dimensions of U.S. public diplomacy. For example, Former U.S. Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith suggested the creation of a Smithsonian-like “Public Diplomacy Institute” that would “handle outreach to foreign publics.”¹⁰³ According to Smith, “the State Department should retain the policy advocacy and information functions of public diplomacy, which should be married with the policy formation process, but public diplomacy’s long-term relationship building or ‘mutual understanding’ programs should be divested from State” and merged with other “soft power” efforts, such as the Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Institute for Peace, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Such an arrangement, she said, would enable these activities to network with each other, as well as with NGO and private sector partners that, collectively, could “greatly increase the clout of soft power work in Washington.”¹⁰⁴

Another question that has significant implications for a domestic mandate in U.S. public diplomacy is whether mutual understanding is a realistic, i.e., achievable, goal. In answering this question, yet another question will have to be addressed first: What *is* mutual understanding? For example, although there is broad acceptance of the idea that public diplomacy today must be two-way street, proponents of the “new” public diplomacy have not defined what the principles of mutuality and reciprocity require in practice. As Zaharna said, “While scholars and practitioners are increasingly calling for more ‘relationship-building’ in public diplomacy, few have articulated what a relationship approach would entail beyond conducting more exchange programs, more listening or more dialogues.”¹⁰⁵ The question is this: What does a “model of mutuality” look like?

If mutual understanding—however defined—is determined to be a proper and achievable goal for U.S. public diplomacy, then other questions that must be considered are whether and how success in

achieving it can be measured. Are U.S. leaders willing to concede that the achievement of mutual understanding—at least to some degree—may not be measurable? A report on cultural diplomacy by the Curb Center at Vanderbilt suggested not: “Given the pressure for immediate, measurable results on specific policy issues, any policy of cultural exchange—burdened by assumptions of give-and-take, mutual learning, and creative processes that rarely register in exit polling—stands at a significant disadvantage in the constant struggle for government attention and funding.”¹⁰⁶

Another question related to domestic publics involves the legislative underpinnings of U.S. public diplomacy. The issue here is how to address the unintended consequences of the Smith-Mundt Act. Clearly, the domestic ban on the dissemination of public diplomacy materials within the United States did not preclude U.S. public diplomats from informing U.S. policy makers about the potential impact of U.S. foreign policies abroad. Nor did it preclude initiatives designed to improve the global literacy of American citizens. Nor was it intended to prevent Americans from gaining access to information about the nation’s engagement abroad. Yet, the legislation—as interpreted—virtually guaranteed that domestic publics would be ignored and that the second mandate would not be achieved. It also meant that “while the USIA was busy telling America’s story abroad, no one was telling the USIA’s story at home.”¹⁰⁷ As a result, a domestic constituency for public diplomacy does not exist.

Although the domestic dissemination ban has been challenged as “entirely unenforceable” in today’s communications environment, the courts have not been convinced of the need for repeal.¹⁰⁸ In the absence of such action, the question that should be addressed is this: Just how far does the domestic dissemination ban reach? In other words, rather than focus on what is *not* possible under the Act, the focus should be on what *is* possible under existing legislation. As

discussed during a recent symposium that explored the purpose and structure of public diplomacy, the Smith-Mundt Act, which continues to shape America's engagement in the world, "is one of the most influential, and least understood, laws affecting American national security."¹⁰⁹

A final question related to a domestic mandate for U.S. public diplomacy concerns the role of public diplomats in advising one specific public: U.S. government leaders. There appears to be broad agreement among informed observers that public diplomacy specialists who are most familiar with foreign cultures should contribute to the formation and implementation of foreign policy. Yet, public diplomacy's policy advisement role remains undefined. As Tuch observed:

[The] requirement to understand others is indispensable to public diplomacy, and it is part of what makes public diplomacy an important tool of our foreign policy process. While our information and cultural activities abroad are generally accepted by the American foreign affairs establishment as an often useful and sometimes necessary aspect of the U.S. foreign relations process, the second principal function of public diplomacy—the gauging of public opinion abroad and the consideration of these public attitudes and perceptions—is not sufficiently recognized as an integral element in the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy.¹¹⁰

Others similarly have concluded that public diplomacy's advisory role was undervalued and underutilized during the USIA's existence and that it continues to be marginalized today.¹¹¹ According to U.S. officials, the 1999 merger of the USIA and State Department public diplomacy functions was intended to give public diplomacy a stronger voice in foreign policy making. But this has not happened. In an increasingly interdependent global society, the need for government leaders to better understand foreign cultures, ideas and values is obvious. Why U.S. government leaders have not put in place the processes needed to ensure that they make *informed* foreign policy decisions is not. That is a question that deserves more attention.

Conclusion

In hindsight, it seems clear that former President Jimmy Carter had it right. His emphasis on mutual understanding and two-way exchanges in international relations set the standard for how public diplomacy should be practiced in an increasingly interconnected global society. Carter recognized the perils of one-way diplomatic efforts designed to “sell” America to people abroad and the importance of mutuality in the advancement of national and international interests.¹¹²

Fortunately, notwithstanding the setbacks experienced by U.S. public diplomacy since the end of the Cold War, Carter’s vision still holds promise for U.S. public diplomacy’s future. As Cull observed, the Carter administration “produced a model of public diplomacy for the era of global interdependence... [that] may yet prove to be the formula for success in U.S. public diplomacy in the twenty-first century.”¹¹³ The challenge, of course, will be putting that model into practice.

* * * * *

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