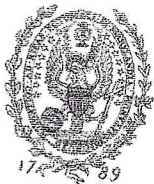


ISD REPORT

***USIA: NEW DIRECTIONS
FOR A NEW ERA***

March 1993



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF DIPLOMACY
School of Foreign Service Georgetown University

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ISBN 0-934742-76-6

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PREFACE

Since the waning months of 1990 the worldwide political and economic environments have changed dramatically, with momentous consequences that are still unfolding. By the fall of 1992, in the midst of a closely contested U.S. presidential election, it appeared likely that the United States might soon have a new administration. In that context, the work of the United States Information Agency (USIA), among others, seemed clearly ripe for review.

In September 1992, Robert Gosende, a Foreign Service officer with the United States Information Agency (USIA) who had just begun a year of research and teaching at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, joined forces with Institute Director Hans Binnendijk to design a large-scale study to consider how USIA's talents and resources could best be adapted to changing world conditions. To launch the project, some seventy-five participants met at Georgetown University on December 5, 1992, to consider the framework of the study and the principal issues to be addressed.

The group divided into six working groups, each to consider a separate aspect of the agency and its work, namely (1) its role in the foreign affairs community, (2) its overseas operations, (3) its broadcasting activities, (4) its cultural affairs and educational exchange programs, (5) its information, press, and publications functions, and (6) its personnel and training systems. Following that meeting, each working group set its own schedule of separate meetings and drafted its own contribution to this report.

Meanwhile, the striking changes in the world that stimulated Mr. Gosende to propose this study suddenly changed his life enormously. His university year was abruptly suspended, and within days of the U.S. troop deployment in Somalia he had left the contemplative atmosphere of Georgetown to become the U.S. public affairs officers in the rather more tumultuous milieu of Mogadishu. He returned to Washington in mid-January, only to be sent back in March as U.S. special envoy.

Following Mr. Gosende's initial departure in early December, Henry Butterfield Ryan, an associate of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a retired USIA Foreign Service officer who had been heading one of the working groups, took over direction of the entire study. Dr. Ryan maintained the project's original objective: to identify ways in which USIA can support most effectively the short-term and long-term foreign policies of the United States in the mid-1990s and beyond.

This report's recommendations represent the overall judgments of each of the six working groups, although as might be expected with a study this broad, some individuals disagreed with certain recommendations. The report is not a consensus document, and in a few cases we have noted marked disagreement in the text or in a footnote.

The Institute for the Study of Diplomacy has tried, through this project, to create a forum in which new ideas could evolve and be presented to persons and organizations interested and influential in the future of USIA. The study

participants and the staff of the Institute offer this report in that spirit, hoping that it can make a significant contribution to the new administration as it sets out to guide the agency in coming years.

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Clinton administration intends to make democracy-building a principal feature of its foreign policy. The United States Information Agency (USIA) can and should play a leading role in that important effort, and the administration should give it the authority and funding to do so. Furthermore, the director of USIA should be included in the top foreign affairs councils of the government to enable the agency to carry out to the best of its ability not only this task but the many other important missions assigned to it.

The United States today has an unprecedented opportunity to marshal the government's resources creatively to help others develop more prosperous, freer lives than ever before, something we deem to be in our mutual interest. Meanwhile, whether in matters of public health, food production, free elections, or the environment, information and mutual understanding rank among the most urgent needs. USIA can play a major part in filling those needs.

DEMOCRACY-BUILDING AS A MAJOR MISSION

The end of the Cold War provides a dramatic opportunity for countries everywhere to achieve more open economies and develop more democratic political systems than in the past. To this end, traditional diplomacy—the process of achieving foreign policy objectives through ongoing relations between governments—must continue to be augmented by public and cultural diplomacy—the effort a government makes to improve relations directly with the people of other countries.

The U.S. Information Agency, the government's principal instrument of such diplomacy, serves as the face of America abroad, reflects the faces of others at home, and provides new ideas and information around the world, a capability needed now more than ever. In this age of information, the U.S. position as a leader in the global community and a principal advocate of democracy depends on its ability to manage information effectively. USIA plays an important role in the collection and analysis of international information and an even more significant role in its dissemination.

The agency has played this role for forty years and throughout that time has been one of the world's principal advocates of democracy. It should continue that advocacy but now must do more, relying heavily on its educational and cultural exchanges and information programs. Within a coalition of public and private agencies, USIA must play a leading role in helping develop strong democratic and free market institutions in societies free to have such institutions, but where they do not yet exist or are struggling to take hold. These include those societies that have recently cast off totalitarian systems.

The effort to strengthen democracies and market economies must be undertaken with sensitivity and skill. USIA, a foreign affairs agency that specializes in analyzing nonofficial trends and attitudes in other countries, is uniquely positioned to help the U.S. government to do so. Those in govern-

ment must realize that when people in other countries speak of democracy their meaning may differ from our own. Within the administration's councils, USIA should clarify these differences.

The U.S. government must be able to distinguish between what is simply different, like the democracies of many of our closest allies, and what is fraudulent, like the various forms of "guided democracy" of recent decades. What is called democracy in some areas today, furthermore, is based mainly on ethnic and religious nationalism, or a desire for high-quality, affordable consumer goods. USIA has unique qualifications to help the U.S. government make these distinctions.

USIA's OTHER MISSIONS

Although we want USIA to play a powerful role in the administration's policy of encouraging democracy and market economies abroad, we do not believe that USIA's mission should be linked exclusively with any particular issue or set of issues, any more than is the mission of the Department of State with which USIA works closely. The agency has its roots in the effort to reduce the influence of the Axis dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere in the 1930s and then to destroy their power on the world scene. USIA as such was created as an independent agency in 1953 in the midst of the next battle to defend democracies—the Cold War—and contributed mightily to Western success in that struggle.

Now it must not only help create durable democratic institutions where they do not exist, but do other things as well. For example, it must continue to play the role it always has in solidifying U.S. relations with sister democracies around the globe and in clarifying U.S. policies toward them. Just recall the recent need to clarify U.S. positions vis-à-vis Western Europe over bread-and-butter trade issues—the ones that often matter most to the populations involved.

USIA, now as always, enunciates and advocates U.S. foreign policy, helps other populations to understand American civilization and Americans to understand others, and advises the U.S. government on public affairs issues abroad. In an information age in which communications technology constitutes one of the fastest growing areas of human endeavor the work of USIA becomes more vital than ever.

This point could hardly be highlighted better than by the events in Somalia during the past twelve months. First, television made it impossible for the U.S. government to ignore the crisis because of the compelling video images of an innocent population being starved to death not because food was lacking, but for political reasons. They saw warehouses of foodstuffs stored or stolen but not delivered to the needy. In short, television made U.S. involvement nearly unavoidable.

With the decision reached to commit U.S. troops, USIA began explaining at once to the Somali population why U.S. forces were there, that this was purely a relief mission, not a takeover of the country in any sense. The agency's efforts encouraged the population to cooperate. They also amplified the U.S. government's drive to convince more than forty other nations around the world to

assist in Somalia with money, troops, or both. All agency media engaged at once in this effort.

USIA Foreign Service officers arrived in Somalia within days of the arrival of U.S. troops and aided U.S. Special Envoy Robert Oakley in his effort to prevent armed resistance to the Americans. That effort often required Ambassador Oakley and the USIA officers to precede the troops into potentially hostile locations in Mogadishu and around the country. Moreover, USIA will remain in Somalia after the present large contingents of U.S. troops depart. It will become deeply involved in the rebuilding process, when its exchange programs especially will come into full play. Effective democratic institutions are surely a long way off in that country, but USIA has played a crucial role in the effort to create the stability that may permit them to emerge eventually. Even more important in institutional terms, USIA stood ready to provide instant support to a very new kind of diplomacy.

To those who would maintain that changing world conditions leave USIA in search of a mission, we would reply that no search is needed. USIA's mission has always been to support U.S. foreign policy, from the shortest to the longest term.

PARTICIPATION IN POLICY FORMULATION

USIA cannot exert its maximum potential in supporting U.S. foreign policies if it does not take part in the creation of those policies. We therefore consider it essential that USIA's director participate in the highest-level meetings of the National Security Council and all other principal foreign policy forums. He or she must do so not only to plan how best to use USIA's facilities to support U.S. policies, but also to carry out the director's mandate to advise the president and his principal foreign policy aides on the public affairs aspects of those policies.

Although the practice has lapsed, directors have participated in these meetings in earlier administrations, as called for in legislation. For the agency to perform at its best and for U.S. foreign policy to be as effective as possible, the USIA director should return to these councils.

KEEPING AGENCY FUNCTIONS INTEGRATED

For at least two decades suggestions have been made to move large parts of USIA into other agencies or to make them free-standing. A few of the panelists who contributed to this report made similar recommendations, which, while not representing the thinking of the large majority of participants, merit acknowledgment. Some felt that many, if not all, of the exchange programs, for example, should be free of policy considerations except of the most overarching type and hence should be removed from an agency that is otherwise highly policy-oriented. Others expressed similar concerns about the Voice of America, believing that it should broadcast international news and features about American life while eschewing any form of policy-conscious programming. Other

panelists believed that the policy-support function that guides USIA media would best be turned over exclusively to the State Department, which has the major responsibility for formulating foreign policy. Some, in fact, argued for shifting the media functions as well to State.

The prevailing view, however, to an overwhelming degree, held that although some problems and inconsistencies exist, nothing would be gained by major organizational surgery, and much could be lost. The component parts of USIA function well together. Separating them for the purpose of freeing them from an agency with both short-term and long-term policy-support functions might well scatter them into far less favorable organizational environments. Inevitably, shifting large sections of a government agency is extremely disruptive, causing them to lose their efficiency for long periods of time. It took well over a year, for example, for the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau to begin operating at maximum effectiveness after moving from the State Department to USIA.

The authors of this report understand the sensitivities and challenges that arise from the combination of elements found in USIA. We believe, however, that they can be addressed most satisfactorily within the framework of the agency and that, meanwhile, their integration provides USIA and the U.S. government with strengths that otherwise would be lacking. More specifically, the various elements that comprise USIA furnish it with an ability to communicate in a multifaceted but coordinated way with audiences abroad on many subjects, including the most urgent and salient. The case of Somalia again serves as a good example.

MISSION STATEMENT AND TOP MANAGEMENT SELECTION CRITERIA

As an overall guide for the use of USIA's energies and talents, we propose the following mission statement, which outlines the work the agency must do and the opportunities it must seize.

For forty years, since its establishment in 1953, the efforts of the United States Information Agency have increased understanding and knowledge between the people of the United States and their global neighbors. USIA is our government's principal instrument for communicating directly with foreign populations, which it does through its overseas operations, exchanges of people, broadcasting, and electronic and printed information materials. Its missions are:

- To advise the president, his administration, and our overseas missions on foreign opinion and attitudes in relation to U.S. policies.
- To promote the exchange of ideas and people between the United States and nations around the world.
- To explain and advocate U.S. foreign policy to audiences abroad.
- To inform foreign audiences about American culture and civilization.

Within the framework of this mission USIA places special emphasis on spreading and strengthening democratic institutions throughout the world. The agency has long been engaged in this effort, but today it directs its energies toward the new challenges of the post-Cold War era, in which old states and alliances have fragmented, groups aspiring to nationhood have proliferated, and many peoples have begun struggling to create democracies. Given this environment, USIA plays a leading role in a coalition of U.S. government agencies striving to foster democratic institutions wherever possible.

Within its mission guidelines USIA also takes part in promoting the administration's international economic and environmental policies. Wherever possible it helps create free market economies and a healthier environment, using its means of disseminating information and of exchanging ideas and people to further these goals.

We also believe that the new administration and the Senate should look for the following qualities in those appointed to top USIA management positions:

USIA's director should be a person of sufficient stature to command the confidence of the president and his closest advisers. He or she should have experience in international affairs and a distinguished record in at least one of the areas that relate to USIA's work, such as mass media, education, or diplomacy. It would also be useful if the director had experience in managing large organizations.

The deputy director should also have a distinguished record in one of those fields and should be a person whose background complements that of the director.

At present, there are four associate directorships. We will not describe qualities for all of them, but we believe that the associate director for education and cultural affairs should have a distinguished academic background, be familiar with the role of government in educational and cultural exchange, and understand the role of USIA in U.S. diplomacy. The associate director for broadcasting, in addition to being a prominent broadcasting executive, should have broad international experience, should be compatible with the director of USIA, and should appreciate the supportive role that VOA plays within USIA.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reports of the six working groups make up most of the document that follows. Each employs roughly the same format: an introduction and brief recommendations, each supported by a short discussion. Listed below are the recommendations of each group and the corresponding page number.

Two concerns arose in so many places and in so many forms that we highlight them here. The first was that USIA should avail itself far more than it does of the talents and energies of the American private sector. While it became clear that the agency already strongly maintains such links, there seemed little doubt that it could achieve its goals more effectively in many areas if it enlisted even greater private cooperation.