

Background Research  
Gates Forum I

Public Diplomacy and the Road to  
Reputational Security: Analogue  
Lessons from US History for a  
Digital Age

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# Abstract

This paper argues that public diplomacy is not an optional extra for foreign policy but a necessary component of sound national defense. It advances the notion of “reputational security” as a component of national security and looks to the history of public diplomacy for pointers on how this can be achieved. It cautions against quick judgements based on received wisdom but examines first the operational lessons emerging from the history of US public diplomacy and especially the work of the United States Information Agency (USIA). It looks at the range of public diplomacy activity, beginning with how USIA countered disinformation and the institutional arrangements supporting US public diplomacy. Emphasis is placed on the role of leadership, the interagency and coordination processes, and finally the domestic dimension (which includes a widespread mistrust of information work). The paper concludes that while the past does not provide a convenient ideal model of the kind encapsulated in the slogan “bring back USIA,” history does provide both guidance and warning. Above all, reputational security requires not only investing in public diplomacy to promote a better image, but also working to promote a better reality.

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# Introduction: Reputational Security and the History of US Public Diplomacy

The English novelist L. P. Hartley famously began his novel *The Go Between* of 1953 by remarking: “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” From the digitally saturated vantage point of 2022, the experiences of the analogue 20th century are increasingly foreign. They are subject to the generalizations, assumptions, and even romanticization akin to the kind of distortions applied across geographical distance. Just as the grass is greener on the other side of the geographical fence, so our temporal fences lend enchantment. Humans readily construct golden ages in collective memory. In the history of US security policy, the experience of public diplomacy is doubly foreign. It is the half-remembered adjunct to the main event, undermined by the absence of a dynamic successor bureaucracy. There is a vague sense in policy circles that at some key moments in the 20th century the United States appeared to be very successful in its global public engagement. Once there were crowd-pleasing jazz ambassadors, influential exchanges, knock-out exhibitions, Oscar-winning documentaries, and compelling rebuttals of disinformation. The world inside the Beltway may have forgotten the institutions of the two World Wars and immediate post-war but it still remembers the free-standing agency which oversaw this global communication from 1953, the United States Information Agency (USIA), and how it merged into the Department of State in 1999. It is easy to assume that correlation is causation and argue that if the USIA enjoyed success, its demise must be at the root of present shortcomings. By extension, some argue that USIA’s restoration must be the fastest route back to success (Khatiri, 2021; Cooper and Manning, 2021). This cannot be taken for granted. Policy choices today should draw on the entirety of the historical record and not just the highlights.

The observations in this essay draw on more than a quarter century of personal research in the archives of US public diplomacy: extensive contact with its veterans; immersion in the work of other scholars; and the process of refining that material into many publications (Cull, 2008; Cull, 2012 etc). I beg the reader’s pardon for the excessive citations to my own work, but each of these publications contain further argumentation and a jumping off point into archives and secondary sources to assist a sustained analysis. This essay is offered with the belief that the achievements of the USIA and the

other mechanisms of US public diplomacy deserve scrutiny and serve as a point of departure for further exploration.

## I: Reputation is Part of Security

The first lesson to extract from the history of US public diplomacy (and the role of image in 20th century foreign policy more broadly) is that reputations are not just optional extras in diplomatic life but a vital part of statecraft. As the extension of democracy empowered publics and media platforms proliferated during the course of the 20th century, it became ever more important that nations were understood on the world stage. In extremity, places with positive meanings received external support while places lacking a reputation or with negative reputations experienced negative outcomes. Consider the divergent levels of support offered to the newer entity of Czechoslovakia, as compared to the more familiar state of Poland during the crisis of 1938-39. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, even made a point of saying that Britain knew nothing about the Czechs in his famous radio speech, opening the door to compromise at that country's expense. In the course of the 20th century, reputation became a key dimension of security and states prospered where they were able to develop their reputations through the tools of public diplomacy: both telling effective stories about themselves abroad and seeking to build admirable realities at home. The United States waged successive wars of ideas against the autocrats of the Great War, the fascist countries of mid-century, and the Communist world of the Cold War, in the ongoing effort to build and protect the US image and amidst the emergence of communication specialists within the diplomatic corps.

The communication element of foreign policy has been variously named within the US. In the Great War, it was often termed propaganda though its presiding agency at home, and abroad it was the Committee of Public Information. Information was the dominant phrase during World War II as well, with the Office of War Information and operation of United States Information Service posts in the field, although psychological warfare had currency internally and in activity aimed at enemies. The US government's communicators of the Cold War initially used information and exchange as their self-description but embraced the newly coined term public diplomacy as a neutral alternative to propaganda, which was reserved to refer to the activity of adversaries. Practitioners embraced it and gave it a more benign meaning in the breach than its

originator Edmund Gullion had intended. Since the Cold War, the dominant frame has been one of “soft power,” the term coined by Joseph Nye around 1990, which frames the benefit to be derived from public diplomacy in terms of an enhanced admiration for values and culture that can be harnessed for policy gain (Nye, 2004). Today that term seems too imprecise. It has been diluted by multiple interpretations, including those of Russia and China. Soft power implicitly frames the purposes of public diplomacy in terms of manipulation and getting what you want. The reality is that for most countries most of the time (and even for powerful places like the United States some of the time) public diplomacy is more defensive: working to be understood to avoid what you do not want. With this in mind, I have advanced the concept of “reputational security” as an alternative way of thinking about the role of images in international life (Cull, 2022).

The concept of reputational security underlines the role that image plays at the core of statecraft, invoking statecraft’s highest purpose: defense. Moreover, the concept also directs attention to the competitive nature of the international information space and reminds analysts that at any time adversaries are seeking to undermine the reputations of individuals, nations, and their alliances. Finally, reputational security is readily open to one of the great lessons of international image: that sometimes the problem is not your image or narrative but the reality behind it. The great strides to advance the reputational security of the United State have included changes to America’s reality made with international audiences in mind. For example, as Mary Dudziak has shown, worries over the international image of the United States were a key driver of both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations’ decisions to address issues of race and Civil Rights (Dudziak, 2000).

How then did the mechanisms of US public diplomacy contribute to the reputational security of the United States? During the 20th century, there were three distinct attempts to create a mechanism through which the United States could engage global opinion, each associated with a crisis. These were the Committee on Public Information (CPI) in the Great War; the Office of War Information (OWI) in World War II; and the initiatives of the early Cold War, overseen from the Department of State, which coalesced into the creation of the independent United States Information Agency (USIA). The existence of single agencies should not obscure the distinct nature of constituent tasks required to engage publics and thereby bolster reputational security. Historically, these have been listening, advocacy (including the countering of

disinformation), cultural outreach, exchanges, and international broadcasting. It is an open question as to whether a single agency is the best way to manage these elements.

## II: It All Begins with Listening

Listening is the process by which an international actor engages a foreign public and integrates what it hears into its foreign policy formation. It is necessarily the foundation of effective public diplomacy, as for all communication. The function was part of the Office of War Information's wartime brief at home and abroad and became a particular strength of the USIA, with the reporting function built into its field posts. Some of this work falls under open-source intelligence. The USIA developed central expertise in the scientific measurement of public opinion. Its great in-house expert for thirty years was Leo Crespi, whose stature may be judged from the fact that he simultaneously served as president of the World Association of Public Opinion Research. Crespi's evidence of the comparative slippage in the prestige of the US was famously leaked on the eve of the Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate on foreign policy (Cull, 2014a). More than this, USIA officers in the field became individually attuned to the currents of opinion in their assigned countries and were able to finetune activities accordingly. The USIA's greatest public diplomacy successes usually reflected local knowledge. The agency's best-attended Expo pavilion (in Osaka in 1972) rested on the insight of the USIA's exhibit director, Jack Masey, that Japanese people would be excited both by a piece of moon rock and the locker and uniform owned by baseball legend Babe Ruth (Conway and Masey, 2008). At some points, agency research materials indicating negative opinions overseas elicited not just different communication but different policy. As already noted, the best example of this is the effect of the USIA's reporting and other feedback stressing the damage to the credibility of the US that flowed from racial segregation. For both Eisenhower and Kennedy this evidence was a spur to deploy federal force in support of change (Dudziak, 2000).

By the same token, failures to listen or failure to transmit listening were part of foreign policy failures. The history of the Vietnam War includes several examples. USIA director Carl T. Rowan neglected to pass on to President Johnson agency evidence that Vietnamese opinion would be unreceptive to increased American involvement. When Lyndon Johnson saw USIA poll evidence of the unpopularity of US foreign policy, he

saw it not as guidance but as a political liability and canceled the agency's global survey before it could become an issue in the 1964 election (Cull, 2008).

The ideal was probably the panel of regional experts convened by George H. W. Bush's White House during the first Iraq crisis and war who were able to shape a culturally sensitive and responsive foreign policy throughout. It is significant that participants had deep knowledge of the Middle East gained from decades of service on the ground and that President Bush and his team had an obvious respect for the extent and relevance of their knowledge (Cull, 2006).

### III. Effective Advocacy Needs a Clear and Credible Story and Local Allies and Partners.

The second core element of public diplomacy is advocacy—the process of engaging a foreign audience around a particular foreign policy issue. Over the years, US public diplomacy has created a stream of publications, commissioned film and television, sent out speakers, and run libraries and other activities as part of its mandate to “tell America's story to the world.” The CPI had what amounted to its own telegraph agency: COMPUB. The OWI made excellent use of documentary film. Local relevance and partnerships emerge as a theme in many of the successes of US public diplomacy. The Marshall Plan did an amazing job of partnering locally to create bespoke materials which worked in the idiom of individual countries: in Ireland, this meant sentimental short films featuring veterans of the Abbey Theatre; in Sicily, this meant puppet shows for non-literate audiences; in the UK, it was witty animation (Ellwood, 2003). The USIA's apparatus included a number of Regional Production Centers at strategic locations like Vienna, Manila, and Mexico City to create media materials closer to their countries of use and in-step with local taste. One of its greatest successes in terms of viewers was a politically-themed television soap opera created for Mexico but seen across Latin America in the mid-1960s: *Nuestro Barrio* (Cull, 2008).

The content of US advocacy has varied, from specific items on a diplomatic agenda such as support for Woodrow Wilson's peace plans to broad presentation of American life and values as with Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Successes of the Eisenhower era included the Atoms for Peace campaign, which helped to decouple nuclear technology from purely military applications in the global imagination, and



People's Capitalism, which countered perceptions of the US economic system as simply exploitative by showing how it shared wealth with the many rather than the few. Similar achievements in the Reagan era included work to reduce European opposition to intermediate nuclear weapons enough to allow their deployment. Justifications of missile deployment were based on materials provided through the USIA but delivered by local voices. The campaign did not teach Europe to love nuclear weapons but cruise missiles could be deployed and hence brought to the negotiating table in Reagan's talks with Gorbachev (Eames, 2023; Cull 2008).

There were limits, of course. The USIA deployed immense resources in support of the US effort in Vietnam in the 1960s but was unable to convince most of the world that the war was necessary or winnable. Public diplomacy alone can not make a bad policy good. A second caveat, specific to strategies of partnership, is that covert support is unwise. The clearest historical example of this was the backlash against recipients of support during the so-called Cultural Cold War—not from the USIA but from the Central Intelligence Agency. Unknowing recipients of CIA largesse in the non-Communist African literary scene experienced news of their benefactor's true identity as a personal violation. In one extreme case—that of South African author Nat Nakasa—it may have triggered suicide (Brown, 2005). The openness of support provided by the National Endowment for Democracy since its creation in the 1980s has accomplished the same objectives of the old CIA program, without a track record of backlash (Cull, 2008; Cull, 2012).

## IV. Countering Disinformation Needs a Multi-pronged Approach

One important subset of advocacy was its role in countering disinformation. This was always closely related to listening. The OWI monitored the rise and fall of Nazi-inspired and home-grown rumors at home and abroad, and came to an understanding that the best response was not to repeat and rebut the rumor but rather to actively sell a vision that undercut the assumption underpinning the rumor in the first place (Cull, 2015). For the USIA in the 1980s, rebutting Soviet disinformation was a major challenge.

Spreading disinformation had become a core activity of the Soviet KGB overseas, and the US faced the steady publication of inflammatory stories and supportive fake documents crafted to implicate the US in the latest assassination, coup, or disease

outbreak. Probably the most damaging Soviet disinformation campaign was one claiming that HIV/AIDS was an American bioweapon run amuck. The story filled a gap in knowledge of the era and played to a long-standing theme in Soviet propaganda, that the US had a track record of bacteriological warfare seen in the Korean War and dating back to the oft-repeated claim in Russian history texts that the US had used blankets laced with smallpox to facilitate the conquest of Native American tribes. The USIA's response to this and other Soviet misdirection worked at a number of levels. In the first instance, the agency's network tracked Soviet disinformation. It then published its findings for the benefit of other federal departments in a regular newsletter called Soviet Propaganda Alert, which circulated widely within the Beltway. Its rebuttals were carefully thought through. The agency's representative on the interagency working group on disinformation—Herbert Romerstein—understood that by revealing Soviet gambits to audiences other than those for whom they were created he could discredit the USSR. The strategy worked extremely well. Romerstein impressed audiences in western Europe with evidence of the laughably extreme claims made by Soviet media in the developing world (Cull, 2008).

But the history of the USIA's response to Soviet disinformation is more complex than simply communicating rebuttals and exposés more effectively. When the time was right, the USIA responded to Soviet disinformation with conventional diplomacy, negotiating what amounted to disarmament in the war of words as surely as the mainstream of US diplomacy addressed the world of conventional weapons. Highlights of information disarmament at the end of the Cold War included mutual textbook reviews, discussions about reigning in media stereotypes, and even an agreement to set up a hotline between embassies to correct misrepresentations swiftly. The most dramatic moment was probably the confrontation of the Soviet government at a health summit in April 1987, when the United States delegation threatened to suspend all cooperation with the USSR in HIV/AIDS research if the country continued to circulate claims that the virus was a US invention. Moscow's use of the claim diminished and—following a second confrontation during the Washington summit of December 1987—evaporated along with other disinformation claims for the remainder of the Soviet period. Mikhail Gorbachev himself pledged: “No more lying, no more disinformation... It's going to be a new day” and so it was for the remainder of his time in office (Cull, 2020).

## V. US Culture Can Be Both a Solution and a Problem

While culture in general and the appeal of US popular culture in particular has long been part of the strength of the United States in global perception, it has a mixed history within US public diplomacy. Culture has been a secret weapon of US diplomacy, with audiences responding to initiatives as varied as jazz and ballet tours or the famous Family of Man photo exhibition co-organized by the USIA and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Yet culture has also been a weakness. US culture offends some audiences and requires contextualization to be explained as unrepresentative of real American life. The USIA had to work hard to show that American culture was not just 'fun' but could hit formal artistic marks as admirably as the formal cultural exports of the Soviet Union. It is significant that when the USIA considered which European journalists could benefit most from exposure to American thought networks through leader exchanges during the 1950s and 1960s, cultural correspondents and writers about dance and classical music were often favored. Embassies understood that such people could play an essential role in disrupting the unfair stereotype of the US as the land of cowboys and rock alone (Scott-Smith, 2008).

For most of its life, the USIA was not the sole diplomatic actor in the cultural field. At its birth Senator Fulbright hobbled the agency by insisting that the Department of State retain the reigns in both culture and exchange work. This meant that from 1953 until a reorganization in the Carter years the State Department oversaw cultural diplomacy through what became the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and subcontracted USIA officers in the field to deliver its program. This anomaly was eliminated in the Carter reform but remains an example of one of the most obvious ways in which the USIA represented the structure that was politically possible at the time and not an inspired and flawless ideal for the ages (Cull, 2016).

Cultural work was often the easiest to criticize, as President Truman discovered when an innovative modern art exhibition sponsored by the USIA's predecessor unit at the Department of State stoked the ire of the domestic media. There is a long history of congressional grandstanding to critique or even mock attempts to work through culture.

Examples include sustained attacks on expo pavilions by Representatives like John Tabor (D. NY), Wayne Hays (D. Ohio), and Neal Smith (D. Iowa) (Cull 2008). Smith effectively ended the run of world's fair pavilions sponsored by the USIA by insisting that the agency raise support from the private sector (Cull, 2012). At the end of the Cold War, it was the USIA's cultural work which lost its budget first. To budget-cutters like Senator Jesse Helms (R. North Carolina) it was an unnecessary extra. A pattern emerged of administrations realizing the value of culture only late in their term. President Clinton hosted his cultural diplomacy summit during the lame duck days following the 2000 election. President George W. Bush's energetic Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs—Karen Hughes—also came late to the importance of cultural outreach. The power of culture has been neglected in US public diplomacy against other components. Simply "bringing back the USIA" would not ensure an effective use of cultural tools.

## VI. Exchanges May Be Slow But Their Impact Lasts

Exchanges are consistently cited by practitioners as the crown jewels of US public diplomacy. They have a track-record of being well-resourced, with funding comparable only to that spent on the technology-intensive area of international broadcasting. As with culture, exchanges had an awkward place at the USIA during its first quarter century, thanks to Fulbright's skewing of the original design. The agency did, however, come to use exchanges effectively. The State Department's role in exchanges dated from the later 1930s and the range of 'good neighbor' initiatives deployed then to promote closer dealings with South America in the name of better hemisphere defense. Exchanges were favored as ideal postwar tools for reeducating Germany and Japan and for promoting the goals of European recovery and integration. The USIA developed a multi-tiered approach to exchange, with short-term International Visitor Leader Program exchanges emerging as a key tool for embassy teams and longer-term exchanges such as Fulbright working to build more substantial networks of mutual knowledge at arms-length, thanks to their board structures. Developments with exchange during the USIA's life included the emergence of bilateral exchanges jointly funded by wealthier partner countries like Germany and Japan and a shift to younger participants, based on an understanding of the value of connecting with individuals before their political attitudes have solidified. This trend towards younger participants continued in the post

9/11 period (Cull, 2019). Simply restoring the USIA would not ensure an effective exchange program.

## VII. International Broadcasting is Powerful but Works Best at Arm's Length

International broadcasting was an ongoing headache for the USIA and another clear example that its setup was not optimal. Radio work had begun in the days following Pearl Harbor. The story told by Voice of America in the service of its modern mission tends to eliminate the contradictions. In this version, broadcasts began with a pledge to tell the truth and proceeded with an unbroken record of objective journalism. The archival record reveals a more complex picture. The war years included both truth-telling and more provocative propaganda broadcasts. The term "Voice of America" was not used consistently by broadcasters and the relationship between VOA and the formal mechanisms of foreign policy was rather fraught. Journalists indulged personal political bias (most notoriously in favor of the Soviet wartime ally) and allowed their critical views of certain diplomatic decisions to color broadcasts. The State Department took exception to on-air reference to the "moronic little king" of Italy. The war ended with VOA still as a definite work in progress. Despite wartime cleaning house, its mixed history left the station as an obvious target for Senator McCarthy. Commercial networks decided that VOA contracts were more trouble than they were worth. Eisenhower increased levels of policy oversight, including a relocation of VOA from New York to Washington, DC. The stabilization of VOA is one of the great achievements of Eisenhower-era public diplomacy. It helped that sections of the government seeking to play propaganda hardball had the CIA-sponsored stations—RFE and RL—in which to invest. By the end of the Eisenhower years, VOA had a clear sense of a news-focused mission and a presidential charter to deliver that.

It fell to the USIA to manage VOA from the agency's inception in 1953 to the reform of the broadcasting oversight mechanism in 1994. The agency was sometimes clumsy in its attempts to direct VOA. While tight control exercised during the Cuban Missile Crisis was understandable, administrations sometimes overreached. Tensions over reporting the end of the war in Vietnam and Watergate were sufficient to prompt bipartisan sponsorship of the VOA charter being written into law in 1976 (Cull, 2008;

Heil, 2003). The news mission of VOA was challenged in the early Reagan period, when incoming political appointees saw the broadcaster as a mechanism for a battle with the Soviet Union and failed to grasp the value of its reputation for objectivity (Cull, 2008). Similar struggles emerged in the wake of the Chinese government's repression of its citizens in 1989. The spat between VOA director Richard Carlson and USIA director Bruce Gelb weakened the image and reality of the agency at the crucial moment of post-Cold War transition (Cull, 2010).

The chain of reforms that led to the creation of the Broadcasting Board of Governors limited the role of the USIA in oversight of US broadcasting. The USIA director became simply an *ex officio* member of the board. This continued after the agency's merger into the State Department and down to the current Agency for Global Media, with the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs as *ex officio* board representative of the Secretary of State. While its institutional context was chaotic, VOA and the other stations showed themselves capable of making a difference to listeners around the world. Strategies that emerged during the 1990s included partnership with like-minded western stations, such as the initiative known as Broadcasting for Child Survival. VOA also showed itself able to maintain impartiality in reporting politically sensitive stories such as Bill Clinton's "Monicagate", an especially sensitive story for VOA as its then director—Evelyn Lieberman—had played a role in events under scrutiny in her former post as a White House aide (Cull, 2012).

## VIII: Bureaucratic Context has Consequences

While work in each of these individual areas provided strength to the USIA, the agency was frequently limited by its political context within the bureaucracy and relationship to the wider world of US defense and foreign policy. The United States is unusual among democracies for perceiving public diplomacy as being a single task. Comparators such as modern Germany, Britain and France prefer to separate and firewall culture, broadcasting, and policy engagement each from the other. Totalitarian states think differently. The reflex of totalitarian states toward global "us versus them" thinking and centralized control structures has led to strongly integrated communication structures both in the past (Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Saddam's Iraq) and present (Russian Federation, Islamicist Iran, and China). The United States has also opted for variations of this same unified approach abroad, perhaps because its expenditure has been

conceived and justified to funders as a response to an adversary's campaign, rather than generally a good thing for a media age. In the era of the United States Information Agency, the US government also adopted unifying terminology to match: the single term "public diplomacy," as popularized by diplomat-turned-dean Edmund Gullion in 1965. The preference for the single umbrella term should not obscure the existence beneath that umbrella of five far older core practices: listening, advocacy, culture, exchange, and international broadcasting. These five elements work in different timescales, rest on different kinds of credibility and could be mutually damaging when mixed. The term public diplomacy was promoted by the USIA as part of its internal argument for sovereignty over all elements of engagement. For all its unified structure and terminology, the USIA prospered in part because its internal culture allowed these five approaches to flourish in their own way, and it fell short when it limited their development. The USIA and its organizing concept of public diplomacy was always a roof for a house divided (Cull, 2014b).

The USIA was also always a component of a larger US foreign policy machine which was itself in motion, as the country formed and reformed its approaches to the foreign policy challenges of the era. The agency existed as part of a process of adaptation to a world increasingly dominated by media and in response to a geopolitical challenge—the Cold War—in which media had particular significance, owing to its ideological nature and the stalemate on most conventional fronts that forced the conflict into psychological space. Key questions opened and re-opened during the period: what was the best kind of institution to oversee information work? How should it be led? How should it interface with other elements of US foreign and defense policy? How should it relate to the US public? This overall experience carries warnings for today's policy makers but also extends a promise of the times when the stars aligned and public diplomacy became a key asset of US foreign policy.

The USIA was created out of a patchwork of pre-existing federal communications activities. It drew on programs created during World War II such as Voice of America and the Office of War Information's embassy posts, known as the United States Information Service (a brand thought sufficiently valuable to be retained overseas after the creation of the USIA). It also absorbed the information elements of the allied occupation of Germany and Japan, such as the Amerika Hauser in Germany and its information work. Experiments with managing outreach in the early Cold War included

establishing an International Information Administration within the Department of State as a home for information, exchange, and broadcasting. The wish of the traditionally-minded Department of State and its especially traditional Secretary John Foster Dulles to be rid of this work was one of the dynamics at work in the agency's creation. Even had Dulles been a tech-loving risk-taker, he might still have felt awkward providing a home to the information program, given continual attacks from Senator McCarthy and others. Indeed, during the opening months of the Eisenhower administration when multiple inquiries were investigating options for restructuring US information, McCarthy's researchers Roy Cohn and G. David Schine launched a high-profile tour exposing alleged leftwing propaganda in the US library network overseas. The decision to establish the USIA as a free-standing agency was taken to head off criticism and rationalize existing operations. It rescued information work from an unsympathetic host but it also saved money. It was only in the area of publicity to Africa that the budget increased with the inception of the USIA (Cull 2008). The point is that it is not clear that just because the sub-agency structure was rejected in 1953 it is unworkable today. Communication is so central to all foreign policy that the idea of a foreign ministry without an in-house capacity of global advocacy and digital diplomacy is absurd. Similarly, the listening function belongs close to the heart of policy. Broadcasting has its independent existence now. It is harder to see how culture and exchange benefit from being sub-units of either the State Department or a notional revived USIA for that matter. The German model of separate academic and cultural agencies or the British approach with the British Council seems optimal. This argument was made by the Stanton Commission on US public diplomacy during the Ford period, only to be lost during the Carter years after lobbying from former USIA directors (Cull, 2016).

## IX. Public Diplomacy Requires Investment in the Public Diplomat on the Ground

The enduring strength of US public diplomacy has always been its foreign service officers and their contribution to the country teams on which they served around the world. The USIA recruited from a range of fields, including journalism, public relations, academia, design and the arts, and officers used their eclectic backgrounds to the fullest. The integration of these officers took time and the evolution of a collective



ethos was also the task of many years. It was only in the later 1960s that USIA officers were permitted to serve as Foreign Service Officers rather than members of the Foreign Service Reserve. In the process, USIA officers evolved a distinct approach to their task. The term public diplomacy may have been coined as a euphemism for propaganda, but USIA officers gave it its own nuance with an emphasis on two way communication, mutual learning, and mutual benefit.

## X. Leadership is Crucial for Success

To be truly effective an agency needs to be connected into policy. This was famously pointed out by Edward R. Murrow in the spring of 1961 when—frustrated by being shut out from policy discussion in advance of the Bay of Pigs invasion—he stated that if the USIA was expected to be “in on the crash landings” of policy it had to be “in on the take-offs” too. The agency had its greatest impact when its director was someone with a pre-existing relationship with the president. Murrow was able to establish a strong relationship with the Kennedy administration perhaps because his key deputies Tom Sorenson and Don Wilson were themselves so well connected with the inner circle. Sorenson’s brother was Kennedy’s lead speechwriter and special assistant Ted Sorenson (Tomlin, 2016). Other administrations had still more direct connections. Lyndon Johnson had a close relationship with his final USIA director, Leonard Marks, who had been lawyer to the family communication business back home in Texas. Ronald Reagan appointed his closest friend—Charles Z. Wick—to direct the USIA, and in more recent years the area of public diplomacy was taken more seriously when George W. Bush set his close associate Karen Hughes at the helm. In the Wick era especially, the connection to Reagan helped the USIA in the struggle for resources and encouraged less well-connected officials to rally to Wick’s initiatives. It was impressive how both officials and private citizens joined in the USIA international advisory council project to brief leading figures in global business of administration priorities under the pretext of consulting them. On the downside, at some points Wick’s friendship with the president set him up as a proxy avenue of criticism, especially from the political right. The friendship did not insulate USIA from congressional budget cuts at the end of the Reagan years (Cull, 2008).

Besides the value in having the right leader, US public diplomacy would benefit from having *any* leader. As researcher and former broadcasting governor Matthew

Armstrong has calculated, since the end of the USIA, the post of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy has been vacant for 40% of the time: hardly a foundation for successful work. Perhaps part of the USIA's secret was simply having someone in charge (Armstrong, 2021).

## XI: Public Diplomacy Needs to be Connected to the Foreign Policy Process

When the USIA was created, it was fully connected to the wider foreign policy process. President Eisenhower invited the agency's director to sit in both his cabinet and the national security council. Unfortunately, these seats were by invitation and not required by law. Later presidents proved able to just as easily exclude the USIA from the inner circle of policy making. The Eisenhower years represent an especially interesting model. The president had realized the vital significance of the psychological dimension—he called it the P factor—during his time as commander of allied forces in Europe. He saw how skilled communication could shorten battles or even render them unnecessary (Cull, 2008). As Stephen Casey has documented, he also saw how poorly managed media behind the lines could create new hills to climb (Casey, 2017). His key lieutenant in many of the psychological battles was an executive from Life magazine—Charles Douglas Jackson (always known as “CD”)—and at the war's end Jackson remained both an associate of his and active in foreign policy establishment movements to rally resistance to Soviet advances. When Eisenhower became president, he called on Jackson to advise on restructuring of the information program and then to serve at his right hand in the White House as a Special Assistant for Psychological Warfare. Jackson's role meant that during the Eisenhower period there was an extra level of coordination of information work: a presidential adviser akin to the National Security Adviser who was in a position to steer both the overt work of the USIA and the covert psychological operations of the Central Intelligence Agency. He could also bring the president's clout to bear on policy matters with psychological or reputational implications which lay beyond USIA or CIA control. He or his successors in the role—William Jackson and Nelson Rockefeller— dealt with a variety of issues of this kind, including alliance relations, image implications of Civil Rights, and the space race (Osgood, 2006; Cull, 2008). In the atmosphere of the 1950s, with leadership from the top and a sense of collective struggle, it is amazing the extent to which the USIA was

able to draw citizen participation into public diplomacy. Famous peaks of State/private partnership included the many elements of US society which rallied to the people-to-people program launched by Eisenhower and the USIA in 1956 (Cull, 2006b). Largely unknown but significant activities included the USIA's role reviewing Hollywood screenplays to take out elements that might seem offensive to international audiences. The agency could draw on celebrity advisers such as filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille or pollster George Gallup. Their work was sufficiently valuable that they were promised places in the US government's deep nuclear shelter: tickets to survive nuclear Armageddon (Cull, 2008).

There are various counter examples of the USIA's exclusion from the foreign policy process. During the Kennedy years the agency was consulted, especially at moments of crisis such as the Cuban missile crisis or panics over Berlin, nuclear testing, and Vietnam; however, there are few examples of Murrow actually prompting a policy change for reasons of public diplomacy. He did manage to delay a resumption of US nuclear tests to emphasize Soviet violation of the moratorium. He was ill during the Cuban Missile Crisis, but his deputy—Donald Wilson—sat on the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM), successfully pushed back against CIA requests, and persuaded the administration to release the U-2 reconnaissance photographs which showed the missile base under construction in Cuba. The images allowed the world to see the same provocation that Washington saw and move to its own conclusions. Johnson drew the USIA into the interagency process specific to Vietnam. Public diplomacy within that country was the responsibility of a USIA-led Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO). The overall information tsar in South Vietnam was the USIA's Barry Zorthian, one of the driving forces behind the VOA charter who was credible to the military side as a marine veteran from the Pacific War. The USIA was also a partner in publicity around the space program, the climax of which in the Apollo moon landings was one of the highpoints of US self-projection (Cull, 2008).

Coordination proved to be more of a problem in the 1970s. The USIA was disadvantaged by National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger's feeling that Nixon's choice as USIA director—Frank Shakespeare—was a loose cannon. Kissinger excluded the USIA from the inner sanctum of policy discussion and even created a special Siberia to hold the USIA at bay. He did, however, see the value of agency programming and was enthusiastic about exchanges. Later in the Nixon and Ford period, the USIA had a

valuable role turning Watergate into a kind of civics lesson and teachable moment. The agency was also a key partner in the planning and execution of international programming around the bicentennial. The bicentennial served as a welcome opportunity to reboot the US image after the difficulties of Watergate and the end in Vietnam, with a renewed focus on core ideas of democracy (Cull, 2008).

During the Carter period, the administration spoke of listening to the world and restoring the US image, but the agency had little direct contact with the president himself. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was an enthusiast for public diplomacy to the extent that it fitted his sense of a return to the Cold War. In contrast, the Reagan years were a golden age when, as in the Eisenhower period, the agency was integral to foreign policy and the director was a character on the diplomatic landscape. The agency's enhanced role was, however, tied to the personal standing of Charles Wick and did not survive his departure from the helm at the close of the Reagan presidency. Thereafter the agency was selectively integrated into the policy process during the George H. W. Bush and Clinton years, playing a significant role over Iraq and democracy promotion in Eastern Europe. Clinton's director of the USIA—Joe Duffey—was a subordinate figure in the policy process. His interface was through the Secretary of State's daily meetings, even though he was himself an agency director. There was irony in the agency's demise. President Clinton understood that maintaining the good image of the United States abroad required payment of UN dues and the signature of the treaty on chemical weapons. He did not see that his agreed quid pro quo—surrendering the independence of the agency responsible for the projection of the US image—might do even more damage to the US image by impairing the country's ability to communicate (Cull, 2012).

The period following 9/11 saw a mismatch between the needs for public diplomacy and the ability of the Department of State to respond. President Bush's first Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy—advertising executive Charlotte Beers—became rapidly frustrated with the channels available to her and looked to the US military to take on more of the burden of engaging foreign publics, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. The imbalance in institutional responsibilities took some years to correct. The reassertion of civilian leadership in the field of public diplomacy is one of the important legacies of the tenure of Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense (Armstrong, 2020).

## XII. Expect Trouble at Home

Historically, one of the problems for US public diplomacy has been discomfort on the part of legislators and many citizens with the idea of media shaped for an external audience skewing domestic politics. Such concerns accelerated the demolition of the Committee on Public Information at the end of World War I and prompted mid-war reform of the Office of War Information during World War II. In the early years of the Cold War, US public diplomacy faced stiff opposition not merely from those who worried about political bias leaching into domestic discussion but also from US media outlets like the Associated Press, who considered that government channels would be unfair competition. Why would a small-town paper subscribe to the AP wire if it could get the news for free by tuning in to Voice of America? The US information program took shape with the expectation that it would be externally focused. A surge in partisanship during the 1960s established a precedent that USIA films could only be shown domestically with a special act of Congress. By the early 1970s, this had been codified into a tightening of the legislation authorizing all post-war US public diplomacy: the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948. The agency learned to live within the strictures of the tightened act and, as is the way of things, it became received wisdom that such was the American Way, rather like the posse comitatus restriction on domestic use of the US military.

The USIA had a second level of domestic difficulties linked to the first. Because of the restrictions on activity at home, the agency could do little to flag its achievements. Its materials were not open to scholarship in the same way as materials created by the Department of State and it lacked an obvious domestic constituency. Groups who cared about US public diplomacy—such as lobbies linked to diasporas within the US—were often a mixed blessing. The political strength of the Cuban American lobby in the electoral battleground state of Florida ensured that US broadcasting had to include an anti-Castro dimension, whether or not broadcasts created could actually be heard on the island. In other cases, lobbies which the USIA hoped might be supportive failed to deliver. The agency's final director, Joseph Duffey, hoped that university partners in exchange programs might rally against the planned merger of the agency in the late 1990s, in the same way that NGOs connected to international aid rallied in

defense of their federal partner, USAID. In the event, the USIA's private partners largely remained quiet, apparently accepting a level of interchangeability in their federal contacts and preferring to keep their powder dry (Cull, 2012).

This experience is instructive. One of the most obvious lessons of US public diplomacy in the 20th century is its inherently controversial nature. Each iteration of US global public engagement has drawn its share of partisan criticism. Congress and the US media have historically seen communication as a prerogative of the private sector and feared the potential for messages crafted for international audiences to spread into the domestic theater. In some eras worries were justified. Personnel in the Office of War Information really were too enthusiastic about the Soviet Union. In other eras domestic suspicions seem more of a reflex. George Creel who ran US propaganda at home and abroad during World War I was a veritable lightning rod for criticism, but it is hard to imagine anyone escaping the ire of the press when attempting to bring order to the chaos of communication in wartime (Hamilton, 2020).

It is the misfortune of international communication to be a field which appears readily understandable to the common citizen, and as such it has been a ready source for a certain kind of political playing to the gallery. In the era of the USIA, the Eisenhower administration was wrong-footed by the inclusion of material presenting Civil Rights problems at the Brussels expo, the Johnson administration was stung by including staged combat footage in documentaries about Vietnam, and the Reagan administration slipped when it attempted to manage domestic thinking about the crisis in Central America through an "Office of Public Diplomacy" at the State Department. The Clinton administration was burned by a plan to rationalize its international media work under Presidential Decision Document 68 (Cull, 2012). George W. Bush drew fire for setting up an Office of Strategic Influence at the Department of Defense. Sensitivity over information policy emerges as a constant. Administrations are attacked for not doing enough and then lambasted for seeking solutions that appear too Orwellian. The sensitivity was revisited in 2022 with the debacle over the Biden-era Department of Homeland Security's ill-starred Disinformation Governance Board. Administrations need to expect that initiatives in this area will be controversial and plan accordingly. To assume that initiatives in information will be treated as less controversial than regular policy is naïve to the point of negligence.

## XIII. An Agenda for Reputational Security, Today and Tomorrow

What then can be understood from the history of US public diplomacy and applied in our own time? Each of the lessons identified above is instructive in its own way for the dilemmas facing the US today and emerging as we look to the future.

### 1) Reputation is Part of Security

The obvious lesson of the history of US public diplomacy is that it matters and has long been a necessary element in foreign policy success. We cannot understand the course or results of the World Wars or Cold War without considering the contribution of public diplomacy and other communication processes to the core tasks of winning friends and blunting the ideas of enemies. Importantly, the great crises of the past century were resolved not simply by the US convincing its allies of the virtues of cooperation, but by winning former adversaries over to shared objectives. The tasks of protecting the reputation of the US and advancing its core ideas are all the more important in an era like our own, in which the media have an unprecedented presence in public lives while at the same time—owing to the relative novelty of social channels—lacking the restraint that comes from the accumulated skepticism of long-term use. It is also clear that enhancing and protecting reputational security is not just about putting out the best image; it requires addressing those parts of our reality that undermine our position in the world.

### 2) It All Begins with Listening

Reputational security requires a clear understanding of how one is perceived in the world. The foundational step here is simply to care about the country's reputation and to do so in a systematic way. Americans are often surprised that some of the things they assume foreigners dislike in their country and dislike themselves—gun violence for example—are not drivers of international mistrust. Dysfunctional government and

intense political divisions are another matter and constitute a much greater danger to the reputational security of the country than stories invented by enemies.

Listening is a deliberate act. Much of the heavy lifting in this area is done by non-governmental sources such as the Pew Global Attitudes Survey or Anholt/Ipsos National Brands Index. But their work needs to be read and considered as a foundation for public diplomacy and matched by ongoing commentary from overseas posts. The USIA's strengths included its capacity for analysis. US public diplomacy today has a dedicated Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R/PPR, often referred to as "Ripper"). Any plan for reviving US public diplomacy should include investment in R/PPR. An enhanced public diplomacy requires a listening mind-set at higher levels of policy making and clear channels for transmission of what is heard in the field.

### 3) Advocacy Needs a Clear Story and Local Allies and Partners

Advocacy remains a key task of public diplomacy and is probably the element seen as most relevant by Congress. Effective advocacy has a role for centrally generated materials, and the history of US public diplomacy includes many examples of national ideas being channeled into materials for international audiences. The diversity of global audiences should, however, put a break on a complete embrace of a one-size-fits-all approach. US public diplomacy has often succeeded because of its ability to be locally flexible and work with credible partners country by country. The digital revolution has increased the relevance of partnership. Audiences around the world use peer-to-peer digital platforms to share information. This is a problem for public diplomacy, where communicators are necessarily unlike their audiences by reason of nationality. In digital public diplomacy, the key question is no longer "what can I say to persuade my audience" but "who can I empower who will be credible to my audience." The implication of this is to redouble the importance of field-level public diplomacy because of the process of local partnership. The creation of the Global Coalition to Defeat DAESH/ISIS in 2014 and the successful operation of its media hub in Abu Dhabi is an example of what can be done.



An important caveat to an emphasis on partnership is that support should be transparent. While covert sponsorship may be very tempting, experience suggests that there is no alternative to transparency.

#### 4) Countering Disinformation Needs a Multi-pronged Approach

Of all advocacy tasks, counter disinformation needs particular attention. Counter disinformation responds to one of the highest profile assaults on US reputational security. The experience of US public diplomacy reveals that counter measures are possible, and that disinformation is not an all-powerful magic weapon. The history of the USIA shows especially the value of tracking disinformation and keeping audiences (within government especially) informed about the emerging lines of attack and the importance of cross-government cooperation. When it comes to presenting disinformation stories to the outside world, there is precedent for being wary of giving a malign story further currency—yet there is still greater value in reporting stories designed for one audience to discredit the adversary in front of another, or compiling multiple and contradictory stories from one source about a single issue and releasing those. This was the British government’s response to Russian disinformation around the chemical attack on Sergei Skripal in 2018. The experience of the USIA suggests that there is also value—when the time is right—in actually negotiating to reign in weaponized information as a route to mutually beneficial stability. Information disarmament may be a way forward in some areas. This might also include negotiating to ensure equal media access in those places, like contemporary China, which make use of easy access to the United States but do not reciprocate.

#### 5) US Culture Can Be Both a Solution and a Problem

US culture remains a key asset for US public diplomacy but also opens vulnerabilities. It is to be expected that some audiences around the world will dislike US popular culture, and exposure to US high culture has long been a helpful balance. Unfortunately, culture has historically been an easy target for politicians seeking to score partisan points at the expense of a sitting administration. Both parties have done this, but the most recent example is Senator Rand Paul using the State Department’s sponsorship of a tour of three South Asian-American comedians to their ancestral homeland, “Make Chai Not War,” in 2012 as a way to embarrass Secretary of State Clinton in 2013 and

prospective Secretary of State John Kerry during confirmation hearings in 2014. Neither Clinton nor Kerry were able to robustly defend the work as relevant to maintaining the US image or as modeling community integration (the three comedians came from different Indian cultural and religious backgrounds). The positions of foreign policy leaders—whether for President Truman when attacked for the State Department’s “Advancing American Art” show or Clinton and Kerry in our own time—would have been stronger if the question of the legitimacy of cultural outreach had already been settled by the establishment of a congressionally-mandated cultural actor, akin to Germany’s Goethe Institute or Britain’s British Council. Such agencies are also easier for cultural figures to partner with as they work at arms-length from particular administrations. The artist is “playing for the country” rather than the administration.

## 6) Exchanges May Be Slow But Their Impact Lasts

Perhaps the strongest lesson to be gathered from practitioners of public diplomacy—after their passion for the field as a whole—is their regard for the particular power of exchanges. There is much evidence that exchanges bring sustained changes in attitudes but, unfortunately, they take a long term to pay off in full. It took a quarter century for the experience of Alexander Yakovlev at Columbia University to pay off in his promotion of the Soviet policy of Glasnost. One implication of this is that policy circles need to accept that public diplomacy and reputational security are part of a long game played across generations. The USIA understood this, crafting exchanges in the 1980s to successfully engage the so-called “successor generation” in Europe. Our adversaries speak in these terms today, investing in educational and language promotion across the long term.

Exchanges need to be responsive to policy in terms of their geography and—to some extent—focus. The Department of State should ensure that country specific exchanges are serving long-term policy priorities and are not stuck in a comfort zone servicing a particular academic discipline. Exchanges are not always successful. There will always be examples of persons whose home identity was strongly affirmed by their experience of the United States and who become enemies. The Egyptian nationalist Sayyid Qutb is the usual example of this, although Putin’s editor-in-chief of RT, Margarita Simonyan, is a potent example from our own time. There will always be outliers, but at minimum, exchanges need to be planned with attention to educational research in fields such as

culture shock. Evidence is clear that short, well-focused exchanges like those operated by the international visitor leader program work well and build positive feelings within the super-positive honeymoon period for the visitor. Longer-term Fulbright visits of a year outlast the disruption of culture shock and enable the visitor to develop a balanced response to the country. Medium-term exchanges of around three months length overlap exactly with the likely formation of negative feelings and may be counterproductive.

## 7) Broadcasting is Powerful but Works Best at Arms-length

International broadcasting by Voice of America and its sister stations has plainly been one of the crown jewels of US public diplomacy. History suggests that this has sometimes been despite the bureaucratic structures created to manage the activity. Policy discussion today might best consider how to support the existing mission of VOA and US international broadcasting more broadly: to uphold its mandate to present objective news at a time when media freedoms are under attack in so much of the world and when US media itself is undermined by partisanship. The history of the USIA's tenure in this role suggests that while international broadcasting requires management to maintain editorial standards, attempts at explicit editorial control are counterproductive. Some of the best work that parent agencies of US international broadcasting have done has been explaining to the rest of the United States why it is so important for VOA and its stable-mates to be objective. Even if Edward R. Murrow had his share of clashes with VOA leadership during his tenure as USIA director, he could be counted on to defend the charter to the rest of government, famously telling Congress in 1963: "To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful" (Kendrick, 1969 p. 466).

## 8) Bureaucratic Context Has Consequences

US public diplomacy has tended towards being focused on a single structure: CPI, OWI, USIA. This means that the process of managing public diplomacy necessarily requires reconciling elements that work in very different ways across different timescales. Other democracies avoid this and prefer to develop agencies dedicated to specific tasks. If the creation of independent agencies is possible, it makes most sense to extend that status to the elements of public diplomacy that are limited or even undermined by their

connection to the ebb and flow of foreign policy—culture and exchange—and work to establish arm’s-length institutions of the kind that already serve western allies so well. At the same time, the administration should work to ensure the integrity of US international broadcasting and its own system of firewalls against the wrong kind of management, which has figured in a number of administrations but was certainly a problem during the Trump era.

Recent consolidation within the public diplomacy bureaucracy has deepened the need for careful oversight. The merger of the Bureau of International Information Programs and the Bureau of Public Affairs into a single Bureau of Global Public Affairs removes an old firewall and opens the possibility of short-term, politically-driven domestic priorities forcing out longer-term international items on the agenda, like a cuckoo chick forcing out nest mates and demanding ever more resource from their unwitting foster parent.

## 9) Public Diplomacy Requires Investment in the Public Diplomat on the Ground

The history of US public diplomacy demonstrates the value of maintaining a corps of experienced public diplomacy professionals with the ability to respond to public opinion as understood locally and to operate creatively. This required structures of personnel management and professional education; it also required adjustment to foreign service rules, formally extending the status of career Foreign Service Officer to public diplomats in the later 1960s. In the immediate aftermath of the merger of the USIA, the welfare of public diplomats suffered. The creativity which had flourished in the old agency withered in the risk-averse culture of the State Department. Public diplomats in the field became and remain subject to the area bureaus within the State Department and are adrift from the authority of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. And yet, moving the entire field of endeavor away from the State Department is not the move that is needed. It would make sense to begin by trying to get the existing mechanisms to work by nominating and appointing people to hold the key posts, valuing public diplomacy achievement, and providing a budget.

## 10) Leadership is a Crucial Factor in Success

The history of US public diplomacy suggests that the area is peculiarly sensitive to leadership—both good and bad—perhaps because the area of activity does not have an automatic profile within the Beltway of the kind enjoyed by other foreign policy agencies. US public diplomacy historically benefitted from leaders who were either public figures in their own right—like Edward R. Murrow—or who enjoyed a trusted relationship with the president, like Charles Z. Wick with Reagan or Karen Hughes with George W. Bush. Yet the problem during the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more often having any leadership at all. Public diplomacy advocate Matthew Armstrong has pointed out that the top position in US public diplomacy—that of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs—has been vacant for 40% of the time (Armstrong, 2021).

## 11) Public Diplomacy Needs to Be Connected to the Foreign Policy Process

For public diplomacy to play a full role in enhancing a nation's reputational security, its concerns need to be part of the highest levels of policy making, both foreign and domestic. This was the case during the Eisenhower years. This suggests that the easiest way to increase the visibility of public diplomacy concerns at the policy-making level is to seek out a new C. D. Jackson to sit alongside the National Security Adviser. Such a figure would have a presidential mandate to convene the kind of conversations necessary to respond to and shape the current public opinion and reputation on the world stage.

## 12) Expect Trouble at Home

Finally, it is clear that public diplomacy and issues around reputational security are inherently controversial. Americans have a historical dislike of giving the sitting government an unfair advantage in domestic communication. It is the misfortune of international political communication to resemble an everyday activity. Everyone considers themselves competent to offer judgment and people in tangential fields believe themselves to be experts. The insights of professionals are too readily sidelined in favor of well-meaning intuition. More than this, public diplomacy necessarily touches

nerves at home. Domestic publics can be outraged that their country is not sufficiently admired overseas. Domestic media have a vested interest in pushing back against a government presence in communication. The history of the USIA and its predecessors shows that in times of partisanship the temptation to play to the political gallery over issues like cultural diplomacy or the representation of domestic problems is too great to resist. Policy makers looking to organize or reshape public diplomacy or to respond to issues of reputation should tread warily, with attention to partisan sensibilities and historic mistrust. The debacle around Homeland Security's Disinformation Governance Board is just the latest such misstep.

The answer is to look to develop bipartisan structures around public diplomacy and to work to build the kind of consensus that supports other aspects of US security.

## Conclusion

The bottom line is that the world has changed from the immediate post-Cold War period. Analysts in those days became used to thinking of communication and cultural outreach as a kind of optional extra. The dominant understanding of Joseph Nye's helpful term "soft power" was that it was a bonus, once the aircraft carriers and economic levers of hard power were in place. Today we need a much more integrated approach. Adversaries large and small are seeking to increase their own standing and diminish the reputations of the United States and its allies and the values for which it stands. Reputation is now central to international struggle in the world and as such represents a vital dimension of security. That is why our adversaries devote so much time and energy to assailing it. An integrated concept of reputational security should require attention to all elements of public diplomacy, including investment in listening. It also gives a renewed logic to cultural and exchange elements: the human dimension that creates the personal experiences that disrupt the stereotypes peddled by others.

Once we think in terms of reputational security, we are obliged to reexamine not only appearance but reality. The path to truly securing the reputation of the United States requires not just better storytelling but living a better story. Foreign audiences know that America is deeply divided and that the political mechanisms which worked so well and attractively in the past are straining as never before. The remedy must include working together to improve the reality. The history of US public diplomacy supports

this approach. When the USIA told the White House of the extent of damage to America's standing that came from the Civil Rights Crisis, the White House responded. But it was changes to the reality of the racial situation in the 1960s that undercut Soviet propaganda on that theme, not simply glitzy communications about other things. Finally, an approach based on reputational security should include helping others to eliminate their vulnerabilities and improve their own ability to present their best face to the world. We need to think of the collective reputational security and mutual benefit derived from credible media and resilient and stable societies around the world. Sometimes investing in the reputational security of others requires constructive discussion of their weaknesses as part of the process of eliminating their vulnerabilities. We cannot restrict discussion of human rights abuses to criticism of our enemies (Cull, 2021).

In whichever way we understand the minutiae of the history of the USIA, public diplomacy plainly mattered in the past and matters now. In a world in which the nation's reputational security is threatened, the tools of public diplomacy are too important to be a mere political football. Inaction is inexcusable. The country would not accept the neglect of its tools of physical security and should not tolerate the neglect—by both sides of the political aisle—of the machinery and policies needed to ensure reputational security.

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