## THE COLD WAR AND THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

Published at a time when the U.S. government's public diplomacy is in crisis, this book provides an exhaustive account of how it used to be done. The United States Information Agency was created, in 1953, to "tell America's story to the world" and, by engaging with the world through international information, broadcasting, culture, and exchange programs, became an essential element of American foreign policy during the Cold War. Based on newly declassified archives and more than 100 interviews with veterans of public diplomacy, from the Truman administration to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Nicholas J. Cull relates both the achievements and the endemic flaws of American public diplomacy in this period. Major topics include the process by which the Truman and Eisenhower administrations built a massive overseas propaganda operation; the struggle of the Voice of America to base its output on journalistic truth; the challenge of presenting civil rights, the Vietnam War, and Watergate to the world; and the climactic confrontation with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. This study offers remarkable and new insights into the Cold War era.

Nicholas J. Cull is professor of public diplomacy at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California. He is the author of *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* and the co-editor (with David Culbert and David Welch) of *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, a member of the Public Diplomacy Council, and President of the International Association for Media and History.

# THE COLD WAR AND THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

## AMERICAN PROPAGANDA AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, 1945–1989

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*For Karen*

# CONTENTS

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

# PREFACE

This book is the biography of an idea: the idea that America needed a permanent apparatus to explain itself to the postwar world. It charts the career of the institution created around that idea – the United States Information Agency or USIA, known overseas as the United States Information Service or USIS – and its role in the Cold War. The book relates the birth, youth, midlife crisis, and mature successes of the USIA. The story of the agency's post–Cold War demise must wait for another volume. The evolution of America's approach to global public opinion remains relevant today, especially as many of the lessons learned across more than forty years of Cold War effort seem to have been forgotten.

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

This book builds on the work of a number of scholars of the history of propaganda,[1] scholars of the role of culture in American foreign relations,[2] and a small group of agency veterans who have written about the USIA and gathered oral evidence from its retirees.[3] Despite these worthy antecedents, it is necessarily offered as a corrective to scholarly neglect. Not only is this is the first full and archive-based historical treatment

[1] The author is indebted to the pioneers of the field of propaganda history, including Philip M. Taylor, Nicholas Pronay, Robert Cole, David Culbert, Ken Short, David Welch, and Garth Jowett, who have provided intellectual models for this project and encouraged its writing, and to Donald Browne, whose work is the starting point for any scholarly engagement with international broadcasting.

[2] Emily Rosenberg and Frank Ninkovich pioneered the study of culture within American foreign policy. Allan Winkler and Holly Cowan Shulman conducted the foundational work on the Second World War period. The birth of U.S. Cold War propaganda has been eloquently covered by Walter Hixon and Scott Lucas, and the linkage between the USIA's Cold War and Civil Rights has been brilliantly explored by Mary Dudziak. Coverage of the USIA in Vietnam obviously benefits from the work of William Hammond and Caroline Page. The Voice of America has been charted by VOA veteran Alan Heil, Alexandre Laurien, and Michael Nelson and in its crucial early phase by David Krugler. Recent studies of particular elements within the U.S. international cultural program have included Penny M. Von Eschen on jazz, Naima Prevots on dance, and Michael Krenn on art. I have also benefited from the recent work of Laura Belmonte, Ali Fisher, Ken Osgood, Giles Scott-Smith, and James Vaughan. I am especially grateful to Gene Parta of RFE/RL for advance access to his monograph on radio audiences in the Cold War U.S.S.R.: R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War*, Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Press, 2007.

[3] In order of publication, the key texts are Wilson Dizard, *Strategy of Truth: The Story of the U.S. Information Service*, Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1961; Thomas Sorensen, *The Word War: The Story of American Propaganda*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968; Fitzhugh Green, *American*

of the agency, but also remarkably few accounts of American diplomacy even mention the USIA. This is not entirely the result of prejudice on the part of "conventional" diplomatic historians. The USIA was restricted in its self-publicity by legislation that underpinned its work, the Smith–Mundt Act of 1948, and had a rather haphazard institutional approach to its archives and record-keeping. The absence of the USIA from the historical record is a substantial omission. It was through the medium of the USIA that much of the world experienced American ideas and culture. It was the agency of "globalization" when no single private corporation could afford to disseminate information globally. It played a key part in the great events of the era, such as the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. World newspapers received key speeches and news stories from its offices; future leaders of the world were cultivated by its tours of the United States; millions read its books and magazines and viewed its films. From Khrushchev's Russia to Nehru's India, the world saw American life and technology firsthand in the vast spaces of major exhibitions and experienced America in the intimacy of the home, over Voice of America radio.

## SOURCES

This history is based on extensive research in the system of presidential libraries, USIA and State Department holdings at the National Archives, and the USIA historical branch collection (most of which has now also been absorbed into the main National Archives holdings). Important collections further afield included the historical collection assembled by the State Department's old Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which is held at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. This book also makes extensive use of more than 100 of my own interviews with agency veterans and serving officers and correspondence with others. Despite the widest foundation possible, the narrative is necessarily selective, and a host of stories remain to be told in the files of the agency and U.S. missions around the world. I am particularly aware that I have privileged the story of the high politics of public diplomacy at the expense of efforts of yeomen in the field, and that I present an analysis of ideas of transient political appointees while passing over the work of thirty-year career veterans. I hope that the veterans will forgive the bias and that my fellow historians will correct it with field-centered case studies.

## DEFINITIONS

The centrality of the concept of public diplomacy to this story requires a brief definition. Although an account of the coining of the term in 1965 is part of the narrative,

*Propaganda Abroad: From Benjamin Franklin to Ronald Reagan*, New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988; Allen C. Hansen, *USIA: Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age*, second ed., New York: Praeger, 1989; Hans N. Tuch, *Communicating with the World: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990; and Wilson Dizard, *Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004. For the parallel story of the State Department's cultural work by a veteran see Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005.

the term as understood today has helped to frame and structure the narrative. The reader must therefore tolerate my use of a twenty-first-century interpretation of a 1965 term to discuss practices in decades before the term was coined. Most simply put, if diplomacy is an international actor's attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with other international actors (traditionally government-to-government contact), then public diplomacy is an international actor's attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics (traditionally government-to-people contact). It has five core components: *listening*: research, analysis, and the feedback of that information into the policy process – an example would be the commissioning of opinion polls by a foreign ministry; *advocacy*: the creation and dissemination of information materials to build understanding of a policy, issue, or facet of life of significance to the actor, which might take the form of an embassy press conference; *cultural diplomacy*: the dissemination of cultural practices as a mechanism to promote the interests of the actor, which could include an international tour by a prominent musician; *exchange diplomacy*: the exchange of persons with another actor for mutual advantage, as in the exchange of college students; and *international broadcasting*: especially the transmission of balanced news over state-funded international radio.[4] The reader will note that these components are not all one-way. Exchanges rest on a two-way flow of people and the listening process feeds data from the field to the center. This said, Cold War public diplomacy was largely characterized by a top-down dynamic whereby governments distributed information to foreign publics using capital-intensive methods such as international radio, exhibitions, and libraries. Since the end of the Cold War, the dynamic has shifted toward a more horizontal structure in which people are connecting with each other in international networks aided by new technologies; governments are joined by nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, corporations, and nonstate actors as practitioners of public diplomacy; and communication happens in real time without clear distinctions between a domestic and an international news sphere. To differentiate between this new reality and the old practices, scholars have begun to speak of the New Public Diplomacy, but this new world lies beyond the scope of this history.[5]

It should be understood that despite addressing publics, public diplomacy does not necessarily engage a mass audience. Public diplomats have always spent some – or sometimes most – of their energy focusing on significant individuals in the knowledge that they can, in their turn, either communicate to the wider public (and do

[4] Commercial international broadcasting (IB) may still be regarded as public diplomacy (PD), but it is diplomacy for the corporate parent, not the state in which the broadcast originates. The corporate parent is free to warp the output or insist on rigid objectivity on its airwaves, according to its desired ends. Both commercial and state-funded IB can affect the terrain on which all PD is practiced: witness the rise of Al Jazeera in the late 1990s. IB work can overlap with all the other PD functions, including listening in the monitoring/audience research functions, advocacy/information work in editorials, cultural diplomacy in its cultural content, and exchange in exchanges of programming and personnel with other broadcasters. The technological requirements of international broadcasting are such that the practice has usually been separate institutionally from other public diplomacy functions, but the best reason for considering international broadcasting as a parallel practice apart from the rest of PD is the special structural and ethical foundation of its key component: news.

[5] For discussion see Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy*, London: Palgrave, 2005.

so more effectively because of local credibility) or become the government insiders in time. It is also worth stressing that public diplomacy is not necessarily the same thing as international communication or intercultural relations. Although international communication and intercultural relations contribute to the terrain on which public diplomacy must operate, they are not public diplomacy until they become the subject of an international actor's *policy*. An outward-bound business traveler is not always an agent of his state's public diplomacy (though he could easily be an agent of his corporation's public diplomacy if that corporation is a player in the international environment), and, similarly, an exported movie is not always part of a nation's public diplomacy. This said, a government's policy to issue the traveler with a leaflet on how to behave overseas, or its input into the making or distribution of the movie, does move these things into the realm of public diplomacy, and such cases will be seen in this history. It is also clear that when a traveler or a movie identified with a particular state offends local sensibilities, it becomes a problem for that state's diplomacy, public or otherwise.

Public diplomacy activities are neither new nor unique to the United States. Its five core practices – listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting – all have considerable antiquity. Sun Tzu urged his ancient Chinese readers to know an enemy's state of mind. Herodotus tells of envoys from the Persian emperor Xerxes appealing to the citizens of Argos to remain neutral during that empire's invasion of Greece. The Roman Republic extended its influence by educating the heirs to neighboring kingdoms. Celtic tribes built bonds by exchanging and fostering each other's children, and long before shortwave radio, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II anticipated its reach by circulating a newsletter about his activities to the courts of Europe. Similarly, at the dark psychological warfare outer edge of public diplomacy, Kautilaya urged his classical Indian audience to influence an enemy by spreading rumors in his midst.[6] America's innovation in the Cold War was to devise a single-portfolio term for all this work – "public diplomacy" – largely, as will be seen, as an alternative to the more familiar but debased word "propaganda." Whether or not we like the term "public diplomacy," the process of an actor's engagement with a foreign public to policy ends is an enduring feature of international life, and public diplomacy is as good a term for the phenomenon as any.

## SCOPE AND BIASES

This book has been though a number of transformations, each of which has left its mark on the text. I originally set out in 1995 to write a history of U.S. public diplomacy during the Vietnam War, but during my preliminary research I became aware of the

[6] For background see Harold Lasswell, "Political and Psychological Warfare," in Daniel Lerner, *Propaganda in War and Crisis*, New York: George W. Stewart, 1951, p. 261; Jarol B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 3; Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings*, pp. 1–23; Michael Kunczik, *Images of Nations and International Public Relations*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997, pp. 152–90; and Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*, third ed., Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003.

manifest lack of a sustained scholarly treatment of the wider subject and decided to broaden my scope to include the whole story of U.S. public diplomacy. I imagined using the prism of the eight or so great crises and diplomatic set pieces of the Cold War, events such as the Hungarian rising of 1956 or the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, to tell the story. Such cases are here, but more was needed. When I commenced research, it became clear that the view of the Cold War as a series of crises, on which my plan was based, implied a crisis-driven structure of public diplomacy, and this simply did not fit the archival record of USIA. First of all, the agency had its own crises – the coincidence of the Little Rock crisis and the Sputnik launch in 1957 with serious management trouble was an especial low point – and its own triumphs, such as the Moscow Exhibition of 1959, the Dominican intervention of 1965, and the Bicentennial in 1976, all of which would have to be addressed. More importantly, I came to see the USIA's Cold War as less a succession of short, intense moments of crisis than a sustained long game of move and countermove against Moscow's propaganda machine, made for control of the contested spheres of Europe, Asia, and eventually the developing world. With this in mind, I resolved to write a seamless history of U.S. public diplomacy through the experience of the USIA. I opted to focus on the agency's administration and to explore the relationship between public diplomacy and the wider foreign policy process.

The research began at the top with the career of each USIA director and their relationships to their respective White Houses and worked outward to the USIA's media operations, paying particular attention to the Voice of America, which former USIA directors consistently cited as their single most important tool. Film also figured prominently, largely because, unlike the VOA's output, it had been archived and could be analyzed in detail, and moreover there was no shortage of archival testimony in the State Department correspondence to attest to its influence. My research then moved outward to the agency's wider activities in the field. This schema produced a narrative rather different from that which I had anticipated. Although the chronology runs seamlessly from 1945 to 1989, the focus on the view from Washington has necessarily been at the expense of the perspective from the field and the day-to-day working practices of the agency.

The available evidence – being disproportionately from the presidential libraries and the USIA Director's files – brought further bias. I have written most about the parts of the story that generated the most controversy, created the most documentation at the top, and loomed largest in the minds of my interviewees. The relationship with the VOA caused innumerable headaches and is treated in depth, and similarly the relationship with Congress and dealings with the Department of State loom large. By the same token, I have written least about the parts of the USIA that functioned best: the exchange-of-persons program seldom figures here, though the agency had a mandate from the State Department to administer that work; libraries and cultural centers attract little attention unless they are opened, closed, or burnt in a riot. I hope that there is enough detail for the reader to extrapolate an accurate picture of the whole. The USIA's research work is also underrepresented here. Although polls and survey activities appear from time to time, there is surprisingly little about the USIA's opinion

research apparatus, largely because such listening activity did not figure prominently in the day-to-day administration of the agency, greatly preoccupy its leaders, or claim much of the budget. If it is absent in this book, it is because it was often absent in the agency's strategic thinking, which must be considered a major weakness within U.S. Cold War public diplomacy.

The psychological warfare activity conducted outside of the USIA by other agencies during the Cold War is dealt with only in passing. Readers seeking detailed treatments of Radio Free Europe or the cultural Cold War waged by the Central Intelligence Agency will need to look elsewhere. Similarly, although key themes in the output of overt American information, such as the civil rights issue, may certainly be traced here, this volume is not structured thematically and the thematically curious reader will need to work from the index. Finally, this volume does not probe issues of the engagement between American and local culture.[7]

## TRAJECTORIES, MAPS, AND THEMES

Each of the five core elements of public diplomacy has a narrative arc that runs though this volume. They are as follows:

1) Listening: The feedback of the USIA's advice and data into the creation of U.S. foreign policy.
2) Advocacy: The ways in which the USIA was mobilized to directly advance the ends of U.S. foreign policy and the shifting approaches of its application.
3) Cultural Diplomacy: The USIA's use of cultural mechanisms including music, exhibitions, and art; its relationship with the practitioners of cultural diplomacy in the State Department; and its drive to acquire dominion over those practitioners.
4) Exchange Diplomacy: The USIA's encounter with the twin of culture, whose adherents within the State Department had their own credo of international relations based on mutuality and reciprocal exchange, and the collision between this outlook and the one-way approach of the leadership of the agency.
5) International Broadcasting: The career of the Voice of America, the development of its own ethical structure based on objective journalism, its shifting approach to America's message, and its struggle to be free from the USIA.

Besides these arcs, the reader will note geographical emphases – one might say maps – within USIA operations, which can be discerned throughout the work:

1) East–West: The role of the USIA in waging the Cold War against the Soviet Union, China, and their satellites.

[7] For first-rate studies of this sort see Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coco-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, and Richard Kuisel's *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

2) West–West: The role of the USIA in sustaining and developing relationships within America's own camp in Europe and Asia.
3) North–South: The development of a role for the USIA in reaching out to the developing world, albeit with a marked obsession with the East–West context of these relationships.

Finally, there are seven essential themes within this work.

1) The relationship of the USIA to the foreign policy process: The White House and the National Security Council.
2) The development of the terminology and the idea of public diplomacy.
3) The relationships between the constituent parts of U.S. public diplomacy.
4) The domestic context of the USIA's work, its relationship with Capitol Hill (and especially the budget process), the media, the private sector, and the American public.
5) The issue of leadership in U.S. public diplomacy.
6) The development of the profession of public diplomat.
7) The changing nature of the task of public diplomacy.

The conclusion will return to these same points and seek to generate lessons from this history for America's public diplomacy today.

One book can only be a starting point. This study is offered as a framework of narrative history on which colleagues can build case by case, country by country, and element by element the next level of analysis of the role of public diplomacy in postwar American foreign relations, and – by example – begin to chart the public diplomacy of others. The significance of a such a collective project increases with each passing year. Since the end of the Cold War, international relations have moved ever more plainly into the territory of public diplomacy. America's past experience in this field stands as a guide – and a warning – to diplomats of the present and the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has taken twelve years to write, and, in that time, I have contracted a long list of debts on both sides of the Atlantic. At the outset I benefited from discussions about the subject of Cold War propaganda with two remarkable teachers: Philip M. Taylor and Nicholas Pronay at the University of Leeds. I began writing a case study of the USIA's activity during the Vietnam War, but David Culbert persuaded me to broaden it into a full-scale history of the agency. The post–Cold War parts of the story will appear in a later volume.

My work began in 1995 when, while teaching at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, I received the first of two grants from the British Academy to research the USIA in the United States. The Department of History at the University of Maryland at College Park provided a visiting affiliation. Here Holly Cowan Shulman took me under her wing and began introductions to veteran staff at the VOA, while Jon Tsumida provided sustaining intellectual companionship. Fellow visitor at Maryland

Mel Leffler of the University of Virginia also provided early encouragement. Martin Manning at the USIA Historical Branch initiated me into the workings of his agency and directed me to willing sources of testimony, while the VOA's head of public information, Joe O'Connell, became and has remained an invaluable point of contact with U.S. international broadcasting. At the National Archives, Sally Kuisel helped me access new sources. Much of the material used here simply could not have been opened without her intervention on my behalf.

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David Chang helped with the bibliography, and Andrew Sternberg copy edited an interim version of the manuscript. William A. Coger proofread the final work. The UK Arts and Humanities Research Board funded study leave to write.

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My final debt is to my family, who know that the years 1995–2007 have been something of a roller coaster ride for the author. My parents, Joan and Tony Cull, my sister Hilary O'Sullivan and her family, and my late grandfather Bernard O'Callaghan all provided vital emotional support. My sons, Sandy and Magnus, brought much good cheer to the final years of this project. Above all, my wife, Karen Ford Cull, has been *the* essential part of the completion of this book: challenging me intellectually, sustaining me personally, and holding the fort during my physical absences. This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife with much love.

Nick Cull
Redondo Beach, California, December 2007

# ABBREVIATIONS

## Abbreviations used in text

| | |
|---|---|
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| BBG | Broadcasting Board of Governors (parent body to RFE/RL, VOA, etc., 1994– ) |
| BCICA | Bicentennial Committee on International Conferences of Americanists |
| BIB | Board for International Broadcasting (parent body to RFE/RL, 1972–94) |
| CAO | cultural affairs officer |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| CPI | Committee on Public Information (in First World War) |
| CU | Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (at Dept. of State) |
| ECA | (1) Economic Cooperation Administration (Marshall Plan)<br>(2) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (State Dept., 1999– ) |
| ERP | European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) |
| FBIS | Foreign Broadcast Information Service |
| HICOG | High Commissioner for Germany |
| IBB | International Broadcasting Bureau (management unit for the VOA, RFE/RL, etc., 1994–) |
| IBS | International Broadcasting (USIA internal designation for the VOA) |
| IIA | International Information Administration (State Dept., 1952–53) |
| IIIS | Interim International Information Service (State Dept., 1945–46) |
| IIP | Bureau of International Information Programs (State Dept., 1999– ) |
| IMG | Informational Media Guarantee progam |
| IMV | USIA designation for motion picture branch |
| IPI | International Public Information Group (Clinton era) |
| IPS | International Press Service (within the USIA) |
| JUSPAO | Joint United States Public Affairs Office (in Vietnam) |
| NSC | National Security Council |
| OCB | Operations Coordinating Board (in Eisenhower era) |
| OEX | Office of Educational Exchange (OIE/USIE/IIA subunit, 1948–53) |
| OIAA | Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (Rockefeller Office) |
| OIC | Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (State Dept., 1946–47) |
| OIE | Office of International Information and Educational Exchange (State Dept., 1947–48) |
| OII | Office of International Information (OIE/USIE/IIA subunit, 1948–53) |
| OWI | Office of War Information (World War Two) |
| PAO | public affairs officer |

| | |
|---|---|
| PSB | Psychological Strategy Board (in Truman era) |
| RFE/RL | Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty |
| RIAS | Radio in the American Sector |
| USIA | United States Information Agency |
| USICA | United States International Communication Agency (in Carter era) |
| USIE | United States Information and Exchange (State Dept., 1948–52) |
| USIIA | See IIA |
| USIS | United States Information Service (term used for USIA posts overseas) |
| VOA | Voice of America |

### Abbreviations used in footnotes

| | |
|---|---|
| ADST | Association for Diplomacy Studies and Training |
| ASoS | Assistant Secretary of State |
| CF | Confidential file |
| DASoS | Deputy Assistant Secretary of State |
| DDEL | Dwight D. Eisenhower Library |
| EF | Executive file |
| Emb. | Embassy |
| *FRUS* | *Foreign Relations of the United States* |
| GBL | George [H.W.] Bush Library |
| GRFL | Gerald R. Ford Library |
| HSTL | Harry S. Truman Library |
| JFKL | John F. Kennedy Library |
| LBJL | Lyndon B. Johnson Library |
| LoC | Library of Congress |
| NA | National Archives |
| NA SMPVB | National Archives Sound Motion Picture and Video Branch |
| OF | Official file |
| *PPP* | *Public Papers of the Presidents* |
| RG | Research group |
| RNPM | Richard Nixon Presidential Materials |
| RRL | Ronald Reagan Library |
| SoS | Secretary of State |
| UoA | University of Arkansas |
| UoC | University of Chicago |
| USIA HB | USIA Historical Branch |
| USoS | Under Secretary of State |
| WHCF | White House Central Files |
| WHORM | White House Office of Records Management |