

The United States Information Agency

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“Information and education are powerful forces in support of peace. Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace.”

President Dwight Eisenhower, January 27, 1958¹

“The employees of USIA — Americans and Foreign Service Nationals — have been the human face of America’s public diplomacy, people-to-people diplomats in times of crisis and times of hope. You are freedom’s herald. You must tell those who have earned their freedom and those still yearning to be free that we support their battle for liberty, democracy and dignity.”

President Bill Clinton, USIA’s 40th anniversary, 1993²

What was USIA?: Overview, Mission, Structure

The United States Information Agency (USIA) was an independent executive agency responsible for American public diplomacy, most centrally during the Cold War period.

USIA was the largest full-service public relations organization in the world, with an annual budget over \$500 million in the 1980s, which eclipsed \$1 billion in the years directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall.³

It presided over U.S. government communications to over 150 populations internationally during the height of the Cold War.



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Mission: to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad.

Specifically, this mission is carried out through four distinct functions:⁴

1. Explain and advocate U.S. policies in terms that are credible and meaningful in foreign cultures
2. Provide information about the official policies of the United States, and about the people, values, and institutions which influence those policies
3. Bring the benefits of international engagement to American citizens and institutions by helping them build strong long-term relationships with their counterparts overseas
4. Advise the President and U.S. government policy-makers on the ways in which foreign attitudes will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of U.S. policies

Legislative Precursors

Following World War II, Congress acknowledged the need for the federal government to communicate with foreign populations, continuing the wartime exchange of information into a permanent, peacetime practice.

This concept, coined as “public diplomacy” by Edmund Gullion in 1965, includes activities such as international broadcasting, publication of materials, cultural/educational/technical exchanges, and other information dissemination tactics.⁵

The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 established the mission of public diplomacy within the purview of the State Department’s Office of Public Affairs.

This statute was the policy outcome of a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report and bipartisan Smith-Mundt Commission findings aimed to combat “weapons of false propaganda and misinformation” against foreign populations.⁶ Voice of America, a wartime creation, was transferred to State as a permanent media outlet for US communication to foreign populations. The act also strengthened the cultural exchange Fulbright Program (later to be overseen by USIA) as a tool of public diplomacy.

In 1953, President Eisenhower appointed The President’s Committee on International Information Activities to study the global effects of propaganda and its relation to U.S. national security.

The “Jackson Committee” subsequently recommended the establishment of a permanent agency responsible for the strategic dissemination of an American message to foreign peoples – which would be the role of USIA as created by Executive Order 10477 later in 1953.⁷



The Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1972, an amendment to Smith-Mundt, expressly prohibited federal bureaucracies (not including the DoD) from domestic dissemination of information in general, which was a task set aside for Congress, the American media, and academia.⁸

USIA, as the instrument of American public diplomacy, was later specifically prohibited from disseminating its foreign message to American citizens. The “Zorinsky Amendment,” passed in 1985, formally banned USIA and its media arms from domestic dissemination activities.⁹

Specific media channels were utilized to spread the intended message to the target audience abroad.¹⁰ USIA was the domestic moniker for the agency. It was known abroad as the United States Information Service (USIS).¹¹

Personnel

After personnel reductions in 1997, USIA’s employment totaled 6,352.

Of those 6,352 USIA employees:¹²

- 904 Americans were Foreign Service personnel
- 2,521 were locally-hired Foreign Service nationals
- 2,927 were domestically-based civil servants
- 1,822 in international broadcasting; 1,105 employed for educational & informational programs

By FY1999, Foreign Service Officer (FSO) deployments overseas had been reduced to 520 FSOs dispersed among 190 posts in 142 countries.¹³

USIA FSO personnel were placed abroad in conjunction with the State Department’s deployments.

FSO deployments typically consisted of three major officers per country: the public affairs officer (PAO), information officer (IO), and cultural affairs officer (CAO).

The PAO was the senior public affairs strategy and implementation advisor to the ambassador, while the IO and CAO were subordinates, reporting to the PAO.¹⁴

The staff was typically stationed at the embassy or, security allowing, at other off-site outposts within the capital or major cities.

Work sites could be permanent (i.e.: USIA libraries/Information Resource Centers) or temporary locations associated with a given campaign.¹⁵

History

The agency was formally founded in 1953 under the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

USIA existed until 1999, when it was disbanded under the provisions of the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998.¹⁶

This legislation, which placed USIA and the independent Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) within the State Department, was designed to consolidate missions falling under the general umbrella of diplomacy.

The statute also placed USAID under the Secretary of State's leadership and granted the Broadcasting Board of Governors independent agency status. The budgets and personnel of ACDA and USIA were incorporated into State's subsequent FY2000 budget request.¹⁷

Legislative Timeline

- 1948: Public diplomacy function established in the State Department under Smith-Mundt Act.¹⁸
- 1953: Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, USIA is officially created as the independent federal agency responsible for public diplomacy through Executive Order 10477 and the President's Reorganization Strategy No. 8.¹⁹
- 1961: Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange/"Fulbright-Hays" Act formalizes USIA control over exchange programs, most notably the Fulbright Scholarship Program.²⁰
- 1977: President Jimmy Carter establishes the International Communication Agency (ICA) with Executive Order 12048.²¹ This transfers all functions of USIA to ICA, until the E.O. is reversed under the direction of the Reagan administration.
- 1982: Executive Order 12388, issued by President Reagan on October 14th reconstitutes USIA and abolishes the International Communication Agency.²² This was a nominal, rather than structural, realignment.
- 1985: "Zorinsky Amendment" prohibits domestic broadcasting/publication by USIA entities.²³
- 1994: International Broadcasting Act consolidates all international broadcast services of the American government under the umbrella of the newly created Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).²⁴
- 1998: Passage of Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act, abolishing USIA effective 1999 and dividing its duties between State Department & Broadcasting Board of Governors.
- 2012: The proposed Smith-Mundt Modernization Act of 2012, which is currently referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, would lift the ban on domestic dissemination of information by the public diplomacy agencies of the U.S. government (BBG & State).²⁵

This piece of legislation would effectively overturn the Zorinsky Amendment, and it is a response to the "Neglected Mandate" of American public diplomacy to educate Americans about the outside

world.²⁶ The Congressional Research Service estimates a 1% chance the bill will pass in the general assembly as currently written.²⁷

List of USIA Directors^{28, 29}

Theodore Cuyler Streibert (1953-1956)

Arthur Larson (1956-1957)

George Venable Allen (1957-1960)

Edward R. Murrow (1961-1964)

Carl Thomas Rowan (1964-1965)

Leonard Harold Marks (1965-1968)

Frank J. Shakespeare Jr. (1969-1973)

James Keogh (1973-1976)

John Edward Reinhardt (1977-1980)*

Charles Z. Wick (1981-1989)

Bruce S. Gelb (1989-1991)

Henry Edward Catto Jr. (1991-1993)

Joseph Duffey (1993-1999)

Penn Kemble (1999)**

**Following the passage of Executive Order 12048 (effective April 1, 1978), John Reinhardt served as director of ICA. USIA was officially reconstituted under its previous name during Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1982.*

***Penn Kemble served as acting director of USIA in 1999 prior to its integration into the State Department on October 1, 1999*



Edward Murrow

The most famous director of USIA was Edward Murrow, a prominent journalist and broadcaster at CBS. Murrow was well-known and respected by the American people for his coverage of foreign and domestic issues during WWII and the Cold War.

His appointment by President John F. Kennedy and productive (albeit limited) tenure at USIA added legitimacy to the agency's mission for the American people.

Modern Vestiges of USIA

Upon USIA dissolution in 1999, its responsibilities were divided between the Broadcasting Board of Governors (broadcasting function) and the Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy within the State Department (information and exchange functions).

The Public Diplomacy & Public Affairs office of the State Department is modernly known internally as “R.”

“The Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs leads America’s public diplomacy outreach, which includes communications with international audiences, cultural programming, academic grants, educational exchanges, international visitor programs, and U.S. Government efforts to confront ideological support for terrorism. The Under Secretary oversees the bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Public Affairs, and International Information Programs, and participates in foreign policy development.”³⁰

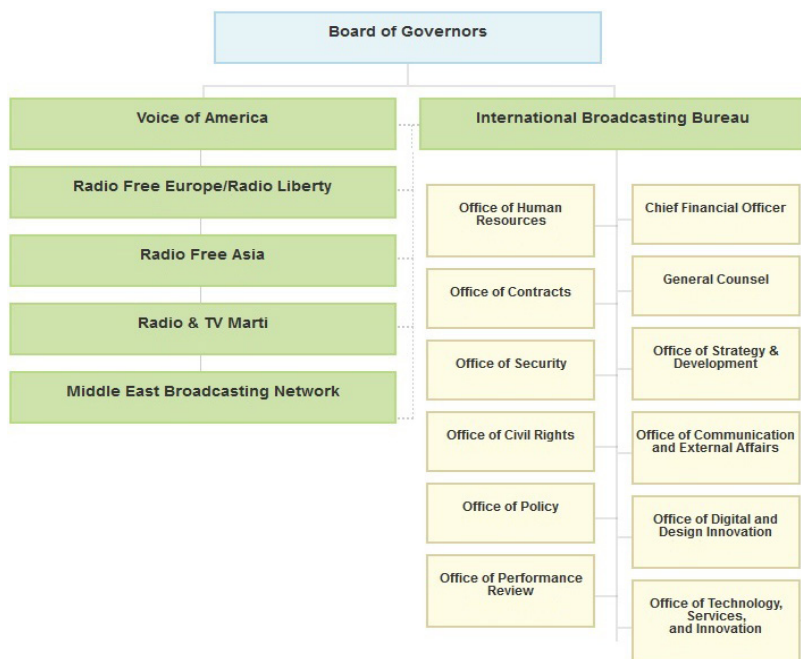
The current Under Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy is Tara Sonenshine, who was sworn into office on April 4, 2012.³¹

Broadcasting Board of Governors

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), established as an independent agency under the 1998 legislation, is tasked with all non-military international broadcasting duties of the federal government.

The BBG is the coordinating body which presides over the activities of the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) and five broadcast entities – Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio/TV Marti (Office of Cuba Broadcasting), Radio Free Asia, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks.³²

BBG controls all mediums of state broadcasting including radio, television, satellite, and Internet. BBG’s congressional budget award over the past five years has ranged from \$650 to \$750 million.³³



BBG Organizational Structure³⁴

Voice of America

Initially established as a source of information for foreign populations during WWII, the Voice of America (VOA) is the official external broadcast institution of the United States.

Through radio and television broadcasts and its website, VOA disseminates objective news reports intended for foreign populations. With 1,209 employees and an annual budget constituting roughly 30% of the BBG's allocation (FY2013 budget - \$205.1 million), Voice of America broadcasts reaches an estimated 141 million weekly viewers. It broadcasts in 43 languages through 1,200 local radio and TV affiliate stations.³⁵

VOA aims to convey America's messages of liberty, democracy, and free speech by providing factual, unbiased reports where in places where state control of the media fails to do so.

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Endnotes

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Building a New American Arsenal

The American Security Project (ASP) is a nonpartisan initiative to educate the American public about the changing nature of national security in the 21st century.

Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

ASP brings together prominent American leaders, current and former members of Congress, retired military officers, and former government officials. Staff direct research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, failed and failing states, disease, and pandemics. The same-old solutions and partisan bickering won't do. America needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

ASP exists to promote that dialogue, to forge consensus, and to spur constructive action so that America meets the challenges to its security while seizing the opportunities the new century offers.



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