



A NEW DIPLOMACY FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

**United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
November 1996**

TO THE PRESIDENT, CONGRESS, AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

I. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW DIPLOMACY

- A. Executive Branch
 - 1. White House
 - 2. Department of State
 - 3. U. S. Information Agency
 - 4. U.S. Agency for International Development
 - 5. Defense Department
- B. Congress
- C. Non-Governmental Organizations

II. FOUNDATIONS OF A NEW DIPLOMACY

- A. Information Revolution
- B. People and Power
- C. Globalized Issues
- D. Non-governmental Organizations

III. EXECUTION OF A NEW DIPLOMACY

- A. Global Digital Network
- B. USIA's Advisory Role
- C. U.S. International Broadcasting
- D. Exchanges
- E. Overseas Presence

IV. CONCLUSION

A NEW DIPLOMACY FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

**United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
November 1996**

The information revolution and the growing power of foreign publics are the foundations of a New Diplomacy.

November 1996

To the President, Congress, and the American People:

The Information Age is increasing the power of information and revolutionizing how America communicates with the world.

Simultaneously, because of the growth of democratization and free markets, foreign publics have become far more powerful.

This is good news for America. We have an immense edge in a world where people and information matter more. We have unmatched communications skills and information technologies, and we have incomparable experience with democracy and free markets.

To ignore this edge would be to waste an incredible opportunity. To exploit this edge requires a

complete rethinking of U.S. foreign affairs agencies.

Moreover, a New Diplomacy rooted in the Information Age is a necessity if we are to rekindle the American public's interest in foreign policy.

The Commission strongly recommends that the Administration and Congress rethink current arrangements and develop a New Diplomacy for the Information Age and the worldwide increase in the power of foreign publics. Our recommendations are designed to aid such rethinking.

	Lewis Manilow Chairman Illinois	
William J. Hybl Vice Chairman Colorado	Walter R. Roberts Washington, DC	Pamela J. Turner Virginia
Harold C. Pachios Maine	Maria Elena Torano Florida	Charles H. Dolan, Jr. Virginia

United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy

A Presidential Commission created by Congress to provide bipartisan oversight of U.S. government activities intended to understand, inform and influence foreign publics. The Commission reports to the President, Congress, the Secretary of State, the USIA Director, and the American people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW DIPLOMACY

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

WHITE HOUSE

- Make clear through Presidential directives and appointments that information is as important as political, economic, and military power -- and that understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics is a high national priority.
- Recognize that governments now change more frequently and that America's diplomacy must be supported by foreign publics as well as foreign governments.
- Designate the U.S. Information Agency a regular participant in National Security Council and other policy planning meetings so that advice on foreign publics and communication strategies can be built into policy decisions.
- Require that all U.S. embassies and foreign affairs agencies have access to the Internet and related technologies.
- In the selection of ambassadors, make skill in communicating with foreign publics a highly significant factor.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

- Transform the State Department's thinking and priorities so that it can deal as effectively with foreign publics as with foreign governments.
- In the recruitment of new officers and in their subsequent training, put much greater emphasis on the necessity to communicate with foreign publics and the skills to do so.

U.S. INFORMATION AGENCY

- Build a global, high-speed interactive digital network for multilingual voice, video, print, and data communication worldwide. This network should be separate from and complementary to the Department of State's telecommunications service (DTS-PO) whose highest priority is secure communications.
- Increase polling and research studies to better understand foreign attitudes for effective decision-making and communication.

- Funding for such a global digital network and increased foreign opinion research should come from a reduction of international broadcasting and consolidation of exchanges.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- AID is becoming less a source of funds for large capital projects and more a facilitator of programs that promote economic growth, advance democracy, deliver humanitarian assistance, protect the environment, and create digital technology infrastructures. A New Diplomacy will clarify and build on these missions.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

- The Defense Department recognizes that understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics reduces tensions and saves lives. Current ad hoc inter-agency coordinating mechanisms between the Department of Defense, USIA, and other foreign affairs agencies should be institutionalized.

CONGRESS

- House and Senate appropriations subcommittee structures force foreign affairs to compete for funds with prisons, the FBI, the National Weather Service, and other domestic programs. Congress should install "firewalls" so that foreign affairs does not compete with domestic spending.
- The budgeting process should assure adequate funding for information age technology and programs intended to influence foreign publics.
- USIA should be invited to provide periodic briefings and research reports on foreign public opinion.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

- NGOs are an enormous asset to countries in transition to democracy and free markets. A New Diplomacy should define appropriate relations between government and NGOs and identify clearly the strengths of each.

FOUNDATIONS OF A NEW DIPLOMACY

The information revolution and the growing power of foreign publics are the foundations of a New Diplomacy. Together with the globalization of issues and the rapidly expanding reach of NGOs, they are fundamentally changing how the U.S. pursues its interests abroad.

In the following sections, the Commission addresses America's advantages in this new world and how these forces are transforming traditional diplomacy. The Commission then cites five broad areas where change is needed in USIA, the government agency principally engaged in public diplomacy.

INFORMATION REVOLUTION

Information technologies are fundamentally transforming the way we live, work, govern, and communicate.

In country after country, governments, corporations, educators, military leaders, and a growing number of citizens' groups are defining their future with the knowledge that ideas, products, and activities can be delivered in digital form.

America has an unmatched capacity to create and integrate complex information systems. This is our edge. It is extraordinarily attractive to other countries. Helping them develop their own information societies can have positive consequences in our relations.

These technologies hold enormous promise for America's leadership. Yet, U.S. foreign affairs agencies have barely scratched the surface in capitalizing on their potential.

The United States should move quickly to build open, reliable networks for communication within and between Washington agencies and U.S. missions abroad, and with NGOs and populations worldwide.

Information technologies will never replace human contact. Indeed, their value in furthering U.S. interests abroad will make diplomats on the ground even more essential in connecting useful

information with influential users.

Traditional communications will remain necessary in much of the world. But digital technologies increasingly will become universal and taken for granted. They will enhance and replace many traditional programs. They are the inevitable and cost-effective tools of a New Diplomacy.

PEOPLE AND POWER

The United States has enormous capacity to achieve favorable outcomes through what Joseph Nye has called "soft power," or the "ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others."^{*}

Soft power strengthens American diplomacy through attraction rather than coercion. Our interests are enhanced to the extent people speak English and are familiar with or use our legal and financial systems. Democracy and free markets can lead to better trading partners and governments less inclined to war and terrorism.

People are changing their governments and influencing what governments can do more than any time in history. The number of societies in democratic transition is unprecedented. Recent democratic elections in Russia, Taiwan, the Palestinian West Bank and elsewhere have profound consequences for diplomacy. Even in one-party states, regimes cannot act entirely or for long without regard for public opinion.

America still needs diplomacy between governments, but policies and negotiated agreements will succeed only if they have the support of publics at home and abroad.

^{*} Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and William A. Owens, "America's Information Edge," Foreign Affairs, March/April, 1996.

GLOBALIZED ISSUES

The globalization of issues -- trade, financial markets, immigration, drug trafficking, weapons of mass destruction, the environment, intellectual property, disease, terrorism -- is blurring the separation of foreign affairs and domestic politics.

The State Department now accounts for less than half the staffing at most U.S. embassies. In Mexico, for example, U.S. interests are shaped by 32 government agencies including the Departments of Justice, Agriculture, Treasury, Commerce and Defense, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the FBI, and the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Add financial investments, American popular culture, family ties, a host of NGOs, California and Texas, San Diego and San Antonio, and it is clear that relations between the United States and Mexico are far more complex than what happens between the State Department and the Mexican foreign ministry.

This globalization of issues and actors means America must practice a new kind of diplomacy. It will require state-of-the-art information systems. It will demand new ways of helping non-foreign service officers understand foreign publics, history, and cultures. It will call for ambassadors to manage missions where U.S. interests are served by diverse organizations with ambitious agendas.

"As we move from the industrial to the information age, from the Cold War world to the global village, we have an extraordinary opportunity to advance our values at home and around the world." -- President Clinton

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

NGOs are powerful players in an international scene transformed by the increased power of ordinary citizens. They are independent of the U.S. government. They reflect the quintessentially American tradition of volunteerism -- and a civil society in which Americans organize themselves to solve problems rather than leaving them to government.

NGOs are an enormous asset in assisting countries making the transition to democracy and free markets. In many ways they can do things better than government. They foster a flexible style that encourages innovation. Many are exploiting digital technologies in their daily work. They offer the world a winning combination of America's greatest strengths: professional skills, a wealth of

experience, fresh perspectives, and enormous good will.

The proliferation of NGOs presents new opportunities for America's diplomats. The activities of NGOs should be seen as different from, but complementary to, those of the U.S. government. Building civil societies is important and difficult work with room for all comers. Through cooperation with NGOs, U.S. officials will learn more about the societies in which they work, accomplish more in an era of limited resources, and send a message to societies in transition that the American people -- not just their government -- care deeply about their success.

Defining appropriate relations between government and NGOs, identifying clearly the strengths of each, and helping NGOs do what they do best will be critical tasks for a New Diplomacy.

NGOs are an enormous asset in assisting countries making the transition to democracy and free markets.

EXECUTION OF A NEW DIPLOMACY

Recommendations for a New Diplomacy regarding the foreign affairs agencies of the U.S. government are included in the opening summary. Inasmuch as the United States Information Agency is the principal U.S. agency engaged in understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics, more detailed recommendations are warranted.

The information revolution and the power of publics make USIA's work more essential. At the same time, these forces require fundamental changes in USIA's priorities and programs. For example:

- Direct radio broadcasting and news gathering (USIA will need far less);
- Traditional libraries (many will be replaced by on-line reference services and electronic libraries);
- Exchanges (will be enhanced by distance learning);
- The Washington File (is being transmitted via the Internet);
- Publications (are giving way to Internet publishing);
- Speakers (are being augmented and replaced by digital video conferencing).

The Commission sets forth below needed changes in information technologies and USIA's central operating elements: opinion research, overseas missions, exchanges, and international broadcasting.

We recommend increases for a global digital network (an estimated \$10 million in capital investment for 150 sites and \$6 million in annual operating funds) and for opinion research (\$5 million annually). Offsets for these increases should be more than covered by savings from international broadcasting, exchange consolidation, and reduced communications costs.

During the past four years USIA has reduced staff more than 25 percent and overall funding by 28 percent in real terms. The Agency has eliminated core programs, closed overseas posts, and cut personnel at headquarters and in the field. The Commission believes continuation of these reductions would exceed levels that are wise and that national needs require in the Information Age.

GLOBAL DIGITAL NETWORK

Interactive digital technologies have significant cost-saving implications for many administrative and program activities. The U.S. government does not have the state-of-the-art digital network it needs for open communication with U.S. missions, and with local populations and NGOs around the world. The Department of State's Diplomatic Telecommunications Service Program Office (DTS-PO), which is responsible for creating such a network, has not developed a system that meets USIA's needs. DTS-PO's first priority is to build a network for closed communication within 46 U.S. government agencies. For example, it does not permit digital video conferencing or provide sufficient access to the World Wide Web.

Congress and OMB should authorize USIA to develop, in partnership with the private sector, a global, high-speed interactive digital network with adequate bandwidth for multilingual voice, video, print, and data communication. The network will enable USIA, the State Department, and other agencies to use the low cost, readily available technologies that are revolutionizing global communications.

Opinion leaders and decision makers increasingly are users of the Internet, the World Wide Web,

electronic libraries, personal computers, digital video, and other new information technologies. Many are young, educated, and affluent -- future leaders with whom it is in America's interest to have a dialogue.

USIA'S ADVISORY AND RESEARCH ROLE

A New Diplomacy requires strengthening the USIA Director's role as advisor to the President, Secretary of State, and National Security Council on the impact of U.S. policies on public opinion abroad. Knowing what foreign publics think is crucial to effective policies and communications strategies.

USIA should be a regular participant in NSC and other policy planning meetings. The Agency should develop the institutional support needed to enhance its advisory role -- to put opinion research and the views of professionals who understand foreign publics at the service of the wider government and NGO community that now shapes U.S. interests abroad.

There is a fundamental imbalance in USIA's priorities. USIA spends nearly \$1 billion annually on radio broadcasting, exchanges, and a variety of press and public affairs activities intended to "inform and influence" foreign publics. USIA spends only \$5 million -- of which a mere \$1.9 million is for polling -- on opinion surveys, research studies and other tools essential to "understanding" foreign attitudes and cultures.

Funding for foreign opinion research should be increased to \$10 million. USIA should increase dissemination of research studies to U.S. agencies, NGOs, think tanks, and universities. It should initiate the commercial sale of polling results to private sector clients, and it should seek to increase co-funding arrangements for polls useful to other U.S. agencies.

Reading the mood on the streets of Moscow, New Delhi, Havana, or Sarajevo is crucial to responsible policy judgments.

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

Although audiences for U.S. government radio broadcasts are falling, USIA still spends \$101 million annually on the Voice of America, \$94 million on surrogate radios (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and Radio Marti), and \$116 million on signal delivery costs.

U.S.-financed radio broadcasts should be decreased. The savings should come from the 57 language services and not from English broadcasts, which should be accorded higher priority. More people than ever before understand English, and the Commission welcomes VOA's new 24-hour English language network.

Savings should come also from privatization of RFE/RL's surrogate services not later than December 31, 1999 as called for by Congress in the United States International Broadcasting Act.

Television is by far the world's most influential broadcast medium. Interactive dialogues (USIA's one-way video, two-way audio telepress conferences) are valuable, especially when senior U.S. officials are interviewed on high profile issues.

In contrast, production costs for U.S. government broadcast television programs are high and placement is difficult. Given its importance as a communications medium, however, USIA should give higher priority to planning, research, and experiments with broadcast television such as VOA TV.

The Internet, digital video conferences, and other on-line services have great potential, and USIA should be the preeminent provider. Anticipated worldwide growth in the use of these technologies will justify a shift in the proportion of funds to interactive digital communications as compared with radio broadcasting.

The Defense Department recognizes that understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics reduces tensions and saves lives.

EXCHANGES

Exchanges are in the national interest. They are the best way for Americans to learn about others, and for others to learn about us. The enthusiastic and growing involvement of NGOs in exchanges offers striking evidence of the growing power of people-to-people contacts in all

fields. Exchanges help societies grasp democracy, free markets, and rule of law. They help build civil societies. Many U.S. ambassadors have called them the single most valuable asset in American foreign relations.

USIA manages 68 exchange programs including the Fulbright and International Visitor programs. To increase efficiencies through reduced layering and fragmentation, the Agency should merge these programs into two core elements: academic exchanges and professional/cultural exchanges.

U.S. government exchanges, many of which are Congressionally earmarked, have greatly proliferated. At least 39 U.S. agencies spend \$1.6 billion annually on international exchanges. AID accounts for 38 percent of all government exchanges compared with USIA, which accounts for only 13 percent. Other agencies run the gamut from the Departments of Energy and Health and Human Services to the Census Bureau and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

It will take a government-wide effort to make the hard choices needed to set priorities, consolidate programs, and increase oversight and evaluation. The Administration and Congress should examine all exchanges and establish principles applicable to all agencies. Such principles should include:

- All U.S. agencies with international exchange programs should continue to report annually to USIA, which will maintain a current inventory of U.S. government exchanges and report to the Administration and Congress.
- USIA's reports should recommend where exchanges that share objectives and target similar participants should be consolidated, identify approaches to increased administrative efficiencies, and suggest strategies for leveraging private funds for federal programs.

*At least 39 U.S. agencies spend \$1.6 billion annually on international exchanges.
USIA's share is only 13 percent.*

OVERSEAS PRESENCE

Between 1990 and 1996, USIA closed 28 posts overseas, but opened 26 new posts, most in the former Soviet Union. Yet during the same period, the Agency cut overseas staffing by 19 percent.

The United States must have the capacity to communicate quickly and effectively anywhere in the world. Rapid change propels small countries and large to center stage in ways that fit no clear pattern. Yesterday, Somalia and Haiti. Tomorrow, possibly Turkey or China.

USIA should develop a "surge capacity" that will allow it to redirect resources ahead of normal planning cycles as crises and priorities warrant. This means greater freedom from budget earmarks and fewer programs that, while politically popular, are no longer cost-effective. It means giving USIA authority to shift up to 25 percent of its funds within a fiscal year. It means willingness to work with "just in time" public affairs assets including contracts with NGOs and private companies where appropriate.

The tools of the New Diplomacy make it easier to expand or contract. Tomorrow's USIA officer may well be part of a multi-agency rapid deployment team as in Bosnia or Haiti. Coordinating with other departments will be important. Self-sufficiency, mobility, and flexibility will be at a premium.

A New Diplomacy cannot be left to the commercial media. Private media focus on immediate, often sensational headlines, on popular culture, and ultimately on whatever is profitable. CNN will never make the persuasive case, in context, for U.S. interests: for selling American agricultural products in Japan, for protecting intellectual property rights in China, or for extraditing terrorists in the Middle East. Nor should it.

These are tasks for the executive branch and Congress that will capitalize on America's unmatched skills and advantages.

U.S. interests in Mexico are shaped by 32 government agencies.

CONCLUSION

The information revolution and the power of foreign publics offer America's diplomacy a unique edge. We must embrace these sweeping changes if we are to advance our interests in the 21st century.

A New Diplomacy will build on America's success as a multicultural civil society and the appeal of our values and ideals. America will need diplomats with new skills and new tools. In a world of more powerful publics, engaging the right audience at the right moment can resolve conflicts that might lead to war, create markets for profitable trade, and deal with the problems of terrorism, drugs, immigration, and the environment. More and more that "right audience" may not be in the foreign ministry.

Traditional diplomacy remains crucial as does military strength, adequate intelligence, and economic power. These are what create a Bosnia peace accord or an Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles. But only public support for these agreements will sustain them. This is not just public relations. It is a political, economic, and often a military necessity.

A New Diplomacy will require substantive rethinking and thoughtful bipartisan discussion. No single agency can do the job. It is a task for the executive branch and Congress and for the American people.

United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
Suite 600, 301 4th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20547
(202) 619-4457 Fax (202) 619-5489

Bruce Gregory, Staff Director
Mary Thompson-Jones, Deputy Staff Director
Betty Hayes, Administrative Officer
Deanna deMember, Staff Assistant

Please send comments to: webmaster@advcomm.gov

Advisory Commission:

[Home Page](#)

[Annual Reports](#)

Department of State:

[Home Page](#)

[Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs](#)