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14. ABSTRACT The world has reentered a period of strategic competition featuring similarities to the geopolitical structure and great power struggle of the Cold War. As China pursues policies designed to undermine the dominance of American global leadership, the United States contemporaneously seeks to sustain the liberal international order it helped establish during and immediately following the Second World War. Over the past quarter-century, however, the United States has retreated from the leadership approach it employed during much of the second half of the twentieth century. In order to advance its strategic objectives, the United States must increase the employment and improve the coordination of the informational element of DIME. This can be achieved through more robust and effective public diplomacy for better alignment of U.S. messaging abroad in order to clarify the stakes of the strategic environment for the free world vis-à-vis China and other autocratic powers. As a step in that direction, this analysis proposes the reestablishment of an independent federal entity such as the former U.S. Information Agency, specifically through the enhancement of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.					
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**Modernizing Public Diplomacy in the Information Age:
A Case for Enhancing the United States Agency for Global Media**



A paper submitted to the Faculty of the United States Naval War College, Newport, RI in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of National Security Affairs.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Telling America's Story	3
Practicing Logrolling...and Shortsightedness	5
Communicating in an Information Operations Age	7
Strategy Over Structure	10
What's Past Is Prologue	11
Recommendation: Enhancing the USAGM	12
Conclusion	14
Bibliography	15

INTRODUCTION

The world has reentered a period of strategic competition featuring similarities to the geopolitical structure and great power struggle of the Cold War. Today, as China pursues policies designed to undermine the dominance of American global leadership and the United States contemporaneously seeks to sustain the liberal international order it helped establish during and immediately following the Second World War, each side avers that it aims to realize its objectives without going to war. The *Joint Concept for Competing states*, “U.S. challengers intend to pursue their objectives while avoiding armed conflict,”¹ a modern reflection of Sun Tzu’s observation, “To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”² Given both powers assert that competition is preferable to armed conflict, the United States must supplement its military strength by better coordinating the other instruments of national power – particularly the informational element – to prevail in what is effectively a new cold war.

Over the past quarter-century, however, the United States has retreated from the leadership approach it employed during much of the second half of the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1990s with the belief that the nation had earned a “peace dividend” following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and accelerating in recent years with the reemergence of historical isolationist tendencies, American soft power, particularly relative to China, has been in decline.³ The United States is not properly synchronizing the various instruments that constitute the informational element of national power.⁴ In order to advance its objectives in this era of

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Competing*, (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2023), i, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/23698400/20230213-joint-concept-for-competing-signed.pdf>.

² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Samuel B. Griffith, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), III:3.

³ Bates Gill, “China’s Global Influence: Post-COVID Prospects for Soft Power,” *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2020): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1771041>.

⁴ Donald M. Bishop, “DIME, Not DiME: Time to Align the Instruments of US Informational Power,” *The Strategy Bridge*, 6, no. 20: 2018, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2018/6/20/dime-not-dime-time-to-align-the-instrumentsof-us-informational-power>, 6, no. 20: 2018.

renewed strategic competition, the United States must increase the employment and improve the coordination of information as a key component of its national security strategy. This end can be achieved through more robust and effective public diplomacy for better alignment of U.S. messaging abroad in order to clarify the stakes of the strategic environment for the free world vis-à-vis China and other autocratic powers.

A key step to achieve better coordination of the American message on the world stage is the reestablishment of an independent federal entity such as the former U.S. Information Agency (USIA) by enhancing the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). In an environment of strategic competition, neglecting to be proactive with information has detrimental impacts on the other aspects of national power. China's recent brokering of a deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia in lieu of the United States' perennial involvement in the Middle East,⁵ China's implied message that it can incrementally and with impunity build military bases in international waters,⁶ and China's implementation of its Belt and Road Initiative to help fulfill President Xi Jinping's "China Dream"⁷ represent components of a unified information strategy that employs the diplomatic, military, and economic elements of national power, respectively. Conversely, while the Department of State, Department of Defense, and Congress wield clear control over the diplomatic, military, and economic levers of power in the U.S. government, a single authority for information is murkier.⁸

⁵ David S. Cloud, "China-Brokered Deal Between Iran, Saudi Arabia Marks a New Middle East," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-brokered-deal-between-iran-saudi-arabia-marks-a-new-middle-east-d1eaf94e>.

⁶ Niharika Mandhana, "How Beijing Boxed America Out of the South China Sea." *The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-boxed-america-out-of-south-china-sea-military-d2833768>.

⁷ David Zweig, "China's Political Economy." In *Politics in China: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., ed. William A. Joseph (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019)

⁸ Curtis Kimbrell, "The Un-Mighty American Pen: Why the United States Struggles in the Information Environment," *Modern War Institute*, June 13, 2017, <https://mwi.usma.edu/un-mighty-american-pen-united-states-struggles-information-environment>.

The restoration of an independent agency resembling the USIA, specifically by enhancing the USAGM, offers a solution to this shortcoming in the ongoing strategic competition with China. A review of the former agency's history offers a salutary structure for understanding the importance of its mission in the Cold War, the more recent past, and the contemporary era. In considering this trio of three temporal perspectives, one finds that the USIA (1) was established and proved highly effective in an environment of strategic competition, (2) was dissolved for political reasons as much as policy rationale at a time when it was perceived no longer to have been necessary, which quickly proved to be false, and (3) should be restored in light of the original justification for its creation *and* the realities of today's information operations environment. This analysis will briefly explore how each of these three parts of the historical timeline substantiate augmenting the USAGM to be more like the USIA in this era that resembles the Cold War.

TELLING AMERICA'S STORY

Immediately following the Second World War, the United States pursued several significant reorganizational efforts to carry out the nation's new international leadership role. Among these actions, President Eisenhower established the USIA in 1953 with a 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."⁹ Executive Order 10477 carried out provisions of Reorganization Plan No. 8, which statutorily created an independent public diplomacy agency that, among other purposes, provided a new

⁹ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "The ACDA-USIA Merger into State — The End of an Era," October 18, 2016, <https://adst.org/2016/10/acda-usia-merger-into-state-end-of-an-era/#.Wd0vvdVSyJA>.

home for Voice of America.¹⁰ In pursuit of its mission, the USIA employed a variety of overseas information programs designed to explain and advocate for U.S. policies and promote American culture abroad.¹¹ Only five years after the agency's establishment, Eisenhower observed, "Information and education are powerful forces in support of peace. Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace."¹² In the early days of the Cold War, the United States recognized the need to provide a unified public relations message to the world and understood the value in having an agency set apart from other components of the national security establishment to perform this critical function.

The size, scope, and support of the USIA as the federal government's public diplomacy agency during the tense days of a bipolar geopolitical arrangement underscored the value it provided in advancing the American message. To carry out its important work the agency deployed Foreign Service Officers to embassies worldwide and used broadcasting, exhibitions, and cultural promotions, as well as concerted efforts to counter foreign disinformation about American behavior.¹³ This communication empire functioned through a network called the United States Information Service (USIS) with extensive resources available to execute its mission.¹⁴ At the apex of the Cold War, the USIA directed the communications of the U.S. government to more than 150 populations around the globe, bearing an impressive status as the world's largest public relations entity.¹⁵

¹⁰ Cold War Radio Museum, "United States Information Agency (USIA) Becomes Parent Agency For Voice of America," August 1, 2021, <https://www.coldwarradiomuseum.com/united-states-information-agency-usia-becomes-parent-agency-for-voice-of-america>.

¹¹ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "The ACDA-USIA Merger into State."

¹² William M. Chodkowski, "FACT SHEET: The United States Information Agency," *American Security Project*, November 2012, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/fact-sheet-the-united-states-information-agency>.

¹³ John Cloud and Damien Leader, "Diplomacy, the State Department, and National Security," In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. National Security*, ed. Derek Reveron et al. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 192.

¹⁴ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989-2001* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 2.

¹⁵ Chodkowski, "FACT SHEET."

Perhaps most importantly from the standpoint of durability within the national security structure, there was strong bipartisan support for the USIA. Across the domestic political spectrum the entity was recognized as an important vehicle for “telling America’s story to the world.”¹⁶ Indeed, by Fiscal Year 1995 the agency boasted a budget of more than \$1.4 billion.¹⁷ But as the geopolitical arrangement shifted with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it yielded a “crisis of success” for the liberal international order.¹⁸ This paradoxical victory likewise caused some policymakers to question whether the foreign affairs establishment’s structure should follow suit.

PRACTICING LOGROLLING...AND SHORTSIGHTEDNESS

The 1994 midterm elections resulted in a Republican majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since the initial years of the Eisenhower Administration, some four decades earlier in the dawning days of the Cold War. As Senator Jesse Helms assumed the chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he sought several changes in the foreign affairs realm. Specifically, he aimed to eliminate a trio of agencies he deemed costly and unnecessary, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), and the USIA.¹⁹ Budget cuts reflecting the “peace dividend” the United States had earned through elimination of its strategic competitor of the past half century logically included disassembling the USIA, which had primarily based its existence on Cold War geopolitics.²⁰ Although Chairman Helms’ main targets for these cuts were USAID and ACDA,

¹⁶ Cull, *The Decline and Fall*, 2.

¹⁷ Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Information Agency: Options for Addressing Possible Budget Reductions,” September 23, 1996, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GAOREPORTS-NSIAD-96-179/html/GAOREPORTS-NSIAD-96-179.htm>.

¹⁸ John G. Ikenberry, “The end of liberal international order?,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 10.

¹⁹ ASTD, “The ACDA-USIA Merger.”

²⁰ Cull, *The Decline and Fall*, 6.

the USIA was caught in the crossfire, leading some to observe he “had gone after USAID and hit USIA instead.”²¹

A second domestic political event, the 1996 presidential election, sealed the fate of two of the three agencies. During President Clinton’s first term, his administration fought vigorously for their independence on organizational and budgetary grounds, asserting their elimination would not result in cost savings to the taxpayer.²² Madeleine Albright’s arrival as the new secretary of state in the second term, however, not only revealed her desire to have a productive working relationship with Chairman Helms but advanced President Clinton’s decision that prioritized having the Senate’s support for the Chemical Weapons Convention over maintaining the three freestanding foreign affairs agencies.²³ The resulting Foreign Affairs Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 effected the merger of staff and functions of the ACDA and USIA into the State Department.²⁴ The dissolution of the USIA, therefore, was largely the result of a political compromise between the elected branches rather than a sober-minded policy determination of the optimal way for the U.S. government to engage in messaging.

The ensuing years would reveal in short order that this function would not be best accomplished by the State Department alone. Just two years after the amalgamation of agencies, the United States found itself engaged in a newly conceived global war on terror. Similar to the messaging designed to contain the expansion of communism while developing international partnerships, this new era required disseminating a narrative that could balance fighting violent extremism with fair treatment of Islamic nations and culture.²⁵ The absorption of public

²¹ ASTD, “The ACDA-USIA Merger.”

²² ASTD, “The ACDA-USIA Merger.”

²³ ASTD, “The ACDA-USIA Merger.”

²⁴ Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Jessica D. Blankshain, and David A. Cooper. *Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy: Translating Theory Into Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 135.

²⁵ Cloud and Leader, “Diplomacy, the State Department, and National Security,” 193.

diplomacy into the U.S. government's oldest department, which had core missions deemed more important – and existing tensions between regional and functional bureaus that the merger only exacerbated – would prove suboptimal for the informational element of DIME.²⁶ Such intra-agency shortcomings were amplified within the interagency, particularly among the competing bureaucracies of State and Defense, the disparate cultures of which some have compared to notional alien life forms from Mars and Venus.²⁷ As the United States initiated its foreign policy pivot to the Pacific, the challenges related to a disparate approach to public diplomacy revealed considerable deficiencies in the bipartisan but misguided decision the Clinton Administration and Congressional Republicans made to eliminate the USIA.

COMMUNICATING IN AN INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGE

This new era of strategic competition requires the United States to have an independent agency charged with strategic communication on behalf of the whole-of-government and oversight of the information environment in which the interagency functions. Among the numerous reasons for this assertion, three warrant highlighting. First, effective use of the informational element of national power requires coordinated planning and messaging. Moreover, the revolution in technology and the concomitant development of information warfare have dramatically changed the dissemination approach and pace of such messaging. Finally, in a potentially protracted cold war with China, in which the global balance of power is at play, it is essential for the United States to combine lessons learned from its last such conflict with modern approaches that will help the free world prevail once again.

²⁶ Gvosdev et al., *Decision-Making*, 135.

²⁷ Rickey L. Rife, "Defense Is from Mars, State Is from Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security" (research paper, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1998), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA351032.pdf>, 3.

With the benefit of hindsight during the quarter-century since enactment of the legislation dissolving the USIA, it is readily apparent that this action has left the U.S. government with a suboptimal way of coordinating and broadcasting its message to allies, partners, and adversaries. Both interagency and intra-agency rivalries have replaced unity of effort in communicating. Within the State Department, conventional diplomacy tends to be valued more highly than public diplomacy.²⁸ Similarly at the Defense Department, policy and strategy enjoy primacy over communications, which is seen as a function that supports operators merely for information effects.²⁹ As one observer with extensive government, academic, and media experience has pointed out with a memorable metaphor, “Public diplomacy experts at the State Department think ‘strategic communication’ is what they already do, and want DoD out of the picture altogether. Meanwhile, the DoD Public Affairs Office has traditionally insisted that strategic communication is what *they* already do, and they want the policy people to stop mixing their peanut butter in Public Affairs’ chocolate.”³⁰ This type of piecemeal fighting among U.S. government components is particularly ineffective against adversaries that have the benefit, albeit at the cost of freedom, of centralized planning in their information operations.³¹ These bureaucratic circumstances effectively demonstrate the value that could be realized from reestablishing an independent agency to manage messaging as its primary role rather than as an adjunct duty.

²⁸ David Ensor, “How Washington Can Win the Information War,” *Foreign Policy*, December 14, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/14/how-washington-can-win-the-information-war>.

²⁹ Rosa Brooks, “Confessions of a Strategic Communicator,” *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/06/confessions-of-a-strategic-communicator>.

³⁰ Brooks, Confessions of a Strategic Communicator.”

³¹ Will Duval and Adam Maisel, “Bring Back the United States Information Agency,” *Real Clear Defense*, August 15, 2017,

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/08/15.bring_back_the_united_states_information_agency_112048.html.

The importance of coordination is amplified in an environment featuring dramatic advances in technology since the USIA was absorbed into the State Department. The digital age of social media, immediate and incessant communications, and the establishment of information warfare as a distinct warfighting community have combined to heighten the importance and accelerate the tempo of messaging. Yet, even during the comparatively slower pace of the Cold War, the USIA possessed direct oversight of the key communications channels of public diplomacy and international broadcasting.³² Indeed, the agency was legally empowered and exclusively equipped with the technological infrastructure to broadcast the American message abroad.³³ The modern information environment is considerably more complex with myriad media platforms. And these channels are not merely additional locations on which to post a traditional news release, but critical communication vehicles for countering disinformation. But remarkably, the U.S. government has not established a formula for employing these essential tools to advance its foreign policy objectives.³⁴ Similar to the interagency and intra-agency conflicts that could be ameliorated with better information coordination, the challenges presented by technological advances, ubiquitous communications, information operations, and disinformation would be mitigated by reestablishing an independent public diplomacy entity.

Finally, it is important to recognize parallels between the Cold War and the contemporary iteration of strategic competition, where possible applying lessons from the extended struggle for hearts and minds in a global community that is even more closely connected than it was in the second half of the last century. As General Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, observed in recent remarks at the Naval War College, “there is incredible competition

³² Ensor, “How Washington Can Win the Information War.”

³³ Curtis Kimbrell, “The Un-Mighty American Pen.”

³⁴ Cloud and Leader, “Diplomacy, the State Department, and National Security,” 193.

going on” between the United States, China, and Russia in Africa and South America.³⁵ Others have similarly suggested the “I” in DIME has never been as significant as it is in the Information Age.³⁶ And in a bipolar arrangement in which states will understandably pursue their own national interests, policymakers should be keenly aware that if the United States cannot advance a coherent message, “the world will turn elsewhere for leadership and solutions.”³⁷ Despite these realities, the U.S. government “has surrendered the battlefield” to the enemy on information coordination out of residual concerns about the appearance of employing spin or distributing propaganda.³⁸ The United States can ill afford to neuter itself on the informational element of national power at a time when the necessity of a clear, coordinated message is once again so vital. The geopolitical environment, therefore, offers perhaps the most compelling reason for restoring functions of the former USIA to an independent agency.

STRATEGY OVER STRUCTURE

Detractors of recurring recommendations to reestablish some version of the USIA argue that a foreign affairs structure from the mid-twentieth century is not applicable to the twenty-first century, and even if it were, the lack of a clearly communicated national security strategy, rather than which agency coordinates it, is what actually inhibits the effective employment of the informational element of DIME. One observer suggests, for example, that consolidation or disaggregation of foreign affairs agencies “is not a strategy and it will not conjure up a strategy” and instead prescribes “clear mission and purpose” to achieve better coordination of

³⁵ Daniel R. Hokanson, “An Address: National Guard Bureau Chief,” (presentation at Naval War College, Newport, RI, April 17, 2023).

³⁶ Duval and Maisel, “Bring Back the United States Information Agency.”

³⁷ Gill, “China’s Global Influence,” 109.

³⁸ John R. Mills, “‘All Elements of National Power’: Re-Organizing the Interagency Structure and Process for Victory in the Long War,” *Strategic Insights*, Volume V, Issue 6 (July 2006), <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2006/Jul/millsJul06.html>.

messaging.³⁹ This argument has a certain appeal to the author of the present analysis, who was initially skeptical about proposals to reorganize government in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Though is a natural inclination to seek analogous historical situations in devising approaches to seemingly similar contemporary challenges, history does not in fact repeat itself and each scenario requires fresh thinking.

Another analyst similarly asserts that doctrines from the Cold War and the brief ensuing unipolar period of U.S. primacy are insufficient to meet today's challenges and that the current and immediately preceding administrations have not truly selected a foreign policy framework.⁴⁰ With elements of balance-of-power realism, liberal internationalism, and values-based elements, the core principles of the current administration's foreign policy "have been hard to pin down."⁴¹ These assertions about the criticality of settling on strategy instead of squabbling over structure are not without merit, for it is at least as important for the United States to convey a consistent message to the world as it is to determine which box on an organizational chart is responsible for doing so.

WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

Upon further evaluation, however, each element of this two-part counterargument proves insufficient in making the case not to reestablish an independent agency to improve information coordination. First, while it is clear for a variety of reasons that the extant great power competition with China is not the same as the Cold War with the Soviet Union, not least of which is the economic integration of the two superpowers in the current geopolitical

³⁹ Matthew Armstrong, "No, We Do Not Need to Revive the U.S. Information Agency," *War on the Rocks*, November 12, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/11/no-we-do-not-need-to-revive-the-u-s-information-agency>.

⁴⁰ Ann-Marie Slaughter, "It's Time to Get Honest About the Biden Doctrine," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/biden-foreign-policy.html>.

⁴¹ Slaughter, "It's Time to Get Honest About the Biden Doctrine."

arrangement, the need for the United States to engage the world with reliable information is arguably even more important in this emerging bipolar construct.⁴² Indeed, a detractor of reestablishing the USIA, in comparing the bureaucratic challenges of strategic communication during the Cold War to the current great power competition, allows “it was a similar situation over 60 years ago.”⁴³

Moreover, the implication that the challenges the United States may be experiencing in the information realm are related to unclear strategy rather than ineffective structure is not borne out by the facts. Indeed, if there is one element of continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations’ foreign policies, it is their remarkably consistent assessment of China as the nation’s primary adversary or “pacing challenge.”⁴⁴ Although there are clear differences in the approach of each administration to the ways in which U.S. foreign policy will be *carried out* with respect to China, their strategic evaluations could not be more closely aligned. As one assessment notes, “the Trump and Biden strategies converge fully on the pivotal issue of great-power rivalry.”⁴⁵ One can plausibly make the case that now that having arrived at such clear, bipartisan strategic alignment on China, there is no better time for the federal government to implement an improved structure to communicate its strategy to allies and partners.

RECOMMENDATION: ENHANCING THE USAGM

This analysis has endeavored to make the case that the reemergence of great power competition similar to that of the Cold War justifies the reestablishment of an independent

⁴² Ensor, “How Washington Can Win.”

⁴³ Matthew Armstrong, “No, We Do Not Need to Revive the U.S. Information Agency.”

⁴⁴ Joseph R. Biden, “National Security Strategy,” *The White House*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

⁴⁵ David Adesnik, “Biden’s New National Security Strategy: A Lot of Trump, Very Little Obama,” *Foreign Policy*, October 17, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/17/national-security-strategy-nss-biden-trump-obama-china-russia-geopolitics>.

federal agency dedicated solely to the informational element of national security. It now seems to be understood by observers across the American political spectrum that China is aggressively advancing a narrative that its presence on the world stage serves as a viable alternative to the leadership the United States has provided for the better part of a century – and that it is in the interest of the United States to counter this messaging. Moreover, a revanchist Russia, alongside autocratic governments in Iran and North Korea, must routinely have their false narratives countered by states that adhere to the liberal international order. The global cause of freedom will ever require cultivation, and the United States remains best positioned to provide such leadership.

To improve information coordination, therefore, the U.S. government should build on the existing structure of the USAGM – itself comprised of remnants of the USIA – with components drawn from the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy at the Department of State and the Public Affairs Office at the Department of Defense. Under this proposal, each Cabinet department clearly would need to retain an internal media function to communicate primarily with its domestic audience on programs and activities.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the mission and elements of an enhanced USAGM would resemble the former USIA, including programming such as educational and cultural exchanges that help tell the American story abroad. As they did during the Cold War, these components continue to represent important functions of U.S. public diplomacy and complement existing elements of USAGM, such as Voice of America and

⁴⁶ Helle C. Dale, “Smith-Mundt Belatedly Enters the 21st Century,” *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*, accessed May 8, 2023, https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdin_monitor_article/smith-mundt-belatedly-enters-21st-century. Although the Smith-Mundt Modernization Act, which became effective July 1, 2013, eliminates longstanding restrictions on domestic dissemination of international broadcasting that became impractical if not impossible with the advent of the Internet, it remains important to maintain some distinction between the public affairs and public diplomacy functions the U.S. government pursues on a daily basis.

associated broadcasting programs that currently reach “more than 410 million listeners, viewers, and Internet users around the world.”⁴⁷

Any realignment of functions spread across the interagency also begs the question: who will coordinate the agencies with equities in public diplomacy? Although the White House retains the final decision-making authority on messaging, this proposal envisions the augmented USAGM as the clearinghouse for routine communications. Elevating public diplomacy above the sometimes muddled message that emanates from disparate bureaucracies and centralizing it will yield improved coordination and clearer messaging to global audiences.

CONCLUSION

Reimagining the USAGM to be like the former USIA would beneficially consolidate public diplomacy functions in this time of renewed great power competition. Without question, the adoption of such a proposal would necessitate genuine statesmanship by leaders from both political parties in both elected branches – men and women who understand the importance of prioritizing the needs of the nation above parochial considerations. Yet this kind of bold action is necessary to realize the full potency of the informational element of DIME, particularly in an information warfare environment with a revisionist peer competitor engaged daily in expanding its influence around the globe. Unified public diplomacy across the interagency is essential to amplifying the leadership role of the United States in the liberal international order. Restoring an agency like the USIA in the form of an enhanced USAGM represents a key step in that direction.

⁴⁷ “Structure,” U.S. Agency for Global Media, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/organizational-chart>.

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