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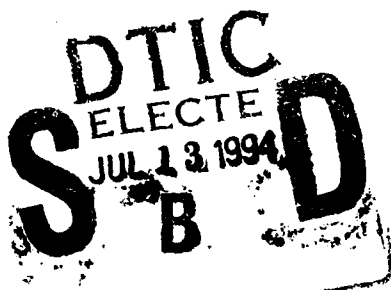
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RAND

Beyond Consolidation

*U.S. Government International
Broadcasting in the
Post-Cold War Era*

John E. Tedstrom

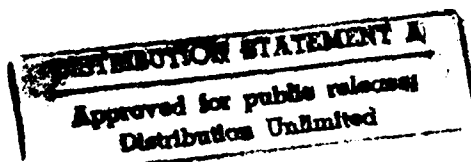


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94-21705



12/1/94

The research described in this report was conducted in RAND's three federally funded research and development centers: The National Defense Research Institute, sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff; the Arroyo Center, sponsored by the United States Army; and Project AIR FORCE, sponsored by the United States Air Force.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Tedstrom, John E.

Beyond consolidation : U.S. government international broadcasting in the post-cold war era / John E. Tedstrom.

p. cm.

"Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the United States Army and Air Force."

"MR-366-OSD/A/AF."

ISBN 0-8330-1495-1

1. United States—Relations—Foreign countries. 2. International broadcasting—Government policy—United States. I. United States. Dept. of Defense. II. United States. Army. III. United States. Air Force. IV. Title.

E840.2.T43 1994

327.73—dc20

93-43637

CIP

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Preface

This report addresses the broad question: How can the United States best use the fruits of the information revolution to further its interests through public diplomacy and international broadcasting? The study outlines the foreign policy challenges facing the United States in the post-Cold War era, and then examines the possible roles that public diplomacy and international broadcasting can play within the new foreign policy agenda. Finally, the report discusses possible reform measures that the U.S. government could take to make international broadcasting a more effective policy instrument.

Research for this report and an associated conference on the same subject were supported by RAND's International Policy Department, using funds from the concept-formulation and research-support component of RAND's federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs) for national security studies: Project AIR FORCE, sponsored by the United States Air Force; the Arroyo Center, sponsored by the United States Army; and the National Defense Research Institute, sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff.

In addition to the sponsors mentioned above, this report should be of interest to a wide audience concerned with foreign policy formulation and implementation, as well as to those in government and the academic research community.

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Summary

By 1990, the confluence of three developments provoked a serious policy debate over the place and role of public diplomacy and international broadcasting in the U.S. foreign policy agenda. The first development was the proliferation of communications technologies, especially to parts of the world that had been isolated, because of geography, economics, cultural gaps, or political animosities, from the West generally and the United States in particular. The spread of these technologies created the potential for vastly improved communications with publics that had had little if any exposure to Western ideas, ideals, policies, or institutions.

The second development was the spread of democracy (or at least democratic impulses) in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Although the revolutions in these countries were prefaced by social, political, and economic liberalization during the 1980s, the formal replacement of socialist regimes with more democratically oriented ones marked a watershed, the full implications of which we still do not fully understand. These revolutions carried two contradictory implications for public diplomacy and international broadcasting. On the one hand, the increased openness of the formerly socialist societies allowed international broadcasters greater access to both their subject matter (for example, they could interview public officials and other relevant people for the first time in history) and to their audiences (by a switch to medium wave and to some extent frequency-modulated [FM] frequencies, and by interacting and cooperating with the indigenous media). On the other hand, as the security threat from these countries dissipated, and as evidence emerged that democracy and a free press were beginning to take root, some in the foreign policy community raised doubts about the relevance of at least some of the U.S. international broadcasting operations.

These doubts were reinforced in Congress and among the public by the third factor, the rising concerns about the level of U.S. deficit spending and about the spending priorities (foreign versus domestic, defense versus health care) reflected in the budget. Some wondered whether the United States needed to maintain its extensive agenda of international broadcasting, especially given the collapse of the Soviet threat.

In the short run, the policy debate over international broadcasting was obscured by a sometimes bitter and always unproductive battle for turf and funding between Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and its supporters, and the Voice of America (VOA) and its supporters. Eventually, though, the debate turned to the central policy issues and, interestingly, representatives of both sides found much that they could agree upon.

The debate over U.S. international broadcasting consisted of three broad sets of questions. The first set of questions involved the nature of the global political and security order in the post-Cold War era. The collapse of the Soviet empire failed to simplify East-West relations as had been hoped; it only changed them. Moreover, what some have referred to as a "global political awakening" has created a whole new set of foreign policy challenges for the United States. How to deal with these post-Cold War challenges is a matter of ongoing debate and discussion, as are the proper place and role of public diplomacy in our international toolbox. Nevertheless, there is strong logic to the notion that as technologies proliferate and international politics become more globalized and intimate, communications between countries, at the public level as well as through official diplomatic channels, take on more importance. Such logic has implications for public diplomacy generally and international broadcasting in particular.

The second set of issues concerns the key question of broadcast missions. Following World War II, RFE/RL and VOA were established with different missions. During the Cold War, it was relatively easy to justify both efforts, even if some failed to recognize the substantive distinction between them. But once the countries of the Soviet bloc began to open up, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the distinction between RFE/RL surrogate broadcasts¹ and VOA U.S. information broadcasts became somewhat blurred. RFE/RL, for instance, at times took on a more international programming mix not only to help meet the information needs of its audiences, but also to meet the emerging competition from the growing indigenous media in the region. VOA, on the other hand, took advantage of increased regional access to do more surrogate programming and went so far as to open small bureaus in many East European countries.² Nevertheless, the distinct emphases—surrogate broadcasting at RFE/RL and U.S. information broadcasting at VOA—were

¹Surrogate broadcasts consist of news and information from and about the receiving country.

²RFE/RL moved early on to establish a physical presence in virtually all of its target countries. In some cases, including in its Russian service, these bureaus have become the nerve centers for the broadcasters and create some of the most timely, useful, and interesting programming.

largely maintained. In fact, both types of programming make important contributions to U.S. interests as well as to the receiving country.

By 1993, the debate over broadcast missions expanded beyond the type of broadcasting most appropriate for the countries in transition. A more subtle argument that emerged was that to justify taxpayer support, U.S. international broadcasting had to have a direct policy connection. This line of thought maintained that the programming agenda of U.S. international broadcasters should be used to advocate or campaign for specific U.S. policies around the world and should be overseen if not controlled by relevant offices at the Department of State or the National Security Council. The counterargument held that to pursue such an agenda would mean sacrificing the credibility of the broadcasters because they would be considered propagandistic mouthpieces of the U.S. government.

The debate over missions had a logical link to the third set of issues—the proper institutional arrangement or structure of the U.S. international broadcasting system.

First, there was for many months disagreement over the issue of institutional consolidation, that is, whether to merge RFE/RL and VOA to save money and rationalize programming. One line of reasoning held that one institution could not successfully undertake multiple broadcast missions, while another maintained that it could or that only one mission, usually U.S. information broadcasting, was necessary for the post-Cold War era.

Second, some held that a broadcaster outside the U.S. government could not be relied on to broadcast the government's policy line unedited and without dissenting commentary. Further, such an organization, by virtue of its institutional and programming independence, may be more susceptible to budget cuts. In contrast, many who believed in the importance of journalistic integrity and credibility for the broadcasters felt strongly that this integrity and credibility could be achieved only by maintaining institutional and programming independence. This argument held that, whatever the decision on consolidation or merger, the new institution(s) should be located outside the U.S. government.

In the end, many agreed that to achieve the cost savings that the Clinton Administration was insisting on, consolidation was the only answer. The question of institutional location remained a more contentious issue, and one whose resolution will not satisfy everyone. It seems fairly clear, however, that many points of substantive disagreement can be resolved so that the United States can have a credible and effective international broadcasting system that comes close to fitting within the budgetary parameters set out by the Clinton

Administration and Congress. In particular, consolidation could reduce or eliminate many areas of administrative and operational overlap. This also holds for a relatively small, but not insignificant, share of RFE/RL and VOA programming. Further, there may indeed be ways to locate the organization within the U.S. government while guaranteeing it the requisite amount of independence. This would require a nonpartisan board of directors or overseers, and, most important, strong and unequivocal language on this point in the organization's charter and in the relevant necessary legislation.

These and other issues are addressed in the following analysis. For convenience, a list of key observations and policy recommendations follows.

Key Observations and Policy Recommendations

- The end of the Cold War, the spread of literacy, a global political awakening, and the development and spread of new technologies call for a comprehensive review and rethinking of our public diplomacy agenda and the role of international broadcasting within that agenda.
- In this new era of multilateral political, economic, and security initiatives, the United States, as the only remaining superpower, has not only the opportunity but the responsibility to articulate its policies to foreign publics as well as to elites.
- International broadcasting, thanks in part to the information revolution, will continue to be one of the primary ways for the U.S. government to communicate with publics abroad.
- Consolidating the current U.S. international broadcasters is both possible and appropriate at this time. Reorganization can result in a less costly, more effective operation.
- Journalistic integrity must be a top priority for all concerned with U.S. international broadcasting. If the credibility of broadcasting suffers, the impact of our international broadcasters diminishes significantly, as does their ability to influence events and trends abroad.
- International broadcasters, as key foreign policy practitioners, must maintain policy relevance and connection if they are to enjoy adequate, steady support from U.S. taxpayers and their representatives.
- Perhaps the most effective way to achieve the right mix between journalistic independence and policy connection is through strong, clear charters and missions codified in law. A nonpartisan board of directors should, in

addition, protect the broadcasters from unwarranted pressures from government agencies.

- If America is to achieve durable, productive political and economic relationships with the countries in East-Central Europe and the former USSR, the absence of communism is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The rise of nationalism and the longing in some parts of Europe for a return to authoritarianism provide ample evidence of looming dangers and risks.
- Given the lack of stability in the political, economic, and security spheres in the former Soviet Union, it would be imprudent to ignore the potential contributions of surrogate and U.S. information broadcasting to that region. If cuts must be made, it may be least harmful to cut the smaller, non-Russian services, because the Russian service broadcasts at RL and VOA cover the entire former Soviet Union and can substitute for native-language broadcasting if needed.
- When considering the phasedown of broadcasts to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, it is important to remember that each of these countries is experiencing its own type of "democratization." Some countries are proceeding faster than others.
- By virtue of their close and purposeful interaction with local journalists, U.S. international broadcasters are rendering critically important technical assistance to the former Soviet bloc.
- Audiences abroad are becoming more sophisticated and are exposed to more ideas and competing sources of information than ever before. Audience research should be given a higher priority within our international broadcasting system to more effectively meet these new challenges.
- A new surrogate operation for Asia should be managed by a surrogate division of whatever broadcasting system is eventually established. First, however, an in-depth feasibility study should be undertaken to assess the costs and the ability to undertake a serious surrogate broadcasting effort to Asia under a consolidated broadcasting system. Current plans are partisan and assume the existing institutional framework.
- Substantive research support should not be a separate division of the new broadcasting organization. Research supports surrogate broadcasting and it should be subordinated to that division. Some departments of the RFE/RL Research Institute, such as those dealing with audience research and monitoring foreign media, are less relevant to the analytical research efforts that are the central focus of the Institute. These departments should be transferred to the broadcasting operations, where they can make a more direct contribution.

- The bulk of the RFE/RL Research Institute should be moved to the United States and become affiliated with a university or a think tank.
- Because of a number of considerations, elaborated upon in the text, it is probably advisable to house the new, consolidated international broadcasting system inside the U.S. Information Agency.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge RAND's International Policy Department for providing support for this report and an associated conference held in Washington, DC, in April 1993. RAND colleagues Arnold Kanter and Jonathan Pollack made many useful comments on earlier drafts of this report, as did a number of participants in RAND's conference. RAND colleague Patricia Brukoff provided excellent research support.

1. Introduction

This report discusses the issues facing U.S. international broadcasters in the post-Cold War era. For over 40 years, America's international broadcasters, the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), enjoyed broad and sustained support for their efforts to broadcast news and information to audiences abroad.¹ VOA was established to tell America's story to the world, in its own way and on its own terms. The rationale of VOA broadcasting was that information regarding U.S. policies could increase support for those policies abroad and that news and features about America—its people, history, and institutions—could serve as a persuasive model for nondemocratic countries. This type of programming is generally referred to as "U.S. information programming," and is the exclusive purview of VOA.

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were established in the wake of World War II to undertake a "surrogate" programming agenda. Surrogate programming consists of news and information from and about the receiving country, and is undertaken on the premise that indigenous state-controlled media distort information and deny individuals the opportunity to evaluate independently their governments and their governments' policies. RFE's programs are broadcast to the countries of East-Central Europe, while RL's broadcasts are targeted on the former Soviet Union.²

The revolutions in East-Central Europe and the dissolution of the USSR provoked a rethinking of the appropriate role of U.S. international broadcasts to that region. For example, is surrogate broadcasting needed in Eastern Europe after three years of democratization? What is the appropriate mix of surrogate and U.S. information broadcasting to the countries in the former Soviet bloc? Is a third type of broadcasting, one that focuses on educating the public about building democracies and free market economies, more appropriate for today's circumstances? If so, who should undertake this "public education" broadcasting?

¹VOA is part of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). RFE/RL is overseen by the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB), whose members are appointed by the President.

²In addition, Radio and Television Marti fall under USIA and perform surrogate broadcasting for Cuba.

At the same time, the crisis in Tiananmen Square, China's rapidly expanding economy and defense budget, and slow progress on human rights and democratization in China and some other parts of Asia prompted proposals to establish a dedicated broadcast service to China and, perhaps, other Asian countries. There was fairly broad support for the need to expand broadcasting to this region, but the type of broadcasting (U.S. information, surrogate, or public education) was a more contentious issue for at least two reasons.

First, there was substantive disagreement about needs of Asian audiences based on their level and pace of development and democratization. Some expert observers felt that because China is not as closed as the Soviet Union was, it did not need surrogate broadcasting. Others balked at a surrogate service for China because they saw the task as too big to be met in a reasonable amount of time and within reasonable budget constraints. Still others argued that even with VOA broadcasts to the region, China and other Asian countries needed a systematic surrogate service because the local media were either controlled or strongly influenced by the state, and, at least in China, millions of people in remote regions had little or no access to news and information about their own country.

The second cause for disagreement over what type of broadcasting was needed for Asia was the implication that decision carried for the U.S. international broadcasting institutions: whoever (either the BIB or USIA) was given "Radio Free Asia" would win a key victory in the political war over turf and budgets for international broadcasting.

The driving issue in the international broadcasting debate in 1992 and 1993, of course, was money. Together, the operating budgets for VOA and RFE/RL total approximately \$500 million, split roughly between them. As estimates and projections of the U.S. budget deficit grew in late 1992 and early 1993, it became easier to consider cuts in international broadcasting. The threat to U.S. security from the Soviet bloc had evaporated, even if the dynamics of transition were chaotic, sometimes violent, and never predictable; and U.S. international broadcasters had few, if any, constituents who voted in the United States. Support from leaders Havel, Walesa, and Yeltsin was not insignificant, but lawmakers in the U.S. Congress tend to support spending programs that are popular at home. In addition, the debate on U.S. international broadcasting was relatively specialized, and many outside (and even some inside) the foreign policy community did not distinguish between VOA and RFE/RL. Their question was, do we really need two radio stations to duplicate each other's work? RFE/RL was generally seen to be in the weaker political position—its audiences had ceased to be a security concern, it did not have a direct

institutional link to the U.S. government, and it was somewhat isolated from the policy debate by virtue of its headquarters being in Munich, Germany.

A by-product of this debate was that VOA and RFE/RL became embroiled in a battle for turf that, as often as not, obscured the central policy issues. Op-Ed pages in the United States, Western Europe, and the former socialist countries were filled with articles supporting one or the other side. At stake was an amount of money that equaled, roughly, the operating budget of either VOA or RFE/RL, several thousand jobs, severe dislocation for employees and their families who worked abroad for either VOA or RFE/RL, and, finally, an important arrow in our public diplomacy and foreign policy quiver.

In an effort to refocus the debate on the central policy issues, RAND sponsored a conference on U.S. international broadcasting in early April 1993.³ The conference brought together executives from USIA, the Board for International Broadcasting, VOA, and RFE/RL, and representatives from the House, Senate, and the executive branch. The agenda of the conference was designed to recast the debate over international broadcasting in terms of U.S. foreign policy opportunities, challenges, and capabilities. Only after public diplomacy and international broadcasting were put in this context could a reasonable attempt be made to discuss how best to reform our broadcasting institutions and policies to meet the new challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War world under increasingly tight resource constraints.

This report builds on existing literature on reforming U.S. international broadcasting and on discussion at the RAND conference.⁴ After outlining some of the more salient developments and trends in international affairs, the discussion turns to rethinking the proper roles of public diplomacy and international broadcasting in the new world order. Following from this analysis, attention turns to the question of reforming our international broadcasting institutions. The context of the problem is laid out before examining possible solutions.

³An agenda and a participants list for the conference may be found in Appendixes A and B.

⁴See, for example, Kim Andrew Elliot, "Too Many Voices of America," *Foreign Policy*, No. 77, Winter 1989-1990; the 1993 report of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy; and two reports that followed intensive investigations by commissions headed by former VOA director John Hughes: *Report of the Presidential Task Force on U.S. Government International Broadcasting*, U.S. State Department Publication 9925, December 1991, and *Commission on Broadcasting to the People's Republic of China*, U.S. State Department Publication 9997, September 1992. Also useful is Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, *USIA, New Directions for a New Era*, Georgetown University, March 1993.

2. The United States in the Post-Cold War World

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the United States as the world's only superpower at the beginning of the 1990s. For all of the immediate euphoria following the fall of the Berlin wall and the demise of the communist systems in Eurasia, the United States quickly came to realize that "superpower" does not mean what it used to, or what we thought it did. Ironically, even though the United States does not face the constraint of an opposing and potentially hostile superpower, we find it difficult to act unilaterally in the world. The need for multilateral military alliances in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, in Somalia, and in the former Yugoslavia emphasize this point, as does the need for multilateral economic support for the former socialist countries in transition.

Further, the "new world order" has emerged with no sign of the superpower condominium that was going to benignly administer post-Cold War affairs. Indeed, this well-worn cliché was quickly reworked to the more accurate "new world *disorder*," and has assumed the following paradoxical characteristics:

- **The United States is the only remaining superpower, yet our role in the world is being questioned both at home and abroad.** The U.S. nuclear guarantee, and perhaps U.S. military power more generally, is diminishing in relevance, paced by the decline of U.S. economic preponderance. The difference between military and economic *power* on the one hand, and political and moral *authority* on the other hand, has been made starkly clear at the beginning of the post-Cold War era and presents a major foreign policy challenge to the United States.
- **Our would-be partner, the Soviet Union, a formerly intimidating nuclear power, has been superseded by several proud, nationalistic, and unstable countries, some with nuclear weapons.** Each of the Soviet successor states is still groping for its own political identity and socioeconomic order. Internal and cross-border armed conflict defines significant parts of the former Soviet region. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) superstructure has only barely survived its first year and a half and by most accounts has proven itself a less than an effective guarantor of regional stability. Finally, although Leninism/Stalinism has been largely (though not totally) discredited, there is still a significant anti-Western sentiment that cuts across

most of the political spectrum in the region. For this reason alone, the former Soviet Union will remain a continuing priority for U.S. foreign policy.

- **Traditional U.S. security partners have become economic competitors.** The shift from military concerns to a preoccupation with economic well-being occurs at a time when U.S. allies are able to compete better economically. This means that they are more likely to have different interests, and to be less pliable when differences emerge. As a result of this decreased willingness to follow, the U.S. exercise of leadership will be more difficult and may well be less successful.
- **The world is a measurably less stable place with new threats and problems filling the vacuum where old ones had been.** The end of bipolar conflict and spheres of influence has not only failed to simplify the intractable problems of conflict in the Middle East, but it has also witnessed the emergence of new, equally intractable problems in the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Africa.
- **Communism has not yet been replaced by stable, functioning democracies.** While many of the symptoms of the old regimes are no longer evident, many of the fundamental problems associated with those authoritarian systems linger in less obvious places. Some countries have made more progress toward modern political and economic systems than others. But throughout the entire region there is a lack of secure democratic institutions, including competent, professional news media, that stand independent of political influence and control.
- **International challenges have become more complex, just as the foreign threat has diminished.** Although each of the above characteristics poses new challenges to U.S. interests, none represents a serious near-term military threat. As the direct and transparent threat to U.S. security recedes and U.S. foreign policy concerns increasingly become displaced by domestic concerns, American policymakers could be seriously constrained in addressing foreign policy issues that arise. Obtaining domestic support for international initiatives is becoming more difficult than in the past, as public opinion polls on aid to Russia and Somalia and U.S. intervention in Bosnia testify.
- **The gap between the haves and have-nots is growing, and the have-nots know it.** In the West, personal consumption issues tend to set the political agenda, but in the poorer regions matters of survival predominate. The poorer regions are now more keenly aware—and envious—of the material wealth of the industrialized West, thanks to more efficient global communications and the export of such cultural icons as “Dynasty” and “Dallas.” There is, however, relatively little appreciation or understanding

of the fundamental values upon which our democracy was founded. The result is a potentially destabilizing lack of political consensus on a global scale—despite the demise of communism in Europe.

- **Globalization of politics and policy.** The spread of literacy, urbanization, and communications technologies has contributed to a global political awakening in the poorer regions of the world. These trends have also increased the degree to which what were previously the “internal” affairs of sovereign states have become the concern of broader regional or global communities and organizations. For an example, one need only consider the rapid rise in U.S. public support for intervention in Somalia following the graphic accounts on television and radio of the tragedy there or the influence of various transnational groups such as Amnesty International or the many “green” movements.

With the increased availability of information and the ability to communicate ideas beyond village boundaries, publics (as opposed to elites) in the world’s transitioning societies and emerging democracies are bound to increasingly influence foreign policy. We thus should reexamine our public diplomacy agenda in terms of the scope of effort and allocation of resources, the messages and ideas we seek to communicate, the audiences we intend to address, and the methods of delivering those messages. A recent Clinton Administration review of U.S. international broadcasting priorities and institutional reform is a start toward addressing many of the key short-term issues in our agenda. For the longer term, a broader debate is warranted about the global interests and goals of the United States, the appropriate instruments and policies to defend and achieve them, and the proper future role of public diplomacy and international broadcasting.

3. The Post-Cold War Order, Public Diplomacy, and International Broadcasting

Public diplomacy covers a broad and diversified portfolio of activities ranging from academic and cultural exchanges to publications and broadcasting. As technologies develop and proliferate, other forms of public diplomacy will emerge as well. Examples might include global classrooms broadcast to remote audiences via satellite and the establishment of computer networks that link individuals and groups and provide an inexpensive means of communication. Global politics will be affected by the spread of transnational organizations that, by virtue of their political influence in multiple countries, will become increasingly important audiences for U.S. public diplomacy efforts.

The paradoxes enumerated in Section 1 pose the following questions about the implications of the end of the Cold War for U.S. foreign policy in general and the role of public diplomacy: Where, when, and how should the United States promote its values and interests abroad? What roles do public diplomacy generally and international broadcasting more specifically play in the U.S. foreign policy agenda? What should the messages of public diplomacy be?

Promoting U.S. Interests and Values: Where, When, and How?

The first question is perhaps the most difficult because today America's enduring guiding values too often seem to conflict with its short-term political and security interests. Consider the "where" and "when" parts of the question. Most people would agree that while American foreign policy must be grounded in principles widely endorsed in our society, it must also be flexible and consider the costs of temporary political compromises for the sake of achieving more principled goals and objectives in the longer term. This flexibility can be confusing, and a chief objective of traditional diplomacy is to relieve any confusion that may arise from U.S. foreign policy at the governmental level. But U.S. policies can also be confusing to foreign publics who, in many instances, have growing influence over their national leaders and policymakers. Public diplomacy can thus serve a useful purpose by clarifying U.S. policy at the grassroots level. As the sole remaining superpower, the United States today has not only the opportunity but

the responsibility to articulate its messages to the world clearly and authoritatively.

The "how" of the question is also the subject of debate. Because the threat to security is no longer direct and transparent, the use of military force becomes more difficult to justify, as the policy dilemmas over U.S. involvement in Bosnia illustrate. Further, the focus in America has turned inward to allocate scarce economic resources. The hesitancy in Congress in allocating relatively small amounts of economic and financial aid to Russia and the other Soviet successor states is an obvious example.

International Broadcasting: What Role?

International broadcasting may help answer some of these questions. A strength of public diplomacy and international broadcasting is that it is relatively easy to send multiple, though not inconsistent, messages to the same audience. For example, one line of programming to the former Yugoslavia could focus on democracy building and domestic news. Another line of programming could focus on U.S. policy toward the region and speak directly to the consequences of Serbian behavior toward Bosnia. Audiences would benefit from both programming agendas and would be in a better position to understand U.S. policy toward their countries and regions.

A main concern about international broadcasting is its cost-effectiveness. In the early 1990s, the U.S. operating budget for international broadcasting was slightly more than \$500 million, split roughly evenly between RFE/RL and USIA's Voice of America and Radio and Television Marti. To be sure, the U.S. fiscal deficit is made up of hundreds of these relatively small allocations every year, and some people argue that each of these programs is as much a part of the overall spending and deficit problem as any of the larger ones.

The response to objections concerning U.S. international broadcasting based on budgetary concerns is twofold. First, dollar for dollar, international broadcasting is one of our most cost-effective foreign policy tools. Every day, U.S. international broadcasters speak to tens of millions of people worldwide. Listeners around the world tune in to the Voice of America for news and information from and about the United States and the world. They learn, from an authoritative source, the key points of U.S. policies and the political, cultural, historical, and economic considerations that underlie those policies.

Likewise, listeners in East-Central Europe and the former USSR tune in to RFE/RL to get reliable news and information about their own countries and

regions. By anyone's standards, the press in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union are still unprofessional and dependent on the state. Although Hungary and Poland are probably furthest along in terms of media development, even they have some way to go before their journalistic communities are secure and independent. The press in Russia and the other Soviet successor states are less developed and in many cases are blatantly influenced by political regimes.

Second, it is worth noting that foreign policy formulation and implementation are the exclusive purview of the U.S. government. Unlike some programs that may be more efficiently run by the private sector, public diplomacy and international broadcasting are public goods that we cannot rely on markets to provide. Public diplomacy and international broadcasting serve national, not regional, interests, and should be funded at the federal level.

International broadcasting's successes have occurred when communications technologies were not as widely available as they are today or will be tomorrow. The explosion of telecommunications technologies and their relative affordability have already led to an impressive shrinking of the globe. Whether by electronic mail, telephone, facsimile transmission, or television and radio, even long-isolated parts of the world are now more intimately linked to the larger global community. This suggests that international broadcasting and public diplomacy more generally can have an even larger impact on foreign affairs than they did during the Cold War.

In terms of thinking about the role of international broadcasting, Zbigniew Brzezinski's observations are especially apt:

[U]ltimately, it is ideas that mobilize political action and thus shape the world. Such ideas may be simple or complex, good or bad, well understood or just instinctively felt. At times they may be articulated by charismatic personalities; at other times, they may be just pervasively present. Ours is the age of global political awakening and hence political ideas are likely to be increasingly central, either as the source of intellectual cohesion or of confusion, as well as political consensus or of conflict.¹

The legacy of U.S. international broadcasts to the former Soviet bloc is a prime example of the phenomena explored by Brzezinski. Surely, our ability to communicate clearly and effectively with audiences abroad will contribute to the process of global political adjustment and development in the post-Cold War era. International broadcasting has been one of our chief means of

¹Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1992, p. x. Brzezinski's outline of global political developments and America's place and role in the post-Cold War world is extremely useful in thinking about the potential future roles of U.S. public diplomacy.

communicating with the world, and, because of its cost-effectiveness and its ability to employ cutting-edge technologies, it can remain so. Although other methods of communication will continue to be important, international broadcasting clearly occupies a central role.

International Broadcasting: What Message?

The post-Cold War world is a far more complex place than when relations between the two superpowers dominated the international agenda. Although Soviet-style socialism has been largely discredited, many in post-socialist Europe are still searching for an acceptable replacement model to organize their societies. The transition is one of the most complex, yet promising, phenomena of this century, and poses new problems and questions not only for those in the former socialist countries, but for those governments in the West that seek to render assistance as well. Each successor state is proceeding along its own path of reform and at its own pace. For these and other reasons, U.S. international broadcasting should be broad-based and flexible to account for regional peculiarities and the special needs of receiving audiences.

The question of message is as important as any in the international broadcasting debate. The answer will help determine the nature of institutional restructuring, funding levels, and programming credibility. These are complicated and sometimes conflicting issues. Nevertheless, there are some overarching, guiding principles—most of which were set down some 50 years ago but that remain valid today—that are useful when thinking about what messages the U.S. should be broadcasting.

The Voice of America. The VOA charter mandates three broad but interrelated missions: (1) to broadcast reliable and accurate news and information, (2) to ensure that broadcasts are balanced, comprehensive, and generally unpoliticized, and (3) to communicate the policies of the U.S. government as well as responsible discussion and opinion concerning these policies. It is clearly in the U.S. interest to communicate its policies to foreign publics so that they have a more accurate sense of the U.S. position on any given issue, especially on those that affect their country or region.

While it is not the purpose of this report to evaluate the programming performance of VOA, most observers agree that VOA does an admirable job of meeting its general objectives. However, many present and past VOA and USIA officials and others are concerned that VOA editorials, "expressing the views of the United States government," may hurt the overall credibility of VOA

programming by focusing on the third mission to the exclusion of the first two. On the surface, these editorials are an entirely appropriate vehicle for conveying official U.S. positions via the Voice of America. This type of programming gives a direct policy relevance to VOA broadcasts. But the concern arises because many people, especially those in the former socialist countries, are not well-equipped to distinguish between accurate, independent journalism, which they so badly need, and government opinion and interpretation of events, of which they are understandably suspicious.

It is thus worth considering how VOA's ability to meet its third objective (communicating U.S. policy and opinion and discussion about those policies) would suffer if these editorials were eliminated. It is quite possible that less pernicious substitutes for these editorials could be found that would (1) convey accurately and clearly U.S. policy and (2) not jeopardize VOA integrity or credibility. One possibility would be to simply report the policy as straight news and discuss the policy in an interview, roundtable, or other format.

There is another concern regarding the VOA programming to the former Soviet Union, East-Central Europe, and East Asia. Over the last four or five years, the Voice has attempted to diversify its programming to these countries, devoting more time to what is essentially surrogate programming. The Voice has also accommodated requests from various quarters for more "public education" programming. At times this diversification has been successful and useful—witness the programming to China during the Tiananmen Square crisis. Nevertheless, the VOA's Eurasian division, as well as other divisions, has suffered significant budget reductions in recent years, and is trying to do more with less.

VOA management has responded to the perceived need to diversify programming under tightening budget constraints by decreasing broadcasting air time to some key countries, including Russia. Again, it is worth asking whether or not VOA is trying to do too much with too few resources, and whether it should focus on its core responsibilities.

The question remains to what extent U.S. information broadcasters should influence directly short-term policy and national security objectives. For example, should the VOA have been used to speak directly to Iraqi military leaders to convince them that they would have been better off withdrawing from Kuwait prior to Desert Storm? Likewise, should U.S. broadcasters be used to directly undermine nondemocratic or unfriendly governments and leaders abroad, such as Serbian officials in the former Yugoslavia?

Because these types of activities would give the broadcasters a direct policy connection, they may make them easier to fund in Congress. However, if the current international broadcasters were to undertake such activities, their primary messages would be undermined and rendered less effective. Such programming could also become the subject of heated political debate at home, especially in Congress, inadvertently damaging the organization's reputation and jeopardizing its funding. In general, effective programming of objective information and analysis, including direct reporting and analysis of U.S. government policy, can provide the policy connection and adequately deliver the appropriate messages. In a crisis, however, where U.S. lives or vital interests are jeopardized, there may indeed be compelling reasons for the VOA to deliver specific messages on behalf of the U.S. government. The conditions under which VOA—or any other broadcaster—may be used for these purposes must be clearly defined and limited to those situations in which vital U.S. concerns are at stake. Otherwise, VOA programming could be subject to undue influence from any number of government agencies.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. America's other major international broadcaster, RFE/RL, serves as the home for a number of surrogate domestic radio stations that broadcast news, features, and analyses about events in the countries of East-Central Europe and the former USSR to those countries. The underlying premise is that the domestic media throughout the region distort facts to serve the political elite, and that the development of democracy requires free access to information and free exchange of ideas at the grassroots level. The demise of communist regimes in East-Central Europe and the former USSR has brought the continuation of surrogate broadcasting to those regions into intense debate. There are two levels of competition for resources: (1) foreign versus domestic spending, and (2) within the foreign affairs budget. Not only are there many other domestic claimants to RFE/RL's \$220 million annual budget, but are there other, more effective vehicles for supporting the transitioning countries?

The case for continued RFE/RL support hinges on two fundamental realities that may well outweigh any doubts about the need for surrogate broadcasting during the transition from communism. First, America's policy objective for the former USSR and East-Central Europe is not simply the defeat of communism. To the contrary, if America is to achieve durable, productive political and economic relationships with the countries in that region, the absence of communism is a necessary but not sufficient condition. We see this in the dangerous rise of virulent nationalism and ethnic conflict as well as in the longing in some parts of Europe for a return to authoritarianism. The new Administration has recognized this point in policy statements, in the creation of a new ambassadorship to the

region,² and in the burgeoning efforts on the part of the entire West, including the United States, to render technical and financial assistance to the societies in transition.

Second, although many of the features of the old regimes are no longer evident, many of the basic problems associated with those authoritarian systems linger in less obvious places. Some countries have made more progress toward modern political and economic systems than others, but throughout the entire region there is a lack of competent, professional journalism³ that is independent of government influence and control.

As the process of reform progresses, the need for surrogate broadcasting will, by design, diminish. Surrogate broadcasting to East-Central Europe as a whole is likely to become less necessary as competent and independent news media become established and these societies open to Western Europe and the outside world.

Individual countries within the region are experiencing their own versions of "transformation," some with more success than others. Romania and Poland are simply at different stages of political development, as are Russia and Hungary. It is inappropriate to paint all of the countries of the former communist bloc with same broad brush and it is important to recognize that each has its own needs in terms of international broadcasting. This argues for a careful process of phasing down RFE broadcasts and flexibility in the programming mix (U.S. information, surrogate, democracy-building/public education) to each country.

Many observers note that surrogate broadcasting provides an important service through its efforts in "cross reporting"—reporting news and analysis of events in other countries in East-Central Europe and the former USSR. In fact, RFE/RL surrogate broadcasts remain the primary source of intraregional news and analysis for millions of people in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. Such programming should likely be a key element in "Radio Free Asia" broadcasting as well. This cross reporting is more important than some might think, given the long, interconnected histories of the countries and peoples within Eurasia and Asia, and the close political, cultural, and economic relationships that continue to link them today. Some of the most worrisome

²This position coordinates government activities for the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union save the three Baltic States and reports to the Secretary of State.

³It is worth stressing "competent" and "professional" at this point. While some would point to the proliferation of publications and "news" programs in the transitioning societies, an alarming share of this journalism is sensationalized, unreliable, and not competent. Further, an appallingly large share of it is targeted at extremist political, ethnic, or nationalistic groups whose agendas are no more acceptable than the propaganda of the former communist regimes.

problems facing East-Central Europe and Asia today involve international or interethnic tensions and disputes. Surrogate broadcasts can play a dynamic role in using moderate, reliable messages from a respected source to promote nonviolent resolutions of these conflicts.

In short, the countries of the former USSR and East-Central Europe have yet to settle on a clear replacement to communism as their political-economic system. Democracy, an obvious alternative, is much more spoken about in the region than it is understood or felt. Much of the rest of the world, including key Asian countries, is troubled by the same questioning and searching, as argued in Section 1 of this report. Brzezinski put forth the U.S. role most clearly:

American global leadership, and especially American authority, is . . . bound to become more dependent . . . on how America responds . . . to the concrete dilemmas of the politically awakened, post-utopian world. *The American response can either serve to deepen or to bridge the conceptual dichotomy between the cravings of the newly activated masses in what used to be called the Third World as well as the former Soviet bloc and the . . . post-Cold War victors.*⁴

It is clearly in America's interest to serve as a bridge, promoting the development of stable democracies, human rights, and free and open economies around the world.

New Challenges for International Broadcasting

Two new challenges face U.S. international broadcasters today.⁵ The first is to address the continuously changing needs of the countries in transition. The second challenge is to address the needs of new regions of special interest to the United States.

Meeting the Challenge of Transition

American policymakers need to identify feasible and realistic means of meeting the country's commitment to the transitioning countries of the former Soviet bloc. The countries in this region are still feeling their way, often uneasily, along the path to a democratic order, and are still unsure about the many questions and choices they must confront. Educating the people of these societies about the nature, roles, and functioning of democratic institutions and capitalist economics

⁴Brzezinski, 1992, pp. 102-103. Italics not in the original.

⁵A third fundamental challenge, beyond the scope of this report, is to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by advances in technology within tight budget constraints.

represents a significant means of rendering technical assistance and transferring know-how.

The successful completion of democratization depends as much on an understanding of societal development at the grassroots level—where high-quality information is less readily available—as it does on an enlightened elite in the government. Educational broadcasting to these ends can play a crucial role in illuminating these questions for citizens in the East and elsewhere. Promoting an understanding of democratic concepts and institutions through international broadcasts is a goal fully consistent with U.S. policy.

Performing this role may be somewhat problematic for VOA, considering its official status as the U.S. government voice. Also, to take on this role systematically and successfully, VOA would probably have to add personnel and technical facilities—its primary responsibilities of U.S. information broadcasting presumably will fully claim its human, technical, and financial resources.

The surrogate broadcasters, in contrast, may be in a better position to fulfill the role of public educator. As the need for surrogate broadcasting diminishes, freed technical, human, and financial capacities can be used to broadcast public education programming more systematically. Also, RFE/RL can use its already extensive presence in the region to its advantage. In short, as the need for outright surrogate broadcasting shrinks, RFE/RL should be in a good position to marshal its comparative advantages of freed capacity, location, and regional expertise to different ends. These opportunities should be considered in any plan to phase down RFE/RL or to consolidate it with VOA.

Another new and important role played by international broadcasters today is that of a training ground for local journalists inexperienced in the functioning of a free press. These journalists are provided an invaluable opportunity to learn, refine, and polish their skills, raising their reporting to world standards. They then return to their home countries and enhance local media capabilities. Both VOA and RFE/RL cooperate closely with local broadcasters, providing technical support, programming, and expert advice on establishing and running successful radio stations and news operations.

Efforts on the part of U.S. international broadcasters to cooperate with, support, and develop indigenous professional news media should be applauded and encouraged. These efforts are bound to have long-term and positive payoffs. They should not be pursued in a vacuum, however, and should be coordinated with other public and the private sector efforts to render technical assistance. It is doubtful, however, whether funds for these activities should come from the international broadcasting budget. It is perhaps more reasonable for these

programs to be funded through agencies, either public or private, that give technical assistance to the transitioning societies. How the broadcasters are rendering assistance should be reviewed and opportunities explored on how to exploit economies of scale and coordinate activities in both the public and private sectors.

New Geopolitical Priorities

The second new challenge is to address the needs of other countries and regions that can now receive broadcast information from the United States. The foremost example here is Asia, but the Middle East and Latin America also afford relevant opportunities.

VOA is already preparing to broadcast a mix of U.S. information programming and surrogate programming to China, Vietnam, and North Korea. Less attention has been devoted to Burma, Laos, and Cambodia, although these countries arguably have as much if not more need for outside information. Broadcasting to China and the other Asian countries will probably require a mix of both U.S. information programming and surrogate programming.⁶ On the one hand, U.S. relations with these countries are complex and, in many cases, tense. U.S. information programming can contribute to a better understanding of the relationships and relevant U.S. policies among Asian publics and elites. On the other hand, because information and the media are largely state-controlled in these countries, surrogate programming can play much the same role there as it did in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Such broadcasts increase public awareness and understanding of events in their countries and thereby increase grassroots influence over policy. This new effort will require research support and posting staff abroad as stringers and correspondents. USIA estimates the annual operating costs of a new surrogate service at about \$30 million. Because China and Asia are foreign policy priorities for the United States, work on this project should go ahead, although it should be preceded by a feasibility and cost study that assumes a consolidated (USIA and BIB) broadcasting system.

U.S. International Broadcasters and the Private Sector: Competition or Cooperation? Concerns have been raised about the public sector crowding out potential international broadcasters in the private sector and stunting the development of indigenous media in the countries in transition. Although these

⁶For more detail, see Kennon H. Nakamura, *Radio Free Asia*, Congressional Research Service Issue Brief, Washington, DC, Library of Congress, May 14, 1993.

concerns are well-intentioned, there is no evidence of such a crowding out. First, the success of CNN International and the recently announced cooperation agreement of U.S. and British broadcasters to broadcast news internationally suggest that there is adequate room in the market for more competition. As regards the indigenous media, both VOA and RFE/RL make a major contribution in terms of setting high journalistic and editorial standards and in providing programming to local media operations that are too small to create a full programming schedule on their own. Finally, through internships, the use of local stringers and correspondents, and other ways of cooperation, U.S. government international broadcasters are contributing to the development of competent, professional journalism in the receiving countries, not impeding it.

Audience Overlap. An argument offered for shutting down RFE/RL is that the audience overlap between RFE/RL broadcasts and VOA broadcasts is large (somewhere between 50 percent and 80 percent by most estimates) and that one broadcaster can therefore suffice. This logic misses the point that listeners will tune to both stations because they get different information from each. If listeners could hear essentially the same message on both stations, they would choose one or the other and overlap would be minimal. Audience overlap is a strong argument for maintaining multiple broadcast missions.

Audience Research. As the message of U.S. international broadcasting diversifies to meet the varied needs of its target audiences, the need for accurate and reliable audience research increases. Currently, both RFE/RL and VOA have their own in-house audience research operations. Although each of these groups is staffed with highly competent professionals and although they cooperate from time to time on audience research efforts, their estimates of listening patterns differ significantly and differ from independent outside audience research groups such as the Eurobarometer. It is not the purpose of this report to explore the causes of these divergences. It is clear, though, that audience research should be given higher priority from management.

4. Institutional Reform

When VOA and RFE/RL were established, policy missions determined institutional structure. This approach recognized the inherent tension between perceived journalistic independence and integrity on the one hand, and the ability to speak authoritatively for the U.S. government on the other. The nature and transparency of the threat to national security that the Soviet bloc represented at the time, plus the relative availability of funds, allowed the United States to mount two separate broadcasting efforts, one aimed at U.S. information broadcasting, the other at surrogate broadcasting.

Today, the absence of a direct threat to national security and the need to reduce deficit spending are the primary motivating factors behind the effort to reorganize the U.S. international broadcasting institutional infrastructure. This effort also is based on the belief that the spread of communications technologies and the more diverse and complex set of foreign policy concerns that has emerged in the post-Cold War era argue for a more focused yet more flexible operation than the current structure allows. **The goal is to create a streamlined international broadcasting organization that is charged with multiple missions (two obvious ones being U.S. information broadcasting and surrogate broadcasting) and is a more effective and more efficient operation, addressing the needs of the U.S. foreign policy community and the needs of receiving audiences in a timely, responsible manner.**

The goal of creating a centralized, flexible, international broadcasting bureaucracy challenges many of the premises that guided the establishment of RFE/RL and VOA in the middle of this century. A number of proposals attempt to resolve what to some are unresolvable dilemmas and conflicts. The options range from creating a totally independent, nonprofit Corporation for International Broadcasting that would house both the surrogate and the U.S. information stations outside the U.S. government (but would rely on U.S. government financial support), to an expanded Corporation for Public Broadcasting that would merge RFE/RL and the USIA's Bureau of Broadcasting into the current CPB, to an Endowment for International Broadcasting that would be an independent organ within the USIA and would comprise both U.S. information and surrogate broadcasters.

We cannot discuss each of the proposals for consolidating or reforming the U.S. international broadcasting system here. Our goal is to distill the main points of some of the more influential proposals and to discuss some of the various policy options.

A Consolidated Broadcasting System

In today's budgetary and foreign policy environment, cost savings from international broadcasting is a goal that finds strong support from many quarters. Although some savings could be generated from cost-cutting measures at both VOA and RFE/RL, influential voices in the Clinton Administration are seeking even more savings by eliminating the duplication of administrative (personnel, finance, public affairs, etc.) and technical offices (transmitting, engineering, news gathering, etc.), as well as through eliminating the duplication of some programming.¹ A logical extension of this line of reasoning is that a full consolidation of U.S. international broadcasting efforts was perhaps warranted, so long as the benefits from the two individual efforts were not unduly compromised in the process. As the debate over international broadcasting developed in 1993, advocates of consolidation pointed to other potential gains from the proposed reforms. Among these were (1) the ability to coordinate the overall international programming agenda from a single, centralized vantage point, (2) the possibility under a single international broadcasting system to respond more quickly to special needs in different parts of the world, and (3) the ability to coordinate capital expenditures so as to more effectively take advantage of the opportunities presented by the information and technological revolutions.

The strongest opposition to this position has come from those who feel that one or more of the following statements argued for maintaining two separate institutions. First, the reform process in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union is far from complete, and we should not jeopardize our presence there by tinkering with an arrangement and division of labor that have worked for over 40 years. Second, in relation to other U.S. spending programs, especially those in the Department of Defense, U.S. international broadcasting costs very little money. Third, and perhaps most important, if the organizations were consolidated within the U.S. government, the independence and integrity of the surrogate stations would be sacrificed and their effectiveness would be reduced substantially.

¹These suggestions had been made in the Bush Administration, but were rejected at the time in favor of the status quo.

Significantly, there is support for consolidation among the senior management of RFE/RL and the BIB. Their major caveat is that the new organization should be independent of the U.S. government. Additionally, there is broad consensus that, because the Soviet successor states are still a security concern and are moving less quickly toward stable democracies than we would like, funding for Radio Liberty broadcasts should not be cut as fast as those for RFE. There is also strong logic and consensus that the new organization should be located in the United States with only the necessary bureaus located in target countries in order to reduce the high costs associated with operating abroad while providing the most timely and intimate broadcasts.

Throughout this debate, the Clinton Administration has maintained its position that the budget for international broadcasting must be cut (by some \$240 million in four years), and a fairly broad consensus thus emerged that consolidation is either a positive development or the most acceptable solution from among the possible options for reform.

Virtually all of the proposals for consolidating international broadcast operations include the following elements:

1. A nonpartisan board of overseers would be composed of senior people with considerable international, broadcasting, or foreign service experience. The purpose of the board, which is modeled largely on the BIB, would be to provide general substantive guidance and oversight of the broadcast operations and to serve as a firewall, protecting the surrogate stations, especially, from undue pressure from government agencies. The terms of the board members may be staggered in an effort to avoid politicization of the positions.²
2. A chief executive officer (president or director) would have executive responsibility for the broadcasters' operations. The chief executive would also serve in an *ex-officio* capacity on the board. Finance, personnel, and public affairs should come under this office.
3. A senior vice president or director of broadcasting would have daily operational responsibility for all facets of the broadcasting operations. The director of broadcasting may have deputies for such functions as programming review and analysis, and production.
4. A vice president or director for surrogate broadcasting would oversee all surrogate broadcasting operations and coordinate and cooperate with the

²As discussed below, by not making the chair a political appointee, the political impartiality of the board—a key factor in the new organization's journalistic credibility—may well be enhanced.

directors of other broadcast operations as needed. Included under this office would be the RFE/RL services, the Marti operations, Radio Free China (Asia), and any other surrogate services. The director for surrogate broadcasting would also be responsible for research support, and a director of research would be subordinate to this office.

5. A vice president or director for U.S. information broadcasting would oversee all U.S. information broadcasting, including World Net.

6. A director for audience research would report to the director of broadcasting and provide audience survey research for both the surrogate and the U.S. information broadcast divisions.

7. A director for engineering would report to the director of broadcasting or a designated deputy and have line responsibility for all of the technical means of broadcasting.

8. A director for information services would oversee the complex computer facilities necessary to run the overall operation.

9. A director for central news would report to the director of broadcasting. Central news would provide news input for all broadcasting operations. Part of its responsibility would be monitoring local media in the surrogate stations' home countries.

A number of issues in such a proposed division of labor and organization are worth exploring. First, the senior vice president/director for broadcasting would have oversight and responsibility for all broadcasting activities, and together with other senior management and with appropriate input from the board, would manage the mix of programming to each receiving country. This person would thus oversee how much surrogate and how much U.S. information programming could and should be broadcast to each country over the course of the broadcast day. This person would also ensure that the resources of the surrogate broadcasting and U.S. information broadcasting divisions were adequate not only for their own respective operations, but for cooperative efforts as well.

Second, it is important that the institutional location of various broadcast services be rationalized. For example, the surrogate operations of Radio and Television Marti should be removed from subordination to U.S. information broadcasting and housed in the surrogate broadcasting division, fully subordinate to its vice president/director. Surrogate broadcasting to Asia should also be part of this division's responsibilities. Further, the responsibility for substantive research

support should be returned to the surrogate broadcasting division. The research department should fully support high-quality programming.

Third, audience research should be accountable to the senior vice president for broadcasting and be independent of either of the broadcast divisions *per se*. Recognizing that the audience mix and audience preferences are bound to become more complex in the future, the profile of this operation should not be diminished in any new organization. High-quality audience survey research should inform management decisions concerning programming and broadcasting priorities. The distinction between substantive research support and audience survey research should be recognized and the two should remain separate.

Finding a New Home

Where to place a unified international broadcasting institution and what level of funding it should receive remain contentious questions that relate directly to the link between programming and policy. A solution that is fully acceptable to everyone is likely to remain elusive. However, some common preferences on how the restructuring should proceed can usefully inform policy.

Where to locate the institution—essentially inside the U.S. government bureaucracy, most logically within USIA, or outside the government, most likely in a private, nonprofit organization that operates more or less like RFE/RL does now—hinges on three considerations: (1) credibility of broadcasts, (2) manageability and flexibility of the broadcast operations, and (3) fundability.³ Most of the arguments concerning these issues are both well-known and straightforward, and require only brief review.

Credibility of broadcasts is the top priority of everyone involved in U.S. international broadcasting. There are concerns on the part of some that the credibility of the VOA, by virtue of its place and role within the U.S. government's foreign policy bureaucracy, suffers somewhat. They argue that, for example, the BBC has a much higher *perceived* independence from the British government and that its broadcasts are held in higher regard, generally, than the VOA's. Those familiar with the BBC and VOA operations and products find this perplexing, given the high degree of self-censorship within BBC and the close ties that it maintains to a number of British government offices, particularly the

³As used here, fundability means the degree to which taxpayer receipts can be expected to be allocated to the international broadcasting effort on an ongoing and stable basis. The question of required funding levels is taken up below.

Foreign Office, either formally or informally. The answer may lie as much in America's leading role in global political and economic affairs and resentment of that role in some quarters, as much as in VOA broadcasts themselves.

VOA executives, past and present, are split on the degree to which the Voice's association with USIA and the rest of the U.S. government is harmful to its reputation and to the credibility of its broadcasts. Some argue that, at least in recent periods, the VOA has been able to avoid any undue influence or pressures from the State Department or National Security Council staff. There is some evidence, though, that this may be a function of strong personalities at VOA. While this argues in favor of selecting strong individuals for senior VOA positions, it also may indicate that the opportunity for outside meddling in VOA affairs does indeed exist. It is not prudent to rely on personalities and professional appointments to guarantee something as critical as broadcast credibility and integrity. To that end, there exists a strong logic that the "firewall" role now played by the BIB is a useful one and should be maintained as a priority for the board of directors of any new broadcasting operation whether it is inside or outside the government bureaucracy.

Funding is crucial to any discussion of the future of U.S. international broadcasting. The strongest concern is that the farther away from the government and from policy implementation, the weaker the link to the U.S. Congress and the U.S. taxpayer. Thus, as one increases the independence of broadcasters and the credibility of programming, one may have to sacrifice stability of funding. Finding a resolution of this dilemma is key to the successful resolution of the U.S. international broadcasting puzzle.

A possible solution to this dilemma is to shift the focus away from institutions and toward legislation and charters. Specifically, it may be advisable to craft a single piece of legislation that (1) acknowledges the vital importance of fair, unpoliticized programming for all U.S. government international broadcasting, (2) establishes the Voice of America as the vehicle to present news and information about the United States and U.S. government policy, essentially as codified now in the VOA charter, and (3) establishes a surrogate broadcasting division that encompasses for the time being RFE/RL services, the Marti operations, and Radio Free Asia, and instructs that division to broadcast programming that "is not inconsistent with established U.S. policy."

With clear, strong legislation that protects the journalistic independence of U.S. international broadcasters but at the same time charges the VOA with presenting U.S. policy and informed discussion of that policy to audiences abroad, a new institution could be located almost anywhere. The new organization could take

the form of an independent Corporation for International Broadcasting and operate through a grant-making mechanism much like RFE/RL operates today. Alternatively, the new organization could be placed in USIA, with some distancing and enhanced independence of its overseeing body as dictated by new legislation.⁴

In many cases, however, the tradeoffs in this dilemma are not comparable. In a perfect world, it may well be preferable to establish an independent Corporation for International Broadcasting within which surrogate broadcasters and U.S. information broadcasters could be close to the government but far enough removed so that surrogate broadcasting credibility is not harmed and that VOA credibility approaches that of the BBC. The marginal costs of creating such a new corporation would be small and the benefits of flexibility considerable.

But we do not live in a perfect world. Such an independent corporation would be susceptible to budget cutters on a recurring basis because of the weak link to U.S. policy and the taxpayer. Further, removing the VOA from the U.S. Information Agency might inflict a mortal wound on that organization, because the Voice represents approximately one third of the total USIA budget and is its largest single operation.⁵ This would ensure a major political battle, one that could inadvertently harm all U.S. public diplomacy efforts, including international broadcasting, and for that reason alone may not be worth invoking.

In the final analysis, journalistic credibility will be more a factor of the programming itself than of any institutional arrangement, as the BBC experience suggests. One way of strengthening the independence of the operation within USIA is to mandate that its board of directors be truly nonpartisan, with equal representation from both major political parties and from candidate lists of House and Senate leaders, as well as from the President. Representatives of other government agencies such as within the Department of Defense, Department of State, and the National Security Council, if represented, could have nonvoting seats or could comprise a one-third minority of the total board membership. The chairman could be elected from within the board itself to increase political independence. If strong legislation with these types of

⁴Some have suggested that an Endowment for International Broadcasting, based on the Endowment for Democracy model, would be a way of creating a fairly independent operation within the general framework of the U.S. government.

⁵The total USIA budget in FY 1993 is approximately \$742.1 million and that for the Bureau of Broadcasting is roughly \$248.5 million. "Overseas Missions," a collection of activities, has a budget of \$285.3 million. These figures are from the *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1993*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1993.

provisions can ensure the proper independence of the broadcasters within the government, the credibility problem may be largely avoided.

International Broadcasting: Cost Savings and Level of Effort

Current plans for restructuring the U.S. international broadcasting program call for reducing the overall operating budget of approximately \$500 million to roughly 60 percent of that amount in FY 1996.⁶ That sum would cover all current operations of the Bureau of Broadcasting of USIA, the services of RFE/RL that have not been phased out, and Radio Free Asia. It is impossible to be precise, but a review of the operations costs indicates that a consolidation of efforts, plus serious cost cutting, plus the addition of Radio Free Asia will likely result in a budget of \$400 million.

Most of the cost cutting will likely come from economizing on surrogate operations, including moving portions of the broadcast operations either east to their home countries or to the United States. A further gradual downsizing of RFE Polish and Hungarian services is also likely to continue. After an adjustment period, these moves alone could result in savings of approximately \$80 million. Other savings would have to come from reducing overlap with VOA in terms of personnel and programming (in addition to the phasedown of the Polish and Hungarian services) and some administrative functions (such as a consolidation of the central news operations in RFE/RL and VOA, consolidation of administrative functions and engineering, and some fat trimming within VOA). Finally, as discussed below, spinning off the RFE/RL Research Institute could save broadcasters several millions of dollars each year.

The RFE/RL Research Institute

RFE/RL, as new surrogate broadcasters, required extensive independent research capabilities so that programmers, many of whom were not professional journalists and none of whom had direct access to their subject matter, could create more in-depth, analytical reports. For many years, the research operations of RFE/RL were directly subordinated to the broadcast efforts. As a by-product of this support work, both the RFE and the RL research departments published

⁶This sum does not include capital costs and the cost of the partially completed transmitter site in Israel, which is to be abandoned. The 1994 estimated budget figures for RFE/RL and VOA are \$220 million and \$253 million, respectively. Radio Free Asia, in USIA but outside of VOA, is budgeted at \$30 million. These figures are from the 1994 U.S. budget.

weekly research reports and a daily news summary primarily for Western academics and policymakers. Today, the RFE/RL research journal is one of the most widely read publications of its sort, and RFE/RL analysts are among the most respected in their fields.

Because the focus of public debate has been on broadcasting, the fate of the RFE/RL research effort has received less attention than it perhaps deserves. The debate over the RFE/RL research effort today is not whether it is a valuable asset, but whether it should continue its association with the broadcasters and whether it should remain in Europe. A brief review of how the research operations at RFE/RL developed is instructive for this debate and has implications for the creation of a research arm for a new broadcasting organization, and particularly for a new surrogate broadcast service to Asia.

Over the last 10 to 15 years, substantive research to support broadcasting became increasingly independent of the broadcast operations at RFE/RL. In response, several of the language services (for example, the Polish, Hungarian, and Russian services) created their own independent research capabilities. As these and other research efforts were mounted to support programming, the official research departments were freed to turn their attention to the needs of their primary audience—Western academics, policymakers, and journalists—many of whom subscribed to both the weekly and daily research publications.

With the creation of the RFE/RL Research Institute (RI) in November 1990, this trend was cemented. The RI is not now subordinate to the broadcast effort and is expanding its constituency outside RFE/RL. Virtually all of the RI's output is geared toward its Western audiences.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this review. First, although a research unit is needed for a successful surrogate broadcast operation, that unit must concentrate on its primary audience—the programmers. At RFE/RL, the research effort was allowed to develop along different lines, resulting in duplication of efforts and redundant costs for personnel and material inputs. This is an important point to remember when organizing a research unit for surrogate broadcasting to Asia.

The current cost of the RFE/RL Research Institute is somewhere in the \$18–\$20 million range, depending on whether and to what extent indirect costs are included. The policy objective for dealing with the RI should be the same as that for the broadcasting operations: seize this opportunity to create an organization that is commensurate with budget constraints and with the needs of consuming audiences.

Several options for the RI have been proposed, including plans to (1) create a separate, independent research center to be located in Europe but funded by the U.S. government; (2) create an American-European research institute that would be funded jointly by the United States and European sources (to serve as a cultural bridge between Europe and America); and (3) move the RI to the United States, either as part of the new broadcasting operation or as a separate entity. Two factors are especially important when considering these options. First, the surrogate services do need research support and it is probably advisable to return at least parts of the current RI to the broadcasters as part of a consolidation or unification. Some research personnel and monitoring of foreign media and audience research might return to the broadcasting operations. Second, the bulk of the RI's assets and energies is targeted to audiences other than the surrogate broadcasters, and the RI continues to be an important source of information about East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union for many in the West.

By leaving the RI in Europe, the staff have the advantage of being closer to their countries of study. Travel costs to the East are lower, although travel to the United States is, of course, more expensive. It seems odd for the United States to fund an independent research institute in Europe where it is isolated from U.S. taxpayers and from its primary constituency—U.S. academics, policymakers, and journalists. A joint U.S.-European center may be preferable to a purely U.S.-funded operation because the cost to the United States would be less, but the complications of multiple funding sources and of control over the entity may outweigh those benefits. Some have called for moving the RI analysts and archives to Prague, although the director and publications department would move to Washington, DC. Such a move would likely result in the quick death of the RI. Not only would the analysts be further isolated from their primary audiences, but the complications of publishing would require costly investments in technology. Moreover, a recent survey of business costs in Central Europe noted that housing costs in Prague are significantly higher than they are in Munich. Finally, recruiting for professional staff will be more complicated if staff members have to live in Prague. In short, operational, staffing, and funding uncertainties—for little or no clear improvement in the output of the RI—argue against this option.

The scenario for the RI that makes the most sense may be to move it to the United States and associate it with a major research university or research institute. It may be advantageous to choose its new partner so that the RI remains geographically close to the broadcasters so that the beneficial relationships that do exist between them may be maintained. The advantages of such a move are

(1) the RI would be more accessible to its primary audiences—the academic, journalistic, and policy communities both inside and outside the U.S. government, (2) the RI could be operated for roughly one-half of its current budget, a significant savings, and (3) an association with a university would be mutually enriching for faculty, students, and RI staff. It would broaden and deepen the RI's pool of intellectual resources, creating opportunities for faculty to participate in RI activities and giving more students more possibilities for practical training in East European and Eurasian studies.

5. Conclusions

The principal component of the debate over U.S. international broadcasting has been over institutional reform and economizing. Important secondary issues include the programming mix (U.S. information, surrogate, and public education broadcasting) and regional priorities (the former Soviet bloc, Asia, other).

As regards institutional reform, this report supports a downsizing of RFE/RL in the near term (FY 1994) and its consolidation with VOA shortly thereafter.¹ The consolidated organization will allow significant streamlining and economizing, and, just as important, allow the United States to more effectively bring its broadcasting resources to bear on a wide variety of foreign policy problems and opportunities.

The institutional location of the new, consolidated organization remains open. The conclusion from this research, however, is that it is indeed possible to mount an international broadcasting agenda that is both policy relevant and *journalistically credible* by housing the *independent* organization within the USIA framework.

As regards regional priorities, Asia is obviously the new focus, and this report supports a Radio Free Asia within the surrogate division of the new, consolidated broadcasting organization. Further, this report recommends scaling back RFE broadcasting to Eastern Europe on a selective, case-by-case basis, recognizing that each country is on its own path to democracy and will proceed at its own pace. Obvious early candidates for downsizing are the Polish, Hungarian, and Czech services. It is worth remembering, also, that significant savings can be found by moving these services (or parts of them) to their home countries. There, they could be overseen by RFE employees and could serve as realistic training grounds for a new generation of local journalists. To that end, any such training programs should not be funded from the international broadcasting budget, but should be coordinated with similar efforts in both the public and private sectors.

¹Through FY 1996, at least, this downsizing should not take place at the expense of Radio Liberty broadcasting to the former Soviet Union, with the possible exception of eliminating one or more of the smaller non-Russian language services so long as its programming is replaced by Russian-language programming. In 1996, a comprehensive and independent review of broadcasting needs for the former Soviet Union should be undertaken to see if that region still requires Radio Liberty-style programming.

These issues are all relatively short term. Consolidation will address the immediate concerns of economizing and management coordination. New regional priorities (for now, Asia) will constantly emerge and demand our attention.

More fundamental questions in an examination of U.S. public diplomacy and international broadcasting concern the nature of the global political awakening, the growing cultural and economic gap between the Western democracies and the poorer parts of the world, the redefinition of America's security interests, and the limits we as a people are willing to go to secure those interests. The answers to these questions will be key to defining the long-term role of public diplomacy and international broadcasting in America's foreign policy and national security agendas.

Appendix

A. Beyond Consolidation: U.S. Government International Broadcasting Missions and Institutions (A Conference)

April 2, 1993
 RAND
 2100 M Street, N.W.
 Washington, DC 20037

Charting a New Programming Agenda

Session I

Addressing the New World Order: U.S. Global Concerns and Public Diplomacy—(Arnold Kanter, RAND)

Addresses current and emergent U.S. international concerns and priorities with respect to U.S. information broadcasting and the overall public diplomacy effort. Particular attention is given to the situation in the current focus areas of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and in emerging focus areas such as China.

Session II

How RL and VOA Adapt to Russia's Transformation—(Gerd von Doemming, Director, Eurasian Division, VOA, and Kevin Klose, Director, Radio Liberty)

Examines the institutional, budgetary, and programming frameworks necessary to effectively adapt to rapidly changing audience needs and U.S. interests and concerns abroad. Implications for future USG broadcasting efforts. Discussion expands to address implications for targeted/surrogate broadcasting to China/Asia.

Session III

The Berman Bill: Budget Constraints, New Technologies, and the New Broadcasting Agenda—(Graham Cannon, House Subcommittee on International Operations)

Presentation of the Berman Bill and an outline of its underlying logic and goals. Implications for future broadcasting missions, particularly to those areas, such as Asia, where technology is spreading rapidly and U.S. interests suggest an increase in USG broadcasting.

Moving Beyond Consolidation

Session IV

The Logic of Consolidation—(Penn Kemble, Freedom House)

Identifies the strengths of the current system that ought to be maintained/enhanced and the weaknesses of the current system that need to be corrected, particularly in light of the morning discussions. Views consolidation in light of USG international broadcasting specifically and USG public diplomacy more generally.

Session V

Designing a New Institutional Framework—(Gene Pell, President, RFE/RL, Inc.)

Outlines the political, financial, and institutional aspects of establishing a new organizational structure for USG international broadcasting in the overall Public Diplomacy agenda and in light of reduced budgets, audience needs, competing interest groups, new technologies, etc. Accommodating new broadcasting services to China/Asia and the need for research also discussed.

Session VI

Surrogate Broadcasting to Asia—(Brian McKeon, Senator Biden's Office)

Discusses Biden legislation on international broadcasting to Asia in the context of new institutional framework. Identifies major obstacles to a new programming and institutional framework, areas where further information/research are needed. Discusses timetable of bringing new legislation to the floor and role of executive branch players.

Session VII

Wrap-up Session—(John Tedstrom, RAND)

General summation of areas of consensus and continued differences. Suggestions about the next steps to be taken.

B. Beyond Consolidation: U.S. Government International Broadcasting Missions and Institutions—Conference Participants

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Joseph Bruns
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Brian Carlson
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Nadereh Chahmirzadi
U.S. Congress

Sherwood Demitz
Voice of America

John Despres
Senate Intelligence Committee

Joseph Duffey
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