

24TH REPORT OF U.S. ADVISORY COMMISSION
ON INFORMATION

LETTER

FROM

THE CHAIRMAN, U.S. ADVISORY
COMMISSION ON INFORMATION

TRANSMITTING

THE TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT OF THE UNITED STATES
ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INFORMATION, PURSUANT
TO THE PROVISIONS OF PUBLIC LAW 80-402



JULY 1, 1969.—Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON : 1969

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TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

In accordance with requirements of Section 603, Public Law 402, the United States Advisory Commission on Information submits herewith its 24th Report to the Congress on the information, educational and cultural programs administered by the United States Information Agency.

Respectfully submitted,



Chairman

May 19, 1969

THE COMMISSION

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Staff Director

The 24th Report
United States
Advisory Commission
on Information

May 1969

FOREWORD

The United States Advisory Commission on Information—created in 1948 to watch over a communications dialogue with the rest of the world—has arrived simultaneously at its majority and an inescapable conclusion:

Our national commitment is incomplete.

We are quick to advocate “mutual understanding,” but slow to establish the conditions for its accomplishment.

We lament communications gaps, or credibility gaps, or information gaps, but throw few lines across them.

We claim to be motivated by “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind,” yet keep those charged with that concern at arm’s length from the national policy process.

We profess to seek the solution to men’s problems with words, not weapons. But:

In fiscal 1968, we spent \$80.5 billion for “national defense” and \$4.6 billion for “international affairs and finance”—a ratio of 94.6 to 5.4. *United States Information Agency: \$194,255,000.*

In fiscal 1969, we anticipate spending \$80.9 billion for “national defense” and \$3.9 billion for “international affairs

and finance"—a ratio of 95.4 to 4.6. *USIA: \$173,168,000.*

For fiscal 1970, we have budgeted \$81.5 billion for "national defense" and \$3.8 billion for "international affairs and finance"—a ratio of 95.5 to 4.5. *USIA: \$177,650,000.*

Our concern is a matter of record. "There are four channels through which a nation may conduct its foreign affairs. The first is diplomacy. The second is trade. The third is communication. The fourth is force. Three are complementary, the last is alternative. Indeed, the last alternative. It is indicative of the disordered priorities of our time that 95 percent of our foreign affairs moneys are devoted to the channel that the other 5 percent is dedicated to avoid."

But the essential problem is not in dollars. It is in direction.

Which way best leads from where we are to where we want the world to be?

How are the two hundred million of us to convince the thirty-three hundred million of them that we are on the right path, and that it is wide enough for all to travel.

Eventually, if not now, it must be through knowing each other, then trusting each other.

And if eventually, why not now?

That is the petition of the 24th Report.

The 24th Report

United States Advisory Commission on Information

The world's curiosity about the United States—about its policies and intentions, its actions and capabilities—has increased in proportion to the growth of America's power and influence. The world's *opinion* about the United States has fluctuated measurably. In recent years, the trend has been down.

To discover why, we must first look to actions, not words. Yet we may reasonably consider how much of the fault may lie in our prevailing approach to foreign and national security policy formulations, which gives but cursory due to public opinion abroad. This aloofness may well have been valid in a time when secret diplomacy was the principal if not the exclusive approach to relations between nations. It is not today. It can never be again. The time has passed when governments could control information dissemination—and, thereby, what their peoples think. After two decades of experience with the overseas information, educational and cultural programs initiated by Public Law 402 (the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948) and now administered by the United States Information Agency, the foreign affairs establishment has still to learn this lesson. The continued avoidance of this truth—and, in the Commission's view, of this opportunity—can lead only to further erosion of and disenchantment with U. S. leadership.

Effective, accurate, open communication can make the difference between peace and war. Moreover, it can make the

difference in the eventual outcome of the contest now being waged between reform and revolution. Between 1948 and 1968, and now under its fifth Administration, USIA has constructed a worldwide apparatus capable of transmitting the message and the idea of America. Yet a number of opportunities remain unexploited, and some past gains must be consolidated:

1

The Agency's research is inadequate. It does not deliver to the foreign policy planning process incisive inputs on trends in worldwide public opinion about the United States, or to USIA management meaningful data on the success, or lack of it, of the Agency's own efforts. As we have said before, "The plain fact is that in too many cases the Agency does not know why it is doing what it is doing." USIA's research effort—primitive, timid and stumbling in the past—must be subjected to fundamental overhaul and strengthening.

2

Over the years, the Voice of America has established a capability for instant access to virtually all corners of the world—essentially via the shortwave bands. But the world has changed. The transistorized radio, available in abundance and at low cost, has brought standard medium-wave radio—that is, local radio—into a dominant position among communications media in many countries where the Voice hopes to be heard. (Two notable exceptions: The U.S.S.R. and Red China, where shortwave remains the principal courier for VOA.) This development has created both technical and programming demands which must be addressed at an accelerated pace if VOA is to retain its position of influence. It must maintain its capacity for service in "stress" situations and, in "slack" periods,

must hold its audience with an attractive program service.

3

The 150 libraries and information centers, the 45 reading rooms and the 130 bi-national centers can bring basic information about the U. S. to 101 countries—in English as well as the host language. These peaceful symbols of America abroad attract thousands of visitors daily. They need to be redesigned, refurbished and restocked with the dynamic new materials emerging from the American university presses and from the rest of the American communications industry.

4

It is overwhelmingly evident that there is no substitute for a foreign citizen's visit to this country. Invariably, he takes back with him profound and lasting impressions of our energy and purpose. His ability to witness first-hand the openness of our society—from space adventures to face-to-face confrontations of Presidents and press—demonstrates beyond dispute that ours is a free society. Similarly, the exposure of Americans to foreign cultures and viewpoints helps assure the mutuality of understanding we seek to achieve. The program of cultural and educational exchange—administered jointly by USIA and the Department of State—deserves an infusion of Congressional encouragement.

5

New techniques in audio-visual presentations, ranging from television to film exhibits, electronics and graphics—all especially cast for foreign audiences—can help

dramatize and enhance America's efforts to communicate its story to the people of the world. They must be made part of USIA's skills inventory.

6

The massive private resources of this country must be brought into tandem with the U. S. communications program abroad. The vein has hardly been tapped. Creative, constructive talents in radio, press, television, film, design, graphics, publishing, education, the arts, the social sciences and related professions need to be marshalled more effectively.

7

Similarly, a special effort should be made to capitalize upon those resources in foreign countries which may be used to USIA's advantage. The two most conspicuous are those organizations indigenous to a host country which identify with the United States and have common cause with its policies and objectives, as well as organizations of the American private sector which have operating arms abroad and which by the mere fact of being there already serve as unofficial representatives, for good or ill. Of equal importance are those foreign journalists and news organizations stationed in this country and thus positioned to perform a key role in informing their audiences about us.

8

The level of representation allowances for USIA activities remains scandalously low; roughly half the level of current expenditures, forcing USIA personnel in the field to make up the difference from their own pockets. The Commission again urges the Congress to make adequate provision for this essential element of

the Agency's overseas operations, and to lift the financial burden that is now being shouldered by a dedicated career staff.

9

The creation of a solid corps of professional officers in foreign communications, whose ability to communicate with the peoples of the world in their own languages and with a sensitivity, understanding and respect for the psychology, customs and traditions of their cultures, has helped gain acceptance and understanding of U. S. policy and action. (In this connection, the Commission is pleased to commend the 90th Congress—and particularly the leadership of Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island and Representative Wayne Hays of Ohio—for establishing a career corps for Foreign Service Information Officers, and thereby providing a long overdue legislative personnel base for USIA operations.) The importance of encouraging these American “ambassadors” to bridge the gaps between national cultures—and of strengthening their ability to do so—cannot be overemphasized.

One basic theme is common to this and the 23 earlier reports prepared by this Commission for the Congress and the President: that America's foreign policy must be strengthened by the infusion of psychological or communications factors. This can occur only if USIA is permitted to play a role where the action is—in the National Security Council, with the Secretary of State, with Ambassadors abroad, and whenever feasible in the Cabinet. The past 20 years have seen tortured, though discernible, progress toward that end. It is our hope that the reluctance of the past will be overcome by the enthusiastic endorsement of the future.

AFTERWORD

We of the United States Advisory Commission on Information find ourselves one year older, but of no different mind, than we were at the conclusion of the 23d Report. It was then that we called for a major review of (1) the USIA and (2) the governmental context in which it operates. We said it was time to examine assumptions, and posed eleven questions that might be among those covered in such a study.* They are still worth asking:

Is the United States Information Agency to be but an agent of American "propaganda"?

Should it be more than an arm of foreign policy?

Are information, educational and cultural objectives compatible within one agency?

Were they consolidated outside of the Department of State, should that body have Cabinet rank?

Or should the reins be drawn together within a restructured Department of State?

Does the responsibility of those who create the foreign policy of the United States go beyond its declaration?

Should they have charge of its promulgation as well?

Should USIA have a hand in information dispersal for Government agencies beyond the Department of State?

Should it play a role in the influence of policy as well as in its execution?

Should it help support those private organizations whose overseas activities had been subsidized covertly in the past by the federal government and whose future funding is under study by a committee chaired by the Secretary of State?

Do we really intend that USIA work toward "mutual understanding"; is it to help us understand them as well as to help them understand us?

As we repeat the questions, so also do we repeat the hope that they will be answered.

*A number of courses might be taken in pursuing the examination. One which commends itself to the Advisory Commission takes this form:

The President would appoint a Committee of Nine—one member each from the Senate, the House of Representatives, the National Security Council, the Department of State, the United States Information Agency and the United States Advisory Commission on Information, and, from the private sector, a chairman and two additional members knowledgeable in the fields of information, education and cultural affairs. This committee would select the study organization, review and approve the direction and plan for the study, and critique its findings.

The study itself would be conducted by professional researchers and experts in foreign policy, members either of an existing research and development organization or, perhaps, drawn together on an *ad hoc* basis under the auspices of a school of international studies.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The United States Advisory Commission on Information is a citizens' commission created by the Congress in 1948, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate to conduct a continuing, independent overview of the United States Information Agency. Its members are Sigurd S. Larmon (1954-), former chairman of the board and president of Young & Rubicam, New York; M. S. Novik (1962-), radio-television consultant, New York; Frank Stanton (Chairman, 1964-), president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., New York; Palmer Hoyt (1965-), editor and publisher of *The Denver Post*, and Thomas Vail (1967-), editor and publisher of *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland.

On January 25, 1968, President Johnson nominated Mr. Novik for re-appointment to the Commission. He was confirmed by the Senate on February 3, 1968.

The Commission held eleven meetings during 1968, eight in Washington and three in New York. A joint meeting was held with the U. S. Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Commission met with members of the House of Representatives on February 5, 1968 and with members of the Senate on February 6, to discuss recommendations of the Commission's 23d Report to the Congress.

During March and April 1968, Mr. Novik participated in the Public Affairs Officers briefing and orientation program in Saigon. He then visited U. S. Information Service posts in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Tel Aviv and London.

During November 1968, Mr. Larmon visited USIS posts and binational centers in Belem, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Rosario and Santiago.

On July 22, 1968, Dr. Stanton's statement on the "Importance of Communication in International Relations" was read by Mr. Novik at the hearing conducted by the Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The Commission commended the subsequent Report of the Subcommittee, supported its principal conclusions and recommendations and welcomed its recognition that public diplomacy has emerged as an important part of international relations.