

# **THE ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE UNITED STATES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Cultural diplomacy is an imprecise and often immeasurable concept that has received only intermittent attention from the government in the United States. Studies on the current environment of cultural diplomacy in the United States conclude that government efforts are lacking, but do not given much attention to the reasons why there is so little support.

Through a review of the historical developments of cultural diplomacy in the United States, an analysis of trends that account for the low level of government support and interviews with Foreign Service Officers, this study identifies some of the reasons why support exists at its current state. This investigation concludes that no single factor accounts for the way in which cultural diplomacy receives support from the federal government. Rather, the U.S. system of government, private sector power, perception of importance as a national issue, and personal ambitions of government leaders have all contributed to bringing cultural diplomacy to its current state.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, United States

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural diplomacy is a part of every nation's interaction with one another. As Bound et al. (2007:14-15) describe, cultural diplomacy through the forms of performing and visual arts, heritage, science, sport, and popular culture represents one of the "soft" aspects of international interaction versus the "hard" aspects of treaties, multi-lateral organizations and military power. Some nations, such as France, have a historically strong and directed government commitment to cultural diplomacy activities, while others, like the United States, have a more detached and variable approach. As will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter, one of the purposes of cultural diplomacy is to foster understanding among nations.

Living in a globalized world, the occasions for international connections and contact are continually increasing with the basis of those interactions derived from a knowledge of and familiarity with individual cultures. If first-hand interaction is unavailable then second-hand information becomes the source of cultural familiarity and understanding. The risk of second-hand information is that the true nature of a country may become obscured through the transmission process. For example, the world has witnessed the proliferation of U.S. pop culture over the last fifty years, but in an undiscerning fashion this mass culture of Hollywood movies and commercialism is now assumed by foreign nations to represent the ideals of America. The ideals of liberty, freedom and justice that the U.S. promotes in official engagements have been eclipsed by consumer products. Allowing the market to control cultural diplomacy limits the quality and depth of national images presented and impressions created abroad.

The security of a nation depends on the quality of its relations with other nations and cultural exchange and understanding plays a key role in fostering relationships. Cultural diplomacy offers the opportunity to engage nations outside of the normal political arena and develop a foundation for support that extends beyond the immediate circumstances. It is an

imprecise and often immeasurable concept, however, which in many nations places it as a supplement to foreign relations rather than as an element of core business. Bound et al. (2007:11) report that a common view is that cultural diplomacy can help establish and support working relationships between countries, but that it is strictly subordinate to economic and military capabilities. In the U.S., cultural diplomacy has received only intermittent attention. Emerging in the 1930s, U.S. cultural diplomacy has moved through various phases of use, support and irrelevance which will be discussed in the following chapter. Before addressing its historical path, however, the subsequent sections will explain the concept and its context of use.

### **1.1 Defining Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy can be undertaken by all types of groups and organizations. National foundations act as cultural diplomats when they offer grants to visiting artists, private businesses engage in cultural diplomacy when they open operations in a foreign land and universities employ cultural diplomacy in the student exchanges they sponsor. The subject of this investigation, however, is the federal government's promotion of such activities and programs.

The definition widely used today in the U.S. refers to cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (Cummings 2003:1). Yet, there is more to the concept than this definition reveals. Cultural diplomacy is also a “proactive process of external projection” whereby national institutions, values and cultural personality are promoted at bilateral and multilateral levels to establish, develop and sustain relations with foreign states (DiploFoundation 2007). In addition to the energetic promotion of one's own culture, the U.S. Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy advises that nations must also reciprocate and *listen* to their counterparts in order to explore common ground and uncover

shared meaning (ACCD 2005:5). The idea here is that every culture has its own way of exploring global values and in order to extract a shared meaning everyone engaged in the process of exploration – intellectuals, artists, educators, diplomats – needs to allow themselves to be influenced by foreign views in their field. Channick (2005) highlights the approach artists take toward cultural diplomacy as an engagement intended “to understand different cultural traditions, to find new sources of imaginative inspiration, to discover other methods and ways of working and to exchange ideas with people whose worldviews differ from their own.” The author contrasts this vision with the use of culture as a tool or weapon to achieve targeted political objectives.

## **1.2 Objectives of Cultural Diplomacy**

Just as definitions for cultural diplomacy have multiple dimensions, so do its objectives. The legislative authority for cultural diplomacy, the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, establishes the primary goal of fostering mutual understanding among nations with a secondary goal of improving America’s international competence (Sablosky 2003:4). Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century activity centered on the primary goal and overlooked the second mandate. While mutual understanding was officially supported, in practice, cultural diplomacy efforts weighed heavily in favor of creating a positive image of America abroad. For example, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was charged with promoting mutual understanding between the U.S. and other nations by conducting educational and cultural activities, but was prohibited by the Smith-Mundt Act from distributing program material within the U.S. or influencing U.S. public opinion (FAS 1998). So, while USIA was able to initiate and maintain substantial overseas programs, this ban prevented the agency from teaching U.S. citizens about other countries (Snow 2002:63).

In recent years, the objectives of cultural diplomacy have moved more toward the reciprocal goal of engagement and understanding. From the shock of world events and polls

conducted by the Pew Research Center and Zogby International, the U.S. government learned that anti-American sentiments were growing around the globe.<sup>1</sup> Investigative committees determined that the U.S. needed to counterbalance the hostility towards the U.S. and its policies through enhanced cultural diplomacy activities (ACCD 2005:3) and the engagement of ideas (9/11 Commission 2004:375). Recommendations highlighted exchange, scholarship and library programs that would bring ideas together “to establish a secure base from which to inspire and sustain the dialogue among all nations” (ACCD 2005:18).

In the tradition of the past, the majority of attention centered on efforts to improve the U.S. image abroad, however, the federal government did give new consideration to the fact that U.S. citizens lacked extensive knowledge of foreign cultures, particularly those in the Muslim world where anti-Americanism was the strongest. In response, the U.S. launched a new foreign language initiative and two professional exchange programs to encourage domestic participation in international cultural relations. Additionally, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice presented a “Transformational Diplomacy” plan that called for repositioning American diplomats from Europe and Washington, D.C., to critically emerging areas of the world, creating regional public diplomacy centers and training diplomats in new skills and languages (Nowels et al. 2006:Summary). Funding for educational and cultural exchange more than tripled between 2001 and 2006, according to one State Department document (US DOS 2006), and the Administration’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 appropriations request for the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was 11.3% more than the FY2006 level (Epstein 2006:6, Epstein and Villarreal 2007:50).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of polls include the Pew Research Center report *Views of a Changing World 2003: War with Iraq Further Divides Global Politics* (June 2003) and more recently the Arab American Institute/Zogby International poll *Continuing Conflict in Iraq and Palestine Deepens U.S.-Arab Rift with Growing Costs to Both Sides* (December 2006). The 9/11 Commission cited statistics from James Zogby’s book *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns* (Zogby International 2002).

<sup>2</sup> FY2005 appropriations for the Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs totaled \$355.9 million, which included \$160.5 million for the Fulbright Program that was to incorporate a Foreign Student Program with Iraq and Afghanistan (Epstein 2005:3). FY2006 appropriations totaled \$426.3 million, which included \$185.1 million for the Fulbright Program, and the Administration’s request for FY2007 was for \$474.3



These initial budget increases and program initiatives signal a renewed interest in cultural diplomacy within the State Department, but only a few programs have reached fruition while scores of recommendations await recognition and implementation. A recent Foreign Affairs Council report found that of 1,100 new positions requested to achieve the “Transformational Diplomacy” initiative, none of the positions were granted in FY2006 or 2007 (FAC 2007:v). Additionally, some 200 existing Foreign Service jobs are unfilled and an additional 900 training slots necessary to provide essential linguistic and functional skills do not exist (FAC 2007:iv). The discrepancy between stated goals and funded reality suggests that government-wide support for extensive cultural diplomacy activities is not secured.

### ***1.3 Elements of Cultural Diplomacy***

When discussing cultural diplomacy, officials and cultural affairs experts sometimes differ on the scope of activity it encompasses. The following discussion gives a brief assessment of the areas of consideration. Support for the visual and performing arts and literature are generally considered key components of cultural diplomacy. They are universal concepts with which every country has experience and familiarity and are often described as expressing the values of a nation. Professional and academic knowledge are two other areas of cultural diplomacy that communicate national ideals and are seen as promoting understanding through exchange. Broadcast media has been described as an influential form of cultural diplomacy, though when distributed according to the rules of the marketplace it often challenges the legislative goals of cultural diplomacy (Schneider 2003:14). A final consideration is trade policy in that it sets the conditions under which U.S. cultural products are distributed in other nations (The Curb Center 2004:3).

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million (Epstein 2006:6, Epstein and Villarreal 2007:50). Additionally an emergency supplemental spending bill was passed in 2006 which included \$5 million for exchanges in Iran (Epstein 2006:4).

In this paper, the elements of cultural diplomacy will include different kinds of support for the visual and performing arts, literature, and professional and academic knowledge. Sponsoring activities involving actors, artists, directors, musicians, photographers, producers, stage technicians, or writers provides the opportunity for a nation to both express itself as well as share training and techniques (ACCD 2005:12-13). Programs with public figures help open the doors of communication, and educational programs spread knowledge through activities such as book translations and student and teacher exchanges. In that broadcast media more often deals with aspects of information dissemination rather than person-to-person exchange, it will be excluded from the elements of cultural diplomacy in this study. Likewise, trade represents a realm of policymaking, setting the parameters for exchange rather than existing as part of the exchange itself and will also be excluded from the discussion.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The U.S. Center for Arts and Culture, an independent cultural policy think tank affiliated with George Mason University, was active in publishing research pieces aimed at heightening awareness about the power and importance of cultural diplomacy in the contemporary world. The Center's 2003 studies on U.S. cultural diplomacy focused on the State Department support for cultural diplomacy, country comparison of international cultural relations, U.S. foundation support for international arts exchanges, and best practices in the field.<sup>3</sup> The reports analyze various factors contributing to the current context of cultural interactions and all conclude that U.S. efforts to promote international cultural diplomacy are lacking. What is not given so much attention is an analysis of the reasons why there is so

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<sup>3</sup> The Center for Arts and Culture studies mentioned are the following: Cummings, Jr., M. C., *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*; Sablosky, J. A., *Recent Trends In Department of State Support for Cultural Diplomacy: 1993-2002*; Wyszomirski, M., *International Cultural Relations: A Multi-Country Comparison*, Schneider, C., *Diplomacy that Works: 'Best Practices' in Cultural Diplomacy*; and Szántó, A., *A New Mandate for Philanthropy? U.S. Foundation Support for International Arts Exchanges*.

little government support for cultural diplomacy in the U.S. This study seeks to fill this gap. A review of the historical developments of cultural diplomacy, an analysis of trends that account for the low level of government support and interviews with Foreign Service Officers will serve as the basis for identifying some of the reasons why support exists at its current state and where avenues for improvement lie.

## **CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE 1930S TO THE PRESENT**

The government's support for cultural diplomacy in the U.S. has fluctuated since its inception. The following sections examine the path of cultural diplomacy from its emergence in the 1930s to the present post-9/11 period. This assessment of cultural diplomacy initiatives is a thematic investigation into trends involving proliferation activities, jurisdictional conflicts, propaganda connections, and the role of the private sector, rather than an exhaustive, chronological account of history. Such an analysis looks at how the efforts were conceived and executed in order to identify patterns of government support and indifference.

### ***2.1 Emergence in the 1930s***

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, American missionaries, academic institutions and secular foundations were at the forefront of developing international educational training and exchange (Feigenbaum 2002:28). Promoting personal exchanges between nations conveyed interest in foreign cultures and promoted respect for the nations involved in the exchange. Students, scholars and artists were the pioneers of the privately funded exchange programs and the U.S. government soon recognized the positive effects of these initiatives. In the early 1930s, Latin America was being courted with Nazi cultural propaganda and the U.S. took notice that culture had entered the realm of national security and needed attention. In response, the nation undertook its first commitment to a government-sponsored international cultural exchange (Cummings 2003:1, Feigenbaum 2002:29, US DOS 2000).

The steps taken in the name of national security were also closely tied with private sector needs and activity. At a time when the private sector was looking for assistance in promoting its exchange programs and the U.S. was seeking to enhance cross-border relations

with Latin America, the U.S. government initiated a convention in Buenos Aires which stressed the importance of greater mutual understanding and introduced student, professor and teacher exchanges on a reciprocal basis (Cummings 2003:1).<sup>4</sup> The government needed to show commitment to these efforts and in 1938 established its first Division of Cultural Relations in the State Department. A crucial element of this Division was the collaborative program efforts that involved the private sector philanthropic, educational and cultural entities of the nation (Cummings 2003:2, US DOS 2000).

The influence of the private sector and institutionalization of intellectual and cultural exchange continued to penetrate federal activity and impact government goals. Continued Nazi and rising Fascist propaganda was securing sympathy in Latin America, so, in response, President Roosevelt created an agency, outside the scope of the State Department, which promoted educational, cultural and scientific exchanges with Latin American countries.<sup>5</sup> Leadership of this agency was charged to Nelson Rockefeller, a prominent private philanthropist and ally of the President. Miller and Yúdice (2002:40) note that some of the most important artists, scholars and intellectuals of the time were recruited by Rockefeller which led to important linkages between the private sector and the government.

The multiple fronts of cultural diplomacy were not without problems, however. In that Rockefeller had direct access to the President and the ability to raise large sums of money to mobilize his office's cultural endeavors, this led to strained relations with the State Department (Cummings 2003:3, Miller and Yúdice 2002:39). This inter-agency conflict foreshadowed future government battles to come.

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<sup>4</sup> The convention was part of the 1936 Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace.

<sup>5</sup> The Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations Between the American Republics was established by Council of National Defense order on August 16, 1940. It was abolished by Executive Order 8840 on July 30, 1941, and its functions were transferred to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), established in the Office for Emergency Management. OCIAA was re-designated the Office of Inter-American Affairs by Executive Order 9532 on March 23, 1945. Its informational activities were transferred to the State Department on August 31, 1945, and its remaining functions and responsibilities were similarly transferred by May 20, 1946, when the Office was abolished (U.S. National Archives 1995).

With the United States' entry into World War II, cultural diplomacy continued to play a major role and the government subsequently expanded its cultural relations activities in existing offices and created a new Office of War Information (OWI) to coordinate domestic war news and launch a propaganda campaign abroad.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the exchange programs begun by the private sector and those promoted by OCIAA emphasized a two-way exchange of ideas between nations, the OWI focused primarily on explaining America's objectives to the world in an attempt to undermine enemy morale (Cummings 2003:3). The origins of U.S. involvement in cultural diplomacy therefore sought to meet both short-term goals of countering Axis propaganda and long-term goals of developing relationships and understanding through exchanges (Feigenbaum 2002:30).

As World War II ended, the U.S. government re-oriented its approach to cultural efforts and focused on educational and cultural exchanges that would promote the values of a democratic system (Cummings 2003:4). Internally, cultural and information policy reorganization began in 1945 with the transfer of the international information functions of OWI and OCIAA to the State Department.<sup>7</sup> This move was followed by a series of changes and reorganizations of the government agencies entrusted with the conduct of America's programs in cultural diplomacy (Cummings 2003:5). The next section details the expansion of cultural endeavors during the Cold War.

## **2.2 Cold War Era**

In the mid-1940s, the State Department entered new fields of experimentation with cultural diplomacy. Acknowledged by one scholar as "the most famous program of educational and cultural exchange in American history," the Fulbright Program was enacted

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<sup>6</sup> The Office of War Information was created in 1942 and abolished in 1945 at which time its foreign functions were transferred to the Department of State.

<sup>7</sup> The OWI and OCIAA functions were combined with the Division of Cultural Relations responsibilities to form the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, which was renamed a year later as the Office of International Information and Educational Exchange.

in 1946 and continues to this day (Cummings 2003:5).<sup>8</sup> Over the past sixty years the Fulbright Program has accounted for approximately 279,500 participants – 105,400 from the United States and 174,100 from other countries (US DOS 2007). Promoting tolerance, amity, peace, and stability among the people of the world, the Fulbright Program at fifty was concluded by a committee of experts from the fields of education, international affairs, business, medicine, philanthropy, and the media to be a valuable world investment in international cooperation and security (The National Humanities Center 1997).

Aside from exchange activity, some trace the beginnings of U.S. postwar cultural diplomacy strategy to the creation of “America Houses,” which originated in 1945 in response to Soviet cultural activities in Berlin (The Curb Center 2004:5). During the Cold War, America Houses and American Cultural Centers were established to bring news from Washington and American books, films and exhibits to foreign locations (Schneider 2003:14). The houses and centers were established in locations separate from the embassy, which promoted easy access and use of the facilities and resources, and offered a variety of outlets through which consumers could educate themselves on various subjects concerning the U.S. By 1946, the State Department’s Office of Information and Cultural Affairs directed 76 outposts around the world (The Curb Center 2004:6).

As the Cold War began in 1946-47, government attention returned to the benefits of the international exchange activities of the past and their connection with national security. In response to its power struggle with the Soviet Union, the U.S. enacted what some have called “the founding legislation of U.S. cultural diplomacy,” the Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, commonly referred to as the Smith-Mundt Act (ACCD 2005:7). For the first time when the U.S. was not officially at war, the government took action to conduct

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<sup>8</sup> The Fulbright Act was enacted as an amendment to the Surplus Property Act of 1944. According to the law, the Department of State could enter into executive agreements to initiate educational and cultural exchanges and use foreign currencies accrued from the sale of U.S. government property abroad to finance the exchanges. Over time, the U.S. Congress has maintained the program through annual appropriations.

international information, education and cultural exchange activities on a worldwide scale in order to promote better understanding of the U.S. in other countries and to strengthen cooperative international relations (Cummings 2003:7).

Interestingly, as part of the Act, the cultural administrative division was reorganized to separate the educational and cultural programs from the information and media programs (Cummings 2003:7). The separation illustrated the struggle within the government to determine where cultural diplomacy belonged. In 1953, the belief of separation of purpose – short term versus long term – was further advanced with the creation of USIA, an agency separate from the State Department charged with responsibility for all the information programs. Within two years, however, the administration of the overseas operations part of the educational exchange programs was transferred to USIA (Cummings 200:7) and in 1978 the remainder of the cultural exchange responsibilities still housed at the State Department were moved to USIA (The Curb Center 2004:6).

USIA's mission was to “to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad” (USIA 1998:5). The agency's work was carried out by Foreign Service Officers posted at U.S. embassies and missions abroad serving as Public Affairs Officers, Information Officers or Cultural Affairs Officers. The Washington headquarters provided policy guidance and support for the overseas posts and maintained contact with U.S.-based private sector groups participating in the exchanges and programs.

USIA's operations ranged from exchange program oversight to broadcasting activities to democracy building initiatives. In 1954, USIA broadcast 28 program hours daily in 34 different languages, published 25 periodicals, distributed daily press service to 10,000 newspapers, and maintained 160 libraries or information centers (Bogart 1995:xiv). It had an



early operating budget of \$96 million (Bogart 1995:xvi) and, at the height of its activity in the mid-1960s, USIA employed 12,358 individuals (Bogart 1995:xxiv).

USIA remained active during the Cold War period, but as tensions eased the agency's purpose came into question and its importance began to decline. After the end of the Cold War, USIA funding was repeatedly cut until 1999 when the agency was consolidated into the State Department. At that time, USIA maintained 190 posts in 142 countries operating with a budget of \$1.109 billion and a staff of 6,352 employees (USIA 1999). USIA was broadcasting 660 hours of weekly programming in 53 languages, distributing daily press service in 5 languages and responsible for over 100 libraries or information centers (USIA 1999). USIA's role had diminished, but its abolition was a decision that had been contemplated since the 1970s (Time 1975).

While USIA openly strengthened U.S. information and exchange initiatives abroad, another organization, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began working covertly in support of a variety of intellectual and cultural programs overseas. Drawing on the "old-boy networks of inter-Americanists," familiar foundation and private sector principals led the new era of Cold War initiatives (Miller and Yúdice 2002:41). The CIA helped create institutions, like the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which sought to negate communism's appeal to members of the European intelligentsia through publishing literary and political journals, hosting conferences and helping intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain (Warner 1995).

The CIA was also responsible for creating Radio Free Europe (RFE), a project launched under the auspices of the Free Europe Committee to broadcast programs in support of East European resistance to Soviet domination.<sup>9</sup> While RFE was the CIA's most expensive covert project in the area, its broadcast policy and political documents were a cumulative effort of negotiation involving the RFE, the CIA and the State Department

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<sup>9</sup> The Free Europe Committee was originally called the National Committee for a Free Europe.

(Puddington 2000:24,26). A study of RFE's history and relationships reports that the radios were protected from CIA secret operations due to the fact that such use of the radios would have compromised the project's long-term viability, as well as the reality that there was a mutuality of intelligence interests and radio goals between the CIA and RFE (Puddington 2000:27-28). In fact, while some cite the CIA connection as a source of embarrassment because it made the station vulnerable to accusations of espionage, others concluded that the radios enjoyed greater freedom and success under CIA administration because it followed the belief that the less government interference there was the better (Puddington 2000:31,32).

In general, the undercover activities were largely heralded as effective at combating communism (Warner 1995). Yet, not everyone viewed the CIA's actions with understanding or appreciation for the greater goals. Rather than clearing new ground for democratic thought, authors Meyer and Steinberg (2004) assert that the CCF's activities were "mass brainwashing" exercises aimed at "cultural pessimism." They believe the CCF manipulated individuals with the inundation of popular culture in order to marginalize classical European culture and gain the support of the masses so as to prevent the disruption of world order and, particularly, the United States' position of power. This is an antagonistic point of view, but one that clearly identifies the level of mistrust the CIA sponsorship caused. Future programming has since prompted an underlying question of trust among nations about whether or not cultural activities involving the U.S. are still linked to the CIA (Feigenbaum 2002:31).

By the 1960s, cultural diplomacy had become tightly connected with military, political and economic strategies as the government undertook new initiatives to tie U.S. leadership in the world to respect for the quality of its ideas and spirit (Miller and Yúdice 2002:45). The 1956 International Cultural Exchange and Trade Fair Participation Act led to 111 attractions being sent to 89 countries in the first four years of the program (Cummings

2003:8). International and educational programs were restored as a recognized area of the nation's official foreign relations through the 1961 Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act and 1964 marked the beginning of the ART in Embassies Program, a public-private partnership which provides loan exhibits of American works of art in U.S. ambassadorial residences overseas.

This explosion of cultural activity is attributed to the U.S. fight to counterbalance Soviet influence. Of note, however, is the fact that even in the midst of the Cold War, the U.S. spent less in absolute terms on policy information and cultural communication functions than France and Germany and less percent of its budget in absolute terms, at .11 percent, than Britain and Japan, at .23 and .14 percent respectively (Nye 2004:6). It is no surprise then that as the Cold War drew to a close the government began making dramatic cuts in cultural diplomacy programs and, without a viable threat against the nation, its interest in advancing culture subsided. The next section addresses this decline of cultural diplomacy.

### ***2.3 Post-Cold War Era***

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union that began in 1989, the historic transformations in international relations that followed led to revised strategies of engagement in cultural diplomacy. USIA continued to sponsor broadcasting propaganda, information programs and scholarly and community exchanges, but the objectives of the United States' presence in the world had changed. In response, USIA's resources were redirected from democratic nations to Eastern Europe and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union. The resources were used to expand academic, cultural and information exchanges in these areas and initiate new programs to encourage the development of democracy and free market economies and institutions.

In addition to the changing international environment, the U.S. started the 1990s with a weak economy and severe recession that moved foreign policy and cultural diplomacy

discussions away from the national agenda spotlight (Cummings 2003: 11). Emphasis was placed on downsizing the government and balancing the budget which took a significant toll on cultural diplomacy programming. By the end of the 1990s, USIA's budget had been cut by 33 percent and its staff decreased by 29 percent (Sablosky 2003:5). From 1995 to 2001, the number of exchange participants dropped from approximately 45,000 to 29,000 (U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy 2002:10) and widely accessible America centers and libraries were closed and replaced by internal embassy "information resource centers."

The question of cultural diplomacy's role in foreign affairs resurfaced and it was decided that it should no longer be independent from foreign policy, but should instead be linked to increasing understanding and support for U.S. policies (Schneider 2004). Nearly half of USIA's operations moved to the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) in 1999 with the rest being incorporated into the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). To coordinate and oversee the spectrum of cultural diplomacy programs, the State Department created a new position, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. According the U.S. Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (2005:8), this consolidation "marked the end of a formal cultural policy and the beginning of a retreat from the war of ideas raging around the world."

Several modest programs were initiated by the government during this time, but given the trends of this period, cultural programming struggled to stay afloat. When adjusted for inflation, the FY2000 budget for cultural presentations was operating with \$9.4 million less than it had in the 1954-62 period (DOS 2000). Alternative funding sources became more critical and received more attention. For cultural programs abroad, geographic bureaus and local embassy budgets at times provided funds, although these budgets also suffered severe cuts in the post-Cold War period (Sablosky 2003:7). Additional resources took the form of financial and in-kind support from both foreign governments and the private sector. In

FY2001, foreign governments provided approximately \$27.9 million in direct financial support for academic exchanges, the private sector abroad provided \$18.4 million in-kind donations and, in the U.S., American universities contributed about \$46.4 million in-kind support (Schechter 2002:66 cited in Sablosky 2003:7).

The reality of the situation was that while some ambassadors and experts in the field of cultural diplomacy acknowledged the value and impact of cultural programs overseas, the government was unconvinced of their importance. There was confusion regarding cultural diplomacy's purpose, funding constraints on a shrinking number of programs and a mindset that cultural diplomacy was expendable. A horrific crisis shattered the government's complacency on the issue on September 11, 2001. With the devastating terrorist attacks in the U.S., the government took notice of its vulnerability and faltering image in the eyes of the world. Many officials began to recognize the negative impact of the government's inattention to cultural diplomacy and initiated renewed commitment to improving the nation's relationships overseas. The following section details those efforts.

#### **2.4 Post 9/11**

“Official indifference” to cultural diplomacy ended on 9/11 (Dizard 2003). The terrorist attacks exposed the gap in America's cultural presence abroad and revived the debate on the role of cultural diplomacy in national security. Initial efforts to communicate U.S. values and ideals to the world relied heavily on marketing the American method of foreign policy through aggressive programs, a method that was poorly received (Dizard 2003). Program adjustments were made and softer measures drawing on exchange activities moved into focus.

In an effort to promote American understanding and respect for other cultures, as well as enhance diplomatic engagements and national security, the National Security Language Initiative was introduced in the U.S. in January 2006. This long-term interagency initiative

supplemented existing scholarships and language programs and established new domestic and overseas programs in critically needed foreign languages. Also in 2006, ECA partnered with U.S. universities and the Aspen Institute to create a program that brings journalists from around the world to cities across the U.S. to examine journalistic practices and foreign policy objectives. Later that year, ECA initiated a program that connects America's leading female business leaders with emerging businesswomen from around the world at an annual conference.<sup>10</sup> In September 2006, the State Department also launched the Global Cultural Initiative, a partnership enterprise to coordinate, enhance and expand overseas cultural diplomacy efforts.<sup>11</sup> While the State Department has previously collaborated with the private sector on specific projects, the Global Cultural Initiative represents the first long-term, institutional partnership on cultural programs in multiple arts disciplines (US DOS 2007).

Not all government efforts were swiftly undertaken, however. Several White House initiatives to move beyond its oversight role and coordinate a defined national communications policy proved unsuccessful. In 2002 and 2003, separate entities were established to facilitate coordination of global U.S. public diplomacy efforts, but within two years each disbanded without issuing a strategy (GAO 2005:10; Kamen 2005).<sup>12</sup> A U.S. Government Accountability Office report cited the lack of leadership as a problem hindering the production of a strategic plan (GAO 2005:13). This obstacle may now be resolved, however. In June 2007, Under Secretary Hughes released the long-awaited national strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication. The report identifies strategic objectives, target audiences, program priorities, funding recommendations, and a committee that will monitor the implementation of the proposed strategy. It builds on the current multi-agency

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<sup>10</sup> The program is entitled the International Women Leaders Mentoring Partnership.

<sup>11</sup> The State Department intends to partner with both U.S. government and private sector cultural agencies and institutions. Its initial partnerships are with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the American Film Institute, the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

activities and offers specific recommendations for how agencies can expand their exchange programs and broaden their cultural activities in order to increase the promotion of American values. The report is a first step in defining the mission of public diplomacy and how cultural diplomacy fits into its goals, as well as establishing a plan of action for achieving those goals.

With regard to public-private partnerships, new challenges arose in this period relating to competing ideologies. The government relies on the private sector for expertise in cultural diplomacy matters, but has been steadily cultivating its own policy goals as well. The idiosyncratic visions of U.S. culture and values that have surfaced between the private sector and government, therefore, contribute to the difficulty of developing a coherent and consistent cultural diplomacy policy (The Curb Center 2004:32). The following chapter will address the issues of private sector influence and other reasons accounting for the lack of government support for cultural diplomacy.

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<sup>12</sup> The Strategic Communications Policy Coordinating Committee was established in 2002 and disbanded in 2003. The Office of Global Communications was established in 2003 and disbanded in 2005.

## **CHAPTER 3. ACCOUNTING FOR THE LACK OF SUPPORT FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY INITIATIVES**

U.S. government interest in cultural diplomacy has ebbed and flowed. Though there was a period of intense activity during the Cold War, in general, the government has sought to maintain an arm's length approach to the conduct of cultural diplomacy. No single policy or dedicated agency exists to provide direct guidance on the issue. Rather, multiple agencies and departments produce individual policies relating to cultural diplomacy. In addition to government initiatives, private sector organizations also contribute to cultural program development, further removing government control over cultural diplomacy.

This chapter looks at the factors that contribute to this array of cultural diplomacy policies and investigates what accounts for the low level of U.S. government support. It will consider three main explanations, the first is that minimal support is a consequence of the federal system structure of government; the second, that private sector leadership and resources negate the need for government direction; and finally, that cultural diplomacy is widely viewed by senior politicians and policymakers as an irrelevant topic. The following sections explore these impediments to government support for cultural diplomacy and the effects each has on U.S. relations with other nations.

### ***3.1 U.S. Tradition of Arm's Length Authority***

In accordance with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. federal government seeks to adhere to principles that protect individual freedoms and prevent infringement on those rights. Culture and the promotion of particular cultural images require interpretation on the part of the user and this obligation makes the U.S. government hesitant to engage in cultural activities lest it infringe on personal freedoms via interpretation. Miller and Yúdice (2002:35) argue that there is a deep American commitment to keeping the state



separate from the production and management of cultural meaning which prevents the government from elevating, discriminating or even differentiating cultural products. As the previous chapter showed, however, the government does involve itself in cultural activities and the promotion of cultural diplomacy. This conduct exemplifies the tension that exists between the government's value of freedom of expression and its responsibility to support cultural expression when the market inadequately accomplishes this goal.

The distance that the U.S. government maintains prevents the creation of a federally directed policy of cultural diplomacy. Without official strategic guidance, multiple agencies have taken responsibility for implementing cultural diplomacy according to their individual needs. A look at the exchange landscape in FY2005 reveals 239 international exchange and training programs implemented through 15 departments and 49 independent agencies (IAWG 2006:13). Of these programs, 88 addressed the objective of promoting international understanding and 12 sought to strengthen diplomatic and program capabilities (IAWG 2006:18). Examples of cultural exchange programs included programs run by the Department of Agriculture to encourage collaboration between U.S. and foreign universities; a program administered by the Department of Defense to educate officers in foreign military staff schools; and a program conducted by the Department of Education to promote postgraduate research, exchange or area studies (IAWG 2006:38, 63, 72).<sup>13</sup>

The problems with this system of operation are that the duplication of efforts and narrow focus of activity limit the effectiveness of both individual and national goals. To address these problems, the Interagency Working Group on U.S. Government-Sponsored International Exchanges and Training (IAWG) was established within the State Department in 1997. The group produces annual reports on exchange and training activity and promotes outreach with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. It does not

develop and oversee the implementation of a long-term interagency strategy for exchanges. Coordination of such an action plan was part of IAWG's original tasking, but due to the complexity of the federal exchange arena, it adapted its mandates to meet more attainable goals (IAWG 2006:2). The original mandate for a national strategy underscores the importance of multi-departmental oversight of exchange activity; while the dissolution of this goal communicates that the government views this complicated task as more trouble than it is worth.

The concern with the lack of national direction is that the decentralized approach inhibits the cultivation of a common outlook, common values and common ways of thinking (Wyszomirski 2000:101). It is impossible to foster cross-cultural understanding of national ideas and values when these concepts are inconsistently portrayed among government departments and agencies. For example, the State Department promotes the value of cultural heritage protection, yet the U.S. Department of Defense did not take this value into account when it established a base camp in an archeological site in the ancient city of Babylon at the start of the Iraq War. It took over a year before government officials ordered contractor activity in and around the site stopped and issued a statement of commitment to the preservation of Iraq's cultural heritage (American Forces Press Service 2004). As the U.S. Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (2005:3) explains, the U.S. creates barriers with other nations when its actions do not match the values it preaches. The Committee (2005:3) then argues that an articulated vision of cultural diplomacy would improve the United States' ability to engage other nations and enhance its national security in subtle, wide-ranging and sustainable ways.

The trend of multi-department and multi-agency dissemination of programs continues today, but the recent release of a national strategy seeks to establish a new coordinated

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<sup>13</sup> The official program titles are the Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Sciences Faculty Exchange

direction for these programs. The success of this new initiative will depend on the agencies' willingness to commit to the new strategy and the regularity with which oversight of their progress is maintained. The creation of incoherent and inconsistent messages domestically and abroad is counterproductive to the goal of increasing mutual understanding among nations and a problem only coordination and commitment can resolve. The next section examines the effect of the private sector's influence on cultural diplomacy.

### **3.2 Private Sector Leadership**

As previously mentioned, the private sector has played an integral role in the development of cultural diplomacy. "From the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the biggest players have been large foundations, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions" (Feigenbaum 2002:28). America's decentralized society and preference for do-it-yourself initiatives over government bureaucracy opened the door for the private sector to take the lead in projecting America's cultural personality and objectives (The Curb Center 2004:2).

The private sector advanced arts and educational exchange and, even once the government became involved in cultural diplomacy issues, maintained influence. The Division of Cultural Relations was the precursor of today's government programs and the Division head made it clear that the government's role was secondary to that of the private sector (Ninkovich 1981:32-33 cited in Sablosky 2003:3-4). Grant arrangements ensured a continued relationship between the government and private sector and the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act institutionalized the role of the private sector by providing for an Advisory Commission of private citizens for the government's cultural and information programs (Sablosky 2003:4-5). Today, some 1,500 private sector organizations, academic institutions and NGOs manage the majority of exchanges and cultural programs in ECA (ACCD 2005:10) and three of the

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Programs, the Professional Military Education Exchange Program, and the American Overseas Research Centers Program, respectively.

State Department's top exchange programs receive roughly one-quarter to one-half of their funding from non-government sources (GAO 2006:3).

Private sector leadership derives from the work of foundations, corporations, universities, and NGOs. There are more than 71,000 grant-making foundations in the U.S. which contribute billions of dollars in annual gifts as legacy planning and philanthropic donations (Lawrence et al. 2007:1-2). When broken down into giving trends for 2005, a sample of nearly 1,200 of the largest foundations showed that arts and culture received 13 percent and education received 24 percent of the grant dollars awarded (The Foundation Center 2007:1). Activities that might be included in the international aspect of these contributions are exchange programs, conservation efforts and operating grants for foreign institutions (Szántó 2003:4). Smaller foundations also make significant contributions through specialized knowledge of policy development for international programs and regional offices that help implement the programs (Szántó 2003:6).

Corporations play a leading role in cultural diplomacy through not only financial measures, but also their global presence. The conduct of their overseas operations places corporations in a unique position to engage with the local environment and offer exchange opportunities to both domestic and foreign employees. Universities provide abundant opportunities for educational exchange and through targeted services smooth the path for international recruiting and processing (PR Coalition 2007:9). NGOs are a final category that is becoming increasingly involved in cultural diplomacy activities. Many of these organizations are policy and research institutes working to increase public awareness about cultural diplomacy and positively influence the development of international relationships through research initiatives, publicity campaigns, advocacy efforts, and network organization.

Despite the breadth of private sector activity, there are concerns that it is not effectively contributing to cultural diplomacy efforts. A 2003 study found that, among the

foundations that support arts, international exchange grants that directly encourage artists, productions or arts experts to cross U.S. borders rank among the lowest of funding priorities (Szántó 2003:1). In 2001, international arts exchanges received \$15.4 million distributed among 87 grants – a total that represents 2.8 percent of combined arts grant-making and less than one fifth of one percent of all grant-making by top foundations in that year (Szántó 2003:4). The conclusion of this study finds that grants for arts are misleading in terms of cultural diplomacy because the money is not sufficiently supporting programs that cross borders. The lack of private funding coupled with little federal funding means that the cost of the exchange is born by the artists themselves, foreign governments or foreign organizations (Katz 1985:82). This dynamic fails to promote the sensitivity and understanding of foreign nations intended by cultural diplomacy.

In comparison to U.S. foundation contributions, the following data illustrate foreign government contributions to international exchange efforts (Wyszomirski et al. 2003:19).<sup>14</sup> In 2000, France reported support of over 36,000 exchanges of individuals and 11,000 events, with the Foreign Ministry spending nearly \$650 million and the Cultural Ministry adding another \$18 million. In 2001, Australia reported funding 3,296 exchanges of individuals and events at a cost of over \$37 million, while Japan reported spending approximately \$61 million on exchange activities. The Netherlands indicated spending approximately \$12 million in 2003 and Canada reported \$75 million in 2002. According to these figures, the U.S. foundation contributions do not match the tenacity of foreign government contributions to international exchanges. If the U.S. government is looking to foundations for leadership, this might explain the low level of funding and activity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The data was taken from a multi-country study on international cultural relations. The spending for each country is converted into U.S. dollars.

<sup>15</sup> Comparable budget figures for FY 2002 show that the U.S. government authorized \$237 million for educational and cultural exchanges, with \$118 million of that funding directed toward the Fulbright program (Epstein 2002:3).

Other private sector concerns are the motivating factors and level of influence of corporate businesses and NGOs. From explicit cross-cultural education programs to more subtle promotions of cultural sensitivity abroad, these organizations are impacting the direction and development of cultural diplomacy (The Curb Center 2004: 29-32). Most of their activity is independently motivated, however, and lacks the constraints of government rules and direction. While the Curb Center (2004:29), a university-based research center at Vanderbilt University, makes the point that the routine shuffling of personnel among government, business and non-profit jobs ensures a certain degree of consensus on objectives, it concedes that connections with the cultural sector are not as strong now as in the earliest days of cultural diplomacy. Even if a connection exists, it seems irrational to conclude that private executives would promote government objectives over organizational goals. The result in this case could be that private sector leadership directs government programs down a path inconsistent with national ideals or in conflict with other policy goals.

Recognizing these influential resources and the scarcity of government oversight, an advisory panel issued a report in 2003 intended to improve the State Department and private sector coordination. According to the Government Accountability Office (2005:3) though, deficient resources, bureaucratic resistance and a lack of management commitment meant that the suggested areas of cooperation were never adopted. A second attempt at coordination was made in 2006 and, as of April 2007, Under Secretary Hughes reports that the Office of Private Sector Outreach in the State Department has leveraged approximately \$800 million dollars of funding from partnerships with American companies, foundations, NGOs and private citizens (Hughes 2006). This renewed emphasis on the public-private relationship gained further momentum in 2007 with a summit calling for greater private sector involvement and enhanced partnership activity in order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The summit's action recommendations included individual business initiatives

such as workforce and educational exchanges and increased internship opportunities, as well as financial support for ECA exchanges (PR Coalition 2007:10-13).

The government has traditionally followed the lead of the private sector, but their partnerships have largely been a disappointment to the expectations of scholars and altruistic promoters of cultural diplomacy. Foundations tend to focus their money on domestic grants (Szántó 2003:4) and accountability reservations cloud corporate and non-profit activities. Given these concerns, new efforts emphasize broader relationships with the private sector and cultural diplomacy initiatives that communicate shared American ideals and values.<sup>16</sup>

The transnational nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes cooperation and partnerships inevitable and there appears to be a concrete commitment on behalf of both the U.S. government and private sector toward working together to achieve success in the area of cultural diplomacy. Global relations are a reality with which most private organizations have first-hand experience, so convincing businesses of the advantages of fostering international relations will not present the challenge today that it did in the past. The uncertainty lies in whether or not the current momentum is sustainable and how well the government is able to coordinate the activities. Further challenges include the promotion of programs after anti-American sentiments settle and coordinating private sector and government program goals. Achieving partnership success, therefore, requires a long-term vision of engagement and strategy of collaboration that extends beyond individual leaders to organizational competency. The final section considers the question of relevance of cultural diplomacy in the eyes of the government.

### ***3.3 Is Cultural Diplomacy Irrelevant?***

Many advocates of cultural diplomacy find that the U.S. approach has been characterized by public ambivalence and the uncertain commitment of the political leadership

(Sablosky 2003:18). The historical developments reported in Chapter 2 highlighted the occurrence of multiple policies being led by different agencies and the almost constant reform and transformation of oversight. Sablosky (2003:5-6) determines this “organizational seesaw” is an indication of U.S. uncertainty about what cultural programs are, where they belong and what their purpose should be. In the days of USIA, cultural activities were plagued by agency ambiguity about whether programs should be serving specific diplomatic objectives or “doing good,” as well as disagreements regarding the targets to be addressed (Bogart 1995:ix). The fact that cultural diplomacy remains such a vague concept, as opposed to economic or political issues, is a reflection of its relative unimportance. If an issue is viewed as critical to a nation’s success, it is usually clearly identified, promoted and monitored.

The U.S. Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (2005:4) determined that cultural diplomacy in the U.S. consists of ad hoc programs and a diminished position in the hierarchy of diplomatic values. The State Department, the agency now charged with generating cultural diplomacy, has publicly advocated the importance of cultural exchange and understanding, yet it has been unable to convince federal policymakers and senior officials of this argument. The diminished number of programs at the turn of the century and unfulfilled attempts to coordinate activity might in fact call into question the authenticity of the State Department’s own claims. It is difficult to imagine that an agency would allow programs that it considers important to be abandoned without a fight.

The international communication void that followed the decline of U.S. cultural diplomacy activity during the 1990s illustrates the perception of irrelevance. Aside from creating obvious program deficiencies, the staff and budget cuts severed networking capacities abroad that had been crucial to cultivating long-term relationships among

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<sup>16</sup> The PR Coalition Private Sector Summit on Public Diplomacy Models for Action paper (2007) summarizes



individuals and institutions (Sablosky 2003:8). The closing of publicly accessible learning facilities curtailed American outreach efforts and reportedly sent the unintended message that the U.S. is unapproachable (Ford 2006:3). The sharp decline in American resources and infrastructure left a gap in public perception abroad that became filled with political agendas diametrically opposed to U.S. goals (ACCD 2005:8). The absence of a U.S. cultural presence has been cited since 9/11 as a contributing cause of negative foreign attitudes, but its demise passed relatively unnoticed by the government until that point.

Even since 9/11, ECA's increased cultural programming continues to lack funding making cultural diplomacy little more than symbolic (Riding 2005). A fact-finding mission in 2004 found that a common frustration abroad was that the U.S. had vanished on the cultural front (ACCD 2005:11). Where other nations were present on the cultural scene in foreign countries, the U.S. was either noticeably absent or haphazard in their efforts to organize activities (ACCD 2005:13). The U.S. Advisory Commission on Cultural Diplomacy determined that programming cutbacks, particularly in the Arab world, increased misunderstandings of America because they removed the cultural counterweight to the political activity that drives foreign policy engagements (ACCD 2005:13).

Staffing problems also hinder cultural diplomacy efforts in the post-9/11 era. A 2003 Government Accountability Office report noted that 30 percent of Foreign Service Officers in language-designated public diplomacy positions in the Near East had not attained the level of language proficiency required for their positions thereby hampering their ability to engage with citizens of their host country (GAO 2003:27). The U.S. Advisory Committee for Cultural Diplomacy observed that the public diplomacy field staff had been particularly hard hit since the budget cuts and reductions in the 1990s with not only a loss of personnel but the downgrading of positions in which field activity became desk work (ACCD 2005:17).

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the direction of the partnership initiative and outlines the group's top 11 recommendations for action.

Roughly 15 percent of the Foreign Service public diplomacy positions overseas were vacant in 2005 and officials indicated that insufficient numbers of staff and lack of staff time for work outside the embassy hindered local outreach efforts (Ford 2006:3).<sup>17</sup> These statistics testify to the government's lack of ability to accomplish cultural programs that would promote U.S. values and engage foreign nations.

Cummings (2003:14) reports that programs in cultural diplomacy are strongest when they have a firm institutional base, grounded in legislation, and the support of powerful leadership at the top of the federal government. Nominal government interest in cultural diplomacy translates into insufficient funding and minimal program activity. A barrier to attaining widespread support is that cultural diplomacy initiatives offer little tangible accountability. No metric or language exists by which to measure the success of a cultural program or exchange (ACCD 2005:14). As Sablosky (2003:2) contends, "a certain degree of faith is involved in cultural diplomacy."

Given that the positive impacts of cultural diplomacy are difficult to assess, it cannot be expected to garner as much attention as economic or military policy. Its long term impact on foreign relations, however, has the potential to secure it a position of consideration among federal policymakers and officials. The recurring challenge of achieving this end is convincing U.S. congressional leaders and officials that responsibility for directing cultural diplomacy lies with the state and not the market.

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<sup>17</sup> The coordination of cultural diplomacy activities occurs under the purview of Public Diplomacy Officers.

## **CHAPTER 4. SURVEY OF FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**

The facts and figures gained from reports and studies create a baseline picture of what the level of government support looks like for cultural diplomacy. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of how these initiatives are being implemented, however, a first-hand report from those charged with coordinating the programs can be instructive. This chapter takes the discussion of cultural diplomacy to Foreign Service Officers who have managed the issue overseas. The following sections will explain the role of a Foreign Service Officer in cultural diplomacy and why their role is instructive, assess their perceptions of the current environment of support, outline some major obstacles to cultural diplomacy, and offer views on the potential for change. The chapter presents both the officers' views as well as personal conclusions drawn from their comments.

### ***4.1 Foreign Service Officers and Cultural Diplomacy***

U.S. Foreign Service Officers help formulate and implement the foreign policy of the United States at nearly 265 locations abroad and in Washington, D.C. (US DOS 2007). Responsibility for cultural diplomacy belongs generally to Foreign Service Officers in the field of public diplomacy, known as Public Diplomacy Officers, and specifically to a sub-set of Public Diplomacy Officers, known as Cultural Affairs Officers, if the post is allocated such positions. Assignments include managing creative cultural programs and orchestrating exchange programs to enhance personal, institutional and governmental links which deepen foreign understanding of American society (US DOS 2007).

Given their role as representatives of the U.S. who shape the implementation of cultural diplomacy abroad, Public Diplomacy Officers have watched cultural diplomacy evolve over the years and maintain direct knowledge of the state of its activities and

programs. From interviews with current and former Foreign Service Officers, this chapter offers valuable insight into how the government's role in cultural diplomacy is perceived by those charged with its administration. The following sections elaborate on these perceptions.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.2 Current Environment – Supportive or Lacking?**

While there was general agreement among those interviewed that the government is looking at cultural diplomacy in a new way, many cited that little funding is being directed to back up the rhetoric of top officials. Total figures show that funds for State Department activity in the areas of cultural diplomacy appear to be slowly growing, however, officers in Europe report otherwise. One officer noted that you must look at the earmarking of funds in order to see the true level of budget support. The government may be increasing its monetary contributions to public diplomacy in aggregate, but a lot of the new money is being pulled from existing programs and directed to the Secretary of State's "Transformational Diplomacy" programs. For example while the overall budget for educational and cultural exchange grew over the past year, the public diplomacy budget in Hungary was cut by 6 percent. A tangential issue of consideration is the strength of the dollar in local currency. If the dollar is weak, as is the case in Hungary, the post budget is stretched even thinner.

The shift of attention toward countries targeted in the "Transformational Diplomacy" initiative creates a skewed view of government support for cultural programs. As programming money and staff are repositioned to State Department designated "pilot countries,"<sup>19</sup> cultural activities in areas such as Western Europe receive less support. The justification for these consolidations and relocations rests in the government's belief that the

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<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Foreign Service Officers Kate Byrnes, Gilbert Callaway, Michael Hurley, Philip Reeker, and Mark Tauber provided the data for the content of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Under Secretary Hughes selected 18 posts to participate in the pilot initiative focusing on the goal of countering extremism (Ford 2007:10).

U.S. has the most work to achieve in states whose values and beliefs differ greatly from those of the U.S.

One might question, however, whether diverting funds and programs counteracts the goal of fostering long term relations in *all* nations of the world, not just those in the middle of the current crisis. A now retired Public Diplomacy Officer recalled advice heard after the fall of the Berlin Wall which stressed the importance of remembering your closest allies. Using cultural programs and exchanges to increase understanding among allies helps strengthen partnerships on which one officer noted the U.S. depends for its promotion of democratic values.

Maintaining cultural diplomacy efforts in all parts of the world is beneficial for a second reason. The transnational reality of today's world allows information, and often people, to travel seamlessly across borders. It seems restrictive, therefore, to assume that the ideology the U.S. is fighting is confined to specific geographic areas. Communicating a consistent and continuous message from all corners of the world has the potential of reaching the broadest audience and creating long term impressions. One former Public Diplomacy Officer conceded that to a degree it is short-sighted to concentrate on the Middle East and forgo programs in Europe. At the same time, another officer pointed out that the Bush Administration acts according to strategic response and nobody is going to convince them that Europe needs more money for cultural programming.

Where budgets are tight and program interest targeted, cultural diplomacy seems to derive its strength from the dedication, creativity and commitment of the officers. As one senior officer explained, there is a new logic to the cultural diplomacy of today and as a result officers must learn to do business in a different way. Due to budget constraints, embassies can rarely bring individuals out to a post as part of government-sponsored programs. Instead, new initiatives involving "Cultural Ambassadors" have embassies searching out opportunities

in which they can gain visibility through association with individuals and groups who are on private tours from the U.S. According to a Cultural Affairs Officer, there is little direction from Washington regarding program opportunities compared to a lot of footwork at post to locate performers and artists who are interested in such recognition from the embassy.

In sum, as expressed by one Public Diplomacy Officer, the government mentality has changed. In what they say, the U.S. Administration, Congress and officials appear sympathetic to the needs of cultural diplomacy, but as of yet the government has not turned this verbal support into widespread action. The following section covers some of the major obstacles to implementing cultural diplomacy.

### **4.3 Major Obstacles**

Officers in the field had various opinions on the underlying reasons accounting for the government level of support for cultural diplomacy. When questioned about what accounts for the government's level of support for cultural diplomacy, one officer immediately cited the view that it is a tradition in the United States that the government should not be involved in culture. It was highlighted that "culture" is more controversial in the U.S. than in other nations and that the U.S. is caught in the problem of defining what constitutes "culture." As a result, one might conclude from this officer's observation that the government does not invest a lot of attention and funding into what it struggles to define.

A second perspective relating to the government's role in promoting culture comes from a historical and attitudinal perception of the government's responsibilities. One Public Diplomacy Officer compared the challenge of justifying funding for cultural diplomacy to that of justifying funds for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), an independent federal agency supporting arts and artists in America that has been plagued by funding problems throughout its history. Just as NEA faces the challenge of justifying funding school art as opposed to school lunches, the State Department must justify funding theater

programming over military helmets and economic initiatives. As a Cultural Affairs Officer elaborated, the necessity of government spending on culture over defense expenses does not resonate with the average U.S. citizen and, especially in a time of war, no one has the patience for designating money for cultural diplomacy.

In addition to the feelings of the general public, there is also little support in the U.S. Congress for cultural diplomacy. Unlike the leadership exhibited under Senator J. William Fulbright, one officer noted that there are few true believers in the programs of cultural diplomacy these days. With occasional exceptions, U.S. Senators and Representatives concentrate their authority on other issues and even those who do consider cultural diplomacy important have little influence in the face of competing policy initiatives.

Much of the level of support also stems directly from the perspective of the Administration. If it values cultural diplomacy, then others are aware of increased support and interest that may translate into budget increases. In the opinion of one officer, however, the current Bush Administration, if it were to answer honestly, would still question why the government should get involved in cultural diplomacy when the private sector makes cultural products better with more money available to put towards the programs.

On the one hand, there is a lingering perception that the government can leave the responsibility for cultural programming to the private sector. On the other, there is increasing awareness within the government that the U.S. has had a hard time communicating with the world and that cultural diplomacy has a role in this mission. To a certain degree, the government is realizing the problems created by leaving the messages to the private sector. A Cultural Affairs Officer recognized that the private sector often imparts a stereotyped image of the U.S., precisely the inaccurate presentation of U.S. ideals and values that the government programs are intended to correct.

A chronic problem that prevents increasing awareness of the importance of cultural diplomacy is the federal budget. Time and again, officers cited budget shortfalls as a major obstacle to successful cultural diplomacy initiatives. Complicating this issue is the fact that justifying funding is a circular dilemma. Cultural diplomacy programs need to be viewed as worthwhile in order to be funded, but in order to achieve results and convey evidence of their worth, they need funding. In addition, the results of cultural programs and exchanges take time to develop. According to one officer, cultural diplomacy programs take years not events to build. Patience and faith are required in an environment where immediate results are rewarded and lack of results lead to program cuts.

The rating of programs is a recurring obstacle that officers face in terms of trying to justify why funding is necessary. Under the current Administration, several officers raised the constant expectation for results reporting. According to the Government Performance and Results Act, officers must report how the programs were noticed, if attitudes changed and if somebody did something as a result of participation in the program. There are two sides to such reporting, the results data and the outcome details. The results are calculated quantitatively in concrete figures while the outcomes are measured qualitatively according to what changes occurred as a result of a program. An officer noted the difficulty in this task stating you cannot always report on the true success of an event such as a U.S. dance troupe coming to Budapest.

In order to convince others of the importance of the programs, one Cultural Affairs Officer emphasized that aggressive reporting is essential. One way reports gain attention is if the officer can show that there was a dramatic change that resulted from participation in a program. For example, if a foreign official drafts a new policy in response to returning from the International Visitors program or an individual establishes a new association in their home country after returning from a program in the U.S. Additionally, there is the



uniqueness factor as a way of measuring success. An officer must be able to make the connection between an event the U.S. supported and an end result of stimulating discussion or deeper investigation on an issue.

A final obstacle raised was the element of bureaucracy. Officials in Washington and officers posted overseas often have different ideas of what programs and activities will best promote cultural diplomacy. Because one is responsible for funding and the other for formulation and implementation, discord between the two threatens the success of the mission. A Cultural Affairs Officer shared that to work efficiently, an officer must be a bureaucratic player who knows how to move through the red tape in order to get the message out, to reach the target audience and to do it quickly. The element of time resurfaces as an important factor because the embassy is competing with other cultural venues and, if it does not engage in a timely manner, it risks losing its audience and the chance of being recognized as a contributor in the cultural arena. Given these obstacles and identified factors that contribute to the government level of support, the next section looks at where the future of cultural diplomacy lies.

#### ***4.4 Potential for Change***

According to one officer, while cultural diplomacy will never get consistent funding, through the efforts of small dedicated organizations and individual personal commitments, it is destined to remain a part of the political landscape. This officer sees leadership as a key factor in the future of cultural diplomacy. After the cultural programs and exchanges were folded into the State Department, the department failed to employ consistent leadership in this area. In the present Under Secretary, however, this former officer sees new potential for cultural diplomacy citing Hughes' efforts and initiative to raise awareness about cultural diplomacy in the long term, her willingness to engage Congress on the issue and her direct access to the President. These factors contribute to a new momentum for cultural diplomacy,

although the question remains whether the lip service can be translated into tangible programs and funding.

Another question arising from this focus on stability is the nature of political appointments in the U.S. government. In that political appointees come and go at the pleasure of the President and are rotated in and out as a display of gratitude for their support, it raises doubt about the ability to achieve long term stability. The current Under Secretary may prove to be an exception if she completes the President's term in her position. With the impending election and guaranteed change of leadership, however, change is on the horizon. A former officer reported that every change of management leads to suspicions of loyalty and the need for staff to persuade the new leadership that programs are valid and individuals are dedicated. This process disrupts the activities in progress and slows future endeavors of cultural diplomacy while momentum is rebuilt.

Given the current situation and slowly growing attention to cultural diplomacy, some small changes can be witnessed and generalizations for the future drawn. One area where steps are being taken to put words into action is in outreach programs. U.S. information centers in local facilities, called American Corners, continue to open in efforts to improve the U.S. presence outside embassy grounds. While increasing foreign access to U.S. materials, the Corners only have a tenuous link with the embassies and as such are limited in their impact. A Senior Foreign Service Officer shared that the loss of the American libraries and cultural centers was a big mistake. These former programs were fully funded and staffed by the U.S. government and, according to this officer, had significant impact in terms of hosting activities and creating a space of interactive use. With the Corners, the local community provides the space and staff with the embassy supplying start up funds and a small annual budget that goes toward maintenance repairs and journal subscriptions. The government does not fund directors for the Corners, so while they are more cost effective than libraries or

cultural centers, the officer conveyed that they do not achieve the same amount of productivity or purpose.

The use of partnerships with the private sector is gaining increasing promotion and seems to be the focus of State Department efforts for the future. A former Public Diplomacy Officer sighted two impetuses for the push for public-private partnerships. First, there is money and initiative in the private sector. U.S. companies have created a broad international presence over the years and are continuing to expand their activities. Government affiliation with their efforts to promote cultural programs and exchange would require minimal cost. Second, the Bush Administration has an affinity for privatization. As a political move, the Administration has awarded its private sector supporters with contracting opportunities with the government. This is not a new practice, President Johnson took similar measures during the Vietnam War, but as this officer emphasized President Bush has definitely demonstrated his support for the work of the private sector.

One officer saw former Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Dina Powell as the driving force behind recent public-private partnership initiatives. The officer noted that partnerships with the private sector are not new, but that their importance cycles with the leadership. A long time Public Diplomacy Officer stated that cultural diplomacy has been successful in ongoing partnerships with NGOs and the private sector, but cautioned that they must take place within appropriate legal boundaries and be based on the companies' willingness to support national values. The second requirement represents a challenge in terms of defining what constitutes national values and obliging the companies to identify themselves as a U.S. company affiliated with the government versus an international organization.

Another challenge rests in the issue of accountability. One Public Diplomacy Officer very succinctly observed that the government cannot hold the private sector accountable for

private measures. According to the officer, the two entities must come to an ideological agreement about the goals of the partnership and values to be conveyed and the government must then let go of the reins. It is a situational dynamic that comes with partnerships that the government cannot change. The only recourse the government has is to partner with a company up to the point it is comfortable with the activity. The officer noted that this becomes an ethical dilemma, however, in terms of making a judgment call as to what the government considers suitable activity. The officer suggested establishing strict ground rules, considering conflicts of interest and drawing on examples of successful public programming before engaging in partnership activity as ways to reduce the occasions of miscommunication.

When discussing the potential for change in the administration of cultural diplomacy, an obvious consideration is whether or not it would be better housed as an independent agency, separate from foreign policy. France, Germany and Great Britain all have cultural institutes that are shielded from the policy aspects to which U.S. initiatives are intricately connected. Cultural diplomacy within USIA attained a certain distance from foreign policy, but it also incorporated broader responsibilities than just cultural programming and exchange.

Officers' views on whether cultural affairs should be housed independently were mixed and inconclusive. One officer commented that public diplomacy should be a part of policymaking, but that because of the current environment at the State Department in which everything is being consumed by Iraq, culture loses its place. It was noted that there has been talk in Washington regarding a renewed call for a type of USIA agency, but the habitual problems that USIA faced – its role and scope of activity – continually resurface. Believers in the purely altruistic purposes of cultural diplomacy recommend complete separation from foreign policy, propaganda and information activities.

Others are unconvinced that cultural diplomacy should be moved again. One Public Diplomacy Officer explained that while under the current arrangement there is more day-to-day emphasis on current policy, the activities allow greater interaction with the Ambassadors which brings greater prestige to the programs. Another officer stressed the importance of having U.S. values behind U.S. policy. Caution was emphasized, however, in that the credibility of the program could be undermined if the officers merely act as spokespeople for the Administration. In order to maintain their mission, officers must continue to work with local contacts and support a consistent set of values. One officer's opinion was that more studies need to be done about the transition of USIA into State, whether or not it made sense, where it is going, and where it ought to go.

Finally, one Public Diplomacy Officer made the point that there are multiple U.S. agencies overseas, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Agency for International Development, that have public affairs offices and an expansive international reach. The officer expressed the belief that an independent cultural institute would have a hard time competing with and surviving against these other entities and made two alternative recommendations for ways to increase cultural diplomacy. One recommendation was to strengthen the programs that currently exist in the other agencies while maintaining policy coordination in ECA. The second recommendation was to establish a cultural fund that would be based on supporting networks and agencies. In this case, ECA would retain direct policy control, but the semi-independent agency would be allowed indirect policy control among its network. These are interesting suggestions with potential. With both, however, it is hard to imagine that independent agencies would turn over policy control of their programming to an outside agency. It would take changing a lot of territorial mentalities among individuals and within the organizations.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Cultural diplomacy has proven to be a complex subject in the United States. Unsure of what it incorporates and how best to administer it, government attention has waxed and waned amidst multiple agencies and departments. From this investigation it has been determined that no single factor accounts for the way in which cultural diplomacy receives support from the federal government. Rather, it is a combination of factors that influence the level of support. The U.S. system of government, private sector power, perception of importance as a national issue, and personal ambitions of the nation's leaders have all played a part in bringing cultural diplomacy to its current state.

Additionally, the study found that support for cultural diplomacy appears tied to targeted foreign policy goals in the U.S. and unable to exist purely on the value of increasing mutual understanding. This connection accounts for the inconsistent levels of support that rise and fall as the government chooses to manipulate cultural diplomacy to achieve ends that increase national security. Recognizing these influences and the depth of support when determining future developments in cultural diplomacy will allow officials the opportunity to make the most of their program and exchange endeavors by drawing attention to the reality of ideological and routine barriers.

During this course of investigation, an interesting dimension of cultural diplomacy arose that deserves greater exploration – its scope of activity as defined by law. As has been discussed, officially there are two mandates that cultural diplomacy entails – promoting national ideas abroad and fostering national understanding of foreign cultures. Activities in the U.S. have historically centered on the first mandate, though recommendations and recent attempts have been made to increase programs relating to the second mandate.

I believe a viable question exists as to whether or not you can tie the second mandate to the work of Foreign Service Officers. The connection between the U.S. government and

its citizens as defined by law and expected according to cultural diplomacy objectives is contradictory. The Smith-Mundt Act creates a fundamental challenge by preventing Foreign Service Officers from communicating what they learn about the local environment overseas with the public in the U.S. Without this exchange, the government cannot clearly state that its mission involves two-way communication and a reciprocal fostering of understanding. For this reason, it would be interesting to investigate the impact of changing the mandate to separate the responsibility for the political goals of cultural diplomacy from the non-political goals. The results of such a study would call attention to the incongruous nature of the government definitions and activity and help answer the residual question of how the U.S. government should best engage in cultural diplomacy. Results from such a study might also answer the question of whether cultural diplomacy could garner sufficient support in order to exist on its own merit.

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