

SYMPOSIUM ON THE



SMITH-MUNDT ACT OF 1948



Organized by:

ARMSTRONG STRATEGIC INSIGHTS GROUP, LLC

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2009 Smith-Mundt Symposium
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Welcome Address

WELCOME:
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Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

MATT ARMSTRONG: Good morning. If we can get seated, this is a – we have a tight schedule today, so we need to get started on time. If I can ask you to sit down.

Well, I would like to thank you all for making it here at this early hour. I know it is 8:00, and we are actually starting close to 8:00. So I appreciate it and I appreciate – I'm overwhelmed by the interest in this event. Before I talk anymore about that, though, I want to say thank you to the undersecretary and the former DASD, as well as everybody here for coming to this event and showing the interest that you have in what I think is a very interesting and important discussion. And apparently you do, too, since you are here.

Before I get going and really start my role, let me get the important announcements out of the way. The men's room is outside and to the left. And the ladies' room is outside and to the right. Because this is a tight schedule, feel free to get up and get a drink, get a bite to eat and come back. There are few breaks. Because of that, we have added a hosted reception at the end of the evening at 5:30, right after this, downstairs in the entry is an opportunity to socialize the ideas and network because admittedly, this is a very packed day that we have today.

I haven't noticed any distortion from BlackBerrys – any noise – but if I can ask the panelists when they come up to turn off BlackBerrys and if you are sitting near the microphones and you hear a buzz, assume that it is your BlackBerry and turn it off. I would appreciate that.

Also, let me remind you that this entire day is unclassified. It is on the record. A transcript will be published. It will be public. So take that as you feel necessary. The transcript will be published hopefully at the end of the month. We will see when that comes out. There will also be a report coming out of this event.

So let me also thank VOA Director Geoff Cowan and his Center for Communication Leadership for their help in putting on this event. And also the Booz Allen staff, Wes Williams, Jeff Douglas (sp), Stacey Higgins (sp). So there are a few – and some other staff, so they are floating around here. And I appreciate their assistance in getting the room set up and greeting you downstairs, getting your nametags and helping throughout the day. They are going to be a lot busier than me; after all, this is a Q&A-intense opportunity to discuss the idea.

This is a unique discussion. Not only that we have Congress involved in this, it is an interagency, intertribal, intergovernment discussion – (laughter) – but it is an opportunity to engage thoroughly the discussion. The subtitle of the event is a discourse to shape America's discourse. While my wife doesn't like that phrase very much, I think it is very important because we are talking about sharing ideas, understanding really what is the impact of this act? How do we – what is the foundation of our public diplomacy? Why do we do it? What is this firewall all about? There are so many ideas of what we are talking about.

And even the issue of why we are talking. So the whole purpose of this is to understand what we are doing and why. This is a discussion on the foundation of America's global engagement. So many people don't quite understand what the Smith-Mundt Act is. You had homework. Unlike most events, you actually had homework. And I hope that you had an

opportunity to read it. I gave that homework to you largely because the opportunity to present is not here, so I don't have anybody – well, actually there are three of us that get to make opening statements – myself, the undersecretary and the former deputy assistant secretary of defense. We are the only ones that get to make opening statements. Everyone else is responding to questions. Because of that, you needed to come somewhat prepared. And I hope that you had an opportunity to at least peruse some of the reading and be informed a little bit more on the subject matter.

If you learned anything from the reading, you won't be alone. Most people don't understand what we are talking about. They just build upon recent history. But the reality is the United States is engaged in some kind of ideological struggle. It is a struggle for minds and wills. And we have done this before. And the Smith-Mundt Act is the product of two Congresses. The 79th Congress almost passed the Bloom Bill. It passed the House in July of 1946, and it was blocked in the Senate by Senator Taft. He never gave a reason. But it is possible that he blocked it because it was Truman-backed legislation. He believed everything that Truman did was communist, left wing and socialist. He also opposed America going overseas and he had an interest in private media.

It was reintroduced in the 80th Congress as the Mundt Bill. It picked up the sponsor Alexander Smith in the Senate and became the Smith-Mundt Bill. The idea that information was important is something that we might think is agreeable today. However, the 80th Congress – actually, the 79th Congress, as well – felt that information was tremendously important, so important that they instituted a loyalty check – what we would call a security clearance – so that anybody dealing with information had to deal – had to pass a loyalty check. As Representative Mundt said, it was on par only with the protection of our atomic secrets.

The 80th Congress felt that information was that imperative. They understood that standard diplomacy wouldn't matter. The communists, the Russians were crazy. Diplomacy didn't matter. You could not engage with these people. This was a global war of subversion. As our Russian ambassador said in '46, this was a war of ideology. The Russians had declared psychological war on us. This is a war unto death.

If you look back at the history, what happened in the 80th Congress was remarkably similar to what you hear happening today. Why do we engage globally? It doesn't matter. If who we are is not self-evident, that is ridiculous. We must be self-evident. We have heard that recently.

So at the risk of proselytizing my own views, let me challenge you with some ideas of what I expect to come out of this workshop, this symposium. It is, of course, a Q&A. We have experts that are speaking up here up on the panels. The idea of each panel is that there is a great deal of diversity. I wanted not to get people that were likeminded people, but people with different experiences, expectations and understanding and worldviews to talk about the subject. More importantly, you are a diverse audience, as well. So my expectation is that you are going to ask the questions. Each panel is, after all, 90 minutes. And it is 90 minutes of moderated Q&A.

If you have a question, I expect you to ask it. If you have a question that comes up later, there is a symposium Web site to ask it. Send it to me, if you wish. This is an opportunity for discourse on the subject at hand.

The panels are generally arranged chronologically. Panel one is the history – basically, 1946 through the somewhat recent past. Then we go into panel two and panel three. Panel two is on the – basically, the contemporary – today's impact of Smith-Mundt. What are the effects? What are your thoughts on the act as it happens today? The panelists are generally inclined on that panel – generally inclined to talk about today. However, they are not restricted to it, nor are you restricted in your questions on what you are going to ask.

Panel three is generally on the future with Smith-Mundt as it is. In panel four, we change gears radically. And this is one of the points of departure of almost any other discussion of this kind and that is it is congressional. We have come to a full stop and instead of going on a temporal walk, we stop and we have two congressmen come and a staffer – congressional staffer. And we talk about the congressional view of this because one of the problems that I see in our discussions of public diplomacy is that we are not bringing in everybody's that is involved. One of the reasons that Smith-Mundt exists was to create confidence in the Congress.

Congress had no confidence in what the United States Department of State was doing. They didn't trust them. They slashed the budget. Smith-Mundt was a response to that to instill confidence in the Congress that the State Department would do something and would do it properly. And this gets us into the firewall issue. The firewall was not as we think of it today as a way to protect the American public. It was a way to protect the American government from the communist and left-wingers within the State Department. Now, as an aside, if we want to really bring the firewall into modern times, it would mean that, of course, the State Department and by extension, Defense Department is infested with al Qaeda sympathizers.

But at the time in '46 and '47, not only was information tremendously important, but the State Department was constantly being questioned on their loyalty – who they were. The secretaries of State were being pulled up to the Hill and told to get men out of – strong Soviet influence out of the previous version of INR, out of the information programs. The Congress said if you got the loafers out of the information programs, we might give you some more money.

So what I want to do is talk about what is the importance of our information. I want you to ask that and understand that. Everybody again is going to have their own view on what is going to come up here, on what you are going to say. Many of them – some of them – not many of them, hopefully – will diverge from my opinion, but they will bring their own perspectives on this. And ultimately, what I hope to come out of this is a more informed discussion of what is Smith-Mundt, which is not a firewall, which is ultimately a foundation for our global engagement, and an informed discussion to proceed into the future. How do we change our public diplomacy and our strategic communication? How do we operate in what truly is a global information environment? Not a U.S. and non-U.S. information environment as we have come to think, but a global information environment.

One of the questions that comes up with this firewall issue is what happens on the – what happens when American people are subject to the propagandizing of our government? Well, let me throw a couple other thoughts out to you. And that is the American government already propagandizes its people. There is something called the Sunday talk-show circuit. There are op-eds. Yesterday's New York Times talked about the president-elect seeking to influence public opinion on the economy. Why do we put foreign affairs into a separate bucket? It is a very interesting thing, especially when the role of a democratic leader is to marshal and manage public opinion. Why do we put what we do overseas into a special bucket?

So what I would suggest – one of my final comments is we hear a lot about “Public Diplomacy 2.0.” Let me suggest we are actually at “Public Diplomacy 2.5.” That is, “Public Diplomacy 1.0” was started in 1948 with Smith-Mundt and we understood the nature of global engagement. And that global engagement in the information realm was to support a smart public diplomacy – I'm sorry – foreign policy. For example, Smith-Mundt was passed largely in response to the need to protect the Marshall Plan. It was being subjected to disinformation. The propaganda of our events were being lost in the disinformation of our enemy. This wasn't what we see today that we needed to beautify our foreign policy, put lipstick on a pig or to change the subject. This was to protect and make sure that our foreign policy was getting its rightful hearing.

We go to “Public Diplomacy 2.0.” It was landmarked by Senator Fulbright, who recognized the changing atmosphere. No longer did we need to agitate foreign peoples. The borders were all set. Public diplomacy 2.0 really got started when Senator Fulbright says that the radio – Voice of America, RFE and RL, et cetera, should be given their rightful opportunity to take their place in the graveyard of Cold War relics.

Now here in 2009, 1972 doesn't seem like a time to put something in that is a Cold War relic. And that is when he said that. Bookend 2.0, “Public Diplomacy 2.0” with the presidential election of 2004, when the mere suggestion that foreign policy should factor into our foreign policy was mocked as ceding our sovereignty. I believe that we are actually getting into “Public Diplomacy 2.5,” as we progress to 3.0, which is a lot closer to the first edition. And that is, we understand that the informational effects of what we do is more important than anything else and that we have to act accordingly.

And with that, I hope to shape your discourse, your understanding of what is Smith-Mundt, the importance it actually has to our public-diplomacy apparatus. You will hear a lot of people talk about why it should be kept – protection of budgets, protections of what we do and how we do things. But ultimately, I hope that you take away some increased knowledge of why we engage globally, what we have done before and that there are, in fact, lessons to be learned from the past.

So with that, as I said, this is a fairly tight schedule. I am going to be – I will be rather draconian in enforcing time, which I have already let myself go over. So with that, I think pretty much this group is a self-selected group, so I don't think I really need to introduce our first keynote speaker. Feel free to – Mr. Undersecretary, feel free to move that out of the way if that is in your way. Let me introduce the undersecretary of state for Public Diplomacy and Public

Affairs, Jim Glassman. We have been talking about this subject for quite some time. And I am honored that he came, that he is here to come talk to you about this subject. He is going to give a few remarks and take questions. And then after that, we will go into panel one. So with that, thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)