

FACELESS LEADERSHIP OF AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: HR CRISIS IN THE POST-BIPOLAR ERA

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Abstract: This article focuses on trends in leadership in the American public diplomacy. Author compares tendencies regarding HR-policy, e.g. frequency of leadership change, length of periods of time between nominations, the ratio of acting and confirmed nominees, during the age of USIA (United States Information Agency) and after its disbandment in 1999. Comparison demonstrates a considerable change of patterns: since 1999 persons in charge of American public diplomacy have been changing more often and the position itself stayed vacant longer than it did in 20th century. There have been many acting nominees during the past decade whereas in the time of USIA there has been none. In addition, article studies characteristics of directors of USIA and of Under Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Analysis of education, professional background, personal relationship with the president (or lack of thereof) demonstrated that standards for candidates for the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs are significantly lower than the ones that were applied to candidates for the directorship of the USIA. With the results obtained author arrived to the conclusion that the change of HR-policy in the sphere of American public diplomacy indicates the lack of interest in the particular dimension of foreign policy among the political leadership of the US in comparison to the age of Cold War. This conclusion agrees with the fact that since 1990-s American public diplomacy remains in crisis: no major reforms of institutions since 1999, unsuccessful attempts to develop the comprehensive strategic document for public diplomacy, frequent piques of anti-americanism in the international public opinion in 21st century. Article argues that the absence of a prominent leader in American public diplomacy, who would have stayed in the office for considerable amount of time, been confidant of the president and thus an active participant of the formation of national political vision, possessed outstanding professional experience, is both the consequence of the crisis of the US public diplomacy and the factor that contributes to this crisis remaining unsolved.

Key words: public diplomacy, soft power, USA, world order, global leadership, HR policy, USIA, State Department, cold war.

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the trends in human resource policies regarding the leadership position in the field of the U.S. public diplomacy (PD). Author seeks to find out whether the general approach to the selection of candidates for such post varied since 1999 (when the last large-scale reform of relevant institutions took place in the U.S.: the United States Information Agency (USIA) was disbanded and most of its functions were inherited by the State Department).

To achieve this goal, article scrutinizes the following factors: the education and professional background of all persons who occupied the relevant post, as well as the average duration of time in office and the average period of time during which this position remained vacant. These indicators will be used to compare two periods in U.S. public diplomacy: from 1953 to 1999 (the period of the USIA existence) and from 1999 to the present. The trends of the periods outlined reflect two different forms of institutional organization of the American PD and two different approaches to its role in U.S. foreign policy. One of the key factors that influenced the change of the role the public diplomacy had in the strategic vision of American political leadership was attributed to the disappearance of the global rival (USSR) and – consequently – of the Soviet-American axis of confrontation in international relations.

The researcher's hypothesis suggests that changes in the trends of studied HR policies are closely interconnected with the general pattern of decline and crisis that has characterized American PD since the end of the 20th century. This article will help to find out whether the HR problem is one of the causes or one of the consequences of that crisis.

The relevance and novelty of the presented work stem from the actual lack of attempts to study American public diplomacy and its current state from the standpoint of a systematic research of the evolution of approaches to personnel policies regarding the leadership position in the PD sphere, both in the domestic and foreign scientific communities.

HR POLICIES IN THE U.S. PD LEADERSHIP

In 1999 in the United States was established the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations. It was a part of a major reform and restructuring of the system of PD institutions in the country: USIA, which consolidated the main functions of public diplomacy in the 20th century, was disbanded, and its functions were divided between a new governmental agency - the Broadcasting Board of Governors - and several divisions of the State Department, which were supposed to come under the authority of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations.

USIA's main successor was the State Department, as the Broadcasting Board of Governors was originally created as a body focused exclusively on international broadcasting and affiliated institutions: Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and later the Middle East Broadcasting Network. All other functions related to the PD, including cultural and educational programs, information support for foreign policy, as well as the processes of planning and development of a common strategy, fell within the jurisdiction of State Department under the leadership of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations [1]. In this regard, author considers it appropriate to view the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations as a key leadership post in the field of American PD, equivalent to the position of Director of the U.S. Information Agency in the past (1953-1999).

During the 22 years of the existence of the position, 16 people have occupied this post, seven of whom (including J. Hall Godfrey, appointed by President J. Biden) were acting, not confirmed nominees. During the 46 years of USIA's existence, the position of its head was occupied by 13 people, among whom there was not a single acting nominee: all appointments were final. On average, Under Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy are replaced more frequently than directors of the U.S. Information Agency: the average duration of time in office for the leadership post of the U.S. PD from 1999 to the present is 13 months, while from 1953 to 1999 it was 3,5 years (three times more).

Moreover, the position of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs was vacant much more often than the position of Director of the U.S. Information Agency: on average, during these 22 years the leading post of public diplomacy remained unoccupied for almost 5,5 years, or a quarter of the whole time. By contrast, in the case of USIA, during the 46 years of the agency's history, it remained without a director for a total of two and a half years, or 5.5% of the whole time.

Alongside the actual absence of a permanent leader, one should also consider the change of the professional qualifications required of candidates. In particular, the level of education of appointees has noticeably decreased. Of the 13 USIA directors, nine held a master's degree or higher. In turn, out of 16 undersecretaries of state for public diplomacy, only six had a degree higher than undergraduate (B.A. or equivalent).

The professional profile of U.S. public diplomacy leaders has also changed. In the 20th century the was the following distribution: three directors of USIA had experience in the business sphere (one way or another connected with broadcasting, television, show business); three directors were professional journalists; two directors were career diplomats; two directors were lawyers; one had business management experience; one had previously been a public servant; and one was a member of the academic community.

Among those who served as Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (including acting ones) were three career diplomats; two professional journalists; three representatives of business community with experience in marketing and public relations; two representatives of the business sector with management experience (one of whom is a former military); six experienced political consultants (including high-ranking officials), a member of the expert community, a party functionary, and a lobbyist.

There are other interesting trends besides the changes concerning education and professional backgrounds of public diplomacy leaders. One could argue that the presidents of the United States in the 20th century approached the choice of candidates more carefully. During many years of its existence the USIA interacted with eight presidents (B. Clinton excluded because of the disbandment of the agency under his rule). In half of the cases, the principle "one president - one director of the USIA" was applicable. But in other cases, the number of USIA directors nominated during the period when one president was in power did not exceed two consecutive appointments. The exception was the presidency of D. Eisenhower - three appointments, what can be explained by the fact that it was during this period of time that the agency was established and going through the formation stage.

As for the nominations for the post of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy (for the already mentioned reason, excluding from the comparison the period of the presidency of B. Clinton as well as the administration of J. Biden, since on the time of preparation of this article it has not yet been one year since his election), one can notice the exactly opposite pattern: under George W. Bush Jr. there were four appointees, under B. Obama and D. Trump

- five people for each president. Two out of five were acting nominees under B. Obama, and under D. Trump - four out of five.

In addition, during the existence of USIA, the leading position in the field of public diplomacy was occupied by persons who held the personal trust of the president, who, even before appointment, had a closer relationship with the respective president: campaigners, speechwriters, personal lawyers and advisers, family friends, old friends. To one degree or another, this principle was true for seven directors of the USIA out of thirteen [2]. By contrast, among those who held the post of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations, only Karen Hughes, who was in office from 2005 to 2007, is known to have had such a relationship with the president. She worked with George W. Bush Jr. since 1994, occupying positions of his campaign manager and later adviser, and even after leaving the administration in 2002 for family reasons, she continued to advise the president by telephone from her home state of Texas until she returned to Washington in 2004 [3].

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Thus, it is possible to identify several trends in human resources policies regarding the leadership position in the field of the U.S. public diplomacy (PD), which distinguish the current stage from the period of the Cold War and the end of the 20th century. First, there are obviously some procedural problems in terms of recruiting candidates, which are reflected by the frequent turnover of Under Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, the increased time span between appointments and the growing number of acting nominees. Secondly, there are noticeable changes in the qualification requirements for candidates: obviously the requisite level of education is less challenging than it used to be. There are also new patterns in terms of professional background. The lists of leaders of the American PD of both periods have an approximately equal number of career diplomats and professional journalists. It is revealing to compare their professional skills on the example of selected cases.

Among the directors of the USIA there were two career diplomats: J. Allen (1957–1960) and J. Reinhardt (1977–1980), both of them occupied this position for a period of three years, and for both of them this post became the peak of diplomatic career. J. Allen had exceptional experience in foreign policy typical for the Cold War period [4]: he prevented the spread of Soviet influence in Iran in the 1940s and in India in the 1950s, he was ambassador to Greece in 1956-1957 amidst the normalization of that country's relations with the USSR and the states of

the Eastern Bloc, which began after 1953. [5] He also served as Assistant Secretary of State for Public Relations.

J. Reinhardt, in turn, had previous experience of working inside both the State Department and the USIA [6]. Particularly important role in his appointment was played by the fact that he headed the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the State Department, whose merger with USIA occurred a year after Reinhardt took office as director of the agency.

However, in the post-USIA period, all career diplomats who led U.S. public diplomacy were only acting nominees, staying in the office for short periods of time. Kathleen Stephens after her three months-long acting tenure in 2012, continued her diplomatic career in India. Bruce Warton, who served from December 2016 to July 2017, subsequently retired. Although their career paths are impressive (taking into account many years of work both from the United States and overseas dedicated to South Korea for K. Stephens [7] and to Africa for B. Warton [8], as well as the pre-existing experience directly related to public diplomacy), in terms of the level of professional achievements, and, consequently, the significance of their appointment, they, in our opinion, are still inferior to J. Allen and J. Reinhardt.

Similarly looks the comparison between professional journalists who managed U.S. public diplomacy during and after the Cold War. Edward Murrow (director of USIA, 1961–1964) was a living legend in the world of journalism due to his career as a war correspondent, reporting live from Vienna in 1937 during the Anschluss of Austria and from London during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Murrow in his broadcasts on the American television and radio network CBS in 1954 openly condemned McCarthyism, which made a significant contribution to the growth of public condemnation of the methods of Senator J. McCarthy and the gradual decline of his career [9].

Carl Rowan (director of USIA, 1964–1965) was also a distinguished journalist who covered the U.S. civil rights movement for a decade (1950–1961) [10]. He became one of the first African Americans reporters working for a major American daily newspaper, gaining an editorial position with “The Minneapolis Tribune” in 1950 [11]. C. Rowan was awarded a number of professional awards [12]: The Hillman Prize in 1952 as well as the prestigious annual award "Sigma Delta Chi", awarded by the Society of Professional Journalists in 1953.

At the same time, among three journalists who led the American PD in the post-bipolar era, only Richard Stengel, the longest-serving Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Relations (2014-2016), can claim to have relatively comparable professional achievements. He is known as the “ghost co-author” of N. Mandela’s autobiography “Long

Road to Freedom” [13] and as the managing editor of “TIME” magazine (2006–2013). It was under his leadership that “TIME” was first awarded the "Magazine of the Year" [14], and he himself received a news and documentary Emmy award as an executive producer of the “TIME”’s documentary project on the topic of 09/11/ 2001 [15].

As for the appointment of James K. Glassman (who served seven months in 2008-2009), his experience in the American foreign broadcasting (he was the chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors in 2007-2008), apparently has played a greater role than his achievements in journalism, since he did not have much fame, despite a column in the Washington Post (1993–2004) and a program on CNN (1995–1998) [16]. The same can be said for Heather Nauert, who served as acting leader of U.S. Public Diplomacy for seven months in 2018 and was a relatively ordinary correspondent and anchorwoman for Fox News and ABC before joining the State Department [17].

The examples above, as well as a significant number of political consultants who have held the post since 1999, show a certain pattern. In the 20th century, the choice of a candidate, in terms of professional experience, had obviously depended a lot on the outstanding achievements, regardless of the narrow professional specialization. However, at the present stage, the possession of specific professional skills related to public opinion management has become a more important quality for candidate. This trend combined with the fact that in recent decades, in contrast to the Cold War period, personal trust of president is no longer a priority quality of the appointee to the leadership position in the sphere of the U.S. public diplomacy, allows us to draw a key conclusion.

The fact that candidates for that position are not required to have an exceptional level of education, or extraordinary professional achievements, or to possess the personal trust of the president, speaks to the low priority of public diplomacy in the vision of the U.S. political leadership compared to the Cold War period. Frequent turnover of personnel and difficulties in finding a suitable candidate also reflect this trend. This is consistent with the general crisis in the field of U.S. public diplomacy that has been observed in recent decades.

The last major restructuring and reform of U.S. public diplomacy institutions took place in 1999. The disbandment of the USIA occurred amidst the certain degree of euphoria that affected American political establishment after the victory in the Cold War and the disappearance of the key ideological rival - the USSR. Thus, some members of political elite believed that the PD had fulfilled its important, but still narrowly specific role and could have safely taken a back seat. The winner has no need to invest in such an expensive and long-term

leadership tool in the absence of an opponent. In 1999, Republican Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, pushed for cuts in government spending and the number of government agencies, in particular, along with the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), he proposed cutting USIA and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The Clinton administration, probably also did not deem it necessary to maintain key institutions of the Cold War era and easily "traded" the future of USIA and the ACDA in exchange for Congress' support for the Chemical Weapons Convention. Only the USAID, which was assigned an important role in the foreign policy agenda of the United States – democracy promotion, has persevered in the described heat of the moment [18].

However, it is becoming more and more obvious how erroneous this way of thinking turned out to be, which led the U.S. PD to the deepest crisis. For 21 years American political leadership has not implemented large-scale reforms of the institutions of public diplomacy. As a result, in the face of new challenges, PD, which used to play an important role in the promotion of positive international image of the U.S. during the Cold War, looks more like a dusty relic of a bygone era than as an active and effective tool for a new round of struggle for global leadership.

One of the indicators of this crisis is the protracted absence of a strategic document for this political area. Three noticeable attempts have been made to formulate such a paper: the U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication in 2007, the National Framework for Strategic Communication in 2010, and Update on National Framework for Strategic Communication in 2012. However, no conceptual consensus has been reached [19].

The crisis of American public diplomacy is also noticeable in the fluctuations of international public opinion: in the 21st century outbursts of anti-Americanism became quite frequent. Examples include mass demonstrations against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 800 cities around the world in 2003 [20]; a sharp decrease in the level of favorability of the United States (by an average of 20%) among the international community after D. Trump was elected president in 2017–2018 (according to the Pew Research Center [21]); the foreign public's negative assessment of the United States' first response to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (the level of favorability in some countries turned out to be the lowest over the past 20 years), and a positive assessment of the only 15% of respondents [22]; as well as the fact that, according to a study conducted in 53 countries in 2021 among 50,000 respondents (commissioned by the Alliance of Democracies), the United States was perceived by most as a greater threat to democracy than Russia and China [23]. All of it suggests that the U.S. public

diplomacy is failing in its task of promoting a positive image of the state in foreign public opinion, minimizing the negative impact of certain factors on this image, and maximizing reputational dividends from the country's achievements. A critical role in this decline of the effectiveness is played by the absence of a competent professional leadership for the American PD.

The changes that have occurred in human resources policies regarding the leadership position in the field of the U.S. public diplomacy in recent decades have significant implications for the PD of this country in general. On the one hand, the discovered trends reflect a clear decline of interest in the American political leadership for this area of foreign policy. On the other hand, the absence of a figure comparable in terms of professional skills and political weight to the directors of the USIA in the past is not only a consequence of the crisis in American public diplomacy, but also one of the factors that make it so difficult to be overcome.

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