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Reviews

**Nicholas J. Cull: *The Cold War and the US Information Agency*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 533 pages. ISBN 978-0-521-81997-8. \$125.00.**

**Reviewed by Walter R. Roberts.**

Nicholas Cull, a British scholar who now teaches at the University of Southern California and previously studied and taught at Leeds and Leicester universities in England, has written a well-researched, comprehensive book on the history of the US Information Agency (USIA). It is the first, and so far only, work that relies heavily on documentary sources rather than the personal recollections of a former USIA officer. It is unique, and scholars as well as practitioners of public diplomacy will want to read this insightful and well-written book.

Yet, despite more than one hundred interviews with former USIA officers and others and painstaking research in archival sources, a few important gaps exist. There are, for instance, three decisive events in the history of US information and cultural programs where additional facts would have strengthened Cull's assessment:

1. The end of World War II
2. The directorship of Arthur Larson
3. State's coup d'état attempt

Cull describes the fate of the World War I information program, which ended with the conclusion of that war, and he tells us that a similar fate did not befall the World War II programs upon the end of that war. He quotes from a 1945 report by management consultant Arthur W. MacMahon recommending that the wartime information program be retained after the end of the war and states that President Harry Truman accepted the recommendation.

In fact, it was widely assumed that the president's decision was based on his experience at the three-power conference in Potsdam a few weeks earlier. The overwhelming expectation among Office of War Information (OWI) employees at the time was that the international information programs would not survive the end of the war. Therefore, when President Truman issued Executive Order 9608 on 31 August 1945, which abolished OWI but transferred the overseas information services to the Department of State, his action came as a complete surprise. In the event, the president, after only a couple of months in office, was shocked by Stalin's inflexible attitude at the Potsdam conference.

He became convinced that the postwar situation would not be as harmonious as he had hoped. So, when the question of the future status of the wartime overseas information programs reached his desk, he considered it the better part of wisdom to retain rather than

abolish the programs. That was a decision that fundamentally charted the course of American public diplomacy.

After President Eisenhower's reelection in 1956, with the first USIA director, Theodore Streibert, having resigned, the president appointed Arthur Larson to head USIA. Larson had been undersecretary of labor in the first Eisenhower administration. On 16 April 1957, Larson gave a speech to the Hawaiian Republican Party that nearly destroyed USIA. While Cull reports the speech and the Democratic response in the Senate, the situation was much grimmer than Cull's narrative might imply. In his Hawaii speech, Larson was quoted as saying that "throughout the New and Fair Deals, this country was in the grip of a somewhat alien philosophy imported from Europe." That speech irked many observers, including particularly Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, the chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that handled USIA. Johnson was instrumental in Congress punishing USIA with a devastating budget cut. This hostile congressional attitude toward Larson had its repercussions not only in USIA but also in the State Department, where Secretary of State John Foster Dulles became concerned about the weakened status of USIA. His assistant secretary of state for public affairs was Andrew Berding, a former assistant director of USIA. Berding kept Dulles informed about the dire budgetary situation in USIA; operations in Europe were to be cut by over 25 percent and other programs heavily reduced. Dulles felt that Larson had to go, and even came up with a possible replacement: the US ambassador to Greece, George V. Allen, who had served as assistant secretary of state for public affairs in the late forties.

Dulles took it upon himself to talk to the president about this matter, and Eisenhower agreed. Larson was fired and Allen was appointed as the third USIA director. Historically, there was therefore more to the matter than Cull's statement: "Disillusioned with Washington, he [Larson] accepted the chair of law at Duke University and resumed his academic career."

After Dulles resigned due to illness in April 1959, his deputy Christian Herter succeeded him and Douglas Dillon became undersecretary. They led a determined effort to bring USIA into State. Cull correctly traces this effort back to the Larson fiasco when Senator Johnson and others had suggested that the information program be returned to State, and also to the President's Advisory Committee on Government Organization chaired by Arthur S. Fleming. When that committee in June 1959 recommended "a meaningful integration of the psychological and information aspects of foreign policy with the Department's politico-economic-diplomatic activities," State felt it had its go ahead signal. It invited USIA director Allen to participate in its preparatory work. Allen agreed. He was in a difficult position. On the one hand, he was one of State's top Foreign Service officers who had reached the highest rank of career ambassador. On the other, he was director of an independent agency. By agreeing to participate in State's preparatory work, he ensured that USIA would be informed of State's moves. Personally, he believed that the foreign policy part of USIA should be in State but that other activities, such as the Voice of America (VOA), did not belong there.

Cull's description of these events does not adequately convey to the reader how imminent USIA's demise was at that time. The hero of its continued existence was Abbott Washburn, USIA's deputy director, who worked day and night to frustrate State's plan. He not only persuaded the chairman of the US Advisory Commission on Information, Mark May, to oppose USIA's integration into State but also was successful

in influencing the White House staff to delay the submission to Congress of a bill drafted by State that would have put USIA in the department. President Eisenhower, aware of the Herter-Dillon desire to integrate USIA into State and Washburn's fierce opposition, decided to appoint yet another commission, the Sprague Committee, named after Mansfield Sprague, a former assistant secretary of defense. The Sprague Committee had its first meeting in March 1960. The Eisenhower presidency was about to come to an end and USIA survived the State onslaught. It would not have happened without Abbott Washburn.

Cull traces USIA's history through the tenure of its directors, from Theodore Streibert to Charles Wick (via Arthur Larson, George Allen, Edward Murrow, Carl Rowan, Leonard Marks, Frank Shakespeare, James Keogh, and John Reinhardt). Since this book ends with the Reagan presidency, the later directors (Bruce Gelb, Henry Catto, and Joseph Duffey) are not included.

By organizing the book systematically this way, Cull informs the reader about USIA's work under its various directors; how they functioned in relation to the White House, the State Department, and Congress; how they interacted with the staff; and what international and national developments were dealt with by USIA under each director. Cull gives us a remarkably accurate portrait of each USIA director's personality and background. And there were different backgrounds indeed — two radio and TV managers (Streibert and Shakespeare); three journalists (Murrow, Rowan, and Keogh); two lawyers (Larson and Marks); two Foreign Service officers (Allen and Reinhardt); and one businessman (Wick). Their appointments by six very different presidents show no pattern.

By writing a history of USIA and connecting it with the Cold War, the author correctly reminds the reader that USIA was created in 1953 because of the Cold War. The Department of State that had conducted traditional diplomacy (government-to-government) for almost two hundred years was not considered the proper agency to manage programs that were required in pursuit of US Cold War goals. A new government agency was established whose purpose was to reach foreign publics through VOA, press and publications operations, libraries and information centers, films, and cultural and exchange-of-persons programs. These government-to-foreign publics' activities are now called public diplomacy. Invariably, funding for USIA was justified by various administrations to Congress on Cold War needs. At the same time, the men and women who worked in USIA (including USIA directors and other political appointees) and the US Advisory Commission on Information labored hard to steer USIA away from solely Cold War efforts and turn the agency into a vital instrument of information-age foreign policy.

With perhaps one or two exceptions, none of the men who were appointed directors was an obvious candidate to lead a Cold War agency. Eisenhower knew why USIA was created and his appointment of Streibert was probably based on the assumption that the agency's initial problem would be managerial. The reason why Eisenhower appointed Larson is less clear. Allen was the choice of the State Department and Eisenhower consented. Kennedy liked the idea of having a reputable newsman in his administration. Murrow and USIA seemed like a perfect fit. Johnson's appointment of Rowan was heavily influenced by the fact that Rowan was a leading African-American newsman. Marks was nominated because he was Mrs. Johnson's communications lawyer

and also a man who Johnson knew and trusted. Nixon's selection of Shakespeare was based on the good work that Shakespeare had done in the 1968 presidential campaign to enhance Nixon's television image. Nixon's appointment of Keogh brought a seasoned newsman and former White House speech writer to USIA. Carter's selection of Reinhardt was based on Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's recommendation — Reinhardt had been a successful ambassador to Nigeria and assistant secretary of state for public affairs. Reagan's appointment of Wick was due to the personal friendship of the two families and Wick's successful business career in communications.

Cull has described well each USIA director's relationship with other administration elements. However, there is one exception: Frank Shakespeare.

Although Cull correctly discusses the cold Henry Kissinger – Shakespeare relationship when Kissinger served as Nixon's national security advisor, he does not mention the even frostier atmosphere between Secretary of State William Rogers and Shakespeare. This discord was due to Shakespeare's single-minded view that USIA did not have to follow State's policy of détente with the Soviet Union — that USIA's sole purpose was anticommunism and if this mission somehow impeded the policy of détente, USIA was justified in going its own way. Shakespeare thought that Nixon was on his side, but the president did not wish to get involved. This Shakespeare approach resulted in State's cold-shouldering USIA at every level. It was the coolest period in the entire history of State-USIA relations. After Shakespeare's departure and the arrival of Keogh in early 1973, Rogers, to make a point, attended the swearing-in of a new USIA deputy director, Eugene Kopp. Indeed, State-USIA relations almost overnight returned to the cooperative status of the pre-Shakespeare era.

The other day, a former USIA colleague phoned me and asked for details of one of the USIA programs in the late fifties. Frankly, my memory was too vague to give him a definitive reply, but I told him that conceivably the answer might be found in Cull's new book. And, indeed, it was.

I shall always keep Cull's *The Cold War and the US Information Agency* close to my desk.

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