

REIMAGINING THE VOICE OF AMERICA AS A
GLOBAL FORUM FOR TRANSNATIONAL DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will argue for a reimagining of the journalistic norms and values that have guided the Voice of America (VOA) for the past seven decades. While it will not challenge VOA's foundational commitment to "tell you the truth," it will describe an updated organizational mission designed "to move beyond merely telling the news" and instead embrace a bold and broader vision of promoting transnational deliberative democracy as a project of U.S. public diplomacy.

For those avowed to a foundationalist view of the profession – *news purists* as they have been called (and as they often call themselves) – it might be imagined that any project which challenges longstanding traditions must perforce advocate in one way or another on behalf of propaganda or audience manipulation. (Such is the suspicion that exists between public diplomacy and traditional visions of journalism that this objection must be presupposed). But, as will be demonstrated below, the intention here is quite the opposite. The ultimate objective of the approach presented here is to shore up the credibility of both United States international broadcasting (USIB) and the VOA, while setting a more effective course for the future of both. In pursuing this course however,

core elements of VOA’s longstanding journalistic norms and practices, along with its present day vision of itself, will indeed be brought into question in the light of changing times and circumstance.

In the pages that follow I will also argue against VOA’s current “overarching strategic objective” of becoming “the world’s leading international news agency by 2016,” and will offer what I believe is a more reasonable and effective public diplomacy alternative. I will hope to show that the assets possessed by VOA, including its mass media communications capability, multiple language proficiencies, and legacy as a reliable source of credible factual information, may be put to far better future use than in the fanciful and ultimately self-defeating quest for global news supremacy.

Recognizing that globalization and the spread of mobile communications technologies have materially altered geopolitical priorities and revolutionized the ways in which information is now accessed and processed, I will argue for a new approach to U.S. international broadcasting that prizes engagement and community-building over today’s centralized, authority-based, headline-chasing model. Following a brief review of the purposes and practices of U.S. public diplomacy and its constituent project of international broadcasting (which, notably, comprises nearly half of current U.S public diplomacy funding), I will present an argument for what many believe is necessary reform. Building on the principles embodied in the civic philosophy project known as public journalism, I will describe a new and more-participatory approach to serving the information needs of global audiences. This new approach adheres to a new set of global

journalism standards perhaps best described by the ethicist and media scholar Steven Ward as “pragmatic news objectivity.”

In keeping with the guiding ethos of public journalism, the ultimate purpose of the new approach to journalism proposed here for VOA is to nourish and sustain democracy in the transnational public sphere. Reconfiguring the norms and values that guide so venerable an organization as the Voice of America is a project not lightly undertaken. But if VOA is to survive and remain relevant in a radically altered media ecosystem, it will need to adapt to challenges unforeseen at the time of its founding. This work is intended to help move that project forward.

PREFACE

Our Broadcasting Board of Governors is practically defunct in terms of its capacity to tell a message around the world.

– Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, January 23, 2013

In her final official appearance before Congress, American’s 67th Secretary of State addressed what she perceived to be the patent shortcomings of U.S. international broadcasting, a government-run project that has become the target of incessant public criticism in recent years. Echoing an assessment remarkably similar to one she had offered during an appearance two years earlier,¹ Secretary Clinton now asserted that the U.S. was still not doing enough to “provide a counter-narrative to the extremist Jihadist narrative.”²

Clinton accused the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which oversees U.S. international broadcasting of “abdicating the ideological arena”³ to America’s enemies. And, obliquely referring to unspecified ideological warfare activities of an earlier era, bemoaned the fact that “we are not doing what we did in the Cold War.”⁴

¹ In March 2011, citing the success of Al Jazeera, Secretary of State Clinton warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee “we are in an information war and we are losing that war.”

² Robert Schadler, "Hillary Clinton's Unfinished Business at the Broadcasting Board of Governors," *U.S. News and World Report*, February 26, 2013.

³ <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1301/23/se.02.html>

⁴ Ibid.

Secretary Clinton’s historical reference suggests a view of U.S. International Broadcasting (USIB) as not unlike a messaging campaign, aimed at shaping a narrative of global events. The intent, as she makes clear, is to convince foreign audiences of America’s good intentions in the world.

But this view finds considerable resistance among many if not most in U.S. international broadcasting community, which includes employees at the Voice of America. They perceive their calling as journalism – not messaging, branding, or image building.⁵

Fully aware of these concerns, and not altogether unsympathetic to them either, Secretary Clinton nonetheless delivered a final parting shot at the management and operations of the BBG in a farewell address delivered before the Council on Foreign Relations in early 2013, declaring that “if we don't have an up-to-date, modern, effective Broadcasting Board of Governors, we shouldn't have one at all.”⁶ Kim Andrew Elliott,⁷ a media scholar who has written widely on U.S. international broadcasting issues, responded to Secretary Clinton’s remarks in a posting titled “US international broadcasting: "Defunct"? Or merely "dysfunctional"?”

⁵ In addition to the Voice of America BBG administers four so-called “surrogate” broadcasters: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio and TV Martí, and The Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN) Their mission, to serve as substitute sources in areas where press freedom is denied. This argument is specific to the Voice of America and its mission.

⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, “Remarks on American Leadership” (transcript), <http://www.cfr.org/us-strategy-and-politics/remarks-american-leadership/p29911>, (accessed May 29, 2014).

⁷ Dr. Elliott, a former broadcast journalist at the Voice of America, is an audience research analyst at the U.S. International Broadcasting Bureau and holds advanced degrees in international affairs and communications.

Citing Clinton’s apparent misunderstanding of the purpose for which U.S. international broadcasting is intended, Dr. Elliott offered this correction. “(Secretary Clinton) seems to be referring to the work of public diplomacy, which is conducted by offices in her own State Department. International broadcasting has a *separate, complementary purpose* (emphasis mine): to provide accurate, comprehensive, and reliable news that audiences in many countries are not getting from their state controlled⁸ or otherwise deficient domestic media.”⁹

In the Chapters that follow I will focus primarily on what Dr. Elliott refers to as USIB’s “separate, complimentary purpose,”¹⁰ describing what it currently is (or purports to be), evaluating its effectiveness, and offering an alternative vision of what I am convinced it needs to become. I will also examine the discrepancy between the message-bearing approach to USIB – as expressed by Secretary Clinton – and whether or not it can ever be justified and/or harmonized with the alternative “objective news model” as imagined by Dr. Elliott and others.

I will argue that it can be, albeit in an altered and highly focused fashion. The approach I propose embraces a new, more dialogical approach to U.S. international broadcasting as an engaged project of journalism in support of dialogue and deliberative democracy. I contend that if VOA is to become an effective force in furthering America’s public diplomacy objectives, while simultaneously observing its official mandate to

⁸ It is worth noting here that USIB is itself, by definition, a project of state controlled media.

⁹ Kim Andrew Elliott, blog comment. <http://www.kimandrewelliott.com/?id=14095>, (accessed May 29, 2014).

¹⁰ Ibid.

provide “accurate, objective, and comprehensive” news coverage (as described in the VOA Charter), then a reimagining of USIB’s journalistic mission is required, along with a new and complimentary understanding of the message this project should hope to express. That message, in this reimagining, would above all constitute an expression of the nexus of values described by international relations scholar Anne Marie Slaughter in her book *The Idea That is America*, when she writes that “our shared values are essential because they link America to the world. The belief that American values are universal values—that all men and women are created equal, that all are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, creed, or nationality—connects us to other nations.”¹¹

Adhering to USIB’s core principles of telling the truth and promoting democracy, the proposal that follows places far greater emphasis on engagement and, consequently, far less on “messaging.” It will also focus less on selling American-style democracy, and instead seek to demonstrate a wider range of democratic possibilities, by materially supporting communities of dialogue and deliberative practice through sustained transnational deliberative discourse.

This thesis does not attempt to redefine ‘journalism’, ‘news’, or ‘news values’ merely for the purpose of supporting its own arguments. It simply seeks to account for the fact that time and circumstance have materially altered significant conditions affecting America’s role in the world, along with the posture it can reasonably expect to assume in any mass media expression of that role. What is new here is the application a new set of

¹¹ Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Idea That Is America* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2007). 7-8.

pragmatic journalistic norms and values to U.S. international broadcasting, designed to better address the evolving needs of newly empowered global audiences. This approach focuses on an updated model of operations characterized by networked communities of dialogue rather than the still prevalent, bifurcated model of *experts* guiding *audiences*. It also recognizes that the need for mutual understanding has come to supplant most people's need for information alone, which today is often found in bounteous supply.

Finally, in the pages that follow I will describe how a new dialogical approach to international broadcasting might perhaps help address the transnational democratic deficit described by a global interdisciplinary community of scholars including democracy theorists, international relations specialists, and a wide variety of public diplomacy experts.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBG – British Broadcasting Corporation

BBG – Broadcasting Board of Governors

EFP – Engaged Fallibilistic Pluralism

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

NPD – New Public Diplomacy

PD – Public Diplomacy

SD – Sustained Dialogue

USIA – United States Information Agency

USIB – United States International Broadcasting

VOA – Voice of America

CHAPTER 1

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY – PURPOSE AND PERFORMANCE

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail

Public diplomacy is America’s dialogue with the world.

– William Kiehl, America’s Dialogue with the World

The U.S. Department of State, the agency authorized to conduct America’s official public diplomacy activities, describes the purpose of its efforts as designed to “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”¹

This argument, in accordance with that assertion, will consider U.S. government funded public diplomacy as a coordinated long-term approach to communicating with citizens of other nations. The ultimate objective of this project is persuasion, although – traditionally at least – the target of this persuasion has never been limited to citizens alone. Rather, throughout its history, U.S. public diplomacy’s overarching concern has been with influencing the perceptions and behaviors of other governments. In this sense,

¹ Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Mission Statement, <http://www.state.gov/tr/> (accessed April 15, 2013).

overt appeals to the hearts and minds of international audiences must be viewed as potentially effective methods for communicating with, and influencing, foreign leaders.

In its attempt to influence the citizens of sovereign nations – an effort that extends, by the way, to the wider world of so-called global opinion as well – U.S. public diplomacy is primarily a self-interested enterprise, undertaken and pursued by nations with the goal of achieving results favorable to the national interest. Success occurs when the nation’s foreign policy objectives are made more obtainable, its security is strengthened, and its prestige enhanced. All of this notwithstanding, a nation’s public diplomacy need not be pursued without regard to ethical norms, nor be at odds with its genuine national aspirations to do good in the world.

Half a century ago, even before the term had come into common usage, notable practitioners of public diplomacy – or PD as it often called – were already expressing the view that in order for the practice to succeed in any meaningful long-term way, its approach had to be founded upon truth. In 1963 Edward R. Murrow, Director of the United States Information Agency, in effect American’s chief public diplomacy officer at the time, suggested as much before a Congressional foreign affairs panel when he asserted that “to be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful. It is as simple as that.”²

Widely respected as pioneer in field of radio and television news, Murrow arrived at USIA with a reputation for unshakable fidelity to the established norms of broadcast

² The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, “Credible Public Diplomacy: A Lesson for our Times,” <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow> (accessed April 23, 2013).

journalism: accuracy, openness, impartiality, and honesty. These attributes, Murrow argued, were in no way incompatible with the objectives of public diplomacy: “American traditions and the American ethic require us to be truthful, but the most important reason is that truth is the best propaganda³ and lies are the worst.”⁴

Common sense would seem to suggest this is true, but can public diplomacy’s prescription to persuade and/or shape public perceptions ever be fully compatible with the fact-based, dispassionate imperatives of its journalism? As Murrow himself well knew, a journalist’s reporting may or may not prove compelling, even convincing, but in either case the job is to inform – accurately and without bias – not to persuade or convince. Public diplomacy, even when it adheres rigorously to the truth, seeks an altogether opposite outcome. In public diplomacy “Communication to spread non-objective values, ideas, and perspectives is not just allowed, (it is) a central dimension.”⁵

Writing in the 2009 *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, psychologist Liza M. Persson and international public affairs specialist Ken S. Heller describe the specific differences between the goals of public diplomacy versus those of news or public affairs. Addressing the discipline of public diplomacy, they suggest “it not only can, but is

³ Murrow’s coupling of the term “propaganda” with “lies” reflects a pejorative connotation that had become common well before 1963. State-sponsored mass media manipulations of the early to mid-20th century, most particularly during wartime, had been widely used to deceive and even dehumanize mass audiences. These practices occurred on a scope so unprecedented that a unified term was found necessary to name them. That term became, and remains, “propaganda.”

⁴ The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, “Credible Public Diplomacy: A Lesson for our Times,” <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow> (accessed April 23, 2013).

⁵ Ken S. Heller and Liza M. Persson, “The Distinction Between Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy,” in the *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2009), 229.

supposed to change the forms, targets, timing, and content of messages according to its communications strategy.”⁶ News reporting, according to the Society of Professional Journalists, is not supposed to do that. Its practitioners are bound by a Code of Ethics that declares “Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public’s right to know.”⁷

Later in this thesis the question of ethics in journalism will be examined in greater detail, including VOA’s own Journalistic Code. But for the moment it bears mentioning that (and perhaps not surprisingly) the project of state run media seldom sits easily with the conception of a journalism as described above – at least not when it comes actual practice. Traditional journalism is inherently skeptical of any government’s motives, and its predisposition to let facts fall where they may is antithetical to the inherently oligarchic tendencies of government bureaucracies. Thus, the project of government-funded journalism as a component of public diplomacy has been recognized as problematical since its very inception.

Leaving aside the outright manipulative or purely propagandistic state-controlled news of authoritarian regimes, it might be argued that the news broadcasts produced by democratic governments such as the United States, India, France, or the United Kingdom offer a value beyond the content contained in their daily bulletins. It is not unreasonable to suggest that newscasts of the sort VOA produces represent a form of meta-communication, offering an allusive, albeit persuasive (or so it is hoped) message of

⁶ Ibid., 228.

⁷ Society of Professional Journalists, “SPJ Code of Ethics,” <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp> (accessed May 1, 2013).

truth, freedom, and democratic values. In this imagining, adherence to the norms of journalism – whether actual or ostensible – might be seen as having greater importance than questions about why VOA presents information the way it does, or determines what it will report or leave unreported. The transnational public display of government-salaried civil servants speaking truth to power – occasionally (if only seemingly) biting the hand that feeds them while seldom suffering punishment for it – could be considered a positive projection of the sort that public diplomacy was intended to involve itself with. The Broadcasting Board of Governors argues that U.S. international broadcasting achieves both ends – “gaining audience trust as a source for news,”⁸ while also “serving as an example of a free and professional press.”⁹ Whether or not U.S. government sponsored journalism should be considered as wholly distinct from public diplomacy – or not – is a question for the following chapter. What follows next is a review of public diplomacy in its broader historical sense, and a look back on how it has evolved from its earliest origins up to the present day.

In recent years public diplomacy has been described, perhaps most notably by Harvard University political scientist Joseph Nye, as an instrument of “soft power”: an approach to achieving a nation’s way in the world through peaceful, non-coercive measures. Nye’s 1990 book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, argued that while threats of military force, political pressure, and/or economic sanctions (or inducements) remain potent means of influencing other nations, these measures, as has

⁸ BBG Strategic Plan 2008-2013, “Mission & Strategic Guidance,” 4, http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2011/12/bbg_strategic_plan_2008-2013.pdf (accessed May 5, 2013).

⁹ Ibid., 4.

been shown in Iraq for example, often come at a very high cost. Whether measured by lives lost, treasure sunk, or the forfeiture of international good will, America's military involvements in the first decade of the 21st century demonstrate the desirability of discovering and putting into effect practical methods of persuasion that fall short of war.

As this thesis will show, a growing number of academics, policy experts, military officials, and civil society authorities have become convinced that public diplomacy has been underappreciated and underutilized as an instrument of soft power. Many of them also argue that U.S. public diplomacy has been poorly executed, ineffective, and in need of reform. Updating PD to confront the contemporary challenges of rapid globalization, intensifying political instability (both within and between states), and the revolutionary growth of new information and communications technologies, will need to be at the heart of this reform.

Long considered a key component of America's public diplomacy project, U.S. international broadcasting (USIB) today accounts for some 40% of all federal funding in support of official U.S. PD. While expenditures on infrastructure and operations have fluctuated over the course of decades, most particularly during times of war (when funding has traditionally surged), USIB has provided a steady on-air U.S. presence around the world since before the start of World War II. Funding fell following the end of the Cold War, but rose again a decade later in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Public diplomacy scholar Jian Wang is among those who have described U.S. PD's historical pattern of funding, and its responsiveness to American involvement in armed conflict, commenting that U.S. public diplomacy has, since its inception, served primarily

as a tool of foreign policy during times of war. In this sense at least, USIB has been used since its earliest days as a ready method of promoting U.S. foreign policy interests.

Today spending on U.S. international broadcasting accounts for about \$720 million annually. Unlike most other State Department PD initiatives (the funding of international visitor exchanges for example, which are seen as an effective and enduring method of influencing promising international elites), U.S. international broadcasting seeks to achieve its aims by attracting and influencing mass audiences through communications media. As such, throughout the broadcast era USIB has been a resource-intensive enterprise, the effectiveness of which it has been notoriously difficult to measure. Today the United States Congress is reconsidering VOA's mandate in the absence of useful research on whether and how USIB's audiences are actually influenced. Better known are the methods USIB has traditionally used in its attempt to connect with foreign audiences.

Over the years USIB has occasionally offered cultural programming, radio and film products exploring aspects of the democratic pluralism in both their depiction of life in the United States and through broadcast expositions of art, music, film, literature, and human interest stories from around the world. Additional broadcast content includes radio and television programming focused on communicating U.S. values as well as explanations and justifications for U.S. foreign and domestic policy approaches. But while programming of this sort continues to appear occasionally, the focus of USIB has been primarily directed towards news and information.

The project of covering world news on a global scale is an enormous and expensive enterprise. Considered in the context of a global media marketplace, particularly in

contemporary times, it is a competitive endeavor requiring among, other things, rapid and reliable speed to market. In a digital media environment, with mobile text, photo, and video capability becoming ubiquitous, any major news agency's reputation for providing accurate news is diminished if it cannot provide such news in real time, or at least nearly so. As potential contenders in this enterprise, VOA and the BBG are hobbled by self-limiting bureaucratic and institutional procedures, political hurdles, and (perhaps less significantly) by resource limitations. While additional funding might be of marginal assistance, the more salient issue here is (and is likely always to be) the flexible flow of resources to cover emergent or breaking news with live-on-the-scene coverage and reporting around the world.

As a federally funded foreign affairs institution, buffeted by confusing mission imperatives and ever-present political pressures, news decisions at BBG can be subject to prolonged review processes amid formidable forces of bureaucratic inertia. Such circumstances similarly impede decision makers at other federal agencies of course, but VOA must decide on news items of significant sensitivity and consequence almost instantaneously. Coordinating those imperatives with the mandate to promote U.S. foreign policy initiatives cannot help but slow the process. Therefore, the notion that VOA would be reasonably able to effectively compete in the global news arena – in the face of competition from better financed, abler, and more limber global news concerns such as CNN or America's commercial news networks – does not appear to bear scrutiny. Nor does the idea that VOA, as a purported global news agency, might somehow stand – as it would like to – as an accepted global exemplar of a functioning free press. (The fact

that VOA itself operates as a fully state-sponsored entity absents it from any meaningful watchdog function over the government it presumably reports on). As a government-operated news agency, VOA's functional ability to interrogate the government that funds it – even in the guise of journalism – begs the questions of its legitimate standing as an independent arbiter.

Withal – and notwithstanding the institutional restraints and mission confusion, cited above – USIB has, over the course of the past seven decades, upgraded its overall technical capabilities in order to adapt to the revolutionary innovations introduced by the rise of modern information and communication technologies, or ITCs. The transition from its foundational *broadcast* model of operations to a new *networked* model, widely considered more appropriate to today's interconnected information ecosystem has forced USIB to adapt; and to its credit, it has begun to.

Today, VOA's international broadcast journalists use sophisticated digital tools, including mobile social media applications, to engage with language audiences around the world in thoughtful new ways. As a result of these potent new online connective capabilities, and the altered landscape in which VOA now interfaces with its audience, rapid readjustments in its perception of audience needs and modes of engaging them have become a vital and present concern. Where once, for example, VOA's Ukrainian language service might have broadcast over the air to a Ukrainian-speaking radio audience in Ukraine, it is now additionally able to simultaneously reach Ukrainian diaspora communities situated around the world online, including the language community of Ukrainian-speakers residing in the United States. These new audiences

now have the technical capability to talk back, and with a minimal commitment of resources. VOA's growing ability to engage online with audiences in dozens of languages – from Albanian to Uzbek – now constitutes a sponsored communications link, or bridge, of potentially immeasurable value between the American people and the people of other nations and/or ethnic or linguistic identities. VOA's legacy as a reliable source of news and information imbues its online sites with a measure of prestige, and is an asset to be built on.

More significant than VOA's branding, or even its upgraded technical capabilities is its staff of experienced language-proficient professional journalists. Deployed across VOA's language services, these men and women – typically, though not always, native-speaking émigrés – possess a broad cultural understanding of the language communities they engage with and typically provide audiences with informed reporting of U.S. and foreign news. Their exposure to daily life in the United States often brings them in contact with cultural figures, government officers, and political leaders. They interview scholars and issue experts at universities, private sector concerns, and NGOs, and regularly report on significant trends across the American political, intellectual, and cultural landscape. They also come into contact with a wide variety of domestically disseminated news and opinion, and share a professional affinity with other U.S.-based journalists, be they locally-, regionally-, nationally-, or internationally-oriented in their scope of reporting. Finally, through the editorial review process, VOA's language service professionals are conditioned to the customs of practice and ethical standards of American journalism.

Given these proven assets, and allowing for the inevitable complaint that funding is inadequate to the task, it may still be asserted that USIB minimally possesses the necessary resources to reach audiences both large and small in diverse languages with programming of interest. In this way various VOA language services offer transparent and sourced (or verifiable) information along with a potentially vital pipeline for discourse among specific language communities around the world.

Yet, in spite of all this, USIB's effectiveness under BBG in the post 9/11 has been the subject of ongoing and indeed growing concern. In June 2013 James Glassman, former Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and Chairman of the BBG during the Bush Administration addressed House Foreign Affairs Committee members in a meeting titled "Broadcasting Board of Governors: An Agency 'defunct.'" Glassman described an agency whose mission is "contradictory and confused,"¹⁰ while explaining why that is the case. "The law asks it (the BBG) both to be a tool of U.S. foreign policy and an independent, unbiased journalistic organization protected from government interference."¹¹ Glassman's own view envisions a BBG reintegrated into the State Department and explicitly functioning as an instrument of what he calls "strategic public diplomacy." BBG's mission, he argues, ought to mirror the aims of the State

¹⁰ *Broadcasting Board of Governors: An Agency 'Defunct,'* Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, June 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20130626/101050/HHRG-113-FA00-20130626-SD002.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹¹ Ibid.

Department itself: “To achieve the specific strategic goals of U.S. national security and foreign policy.”¹²

Both statutory elements of it BBG’s mission – objective journalism and support for U.S. policy foreign initiatives – are cited in a 2013 report by the Government Accountability Office, which sees BBG as, incontestably, “an element of U.S. public diplomacy.”¹³ In GAO’s view, BBG is, or ought to be “responsive to U.S. foreign policy and national security priorities while maintaining editorial independence.”¹⁴

In its attempt to contend with the contradictory nature of its multiple missions BBG in recent years has effectively disregarded its public diplomacy mandate, choosing instead to focus on its journalism function, offering audiences programming mostly culled from other online sources or video news services - information that is often readily available from other sources and in nearly identical form, lacking only some slight editorial touches by VOA writers and editors. Perhaps the best that can be said about this strategy is that it duplicates, and consequently amplifies, existing reports from other independent agencies including CNN, BBC, and regional broadcasters – an admittedly slight benefit. But in an age of 24-hour TV news cycles, VOA’s intermittent approach to news broadcasting has become wholly inadequate to the needs of audiences around the world and essentially non-competitive with other major players in the global media marketplace. This challenge clarifies not only the need but also the opportunity to adapt, and find new approaches.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651608.txt>

¹⁴ Ibid.

The argument that follows contends that – rather than trying to compete with the news reporting of others global reporting agencies, BBG might, within the bounds of its limited resources, offer global audiences (and the Americans who pay for its service) something of far greater value than “just telling the news.” With its combined assets of communications infrastructure, its language capability, and its staff of trained journalists, BBG is uniquely positioned to cultivate transnational goodwill and build bridges to communities of dialogue among America’s allies if not (at least in many cases) its adversaries. Such a project is fully in keeping with BBG’s statutory mandate as quoted in its mission statement, “to promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multi-media communication of accurate, objective, and balanced news, information, and other programming about America and the world to audiences overseas.”

VOA’s normative approach to communicating “accurate, objective, and balanced news,” as called for in its Charter, focuses on a narrowly defined and increasingly outmoded model of mass communications in the 21st century. Its dispassionate, disengaged, neutral, point-sourced, authority-based approach to telling news has today all but eclipsed its larger obligation “to promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding about America and the world.”

The argument that follows will attempt to show that effective remedies are at hand, perhaps best reflected in the 20th Century philosophical project known the hermeneutics. Understanding of the principles behind that project gives hope that practical and transformational change can be achieved in American public diplomacy by creating the

kinds of “communities of dialogue” described by scholars of pragmatism and hermeneutics.

BBG has publicly committed to winning the global news race by 2016. But the quest for global news supremacy will require it to compete directly for audience share with for-profit media outlets and all other challengers, including even bloggers, who operate unencumbered by the political and diplomatic considerations that come with BBG’s joint project of promoting U.S. foreign policy and reporting the news. One should remember that while commercial enterprises labor under an obligation to their stakeholders, the publicly funded Voice of America need not worry about turning a profit. Its stakeholders, the American people, might be willing to sacrifice quantity of viewership for qualitative results in engaging with the world. In order to pursue this course, VOA will need to reimagine its approach to serving its audiences.

The journalists at VOA, informed by American traditions of journalism, strive for objectivity, the capacity to stand outside or above history and culture’s ambient accepted truths, authority sources, and the limitations of language. Many would admit that this habit of mind is useful, but imperfect, and that complete objectivity is not humanly possible.

Consequently, in arguing for a new and more engaged approach to America’s strategic communications objectives, I am advocating a reinterpretation of journalism as presently practiced at VOA. U.S. government-funded journalism is likely always to be widely perceived as inherently suspect. It seems too much to ask that VOA can ever

realistically be considered a globally reputable news organization and a tool of the U.S. foreign policy establishment all at the same time.

I propose that rather than competing against the world's major commercial broadcasters and its other competitors for attention, the United States ought now to reinvigorate its image in the world by leveraging its strategic communications assets in a project of participatory deliberation among language communities. A successful project of this nature would surface shared concerns and hidden sources of motive and understanding that might, over time, nourish transnational civil society and serve as a reliable living reference source for informing global public opinion.

In September 2007 the ideologically conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation produced a report on the failure of U.S. public diplomacy to effectively advance its goal of attracting and engaging foreign publics. This lack of effectiveness has been cited by parties on all sides of the issue and does not reflect a specifically partisan position. In fact it represents the conclusion of scores of reports produced in the last decade.

The Heritage report describes a “fundamental lack of clarity over America’s public diplomacy mission,”¹⁵ as well as the absence of a “unified vision, sense of purpose, body of principles, and set of doctrines”¹⁶ over the project as a whole. The situation, says the report’s authors, is particularly acute at the Voice of America, which operates with “its

¹⁵ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2007/09/public-diplomacy-and-the-cold-war-lessons-learned>

¹⁶ Ibid.

own institutional culture and outlook.”¹⁷ This outlook, claim the authors, is reflected in VOA’s ongoing project of broadcasting “so-called authoritative news.”¹⁸

One foundational source of this outlook is the VOA Charter, enacted into law in 1976 following the Watergate scandal to publicize and hence protect VOA’s editorial independence. The Watergate era resulted in an increased awareness among journalists and others concerning the watchdog function of the press, and its role in providing an adversarial counterpoint to power in a democracy. The establishment of the Charter, coincident with the post-Watergate era, may have contributed to the belief at VOA that its operations ought to be focused exclusively on independent journalism.

Carnes Lord and Helle Dale, co-authors of the Heritage Foundation report on USIB, argue that the VOA Charter actually obscures VOA’s public diplomacy mission and that, as they point out, it now serves primarily as “a bureaucratic device to protect the agency from unwanted outside interference in what (are) claimed to be professional journalistic decisions.”¹⁹ Given BBG’s conflicting mission, critiques like this raise legitimate questions.

The pressing need for more successful public diplomacy and U.S. international broadcasting has attracted increased attention in recent years in academic studies, government inquiries and think tank reports. As will be shown below, many agree that new policies must leverage technology and expertise to produce a new form of PD that

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

embraces public dialogue. The project of public journalism, as it has come to be understood in recent years, could represent the form of change that is needed.

A free, competent, and energetic working press is a fundamental requirement for any self-governing people, and the adversarial role of the press in U.S. society has been and probably always will be vital to the success of liberty. But revolutionary changes in the global media sphere, including the gradual overturning of economic models and sources of revenue, now threaten this vital project. While not the specific concern of this thesis, which focuses on public diplomacy, praiseworthy arguments have been made for government support of institutions seeking to provide adversarial or watchdog press coverage. Robert McChesney and John Nichols, writing in *The Death and Life of American Journalism: The Media Revolution that Will Begin the World Again*, argue the future of journalism likely depends on some form of public funding. It may be so.

But that role is not presently appropriate for the federally-funded Voice of America, which throughout its history has been designated by statute, as a tool of U.S. foreign policy. Beyond this, VOA rarely engages in investigative journalism, either domestically or internationally. It is expensive and risky, and might threaten the flow of Congressional funds that sustains it. Finally, in an environment where U.S. credibility runs at low ebb, due in part to the revelation of covert surveillance practices aimed at professional journalists, BBG's attempts to portray itself as a truly independent press agency – as it all too often does – appears not only inauthentic but also ineffective, ultimately undermining any trust that BBG might have hoped to generate.

The chapters that follow will argue that a new set of norms and commitments, described by the projects of public journalism and democratic deliberation, might well offer VOA an important historical opportunity for a more authentic and effective role in public life. As former BBG Chairman James Glassman recently noted, “Now is the time to think big about reforming not just the BBG but the entire public diplomacy effort of the U.S. Government.”²⁰

That effort will take many forms. Increasingly, the Department of Defense has become openly involved in public diplomacy activities, including nation-building activities by soldiers on the ground, and strategic communications initiatives, including misinformation campaigns and psychological operations. In this broad field I believe it is important that VOA differentiate itself from so-called *strategic* public diplomacy activities like these, and build on its legacy of even-handedness and accuracy. It can do that by charting a new course in supporting public dialogue and deliberation.

²⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING'S NEW CHALLENGES

During the Cold War, international broadcasting was an important strategic tool of U.S. foreign policy. In fact, it was instrumental in communicating the strengths of the West while simultaneously weakening the Communist states from within. The key to this success was our understanding of two distinct aspects of our communications policy: public diplomacy—telling the world our story; and surrogate broadcasting—giving other countries the opportunity to openly discuss themselves.

“Understanding the Mission of U.S. International Broadcasting”
– McCormick Tribune Conference Series, 2007.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War era, with the United States widely perceived as the world's lone global superpower, the project of telling America's story to the world signaled, for some, an onerous enterprise of salesmanship, framing, and the imposition of an unwelcome, even burdensome meta-narrative. The idea of a hegemonic discourse, controlled by those with the power to control it, is informed by the views of thinkers from Antonio Gramsci to Michel Foucault and Iris Marion Young, and reflects a postmodern sensibility characterized by suspicion towards power and its interests. But today USIA's slogan of “Telling America's Story to the World” is long gone, along with the public diplomacy agency that promoted it. In 1999 VOA was set free from its PD overseers at USIA, and has ever since defended its independence by invoking an institutional “firewall,” a legal prescription against outside interference, substantiated by the BBG and its offices. Under this regime, VOA sees itself as a journalistic enterprise *in toto*, objectively and editorially independent of the bias inferred by any American meta-narrative, policy posture, or national security concern. Earnest though this view may be,

it is not the only perspective that matters in the debate about VOA and its mission. International audiences today have good reason and every right to question the impartiality of a government-run news outlet committed to advancing U.S. foreign policy interests as its first priority. When that same government is shown capable of invading the privacy of other professional journalists (as was the case with Justice Department's secret seizure of phone records from Associated Press reporters, revealed in 2013), or is exposed for transgressing legitimate bounds of privacy, (as was the case in 2010 Wikileaks and 2013 Snowden affairs), so much the worse for attending to credibility and the building of trust that are at the heart of public diplomacy. This conflict, as noted, has been a source of friction and mission confusion throughout VOA's history.

The concept of U.S. international broadcasting as a global messaging system, advocating for American values and the blessings of American-style democracy, has been present since its founding and remains strongly in force today. This idea also informs the opinions of those who perceive of USIB as an exercise in propaganda, and view its activities as nefarious. But USIB's actual ability to broadly execute an effective messaging campaign continues to draw serious doubt from close observers. The authors of the *9/11 Commission Report* for example determined that official U.S. public diplomacy has performed inadequately in its attempts to "communicate its message,"¹ a state of affairs which, the commission concluded, raised serious national security

¹ United States, *9/11 Commission Report: The Official Report of the 9/11 Commission and Related Publications* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 2004), 377.

concerns. More recently, and as noted earlier, Secretary of State Clinton vigorously criticized the messaging ineffectiveness of the BBG.²

Throughout the past decade however, and to an ever-increasing degree, public diplomacy professionals and scholars have been questioning the so-called *messaging approach*, and searching for new ways of effectively actualizing the concepts of mutuality, dialogue, and engagement, including through the use of U.S. international broadcasting. Michael Schneider, professor of practice at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, notes that mutuality, dialogue, and engagement have long been recognized, if not always fully appreciated, as worthy goals in the administration of official U.S. PD. Now, with the rapid development and distribution of mobile information and communications technologies, these concepts are being re-examined in the quest for more effective U.S. public diplomacy practice.

Kathy Fitzpatrick, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at American University, and an internationally-recognized scholar in the field of public diplomacy, described the consequences of this evolving conceptual turn in her 2011 report *U.S. Public Diplomacy in a Post-9/11 World: From Messaging to Mutuality*. “What this means for U.S. public diplomacy is a shift from ‘telling America’s story to the world’ as

² While Secretary Clinton enthusiastically embraced the potential of social media engagement and listening as critical components of what she termed “21st Century Diplomacy,” the testimony she provided on BBG’s stewardship of USIB suggests an understanding of that agency’s mission as strategic asset in an ongoing information war.

it did both during the Cold War and in the early post-9/11 period to ‘engaging with the world.’”³

Fitzpatrick is part of a growing circle of public diplomacy scholars working within or alongside a project that has come to be known as New Public Diplomacy, or NPD.

Another of its influential figures is Jan Melissen, Senior Research Fellow at the Clingendael, the Institute for the Study of International Relations in the Netherlands. In Melissen’s view, this *new* public diplomacy is “no longer confined to messaging, promotion campaigns, or even direct governmental contacts with foreign publics serving foreign policy purposes. It is also about building relationships with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad”⁴

It is an ambitious project that, in the United States, has been undertaken in part by social media professionals at the State Department. But this new outreach effort might arguably be better accomplished as a project of USIB which, as noted earlier, commands copious, requisite, and applicable assets, including media infrastructure, human capital, and a legacy luminous enough to take on this important new public diplomacy imperative. As a multimedia news operation, and the flagship of USIB, VOA offers the potential to build and sustain communities of dialogue convened in multiple languages across a global public sphere. In this conception, the multiple language services of the

³ Kathy R. Fitzpatrick, "U.S. Public Diplomacy in a Post-9/11 World: From Messaging to Mutuality," *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy*, 6 (2011), http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/perspectives/CPDPerspectives_Mutuality.pdf (accessed May 5, 2013).

⁴ Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice*, ed. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 22.

VOA function as journalistic facilitators, assisting and enabling dialogic communities to access primary source material, and providing them with timely, thoughtful, and verifiable reports on important issues of ongoing transnational concern. This new envisioning challenges VOA's traditional approach to news and international audiences and calls for a re-examination and revision of its traditional norms and practices.

The new VOA would function as partner and facilitator to language-specific transnational communities of dialogue. While remaining fully faithful to its organization heritage as a source of timely and reliable information, it would break with its reliance on a 20th century broadcast model of news operations to be recast as a stable, trusted, and responsive source of support for sustained democratic dialogue. In this mode, instead of "just telling the news," VOA journalists would actively assist in facilitating democratic discourse on transnational issues of global common concern by providing focused, relevant, and impartial information through accessible sites serving multiple language communities. These web-based information stations would provide audio, visual, graphical, textual, and other relevant and information, vetted for validity and presented with sources provided, on topics of common concern to transnational audiences. Made available through VOA's currently existing language services including English, the portals of this new global online platform for discourse would be open to Americans as well, where they might participate in English or in other languages in which they might be proficient.

Affording Americans the opportunity to listen and learn from people of other nations, Fitzpatrick reminds us, supports what she has called the hidden mandate of public

diplomacy, the concept of mutuality. It is an aspect of PD that has historically received short shrift in both funding and attention, but is receiving more attention today thanks to new communications capabilities, and the conviction that traditional public diplomacy is failing. Mutuality in public diplomacy necessarily involves the exchange of views between publics, and offers an opportunity for both sides to hear from and learn about each other. When it comes to USIB however, the American public remains grossly underserved in this regard. For example, federal law has proscribed VOA from broadcasting domestically throughout most of its history. Starting in 2013 Congress has allowed VOA to share much of its broadcast content with other entities for rebroadcast in the United States, but is still banned from producing original content intended for American audiences. In its new role as facilitator of global civic forums, VOA could reasonably welcome its own citizens to participate in democratic discourse on issues of transnational concern intended for transnational audiences, i.e. not specifically directed at crafting messages for a domestic or an international audience. VOA's approach to news reporting, going forward, would be focused on that mission. Kathy Fitzpatrick is among those who have questioned why the U.S. might want to consider such a course, asking "even if genuine dialogue were possible, why would a nation invest in such an 'ambivalent objective' as fostering mutual understanding without advancing acceptance of the government's point of view?"⁵

Fitzpatrick suggests that one explanation may be found in the writings of Manuel Castells, professor of Communication Technology and Society at the University of

⁵ Fitzpatrick, "From Messaging to Mutuality," 6.

Southern California. Castells has studied and written about the disruptive and inevitable nature of networked communications, but has also pointed out that, with this transition comes opportunities for a new diplomacy “of the public,” a convening of dialogic participants focused on issues of transnational concern in the global public sphere. Castells writes that “public diplomacy, as the diplomacy of the public, not of the government, intervenes in this global public sphere, laying the ground for traditional forms of diplomacy to act beyond the strict negotiation of power relationships by building on shared cultural meaning, the essence of communication.”⁶

Castell’s notion of public diplomacy, presented in an article titled *The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance*, bears scant resemblance to traditional public diplomacy practices in USIB, a distinction he reinforces – and here I quote at length – by comparing and contrasting the intentions of the two.

The goal of public diplomacy, in contrast to government diplomacy, is not to assert power or to negotiate a rearrangement of power relationships. It is to induce a communication space in which a new, common language could emerge as a precondition for diplomacy, so that when the time for diplomacy comes, it reflects not only interests and power making but also meaning and sharing. In this sense, public diplomacy intervenes in the global space equivalent to what has been traditionally conceived as the public sphere in the national system.⁷

John Robert Kelley, professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, is another influential contributor to the study of public

⁶ Manuel Castells, “The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance,” *ANNALS, AAPSS*, 616 (March 2008).

⁷ Castells, “The New Public Sphere,” 91.

diplomacy, including USIB. His work has recently focused on “the duality of information/influence approaches to public diplomacy and its opposite number, engagement.”⁸ Kelley’s 2007 paper, titled “Constructing Relevant Public Diplomacy Strategy in the 21st Century” argues that a fundamental shift in current U.S. PD practice is now required to meet challenges brought on by globalization, technology, and changing audience behavior, arguing that while prominent 20th century information and influence tactics tilted toward the propagandistic, “the international environment of the 21st century dictates the need for network-structured, long-term and transparent features of the engagement approach.”⁹

The new network structure Kelley describes has compelled VOA, like all other heritage media organizations, to adapt its approaches to audience engagement, and in many ways it has been uniquely well-positioned to do so. VOA’s established presence as an international information entity (including its reputation, or brand) is helpful, as is popular appreciation around the world for the service it has rendered over time. But new media content and delivery models, says Kelley, bring with them profound implications for new participatory structures. These new structures present broad scale challenges and opportunities in light of the “heightened capability of citizens to migrate from domestic to foreign spheres combined with sophisticated means of participating directly in political

⁸ John Robert Kelley, “Constructing Relevant Public Diplomacy Strategy in the 21st Century,” (paper presented at 48th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association Chicago, Illinois, USA, March 3, 2007).

⁹ Ibid.

matters.”¹⁰ For Kelley, this “means that the critical mass of stakeholders in policy outcomes assumes a form unlike any other seen in the history of international affairs.”¹¹

In the context of U.S. international broadcasting, what Kelley calls “stakeholders” may be thought of as somewhat synonymous with what journalism professor Jay Rosen, writing in his blog PressThink, has called “the people formerly known as the audience.” Newly empowered by mobile devices and inter-connective technologies that have fundamentally altered the way most people around the world consume and exchange information, the former audience to whom Rosen refers are the one-time mass audiences that have now fragmented as a result of ICT penetration and the multitude of now widely available information and communication options. Rhonda Zaharna, another important scholar contributing to the project of New Public Diplomacy, serves as Associate Professor at American University’s School of Communication. Her work focuses on international and strategic communications, and challenges the effectiveness of a traditional messaging approach to public diplomacy, citing among her arguments the complicating likelihood of cross cultural misunderstanding, seen as inevitable (and particularly at moments of international crisis). The fact of contrasting cultural patterns of communication suggests to Zaharna that public diplomacy’s task in effectively interacting with diverse international publics today calls for a more networked-based, relationship-building model of communicative engagement. This model recognizes that intercultural communications function best when dialogic features are built into the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

system, something that may now be broadly and effectively achieved for the first time through online technologies. Given this circumstance, Zaharna and others believe that “rather than trying to fight unwinnable information battles, US Public Diplomacy could be more effective by building communication bridges with culturally diverse publics.”¹²

Both the State Department and the BBG have taken steps over the past decade to enhance their engagement capabilities, offering increased online access and talk-back channels. But, at least when it comes to USIB, these early efforts struggle against its institutional history of employing the messaging approach, along with the mission conflict VOA continues to struggle with. For example: speaking in 2013 before the Public Diplomacy Council, former VOA Director David Ensor addressed the important role Voice of America plays “as an instrument of public diplomacy”¹³ involved in “exporting the First Amendment”¹⁴ and engaged in a global contest of opposing storylines. Ensor went on to advise that “it is not smart to let our enemies dominate the global conversation.”¹⁵

The contours and character of the global conversation Ensor refers to are never clearly defined in his speech. Does he refer, primarily, to the remarks of elite public opinion makers, pundits, politicians, academics, and others whose views are widely-

¹² Ronda Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges: U.S. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy after 9/11*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 8.

¹³ David Ensor, “Keynote Speech to the Public Diplomacy Council” (presented at a gathering of the Public Diplomacy Council, Washington, D.C., November 12, 2013) <http://www.insidevoa.com/content/david-ensor-keynote-speech-to-the-public-diplomacy-council/1789297.html> (accessed November 12, 2015).

¹⁴ Ensor, “Keynote Speech,” 2013.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

publicized through major media streams? Or, does the reference to a global conversation instead reflect Ensor's understanding of how people around the world can now communicate, and often collaborate, as transnational communities of interest? In either case, his focused concern over how to counter those "adversaries" who might "dominate" the global conversation appear as a somewhat shopworn ideological construct, in which a contest of unitary narratives is fought out in a technically limited media space. It is a view better suited to the 20th century's broadcast environment and communications mindset, where limited channels of information offered relatively few viewing and listening options. As this is no longer the case says Kelley, the time has come for public diplomacy professionals to adapt to changed circumstances, both in their technical capabilities and in their approach to what they hope to accomplish. "Official public diplomats must devise ways to first identify, build expertise in and then engage with foreign publics to obtain valuable feedback, which will in turn better align policy goals with the interests and aspirations of those publics."¹⁶

Kelley's project suggests a cosmopolitan sensibility, in which the aspirations of a global public are considered in evaluating and addressing issues of international concern. But that level of engagement calls for an entirely different set of approaches than those involved in broadcasting news headlines. It means building long term relationships of transparency and trust, where feedback enables participants on all sides to consider matters of universal human concern, such as migration, or the health of the global

¹⁶ Kelley, "Constructing Relevant Public Diplomacy Strategy," 2007.

environment, and learn from a collective community relatively unencumbered by institutional limitations on the global possible.

VOA's Ensor, while acknowledging that "the media environment is changing rapidly,"¹⁷ argues that VOA is taking steps to address this. But he also admits his agency is losing ground in broadcast media sector, saying "competition in the TV sector is worrisome because that is where people are getting news, even in traditional radio environments like Africa, and its tough for VOA, with its limited budget, to compete."¹⁸

This raises the question of whether or not VOA's posture as global news purveyor is still well-suited to the public diplomacy goals USIB might reasonably hope to achieve in the 21st century. Given that multimedia choices for news content are expanding rapidly, particularly regional and local capacity in areas around the world, what purpose does the news project VOA is now engaged in currently serve, and is that its highest purpose? Joshua Fouts, former Director of the Center on Public Diplomacy at USC, is among the body of scholars who have written of an expanded mission for U.S. public diplomacy in the online age. In a 2005 presentation titled "Rethinking public diplomacy for the 21st Century: A Toolbox for Engaging the Hearts and Minds of the Open Source Generation," Fouts describes a "generational shift"¹⁹ in audience demographics and habits, requiring an updated approach to PD and international broadcasting. He suggests that, in meeting

¹⁷ Ensor, "Keynote Speech," 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Joshua S. Fouts, "Rethinking Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century: A Toolbox for Engaging the Hearts and Minds of the Open Source Generation," (paper delivered at the American Political Science Association Conference on International Communication and Conflict, August 2005).

that challenge, the growing capacity of connective communications technologies to support and empower new online meeting places offers important new outreach opportunities. Fouts cites the popularity of massively multiplayer online games as an example of “the way that technology is being used as both venue for and facilitator of intercultural dialogue.”²⁰

The broader opportunities for U.S. public diplomacy as it adapts to changes in demographics and communication innovations has also been taken up by British public diplomacy scholar Shaun Riordan, who has remarked on “youth movements, such as the scouts, girl guides or boys/girls brigade, who pioneered international networking in the first half of the 20th century and their modern counterparts; sports clubs; and offshoots of the internet such as chat-rooms and usernets.”²¹

Riordan calls this “dialogue-based public diplomacy” and says it is integral to the NPD approach, a rational adjustment to a world where “the role of government, and diplomats, in relation to these non-governmental agents, will be more as catalysts.”²² Clingendael’s Jan Melissen agrees “the new public diplomacy moves away from - to put it crudely - peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences.”²³ It involves convening and consulting foreign

²⁰ Fouts, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy,” 2005.

²¹ Shaun Riordan, “Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm?,” *Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael,’ Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, (2004), http://gouv.dedation.org/gifiles/attach/41/41473_20041100_cli_paper_dip_issue95.pdf (accessed April 17, 2013).

²² Riordan, “Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy,” 2005.

²³ Melissen, “*The New Public Diplomacy*,” 30.

publics and, further, considering their collective judgment as part of the policy development process on issues of transnational concern. As a sponsor of such forums, VOA would need to focus far more on implementing the optimal conditions for reasonable discourse, far less on its current methods of traditional reporting. As Shaun Riordan points out, “a successful public diplomacy must be based not on the assertion of values, but on engaging in a genuine dialogue.”²⁴ Melissen believes “true dialogue, rather than mere one-way communication, is therefore seen as the essential starting point to fix the US’s serious - but probably not yet fatal - image problem around the world.”²⁵

In 2005 the International Institute for Strategic Studies published a journal article titled “Washington’s Troubling Obsession with Public Diplomacy,” in which Washington political scientists David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs described some of the primary assumptions of USIB’s long term messaging approach.

If only the rest of the world enjoyed unfettered access to accurate information and independent media, they would understand that the United States does not seek an empire, that the ‘war on terror’ is in every civilized nation’s interest, and that America’s values are universal. If only the United States clearly articulated its message, then surely the rest of the world would jump on the American bandwagon.²⁶

Edelstein and Krebs find these assumptions unconvincing however, and argue that America engenders mistrust, even contempt around the world today for two enveloping reasons: its history of support for anti-democratic regimes and its identification with economic globalization, perceived as U.S.-dominated and widely held to threaten the

²⁴ Riordan, “Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy,” 2005.

²⁵ Melissen, “*The New Public Diplomacy*,” 62

²⁶ David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, “Washington’s Troubling Obsession with Public Diplomacy,” *Survival* 47, no. 1, (Spring 2005): 89.

cultural traditions of less economically powerful nations. In the face of such facts say Edelstein and Krebs, whether message clarity in international broadcasting is sought after or not, “antipathy toward the United States is not the product of misunderstanding . . . it’s not the packaging that others dislike. It’s the product.”²⁷

Edelstein and Krebs present a unilateralist world of sovereign nations in which the United States will continue to operate, at least for a time, as a global hegemon. They see public diplomacy as of marginal national utility to America’s foreign policy agenda, but do admit its value in publicizing official U.S. foreign policy positions, including the corollary value of enforced accountability for statements made publicly. It can also, they believe, function as an effective tool for drawing attention to ongoing breaches of international norms.

Any of these goals may be seen as compatible with the larger mission of U.S. public diplomacy and USIB. But the use of VOA for foreign policy aims continues to raise concern among traditional journalists. Gary Thomas, a VOA radio correspondent for nearly three decades, has described BBG’s 2015 budget submission to Congress as the “death notice” for substantive news coverage at VOA. His concerns go beyond proposed cuts in language services and personnel, to focus on what he perceives to be a loss of editorial independence at VOA. Citing the budget request itself, Thomas quotes a portion he finds particularly objectionable.

The BBG thus practices objective journalism - great journalism - but not as an end in itself. Rather, there is a purpose: to support U.S. national security interests. This means freedom and democracy broadly, and more specifically, strategic goals to engage next-generation audiences, support a free and open press and provide

²⁷ Ibid.

exceptional content that helps in-country audiences understand U.S. policy, international events and the events particular to given countries and regions.²⁸

Whether that statement reveals a new thrust or purpose in U.S. international broadcasting, as Mr. Thomas appears to suggest, is debatable. The journalism practiced at VOA has always existed as an element of public diplomacy, which has as its chief mandate persuasion. The text cited from BBG's latest budget submission, like other statements from that body in the past, posits a purpose-driven journalism, yoked to support U.S. national security interests and foreign policy objectives.

Advocacy journalism has a rich, though not altogether unsullied history. But one wonders how effective this approach would be in propagating U.S. foreign policy initiatives or commercial objectives. A better option, if the intent is to attract and persuade, might be to turn USIB to some other approach, one more likely to achieve its objectives. That project has been the subject of study by public diplomacy scholars Shaun Powers and William Youmans, who see promise for U.S. international broadcasting in an updated mission, which is supporting democratic development by subsidizing deliberative technologies. In a 2012 paper titled "A New Purpose for International Broadcasting: Subsidizing Deliberative Technologies in Non-transitioning States" they concluded that "broadcasters offer promise because they, unlike development agencies, can more easily reach large groups of people, can operate outside of domestic, repressive governance structures, and are in need of a new mission."²⁹

²⁸ 2015-BBG-Congressional-Budget-Request, <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2014/03/FY-2015-BBG-Congressional-Budget-Request-FINAL-21-March-2014.pdf>, (accessed November 12, 2015).

²⁹ Shawn Powers and William Youmans, "A New Purpose for International Broadcasting: Subsidizing Deliberative Technologies in Non-transitioning States," *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 8, no 1., (2012),

Vast changes in news delivery technology and information availability, combined with public diplomacy funding realities, suggest that VOA's current mode of operations is not simply stressed, but at risk of becoming critically outmoded. Powers and Youmans argue that, given these realities, the best way for an organization like VOA to remain relevant is by "embracing a role in fostering deliberation."³⁰ In their conception – which this thesis broadly supports – change of this sort would replace the current news project. "Rather than engaging in the largely duplicative work of reporting news that is widely reported and in ways that are often predictable reflections of state interests, increasingly taking on a new role of subsidizing deliberation where it is badly needed can offer greater public service and returns on investment in the form of goodwill for sponsor countries."³¹

Empowered by new mobile communications technologies, audiences are no longer dependent on VOA for timely and relevant news. Re-purposing the entire apparatus however, might allow it to play a related and complementary role, while acknowledging its foreign policy intent (i.e. supporting democratic deliberation) and working to provide expertise and infrastructure to help that project succeed.

Arguing that "new and social media technologies represent a significant development for U.S. public diplomacy and suggest more global implications for the concept of public

https://www.academia.edu/1987972/A_New_Purpose_for_International_Broadcasting_Subsidizing_Deliberative_Technologies_in_Non-transitioning_States, (accessed October 29, 2014).

³⁰ Powers and Youmans, "A New Purpose for International Broadcasting," 4.

³¹ Ibid.

diplomacy,”³² Craig Hayden, a public diplomacy scholar at American University, has identified a growing consensus among the community of PD scholars who argue for reform, and agree that future efforts at public diplomacy “must contend with a transformed global media ecology characterized by networks of selective media exposure, a diffusion of diplomatic agency outward to non-state actors, and the fragmentation of media narratives that frame state action.”³³

Indeed the prospects for controlling so vast and unruly an arena as the global media-sphere appears to be a fruitless venture for an organization constituted as VOA currently is. As a news organization, VOA resists the notion that it serves American foreign policy objectives and ostensibly refuses to embrace any enforced narrative. Advocates for an editorially independent VOA argue, as Kim Andrew Elliott has in his blog, that “if the US government injects ‘counter-narrative’ into US international broadcasting, and throws USIB into the ‘ideological arena,’ audiences will notice. They will conclude that what they are hearing is not the news service they are seeking.”³⁴ While this thesis agrees with Elliott’s argument that audiences will likely reject a “counter-narrative” approach to U.S. international broadcasting, it rejects his assumption that the news service international audiences are seeking needs to, or even ought to, be the Voice of America.

³² Craig Hayden, “Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy,” *Global Media Journal*, 11, no 21 (Fall 2012), <http://journals.textual.info/index.php/gmj-american/article/view/7/4>, (accessed March 31, 2014).

³³ Hayden, “Social Media at State,” 3.

³⁴ Elliott, blog posting, <http://www.kimandrewelliott.com/index.php?s=Past&month=2013-01>, (accessed February 20, 2015).

Geoffrey Cowan, a longtime scholar of public diplomacy and former Director of VOA (1994-1996), recognized the public diplomacy imperatives underlying U.S. international broadcasting, and presided over initiating radio and television call-in talk show programs at VOA, as part of an effort to move from monologue to dialogue, where the benefits of the latter was seen as “...addressing the universal human desire to be heard”³⁵ and laying the groundwork for building relationships of trust. Cowan and Amelia Arsenault describe three essential layers of public diplomacy: monologue, dialogue, and collaboration. America’s *Declaration of Independence* provides an ideal example of monological public diplomacy as single, stable, eloquent and clarifying official document. Presidential oratory, such as President Obama’s 2009 address in Cairo, provides another example. Monological rhetoric provides the state with a powerful and necessary tool of communications, but no single tool, say Cowan and Arsenault, can accommodate all of the state’s communications needs. Dialogic communications, as noted above, holds the potential to cultivate trust, build respect, and cultivate social capital. “Dialogue as a layer of public diplomacy is critical both as a symbolic gesture that emphasizes that reasonable people can find reasonable ways to disagree and as a mechanism for overcoming stereotypes and forging relationships across social boundaries.”³⁶

³⁵ Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault, “Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 10 (2008): 18, accessed December 8, 2013.

³⁶ Cowan and Arsenault, “Moving from Monologue,” 20.

But there is a third layer of public diplomacy, Cowan and Arsenault argue, that is equally if not more important: collaborative initiatives in which “...participants from different nations participate in a project together....”³⁷ To support their argument, Cowan and Arsenault cite “...perhaps the greatest source of information about the benefits of collaboration...the vast body of research into social capital.”³⁸ Citing sources such as Robert Putnam and James Coleman, Cowan and Arsenault endorse the theory’s core notion that “...projects, networks, and partnerships, both within and between communities, have value because they breed social trust, foster norms of reciprocity, and create stores of goodwill that can prove invaluable during times of crisis.”³⁹

Used creatively, as a project of public diplomacy, collaborative enterprises ought to pursue such worthy goals. As a supplement and compliment to other necessary monological and dialogical approaches, new approaches ought to be considered beyond radio and TV call-in shows. The model for a more collaborative approach may be found in *the other side* of U.S. communications policy mentioned in the epigraph to this chapter, i.e. “giving other countries the opportunity to openly discuss themselves.”

This approach will be discussed in the pages that follow, but it must not be overlooked that the same communications advances that allow for new approaches to audience engagement may also be employed for harmful as well as beneficial purposes. Evgeny Morozov, author of *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, takes a skeptical view of what he terms the “cyber-utopian” vision, which, as he describes it,

³⁷ Ibid., 21.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

³⁹ Ibid., 24.

encompasses "...a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside."⁴⁰

That downside, as described by Milton Mueller in a prominent review of Morozov's book, is that internet societies "...will exhibit all the classical problems of human society: bullying, fads and follies, propaganda, political domination, rumor-mongering, theft, fraud, and inter-group conflicts ranging from nationalism to racism."⁴¹

Mueller argues that these threats are common to human experience, and have been since long before the global communications revolution arrived. The fact that the internet may enable expression of such threats, or even empower them, is surely not to be ignored. In the most extreme cases these threats need to be confronted and disrupted; this is the task of law enforcement or, if need be, the military, and the nation national security apparatus. But, given the fact that online communications are here to stay, Mueller argues, it is best to proceed purposefully toward designing effective measures to thwart such threats. Such would include "legal and behavioral controls on Internet use while seeking to preserve the freedom and openness that made the Internet such a valuable resource."⁴²

⁴⁰ Evgeny Morozov. *The Net Delusion The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), xiii.

⁴¹ Milton Mueller, "What is Evgeny Morozov Trying to Prove? A review of "The Net Delusion," Internet Governance Project, (January 13, 2011), <http://www.internetgovernance.org/2011/01/13/what-is-evgeny-morozov-trying-to-prove-a-review-of-the-net-delusion/> (accessed October 6, 2014).

⁴² Mueller, "What is Evgeny Morozov Trying to Prove?"

However difficult it may be to envision the manner in which Internet will affect societies around the world, Mueller argues, internet communications requires, and will continue to require “governance and security at the global, national and local levels.”⁴³

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton endorsed this view in her 2011 Speech on Internet Freedom. Noting the “... challenges we must confront as we seek to protect and defend a free and open internet.”⁴⁴ Clinton used the address to proclaim a startling new universal right “...the freedom to connect - the idea that governments should not prevent people from connecting to the internet, to websites, or to each other. The freedom to connect is like the freedom of assembly in cyber space. It allows individuals to get online, come together, and hopefully cooperate in the name of progress.”⁴⁵

Ideally, these encounters occur under conditions conducive to democratic discourse, but Morozov argues that, while small nations with literate populations and access to online technologies may see democratic benefits, this is by no means true for many nations caught in circumstances of impoverishment or dictatorship. Nonetheless he admits the internet has significantly altered journalism around the world, including in “most Muslim countries,”⁴⁶ where the “...internet provides for a richer information diet and serves as an important source of news during political or military crises. It helps to

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Internet Freedom: The prepared text of U.S. of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech, delivered at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., last modified January 21, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/21/internet_freedom, (accessed October 6, 2014).

⁴⁵ Clinton, “Internet Freedom,” 2011.

⁴⁶ Evgeny Morozov, review of *The Digital Origins of Dictatorships and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam*, by Philip Howard, *American Political Science Association, Perspectives on Politics*, December 2011.

confirm or disprove false news reports from government agencies and creates a way to get news from the diaspora to a home country (and vice versa).”⁴⁷ And it is this final part of Morozov’s internet empowered journalism, i.e. creating ways to get news from diaspora communities to a home country (and vice versa) that lies at the heart of this thesis. The argument here is to create and sustain forums for such communities through the resources of VOA’s language services. The earlier aspects of Morozov’s quartet of virtues may be encompassed by this proposal as well, albeit in a form distinct from much of traditional journalism; the focus going forward however ought to be on sustaining communities of dialogue, discourse, and ultimately democratic deliberation. Political theorist Larry Diamond has described the deployment of new ICTs in the service of building such communities as “liberation technology.” Used effectively, these new communicative instruments hold the potential to “... empower individuals, facilitate independent communication and mobilization, and strengthen an emergent civil society.”⁴⁸

Morozov cautions that government-sponsored content restrictions, cyber-surveillance practices, and sabotage are concerns that cannot be wished away, nor can the online incursions of commercial concerns, hackers, and other malicious agents. All the more reason, I argue, why the State Department and its public diplomacy establishment should seize the opportunity to develop stable and protected platforms for public discussion and public reason, nourished by timely and accurate information resources from the language-

⁴⁷ Morozov, “*Review*,” 899.

⁴⁸ Larry Diamond, “Liberation Technology,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3, (July 2010), 70.

proficient journalists at the Voice of America. The scope of this challenge, as described by then-Secretary of State Clinton, includes establishing, abiding by, and enforcing norms and principles of discourse in a growing transnational public sphere.

The internet has become the public space of the 21st century – the world’s town square, classroom, marketplace, coffeehouse, and nightclub. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there, all 2 billion of us and counting. And that presents a challenge. To maintain an internet that delivers the greatest possible benefits to the world, we need to have a serious conversation about the principles that will guide us, what rules exist and should not exist and why, what behaviors should be encouraged or discouraged and how.⁴⁹

A reimagined VOA might ably serve this purpose, while also helping to remedy the neglect of dialogue and mutuality in public diplomacy and international broadcasting. Quinnipiac’s Fitzpatrick cites rhetorical support for a project of this sort in the Obama Administration’s National Security Strategy report, but scant practical development of the concept, writing “... while there is considerable evidence of a more interactive view of U.S. international relations, the administration has not fully embraced the requirements of genuine dialogue in its international strategic communication and public diplomacy.”⁵⁰

Fitzpatrick also reveals broad contradictions of expressed intent in the strategy’s approach to public diplomacy and mutuality, pointing out that, “although the National Security Strategy states that U.S. engagement will be based on ‘mutual interests and mutual respect,’ it also states that the reason for engaging in relationships beyond U.S. borders is to ensure that the nation is not denied the ‘ability to shape outcomes.’”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Clinton, “Internet Freedom,” 2011.

⁵⁰ Fitzpatrick, “From Messaging to Mutuality,” 33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

This idea also is advanced in the State Department’s 2010 Strategic Framework for Public Diplomacy, which sees relationship-building as an instrumental means for sustaining U.S. global legitimacy and achieving “specific effects” that advance U.S. national interests. This again illuminates the dilemma facing U.S. public diplomacy, particularly at VOA, where the idea of advancing national interests and security is seen as incompatible with independent reporting. The remedy suggested by this thesis is to focus on a specific and minimally controversial project that might yield the kinds of results sought for by the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Framework for Public Diplomacy, while allowing VOA to serve a vital journalistic function. This project rejects any specific attempt to shape outcomes, except as may be achieved by effectively providing for and facilitating democratic discourse among global language communities. The focus on achieving short-term and specific national interests must reside with America’s diplomatic corps, and other elements of the government empowered to achieve such results. Public diplomacy’s writ is the long-term effort to understand and win support among the peoples of all nations. That effort, as Fitzpatrick has argued, should be dialogue driven. But, she warns, “Genuine dialogue requires nation states to go beyond national interests and to also consider the interests of their foreign publics. Thus, the focus on self-interest raises questions regarding the degree of mutuality in U.S. public diplomacy.”⁵²

While addressing the concerns raised by Fitzpatrick, Marc Lynch, Professor of International Affairs at George Washington University, sees encouraging signs for the

⁵² Ibid., 34.

future of engaging international public spheres. Lynch argues that today “... global media and institutions provide the structural potential for actors to create international public spheres around specific issues.”⁵³

Given the structural potential of public spheres spanning transnational networked communities, Lynch next sketches the early contours of an international public spheres theory, an enterprise reflecting values that deeply concern the projects of public journalism and deliberative democracy as well as public diplomacy, for each in its way is intended “...to provide normative foundations for democracy and a pragmatic means for resolving contentious public problems.”⁵⁴

Lynch cautions against a monistic conception of the international public sphere, envisioning rather a constellation of spaces, mostly online, accommodating public discourse and public knowledge.

International public sphere theory does not rest upon an assertion of the empirical existence of a cosmopolitan, global public sphere, but rather upon the existence of *spaces* for deliberation containing the potential for the exchange of argumentation oriented towards rational consensus, problem solving, and the articulation of common identities and interests.⁵⁵

This thesis contends that VOA can provide the facilities and expertise for creating and sustaining spaces such as these, and that it ought to. Organized as fora for meaningful discourse and deliberation, provided with the requisite information resources required to provoke critical inquiry, and offered as a free and facilitated service to the language

⁵³ Marc Lynch, “The Dialogue of Civilizations and International Public Spheres,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000), 308, accessed September 29, 2014).

⁵⁴ Lynch, “Dialogue of Civilizations,” 315.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

communities VOA has traditionally served, I contend that the collaborative project of supporting and sustaining communities of discourse constitutes the material application of New Public Diplomacy's faith in sustained engagement as a preferred model of PD practice. This collaborative approach, endorsed by Cowan and Arsenault, sees effective public diplomacy as a long-term project of trust-building and sustained engagement. Monologic and dialogic approaches, as discussed, are necessary as well. Each can address emergent issues calling for response and clarification, or create conditions for proactively facilitating cultural exchanges. But the final phase in Cowan's paradigm of effective public diplomacy approaches – collaboration – requires a new understanding of international public spheres. In discussing these, Lynch references a concept of transnational public spheres described by Yale University Professor Seyla Benhabib as capable of emerging wherever and whenever they are stimulated into being by the public quest for valid answers.

Today, when that quest can no longer be contained by national boundaries, recognition of international public spheres and their role in contributing to global public opinion is paramount. A reoriented VOA may be looked upon as a project of assistance and support for transparency and the norms of democratic discourse in this now flourishing field. As Lynch writes, "international public spheres serve as locations for norm formation and for deliberation over the shared interests of particular or global international communities."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Lynch, "Dialogue of Civilizations," 317.

In providing the optimal conditions for such fora, a project which will be discussed later in this paper, U.S. public diplomacy's purposes are served by demonstrating in action, rather than by rhetoric alone, the U.S. commitment to democratic discourse and the mediation of conflict. Expanding opportunities for transnational dialogic communities will call for new institutional frameworks writes Lynch, and an acceptance that U.S. public diplomacy stands to benefit from this new collaborative orientation.

Creating and curating convening spaces for democratic discourse allows for the kind of people-to-people exchanges public diplomacy has always concerned itself with. Given today's powerful new multipoint communications capabilities and their effects on audience behavior, that project can only benefit from the scholarly attention that has been devoted to the concept of *the public sphere*. In specifying that "... public spheres exist when action is coordinated through discourse oriented to the achievement of consensus,"⁵⁷ Lynch rehearses the classic Habermasian understanding of the public sphere, introduced in the early 1960's, in which virtuous citizens engage in unrestrained rational discourse until the force of the better argument wins and consensus is achieved. That better argument constitutes the public will on any given issue at any given time, and legitimate government must consider if not abide by this judgment as a guide to its administrative purposes and priorities. Critics of the Habermasian ideal, like political theorists Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib, argue that such requirements are neither attainable nor necessarily desirable. These concerns will be discussed, as will Habermas'

⁵⁷ Ibid.

assumption that effective public discourse must occur within a constitutionally defined framework of citizenship, identity, and adherence to law.

This thesis, as will become clear, envisions a constellation of discourses set in a framework unlike that presented by Habermas. Its collective polity, if it may be called such, is to be bounded only by language, albeit within an institutional framework that encourages and accommodates additional efforts to bridge language communities. Its writ would be to facilitate international public discourse on issues of transnational concern in spaces designed to address democratic deficiencies in matters of common interest across borders. Although, at first at least, anticipating minimal direct influence on the diverse agencies that now determine such policies, often absent citizen debate or participation, the ultimate goal of this project is to provide spaces where the democratic virtue of meaningful public discourse can be nested in a framework of openness, accurate information, and norms of procedure designed to optimize not scale, but rather the quality of meaningful discourse and the conditions for facilitating it.

In the chapter that follows, I will examine, briefly, the concept of dialogue, a fundamental component in the praxis of the New Public Diplomacy approach.

CHAPTER 3

DIALOGUE AND PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING

Dialogue constitutes the very *conditio humana*, because to be is to be in dialogue with one's partner(s). As such, dialogue is always meaningful and complete, even if it is not finalized at any moment.¹

– *Dialectic and Dialogue*, D. V. Nikulin, 2010

In 1998 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously declared 2001 to be the “United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.” Expressing concern over the need for more effective systems of intercultural dialogue, the resolution declared the world body’s “firm determination to facilitate just such a dialogue, which aimed at increasing mutual understanding and tolerance among peoples of different cultural backgrounds, through an active exchange of ideas, visions and aspirations.”² Affirming its commitment to the prospect of a more tolerant and pluralistic global community of civilizations, the resolution “rejected the concept of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’³ which is based on the notion that inter-civilizational understanding is impossible.”⁴

¹ D. V. Nikulin, *Dialectic and Dialogue*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010, iv.

² United Nations University, “Dialogue of Civilizations: Finding Common Approaches to Promoting Peace and Human Development,” UNU, 2001, <http://archive.unu.edu/dialogue/FrameworkForAction.pdf>, (accessed November 4, 2014).

³ The reference to a *clash of civilization* refers to the influential argument by Harvard historian Samuel Huntington, that suggests regional conflict is inevitable. First published in 1996, Huntington’s essay argues that a handful of civilizations, largely defined by cultural and religious differences, must expect, invariably, to come into conflict over time. Widely embraced in the United States following the 9/11 attacks, Huntington’s argument met with disparagement in much of the non-Western world. Today it appears to have diminished influence in the U.S. as well.

⁴ United Nations University (UNU), “Dialogue of Civilizations.”

The project of a dialogue among civilizations found eloquent expression in the spring of 2001, when the Iranian scholar and diplomat Kaveh Afrasiabi, writing in the *United Nations Chronicle*, described its present day purposes and possibilities.

A cursory tour d'horizon of 'Dialogue among Civilizations' depicts, first and foremost, a trope for cross-cultural reconciliation promoting particular values — the discovery of shared beliefs and concerns, regulation of disputes through communication, and the pursuit of normative consensus on global civility, such as with respect to minority rights.⁵

Afrasiabi's trope of a dialogue among civilizations – given the altered media environment of an ever-more interconnected world – suggests potentially transformative possibilities for international broadcasting and public diplomacy. But it also calls for re-imagining the purposes for, and most effective approaches to, engaging international audiences.

A new imaginary of world community, one that is inclusive rather than exclusive, which celebrates diversity instead of succumbing to the forces of global barbarism, above all, racism and ethnic cleansing. Thus, it spurs the imagination of the earth's inhabitants toward cross-cultural learning, providing them with a perceptual predisposition to perceive harmony and cordial relations among nations and ethnic groups, following the premise that through dialogue we can cultivate deeper and more direct experience of cultural traditions other than our own.⁶

In broaching a new imaginary of world community, Afrasiabi's essay, titled "Listening. Inclusiveness, Tolerance, Reciprocity, Perspective: Dialogue among Civilizations," presents a vision that is neither fanciful nor utopian. Rather, it should be considered timely, relevant, and arguably closer to the possibility of fulfillment than ever

⁵ Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Listening. Inclusiveness. Tolerance. Reciprocity. Perspective: Dialogue among Civilizations," *United Nations Chronicle*, Volume XXXVIII, Number 2, (UN Department of Public Information, 2001), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

before in history. It also addresses a concern voiced in 1999 by former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, when he asserted that the 21st Century was certain to present challenges to international peace and security unlike those known by any earlier age. Meeting these challenges, he suggested, would require new ways of thinking. “Here is the crux of our problem today: while the post-war multilateral system made it possible for the new globalization to emerge and flourish, globalization, in turn, has progressively rendered its design antiquated. Simply put, our post-war institutions were built for an international world, but we now live in a global world.”⁷

I contend that the Voice of America, in its present form, is among the post-war multilateral institutions whose design has been rendered antiquated by altered social, political, and technological circumstances. Secretary Annan, like many others involved in public diplomacy and the pursuit of peace among nations, believes that the process of dialogue – and most importantly sustained public dialogue – can provide an effective basis for building institutions better suited to the new realities of a globalized world. Suitably, for well over a decade now the project of public dialogue has been the focus of intense interest and exploration, offering, as it does, demonstrable political and diplomatic possibilities. But as an early scholar warned, “instances of public dialogue are still rare and therefore important to study ... access to dialogue in public is a significant

⁷ Kofi Annan, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century* (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2000), 11.

challenge of our culture, and the problem of dialogue is likely to become one of the central questions for 21st century communication studies.”⁸

While specific instances of public dialogue projects are still few in number, the field of dialogic studies has grown steadily in recent years and now covers a vast terrain of research findings across the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, literature, and communications theory, and international relations. The scope of this survey is generally bounded by a conviction that respectful public dialogue offers potential benefits for every citizen and, increasingly, non-citizen stakeholders as well. Technically developing that capacity on a broad international scale is an act of universal interest to the community of humankind when considered in the light of humanistic scholarship. Georgetown Professor of Philosophy Francis Ambrosio observes that “the first duty of a human being is to be a citizen, an autonomous yet responsible member of one’s community, and this duty realizes itself first and foremost in the responsibility to talk to one another about the questions that matter to us all.”⁹

Launching an enterprise to support the fulfillment of this duty in the global public sphere requires an understanding of public dialogue that considers recent findings in actual practice. Scholars of dialogic practice today encourage a broad and open-ended understanding of its operations and effectiveness, as reflected in a new conception of the word itself. As presently understood “it can describe any communication that uses words

⁸ Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, Kenneth N Cissna, eds. *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage Publications,, 2004), 202.

⁹ Francis Ambrosio, “The Discipline of Dialogue,” in *A Clashing of Symbols – Method and Meaning in Liberal Studies*, ed., Phyllis O’Callaghan (Washington DC, Georgetown University Press, 1988), 132.

to convey meaning.”¹⁰ As used in much of public sphere theory, “the term has come to mean a specific kind of participatory process.”¹¹

Today linguists, social philosophers, and communications theorists all agree that dialogue’s possibilities derive from respectful practices such as disciplined empathetic listening and power-status neutrality, enforced by institutional design features and norms of behavior. Increasingly today, dialogue is seen as a distinctively open-ended conversation involving parties in which participants refrain from the attempt to persuade, convince, or insist on consensus. Though frequently opposed or in conflict, parties agree to focus on matters in which discourse may offer or lead to a surfacing of perspectives on approaches to common problems. Unlike mediation or negotiation, processes in which parties with conflicting interests argue and/or bargain to resolve specific differences (in other words, traditional diplomacy), public dialogue (as a *form* of public diplomacy) represents a more fundamental attempt to bring people together (whether in person or through an internet connection) to participate open-mindedly in a project of dialogue focused on shared interests on matters of global concern. Cooperatively re-examining assumptions that underlie any particular issue, assemblies would be sponsored to participate in joint discovery aimed at uncovering previously unthought-of possibilities for finding common ground. Here, dialogue is seen as a preliminary process, in which the most common elements of shared existence are recognized as the basis for empathy and respect. In true dialogue, these conditions can lead, at the least, to new understanding

¹⁰ Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas, *Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners* (Canadian International Development Agency, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Organization of American States, and the United Nations Development Program, 2007), 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

about the nature of the problem participants address. Renaissance scholar Robert Grudin describes this reciprocal process.

What happens in dialogue? The key ingredients are reciprocity and strangeness. By reciprocity I mean a give-and-take between two or more minds or two or more aspects of the same mind. This give-and-take is open ended, and it is not controlled or limited by any single participant. By strangeness I mean the shock of new information – divergent opinion, unpredictable data, sudden emotion, etc. – on those to whom it is expressed. Reciprocity and strangeness carry dialogue far beyond a mere conversation between two monolithic information sources. Through reciprocity and strangeness, dialogue becomes an evolutionary process in which the parties are changed as they proceed.¹²

Grudin also describes an additional aspect of disciplined dialogic practice and dialogic thinking: it “deflects self-interest in the name of interpersonal understanding, (and) becomes in the process a force of social evolution.”¹³

Applied to the project of facilitating global communities of dialogue, these observations implicitly support the idea of promoting dialogue as an instrument of cultural understanding, and argue against focusing U.S. international broadcasting’s assets on competitive mass media news broadcasting. If public diplomacy’s objective in the new media environment is to engage with audiences, should not USIB’s resources be re-directed to more effectively meet this concern?

U.S. foreign policy planners and public diplomacy professionals, facing the new imperative of engagement, would benefit from a familiarity of with the work of David Bohm, the renowned theoretical physicist whose scientific explorations into order and chance in the universe led – perhaps less surprisingly than one might imagine – to an

¹² Grudin, Robert. *On Dialogue – An Essay in Free Thought* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 12

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

intense interest in dialogue as an effective method for creating human understanding. Bohm's concept of dialogue describes a structured interpersonal communications activity requiring the discipline to forgo predetermined conclusions in a process of "thinking together," and has become widely known as Bohmian Dialogue. Rather than aiming for consensus, it advocates for free and respectful exploration of common concerns through cooperative listening; its objectives are discovery and facilitating mutual understanding. The goals of Bohmian dialogue are also different from those of debate, which focuses on the contest of opinions. Bohmian dialogue looks at how its participants can suspend final judgments and listen openly to disparate opinions, exploring a wide range of perspectives under a shared commitment to find some commonality, even if we may never agree entirely on specifics.

For Bohm, dialogue's potential to transform understanding – even consciousness – depends on its practitioners recognizing and suspending competitive impulses and/or intransigent positions formerly used in pursuit of persuading. In opposition to the point-scoring behavior so often seen among broadcast pundits today, or the now-common rhetorical flourish that has come to know as *the cheap shot*, Bohm describes a different style of discourse, one more suitable to public diplomacy discourse because "conviction and persuasion are not called for in a dialogue. The word 'convince' means to win, and the word 'persuade' is similar. It is based on the same root as are 'suave' and 'sweet.' People sometimes try to persuade by sweet talk or to convince by strong talk. Both come to the same thing though, and neither of them is relevant."¹⁴

¹⁴ Grudin, *On Dialogue*, 9.

What is relevant, says Bohm, is that both personal and group consciousness advance to a greater understanding of each other's blocks to progress. To achieve such an effect, Bohm offers four guiding principles:

- The group agrees that no group-level decisions will be made in the conversation
- Each individual agrees to suspend judgment in the conversation
- As these individuals "suspend judgment" they also simultaneously are as honest and transparent as possible
- Individuals in the conversation try to build on other individuals' ideas in the conversation¹⁵

Adherence to these principles – a difficult task admittedly – is intended to cultivate a habit of mind more likely to lead to progress among estranged personalities and parties. While enforcing such a set of rules would pose challenges to creating dialogic communities of whatever size, the approach suggested by Bohm nonetheless offers relevant insight into the beneficial possibilities of cultivating dialogue. Author Robert Grudin helps explain why.

The dialogic mind is tolerant in terms of ideas. It accepts the idea or premise that a given experience can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and that while some of these various perspectives may be mutually complementary, others may disagree with each other. The dialogic mind derives its sophistication, its play of irony and excitement, from accepting this variety and stress.¹⁶

In his introduction to Bohm's *On Dialogue*, writer Lee Nichols invokes the spacious nature of Bohmian Dialogue, which, practiced properly, focuses on shared human values,

¹⁵ David Bohm, *On Dialogue*. London (Routledge, 1996), 22.

¹⁶ Grudin, *On Dialogue*, 27.

and engages at a deeper level of meaning than other techniques of communication are able to. “As conceived by Bohm, dialogue is a multi-faceted process, looking well beyond typical notions of conversational parlance and exchange. It is a process which explores an unusually wide range of human experience.”¹⁷

Today, dialogic approaches to interpersonal conflict resolution have become increasingly common, and practitioners of this new art owe a debt to the principles of Bohmian Dialogue. But those same principles were themselves inspired by the earlier philosophical inquiries of Austrian theologian Martin Buber. John Stewart, a professor of speech and communication at the University of Washington, writing in Marcelo Dascal’s *Dialogue: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, described Buber’s broad impact on our understanding of dialogue: “Buber’s writings, either alone or in concert with contemporary works in philosophical hermeneutics, can be used to illuminate the most fundamental of our understandings about dialogue.”¹⁸

Buber’s writings consider both interpersonal human communication and our relationship with the Divine; their course perhaps best expressed in his spiritual classic *I and Thou*, first published in 1937. Dialogue scholars Rob Anderson, Leslie Baxter, and Kenneth Cissna describe the work as profound and elemental in its reductive approach to the power of an act the author refers to as “meeting,” finding that “Buber considered his intellectual contribution to be a form of ‘philosophical anthropology,’ and attempted to

¹⁷ Lee Nichols, introduction to *On Dialogue*, by David Bohm (Routledge, 2nd edition, 2004), vii.

¹⁸ Marcelo Dascal, ed., *Dialogue, An Interdisciplinary Approach*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1985), 332.

study the elemental aspects of human experience as they are grounded in meeting and relation. He consistently equated authentic human life with dialogic meeting. As we probe what most makes us human, we discover the central roles of speech and dialogue.”¹⁹

Like Bohmian Dialogue, Buber’s concept of an ‘I-Thou’ relationship based on respect for the ‘other’ presents a broad view of dialogic possibilities. Author Maurice Friedman described the powerful implications of Buber’s approach in his 1955 volume *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*.

Genuine dialogue can thus be either spoken or silent. Its essence lies in the fact that ‘each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them.’ The essential element of genuine dialogue, therefore, is ‘seeing the other’ or ‘experiencing the other side.’ There is no human situation which is so rotten and God-forsaken that the meeting with otherness cannot take place within it.²⁰

Seeing “the other,” attempting to engage in a mutually respectful dialogue of understanding with “the other,” and a willingness to listen are central concerns of public diplomacy. Mutuality, called the forgotten mandate of public diplomacy, is founded on the same principles. Applying a dialogic approach to public diplomacy, which is now possible in ways never known before, can only benefit from a deeper understanding of dialogue and its possibilities. Brazilian scholar Marcelo Dascal took note of these in his volume *Dialogue: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. “Dialogue is, presumably, the most

¹⁹ Anderson, Baxter, Cissna, *Dialogue*, 3.

²⁰ Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955), 87.

complex, pervasive, and specifically human form of interaction. Perhaps this is why it has received little scholarly attention until fairly recently. It was too pervasive and obvious a tool, used everywhere by everyone, to be noticed as substantially problematic.”²¹

Dascal’s 1990 reference to the “little scholarly attention” that dialogic studies received turned out to be more descriptive than predictive. An outpouring of interest and publications would soon follow.

William Isaacs, founder of the Dialogue Project at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, and a colleague of David Bohm’s, has become a major figure in the movement to promote dialogue as a tool for organizational learning and conflict resolution. In the introduction to his 1999 book *Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together* Isaacs amplifies on Bohm’s earlier notion that the ultimate purpose of dialogue is to create new meaning between participants in the service of facilitating breakthroughs to cooperative action. “Dialogue, as I define it, is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it towards something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense, and it is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people.”²²

Isaacs argues for a deeper appreciation of the benefits and techniques of dialogue, which he claims are not only suitable, but also much needed in an ever-more-connected world. Echoing the thoughts of Kofi Annan, Isaacs writes “neither the enormous

²¹ Dascal, *Dialogue*, 1.

²² William Isaacs, *Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 19.

challenges human beings face today, nor the wonderful promise of the future on whose threshold we seem to be poised, can be reached unless human beings learn to think together in a very new way.”²³

Journalist James Surowiecki’s 2005 book *The Wisdom of Crowds* suggests that learning to think together, as Isaacson calls it, is an innate, though sometimes sublimated ability in humans. “Under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them.”²⁴ Offering explicit examples of this phenomenon, Surowiecki presents a paradox however, pointing out that “the best way for a group to be smart is for each person in it to think and act as independently as possible.”²⁵

The concept of crowd wisdom describes the informed collective consciousness achieved through public dialogue, even when it occurs non-verbally. Crowd behavior on a busy city street, for example, is guided by subtle visual cues that, unnoticed, govern foot traffic. Seemingly chaotic social behavior often expresses recognizable patterns writes Surowiecki, that are fundamentally driven by human intelligence and not simply ascribable to mindless herd behavior. Verbal dialogue is similar; groups and communities will innately uncover and express overlapping patterns of common concern if given a chance. Under collectively accepted guidelines for conducting dialogue, biases are set

²³ Isaacs, *Dialogue*, 6.

²⁴ James.Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York. Anchor Books, 2005), xiii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xix.

aside so that new associations can be cultivated. William Isaacs has observed:

Most of us believe at some level that we must fix things or change people in order to make them reachable. Dialogue does not call for such behavior. Rather, it asks us to listen for an already existing wholeness, and to create a new kind of association in which we listen deeply to all the views that people may express. It asks that we create a quality of listening and attention that can include—but is larger than—any single view.²⁶

Creating a system that would encourage these conditions as reflective of national values – such as tolerance, fairness, and a willingness to listen with an open mind – would appear to offer promise for any attempt to craft a new, more engaged public diplomacy. Supporting online communities of dialogue by building trust in the results of public deliberation is seen then as another, and perhaps better way of communicating those values. ”People from different cultures speak different languages, bring different underlying assumptions, carry different ways of thinking and acting. Dialogue can enable people to bring out these differences and begin to make sense of them, fostering communication and understanding among people.”²⁷

In *America’s Dialogue with the World*, a 2006 collection of essays on USIB and public diplomacy, a cohort of international affairs experts address that project’s 21st century challenges. William Kiehl , writing as Executive Director of the Public Diplomacy Council, argues that whether or not foreign audiences tune in to what the U.S. has to say, the United States needs to do a far better job of listening to *what they have to say*. This will require “that we listen to what others are saying in the context of their own society, draft our own messages in a context understandable to each audience, and build

²⁶ Isaacs, *Dialogue* , 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

relationships with citizens and institutions of other nations so that our mutual understanding will survive the inevitable differences that arise among individuals and nation states.”²⁸ By transforming its traditional communication approaches, VOA may be able to more effectively address today’s public diplomacy challenges – engaging international audiences, fostering online communities of concern, and sustaining them.

Seen as an alternative to the traditional news approach, the project of supporting public dialogue offers great promise as an instrument of public diplomacy. In this form, it functions as a facilitator of peaceful and long-term approaches to conflict resolution. In attempting to grasp what this might look like, U.S. foreign policy planners and the USIB both could benefit from studying the approach known as Sustained Dialogue.

Sustained Dialogue (SD) has been described as an open-ended political process designed to transform relationships over time. Its distinguishing characteristic is its focus transforming the relationships that block collaboration. Sustained Dialogue is best suited to those situations not yet ripe for formal mediation and negotiation, because it addresses those factors that prevent people from talking in the reasoned ways that make for effective mediation and negotiation.

The founding figure of the Sustained Dialogue movement is Harold “Hal” Saunders, a former senior State Department official during the Carter administration, and central actor in crafting the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords. Saunders established IISD, the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue in 2002. Since then, Saunders and the IISD have worked to refine their approach to conflict, and launching successful projects in in

²⁸ William Kiehl, introduction to *America’s Dialogue with the World*, by William Kiehl, ed., Public Diplomacy Council, 2006, 6.

many of the world's most troubled regions. Saunders believes that “change in societies proceeds from a cumulative, multilevel, open-ended process of continuous interaction among all actors who influence the course of events—citizens both in and out of government—as well as factors beyond their control. The question for citizens is how to conduct that process—to the extent of their capacities—in the public interest.”²⁹

Communal questioning and respectful public listening are the practical expressions of Martin Buber's central concern – bridging “the between” that forestalls understanding and trust.

Facilitating dialogic communities committed to the promise of sustained dialogue promotes the kind of formalized inter-subjective expression and understanding that thinkers like Bohm and Isaacs describe in their respective works. And, while helping citizens sustain dialogues of this sort is a complex technical and political challenge, few institutions are as well situated to attempt it as is VOA. Presented as a project of public journalism, it merely extends the collaborative aspect of New Public Diplomacy while considerably de-emphasizing so-called first past the post news values, judgments, and presentation forms of traditional reporting. Impetus for change at VOA has come from academic circles, think tanks, and even the United State Congress. Today USIB is under increased pressure to shift its focus toward promoting U.S. foreign policy initiatives and values, and to be more overt about doing so. If, instead, its focus were shifted to embrace the facilitative approach proposed here, a reinvigorated rationale for VOA's continued existence as a news operation (albeit in altered form) might carry sway. Traditional

²⁹ The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue (IISD), *A Democratic Theory of Societal Change*, IISD, http://www.sustaineddialogue.org/change_process.htm (accessed November 4, 2014).

modes of operation at VOA are currently under focused review. In 2014 the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 4490, designed to abolish BBG, reorganize USIB, and redefine VOA's mission.

The new legislation tweaks the language of VOA's mission to explicitly outline the organization's role in supporting U.S. public diplomacy and the policies of the United States government, a move that would settle a long-running dispute within the federal government about whether VOA should function as a neutral news organization rather than a messaging tool of Washington.³⁰

By adapting to a more engaged, more facilitative international news project, a re-envisioned VOA might bridge those missions: embracing the traditional news values of accuracy and impartiality while promoting the idea that public dialogue, democratic discourse, and deliberative approaches serve public needs. Cultivating appropriate online spaces for dialogue and collaboration is a long-term commitment, but its potential benefit, described in David Bohm's *On Dialogue*, are considerable. Perhaps most importantly, dialogue explores the manner in which thought – viewed by Bohm as an inherently limited medium, rather than an objective representation of reality – is generated and sustained at the collective level. Such an inquiry necessarily calls into question deeply held assumptions regarding culture, meaning, and identity. In its deepest sense, then, dialogue is an invitation to test the viability of traditional definitions of what it means to be human, and collectively to explore the prospect of an enhanced humanity.³¹

³⁰ John Hudson, "New Bill Requires Voice of America to Toe U.S. Line," *The Cable Blog*, April 29, 2014, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/04/29/exclusive_new_bill_requires_voice_of_america_to_toe_us_line, (accessed May 23, 2014).

³¹ Lee Nichol, Introduction to *On Dialogue*, by David Bohm, (New York, Routledge, 1996), vii.

Optimally, Saunders believes the process results in a transformed collective consciousness, in which citizens (participants) come to uncover new approaches to understanding shared aspirations and identifying the roots of conflict. By establishing trust and building confidence together they can then advance to a stage of cooperative action, based not on concurrence over specific issues, a goal which remains preliminary at this stage, but rather on the agreement to proceed toward a new understanding, in concert, as mutually dependent and respectful partners. Communal questioning and respectful public listening are the practical expressions of Martin Buber's central concern – bridging “the Between” that forestalls understanding and trust. Facilitating dialogic communities committed to the promise of sustained dialogue promotes the kind of formalized inter-subjective expression and understanding that thinkers like Bohm and Isaacs advocate for. And, while helping citizens sustain dialogues of this sort is a complex technical and political challenge, few institutions are as well situated to attempt it as is VOA. Put forth as a project of public journalism, it merely extends the collaborative aspect of New Public Diplomacy while considerably de-emphasizing the commercial news values, judgments, and presentation forms of its traditional approach. Impetus for change at VOA has come from academic circles, think tanks, and even the United State Congress. Today USIB is under increased pressure to shift its focus toward promoting U.S. foreign policy initiatives and values, and to be more overt about doing so. If, instead, its focus were shifted to embrace the facilitative approach proposed here, a reinvigorated rationale for VOA's continued existence as a news operation (albeit in altered form) might carry sway. Whereas, failure to adapt could result in legislative

measures that would likely call into question VOA's independence and legitimacy, presumed or otherwise, as a disinterested purveyor of news.

The switch to a more engaged, more facilitative international news project might – and in fact ought to – bridge missions: embracing the traditional news values of accuracy and impartiality while promoting dialogue and public dialogue as disciplines to serve public needs. The project of support for sustained dialogue as an enhanced aspect of mutuality in U.S. public diplomacy and international broadcasting offers an opportunity to prepare the ground for agreement by providing a forum for discussion fortified and sustained with trusted, sourced information and fair-minded exposition of contemporary themes in international conflict. This gathering place for transnational communities of dialogue, segmented by language, may at least begin to address the transnational challenges remarked upon at the beginning of this chapter. Could the notion of an enhanced humanity through dialogue describe an early step, a necessary condition for the kind of problem solving that will be required for complex community problem solving? If so, both the public diplomat and the journalist ought to be more aware of dialogue's power to open minds, for as Ambrosio has observed, at the deepest level of our shared humanity “to be human is to be in question...in dialogue, we seek to understand ourselves and be understood by others regarding the questions and choices of identity with which we are all confronted.”³² Applied to the transformation I have argued for in this chapter, Francis Ambrosio's understanding of dialogue offers a hint of the firm

³² Ambrosio, “The Discipline of Dialogue,” 132.

philosophical support that a project of public dialogue as public diplomacy might draw sustenance from.

Another of dialogue's contemporary champions is Richard Bernstein, professor of philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York. Bernstein has spent decades contributing to the late 20th century revival of American pragmatism, a widely unexpected resurgence occasionally referred to as the pragmatic turn in American philosophy. Its precepts have become widely influential beyond U.S. borders, as reflected in the work of Jürgen Habermas, John Dryzek, and others concerned with the project of transnational deliberative democracy.

Philosophical pragmatism, as an original American tradition of thought, arose in the late 19th century, and gained in attention and respect, at least in the United States, throughout the 1920's. In many quarters it was considered an expression of native temperament and character, but by the onset of American involvement in World War II, philosophical pragmatism was "largely in eclipse"³³ – its concerns apparently out of tempo with the times. Beginning in the 1970's pragmatism began a gradual reemergence and today the ideas it introduced are again current, even ascendant in philosophical debate. Pragmatic concerns have attracted adherents across academic disciplines including philosophy, international relations, journalism, and contemporary political theory. Bernstein goes so far as to herald the onset of a new "pragmatic century," in which the philosophical insights of pragmatic tradition are seen as compatible with the

³³ Christopher Hookway, "Pragmatism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatism/> (accessed November 7, 2014).

concerns of diverse contemporary philosophers involved in diverse fields, such as political activity in the public sphere, international ethics, global governance, and public diplomacy. Bernstein, claims an important “unifying theme in all the classical pragmatists as well as their successors is the development of a philosophical orientation that replaces Cartesianism (in all its varieties).”³⁴

Bernstein’s 1983 volume *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* introduces the concept of “*Cartesian anxiety*,”³⁵ the ultimately existential concern that value relativism undermines human understanding and even meaning. Cartesians, so-called, present an objectivist worldview in which universal, objective, and unalterable foundation truths govern all of human existence, and that the accumulation of rationally unassailable fact leads inexorably to human progress. In the objectivist worldview, the ideal means of ascertaining truth is logic and the scientific method, which provide the best tools for autonomous human reasoning.

World historical progress, particularly technological advancement, demonstrates that the Cartesian objectivist approach to knowledge, truth, and knowing offers great advantages in addressing even complex technical challenges. But, while often well-suited to its task in the physical world – problem solving in engineering or the classification in the natural sciences, for example – Bernstein argues that such tools are not always best suited to addressing human and political problems, or ethical problems resistant to

³⁴ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 19.

³⁵ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 16.

instrumental rationality. His search for sources of this kind of knowledge led Bernstein to German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer, whose major philosophical work, *Truth and Method*, "...barely discusses natural science, (and) argues that the modern obsession with Method has distorted and concealed the ontological character of understanding."³⁶

Throughout his career Bernstein has maintained an ongoing engagement with Gadamer's thought and, in his own writings, has expressed a shared exasperation with misapplied Cartesian foundationalism, and its conviction that "in the final analysis there is a realm of basic un-interpreted hard facts that serve as the foundation for all empirical knowledge."³⁷

While impatient with such sentiments, Bernstein also sees room for accommodation between major contemporary philosophical worldviews – and even offers a third way founded on pragmatic principles, and recognizing "the dialogical character of our human existence and our communicative transactions."³⁸

Drawing a connection between this human given and the project of pragmatism, Bernstein cites "the practical need to cultivate dialogical communities,"³⁹ and shows how Gadamer and likeminded contemporary thinkers now call for retrieval and reexamination of dialogue's epistemic potential as understood by the Greeks. Gadamer, in his work, cites Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as timeless paragons of the dialogic approach to

³⁶ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism*, xi.

³⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 111.

³⁸ Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism*, xv.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xv.

acquiring practical knowledge. Here, dialogue is characterized by the rigorous and disciplined process of question and response typically directed at exposing misunderstanding. The idea of a return and re-exploration of this philosophical approach to knowing, writes Bernstein, had by 1983 become the source of a new conversation among philosophers, part of “an extended and open dialogue which presupposes a background of intersubjective agreements and a tacit sense of relevance.”⁴⁰

Bernstein argues that structured dialogue can result in new and philosophically valid ways of facilitating intersubjective awareness and knowing. When dialogic participants agree to privilege common understanding above point-scoring, they are obliged to consider alterity – or otherness, and recognize and listen for the ways in which diverse circumstances shape individual and group perspectives. Mindful of one’s own biases and assumptions, open in fact to seeing them challenged, the dialogic practitioner also recognizes that all human cooperative effort may be, and perhaps must be, eternally fallible and in need of perpetual revision. Gadamer’s invocation of a fusion of horizons informs this a view, and therefore lends itself to the concerns of pragmatism.

Richard Bernstein is among those who’ve helped explain why Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics offers pragmatism a valuable perspective on facilitating the process of human understanding. In this envisioning, shared memories, histories, biases, and traditions – transmitted through language and transformed through dialogue – inescapably inform, and frame, all human understanding. As connected to shared experience, understanding is seen as essentially and inescapably social. In coming to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

understanding then, dialogue serves as an indispensable tool for verifying and, as necessary, adjusting one's accepted beliefs. Bernstein's concern with communication and human understanding and his ongoing involvement with philosophical hermeneutics and pragmatism has led him to advocate for an approach to public life he calls engaged fallibilistic pluralism, or EFP. Aimed at cultivating public understanding through dialogue, EFP suggests possibilities for enhancing public deliberation and developing a more functional platform for democratic discourse in the transnational arena, both of which are obvious concerns of public diplomacy. I contend that the project of U.S. international broadcasting would benefit from the perspective Bernstein brings, the conclusions of which might fruitfully be applied to the project of promoting a more collaborative, more participatory form of journalism at VOA.

Many elements of the EFP approach to the conduct of public life are grounded in the writings of America's best known philosopher, John Dewey. Bernstein writes that he finds "Dewey appealing because of his steadfast commitment to a radical democracy that involves active participation of *all* citizens."⁴¹ Bernstein embraces the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer as another distinguishing feature of his own philosophical project; Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method*, is considered by Bernstein to be "one of the most comprehensive and subtle statements of the meaning and scope of hermeneutics to appear in our time."⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

⁴² Ibid., 34.

Bernstein's own work, *Beyond Objectivity*, reflects on the concept of the hermeneutic circle, effectively an epistemic feedback loop that reflexively orders and evaluates language and meaning. Gadamer argues that this process ultimately extends to all being and defines our consciousness and even our existence; we come to know through reflexive critical examination of present events in the light of history, all inevitably inflected with each individual's own acquired prejudices. The hermeneutic circle further describes the process of understanding that comes from examining and comparing objects, incidents, and ideas in both whole and in part. Gadamer's great insight here was to reintroduce and extend Heidegger's concept of hermeneutics. Formerly considered a method of textual interpretation or questioning, and little else, Heidegger reveals hermeneutic's ontological aspect; for him it becomes a *form of being* wherein intersubjective understanding unfolds through dialogue. As Bernstein writes, hermeneutics is now seen as the "...primordial mode of our being in the world."⁴³

Like Gadamer, who extended Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics to a broader philosophic hermeneutics, Bernstein believes that humans can come to know one another and solve common problems only through open and meaningful encounters with others, mediated through the universal instrument of language. Historically situated and all sharing the common fate of mortality, humans make recourse to tradition – seen always from singular perspectives, or horizons as the metaphor has it – enabling us to relate to and form new shared horizons of understanding together, and potentially solve, or at least ameliorate, the problems confronting individuals and communities. In dialogue, under the

⁴³ Ibid.

right circumstances – including, most importantly, openness to new learning and a willingness to listen expansively and with care – a fusion of horizons can occur. When two or more participants agree to set aside claims of certainty in order to prompt mutual, sometimes even community-wide learning, new common understanding becomes possible. Gadamer’s commitment to hermeneutic experience, writes Bernstein, may be seen in the fact that “his philosophic project has been concerned to offer us a reading of philosophy which shows that what is most distinctive about our being-in-the-world is that we are dialogical beings.”⁴⁴

For Gadamer, the hermeneutic approach is most appropriate for exploring questions of human value because its intent is to explore possibilities as broadly as possible. Truth about our shared human condition arises from active engagement with and entertainment of multiple horizons, from which are derived interpretations and understandings that can be built on and sustained in a program of cooperative engagement. The process itself serves to enlighten all committed participants by enabling them to probe the limits of their own prejudices, or pre-understandings, and compare them against those of others. Key to this project is the cultivation of a form of listening that is respectful, attentive, and open to entertaining unforeseen possibilities rather than focused on a the need for final and definitive answers. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics demonstrates that objectivist disinterested fact on own it is inadequate to meet the needs of humans seeking self-knowledge or for communities involved in the task of public judgment. Simply put, for Gadamer all understanding involves dialogue.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 224.

I contend that Richard Bernstein's writings on pragmatism, philosophical hermeneutics, and engaged fallibilistic pluralism – building as they do on the work of Gadamer – provide not only a rationale, but also an inspiration for reforming U.S. international broadcasting's current approach to mass media journalism and its concomitant mission to promote United States foreign policy initiatives. The project of facilitating transnational dialogue and deliberative democracy in the public sphere comports with both sides of that dual mission, and, I submit, is fully justified as a project of engaged public diplomacy. However, I would also argue this project is far less likely to find success if the task of promoting U.S. foreign policy initiatives not strictly focused on the broad project of building capacity for democracy through public dialogue and deliberation. That is a legitimate public diplomacy initiative. The State Department's Office of Public Affairs ought to be able to handle policy promotion issues, leaving VOA to focus on more collaborative enterprises, and be left protected from participating in specific policy promotion. As a project of public diplomacy this new approach can be seen as pragmatic in that it involves actively supporting democracy rather than merely promoting it. Critics might argue that – given entrenched political and ideological barriers – change of this sort could never happen in USIB. But they might also consider that VOA already operates in a similarly limited fashion, protected from direct political interference, at least to an extent, by a firewall, or statutory grant of editorial independence. The project of establishing a new model of engagement at VOA, one where public journalists facilitate reliable information exchange and offer support for democratic deliberation, seems consonant with Bernstein's decades-long faith in the

possibilities of pragmatism.⁴⁵ His conviction that public discourse poses a powerful tool for strengthening democracy encourages the hope that citizens in the transnational sphere might benefit from a new pluralistic, fallibilistic approach to engagement in the outreach activities conducted by VOA and USIB. In fact, Bernstein's work on engaged fallibilistic pluralism might serve as guide for type of new attitude and ethos that will have to be brought to bear.

⁴⁵ Bernstein's argument, and the trajectory of its development may be found in his many books, including: *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (1983); *The New Constellation: The Ethical/Political Horizons of Modernity/Post Modernity* (1991); *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion Since 9/11* (2005); and *The Pragmatic Turn* (2010).

CHAPTER 4

DIALOGUE IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Throughout my intellectual career I have sought to articulate and defend the practical consequences of philosophical reflection, and the necessity of reflection for intelligent practice and action. The spirit of critical pragmatic fallibilism represents what is best in the American tradition and has global significance.

– Richard Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 2010

BBG’s longstanding public diplomacy mandate, as described on its website, prescribes that U.S. international broadcasting be “consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.”¹ But, according to the employees’ union that represents VOA journalists, this mandate has gone largely “ignored”² for more than a decade. The purpose of that neglect, claims the union, has been to distance VOA from any perception that it might be viewed as a mouthpiece for the government. Instead, today’s strategy is to brand VOA as a so-called “go to” source for news in the global media marketplace. In pursuing this course, VOA overwhelmingly replicates and/or re-purposes the news product of other generally available news sources, and imitates the program content presentation practices of competing commercial news broadcasters, private entities that are both structurally and operationally dissimilar, and whose primary purpose is profitability. The union maintains that by applying an inappropriate commercial model to the enterprise, managers at BBG and VOA have brought on

¹ Broadcasting Board of Governors BBG, “Broadcasting Standards and Principles,” <http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/standards-principles/> (accessed November 9, 2014).

² AFGE Local 1812, “The VOA Mission: Long May it Wave,” last modified June 2014, 2014, <http://laborweb.afge.org/sites/bbg/11812/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=3ff7159f-1e03-498e-bcda-b49ef1f10c21> (accessed November 12, 2015).

calamitous consequences, such that “under this management, the Voice of America was largely turned into an also-ran, imitation-commercial news service, albeit in many languages.”³

Recognizing VOA’s longstanding and ongoing inability to effectively address its Charter obligations, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee has endorsed overhauling BBG and the Voice of America along with its mission, a move that raises serious questions about VOA’s future direction as a news organization. As the New York Times reported on May 21, 2014⁴, the proposed legislation has generated controversy among those “who say it will better enable the broadcast news service to counter disinformation and opponents who claim it will turn the service into an American propaganda tool.”⁵

Aware of the potential consequences to VOA’s credibility and reputation, the union nonetheless supports the measure so long as it includes specific language protecting VOA’s journalistic norms of accuracy and objectivity. This thesis sees that proposal as reasonable, but only in so far as the foreign policy objective VOA supports is focused on a solitary policy expression: support for discursive democracy around the world. I contend that American public diplomacy can incur a measurable benefit by creating and

³ American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE Local 1812) web posting, “The VOA Mission: Long May it Wave,” <http://laborweb.afge.org/sites/bbg/11812/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=3FF7159F-1E03-498E-BCDA-B49EF1F10C21> (accessed February 11, 2014).

⁴ The House Bill referred to by the Times was replaced by new and similarly-intentioned legislation, H.R. 2323, which is currently pending in the 114th session of Congress.

⁵ New York Times, "House Measure to Change Voice of America's Mission Is Drawing Intense Debate," http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/21/us/politics/house-measure-to-change-voice-of-americas-mission-is-drawing-intense-debate.html?_r=0 WASHINGTON (accessed November 9, 2014).

sustaining transnational communities of dialogue and deliberation in support of transnational democracy through its existing media channels.

This project of audience engagement builds on the international expertise of VOA staff journalists and resources, but its function would no longer be break news, set news agendas, or focus on drawing large audiences in the competitive news area. Instead, the entire VOA apparatus would be repurposed to provide a stable platform for transnational democratic dialogue.

By differentiating itself as a serious, transparent, and trusted source of information and support for democracy, rather than a non-competitive news agency, the entire project may be designed to achieve the public diplomacy goals of attraction and engagement, while recognizing its potential for persuasion as a cooperative long term goal among partners. Under this scenario, VOA's existing online platforms⁶ would be refreshed with information reflecting the expressed concerns of each particular language community at any particular time; in other words, its agenda would be in large measure user-driven and responsive to the online concerns of the dialogic communities it supported. VOA journalists would function as moderators or facilitators, providing the information resources their audiences need to engage in focused and informed dialogue and, ultimately, genuine deliberation.

This new model of engagement considers the new communication challenges involved in connecting with and holding audiences in today's global online media environment. Attendant changes in social, political, and cultural forms resulting from

⁶ VOA currently maintains news websites designed to reach audiences in forty-four languages

globalization also argue for an altered approach to BBG's stated mission of attaining global news supremacy. If U.S. public diplomacy intends to engage more broadly with audiences around the world, a reconfigured VOA could offer the greatest hope for success. In a later chapter I will describe a vision of how this might happen in practice, but in the pages that follow I focus on how the philosophical project of American pragmatism offers a fitting framework for considering how to address the need for change at VOA.

Throughout his long career, the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Bernstein has worked to advance critical inquiry and public judgment through public dialogue. He has argued that human perspectives, because they are inherently fallible and incomplete, require dialogue for the production of socially useful knowledge. Dialogue offers an indispensable tool for both community and self-understanding. Because the particularities of each individual's historical circumstance and present existence shape perspectives in ways that are unique, and always so, public understanding is seen as emanating from broad social engagement and openness to otherness. Bernstein believes "it is only by the serious encounter with what is other, different, and alien that we can hope to determine what is idiosyncratic, limited, and partial"⁷ in our own diverse interpretive horizons. The pragmatic approach Bernstein advocates would seek to recognize "the social character of the self and the need to nurture a critical community of inquirers."⁸

⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 328.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.

Engaged communities of dialogue willing to acknowledge and accommodate human fallibility would fulfill two aspects of Bernstein's EFP, or *engaged pluralistic fallibilism* paradigm. The third and last involves another core concern of pragmatism – pluralism; in this case, the “plurality of traditions, perspectives, and philosophical orientations,”⁹ that participants bring to a discussion.

A common dictionary definition, appropriate for the purposes of this argument, recognizes pluralism as “a theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality.”¹⁰ Contrary to the worldviews associated with foundationalist orientations, pluralism accommodates, even encourages, the project of public dialogue and progressive understanding. The American philosopher John Dewey, an early pragmatist, saw participatory democracy and public dialogue as indispensable methods of public discovery, enabling communities to better recognize that which – as Bernstein has described – may be “idiosyncratic, limited, and partial” in their own and each other's conceptual horizons. In this way public dialogue helps citizens recognize and connect on issues of common concern, giving them a better opportunity to some day cooperate in more direct and practical ways.

The concept of pluralism also finds daily application in international relations. Public diplomacy officers understand, or should, the role history and tradition play in informing social, political, and cultural understandings. They understand that the views of citizens are shaped by plural identities in diverse though often discernable ways. All diplomats,

⁹ Ibid., 329.

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster online dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism> (accessed November 9, 2014).

and indeed of most journalists, are expected to recognize this. And here again, the conceptual acceptance of difference in dialogue finds a useful framework for practitioners in Bernstein's engaged fallibilistic pluralism (EFP), which he argues is "the type of pluralism that represents what is best in our pragmatic tradition."¹¹

Recognizing difference and human fallibility in a structured and sustained engagement with its international audiences will, as mentioned previously, require that VOA adopt a new ethos to support a new mission with new practices. The new ethos of EFP, explains Bernstein, "means taking our own fallibility seriously – resolving that however much we are committed to our own styles of thinking, we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other."¹²

The notion of taking our own fallibility seriously is not an approach that contemporary commercial journalism would likely be highly encouraging of. Today's advertiser-driven broadcast news too often profits from the descent into diatribe, invective, and spin. Absent a small functioning core¹³ of adept newsgatherers and reporters, popular media often fails to provide more than minimal illumination about the events of the day.

¹¹ Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 336.

¹² *Ibid.*, 336.

¹³ Alex Jones is a Pulitzer prize winning press critic, who, in his 2009 book *Losing the News: the Future of the News that Feeds Democracy*, describes an "iron core" of reported news. For over a century he writes, the daily aggregated product of serious professional journalism has been "the starting place for a raucous national conversation about who we are as a people and a country." Jones shows that this core, always small and driven by newspaper reporting, is shrinking at an alarming rate. This thesis accepts Jones' argument, admits it is a cause for concern, but does not accept the idea that U.S. international broadcasting ought to be tasked with providing the remedy for it.

The notion of a new, more fallibilistic news sensibility and concomitant pluralistic approach to audience engagement, while clearly not commercially viable, might still be realized however, if VOA were to adjust its model and mission to take on that challenge. While the celebrities and voluble partisan commentators of today's commercial broadcast media may attract large followings and generate large profits, their high visibility rants and antics coarsen the public dialogue. I contend that this is not a model that should be emulated by USIB, and that there are approaches far better suited to its public diplomacy mandate than mimicking private news formats.

In the attempt to successfully compete directly for audience share with commercial news broadcasters, and become the world's leading news agency, VOA needs to consider which news practices might gain the largest audiences. But the growing ideological purity seen among popular news presenters and commentators in the commercial media today represents anything but pluralism. So, while replicating a commercial news model might seem to be the best model for a messaging approach, it ignores the communication and engagement imperatives described earlier, and advocated by the project of New Public Diplomacy. Richard Bernstein's pragmatic alternative, engaged pluralistic fallibilism (EFP), appears to offer a corrective approach more appropriate the public diplomacy than the pundit model offered by commercial news presenters today, arguing that "we must not confuse subjective moral certitude with objective moral certainty,"¹⁴ for "the strength of one's personal conviction is never sufficient to justify the truth or

¹⁴ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion Since 9/11*. (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2005), viii.

correctness of one's claims. This is the primary lesson of pragmatic fallibilism."¹⁵ This ethos accommodates the kind of open dialogic encounters described in the last chapter since, as Bernstein writes, "pragmatic fallibilism does not dictate substantive conclusions and decisions."¹⁶ More concerned with how decisions are discussed and debated, EFP provides grounds for pragmatic critical inquiry, in that it "shifts our attention from the origin of ideas and hypotheses to their consequences for our conduct."¹⁷

Bernstein's engaged fallibilistic pluralism also provides a model for better appreciating how we may profit from indeterminacy or uncertainty, an important aspect of his pluralistic approach. Accepting human fallibility dampens the impulse to grasp for absolute answers to human problems. Like Gadamer and Peirce, Bernstein recognizes that bias and prejudice are inevitable, inescapable conditions of existence; vital preconditions for situated understanding when challenged by openness and inquiry. He reminds us that these conceptual pre-conditions of thought actually provide "a necessary background and orientation"¹⁸ for engaging with others. Recognizing the particularity of our individual conceptual horizons as fallible beings, we ought not to expect our encounters with others will generate absolute truths. But they can help us revise and adjust unsupportable assumptions, learn from and empathize with others, and cultivate respect for the value of dialogue in public judgment. This approach, I contend, holds great promise for public diplomacy and its support for democratic civic engagement.

¹⁵ Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil*, 62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

Today a legion of scholars are involved in diverse but related academic projects exploring how public dialogue helps strengthen democracy. These often-overlapping projects have become known variously, as deliberative, discursive, rhetorical, and associative democracy. All share a belief that democracy today has devolved from earlier participatory models, and now reflects an overreliance on what has been called preference aggregation – essentially, the will of the people (or rather that part of the citizenry that turns out to express their preferences through the ballot). While voting is undeniably indispensable to any democratic system, elections alone do not constitute the entirety of democratic practice say these scholars. Gerard Hauser, Professor of Communication at the University of Colorado in Boulder describes one of the aims of this project in the book *Rhetorical Democracy*. “Rhetorical democracy at its best does not expect contestants to find one another’s reasons acceptable as their own, but it does respond to them as legitimate contributions to the deliberative process.”¹⁹

Building that capacity, internationally and through media, would seem to fall within the purview of VOA and U.S. international broadcasting. Their continued adherence to past practices might also explain their failure to understand and adjust to the findings of deliberative democratic thinking. As Hauser describes, in the 21st century, “for democracy to be a functional form of government in a society of strangers, citizens must learn how to engage difference in a way that recognizes the individual and the group as a

¹⁹ Rhetoric Society of America, Gerard A. Hauser, and Amy Grim. *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement : Selected Papers from the 2002 Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), 9.

subject.”²⁰ To effect this change, Hauser urges “the creation of a discursive practice in which citizens may pursue the possibilities of civic engagement,”²¹ and sees this as an antidote to less participatory, less broadly democratic systems that, not infrequently, sustain only the “privileged voices of epistemic elites.”²²

Hauser’s views align with other deliberative democrats, including political theorists Jane Mansbridge, James Bohman, and Simone Chambers, who all agree that “the last several decades have seen growing agreement among political theorists and empirical political scientists that the legitimacy of a democracy depends in part on the quality of deliberation that informs citizens and their representatives.”²³ Mansbridge defines deliberative systems as those that encompass “a talk-based approach to political conflict and problem solving “through arguing, demonstrating, expressing, and persuading.”²⁴

Systems for producing such results include citizens’ forums, focus groups, deliberative polling, as well as those informal fora where citizens deliberate without formal guidance or rules of behavior. Deliberative theorists cite all or any of these as worthy of support in the pursuit of broader participatory democracy. But the concept of deliberative democracy, whether applied to mass media or simply to small communities

²⁰ Hauser and Grim, *Rhetorical Democracy*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Jane Mansbridge, James Bohman, Simone Chambers, Thomas Christiano, Archon Fung, John Parkinson, Dennis F. Thompson and Mark E. Warren, “A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy,” in *Deliberative Systems*, eds. John Parkinson and Jane Mansbridge. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

²⁴ Parkinson and Mansbridge, *Deliberative Systems*, 4.

can be a complex and resource intensive undertaking, and, as Mansbridge has observed, “a continual challenge for deliberative democracy has been the problem of scale.”²⁵

Creating the complex systems needed to support online transnational communities of dialogue is a large-scale undertaking without question, but it can and should be done. The Australian political theorist John Dryzek argues that transnational deliberative democratization is at least as feasible as its domestic counterpart. Closer to home, the U.S. State Department’s concept of 21st Century Statecraft,²⁶ encourages novel approaches to meet “the disruptive social, political and economic changes that information networks have unleashed.”²⁷

Among those challenges, writes Jane Mansbridge, is “niche or echo-chamber communication, in which the like-minded talk only with one another.”²⁸ A new, dialogic model for VOA would support a pluralistic understanding, and address the troubling “tendency of the internet and now the media in general to segment audiences into like-minded niches (which) prevent citizens from hearing the other side and developing respect for people with whom they disagree.”²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ The Department of State's 21st Century Statecraft, an overview of which appears on State's website, proclaims an “internet moment” in foreign policy, ushering in a new consciousness of and appreciation for the growing power and prevalence of online and mobile communications. “Rapid increases in the availability and power of information technologies are changing the modes of international relations and the conditions for statecraft in the 21st century. In the next few years, the majority of the world's more than 2 billion Internet users will be in developing countries.”

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, “21st Century Statecraft: The ‘Internet moment’ in foreign policy,” <http://www.state.gov/statecraft/overview/index.htm> (accessed November 9, 2014).

²⁸ Mansbridge, “A Systemic Approach,” 21.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

Writing in their 2004 book *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, political scientists Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson describe that project's core commitment as affirming "the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives. Both are expected to justify the laws they would impose on one another."³⁰

Public dialogue, perhaps uniquely, offers a model to provide for that need. Its sustained encounters are intended to build a community's trust, facilitate respect for multiple perspectives, and generate new levels of consciousness and understanding about shared concerns. Community deliberation begins only later, when firm determinations are sought and new rules of behavior take effect. As conceptualized by Gutmann and Thompson, Habermas, and others, rational warrant must guide this process; all agree deliberative democracy's "first and most important characteristic: its reason-giving requirement."³¹

The reasons respondents are obliged to supply, Gutmann and Thompson explain, "should appeal to principles that individuals who are trying to find fair terms of cooperation cannot reasonably reject."³²

Offering a moral basis for this participatory approach as "common to many conceptions of democracy,"³³ Gutmann and Thompson lament the low level of popular political participation in many democracies today, believing that broader popular

³⁰ Amy Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

engagement nourishes respect for the role of citizens in determining their own fate, and that “persons should be treated not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their own society, directly or through their representatives.”³⁴

In addition to “reason giving,” the deliberative process must be accessible and lead to a binding decision, provisional though it may be. Its final characteristic, as described by Gutmann and Thompson, is its dynamism, “it keeps open the possibility of a continuing dialogue, one in which citizens can criticize previous decisions and move ahead on the basis of that criticism.”³⁵

Sustained deliberative communities remain critically engaged after their decisions are taken. Observing the norms of transparency and publicity, their findings can be value-ranked by preference, but are intended to inform rather than to decide public policy. These dialogic projects offer a complement, not an alternative, to the aggregative preference gleaned from official electoral voting. Their overriding value lies in their appropriateness for “keeping the decision-making process open - recognizing that its results are provisional.”³⁶

That is fundamentally important for two reasons write Gutmann and Thompson, quoted here at length.

First, in politics as in much of practical life, decision-making processes and the human understanding upon which they depend are imperfect. We therefore cannot be

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

sure that the decisions we make today will be correct tomorrow, and even the decisions that appear most sound at the time may appear less justifiable in light of later evidence ... Second, in politics most decisions are not consensual. Those citizens and representatives who disagreed with the original decision are more likely to accept it if they believe they have a chance to reverse or modify it in the future. And they are more likely to be able to do so if they have a chance to keep making arguments.³⁷

Gutmann and Thompson argue that the process ought to be guided by a principle they name “the economy of moral disagreement.” Sustaining a community of dialogue or deliberation must be guided by conventions of civility, cooperation, and empathy. The economy of moral disagreement, as described by Gutmann and Thompson, stipulates that “in giving reasons for their decisions, citizens and their representatives should try to find justifications that minimize their differences with their opponents.”³⁸

This gesture of mutual respect emblemizes the kind of sensibility that might be brought to bear on U.S. international broadcasting’s approach to engaging with its audiences. Building capacity for dialogic and deliberative bodies of this nature has been a concern of political science, say Gutmann and Thompson, stretching back to the origins of democracy. “Aristotle was the first major theorist to defend the value of a process in which citizens publicly discuss and justify their laws to one another. He argued that ordinary citizens debating and deciding together can reach a better decision than can experts acting alone.”³⁹

The idea that deliberative communities should somehow guide practical political decisions may have deep roots in political history, but even today, in modern

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 7.

democracies it is popular voting that has force in law, and commands civic attention (albeit to a suboptimal degree). The electoral franchise grants individuals a measure of access to political power, and a civic identity. Free to form associations, they may pool and focus their power, and so influence political decisions. Organized efforts to sway the outcome of preference aggregates, as expressed through voting, abound in the media age. But partisan polarization, absolutism, and non-cooperation appear very unlike the early democratic ideal Gutmann and Thompson describe when they write “the most prominent nineteenth-century advocate of government by discussion, John Stuart Mill, is rightly considered one of the sources of deliberative democracy.”⁴⁰

Only in the early 20th century however, with the rise of John Dewey’s pragmatism, does deliberation come to be recognized as essential to the health of democratic systems; only then, say Gutmann and Thompson do we “finally find unequivocal declarations of the need for political discussion in a polity recognizably democratic in the modern sense. These theorists not only included widespread deliberation as part of democracy, but saw it as a necessary condition of this form of government.”⁴¹ Foremost among these may be Dewey, who saw democracy as a “way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature.”⁴²

Richard Bernstein, who in 1961 published his first book – on Dewey – has helped connect the pragmatic notion of democratic dialogue with the broader philosophical

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Ibid.

project of philosophical hermeneutics. But the idea of cultivating social understanding through deliberation in the public sphere has likely been given its greatest impetus worldwide through the work of Jürgen Habermas. Perhaps more than any other contemporary theorist, write Gutmann and Thompson, it is Habermas who “is responsible for reviving the idea of deliberation in our time, and giving it a more thoroughly democratic foundation.”⁴³

Habermas has been criticized for promoting deliberative forms judged excessively procedural and/or less-than-inclusive; his project is characterized by structures that enable for transnational decision-making, but raise concerns that participants may be encumbered by “informal norms defining what counts as proper deliberation.”⁴⁴

This thesis does not advocate on behalf of Habermas’ political forms, but does assert that his work on communication in the public sphere bears scrutiny, particularly in light of public diplomacy’s task of connecting with and supporting public dialogue and, by extension, deliberative democracy. A renewed VOA would, through its existing language services, work to build sustainable capacity for dialogic communities, enabling for public deliberation, learning, and judgment on issues of common concern in the transnational public sphere. It would provide, in appropriate languages, the fact-checking services, information assets, and convening capacity needed to prepare communities of dialogue to one day become functional communities of deliberation. Gutmann and Thompson

⁴³ John Dewey, Debra Morris, and Ian Shapiro, *The Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1993), 242.

⁴⁴ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 9.

suggest that a project of this sort “is more likely to succeed to the extent that the deliberators are well informed, have relatively equal resources, and take seriously their opponents’ views. “Citizens are more likely to take a broader view of issues in a process in which moral reasons are traded than in a process in which political power is the only currency.”⁴⁵

Public dialogue starts the process leading to deliberation, a process which the authors say offers the “most justifiable conception for dealing with moral disagreement.”⁴⁶

Considered as a component of community self-government, deliberative democracy also serves the related purposes⁴⁷ of promoting:

- the legitimacy of collective decisions.
- public-spirited perspectives on public issues.
- mutually respectful processes of decision-making.
- uncovering error, and helping to correct it.

The process “can also help deliberators distinguish those disagreements that arise from genuinely incompatible values from those that can be more resolvable than they first appear.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁷ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 10-12.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

Deliberative councils of this sort, as Gutmann and Thompson have argued, also function to address partial or incomplete understandings that may lie at the heart of disagreement. “A well-constituted deliberative forum provides an opportunity for advancing both individual and collective understanding. Through the give-and-take of argument, participants can learn from each other, come to recognize their individual and collective misapprehensions, and develop new views and policies that can more successfully withstand critical scrutiny.”⁴⁹

The pragmatic worldview of engaged fallibilistic pluralism finds a ready home in deliberative democracy, since both “tend to emphasize the provisionality of political outcomes more than their finality.”⁵⁰ But the provisional understanding deliberative systems generate, say Gutmann and Thompson “almost always has to be supplemented by other decision procedures.”⁵¹ Aggregative procedures are necessary, at a minimum, to organize and tally voter preference, providing a meaningful reflective instrument. They yield timely operable decision data, something deliberative democracy cannot guarantee. But a second, less obvious value attaches to the deliberative approach as well, since its conception “relies on explicitly moral principles rather than the seemingly neutral ones of aggregative conceptions...deliberation therefore invokes substantive moral claims that may be independent of the preferences citizens put forward.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Ibid. 18.

Deliberative approaches generate nuanced understanding, something the *either/or* results of aggregative preference do not. If their product is captured and publicized, it can act as a powerful and dynamic agent, informing civic understanding. Deliberative systems check arbitrary decision-making, or at least draw attention to it, and promote balance in the overall political process, since "...the open-ended nature of deliberation enables citizens or legislators to challenge earlier decisions, including decisions about the procedures for making decisions. Deliberative democracy's provisionality checks the excesses of conventional democracy's finality."⁵³

The engaged model of practice called for by New Public Diplomacy advocates such as Jan Melissen shares considerable commonalities with the project of deliberative democracy, in which, as described by Gutmann and Thompson, "the very nature of the deliberative process of justification sends a signal that its participants are willing to enter into a dialogue in which the reasons given, and the reasons responded to, have the capacity to change minds."⁵⁴

Normative procedures of this sort provide instrumental value by helping a community find ways to identify and solve its problems. But they also offer expressive value, say Gutmann and Thompson, observing that "significant value resides in the act of justifying laws and public policies to the people who are bound by them. By deliberating with one another, decision-makers manifest mutual respect toward their fellow citizens."⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21-22.

Conversely, when political representatives impose decisions without regard for popular deliberation, they signal a lack of respect, and forfeit the opportunity to profit from knowledge that broader participation might have contributed. So “there is a practical reason for officials to recognize the expressive value of deliberation: they can thereby increase the likelihood not only of discovering but also of implementing good public policy.”⁵⁶

Optimally then, deliberation serves both an instrumental and an expressive function, generating public trust as well as greater community participation, which may then lead to better and more informed outcomes in the public interest. But should community deliberation focus solely on the procedural, i.e., how to allow its representatives to legally address public issues. Or might it not instead address itself to more substantive concerns? Gutmann and Thompson say the answer is – both. “The provisional status of all principles, procedural and substantive alike, thus constitutes a distinctive strength of deliberative theory, and at the same time offers deliberative democrats an effective way of uniting procedural and substantive principles into a coherent theory.”⁵⁷ Gutmann and Thompson identify a “deep and irreconcilable difference between democrats who accept pluralism as part of the human condition and those who see it always as a serious political problem to be overcome by deliberation.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The former view describes open communities of dialogue, while the latter approach prizes the pursuit of consensus. The engaged fallibilistic approach advocated here agrees with the former, accepting pluralism as part of the human condition and consensus as a secondary concern. If less purely instrumental, it is nonetheless pragmatic in the sense that “although pluralists agree that deliberation should strive to justify as much agreement as possible, they also seek ways of living well with those disagreements that cannot or should not be eliminated at any given time.”⁵⁹

As an approach to U.S. public diplomacy in the transnational sphere, this conception seems singularly well suited, addressing as it does a vital if often overlooked aspect of democratic functionality. But can an engaged, pluralistic, fallibilistic sensibility be inculcated as part of VOA norms and practices? Can its journalists create and sustain fora for informed public dialogue? Before turning to those questions, it is important to consider concerns among deliberative democrats about the scope and scalability of deliberative discourse, and its promise for enlivening participatory democracy.

John Parkinson, a professor of international relations at the University of Warwick, takes a universalist view, seeing the overarching goal of deliberative democracy as helping “to improve the legitimacy of democracy by making democratic institutions systematically responsive to reasons, not just the weight of numbers or the power of interests.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰ Mansbridge, “A Systemic Approach,” 170.

There appears no good reason why this goal cannot apply to the legitimacy of transnational deliberative systems. In fact, that possibility has been the object of serious academic concern for more than a generation. Jon Elster, Professor of Social Sciences at Columbia University and author of *Deliberative Democracy*, writes that “largely under the influence of Habermas, the idea that democracy revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences has become one of the major positions in democratic theory.”⁶¹

Elster describes the roots of deliberative democracy in Fifth-Century Athens, where councils of citizens were tasked with informing themselves on issues of interest to the community. These figures, aristocrats representing an elite subsection of the body politic, pre-figure a conception of deliberative democracy that reappeared in the late 18th century in Edmund Burke’s 1774 Speech to the Electors in Bristol, perhaps the “most famous statement of the case for this form of deliberative democracy.”⁶²

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain: parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament.⁶³

Elster’s conception encompasses a larger, more inclusive vision, in which all those affected by political decisions have a right and a responsibility to contribute more than

⁶¹ Jon Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, U.K.: 1998), 1.

⁶² Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*. 3.

⁶³ Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html> (accessed June 20, 2014).

their vote alone. In Elster's view, for political choice to be legitimate, it "must be the outcome of deliberation about ends among free, equal, and rational agents."⁶⁴

While Elster explains that political decision-making nearly always involves a combination of arguing, voting, and bargaining, deliberative forums for citizens operate under the obligations of reason-giving and respect; their provisional conclusions only intended to clarify and inform. Diego Gambetta, a professor of Social Theory at the European University Institute, believes "the positive consequences of deliberation primarily concern the distribution of information."⁶⁵

Enabling the exchange of socially useful information that addresses community concerns, even when these involve transnational issues, is an indispensable element of democracy's promise. Paul Hirst, professor of Social Theory at Birkbeck College, University of London and author of *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Social and Economic Governance*, argues that "bureaucracies do not have to be either corrupt or incompetent to pose a threat to the democratic capacity of citizens. Honest and competent administration can close off citizen's choices and impose its own judgments as to what it deem best for its charges far more effectively."⁶⁶

Hirst argues that most democratic political systems today only marginally accommodate broad public influence on decision-making; its promise remains, for the most part, unexplored. But as Gutmann and Thompson write "if we refuse to give

⁶⁴ Elster, *Deliberative Democracy*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁶ Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Social and Economic Governance* (Amherst) University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 5.

deliberation a chance, not only do we forsake the possibility of arriving at a genuine moral compromise, but we also give up the most defensible ground we could have for maintaining an uncompromising position: that we have fairly tested our views against those of others.”⁶⁷

In the context of U.S. international relations and public diplomacy, there is present need to restore confidence in the nation’s ability to listen and engage in deliberative discourse. Creating the capacity for deliberation to succeed on fair terms might then be seen as a means of building trust; not simply *promoting* democracy, but supporting its actual development. Limited in this sense, transparent, and supported by the current capabilities of U.S. international broadcasting, including VOA’s ethic of balanced and accurate reporting, deliberative systems might be built as part of America’s public diplomacy infrastructure.

Why deliberative democracy? “Deliberation cannot make incompatible values compatible, but it can help participants recognize the moral merit in their opponents’ claims when those claims have merit.”⁶⁸ Given the complex nature of today’s transnational concerns, and the limited scope of VOA’s present effectiveness, achieving such an outcome should be considered a desirable public diplomacy achievement.

⁶⁷ Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

CHAPTER 5

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC JUDGMENT

Daniel Yankelovich, recognized as a doyen of American public opinion research,¹ has argued on behalf of public dialogue and democratic deliberation for decades, convinced that they are essential tools for improving the quality of public opinion and, by extension, the quality of democracy itself. The value of improving the quality of public opinion, Yankelovich suggests, may be found in the strength or weakness of three indices,² he identifies as: taking responsibility for the consequences of one's own views, firmness, and consistency.

Opinion characterized by high levels of all three is likely to lead to improvements in public judgment, but that "... does not mean that the public happens to agree with elites ... good quality means that people don't flip-flop every time they are asked a slightly different question, that they are reasonably consistent in their views and don't contradict themselves every time they voice their opinion, and, above all, that they are fully aware of the consequences of their own views and take responsibility for their opinions."³ High quality public opinion is only created when public dialogue is sustained through engaged

¹ Social scientist Daniel Yankelovich co-founded the group Public Agenda with former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in 1975. Public Agenda, as described on its website, is a nonpartisan research institute that works through public engagement, to "provide the insights, tools and support people need to build common ground and arrive at solutions that work for them."

² Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 38.

³ Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 178.

communities. The failure to support systems that produce quality public opinion, claims Yankelovich, is a serious shortcoming of modern democracy. Largely to blame for this failure is the unhealthy imbalance found today between what he calls “the Culture of Technological Control,”⁴ represented by publicly appointed mavens (who, by virtue of their expertise, are entrusted to decide public matters),⁵ and citizens, seen as a potentially rich source of informed public judgment. Yankelovich argues that “the key to successful self-governance in our Age of Information is to create a new balance between public and experts. Today that relationship is badly skewed towards experts at the expense of the public.”⁶

The projects of public dialogue and democratic deliberation are intended to correct that imbalance by cultivating higher quality public opinion. These efforts recognize what Yankelovich calls “the value of the public’s most important contribution – a high level of thoughtful and responsible public judgment.”⁷ In his 1991 book *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*, Yankelovich argues that while public opinion serves a supportive function in a democratic system, its findings are no less valid than those of expert knowledge. In fact, both are essential to the health of

⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁵ The Culture of Technological Control construct serves as a sound conceptual framework, but suffers from an unfortunate appellation. Sounding vaguely sinister, if not conspiratorial, it evokes T.H.U.S.H., the Technological Hierarchy for the Removal of Undesirables and the Subjugation of Humanity, featured in the 1960’s TV spoof *Get Smart*. Yankelovich’s intentions however are neither comedic nor condemning. He fully grants that technical expertise is vital to public judgment, but argues that expert opinion and public opinion serve two fundamentally different purposes and should seek to strike a balance.

⁶ Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*, 9.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

democracies. Supporting an improved quality of public opinion means healthy communities of dialogic and deliberative interaction must exist. Drawing on his long experience as a public opinion research analyst, Yankelovich writes that “over a period of years, it gradually dawned on me that the creative processes whereby people convert raw opinion into considered judgments are essentially dialogic.”⁸ So-called *expert opinion*, writes Yankelovich, comes from empirical propositions that can, at least in principle, be validated; personal preferences are set aside, rational analysis of data is taken as the chief criterion of objective validity.

Public opinion functions very differently he says. It makes value judgments that cannot be empirically validated. Personal preference, a marginal concern of expert opinion, is recognized as central to public opinion, and the chief criteria of quality – as described above – are the willingness to take responsibility, the firmness with which an opinion is held, and rational consistency over time. One caveat however: the “firmness” with which an opinion is held may, in the present sense, serve as useful index of public opinion assessment, but this does not imply that the quality of public opinion is intransigent, or unchanging. Its project is informative, inter-subjective, and intended to produce common understanding.

Conversely, writes, Yankelovich, expert knowledge is attained, and expresses its priorities, through the conceptual discipline of instrumental rationality, “... a mode of abstracting from experience and arranging reality in a hierarchy of importance – systematizing knowledge about it, breaking it down into components that are suitable to

⁸ Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, 181.

the management of experts and specialists, reducing each component to its most readily measurable and manipulable aspects.⁹ Instrumental forms of rationality produce important technical knowledge notes Yankelovich, but “... these forms of rationalization do not concern themselves with ultimate goals or values.”¹⁰

By excluding these, policy-makers deprive themselves of potentially valuable information for describing problems and promoting the public good. To remedy this, experts must find ways to both inform and to draw on public judgment. But only suboptimal results can be expected if the quality of public opinion that informs that judgment is not sound, or if reason-derived public priorities cannot be captured and publicized. The only known way to accomplish that, writes Yankelovich, is through dialogue. “Dialogue is a unique method for transforming people’s views from raw, mushy, and unrealistic wishful thinking into the kind of thoughtful and considered judgment that should allay the legitimate concerns of elites.”¹¹ Yankelovich also believes “the ability of people to influence one another as equals also contributes to the quality of public opinion.”¹²

Bounded by the principles of open mindedness and a willingness to engage empathetically, authentic dialogue provides the mechanism for actualizing and achieving Yankelovich’s necessary conditions for quality public opinion. Agreeing with Richard

⁹ Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*, 185.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹ Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue*, 175

¹² *Ibid.*, 182.

Bernstein's critique of the objectivist worldview as limited and incomplete, Yankelovich writes, "Objectivism has many sources of support in our society. It fits neatly into an economic system based on specialization, expertise, and division of labor; it supports and is supported by the technology-driven aspects of American culture; it fits the ideological predilections of our journalism, especially TV news with its focus on the sound-bite, the headline, the isolated fact (which permits TV news to present itself as objective)."¹³

Commercial TV news is beyond the scope of this report for the most part, except to the extent that it provides a model and mirror for VOA news coverage. But in the wake of unprecedented changes in the news business, communications capabilities, and global public access to information, VOA, like other media entities, is struggling to adjust, while Congress reconsiders its mission.

I suggest that VOA can provide a far greater value to U.S. public diplomacy today by supporting communities of dialogue and deliberation in support of democracy. This project, sorely needed both at home and abroad, presents a smarter, more practical calling for VOA today. Soldiering on as a broadly ineffectual, redundant headline service no longer makes practical sense. Building capacity for public problem solving and respect for individual freedom is in no way incompatible with the norms of journalism or of public diplomacy. Projects of dialogue and deliberation work to restore the necessary balance between public judgment and expert advice and optimize information sharing in support of democracy. When experts, governments and elected representatives perhaps most importantly, make decisions on behalf of the public, their justification are likely to

¹³ Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment*, 197.

depend on primarily objectivist criteria, as they “... conceive reason as something separate and apart from everyday life – the property of a trained class of specialists, scientists, and other elites.”¹⁴

These notions and their oligarchical implications are at odds however with democracy’s larger claim to support popular sovereignty and protect individual freedom. Public reason, writes Yankelovich, is both a function and a fulfillment of democracy’s promise. “Reason is *not* the exclusive property of a class of experts whose training and credentials certify the possession of a special endowment. Reason is a more humble, more universal, more democratic gift.”¹⁵ In describing why public reason is so important to the overall project of democratic government, and the legitimacy of law, Yankelovich cites Habermas’ insight that “it is disastrous to divorce human reason from the world of ordinary life.”¹⁶

Habermas’ approach to deliberative democracy is founded on critical theory, which, according to one of its notable early contributors, German philosopher Max Horkheimer, is characterized by three core criteria: “it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 240.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bohman, Critical Theory. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/Critical Theory](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/Critical%20Theory) (accessed April 3, 2014).

Habermas believes that critical theory provides the normative and descriptive tools required for contestation and discovery aimed at decreasing domination and enhancing freedom. His own application of critical theory to deliberative democracy demands rationality of its deliberators and recognizes constitutionalism and rule of law as necessary procedural mechanisms for translating the communicative reasoning of the public into political decision-making power. His is an instrumentalist, consensualist conception that recognizes national boundaries as natural frontiers for engaged deliberative concern.

This thesis concerns itself instead with a transnationalist conception of discourse and dialogue, that takes as its purpose the project of creating and sustaining the dialogic communities required to produce quality public opinion (in the sense Yankelovich means it) among transnational language communities, and on issues of transnational concern. Less instrumentalist than Habermas' conception, it nonetheless shares his normative inclination to the values of broad participatory democracy. Habermas' critique, says political theorist James Bohman, also reveals "... striking similarities between Critical Theory and American pragmatism."¹⁸

These similarities – pluralism, faith in the possibilities of inter-subjective public understanding, and the search for broader, more popular democratic systems to enhance human freedom, lend further philosophical support the idea that dialogue and deliberation help sustain the health of democracy. But can these practices themselves be sustained in

¹⁸ Ibid.

the transnational sphere? Dryzek believes they can, arguing that "...many of the conflicts in today's international system can most fruitfully be interpreted as clashes of discourse..."¹⁹ Discourse, writes Bohman, consists of "... sets of concepts, categories, and ideas that provide ways to understand and act in the world."²⁰ Communities of dialogue offer hope for engaging and addressing contested discourses within norms of impartiality and respect that is required, writes Dryzek, because it "...opens the door to decentralized, reflective, and so democratic control over the engagement of discourses."²¹

A central aspect of Dryzek's argument that transnational communities of deliberative discourse are possible involves the participation and support of civil society, described by political scientist Mary Kaldor as a political idea that "expresses a real phenomenon, even if the boundaries of the phenomenon vary according to different definitions, and even if the shape and the direction of the phenomenon are constantly changing,"²² Civil society comprises the complex of private, non-commercial, non-governmental institutions – including family groups, community associations, and interest-specific groups such as Oxfam, Conservation International, or the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, that focus on civic and humanitarian values.

Global civil society expresses the concept in a transnational sense as "... the medium through which social contract or bargains between the individual and centres of political

¹⁹ Dryzek, John, *Deliberative Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vi.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 3.

and economic power are negotiated, discussed and mediated. I argue that the changing meanings of civil society have to be understood in terms of the changing character of political authority....”²³

Recognizing that while the character of political authority may be changing, representative forms will always be required to provide structure, expertise, and accountability, Kaldor understands “the role of global civil society in a system of global governance is not a substitute for democracy at the national level, but rather should be viewed as a supplement in an era when classical democracy is weakened in the context of globalization.”²⁴

Dryzek’s conception of global civil society takes note of the risks as well as the rewards of community engagement in the transnational public sphere, suggesting “...one should treat with caution any connotations of civil society activists confronting and eventually transforming established relations of power in the international system. For sometimes civil society is not at all civil. In a divided world it can also feature groups whose intentions toward one another are hostile, even murderous...”²⁵

As custodians and facilitator of deliberative fora, VOA needs to examine these and other impediments to transnational discursive democratization, including specific threats, identified by Dryzek as:²⁶ 1) discourses and identities that can seemingly only underwrite

²³ Kaldor, *Global Civil Society*, 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁵ Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, 123.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

confrontation (be it across civilizations or within divided societies); 2) unilateralism that seeks (whether through wars of ideas or soft power), only to replace one discourse by another; 3) hegemonic discourses (such as globalization attached to market liberalism); 4) understandings of the international system that ignore its discourse dimension (such as realism), and 5) even networked governance to the degree it evades discursive scrutiny.

A reimagined VOA would allow for all of these by encouraging discursive scrutiny, leveraging its journalistic expertise and ethos to encourage fair-minded and pluralistic discourse, and discouraging or restricting discourse outside the bounds of civility.

It would embrace a notion of journalism as a vital and engaged project of helping communities build greater capacity for democracy and democratic decision-making. It would do this not by promoting democracy but by practicing it, creating and sustaining deliberative communities to promote higher quality transnational public opinion. As a project of public diplomacy it offers a potentially valuable tool for transnational civic education, and signals an approach to engagement that prizes mutuality over messaging; for, writes Dryzek, “in a divided world, deliberation as social learning is crucial.”²⁷

Dryzek’s 2006 book *Deliberative Global Politics* extends the concept of deliberative democracy to the transnational public sphere.²⁸ After describing the “clash of discourses” that he believes gives rise to global conflict, Dryzek goes on to address the normative contours of a “... project of a transnational discursive democracy that could constitute the

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ The *transnational public sphere* is defined in the 2002 book *Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere* as: “that space in which both residents of distinct places (states or localities) and members of transnational entities (organizations or firms) elaborate discourses and practices whose consumption moves beyond national boundaries.”

essence of deliberative global politics.”²⁹ This thesis is largely concerned with the second facet of Dryzek’s book, identifying and describing the normative practices needed to facilitate transnational discourse.

Deliberative Global Politics also identifies two major manifestations of deliberative global politics: one involving institutional transnational discourse, such as that which occurs among international organizations like the United Nations for example, and another that focuses on “... deliberation in the context of diffuse engagement of discourse in international public spheres concerned with public affairs, but not seeking to exercise formal policy making authority....”³⁰ This thesis, again, focuses on Dryzek’s second approach to deliberative global politics as most appropriate for a public diplomacy project of engagement and mutuality.

Frank Ninkovich, author of *U.S. Information Policy and Cultural Diplomacy* (1996), quotes historian William McNeill’s reflection that “... a wise government and nation ought to support and encourage encounters amongst its citizens with societies in all the world so as to accumulate a stock of knowledge about, and alternate visions of, other peoples and places.”³¹

Providing a platform for that to occur, while surely no easy task, should be seen as a present concern of public diplomacy. Working to support the quality of public dialogue as a project of VOA’s engagement with its language communities should be seen as part

²⁹ Ibid., vi.

³⁰ Ibid., vii.

³¹ Ninkovich, Frank A. *U.S. Information Policy and Cultural Diplomacy* (New York, N.Y.: Foreign Policy Association, 1996), 48.

of that broader project of supporting and facilitating democratic discourse in the transnational sphere.

The ultimate objective of this effort is to provide the convening space and information resources needed to give voice to an informed *transnational public opinion*. The question of how long it would take before these practices result in improved, actionable transnational public opinion – or how that opinion might be turned into quality public judgment to express consent or disapproval – is important, but secondary to the moral argument for addressing the democratic deficit, and supporting the universal right to self-determination, in the threatened realm of transnational activities and concerns: “The basic justification for democracy is that legitimate authority *of any kind* (emphasis mine) must rest on popular consent. Given how important authority exercised in the international system is becoming, the same test must be applied there, too.”³²

The political theorist James Bohman, author of *Democracy Across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi*, agrees, arguing that today’s transnational cultural and communications sphere not only accommodates, but rationally encourages transnational democratic participation; “... the proper solution to the problems of democracy is not to find some optimal size or ideal democratic procedure, but rather to establish a more complex democratic ideal.”³³ Bohman calls that ideal *transnational democracy*, and argues that it calls for revising “... the inherited conceptions and norms most people associate with

³² Dryzek, John, *Deliberative Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 23.

³³ Bohman, James. *Democracy Across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007). 2.

democracy itself.”³⁴ This calls for a view of democracy more attuned to the character of today’s global communications interconnectedness, and its ongoing effect on human social and political interaction. The increased prominence of shared transnational concerns, over climate change or migration for example, spotlights a democratic deficit in the transnational arena. Today, citizens are frequently affected by decisions they have no vote in, made by transnational institutions with limited accountability to public concerns.

Discursive democracy addresses this deficit by examining community concerns from the broadest possible range of perspectives. “Democracy is thus an ideal of self-determination, in that the terms and boundaries of democracy are made by citizens themselves and not others.”³⁵ The project of creating the necessary conditions for meaningful transnational democratic discourse is intended to address the democratic deficit created when global institutions fail to include among their calculations the right of individuals to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Building capacity for informed public opinion in the transnational sphere may be said to be in the national interest as well, both as a projection of democratic principles into new forums of deliberation, but also as a living example of America’s interest in listening, learning, and living by its own democratic values. Success, writes Bohman, rests on recognizing “...new social facts as demanding a new normative and conceptual understanding of democracy and its political geography.”³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

Bohman's transnational deliberative democracy offers this new conceptual understanding of democracy, along with an argument for why it is necessary to cultivate a public sphere with deliberative capacity in the transnational sphere. Support for deliberative democratic practices in this sphere would empower citizens affected by transnational issues and occurrences with the resources needed to identify, and participate in addressing such concerns. But, suggests Bohman, before this can occur citizens must assert, and global decision-makers must learn to abide, an expanded conception of *dêmoi* (the rule of peoples) alongside traditional multinational understandings of *demos* or (the rule of the people). "In the age of globalization and significant authority to delegate beyond the nation state, I contend that democracy needs to be rethought in the plural, as the rule of *dêmoi*."³⁷ Here, Bohman does not suggest that a global *dêmoi* take control of public decisions.³⁸ Rather, his argument points to the indispensable accessory role public discourse plays in democracy, and particularly in the transnational sphere; recognizing that before this can happen it will be necessary to provide conditions.

conditions under which an active citizenry is capable of initiating *democratization*, that is, using their power to extend the scope of democratic entitlements and to establish new possibilities for creative and empowered participation. Democracy is on this view the project in which citizens (and not just the agents for whom they are

³⁷ Ibid., vii.

³⁸ A note about the term *transnational sphere*, defined earlier, but still in need of attention. Eponymous, polysyllabic, vaguely suggestive of intrigue or perhaps conspiracy (and here, no doubt in sympathy with the Culture of Technical Control), the *transnational sphere* is a philosophically neutral concept recognizing new communities of interest - or of fate - connected through language, culture, and global media, but newly empowered with connecting capacity. The transnational sphere is a communicative space where these communities can convene and participate in building dialogic and deliberative practices. This thesis argues that project should be supported.

principals) exercise those normative and communicative powers that would make for better and more just democratic practice.³⁹

Nancy Fraser, Professor of Political and Social Science at the New School for Social Research, is also among those who have focused scholarly interest on the subject of a transnational public sphere, citing media studies literature demonstrating the existence of discursive arenas that “overflow the bounds of both nations and states...the idea of a ‘transnational public sphere’ is intuitively plausible, then, and seems to have purchase on social reality.”⁴⁰ Having “purchase on social reality” might suggest the transnational public sphere is merely an imaginary, a notion; but that is hardly the case. Now empowered by interconnected communications, actual transnational discourse is at an time global high.⁴¹

Given the case, the transnational sphere’s purchase on social understanding seems certain only to grow. John Dryzek finds an analogy in the concept of nationhood. “Nations, as Benedict Anderson (1983), points out are imagined communities; they need to be mobilized into existence through symbols invoked by political leadership. As such, they are the products of discourses.”⁴² Taking a stake in establishing norms and

³⁹ James Bohman. *Democracy Across Borders*, 182.

⁴⁰ Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere. On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies website, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0605/fraser/en>, last modified March 2007, (accessed November 12, 2015).

⁴¹ On its website, the United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU), projects that “by end 2014, the number of Internet users globally will have reached almost 3 billion...this corresponds to an Internet-user penetration of 40 per cent globally, 78 per cent in developed countries and 32 per cent in developing countries.”

⁴² John Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 35.

behaviors for high quality transnational deliberative discourse is an act of global leadership; an engaged expression of support for democracy as a preferred form of human organization, and a recognition of new global circumstances. A new model of democracy ought to meet contemporary needs, promoting the deliberative forms needed to inform institutional and aggregative approaches to democracy; but it need not be a part of these. Transnational discursive democracy, writes Dryzek, “does not have to be integrated with any with an particular set of formal institutions....”⁴³

Instead it recognizes that “democracy is about communications as well as voting, about social learning as well as decision-making, and it is the communicative aspects that for the moment can most straightforwardly be pursued in the international system.”⁴⁴

Dryzek argues that traditional conceptions of democracy not only fail to make room for the role of discourse in discovering democratic deficiency (including transnationally), but also encourage an overreliance on institution-building, “inasmuch as liberal multilateralism emphasizes the specification of constitutional rules and the design of administrative structures, it ignores the presence of discourses, and in particular contending discourses.”⁴⁵

Today however, as shown, supporting these systems may be more important to the health and success of democracy than ever before. Addressing the democratic deficit in the transnational sphere has also led Bohman to re-explore “... the republican conception

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 145.

of freedom from domination”⁴⁶ and apply it to his model. In doing so he explains “I have sought to fulfill the two normative tasks that Dewey saw as the essential intellectual contribution to any successful transformation of democracy: clarifying and deepening our conceptual resources related to the core ideals of democracy, and then using these resources normatively to criticize and remake existing political and institutional forms.”⁴⁷ In pursuit of those goals, Bohman came to conclude that “... the best intrinsic justification of a transnational democracy is based on the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination, as constitutive of the powers of citizenship.”⁴⁸ The realist school of thought in international relations describes the transnational sphere as a zone where anarchy reigns and nations operate strictly on the basis of internal interests; all true perhaps concerning interaction among states. But Bohman sees globally connected citizens and associations as a new and vibrant source for creating and informing new international democratic norms. “Far from a condition of anarchy, the international sphere is already quite dense with networks of communication and association that are often connected to informal political processes.”⁴⁹ VOA’s role in this new communications world would be to provide accessible, reliable, transparent online gathering places, governed by enforceable rules of civility and inclined toward rational discourse. Online information resources focused on each community’s interest would be

⁴⁶ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 171-172.

regularly refreshed in all VOA languages. This system's operators, journalists, would focus on facilitating discourse and ensuring the accuracy and timeliness of information provided in support of continued dialogue. Corrective documentary evidence, when necessary, would be posted, although without accompanying commentary. Supporting the interaction of citizen deliberation in the transnational public sphere then may be seen as a form of direct support for democracy, "Since democracy flourishes between the constant interaction between the creative powers of communicative freedom and the normative power of citizens,"⁵⁰ writes Bohman, "the best argument for transnational democracy across borders is simply that it secures non-domination by promoting such interaction."⁵¹

Guided in their practice by rules of civility, dialogic and deliberative communities in the transnational sphere would encourage rationally based discourse toward democratic ends. Fraser implies this is the very purpose of the public sphere concept: "The concept of the public sphere was developed not simply to understand communication flows but to contribute a normative political theory of democracy. In that theory, a public sphere is conceived as a space for the communicative generation of public opinion. Insofar as the process is inclusive and fair, publicity is supposed to discredit views that cannot withstand critical scrutiny and to assure the legitimacy of those that do."⁵² After describing the normative legitimacy of the public sphere in democratic theory, Fraser addresses the political effectiveness of public opinion in the transnational sphere, without which, she

⁵⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere."

writes, "... the concept loses its critical force and its political point."⁵³ But, Fraser contends, the concept of a public sphere, bounded until quite recently by a *Westphalian*⁵⁴ conceptual framework, is finding new and important expression in the transnational sphere: "Only very recently, in fact, have the theory's Westphalian underpinnings been problematized. Only recently, thanks to post-Cold-War geopolitical instabilities, on the one hand, and the increased salience of transnational phenomena associated with globalization on the other, has it become possible – and necessary – to rethink public sphere theory in a transnational frame."⁵⁵ Traditional diplomacy remains fixed in its focus on national interest and engagement with high-level state representatives, but the purpose of public diplomacy is to inform, engage, and persuade international publics in support of democracy. By engaging its language audiences as a convener and enabler of dialogue in the transnational sphere, VOA can build necessary capacity for quality public opinion in that domain. Will it be easy? Fraser assures us, it will not: "It is difficult to associate the notion of legitimate public opinion with communicative arenas in which the interlocutors are not fellow members of a political community, with equal rights to participate in political life. And it is hard to associate the notion of efficacious communicative power with discursive spaces that do not correlate with sovereign

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ In 1648 a peace treaty ending the Thirty Years War was signed at Westphalia, in present day Germany. Treaty terms described a new understanding of sovereignty, territoriality, and national identity for the nations involved. To a large degree, that conceptual framework spread, and remains operative today. Its priorities continue to guide official international discourse and protocols. Critics like Bohman, Dryzek, and Fraser all recognize a world of discourse unbounded by the traditional concerns of the Westphalia framework, one more attuned to changes in transnational dialogue and public opinion as tools of democratic practice.

⁵⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere."

states.”⁵⁶ Nonetheless writes Fraser: “Such a notion is indispensable, I think, to those who aim to reconstruct democratic theory in the current post national constellation. But it will not be sufficient merely to refer to such public spheres in a relatively casual commonsense way, as if we already knew what they were.”⁵⁷ Instead, Fraser argues that it is now necessary to re-examine public sphere theory with a mind to its engagement with transnational communities of fate, and to “reconstruct its conceptions of the normative legitimacy and political efficacy of communicative power.”⁵⁸

Fraser’s 2007 essay, *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World*,” reviews Habermas’ concept of public opinion, encased in its Westphalia worldview, and finds it deficient in addressing the concerns of a growing transnational public sphere, citing significant distinctions which I quote below at length.

In general, then, public spheres are increasingly transnational or post national with respect to each of the constitutive elements of public opinion. The ‘who’ of communication, previously theorized as a Westphalian-national citizenry, is often now a collection of dispersed interlocutors, who do not constitute a *demos*. The ‘what’ of communication, previously theorized as a Westphalian-national interest rooted in a Westphalian-national economy, now stretches across vast reaches of the globe, in a transnational community of risk, which is not however reflected in concomitantly expansive solidarities and identities. The ‘where’ of communication, once theorized as the Westphalian- national territory, is now deterritorialized cyberspace. The ‘how’ of communication, once theorized as Westphalian-national print media, now encompasses a vast translinguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures. Finally, the addressee of communication, once theorized as a sovereign territorial state, which should be made answerable to public opinion, is now an amorphous mix

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of public and private transnational powers that is neither easily identifiable nor rendered accountable.⁵⁹

Fraser's account describes circumstances that warrant attention in the public diplomacy community as well, particularly in its broadcast and digital outreach efforts. For mass media broadcasters, what was "formerly known as the audience" must now be considered in new ways. Fraser proposes "...a critical-theoretical approach that seeks to locate normative standards and emancipatory political possibilities precisely within the historically unfolding constellation"⁶⁰ of new communications networks.

Public diplomacy officers and the journalists at VOA would do well to take note of the unfolding constellation Fraser describes; its transnational public sphere falls within the compass of their shared concerns. Cultivating democratic discourse, writes Dryzek, recognizes that "divisions that are constituted by discourse can also be negotiated through discursive means. Such engagement can be the essence of deliberative and democratic global politics."⁶¹ Dryzek argues that if the quality of public opinion communities produce is high enough, then discursive democracy fulfills its promise to "... combine democracy and rationality, politics and policy."⁶² In summary, Dryzek does not discount the measurable contributions of what Yankelovich calls "experts" in democratic decision-making, but does see a need to open democratic systems up to greater popular participation, if only at first in an advisory role. "I have argued for the democratization

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics*, 164.

⁶² Ibid., 218.

of expertise in politics, public policy, and political science. But this recognition of democracy and rationality only makes sense if it proceeds under the banner of communicative rationality.”⁶³

The tension between diverse communities of citizen opinion and the instrumentalist representative government policymakers can be bridged, but only if each side recognizes its own partialities, and the benefits of accommodating a more cooperative approach. “And democracy, for its part in this reconciliation, must show its participatory and discursive face rather than its protective and strategic aspect.”⁶⁴

In the chapter that follows I will describe a new form of journalism that takes up this challenge. Public journalism takes as its guiding ethos the obligation help communities nourish their democratic systems. Applied to the transnational public sphere, public journalism, I will argue, offers considerable promise for supporting critical engagement in support of deliberative communities worldwide.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 218.

CHAPTER 6

JOURNALISM'S SHARED VALUES AND PRACTICES

Most major universities today offer journalism education programs of one form or another, but it was just over a century ago, in 1908, that the world's first¹ School of Journalism opened its doors at the University of Missouri. The school's founding dean, Walter Williams, would go on to achieve legendary status as both the "Father of Journalism Education" and "Journalist to the World."² Early in his career Williams had been sent around the world, to promote interest in the 1904 Saint Louis World's Fair. Travelling for nine months, he met and interviewed working journalists in twenty-seven countries on four continents.³

By the time Williams returned to America, he had been transformed into an avowed internationalist; as founding Dean of the new School of Journalism, he would act on this disposition. As the school's website records that "from the beginning, Williams envisioned a school of journalism that would positively influence the quality of journalism and advertising worldwide."⁴ Missouri's new J-school welcomed students and faculty from around the world, hosted a World Press Congress, and launched an early

¹ Missouri emphatically asserts its "world's first" status on the school's website; nonetheless, the École Supérieure de journalism in Paris disputes it. In either case, the world's first professional schools of journalism date back only as far as the early 20th century. (In 1934 Missouri did become, indisputably, the first university in the world to award a doctoral degree in journalism).

² The State Historical Society of Missouri, "Historic Missourians," <http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/w/williamsw/> (accessed November 10, 2014).

³ John W. Brown, *Missouri Legends: Famous people from the Show-Me State* (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2008), 221-222.

⁴ University of Missouri School of Journalism, "A Brief History," <http://journalism.missouri.edu/jschool/> (accessed November 10, 2014).

journalism training program in China. All the while, Walter Williams “made certain that the lessons of Missouri Journalism reached worldwide.”⁵

The Missouri Method, as described on the school’s website, focuses on a “liberal arts education with unique hands-on training in professional media.”⁶ As importantly, it was also shaped by Walter Williams’ internationalist perspective and commitment to social responsibility as a norm of journalistic practice. In “American Pragmatism and Chinese Modernization: Importing the Missouri Model of Journalism Education to Modern China,” media scholars Yong Z. Volz and Chin-Chuan Lee describe an additional and important influence on the Missouri Method – American pragmatism.

American journalism education finds its philosophical footing in a Deweyan pragmatism, both in terms of championing the press as a vital instrument of civic engagement and in terms of encouraging public universities to accept more vocational curricula such as journalism. As a product of the Progressive Movement at the turn of the 20th century, it symbolized a model of social responsibility to combat sensationalism and excessive commercialism in the media.⁷

In an effort to promote his distinctive approach to journalism, in 1914 Walter Williams composed a code of ethics for the profession, which has come to be known as *The Journalist’s Credo*. Translated into more than a hundred languages, and engraved on a bronze plaque at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., *The Journalist’s Credo* records the values that have guided journalists throughout the 20th and into the 21st

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ University of Missouri School of Journalism, “The Missouri Method,” <http://journalism.missouri.edu/media/> (accessed November 10, 2014).

⁷ Yong Z. Volz and Chin-Chuan Lee, “American Pragmatism and Chinese Modernization: Importing the Missouri Model of Journalism Education to Modern China,” *Media, Culture & Society* 31, no. 5 (September 2009): 725.

century. Williams' *Credo* is not only an important historical document in American journalism, it is also a telling expression of the professional values that Williams, and many journalists who have come after, consider universal; among the *Credo*'s precepts: "I believe that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service."⁸

Williams' *Credo* was drafted at the onset of World War I, in an age yet to encounter commercial radio, satellite television, or the internet. But the professional values it expresses endure, and remain applicable to today's circumstances. Informed by William's internationalist sensibilities, *The Credo*'s precepts call for a journalism that is "profoundly patriotic while sincerely promoting international good will and cementing world-comradeship...a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world."⁹

This thesis takes it as given that Williams' patriotic ideal is unlikely to draw practical support from the commercial broadcast news industry; nor is it at all certain whether or not it ought to. The question of a "profoundly patriotic" journalism is fraught with ambiguity, and calls into question the legitimacy of any independent press agency too closely associated with it. But VOA is not a part of the independent press. It is owned and operated by the United States government and tasked with supporting democracy.

Therefore, Williams' approach, as described in *The Credo*, while perhaps not suitable for today's independent commercial media, is a patently worthwhile, indeed sensible, approach to VOA's public diplomacy mission. It is also compatible with broadly

⁸ University of Missouri School of Journalism, "The Journalist's Creed," <http://journalism.missouri.edu/jschool/#creed> (accessed November 10, 2014).

⁹ Ibid.

accepted standards of journalism while addressing contemporary communications circumstances.

But instituting an approach of this nature will require a new understanding of VOA's journalistic mission. As noted earlier, a broad consensus between Congress and thought leaders in the public diplomacy community, particularly those associated with the New Public Diplomacy movement, have determined that VOA's current model and performance must be addressed and amended. One problem is that, despite the fact that it has no commercial imperative, VOA continues to do little more than simulate the priorities and presentation approaches of commercial broadcast news organizations, mimicking their claim to journalistic independence while invoking the VOA Charter as a shield against often imaginary adversaries. This tendency to justify intents, to appear Simon-pure in its role as an objective source of news, appears related to VOA's historic and unremitting struggle for journalistic legitimacy.¹⁰

The overriding concern appears to be that, VOA, although an agency of government, must operate as an objective news agency with disinterested motives. To be understood as something other than that would court serious doubts about the independence and the integrity of its news reports. But such reasoning ignores the fact that there are alternatives to the traditional broadcast news model, based not on commercial examples but rather than on public diplomacy priorities. By cleaving to an archaic, unnecessary, and

¹⁰ Despite its embrace of the commercial news media's presentation techniques and editorial agenda, VOA's institutional identity has also long reflected a sanctimonious component – scorning commercial rivals seen as compromised by the profit motive, and dismissive of fellow international broadcasters. These competing international broadcasters are considered *cat's paws* of foreign public diplomacy, and conceived of as “enemies” (in the words of former BBG Chairman Walter Isaacson). As a publicly financed institution operating under a protective Charter of journalistic independence, VOA sees itself as skirting charges of partiality.

increasingly inappropriate approach to its journalistic mission, VOA forfeits the opportunity to create a new, idiosyncratic, purpose-driven and collaborative model of journalism better suited to these times and its own long-term purpose. Informed by this new understanding of journalistic values - including, most importantly, transparency and collaboration - a reimaged VOA could create and support the conditions for democratic dialogue as an extension of its journalistic legacy. This new model is perhaps best described by the project of public journalism, which emphasizes community-building and support for democracy as the primary concerns of its practice. Implementing it, writes the movement's founder, Davis "Buzz" Merritt, will require a recognition that the transformation required is "not about journalists doing a few things differently, or doing a few different things. It is fundamental, the adoption of a role beyond telling the news."¹¹

Merritt sees the project of public journalism as part of *a new philosophy of news*; one that embraces an ethics of active public engagement. As applied to the Voice of America, it would involve facilitating public engagement within and among the language communities VOA currently serves. Although these change over time, the focus remains the same. These platforms, built on the principles of public journalism, would be designed to address a growing need in the transnational sphere: capacity for deliberative democracy.

While traditional journalism's detached, authoritative approach to reporting and ranking of daily news events remains indispensable to an informed citizenry, in much of

¹¹ Merritt, Davis. *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1995), xii.

the world today several sources often already serve that need, and do so with local emphasis, involvement, and presence. Public journalism recognizes that a surfeit of information is often readily available to anyone with online connectivity, that news consumption habits are changing in rapid and unpredictable ways, and that traditional journalism alone may no longer be adequate to the task of helping people intelligently process it all. Public journalism recognizes that today it is not *information* that is lacking, but rather *attention*. Cole Campbell, a longtime and respected journalist and advocate for fundamental change in the profession, once suggested that, in the face of contemporary communications challenges, including what has been called information overload, journalism today must adopt a fundamentally new core approach to its mission.

Journalism must now become a Philosophy of Attentiveness: ‘If we cast journalism as a philosophy of attentiveness – a system of thinking about what to pay attention to and how to pay attention – we begin to see its real, enduring value. Our main contribution is not information or understanding but a kind of ordering of topics worthy of contemplation, conversation, and further inquiry.’¹²

Campbell’s assertion – that the primary contribution journalists can make is providing organized and coherent information worthy of conversation and continued inquiry – is compatible with the vision of a new VOA presented in this thesis. Assisting deliberative communities with information resources helps them prioritize and report their own agenda of concerns. The practice of ordering of topics worthy of contemplation, conversation, and further inquiry can be an important aid to focusing participation, but the editorial ranking of top stories, as seen in traditional news formats, would be de-

¹² Cole Campbell, “Journalism as a Democratic Art,” in *The Idea of Public Journalism*, ed. Tony Wharton (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), xx.

emphasized. Limiting topics to issues of transnational concern is proposed to focus each language community's attention on shared problems and problem solving.

Editorial ranking itself has been challenged for imposing, or at least promoting – in postmodernist terms – a meta-narrative of hegemony, or menu of concerns intended primarily to serve the larger interests of an entrenched power elite. Both commercial and political considerations undoubtedly do often dictate editorial decisions, and stories ranked highest on the news agenda may actually deliver the least in terms of civic utility. Prominent coverage of celebrity scandal would provide a notable example; VOA may distance itself from such stories, or it may not, particularly when the scandal involves important political figures.

If, instead of emulating the editorial priorities and presentation forms of commercial broadcast news, VOA determined to differentiate itself through a new and more participatory approach, it could become an exemplar for a new kind of journalism on a global scale. In *Journalism as a Democratic Art*, Campbell describes the broad challenges facing journalism, including what he believes is the central question now facing the profession. “How can journalism move from its current state, marked by economic uncertainty, professional anxiety, user dissatisfaction, and accelerated social transformation of the world it covers, to a future state in which journalists and their institutions are collaborators with citizens in building and sustaining successful communities.”¹³

¹³ Campbell, “Journalism as a Democratic Art,” 12.

Campbell, like Davis Merritt before him, believes the bridge to this new mode of journalism practice must be informed by a new understanding of what journalism is, and what it can become: “Having listened to citizens talk about their lives and their newspapers for more than twenty years, I’ve come to three different beliefs:

- Journalism is in the problem-solving business, not the truth business
- Journalism’s product is a contribution to understanding (but not a fully finished state of understanding). Therefore, journalism is as much about models for understanding the world as it is about information about the world
- Journalism is philosophy – a philosophical construct of what is worth paying attention to and how best to pay attention to it.”¹⁴

All of these understandings support the idea that sustaining communities of dialogue and deliberation does not fall outside the bounds of the profession’s concerns; in fact, there is pressing need today for addressing what former journalist Stephen Ward calls the confusion over “how journalists should serve the public good and what journalists are ‘for.’”¹⁵

Ward is founding director of the Center for Journalism Ethics at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and author of *Global Journalism Ethics*, which argues that democracy needs “public persons to fulfill various democratic duties, such as politicians, judges, heads of institutions, and journalists. The role of journalists is to promote ethical flourishing in an open democratic society.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵ Stephen J. A. Ward, *Global Journalism Ethics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

In *Media Ethics Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective*, Ward explores the compatibility of patriotism with journalism. As the book's introduction describes, after first formulating "a theory of moderate democratic patriotism that is compatible with ethical journalism within a nation; Ward then develops a theory of global patriotism, for global journalists, where the first duty is to serve humanity at large."¹⁷

VOA exists as a federally funded foreign affairs establishment intended to serve the purposes of U.S. public diplomacy. So the project of cultivating global patriotism, warrants further inspection, because America's public diplomats swear allegiance to the flag of the United States and – whether as citizens or as officers of the government – are expected to serve the nation above all other interests. Would they, by promoting the universalist claims of a global ethics of journalism, revoke their responsibilities of national allegiance? I claim they would not.

Ward's global ethical standards are not greatly dissimilar to the precepts of Walter Williams' *Credo*, with its internationalist sensibility. Ward's thinking recognizes the present day realities of globalization. Confronting these realities, and cultivating a global ethics of journalism as part of a shared language of discourse is, I contend, in the national interest, and an appropriate focus of U.S. public diplomacy.

Comparing this approach with the current goal of achieving market dominance in the global news media-sphere, reveals a strategy incompatible with public diplomacy's neglected mission of mutual engagement. In this light the idea of building capacity for

¹⁷ Stephen J. A. Ward, introduction to *Media Ethics Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2-3.

deliberative discourse through journalism appears not only more appropriate, but more realistic. Similar possibilities have been considered by a wide variety of scholars, including Albert Dzur, Professor of Political Science at Bowling Green State University, who has written that “by sponsoring real and virtual public forums, news outlets provide deliberative resources otherwise lacking in many communities.”¹⁸

Dzur’s 2002 essay “Public Journalism and Deliberative Democracy,” examines the rapid growth of public journalism, considered to be perhaps “the most significant reform movement in American journalism since the Progressive era.”¹⁹ Dzur agrees that promoting deliberative discourse through journalism will require that practitioners “reconceive what counts as news. Instead of being driven by the agendas of office-holders, party leaders, and other elite sources, news is to reflect the interests of citizens. This public listening involves finding out what is of concern in a community and then reporting on how those concerns are or are not being met.”²⁰

In the transnational context, a project of this sort would appear to involve providing online communities with the information resources, communicative capacity, and norms of behavior necessary to support and sustain dialogue, deliberation, and public judgment. Publicizing and promoting the concerns of transnational language communities serves to inform formal global institutions and the wider world, while democratizing the transnational public sphere. Dzur writes that “influenced by ideals of deliberative

¹⁸ Albert W. Dzur, “Public Journalism and Deliberative Democracy,” *Polity* 34, no. 3 (Spring, 2002): 313-336, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3235394> (accessed June 27, 2014).

¹⁹ Dzur, “Public Journalism and Deliberative Democracy,” 313.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

democracy, public journalists think the promotion of reasonable and informed dialogue among citizens should be part of the role journalists play in a democracy.”²¹

Journalism at the Voice of America has taken a variety of forms throughout the seventy years of its existence, some in response to political or ideological imperatives, others driven by technological change. Today the institution is again at a crossroads. Congress has signaled that VOA’s traditional approach to news is no longer adequate to the task of communicating support for democracy. If VOA is to survive as a news organization, mission-driven public journalism may be its only hope. Dzur demonstrates that “public journalists have the justification for advocating what I will call purposeful news. This includes reporting on long-term policy issues, such as environmental protection, that have important consequences for communities but involve policy choices that are too complex or drawn-out over time to fit into normal news-cycles.”²² Purposeful news, writes Dzur, involves “the belief that to promote public deliberation journalists must do more than report the news, and should broaden their role to include helping the public convene and deliberate about public affairs.”²³

Public diplomacy is a project of long-term engagement, and therefore suitable to this task. Traditional news need no longer serve as the model of engagement; general news is now copious, but purposeful journalism is not. As Dzur writes: “Purposeful news also encompasses civic information that helps people become involved in public debate. This

²¹ Ibid., 324.

²² Ibid., 326.

²³ Ibid., 332.

can be basic information about the structures of government and the roles played by different office-holders, or more complex discussions of core values at stake in particular public choices.”²⁴

Traditional journalism’s critique of public journalism, writes Dzur, is essentially composed of three arguments: that collaboration with the public will result in role confusion, thus jeopardizing news quality; that the dominion over objective authority, by custom the province of news professionals, must now be more closely coordinated with audiences; and that the involvement of professional journalists as purposeful players in community affairs could threaten conditions of political equality. While admitting public journalism must negotiate such challenges, Dzur demonstrates a faith in the limits set by a new ethos of impartial engagement.

Public journalists exert power, but it is the power of ‘proactive neutrality’ directed towards the ‘broad public values’ of promoting informed citizenship and focusing community debate but prescribing ‘no chosen solution’ and favoring ‘no particular party of interest.’ Papers and other news outlets are to be ‘fair-minded participants’ who are necessary to the process of deliberation but who do nothing to influence the outcome.²⁵

The concept of *fair-minded participants* comes from Davis Merritt, considered the originator of public journalism theory. In his 1998 book, *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is Not Enough*, argues that “because we are unavoidably participants and because our profession is dependent on democracy’s continuing success,

²⁴ Ibid., 327.

²⁵ Ibid.

we need to develop a working philosophy of participation in helping life go well. I call it the *fair-minded participant*.”²⁶

Appealing as it may sound, this concept does not sit well with traditional journalism or its prevailing ethos of value-neutrality and non-participation. Merritt writes “journalists are almost congenitally uncomfortable talking about values. The idea that dealing in values (other than the First Amendment, of course) and journalistic objectivity are professionally incompatible is an artifact of the canon of objectivity.”²⁷ Media ethicist Stephen Ward addresses those concerns in his paper “Pragmatic News Objectivity: Objectivity with a Human Face,” arguing “objectivity is not the only valuable tradition in journalism, nor is it an ethic that must be followed rigidly in all contexts.”²⁸

In fact, writes Ward, “a new theory is needed, one that retains the ideal of news objectivity while responding to the needs of today’s journalism. The traditional notion of objectivity is flawed because it is based on the mistaken belief that objectivity requires absolute standards and knowledge that is independent of perspective.”²⁹ Ward calls his preferred approach, *pragmatic news objectivity*, explaining: “How does this notion of pragmatic objectivity apply to journalism? News objectivity is a species of pragmatic objectivity. All forms of journalism, including news reports, are interpretations of events

²⁶ Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life*, 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁸ Stephen Ward, “Pragmatic News Objectivity: Objectivity with a Human Face,” The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Discussion Paper D-37 (May 1999): http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/d37_ward.pdf (accessed June 22, 2014).

²⁹ Ward, “Pragmatic News Objectivity,” 3.

with at least some degree of conceptualization, selection, theorizing and evaluation. There are no value-free or theory-free reports.”³⁰ Ward’s hermeneutically-inflected approach to journalism retains a strong requirement for objective warrant, but adds an important additional aspect: standards of rational debate that include public participation: “Neutrality demands not the absence of judgment and feeling but their subjection to objective, public scrutiny — as much testing for fact and logic as journalism allows.”³¹

Ward’s project focuses attention on the stakes involved in public participation, and, quoting former broadcast news reporter Robert MacNeill, describes the role of journalists in the community. “We (journalists) are not social engineers but each one of us has a stake in the health of this democracy. Democracy and the social contract that makes it work are held together by a delicate web of trust, and all of us in journalism hold edges of the web. We are not just amused bystanders, watching the idiots screw up.”³²

Current understandings of public journalism have their origins in the aftermath of the 1988 U.S. presidential campaign, when voter participation reached (what was then) an all-time-low of 50.2%.³³ In the years that have followed, a growing concern began to take hold in newsrooms and at universities across the United States, that public life was not all it ought to be, and that journalists had a role to play in mending it. Davis Merritt, a

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Stephen J.A. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 93.

³³ The American Presidency Project at U.C. Santa Barbara, “Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections,” last modified June 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php> (accessed June 29, 2014).

seasoned editor at the *Wichita Eagle*, was a pioneer in the movement, determined to find a way to reformulate the process of political coverage. In 1992 he established a *People Project*, inviting 192 Wichita-area residents to participate in one-on-one interviews, discussing their positions on public issues. These interviews emphasized each individual's personal perspective; for example, citizens were encouraged to describe their notions of citizenship, and how they felt the political process affected them personally. These "idea exchanges" resulted in a 10-week long series of newspaper articles, offering a community perspective that had, theretofore, been lacking. Merritt described the project's intent in the inaugural series installment as "a collaborative effort to give shape and momentum to your voices and ideas, with the goal of reasserting personal power and responsibility for what goes on around us."³⁴

Jay Rosen, long-time Chairman of New York University's Clark Journalism Institute is another leading advocate for public journalism. Traveling across the United States in the 1990's, Rosen was able to examine a multitude of public journalism projects in places like Dayton, Ohio; Portland, Oregon; Madison, Wisconsin; and Charlotte, North Carolina. Case studies presented in Rosen's 1999 book *What are Journalists For?*, describe each project's intent, and result of these engagements. San Jose Mercury News editor Rob Elder described the goal of his paper's project as "not to change minds, in the sense of persuading people to abandon beliefs based on life as they have experienced it.

³⁴ Wichita Eagle, "The People Project," Civic Renewal Movement, last modified 2003, <http://www.cpn.org/topics/communication/wichita2.html#people> (accessed June 29, 2014).

The objective was to open all our minds to the different beliefs and experiences of others.”³⁵

Rosen found that most citizens he met supported efforts by local journalists to promote participatory communities of dialogue, and that “what was valuable about the forums was not the clash of opinion, but the opportunity to hear how citizens’ lives and personal struggles shaped their beliefs.”³⁶ Rosen’s 1990 circuit set out to describe public journalism in action, and determine what it might be able to accomplish if applied. And, while his account reports general satisfaction among project participants, including most journalists, Rosen’s overall conclusion hints at the continuing challenge public journalism faces: it demands not only new professional practices, but also new habits of mind including, most specifically, openness.

What was Public Journalism? I have tried to describe it in built form. It was a climate of mind, a style of commitment, a disturbance in the professional hierarchy, a passage between journalism and other attempts to strengthen American democracy, and a point of contact between the press and the university. It was also an argument, an experiment, a movement, a debate, and a kind of adventure.³⁷

Rosen’s observation that public journalism constitutes an adventure is not without force, nor is his recognition of the project’s serious practical intents, both political and social. As an expression of the pragmatic philosophy put forward by Dewey, it seeks to revitalize public life by strengthening democratic participation, a process Dewey believed constituted freedom itself. Robert Westbrook, the philosopher’s biographer, explains that

³⁵ Jay Rosen, *What Are Journalists For?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 106.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

“(Dewey’s) social theory was grounded in the moral conviction that ‘democracy is freedom,’ and he devoted his life to the construction of a persuasive philosophical argument for this conviction and to the pursuit of an activism that would secure its practical realization.”³⁸

Public journalism constitutes a practical formulation of that activism. Addressing the concerns of traditional journalists, Dzur writes: “Against these critics I argue that public journalists are right that promoting public deliberation is not inconsistent with traditional standards of press independence and fairness.”³⁹ Campbell, a working journalist himself, understood that daily journalism, deadline-driven as it is, calls for quick judgments. Still, he found the unreflective quality news content today frequently unsatisfying; as for the journalists who produce it “many of them believe that journalism is inherently reflexive, not reflective. They pride themselves on their ‘news judgment’ ...they prefer categorical thinking – using traditional stories lines or topoi.”⁴⁰

This traditional news approach aims to focus public attention on news agendas that are agreed-upon and ranked by the news agency providing the content. Contingent on that entity’s preference, as decided through the editorial process and influenced, as may be the case, by associated ideological concerns of one sort or another, news is presented as a series of objective reports ranked, as seen fit, by importance. Professional journalists in this model stand aloof, functionally separate from the public, offering a nexus of

³⁸ Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), x.

³⁹ Dzur, “Public Journalism and Deliberative Democracy,” 311.

⁴⁰ Campbell, “Journalism as a Democratic Art,” 11.

expertise and access that authorizes and justifies their power to decide. However well-intentioned it may be, this editorial stacking of important local, national, and international news constitutes a narrative-shaping enterprise which, at the very least, presents an authority-backed order of civic priorities. In the context of international broadcasting, as exemplified by the Voice of America, this practice raises questions of legitimacy. A typical broadcast to any of the language audiences VOA serves will reflect news value judgments made, overwhelmingly, in Washington, D.C. Its institutional structure and guiding philosophy assume, unquestioningly, that objective reporting to distant audiences concerning public priorities in their own lands, or in the wider world for that matter, serves both the cause of freedom and U.S. national security.

But VOA's program content contains precious little in-depth coverage, and virtually no investigative reporting whatsoever. Excluding web-based and radio reports, secondary sources of news for most consumers, VOA's various language services typically offer a single half-hour daily TV news broadcast. For an historical comparison, consider that as long ago as 1981, the New York Times reported that: "During his long tenure as anchor for CBS, Walter Cronkite frequently complained that the (30 minute long) evening news amounted to little more than a headline service."⁴¹ Today, news digests of this sort may be found on 24/7 news outlets in many parts of the world for. Online mobile devices alone offer vast access to a widely available variety of news sources.

⁴¹ New York Times, "The Expanding Role of TV News on Cable," Tony Schwartz, August 13, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/13/arts/the-expanding-role-of-tv-news-on-cable.html> (accessed November 10, 2014).

Thus, churning out news content that is already widely available, and often of marginal social utility in the first place, does not appear to be a wise use of limited resources. Might it not now be prudent to examine alternatives to this approach? Public journalism's priorities, while different and less familiar than those of traditional journalism, have no less validity, nor are they any less important. I believe it can be argued that the objectives of public journalism appear more nearly in line with those of public diplomacy than the objectives of traditional journalism. Yet conventionalist tendencies obtain. Writing of the commercial press, although his words apply equally well to the civil servant journalists at the Voice of America, Davis Merritt argues "much of that resistance to change is rooted in traditional journalism's determined detachment from the people and events we cover. That detachment, in turn, stems from a peculiar sort of elitism that questions the ability of people to govern themselves: in other words, an elitism that denies the essence of democracy."⁴²

It is this focus on the essence of democracy and its core commitment to deliberation, rational debate, and self-rule, that make it, an important consideration for political theory, because "it calls attention to the neglected role of journalism in deliberative democratic procedures."⁴³ Today a community of advocates call for a more public-minded conception of journalism; among them is Cole Campbell, whose writings often reflect a Toquevillean

⁴² Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life*, 13.

⁴³ Dzur, "Public Journalism and Deliberative Democracy," 313-336.

optimism for democratic success.

Citizens engaged with associations or discourses can teach and learn from each other, pooling their collective intelligence. They can argue within their association or across discourses without fear of powerful reprisal, because their arguments take place in a sphere outside of power. And the very act of arguing can unite and build social cohesion across differences, without requiring consensus.⁴⁴

As noted earlier, conventional journalism typically sees support for this type of activity as beyond the scope of its longstanding professional responsibilities. Traces of today's debate between public journalism and more traditional approaches can be seen in the exchange between Walter Lippmann, an influential 20th century news commentator, and the philosopher John Dewey. Lippmann triggered the exchange with the release of his book *Public Opinion*, in 1922. Mark Whipple, a sociologist at the University of Texas, has characterized Lippmann as “an articulate spokesperson for the elitist model of democracy.”⁴⁵

Public Opinion asserted that the world of the 1920's had become far too fast and too complex for ordinary citizens to keep account of. Lippmann's wartime experience in information management, and his post-war review of news coverage promoting the war, had convinced him that the American public were distracted, often disinterested in politics, particularly involving international affairs. They were also highly vulnerable to manipulation through what he called “the manufacture of consent.”⁴⁶ To counter these

⁴⁴ Campbell, “Deliberative Democracy as Nested Public Spheres,” 96.

⁴⁵ Mark Whipple, “The Dewey-Lippmann Debate Today, The Dewey-Lippmann Debate Today: Communication Distortions, Reflective Agency, and Participatory Democracy*,” *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 2 (June 2005), 162.

⁴⁶ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1922), 158.

forces, Lippmann advocated a public philosophy of democratic realism, a conceptual adjustment embracing the idea of a professional class of civic managers; technical experts who would generate solutions for the public. Lippmann believed that, because of built-in limitations of the press and popular mind, it was no longer possible to believe in the original dogma of popular democracy as a guide to governing the nation.

Lippmann's biographer, Ronald Steel, argues that his professional career demonstrates a commitment to the belief that if the true nature of public opinion were discernable, and informed public opinion might usefully guide policymakers, but he remained a pessimist about that ever actually happening. John Dewey shared Lippmann's concern over the health of democracy, and agreed with his characterizations of a press that failed to serve the public and a public disinclined to public knowledge or participation. But Dewey was far more hopeful. He saw democracy as a habit to be cultivated for the production of civic knowledge, providing solutions to public problems and an essential community purpose for each individual. Dewey believed the public's capacity to conjointly describe and together "work out" shared problems had not disappeared, though it was certainly in eclipse. But he saw the cure for what was wrong with democracy in education, participation, and a commitment to cultivating the habits of democracy, including the pragmatic willingness towards openness, experimentation, reflection, and intelligent adjustment. For Dewey, reflexivity and participation were the whole point of democracy.

CHAPTER 7

JOURNALISM IN THE AGE OF ENGAGEMENT

(The New Public Diplomacy) is persuasion by means of dialogue that is based on a liberal notion of communication with foreign publics. In other words, public diplomacy is similar to propaganda in that it tries to persuade people what to think, but it is fundamentally different from it in the sense that public diplomacy also listens to what people have to say. The new public diplomacy that is gradually developing – and if it is to have any future in modern diplomatic practice – is not one-way messaging.

– Jan Melissen, *Wielding Soft Power: The New Public Diplomacy*, 2005

In March 2014 the New York Times released an internal report¹ examining the challenges presented by its digital media competitors such as BuzzFeed and Google News. Although the firm has undertaken many online enterprises over the years, the execution and administration of nearly all of them were judged inadequate for being either insufficiently aggressive and/or lacking in coordination and effectiveness. The loss of audience and influence to other online news sources was considered so serious that the report's authors recommended immediate and drastic remedial action, as described in a leak of the report posed by BuzzFeed. "In the coming years, The New York Times needs to accelerate its transition from a newspaper that also produces a rich and impressive

¹ The Times internal report was produced by an eight-person team, composed of informed internal staff from across the organization. A summary memo was initially released to the public by the Times. The official report was later leaked, and appeared on BuzzFeed and other online sources.

digital report to a digital publication that also produces a rich and impressive newspaper.”²

Today that transition is actively underway; its initiative to realign practices across every phase of production is in keeping with an industry-wide reformation known as the *digital first*, movement signaling the kinds of changes required if other legacy news organizations, including VOA, are to successfully adapt to changing technology and audience preferences and remain relevant. Just as importantly, the *digital first* commitment forces news organizations to revise or update institutional norms and practices in order to embrace a new focus on audience development and engagement. The envisioning presented in this thesis focuses primarily on VOA as a unique enterprise, combining both news and public diplomacy capacities. But, as has been argued throughout, while VOA must now change, it need not model its journalism on that of other media companies. Like the Times and other traditional news agencies struggling to find their place in digital information space, VOA needs to focus on its strengths, find a niche, and actively reach out to grow its far-flung audience. It can reformulate its unique capacities to create a new kind of news organization, focused on public journalism in support of dialogue and deliberative discourse. The Department of State’s Office of Public Affairs, including its officers around the world, can ably handle the focused presentation of official U.S. policy positions. Using online tools they can cost-effectively develop and provide timely and topical online multimedia publications, such as issues

² BuzzFeed, “Exclusive: New York Times Internal Report Painted Dire Digital Picture,” (May 15, 2014), <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mylestanzer/exclusive-times-internal-report-painted-dire-digital-picture> (accessed November 11, 2014).

guides and cultural/historical digests on American life and law. This enterprise is necessary, and it is fitting that the single primary source for official news and information about U.S. foreign policy is the State Department's Office of Public Affairs. Its web presence should be a transparent and reliable destination for information on official State Department policies and initiatives; such a site would be marked and understood as representing the official U.S. government position on foreign policy. In this sense, the State Department's Public Affairs Office might be thought of as producing a form of brand journalism, clarifying and condensing while also providing access to full text primary source documents and experts – as the need arises – but always with the intent of promoting U.S. foreign policy objectives and the nation's public image. These offices at State, and around the world, already exist and should be sustained. Public affairs professionals on staff provide a valuable service, but it is not, on its own, public diplomacy.

Similarly, the Department of Defense should be the responsible locus of authority for any serious discussion about information wars. This function should not be nested at the State Department, or Voice of America, but rather consigned to U.S. intelligence agencies or the Department of Defense, an organization designed for the purpose of waging war, funded for that purpose, and subject to appropriate Congressional oversight in the context of that obligation. The Pentagon possesses plentiful resources and expertise for conducting information operations and information wars.

A reimagined VOA would absent itself from these other efforts, whether they be to sell or to strategically mislead. Instead it should continue to function as a responsive

information service, facilitated and sustained by public journalists unimpeded by outside editorial interference. And so the question becomes, what models can VOA's language services use, as a *digital first* enterprises, to provide convening space, protocols, and personnel to develop, facilitate, and sustain online communities of meaningful discourse? In, "Online Journalism in the Information Age," Stuart Allan and Donald Matheson, British professors of journalism and mass communications, predict that "...what is going to count as journalism in the years to come is being decisively reconfigured, at this very moment, by the rise of the network society."³

The New York Times' decisive shift to digital is evidence of network society's increasing pull, yet, write Allen and Matheson "...insufficient attention has been devoted to examining the evolving forms, practices and epistemologies of online journalism in this context, especially with regard to its potential for shaping democratic deliberation and debate across what are ever more globalized public spheres."⁴

A newly imagined VOA might be seen as a leadership initiative in this project, an online, curated, and non-commercial site for topical information in support of democratization across the networked space of the developing global public sphere. In supplying such services, the goal, as with any news organization, is to establish bonds of trust within the user community. If VOA cannot hope to compete for mass attention as it did in the 20th century, it may nonetheless find a useful public diplomacy purpose in

³ Allan and Matheson, "Online Journalism in the Information Age," *Savoir, Travail & Société* 2, no. 3, (2004): 73-94.

⁴ Allan and Matheson, "Online Journalism," 73-94.

constructing functional multilingual conduits of information exchange in support of democratic discourse.

Allan and Matheson describe the attraction of such an approach, writing that “it is in making use of information or analysis available from varied sources, especially those situated well beyond the borders of any one nation state, that people can refashion new forms of collective creativity, identity and attachment as global citizens.”⁵

VOA is favorably situated to help meet this demand. Its mandate accommodates efforts to “... contribute to the broadening of these distant relationships, and in so doing facilitate processes of democratization...”⁶ Allan and Matheson believe the new realities of network society and online journalism “...point to similarities between this sense of task and the ethos of the civic journalism movement in the US, in which journalism is understood to be an active participant in civic affairs rather than an observer, and as a more service-oriented activity than other forms of journalism.”⁷

But, even given VOA’s considerable assets in this endeavor, the task of reforming the institution will be challenging, and will require recognition of new public diplomacy imperatives driven by growth of online technologies and social media. Craig Hayden, assistant professor of international communications at American University’s School of International Service, argues that these new online capabilities “expand the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

communication ecology of public diplomacy, complicating how to reach audiences, shifting genres of message composition, and constituting different kinds of publics.”⁸

Zaharna and Rugh, writing in “The Use of Social Media in Public Diplomacy,” amplify on this “expanded communications ecology,” while contrasting it with the old.

The old mass media represented an ideal communication experience for governments seeking control and dominance. The media was primarily one way, controlled by sponsor, directed at a target audience that was perceived as passive. The nostalgia for such communication dynamics is palatable even today. Compared to the mass media, the social media represents a daunting challenge. The social media is difficult, if impossible to control.⁹

Zaharna and the other scholars promoting a New Public Diplomacy seek an alternative that confronts the failure of the monological messaging approach, and have found common cause with others, outside of the field of academic interest, as well. In “America’s ‘engagement’ delusion: Critiquing a public diplomacy consensus,” Canadian communications scholars Edward Comor and Hamilton Bean, assess the Obama administration’s public diplomacy policy, and observe that new public diplomacy engagement strategies (referred to as public diplomacy 2.0), have become a serious concern, not only among public diplomacy practitioners, but among national security planners as well.

The discourses of engagement and ‘public diplomacy 2.0’ are evident within the National Framework for Strategic Communication (White House, 2009). This document lists three objectives for current US PD efforts. First, it stresses the need for foreign audiences to ‘recognize areas of mutual interest with the United States’;

⁸ Craig Hayden, “Social Media at State: Power, Practice, and Conceptual Limits for US Public Diplomacy,” *Global Media Journal*, (Fall 2012): 1.

⁹ R.S. Zaharna and William A. Rugh, “The Use of Social Media in U.S. Public Diplomacy,” *Global Media Journal – American Edition*, 11, no. 21 (2012), <http://journals.textual.info/index.php/gmj-american/issue/view/4> (accessed November 15, 2014).

second, it wants to enable foreign audiences to ‘believe the United States plays a constructive role in global affairs’; and third, it hopes foreign audiences will come to see the United States as a ‘respectful partner in efforts to meet complex global challenges.’¹⁰

A new VOA, with an updated mission as described above, accommodates all three of these strategic communications objectives while focusing its efforts on designing, constructing, maintaining and sustaining systems of public discourse, deliberation, and decision. As a project of public journalism, extended into the transnational public sphere, it can achieve public diplomacy’s objective of engaging international publics on a sustained basis. But designing such a system is a daunting challenge, and will inevitably involve careful consideration of how it can effectively address the Security Framework’s recommendation to promote mutual interests and assist foreign audiences in coming to see the United States as a “respectful partner in efforts to meet complex global challenges.”

Addressing these national security concerns in a public diplomacy context requires a trained and dedicated staff of skilled information resource specialists, discourse facilitators, and public journalists. But, while training and some transition period would be needed, most VOA staff journalists possess many of these essential attributes required, in addition to language proficiency and frequently notable achievements in wide areas of specialization, particularly, global issues and politics. For a large scale project of democratic engagement on issues of transnational concern, the synergies here appear

¹⁰ Edward Comor and Hamilton Bean, "America’s ‘engagement’ delusion: Critiquing a public diplomacy consensus," *The International Communication Gazette*, 74, no. 3, 12 (2012) <https://www.academia.edu/8652590> America_s_engagement_delusion_Critiquing_a_public_diplomacy_consensus (accessed November 16, 2014).

particularly apt. Bruce Gregory's 2014 journal article "The Paradox of US Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and 'Demise,'" describes the accelerating effort by public diplomacy scholars to discover a functional mechanism for engagement.

Their proposals differ in detail, but they reflect a consensus that bridging significant gaps between capacity and relevant knowledge is essential. Some would create a government-funded independent non-profit and nonpartisan entity. It would provide services and contract with academic, commercial, and non-government organizations as a central clearinghouse for expertise and professional resources.¹¹

This challenge, on its own, might not be excessively difficult for an institution like VOA to at least begin to tackle. But adding the challenge of engaging participants in meaningful deliberative discourse under optimal conditions, and sustaining participation in that discourse space over a meaningful period of time, is a far more complex enterprise. It will require many skilled multi-lingual discourse facilitators. And, though – given their interviewing, reporting, and presentation skills – VOA journalists may possess many of the necessary attributes, they are also likely to require ongoing training and development in this new, collaborative enterprise of sustained discursive engagement.

A useful model for imagining how this might appear is supplied by AmericaSpeaks, a non-profit organization launched in 1995 to promote democratic engagement and deliberative approaches in communities across the United States. The group ceased operations after twenty years in January 2014, but in its time sponsored a series of Town Hall Meetings, attended by hundreds, and sometimes thousands of participants at a time.

¹¹ Bruce Gregory, "The Paradox of US Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and 'Demise,'" Institute for Public Diplomacy and Global Communication, *IPDGC Special Report #1*, February 2014), 21. <https://ipdgc.gwu.edu/sites/ipdgc.gwu.edu/files/downloads/IPDGC-SpecialReport1-BGregory.pdf>, (accessed December 12, 2014).

Focused on local, regional, and national issues, AmericaSpeaks eventually engaged with hundreds of thousands of participants, providing impartial briefing materials and trained moderators/facilitators for small panels of discussion, typically twelve to twenty people at a table. Over the course of a period as brief as a weekend, participants sat in on expert panel discussions and shared in informal discussions on multiple sides of the issue at hand. Civic decisions on the redevelopment of New York's Ground Zero, or New Orleans flood-ravaged precincts were among the projects AmericaSpeaks undertook in its brief existence.

Face-to-face encounters of the type AmericaSpeaks produced are not immediately practical as a project for VOA. Today's globally distributed language communities are best reached through online media, and funding concerns will largely dictate the scope of any engagement activities or programs VOA may undertake. This proposal assumes funding levels similar to those already in place at VOA, and envisions language-based online platforms as the best option for cost effectiveness and accessibility, while admitting that many, including all of the world's poorest, currently suffer with no access at all.

While many online sites now attract news and information seekers, a non-commercial, non-dominational, safe, and transparent supplier of timely and topical information on matters informing democratic discourse and community problem solving would provide a rare if not unique service. It is also one considered by public diplomacy scholar Craig Hayden to be one very much in need when he suggests "social media and international communication warrant innovation in US diplomatic practice, yet it remains uncertain

how traditional public diplomacy institutions can adapt to the collaborative communication ethos of the medium.”¹²

Another promising method of facilitating democratic deliberation today involves the use of so-called deliberative polls, a technique developed by James Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. Launched in 1994, the center has conducted some 70 deliberative polls in 21 countries including last year, for the first time in Africa. According to Harvard’s Jane Mansbridge, Fishkin’s deliberative polling currently offers the best hopes for the success of the deliberative project, writing that “deliberative polls are the gold standard today in several respects. They are strongest in representativeness, very strong on outcome measurement, and equal to any other in balanced materials, policy links, and the quality of space for reflection.”¹³

Fishkin’s deliberative polling concept, described in his 2009 book *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy & Public Consultation*, relies on random sampling techniques to identify a representative subset of the overall population. Guided in part by the concept of rational ignorance, which argues that most citizens in mass democracies will opt out of active engagement in democratic decision making, on the logical premise that their individual vote may be of slight determinative force due to the force of numbers involved in mass voting. In seeking to address this defect, Fishkin developed a concept he describes as the trilemma of democratic reform. In this view, three core values – political equality, mass participation, and deliberation – are considered as conditions held in

¹² Hayden, “Social Media at State,” 15.

¹³ Jane Mansbridge, "Deliberative Polling as the Gold Standard," *The Good Society* 19, no. 1, (2010): 55.

habitual tension. The desire for mass participation undermines the desired outcome of meaningful deliberation, for example, while equality and mass participation suggest either an unwieldy direct democracy, or anarchy. In the face of the trilemma, Fishkin applies his deliberative polling technique to reflect the inclusiveness of mass popular participation, while dampening the effect of its unwieldiness and, frankly, unlikeliness.

In Fishkin's model this is again accomplished through face-to-face contact. Sample groups are identified, recruited, and brought together for conventions focused on addressing particular community concerns. The National Issues Forum held at Philadelphia in 2003 provides a good illustration. Here, 350 Americans, chosen through random sampling techniques to be representative of the U.S. as a whole, spent a weekend discussing and learning about America's role in the world. Fishkin found here, as he has in other such polling experiments, that the quality of participants' knowledge and opinion, as demonstrated through preference reversal and measurably increased levels of understanding about alternative points of view. What makes the Philadelphia experiment notable writes Robert Kingston, chief institutional designer of the National Issues Forums, is its material expression "...that participatory, deliberative public discussion might be central to the political process."¹⁴

A newly imagined VOA could attempt to do the same, applying that same ethos to the project of providing facilities (likely to be online only at first) and trustworthy facilitators for globally concerned citizens to engage, inform themselves, and deliberate on matters

¹⁴ Robert J. Kingston, "Public Thought and Foreign Policy," in *Public Thought and Foreign Policy: Essays on Public Deliberation About America's Role in the World*, ed. Robert L. Kingston (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press), 4.

of mutual transnational concern. Its public diplomacy *message*, so to speak, would be no more than its ongoing commitment to moral and material support for new forms of global citizen deliberation. The success of this project rests largely on the construction of online forums designed to inform and encourage participatory discursive practices and understanding. In effect, this might be characterized as a form of democratic aid, a global assistance program for transnational democratic discussion. The United States Agency for International Development currently supports and funds projects of this sort; establishing a functional auxiliary system to fortify and enhance that work fits squarely within the public diplomacy mandate.

Support for informed deliberation is an indirect path to public diplomacy's ultimate goal of cultivating and legitimately earning respect in the global public sphere. Building trust through long-term relationships is key to the pursuit of effective public diplomacy. In the first quarter-century of its existence, VOA was able to establish a measure of trust, even loyalty, with audiences in many parts of the world of the world. That trust was based on a faith in the quality and relevance of the news they received, and the fact that options for acquiring trusted information were often severely limited.

In the digital era, VOA's influence as a source of authoritative news in the tradition sense is challenged on all sides, but particularly by the expansion of regional (native language) broadcasting outlets around the world, and the explosion of the online and mobile network communications capacity and availability. The desirability of transitioning away from a fruitless competition in this altered sphere is described by Tanni Haas, a professor of communications at the City University of New York, who has

written an important history of the public journalism movement, citing specifically the contributions of James Carey.

Carey argued that, if journalists were to help stimulate citizens to participate more actively in democratic processes, they would need to move from a Lippmannesque ‘journalism of information’ to a Deweyan ‘journalism of conversation.’ That is, instead of perceiving themselves as disseminators of ‘expert information,’ journalists should perceive themselves as facilitators of ‘public conversation.’¹⁵

By perceiving themselves as such, and by building a media capacity designed to support meaningful democratic discourse on issues of transnational common concern among its several language communities, public journalists at VOA can help the United States project its commitment to public discourse, public reason, and their role in effective democratic self-government.

Thomas Carothers, founder and director of the Democracy and Rule of Law Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and a leading authority on democratization, argues that democracy promotion is a critical mission for the United States, and calls democracy promotion “...a spreading global practice.”¹⁶

Enhancing support for democratization through online media is a focused task that fits with VOA’s mission and better meets the needs of its far-flung audiences today than its current format permits.

A project of this nature assumes and accepts that a radically altered media landscape has emerged over the past quarter century, calling for new approaches to engagement, techniques. The project of international broadcasting as a practice of public diplomacy

¹⁵ Tanni Haas, *The Pursuit of Public Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 7.

¹⁶ Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004, 20.

must acknowledge the reality of an emerging transnational networked public sphere. By servicing and engaging with language communities in digital space, VOA's language services must now consider those communities in their global diasporic sense, including community members in the United States. Unbound by legislative restrictions on receiving targeted content from VOA, a reimagined VOA is free to encourage American citizens of whatever language community, including of course English, to participate in a global endeavor to find common cause.

A project of this nature also exposes the tension between cosmopolitan and communitarian visions of global governance, and might enlighten global policy makers and the community of concerned global citizens searching for mutually agreeable solutions. The very activity of designing and maintaining systems of this sort starts the process a sustained engagement with transnational publics. The precise design criteria cannot be described in detail here, but surely must accommodate effective political equality within the community of discourse, and the opportunity for meaningful deliberation guided by protocols of respect for difference and adherence to civility. Although the project described in this thesis is difficult and ambitious, it is also necessary and feasible.

European social scientists Maarten Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar, coauthors of a 2003 report titled "Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society," suggest that such systems can only come into existence through active efforts, but can yield notable benefits.

Networks of actors must create the capacity to interact and communicate. This awareness seems to facilitate a new creativity in thinking about new modes of conflict

resolution that suggest the essence of dealing with policy conflicts might be a more substantial process of deliberation, shared problem solving, and developing regimes of joint responsibility than merely interest-based bargaining.”¹⁷

Fifty years ago the United States Information Agency operated libraries and cultural centers around the world, places that quickly became not only repositories of reliable information, but in many cases meeting spaces as well; effective expressions of a public sphere of activity and interaction for their time. That model might provide the inspiration for a digital equivalent.

Today the entombed remains of USIA repose in a cyber-sarcophus, housed in Chicago at the University of Illinois’ federal depository library. There, on hold in perpetuity, lie its hopes for engaging international publics in mutually beneficial discourse. One might imagine an encounter with its final resting place.

Here lies:

<http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia>¹⁸

Born 1953 - Died 1999

But in another imagining, the fragments preserved at UIC might serve as talismans for a new age of engagement. Informed by a new understanding of dialogue and deliberative democracy, and intent on developing capacity for practical communities of

¹⁷ Maarten A. Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar (eds.), “Governance or the Rise of a new Vocabulary, Editors’ Introduction, *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*, 16. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁸ This web site is an archive of the former USIA site as it stood in September 1999, and is now maintained as part of the Electronic Research Collection of historic State Department materials by the federal depository library at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

discourse. As a project of public journalism, I see this as the most desirable way forward for the Voice of America.

This argument bears the burden of proving that the BBG and VOA are currently deficient in their operations and effectiveness, and in need of fundamental reform. Testimony and examples provided in earlier chapters, including by former BBG Chairs and the U.S. Secretary of State, have been included in this argument to help meet that obligation. In March 2015 a further reminder of U.S. international broadcasting's ongoing distress was provided when the newly named CEO, Andrew Lack, departed his position after only forty-two days on the job. Lack, a former president of NBC News, was chosen, after a year-long search, to serve as BBG's first ever Chief Executive Officer, an administrative maneuver intended to address BBG's current shortcomings.

In the wake of this latest disruption, Rep. Edward Royce, current Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, issued the following statement.

This resignation, once again, leaves the Broadcasting Board of Governors truly rudderless. For too long, the BBG has lurched from crisis to crisis, destroying the reputation of brands like the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe in the process. Two successive Secretaries of State have called for reform of the BBG. Secretary Clinton called the agency 'defunct,' and Secretary Kerry last week stated that he is 'absolutely committed to the reform of the BBG.' Their statements echo calls by the Office of the Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office for far-reaching reforms.¹⁹

Chairman Royce, co-sponsor of the *Royce/Engel U.S. International Broadcasting Reform Legislation*, or H.R. 4490, further announced that "in the coming weeks, I will reintroduce legislation to reform fundamentally this dysfunctional agency. In the last

¹⁹ U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee website, Chairman Royce Statement on Resignation of U.S. International Broadcasting Executive Andy Lack, March 5, 2015, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-royce-statement-resignation-us-international-broadcasting-executive-andy-lack>

Congress, this legislation passed the House unanimously, and I expect it to move to the President's desk for signature this Congress."²⁰

The overall thrust of the new legislation is to bolster recognition of VOA's function as a messaging device and tool in an international propaganda war. It's a development that many on the staff at VOA find deeply troubling. Chairman Royce recently referenced the efforts of Russian state officials to propagandize U.S. audiences through Russian broadcasting, and suggested BBG were being badly beaten in this struggle. VOA's self-identification as a trusted sources of news and information appears to face a profound challenge, as was noted in the *Columbia Journalism Review* article titled: "End of an era? Congress tries to neuter Voice of America's journalism."

The drumbeat to overhaul the broken bureaucracy of government broadcasting has now allowed ideologues who think the VOA and its sister operations should be, effectively, US propaganda outlets, to infect the debate about what needs 'reforming' and what does not. If the ideologues win, I suggested, if the mission of US broadcasting is to be 'messaging' and policy advocacy,' then stop hiding behind the label of journalism. Call it what it is public diplomacy—and put it under the State Department. Anything less is a disservice to VOA listeners and to the profession of journalism, and an insult to the men and women who strive to uphold the journalistic integrity of Voice of America.²¹

One recent Sunday morning a reader went online to access the Sunday New York Times, and saw for the first time – though surely it will not be the last –a front page that feature moving images set alongside a headline about the upcoming Israeli elections. This new readership/viewership experience was not offered as an option, but rather

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gary Thomas, *Columbia Journalism Review*, "End of an era? Congress tries to neuter Voice of America's journalism," www.cjr.org/reports/end_of_an_era.php, (accessed March 15, 2015).

experienced as yet another encounter with the new face of news and information consumption and choice.

U.S. international broadcasting must acknowledge that serving the needs of news and information seekers in this new environment means providing the services, security, and support that will attract attendees to the information resources and social sustenance they seek. Though it runs against the grain of traditional mass media audience approaches, this new approach recognizes the need to create the spaces and conditions that will enable online communities of concern to easily find sources of reliable information, that may, in time, bind them as communities. Building on this capacity by supplying and facilitating discourse, dialogue, and ultimately deliberation is the long term goal of this, admittedly, gradualist initiative of trust-building and support for democracy.

An experiment demonstrating the potency of this approach was recently reported by the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto. Called, the “Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran,” and supported by funding from Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, this ongoing project has established an online space,²² and sponsored events designed to promote a non-dominated discourse on Iran’s upcoming elections, scheduled for June 2015. The Munk School launched its initiative in the Spring of 2013, envisioning a new kind of online diasporic forum.

Experts and members of the Iranian diaspora in Toronto opened a live two-day session discussing a range of topics relevant to Iran’s upcoming presidential election. Using Psiphon’s circumvention technology (a free access to information tool originally developed at the Munk School) participants from directly inside Iran could join using a whole portfolio of social media and meeting platforms, including

²² Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran, <https://theglobaldialogue.ca>, (accessed March 15, 2015).

Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Google Moderator. Those tools allowed Iranians anywhere to contribute to the discussion in live time, and vote on questions on any topic – anonymously, if they wished.²³

The outcome of this initial event surprised even researchers at the Munk School. “The results after the event were staggering: within two weeks, more than 360,000 unique users had connected with the Global Dialogue from inside Iran, and had visited the site over 1,490,000 times.”²⁴

While acknowledging the nationally bounded realities of the Iranian electorate, the Munk project also engages the community of thought and interest found beyond those frontiers, an approach that the New Public Diplomacy deems essential. In 1975, the noted American historian Henry Steele Commager presciently described a similar sensibility, one recognizing the transnational concerns all humans now face. He called it, “A Declaration of Interdependence,” and argued: “When in the course of history the threat of extinction confronts mankind, it is necessary for the people of the United States to declare their interdependence with the people of all nations and to embrace those principles and build those institutions which will enable mankind to survive and civilization to flourish.”²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Henry Steele Commager, “A Declaration of Interdependence,” paper presented to The World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, 1975, <http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/declaration-interdependence>, (accessed March 15, 2015).

Building an institution such as this might be accomplished by rebuilding the Voice of America as an institution of – not only independence – but also one of interdependence; it is a bold plan, as Commager might have appreciated.

We can no longer afford to make little plans, allow ourselves to be the captives of events and forces over which we have no control, consult our fears rather than our hopes. We call upon the American people, on the threshold of the third century of their national existence, to display once again that boldness, enterprise, magnanimity and vision which enabled the founders of our Republic to bring forth a new nation and inaugurate a new era in human history. The fate of humanity hangs in the balance. Throughout the globe, hearts and hopes wait upon us. We summon all Mankind to unity to meet the great challenge.²⁶

United States international broadcasting has the tools to address this challenge, and could be an important force in its advancement. As organized presently however, it lacks both the direction and the will to do so.

²⁶ Ibid.

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