PART ONE

BACK TO THE FUTURE
When he entered the USIA in 1959 as a young officer, Robert L. Chatten recalled that “there were an awful lot of people in the State Department who didn’t think about [public diplomacy] deeply, if at all.” In fact, at his first posting in Manila, he encountered “a kind of condescension” toward the public side of diplomacy that “became standard later on—people saying things like, ‘You seem like a bright young man. Why don’t you get out of this Mickey Mouse peripheral thing you’re doing and get into the real Foreign Service?’ That was the roots of an abiding theme that persists to this day.”

Chatten made these remarks during a postretirement interview in 1994, following a successful career in U.S. public diplomacy. As it turned out, during his tenure with the agency, the USIA enjoyed the heyday of its existence. The existential threat posed by communism during the Cold War dulled criticism of the international communications agency that, though not widely respected in Washington, was viewed as a necessary instrument of war—particularly one in which ideological battles could determine the outcome. As a result, the USIA received the resources it needed to carry out its mission, which was to explain and advance U.S. foreign policy and ideals overseas and build good relations for the United States with people abroad.

But when the Cold War ended, so did public diplomacy’s support among American policy makers. Despite the USIA’s success in helping to win the battle against the Soviet Union, many believed the agency’s time had passed. The thinking was that the “peace dividend” of winning the struggle against communism allowed America to spend less

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3 Ibid.