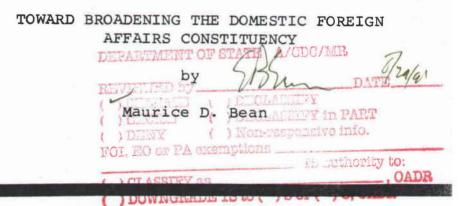




CASE STUDY



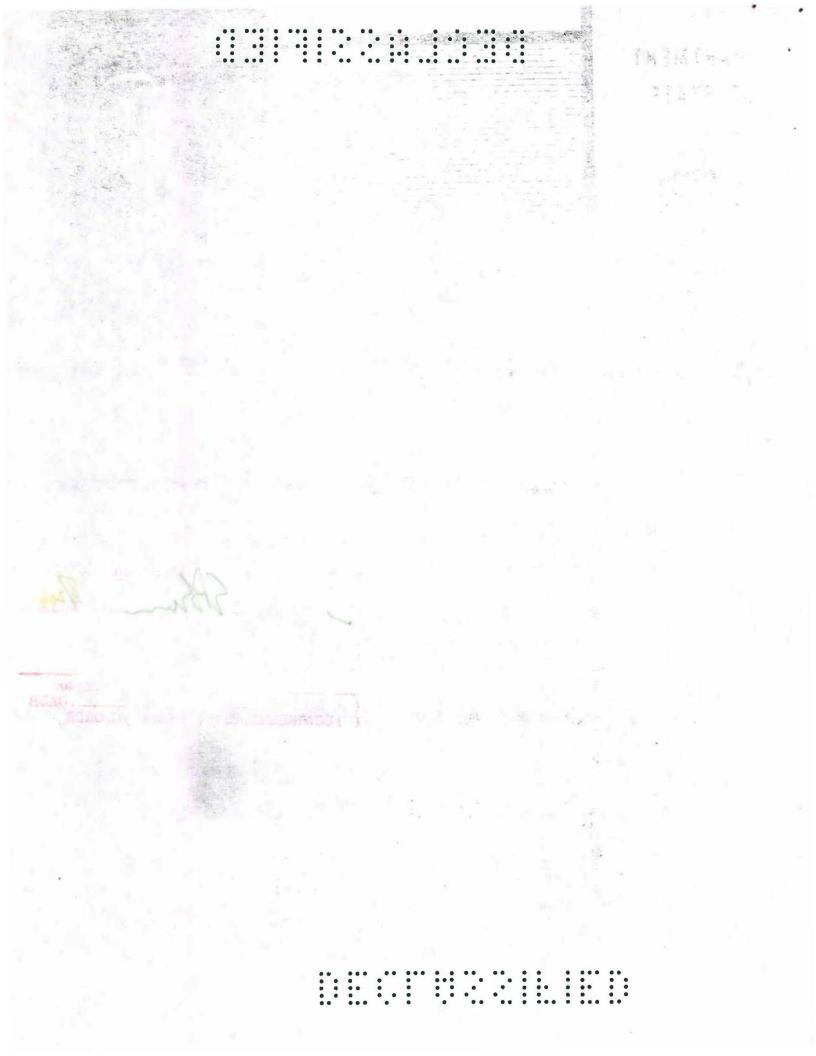
THIRTEENTH SESSION SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY

Washington, D. C.

1970 - 1971

This is an educational exercise and does not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy or of the Department of State.

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THE SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY

THIRTEENTH SESSION August 17, 1970 - June 11, 1971

TOWARD BROADENING THE DOMESTIC FOREIGN AFFAIRS CONSTITUENCY

A Case Study

by

Maurice D. Bean

April, 1971

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SUMMARY

A fleeting inquiry into the average American's interest in foreign affairs, what the Department of State is doing to serve that interest and what the Department might do to broaden it. The paper concludes that there is a continuing general public interest in foreign affairs but that the public is not as well informed as it should or would like to be on these matters. It concludes that the Department's current Public Affairs program is conceptually sound but does not reach as large a segment of the public as it should. This study recommends that certain public affairs activities be expanded and offers some suggestions for new activities.

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PREFACE

The thoughts, ideas and biases leading to this case study were entirely my own. However, much of the basic information contained herein could not have been acquired without the cooperation of the Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State. Personnel of the Bureau shared their thoughts, ideas and frustrations with me as well as providing the required data. In addition, the Speakers Services Division of the Bureau's Office of Public Services made the initial arrangements and contacts for my field research. For its assistance and kindness, I am indebted to the Bureau.

I assume all responsibility for any contentious and/or controversial statements or recommendations put forth in this paper. Should any of the ideas or propositions contained herein be deemed to have merit, I gladly share the credit for them with those who were of assistance to me.

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INTRODUCTION

Many observers of the American scene have asserted that most Americans have no interest in international affairs. They contend that such interest as does exist is temporary and is limited to only the few issues of global import that are thrust upon the public from time to time. These observers suggest that, at best, less than 10% of the American citizenry has any continuing interest in international affairs and that this group is drawn primarily from academia and the coastal (east and west) establishment.

This study was undertaken in the belief that these assertions are not correct. I believed that the problem was not one of lack of interest, but a lack of opportunity for the public to keep itself informed on a broad range of international affairs matters. On the one hand, the general public has limited exposure to those who engage in international affairs activities and, on the other, most of the information upon which the public must make its foreign affairs judgements is reported, filtered, interpreted and often distorted by limited elements of the commercial information media, which is highly selective in what it chooses to report to the public. My belief included the thought that the general public would welcome the opportunity for exposure to a greater amount of information concerning international affairs and the U.S. role and responsibilities therein.

With these assertions and counter-assertions in mind, I attempted to take a quick look at the State Department's public affairs program and a small segment of "mid-America" to try to determine (a) whether the American public was really interested in international affairs, (b) whether this interest could be usefully heightened, (c) how the Department of State was trying to reach the public and (d) what the Department might do, beyond its present efforts, to increase American public understanding of and appreciation for United States Government activities in the international arena.

The pages which follow summarize my findings, conclusions and recommendations. The paper does not go into great detail nor does it exhaustively cover all aspects of the subjects discussed. In fact, it does not fully describe all of the present efforts of the Bureau of Public Affairs. Thus, I must concede that it is not an "in depth" study and that it contains many highly impressionistic elements. Nevertheless, I think that this paper highlights the subject matter sufficiently to warrant consideration of its substance and suggestions. Had I been favored with more time, better investigative experience and equipment and no limitations on the length of this paper, an exhaustive and scientific study could have been made. But even with these luxuries, I doubt that the outcome would have been significantly different.

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IS THERE A CONSTITUTENCY?

In trying to ascertain whether there is a foreign affairs constituency in the United States beyond that posited in the first paragraph of the Introduction to this paper, I visited seven small and medium-sized cities in Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma and West Virginia and one large city in Georgia over a two week period. (The thought here was that they were sufficiently inland and provincial so as to be likely to be indicative of the lower level of citizen interest in foreign affairs.) I was directly exposed to approximately 1500 people in individual conversations, group meetings, luncheons, "rap" sessions and newspaper and television interviews. My contacts ranged from college students and faculty through newspaper and television reporters and editors to taxi drivers. One attribute that most of them had in common was that they had spent most of their lives in or near the community in which they were currently living or one relatively similar thereto; that is, outside the direct influence of cosmopolitan/metropolitan U.S.A. (normally considered the locus of the previously mentioned limited foreign affairs constitutency.) I found no lack of interest in foreign affairs nor were the areas of interest confined to a narrow range. I did find a lack of information and a surfeit of misinformation. I also found surprise that there were people in Washington who cared that the public be as fully informed as possible.

As to range of interest, while the Viet-Nam and Middle East conflict arose in practically every conversation and discussion, they were by no means exclusive topics. Interest was expressed continuously in mainland China, Soviet interest and intentions, U.S. trade policies and problems, the meaning of the "Nixon Doctrine", the U.S. image abroad, Executive Branch reaction to public opinion, how foreign policy is developed, Latin America, NATO, Japan, illegal importation of narcotics, apparent inconsistencies in U.S. foreign relations (e.g. equal recognition of democracies and dictatorships), and how one joins the Foreign Service. There were many other subjects that arose, but the ones enumerated above were the most consistent.

The misinformation (or malinformation) range was equally broad. There was a continuing theme to the effect that the State Department can and does destroy any government of which it does not approve. There were several assertions that the Department is only interested in protecting the interest of U.S. business. (These assertions were usually framed in language suggesting that there is something inherently "bad", if not immoral, about all U.S. business firms operating abroad.) There was a disturbing air of distrust of public statements of the Department (and the Executive Branch). I was asked on several occasions why I should be believed and, more than once, the assertion was made that the Department (and other elements of the Executive Branch) intentionally lie to the public. On one occasion, I was asked, in what I believe to have been sincerity and seriousness, if it was true that the State Department always manipulates the Miss Universe Contest in order to insure that the winner comes from a country with whom the U.S. Government is trying to curry favor.

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.. :.. : Despite this misinformation or malinformation syndrome, I found that most people were willing to engage in reasonable discussion with me and if not convinced of the points of view which I advanced, they were willing to hear and consider what I had to say. (They also were appreciative of the opportunity to talk directly with someone from Washington and expressed interest in having future opportunities to do so). At Wheeling College (W.Va.), I met with the campus "Committee to End the War." Once we got through the initial rhetoric and "sizing up" we were able to engage in useful dialogue. I probably did not convince any of the members to change their views, but several admitted that I had placed their views in a new perspective. In Waco, Texas, two young men, who had listened to me earlier in the day came to my motel to talk further with me about foreign affairs in general. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, following a telecast which ended at 8:30 a.m., a woman called me before I left the station to ask questions on a subject that had arisen during the telecast. A taxi driver in Atlanta, upon learning that I was with the State Department, launched into a discussion on textile imports. He was not satisfied with many of my answers to his questions, but expressed appreciation for my willingness to discuss the subject with him. These were not conversations with people who lacked interest in foreign affairs.

Even though I am critical of the manner in which the national commercial information media treat foreign affairs subjects, I found two interesting (and, I believe, exploitable) phenomena. The first was that local newspapers use, as "filler" items, considerable trivia of foreign origin. On March 8, <u>The Amarillo Daily News</u> carried items on cholera in Kenya and Ginseng gum in Korea. On the previous day, <u>The Amarillo Sunday News-Globe</u> published items concerning the Toscanini memorials in Milan and department store sales in Tokyo. <u>The Waco News-Tribune</u>, on March 11, devoted a quarter page to Ceylonese cooking and carried an item on traffic problems in Kuala Lumpur. <u>The Waco Tribune-Herald</u> enlightened its readers on air travel to and through Iceland on March 13. The height of La Paz, Bolivia was cited by <u>The Chattanooga News-Free Press</u> on March 15. These are just samples of a rather sizeable number of such items that I found in the local newspaper in every city I visited.

The other phenomenon was that if the story had any local connection, there was no problem about its being used. In Waco, Texas I was formally booked for an appearance on a "Today" type show. However, before I left the television station I had also been filmed for a television news program and taped for a radio program. The Amarillo papers assiduously followed the visits of an Indian agricultural official and a Chilean business group to the area during the week of March 8. In Chattanooga both daily papers carried lengthy personal interview articles covering my visit to the city.

The coverage and the filler items cited above suggests that local commercial news media recognize that there is continuing public interest in foreign affairs and the local media tries to be responsive to that interest. (Later in this paper I shall offer recommendations on how the Department can assist local media further in its responsiveness to this interest). My interaction with the public and the media actions cited above leads me to believe there is a broader foreign affairs constitutency in this country than is generally recognized. The question now arises as to how can it be more effectively reached.

HOW IS THE CONSTITUENCY CURRENTLY BEING REACHED?

I began this study believing that the techniques being employed by the Department to reach the general public were conceptually inadequate. I no longer hold that view and will engage in greater explication later in this paper. First, let me briefly describe how the Department is currently trying to fill the public's "information gap."

The Bureau of Public Affairs appears to be appropriately organized to deal with all of the segments of the American public falling within its purview. (The Bureau is not responsible for the Department's day to day dealings with the national information media or the working press accredited to the Department. This responsibility is that of the Office of News, whose activities are not included in this study.) In discussing the Bureau's activities, I will not discuss purely administrative unit or units whose responsibilities do not bring them into regular contact with the general public.

Special Assistant for Youth Affairs

This office serves as an ombudsman in the Department for American youth. Its purpose is to try to bring about effective involvement of young people in foreign affairs activity. The Special Assistant strives to ascertain and present to the Department the views of young people regarding foreign affairs. His efforts are not primarily intended to persuade young people to the Department's point of view, though some of his activities might lead to this end. In addition, he strives to insure that there is a youth input into official foreign affairs activities. Recent results of this effort have included the selection of one youth alternate member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, three youth advisors to that delegation, and five youth members of the U.S. Commission on the United Nations. This office also encourages the various bureaus within the Department to include young people on their advisory panels and ad hoc groups where public input is needed and desired. This office tries to keep open avenues to dissenting groups of young people and to follow through on student opinions which surface during its contact with young people.

Office of Media Services (OMS)

This office reaches out to that portion of the commercial information media which can not be classified as "national". It reaches for the "heartland" radio and television station, the local newspaper (daily or weekly) and such other media instruments as may be available. It also reaches out to institutions and organizations which are not media instrumentalities but which use media materials. In addition, the Office of Media Services is responsible for the Department's publications program, its general correspondence with the public and distribution of printed materials requested by the public.

The Office of Media Services attempts to reach its goals through several techniques. It operates a small film library, the content of which is available to public institutions and groups. The prime users are educational institutions (high schools, Jr. colleges, small four-year colleges and small universities). Unfortunately, the office has only five titles in its current inventory and three new titles scheduled for production over the next two years. OMS produces film clips and slides for use by local television stations as either background material for news programs or as feature material. Some 485 television stations subscribe to this service. The service consists

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of approximately 2 film clips and 2 slide features per month. The slides and film clips are designed to (1) explain U.S. foreign policy and (2) explain the work of the State Department and how it affects the average American citizen.

OMS produces a series of five minute radio programs that are used by approximately 1,000 radio stations. These programs can be used by themselves or can be integrated into other programs. One of these shows is produced each week. In addition, OMS produces a monthly radio show entitled "Students and Diplomats" that is used by 150-160 campus radio stations. OMS is currently producing (in cooperation with NBC-affiliate WRC-TV) a fifteen program half-hour series for use by NBC. WRC-TV is paying for the series but the Department will have the right to further distribution once the original telecasting has been completed.

The printed materials produced by OMS vary from "series" publications (Background Notes, Issues, Public Information Series, Current Foreign Policy) and The State Department Bulletin) to "onetime" publications having a specific but limited objective. A regular publication of OMS is the weekly "Diplomatic Pouch" column which is subscribed to by small town newspapers having a total circulation of approximately 12,000,000.

The distribution of OMS publications is limited by budgetary restrictions. Approximately 20,000 copies of each publication are distributed with the total annual direct distribution by the State Department averaging 1 million copies. (Many of these go to individuals and institutions on the Department's standard distribution list.) These publications are also available to the public through the Government Printing Office, but, with the exception of "Background Notes" - of which the GPO sells some 7 million copies per year the general public appears to be unaware of their availability.

The Public Correspondence Division (PCD) of OMS is charged with handling the mail that comes from the public. The preponderant portion (80%) is referred from the White House, 10-15% comes directly to the Department and 5% is referred from the Congress. (During FY 1970, PCD received 477,907 pieces of mail requiring 262,541 replies and 215,366 other dispositions. Comparable figures for FY 1968 were 94,490, 73,321 and 22,236 respectively.) Most of the mail is from dissenters to specific USG foreign policy actions. Much of it is the result of "campaign" efforts regarding given issues. Nevertheless, PCD endeavors to answer all mail that can be legitimately answered.

The Office of Public Services (OPS)

The Office of Public Services engages in four principal activities -Community Meetings, Conferences, Briefings and individual speakers. Community Meetings consist of sending (upon request) a team of four or five State Department officers (sometimes including AID and/or USIA officers) to an area for a week to meet and talk with as many groups and gatherings as it can. (Groups reached range from civic organizations to students of all levels to special interest groups, some with specific foreign affairs interests and others with only a general interest.) Efforts are also made to obtain as much media exposure for the team as is possible during the week. These teams are sponsored by one or more local organizations in the area being visited. During FY 1970, fourteen Community Meetings were conducted throughout the country, reaching an estimated live audience of 88,800 and an estimated media audience of 14 million. Comparable FY 1969 figures were 12 meetings, 63,500 live audience and 12 million media audience.

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Conferences are aimed at a more numerically restricted audience than Community Meetings. Rather than trying to reach the public directly, Conferences are organized to reach groups and organizations whose members views are likely to affect those of the general public in their home localities. Two types of conferences are organized. These are (a) National Conferences, and, (b) Regional Conferences. National Conferences are usually held in Washington, with participants invited from all over the country. National Conferences are usually organized around an homogeneous group, e.g. newspaper editors, secondary educators, etc. However, conferences have been held for less homogeneous groups such as leaders of non-governmental organizations. National Conferences are generally sponsored and financed by the Department.

Ad hoc National Conferences are sometimes organized at the request of specific organizations. During FY 1970, five National Conferences were held. The annual average for the past few years has been six.

Regional Conferences are what the name implies. They are held in a specific region outside of Washington and participants are drawn from that region. (The region involved can be a single metropolitan area, a state or several states.) These conferences are co-sponsored and co-financed by the Department and one or more requesting local organizations. Six regional conferences were held in FY 1970. Budgetary limitations have required a reduction to four in FY 1971.

The Department provides speakers and staff for both types of conferences. Departmental personnel input for Washington-held conferences is limited primarily by availability and need. Participation in regional conferences has fiscal limitations on personnel participation. However, the Department tries to provide five participating speakers, a moderator and two staff officers (conference manager and press officer). In addition, conference participants accept individual speaking and media engagements in or near the city in which the conference is being held, time and circumstances permitting.

The Department responds to as many individual speaking requests as it can. (This responsibility is vested in the Speaker Services Division.) These may consist of a single engagement or an officer taking on several engagements within a given time block. (There are several criteria, the detailing of which space will not permit, which must be met before an engagement is accepted). When the Department can not respond immediately to an acceptable request (there are a variety of reasons for this,) engagements are put on a "standing requests" basis to be filled at the earliest feasible time. Sometimes "standing requests" are filled by scheduling them on the itineraries of participants in nearby Community Meeting or Regional Conference or officers enroute to or from other engagements. Despite these efforts, many desirable engagements must be postponed for lengthy periods, sometimes as much as a year. Whenever possible the Department works out a cost-sharing arrangement with the requesting organization(s) for the transportation and per diem expenses of the speaker(s) it provides. There is no cut and dried formula for this arrangement. Sometimes the organization pays all expenses, sometimes partial expenses and sometimes nothing.

The Speaker Services Division is dependent upon the goodwill, interest and availability of Foreign Service and Departmental officer for filling individual engagements. Some officers who are willing and available to take on engagements are not sufficiently articulate to handle them. Others, who are sufficiently articulate, are often not willing or available. Despite the personnel and financial handicaps, Speaker Services fills approximately 1500 individual engagements per year.

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Briefings are arranged by the Office of Public Services and they take place in the main State Department building. These fall into two categories; (1) regular morning briefings normally scheduled twice weekly and (2) Special Briefings organized on an ad hoc basis on the request of a specific group (usually groups visiting Washington whose interests are not confined to foreign affairs). This activity does not place additional financial burdens on the Department since the required resources are readily available in the main State building. During FY 1970, eight-four regular briefings, involving a total of 2,907 persons, were held and 553 groups involving 19,192 persons received special briefings.

Hindrances to Reaching the Constituency.

As indicated earlier, my general impression is that the programs enumerated above have the design potential for reaching all elements of the general public having an interest in foreign affairs. However, I also have the impression that a large portion of the American foreign affairs constituency is not touched by these programs because of insufficient resources being devoted to them. Practically every Bureau of Public Affairs officer having program responsibility with whom I talked, indicated that his office could effectively use more resources and, thereby, be more effective. The two needs most frequently cited were additional program funds and better cooperation from State Department officers, particularly FSO's assigned to Washington. There was no "pitch" for significantly increasing the Bureau's staff, though some increases would be necessary if programs were expanded. However, the key seems to be acquisition of more funds and the increased participation of experienced officers in the Bureau's programs. Some of my Bureau contacts also cited the lack of public affairs consciousness, at all levels of the Department, as adding to the difficulty of the Bureau achieving its objectives.

HOW TO BETTER REACH THE CONSTITUENCY

Additional program funding is essential to extending the Department's public affairs outreach. The Bureau's FY 1970 budget was slightly more than \$2.6 million. At first blush, this appears to be a substantial sum of money. However, it must be borne in mind that a substantial portion of these funds must cover personnel and related costs as well as operating expenses not related to activities involving direct contact with the public. For example, slightly less than \$604 thousand of the amount cited above was devoted to the Historical Office, whose work is most important, but does not fit into the category to which this paper is addressed. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the Public Affairs budget, but perspective can be achieved by comparing it to the proposed public affairs budgets of selected other Executive Branch agencies. According to Mike Causey of The Washington Post in his "The Federal Diary" column of April 6, 1971, the following FY 1972 public information budgets have been proposed by the agencies indicated: DOD - \$46 million, DHEW - \$38 million, Agriculture -\$4 million, DHUD - \$5 million and DOT - \$9 million. The column also reports that Office of Management and Budget has directed that several of these budgets be cut substantially, but the size of the proposals suggest that previous public information budgets for these agencies have not been unsubstantial and that these agencies have the public relations consciousness that the Department is said not to have. In addition, given the vital role that foreign affairs plays in American life, it would seem that, by comparison with the public affairs efforts of other Executive Branch agencies, more State Department resources should be devoted to keeping the public informed.

Having suggested an increased public affairs budget, I recognize that achievement of this end will be difficult. However, the issue should be of sufficient importance to cause the Department to "bite the bullet." Congress (or at least the relevant committees) would have to be convinced that the additional funds that the Department was seeking were not intended for "propaganda" a la the alleged "Selling of the Pentagon." The inherent difficulties notwithstanding, I believe that sustained effort should be made to achieve an increase, which would probably be a modest amount in terms of the Department's total budget.

If the Department considers its public affairs responsibilities as important, then it must work toward building a greater consciousness of this importance among its personnel. Contact with the American public must become a recognized and desirable part of the job, rather than a chore to be avoided as often as possible. In developing this consciousness, it should be made quite clear that the objective is not that of propagandizing or tooting the horn of the Department, but that of effectively responding to the public's interest in foreign affairs and desire for information.

Assuming that the Department is willing to attach the importance to public affairs that this paper suggests it should and assuming the Department is willing to fight for and is able to obtain the additional resources required, I offer the following specific suggestions for broadening contact with the American foreign affairs constituency:

- Expand the Community Meetings program. This should not be a token expansion, but one that had as its eventual goal a minimum of one Community Meeting per year in each of the states and several in the more populous states. The increased personal contact between the official foreign affairs community and the general public should enhance public understanding of international affairs. While modern communications media have many advantages, they are no substitute for personal contact.
- 2. Expand the Department's capability to respond to requests for individual speakers. The reasoning behind this suggestion is the same as contained in suggestion #1. The expansion should be designed to reduce the time between receipt of a request and response thereto, as well as accept engagements that now go unmet. In order to enhance the Department's capability, it is further suggested that:
 - a. Officers on home leave be encouraged to accept speaking engagements that have been requested through the Speaker Services Division at points reasonably proximate to the location(s) of the officer's home leave. (This would be in addition to the "trailer" program and hometown engagements.) In addition to receiving per diem and transportation costs, the time spent on speaking engagements should not be deducted from the officer's approved home leave time (say, up to ten days).
 - b. <u>A short training program</u> should be developed at FSI to increase capability of personnel assigned to Washington to handle speaking engagements. This must be different from the standard public speaking courses. It should concentrate on the techniques of informal discussion and discourse, extemporaneous speaking, how to listen, "rapping", etc.

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(Suggestions #1 and 2 would also provide the opportunity for more officers to gain first hand knowledge of what the public is thinking. It has often been charged that the Department is grossly deficient in its knowledge of "what is really going on in the country."

- 3. Establish a permanent exhibit at the Washington Visitors Center (Union Station) when it is completed. This could significantly increase attendance at the twice-weekly briefings mentioned earlier. Modest exhibits could also be established at points throughout the city where large numbers of tourists congregate.
- 4. <u>Make State Department publications available to the public</u> at as many distribution points as possible, e.g. Passport Offices, Reception Centers, Civil Service Commission Offices, selected post offices, (and increase the number of copies that are available without cost). The thought here is that while a citizen might be reluctant to solicit publications from Washington in fear of rebuff or being ignored, his reluctance would be considerably less if he could deal with a local or nearby facility. Adoption of this suggestion would require that the distribution points be locally, but not elaborately, publicized.
- 5. <u>Expand the film library</u>, with emphasis on educational content and subjects of long-term value. The size of the present library should be sufficient justification in itself for adoption of this suggestion.
- 6. <u>Increase the educational</u> (as opposed to informational)<u>content</u> of Department publications. A start in this direction has been made in the "Issues" series. It should be added to other series publications.
- <u>Develop a regular series of "filler" materials</u>, for local newspaper use. If done effectively, these could replace much of the trivia now being carried by these papers.
- 8. Expand the television film clip and slide features program. Expansion is meant to include both number of stations subscribing and number of features produced.
- 9. Establish a service for local newspapers that will inform them of matters of foreign affairs interest that are about to occur within the newspapers' area of circulation and which they might wish to cover; e.g. local visits of educational and cultural exchange grantees or other foreign visitors of whom the Department is aware.
- 10.Enlist the aid of and coordinate public affairs activities with other Executive Branch agencies, having foreign affairs responsibilities, in maintaining direct contact with the public. AID, Commerce and USIA should be able to provide a great deal of input into the Community Meetings, Conferences and Speakers programs. Agriculture, DOD and DHEW should be able to provide inputs in specialized situations. The Department should not be reluctant to ask these agencies to share the financial burden of public affairs outreach because they will benefit from enhanced public understanding and appreciation.

My final recommendation is that all of the Bureau's present "public contact" activities be continued at nothing less than the present level. The public's current view of the activities of the official foreign affairs community is already in a state of serious and negative imbalance. Any reduction in public

contact is likely to increase that imbalance. Any serious increase in public misunderstanding of the foreign affairs activities and objectives of the United States Government can only detract from our ability to pursue

the national interest in the international arena.

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