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ABSTRACT

Public and congressional opinion of U.S. involvement in world affairs has begun shifting from support to opposition. Recent public opinion polls and congressional decisions such as the one to re-direct $100 million of the United States Information Agency's (USIA) budget to Midwest flood relief indicate waning advocacy for internationalism and a growing tendency toward isolationism. Lack of a clear understanding about the impact of international affairs programs has led to ebbing enthusiasm for such projects. The United States must maintain the international relations cultivated during and following the Cold War; the nation cannot separate its domestic economy and foreign policy by decreasing world involvement because it depends too much on foreign trade and resources. The notion that to rebuild the domestic economy the United States must direct its attention away from the outside world is challenged by several facts, including: (1) 1991 imports and exports comprised nearly one quarter of the Gross National Product; (2) 50 percent of overall growth since the mid-70s has been in exports; (3) one of every six manufacturing jobs in this country depends on exports; and (4) of all articles published recently in research and scientific journals worldwide, half were co-authored by people from countries other than the United States. Engagement with other countries is vital not only economically, but also because of the threat of other countries' ballistic missile, bacterial, and chemical weapons capabilities; migrations of large groups of people; and environmental threats such as global warming and acid rain. The mission of USIA and similar organizations is largely educational--specifically, to promote and spread democracy--and because a world of democratic nations is a more harmonious and thus safer one, continued support of internationalism by the United States is critical. (LP)

"Resisting the Isolationist Temptation"

Penn Kemble

Univerity of Pittsburgh

September 22, 1993

We're all looking forward to tonight's celebration of the International Visitors Program in Pittsburgh, which is one of our very successful councils -- not just in terms of our agency, but in terms of what it does for this community.

It was several months ago that I agreed to come here for this event, and to offer some remarks on "Resisting the Isolationist Temptation." I knew it would not be easy to persuade you that there is such a temptation and that it's one we have to resist.

I hope you'll congratulate us on a great public relations coup: arranging for the Khasbulatov-Yeltsin conflict to break out the day before I had to give the speech. It helps considerably in making my points.

This is not an audience to which these points most need to be made. I'll concentrate on some of the things we need to say to our fellow citizens during a rather confusing time, and some things that could prevent the undoing of valuable work that our country is engaged in the world.

There are those who argue that there is no risk of isolationism in the United States today. There was actually a very insightful article about this in the 75th anniversary issue

of Foreign Affairs Magazine by Daniel Yankelovich. He makes the case that the American public has learned down in its bones from the experience of two World Wars and a Cold War that the United States has to be engaged in the world, and that we have to lead.

It is true that in last year's presidential elections we saw that candidates who took a more or less pro-isolationist point of view, both on the right and the left, didn't really do well.

We don't have a movement in the country today like the America First movement of the 1930s in which a very highly organized and articulate group of American citizens campaigned against our involvement in the crisis in Europe.

But I do think something else is happening that we need to take very seriously. One sees evidence of it in some of the opinion polls.

In a recent Times-Mirror poll, for example -- taken in May of 1993 -- this question is asked: "Do you think it's best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs."

Back in May of 1992, 47 percent of the respondents to that identical question said, yes, they do feel strongly that the United States should be active in world affairs. But by May of this year, the proportion had fallen to 33 percent: from 47 to 33 percent.

That's not a drastic and irreversible change. But it's a significant change. And it's in other polls as well.

Gallup RSM took polls at about the same time as the Times-Mirror poll and asked the question: "Should the U.S. avoid becoming involved with other nations as much as possible?" Their response showed a somewhat smaller margin of change: 22 percent said yes to that question a year ago. But 27 percent said yes to it this year.

So what we see is not a tidal wave, a sea change in public opinion. But it may be a creeping, slow shift away from a kind of internationalism that has characterized American opinion for most of our memories.

Those of us who work on foreign affairs in Washington don't need pollsters to tell us that something is changing. We encounter it every day in our relations with Congress, with constituency groups, and even within our own administration when questions of resource allocation arise between domestic and foreign affairs.

Last month, for example, the Senate and House voted for drastic cuts in President Clinton's request for $620 million to fund United Nations peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, Somalia, Cambodia, and elsewhere. These were peacekeeping missions that we, the United States government, had urged the United Nations to

undertake. We just don't want to pay for it.

Budget planners have told our own agency that we may have to reduce our budget by as much as 15 percent for FY 1995. An agency of government like ours is really a kind of an organism, and to cut our budget by 15 percent is not a simple thing to do.

We're an organization that tries to maintain a worldwide presence around the globe. We're a network of information exchange, educational exchange. Taking 15 percent out of that is not an easy thing to do without in some radical ways altering the character and the vitality of the organization.

This summer, when the Midwest flood crisis was upon us, a group of Members of Congress came forward to propose that $100 million -- almost a fifth of our discretionary budget -- be taken from USIA to meet the needs of flood relief in the Midwest.

We agreed that there was a serious need for flood relief. But we weren't even asked by the members how a $100 million cut would affect our work. It was clear that Members of the United States Congress -- serious, thoughtful, decent people -- don't understand the work that we are engaged in the post-Cold War World.

Another example: the vote against the National Endowment for Democracy. This small government-funded foundation has

played a key role in making democratic changes happen in the world: Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. It gives small grants out to people in the independent media, helps with election monitors, trains human rights workers -- all sorts of things of this kind.

A Pennsylvania congressman, Paul Kanjorski, introduced a surprise motion on the floor of the House to zero out the National Endowment for Democracy. It won. And it has taken the best efforts of leaders of the House and Senate to mount an effort to bring it back. Even their best efforts may not succeed -- we don't know what's going to happen before this Congress is out.

These examples may suggest to you the volatility, the confusion, the lack of a clear understanding in our own Congress and in the wider public they represent about the impact that programs of the kinds that many of you here participate in in your local communities.

We need to be concerned that the international affairs programs of the United States Government stand on ever-weakening foundation. By the way, not co-incidentally, not just those of the United States Government, either. People in our international visitors councils can tell you that it is happening in areas of private philanthropy just as well. Even in some of our international education programs.

Our country has lost a clear sense of what we're about in the world, why we're out there. It is, really, just uncertainty: there are no villains so far as I can make out.

But when you have such uncertainty, you risk a death by a thousand little cuts. There's always something urgent that needs to be done with the resources we use, and that takes the time of the people we rely upon. Unless we get out there to present the rationale for why the things we do are worthwhile, our support will eventually evaporate.

Let me, then, offer some of the arguments that come to mind that might be aired in communities like Pittsburgh to enable people here better to understand why we need to be engaged with the wider world.

Let me make clear at the outset that we all recognize that the end of the Cold War means that we have to change fundamentally. We all recognize that there have got to be sometimes painful alterations in the work that our foreign affairs agencies do. Some of us, in fact, can legitimately be asked to reduce their budgets.

We are not resisting change; we know that change is needed. But we do believe that change must be accomplished in a purposive, intelligent, and responsible way. We worry that, because the Cold War is over, a kind of euphoric relaxation can

set in. And, before we know it, programs that are still of immense benefit to our country will be damaged in ways that may be irreparable.

In fact, there is a good case that if we take it on ourselves to change the work we do, and to explain the new missions that our programs and our agencies are taking on, we will gain people's hearing much more quickly than if we let it appear that we're just hanging on to old ideas and old resources.

What about the American economy? So often when we talk to people about the resource problems of an agency like USIA the answer is, "We can't spend money on your foreign programs because we need to have the resources to rebuild our economy at home."

That's the most frequent, the toughest, question we get. I think we ought to welcome that question, because we have a very effective answer to it.

Let me cite a few things about our economy at home, because, as President Clinton has said over and over again, today the strength of our domestic economy and the strength of our foreign policy are really two sides of the same coin. Today we cannot separate these two things in a way that we could back when our foreign trade and resource dependency was much, much smaller. In those days, Americans could say, "What do we need <u>them</u> for? We've got two oceans to hide behind, and all the resources that

we need for a strong economy right here in the U.S." But both we and the world have changed.

- In 1991 -- this is the last year I could get full data on -- imports and exports accounted for nearly a quarter of the U.S. gross national product. As economist Paul Krugman argues, "In the 1980's, many and perhaps most firms came either to rely heavily on export sales or, conversely, to face important foreign competitors here in our own domestic markets." We are increasingly a part of the world economy.

- The 1991 Economic Report of the President states that world trade has grown by more than one and a half times the rate of world income growth since the early 1960s, and that in 1970, exports accounted for 7 percent of our GNP. But by 1990 exports had grown to 13 percent of our GNP, effectively doubling. Now, that's 7 percent to 13 percent -- significant, but to you it may not sound huge.

- But what does that doubling of the export sector mean? When you look at the economic growth that we have enjoyed in this country since the mid-1970's, one can argue that 50 percent of our overall growth came from the growth that we've seen in our export sector.

- Despite the trade deficits that we hear so much about, the U.S. economy remains the world's largest exporter. One

manufacturing job out of every six in this country depends on exports.

- Our domestic interest rates are affected by highly liquid, global capital markets. The inflow of foreign capital to this country for quite a long period helped to sustain our economy at a time when our own savings and investment rates were very low.

- Our country is a leading source of investment overseas. We have a lot of overseas investment: $373 billion at the end of 1989.

- U.S. affiliates of foreign companies employed 3,682,000 people in the U.S. in 1988. That's approximately 3 percent of our civilian work force. And, of course, our companies employ large members of workers overseas.

- Especially interesting -- a fact that my wife, an economist, pointed out to me -- of all the articles published in research and scientific journals worldwide in the last few years, fifty percent were articles co-authored by people from different countries. So you have an internationalization of R&D; you have an internationalization of science and technology.

This recitation could go on and on. To say that we can

rebuild our domestic economy by turning away from the wider world is challenged very effectively by these kinds of figures. We are just too involved.

Now, to some people in our country, these kinds of international relationships are described as "dependencies." There is that word from the 1970s, "interdependency." It suggests weakness. It suggests a kind of vulnerability.

I think President Clinton made a very strong point in his speech in the White House last week when he argued that we ought not to be looking on these relationships as vulnerabilities, as something to be worried about. We ought to be looking on them as something that we can take advantage of. They provide opportunities for us. We have tremendous strengths in our economy. Getting out into the wider world is something that can bring us enormous benefits.

There are obviously other reasons besides economics that oblige us to sustain an engagement in the wider world.

One of them clearly is that the world remains a very dangerous and unstable place. Some 25 countries either now have or are well along in the development of ballistic missile capability; 22 have or are developing bacterial and chemical weapons capability. Even though we don't have the "evil empire" looming out there, we still have serious threats in the world.

There are reports that the Chinese are getting ready -- perhaps as soon as the vote of the International Olympic Committee is over -- to test a medium-range ballistic missile. When they have gotten it working, perhaps they'll sell it. Maybe they'll sell it to the outlaw states. So we still have a serious security problem.

Despite the settlement in the Middle East, we must not assume that terrorism is going to be eliminated from the world -- it may even increase.

Because of all the change and turmoil in the world, we now face enormous migrations of people. The advent of mass transportation and its accessibility to so many people have contributed to this. Migrations can be very painful things for the people who make them and sometimes also difficult for the people who take the newcomers in.

The kinds of environmental threats we often face today are often transnational -- depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, oil spills, acid rain. How can we solve these things if we don't have some kind of effective international relations? Most importantly -- this I say as a USIA partisan -- how can we solve them if we don't have relationships with the publics of other societies? After all, that it's not enough to be able to call Gorby or Shevy or Deng Xiaoping or whomever on the phone to deal with a problem. Even if you can convince them, you can't be

sure that they can deliver, or that they won't go back on their word.

But if you're able to develop a relationship to the publics in their countries, if you're able to inform people about what our interests are and what the real facts of a problem are, and if you're able to attain credibility in the eyes of those people, then you're able to have a much greater influence over what it is they will be willing to do.

We're at a very dangerous turning point in world affairs. Look around the world today, and we see that there has been a heroic, splendid movement toward democracy and economic freedom.

But it's not at all clear that the people emerging from under the ice of the Cold War are going to be able to shape the kind of a world that we will be comfortable in. Democracy is not something that's preprogrammed into the genes of all societies.

Democracy is a very fragile thing. It's brought into being by movements of people who have relationships with one another, and who must consciously struggle to sustain their values and their institutions.

Today around the world we see the collapse of old orders, but we haven't yet seen what is going to replace them. We do know, however, that whatever does come next won't just happen

mechanically. It will come about because people in the democratic world reach out to those in the new societies who share their values, and work with them to create new institutions.

That's what we at USIA do. That's what your international visitors program is all about. And that is arguably one of the most important thing we can be doing in our foreign policy today.

Today there is a real craving in much of the world -- not a craving for an abstraction called democracy, but a very practical interest in the particulars of freedom.

How does a city council work? How do you enforce a civil contract? How do you get business to advertise in your paper? How do you persuade different ethnic or religious groups to live together peacefully?

We can help these people enormously, not just by giving them technical explanations of how we do these things, but by letting them see our institutions and practices in action.

We're a country of ordinary people. We're not all counts, or the sons and daughters of the nomenclatura, or whatever. We're a country of people who came out of the dirt. When people in the new democracies see us doing these things, it makes a big, big impression.

So this is a time, as James Billington, our Librarian of Congress, has said, for us to go out to our communities "to make the hard case for what used to be called the soft stuff in foreign policy." This still makes a big difference.

It's no coincidence that the democracy revolution occurred at a time of unprecedented international communication. It occurred at a time of revolution in the technology of communication and broadcasting, fax machines, E-mail, digital broadcasting, VCRs. This communication among peoples was a principal factor in breaking down the isolation and the intimidation peoples in closed societies faced.

So we have a very powerful case to make, first, for the achievements of the kind of work we do and, secondly, for the potential that this work has for peoples engaged in democratic transformation today.

We also have a very powerful case to make for the benefits here at home of engagement with the people engaged in building free societies elsewhere.

Huge new markets are opening. Horace Greeley said, "Go West, young man;" today it it's "Go East."

What ever happened to the Yankee peddler? Why aren't we out in the new markets the way the Japanese are, the way the Germans

are, looking for people to sell our goods to, helping them to become familiar with our ways of doing business, and with our way of life? If we're going to survive and prosper as an economy, that's what we're going to have to do.

Bringing these people here and going out there to meet them is not something we're doing as gratuitous do-gooding for the sake of "international understanding." This is serious work. This is what helped bring down the wall, and this is going to play a very big part in building up our economy in the future.

We at USIA feel that the American public is ready for this message. There was a long period when we were a little reluctant to go out and explain ourselves to the American public. We certainly didn't want to involve our foreign visitors in anything that anyone would say was politicized by the issues of the Cold War.

But today we're in a different situation. We don't have the Cold War, and we have a broad range of leaders -- from Democrats such as President Clinton and our Congressional leaders to leading Republicans such as Richard Lugar and Newt Gingrich -- who believe that we need to continue our engagement in the world. We need to change that engagement, but we need to continue it.

Now people like you have got to go out and put your case on the table at the local level, to the editorial boards, to the

city councils, to business, labor and religious leaders. We've got to get out there so that the local congressmen, the state legislatures, the people who finance the kind of work that you're involved at this center and that your international visitors committee understand what you do and support it. It's going to take leadership on your part.

There will be those who challenge us. There'll be people who say that you are frittering away money, and that you're involved in nothing more than "meetin' and eatin'", and all of that.

Too often the decent and serious people in our public life are not very effective. They've got the good arguments, they've got the track record for work, but they aren't willing to stand up on their hind legs and make their case. That's something we all have to worry about.

If we don't do that, our country is going to miss an enormous opportunity -- one of the golden opportunities of human history. The age of totalitarianism seems to be over. But too often when the United States doesn't step up and take responsibility, evil things happen in the world. That's what happened to us after World War I. We stepped back. We let things go. And we got World War II.

But after World War II, we got involved. Truman,

Vandenberg, Taft -- they got together. They put together these committees, Crusade for Europe, President Truman's "Truth Campaign." Freedom House, where I used to work. They stayed involved. And, because of that, democracy succeeded.

Those are choices that we face again today.

Thank you very much.