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**United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Office of Inspector General**

# Report of Inspection

## **U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program Review Bureau of International Information Programs**

**Report Number ISP-C-06-52, September 2006**

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

- In response to a Congressional request, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) examined whether there was a “litmus test” for speaker selection in the U.S. Speaker Specialist Program. OIG determined that no such test exists.
- In the past, there was undue attention to the speaker selection process, resulting in Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) staff self-censorship in the vetting and selection of speakers.
- Current public diplomacy leadership in the Department of State (Department) has changed the intent of vetting speakers and places emphasis on a realistic balance in the selection of speakers.
- The Strategic Speakers Initiative (SSI) is a new concept with great potential and should continue as a more focused stand-alone program to allow articulation on strategic policy issues.
- There is a continuing need for the development of a speakers’ evaluation matrix that can be the basis for program analysis and a management tool at all levels.
- Many individuals within IIP continue to view themselves as separate from the Department, which has an adverse impact on maximizing the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program potential.
- The IIP nonbureaucratic structure (coordinator and deputy coordinators in lieu of assistant secretary and deputy assistant secretaries) continues to have an adverse impact on the effective conduct and coordination of IIP public diplomacy services and programs. As recommended in OIG’s 2004 inspection report, the Department should consult with Congress on IIP’s structure. Action has been transferred to the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

The review took place in Washington, DC, between July 10 and August 4, 2006. James Dandridge (team leader) and Marjorie Lynch conducted the inspection.



## CONTEXT

IIP engages international audiences on issues of foreign policy, society, and values to create an environment that can be receptive to U.S. national interests. In order to accomplish this, IIP provides leadership to the Department, the field, and the interagency community to develop and implement public diplomacy strategies that influence international audiences through quality programs and cutting edge technologies.

IIP communicates with foreign opinion makers and other publics through a wide range of print and electronic outreach materials published in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Persian, Russian, and Spanish. IIP also provides information outreach support to U.S. embassies and consulates in more than 140 countries worldwide.

The U.S. Speaker and Specialist program is the largest of 11 programs that represent a mix of products and services to engage foreign public opinion. The program enables communication between individual U.S. citizens, who represent a broad range of responsible and informed opinion in the United States, and key foreign audiences. The program awards grants to U.S. experts to present lectures, serve as consultants, or conduct workshops and seminars for professional audiences. The program applies the intellectual and creative competence of those U.S. citizens to public diplomacy issues identified by U.S. missions abroad through the Mission Performance Plan (MPP) process. Participants travel to one or more foreign countries or participate in an electronic audio or videoconference. To maximize this benefit, the program maintains an active commitment to casting as wide a net as possible to attract new participants.

In FY 2005, 731 U.S. speakers traveled throughout countries in all regions to conduct around 1,000 programs. Speakers in Washington, DC, and other parts of the United States appeared in 480 digital videoconferences and 15 telepress conferences.

Although IIP provides a series of important public diplomacy services and products, it is not listed in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 1-series as an integral foreign affairs bureau in the Department. Its leadership structure is designated as coordinator, principal deputy coordinator, and deputy assistant coordinators in lieu of the usual assistant secretary and deputy assistant secretary structure.



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

IIP has undergone several permutations under a series of leaders since its inception in 1994 when it was part of the former U.S. Information Agency. Its unique structure, combined with its remote location from the Department, has detracted from its important role in the Department's diplomatic activities. OIG's July 2004 inspection report, ISP-I-04-31, recommended that the Department confer with Congress to bring IIP's structure in line with the rest of the Department by designating the IIP leadership as assistant secretary and deputy assistant secretaries. The continued use of the designations of coordinator and deputy coordinators is perceived, rightly or not, as implying less than equal standing among Department bureaus. This impedes the acceptance of its products and services within the Department.

IIP has been the victim of frequent transitional leadership. Staff morale was not enhanced with the uncertainty of the in-and-out flow of coordinators and acting coordinators. A past coordinator established his office in the Harry S Truman building in order to be "near the action." Although his intentions were to have an IIP presence in the main Department building and boost the bureau's visibility, this had a deleterious impact on the IIP staff. Many of the staff neither knew nor could recognize him.

The current Department leadership has designated an acting IIP coordinator who has established his office in SA-44 along with the rest of the bureau. The immediate positive impact is perceptible. He has set about realigning the bureau around its services and products rather than, as in the past, attempting to configure programs around a dysfunctional structure. He is making a major change in the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program by bringing all of its disparate components into one office within the bureau. He has the complete support of the current public diplomacy leadership, which is enabling him to bring in an experienced senior officer to realign the operations of the important speakers program.

Many speaker staff believed they were previously operating in an atmosphere of undue caution, resulting in self-censorship in the speakers' program selection process, as detailed in this report. The current office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R) allows the professional operations of the capable speakers staff to operate without undue external influence in its day-to-day activities.





## **POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

### **CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY - SPEAKER SELECTION PROCESS**

OIG received a Congressional inquiry expressing concern with the observations and recommendations in OIG's 2004 inspection report on the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. The inquiry further requested a review of a press report's allegations of the Department's use of an "ideological litmus test to screen speakers" in the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program.

Past R leadership questioned some speakers' ideological credentials, less than five out of more than 1,000 speaker programs, and this contributed to a series of internal IIP management reactions. These reactions were manifested in some cases in poor management decisions that influenced the speaker selection processes during a period of heightened national security concerns. Although there were no expressed or established "ideological litmus tests," or "black or white lists," an atmosphere of extreme caution and self-censorship in the selection processes was created. Previous IIP management had encouraged the speakers program to employ "due diligence" in its selection of speakers. This meant vetting speaker candidates' public statements or publications that appeared to run counter to Administration policies. Several speaker program officers and reference specialists did so regardless of whether speaker candidates' personal opinions had a bearing on the topical issues for which they were being considered for recruitment. Others, in an effort to maintain "balance" unrealistically, suggested recommending two ideologically different speakers for a program in which only one speaker had been requested.

The operative regulations –10 FAM 688.2-1.a – used during this period, clearly stated that speakers should be "selected on the basis of the quality of their credentials, their ability to communicate, and the relevance of their potential contributions to mission performance plan objectives, they are not limited to the expression of U.S. government policies." Although some IIP employees were acting on the margins of this proviso, there was no ideological motivation; rather, it was done in an attempt to "maintain program balance." Nevertheless, it resulted in virtual censorship in the speaker selection process.

The current public diplomacy leadership expressly conveyed support for a “realistic balanced selection of speakers representing a diversity of opinion on policy issues” to the acting coordinator upon his assumption of the position in December 2005. The acting coordinator has committed to convey this to every officer responsible for communication products and services throughout the bureau. He also agreed that the ongoing realignment of the speakers program provides an opportunity to start with a fresh slate for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program.

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should issue a written policy statement and guidelines for the selection of speakers based on the quality of their credentials, their ability to communicate, and the relevance of their potential contributions to mission performance plan objectives regardless of their personal opinions on policy issues. (Action: IIP)

Philosophical differences exist over the responsibility for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. Several officers in IIP said that the speakers program is an IIP program executed by the missions with final approval authority resting with IIP. On the other hand, previous 10 FAM 688.1-a, and current 10 FAM 353.1 state that programs are driven by issues identified by U.S. missions abroad. The FAM supports the concept of the bureau providing services and product support to missions through their MPP processes. The IIP speakers’ manual quotes 10 FAM 688.2-1.c, “The final decision to program a candidate [speaker] always rests with the mission.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, in the same manual, it contradicts itself by stating, “...the final decision to accept the speaker always rests with IIP.”<sup>2</sup> This latter interpretation supports the stated belief by several IIP employees that Washington, and not the missions, strictly controls IIP’s products and services. Several employees also stated, “We make the final decision on the use of our I-Bucks [IIP allocations for products and services], and if they [the missions] want to use somebody else [speakers] then they can pay for it out of their own government operating expenses.” These philosophical misunderstandings reflect a need for closer coordination between IIP and the regional bureaus for more consistency and seamless conduct of the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program in support of the MPP processes at missions.

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<sup>1</sup>The U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program: Section II. Selection - Recruitment

<sup>2</sup>The U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program: Section IV. Process:IIP/T - Recruitment

**Recommendation 2:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should include the regional bureaus in the redesign and realignment of the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program to ensure coordinated delineation of responsibilities between the missions and the bureau. (Action: IIP)

## **STRATEGIC SPEAKERS INITIATIVE**

OIG's 2004 inspection report noted that the current speaker selection processes in place at that time precluded adequate strategic focus of the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program to more proactively address policy issues (Recommendation 27). OIG recommended a senior level review to ensure that the program meets the needs of policy articulation at missions abroad.

In response, the principal deputy coordinator convened a task force of senior leadership and IIP managers of the speakers program. Task force members consulted with all of the public diplomacy stakeholders in the Department, other U.S. government agencies, and private sector experts on program direction and content. Stakeholders were highly satisfied with the current model of recruiting speakers in response to MPP goals but welcomed the bureau's increasing emphasis on identifying themes and individuals who could focus on strategic policy issues.

IIP, in close coordination with R staff, conceptualized a strategic focus for the speakers program in November 2005. The idea was to better align the annual 1,000 traveling and electronic speaker programs with the Secretary's strategic policy goals. The original concept was to:

- Identify five to ten core strategic themes supporting the President's freedom agenda and other foreign policy priority objectives;
- Identify high-profile countries on selected themes;
- Focus on high-priority countries and regions, tailoring program efforts to simultaneously fulfill local and Administration needs; and
- Reallocate a portion of speaker program funds from individual missions.

In February 2006, IIP asked regional bureaus to participate in the pilot Strategic Speakers Initiative (SSI), an initiative of R. The idea was to strengthen collaboration between IIP and the regional bureaus in planning and executing the bureau's single largest program. Regional bureaus' missions were asked to "...think big—we want the SSI to have an impact in your country that goes beyond the ordinary." Missions were also told that SSI would be centrally funded by IIP and would not draw on the existing I-Bucks (IIP budgets for the missions). There were 146 separate program requests. Approximately a quarter of the requests were for prominent names: Tom Friedman, J.C. Watts, Oprah Winfrey, Jimmy Carter, Bill Gates, John McCain, Colin Powell, Al Gore, James Baker, Richard Lugar, to name a few.

The program was launched in April 2006, in the middle of the program year. According to revised budget allocations, 25 percent of the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program funding was immediately set aside from the IIP budget for SSI. This amounted to about \$1.2 million. Although the amount set aside was supposedly taken exclusively from the speakers program, it was in fact from the total I-Bucks allocation for all IIP products and services support at missions, which included the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. As seen in the table below, \$1,182,465 was allocated for SSI (funds set aside), but only \$353,721 had been obligated for SSI programs by July 21, 2006. Subsequent to this examination of the I-Bucks allocations, IIP stated that it expects to have 90 SSI programs (each averaging \$10,193) by the end of the fiscal year for a total of \$917,370. IIP also stated that it has obligated \$30,000 for Citizen Dialogues (a subcomponent of SSI) for Europe, plus \$40,000 for pending Citizen Dialogues for South and Central Asia. IIP's anticipated obligation by the end of the fiscal year is \$987,000.

**IIP I-BUCK ALLOCATIONS (FY 2006 Funding in Dollars)**

<b>Geographic Area Office</b>	<b>Initial Base Allocations</b>	<b>25% Realignment For SSI*</b>	<b>Final Allocations</b>	<b>SSI Obligations (As of 7/21/06)</b>
AF	942,016	(235,504)	706,512	113,594
EAP	956,615	(239,154)	717,461	88,811
EUR	1,229,804	(307,451)	922,353	58,437
NEA	480,898**	(120,224)	360,674	25,849
SA	354,433	(88,608)	265,825	10,858
WHA	766,096	( 191,524)	574,572	56,172
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,729,862</b>	<b>(1,182,465)</b>	<b>3,547,397<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>353,721</b>

<sup>3</sup>\*Strategic Speaker Initiative. \*\*30,000 earmarked for Libya was not taxed for SSI.

This program is still in its infancy, having been launched in the middle of the current program year. So far none of the proposed high-level personalities has been recruited. Nevertheless, missions were willing to reach into their mission budgets to support such initiatives if “out of the ordinary” speakers were recruited. The reality is the current SSI speakers’ selection is operating from within the standard U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program list of speakers.

The SSI concept is excellent and has great potential to provide the Department with a flexible tool for focused articulation of strategic policy issues. However, although the concept was enthusiastically launched, detailed planning required for a program of this magnitude and importance was omitted.

SSI is still undergoing development and has been given a high priority within the realigned U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program office. The planning stages for this important program are still needed:

- Reexamine and develop a limited list of Washington critical strategic issues;
- Identify and recruit high-level speaker participants;
- In coordination with regional bureaus, select a focused group of countries for each of the issues; and
- Set aside a smaller portion of the I-Bucks to continue a well thought out bridge pilot program in the next fiscal year.

In the meantime, IIP should continue to bring the regional bureaus into the ongoing planning processes in the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program to allow for closer coordination with the separate MPP driven program so that the programs are mutually complementary.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should research and plan the Strategic Speakers Initiative in coordination with regional bureaus and missions and continue a bridge pilot program in the next fiscal year with a smaller funding allocation. (Action: IIP)

## **SPEAKERS EVALUATION**

While IIP tracks the impact of the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program using a database known as RESULTS, more can be done to adapt RESULTS to a more meaningful management tool that would permit quantification. The RESULTS database is web based and serves as a repository of public diplomacy activities and accomplishments. Missions or Washington offices can make entries in narrative form. Reports can be generated using a variety of searches such as by country or type of program.

IIP's Office of Strategic Communication is the lead for evaluating the programs, products, and activities of the bureau. Evaluations are conducted with reference to the Bureau Performance Plan, the Government Performance and Results Act, the President's Management Agenda, and the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool. As such, it has responsibility for evaluating the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program.

The 2004 inspection report of the bureau recommended (Recommendation 28) developing a report format to evaluate the performance of individuals participating in the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. In the report's discussion of the subject, a computer template that mission officers could complete in 10 to 15 minutes was suggested. Reporting in RESULTS is not quantified, making comparisons between individual speakers and types of programs cumbersome. Moreover, composing the narrative entries is not a 10 to 15 minute process. The narrative descriptions do incorporate specific elements of how programs helped or did not help to achieve MPP goals. The reconstructed format does require uniform responses. Nevertheless, there are 13 entries, six of which are in narrative format. They also serve a need for and have value in gaining an understanding of a speaker and/or a program for possible future use.

To fully gauge program effectiveness, it is imperative to have a method of accumulating and manipulating empirical data that can provide comparative results. Developing a template for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program, with a rating system giving numerical values within an established range to a series of criteria such as preparation, articulation, audience response, knowledge of subject matter, and others would be a useful management tool. Restructuring RESULTS to provide the extra dimension of quantification would be beneficial to IIP and for the Department at large. The U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program could be a pilot for possible later expansion to other public diplomacy programs and services.

**Recommendation 4:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should adapt its RESULTS database to incorporate a template permitting quantification of critical data for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. (Action: IIP)

The RESULTS database is a valuable resource for IIP and the Department as the only repository for Department-wide public diplomacy program reporting. IIP is reviewing and questioning whether RESULTS is fulfilling its intent. IIP should proceed with this review with the goal of strengthening its effectiveness as a universal reporting repository.





# RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

## RESOURCES

<b>Bureau of International Information Programs Resources</b>	
<b>Staffing<sup>4</sup></b>	
Civil Service	213
Foreign Service	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Funding</b>	
IIP Appropriation, direct	\$22,697,000
IIP Appropriation, reimbursement	199,000
Foreign Affairs Reorganization Appropriation	4,594,103
Information Technology Systems	1,860,432
Emergency Wartime Supplemental (FY 2003-04)	2,550,000
Emergency Supplemental (FY 2002-03)	1,450,000
Freedom Support Act	340,000
Support for Eastern European Democracy Programs	1,413,315
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$35,103,850</b>

Staff resources for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program are dispersed, and employees answer to no one person or office responsible for the entire program. Employees are divided between thematic and geographic programs divisions. For example, the thematic programs division is made up of offices devoted to a particular subject issue such as economic security and not to a program. In the meantime, the geographic programs' offices are devoted to a geographic region. The employees are then further subdivided between multiple offices within each of these major divisions. Lastly, individuals within the offices often have responsibility for multiple programs, only one of which may be the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. An example of this is a geographic program officer for a region, who also acts as a mission's liaison for all IIP programs, products, and services.

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<sup>4</sup>Staffing figures are incomplete in that they show only direct hire personnel. Information on term appointments, students, interns, when actually employed staff, special government employees, and contractors was not provided.

Financial responsibility rests with the joint Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs/IIP executive office, which maintains the official records. Within geographic programs, regional program officers also keep cuff records to track fund allocations for countries within their portfolios. The clarity and completeness of these records vary.

As discussed in the Executive Direction section of the report, the establishment of one office with full responsibility for the entire U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program, which is included in the proposed realignment of IIP, will improve overall management of all aspects of the program including resources. Because of ongoing plans for the realignment, this report makes no recommendation regarding resource management. The unified office is expected to address the weaknesses noted above.

## FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should issue a written policy statement and guidelines for the selection of speakers based on the quality of their credentials, their ability to communicate, and the relevance of their potential contributions to mission performance plan objectives regardless of their personal opinions on policy issues. (Action: IIP)

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**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should research and plan the Strategic Speakers Initiative in coordination with regional bureaus and missions and continue a bridge pilot program in the next fiscal year with a smaller funding allocation. (Action: IIP)

**Recommendation 4:** The Bureau of International Information Programs should adapt its RESULTS database to incorporate a template permitting quantification of critical data for the U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program. (Action: IIP)



## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Arrival</u>
Coordinator	Jeremy Curtin (Acting)	12/05
Principal Deputy Coordinator	Jeremy Curtin	12/05
Deputy Coordinator/Thematic Programs	Judith Siegel	10/99
Deputy Coordinator/Geographic Programs	Janet Garvey	06/06
Office Director/Strategic Communications	Joel Fischman (Acting)	07/05



## ABBREVIATIONS

Department	Department of State
I-Bucks	IIP Products and Services Post Budget
IIP	Bureau of International Information Programs
MPP	Mission Performance Plan
OIG	Office of Inspector General
R	Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs
SSI	Strategic Speakers Initiative