President Ronald Reagan
Oral History Project

Briefing Materials

Charles Z. Wick
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Charles Z. Wick Timeline

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1950s


Charles Wick and Ralph Evinrude found United Convalescent Hospitals. (Snyder, p. 5)

Wick founds Mapleton Enterprises.


1979


The Wicks orchestrate a 1,600-person dinner at which Reagan formally announces his candidacy for the presidency. (Peter Hannaford, The Reagans: A Political Portrait, New York: Coward-McCann, 1983, p. 214, 219)

1980


During the transition, Wick becomes a member of the Executive Advisory Committee, which is headed by Reagan campaign manager William Casey and includes Dean Burch, Jack Marsh, and Clifton White. He also serves on the Presidential Appointments Committee. (The Washington Post, 11/20/1980)

1981

February

Wick organizes a coalition of roughly 500 Reagan supporters into a group named the Coalition for a New Beginning. The group discusses ways to

...
secure congressional approval of the Administration’s economic program.  

**March**  
The White House shuts down the Coalition for a New Beginning.  

Reagan nominates Wick to be the Director of the United States  
International Communications Agency.  

**September**  
Wick signs an agreement with Chinese Communist Party Deputy  
Chairman Deng Xiaoping for a cultural exchange program between the  
U.S. and China.  

**December**  
Wick selects Norman Podhoretz to head an ICA advisory committee to  
“press the American case more effectively and with more relevance  
abroad.”  

Wick meets with White House Communications Director David Gergen  
and a group of neo-conservative intellectuals.  They discuss Wick’s idea  
for a United States Information Agency (USIA) television satellite show  
that would encourage the development of democracy and highlight the  
failings of communism in Poland.  Gergen agrees to write a memo to  
presidential adviser Edwin Meese, White House Chief of Staff James  
Baker, and Deputy Chief of Staff Mike Deaver, endorsing the idea.  
(Snyder, p. 7)

1982

**January**  
Wick directs the preparation of an hour-long documentary, “Let Poland be  
Poland.”  Some diplomats express concern that the piece is a “heavy-  
handed propaganda” tool.  

**April**  
Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands confers on Wick the rank of Grand  
Officer of the Order of Orange-Nassau.

Wick asks the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for an additional  
$161.7 million for the Voice of America (VOA) project.  Wick contends  
the project is “waging a war of ideas with our adversaries.”  

**July**  
Wick travels to the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies  
where he meets with Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo.
August  The International Communication Agency is officially renamed the United States Information Agency.

September  Wick writes a memo recommending that USIA make a “major effort to suggest that State and/or the White House grind out information to the world every time a Soviet defector leaves, there is a crop failure,” or any other negative event happens. The memo spurs USIA’s development of the Worldnet satellite system. (Snyder, pp. 73-80)

Wick announces the establishment of the President’s Council for International Youth Exchange. The program is expected to bring 15,000 foreign students to the U.S. (The New York Times, 11/28/1982)

1983

January  Wick serves as a member of a committee created by Reagan to promote U.S. diplomatic, military, and arms control strategies among NATO allies. Other members of the group include Secretary of State George Shultz, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Agency for International Development Administrator Peter McPherson, and national security adviser William P. Clark, the committee’s chair. (The New York Times, 1/20/1983)

August  As Reagan’s Personal Representative to the Presidential Commission for the German-American Tricentennial, Wick takes part in the activities commemorating the 300th anniversary of the first German settlement in the U.S. (The New York Times, 8/15/1983)

A Russian Sukhou-15 fighter shoots down a Korean airliner traveling over restricted Soviet airspace. Wick orders his top aides to form a task force to devise strategies for publicizing the event abroad. (Snyder, pp. 45-46)

October  Reagan signs legislation authorizing Radio Martí.

Wick attends the UNESCO General Conference in Paris.

1984

January  Congress begins inquiries into allegations that Wick tapes his telephone conversations. Reagan expresses his full support of Wick, saying “I don’t think Charles Wick is a dishonorable man in any way.” (The New York Times, 1/7/1984)

February  Congressional Democrats criticize USIA for allegedly compiling a “blacklist” of persons thought to be too liberal to speak for the agency abroad. Reagan spokesman Larry Speakes says, “The White House does
not condone any blacklist…We’ve communicated our displeasure to USIA.” USIA Acting Deputy Director Leslie Lenkowsky says he killed the blacklist as soon as he learned of it and that Wick never knew about the list. (The Washington Post, 2/10/1984)

March  President Karl Carstens of the Federal Republic of Germany awards Wick the Republic’s Knight Commander’s Cross with Star and Ribbon.

May  Lenkowsky is denied confirmation as Deputy Director of USIA by an 11-6 vote. (The Washington Post, 5/16/1984)

November  Reagan is reelected.

1985

March  Wick approves an initial proposal to train Afghan mujahideen to videotape and report on the fighting in Afghanistan. (Snyder, pp. 206-212)

April  USIA begins daily satellite broadcasts to Western Europe and Japan. (The Christian Science Monitor, 5/16/1985)

Wick calls Reagan’s decision to visit a Bitburg cemetery a “tragedy.” He warns that “the Russians are going to have a field day” publicizing Reagan’s visit to the cemetery in which S.S. soldiers are buried. (Lou Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, p. 514; The Washington Post, 4/25/1985)

May  Reagan names Marvin Stone Deputy Director of USIA. Stone comes into the office after an almost one-year vacancy. (San Francisco Chronicle, 5/15/1985)

Radio Marti begins its broadcasts to Cuba on the 20th. (Green, p. 196)

July  Wick warns that the Soviet Union is outspending the U.S. six-to-one in the “war of ideas.” He asks Congress for a 22 percent increase in the USIA budget to pay for the modernization of the VOA, Worldnet, and other projects. (San Francisco Chronicle, 7/13/1985)

November  Wick attends the Geneva Summit at which the U.S. and Soviet Union sign the General Exchanges Agreement. The agreement’s purpose is to foster increased educational and cultural ties between the two countries.
1986

February  Radio Marti expands its broadcasts from 14.4 hours a day to 17.5 hours a day.


L. Paul Bremer, the State Department’s chief terrorism expert, reportedly arranges with Wick for VOA’s farsi service to air an editorial praising Iran. The editorial is broadcast for three days. (The Washington Post, 1/31/1987)

October  King Hassan of Morocco awards Wick with the Order of the Throne.

Wick and almost 40 public relations specialists travel to Reykjavik for a Reagan-Gorbachev summit. Wick meets with Aleksandr Yakovlev, the Soviet Communist Party secretary in charge of information. The two reach an agreement to end Soviet jamming of VOA broadcasts in exchange for Soviet access to the American AM audience. (Snyder, pp.164-172; The Seattle Times, 10/30/1986)

November  Wick leads a U.S. delegation to a seven-nation conference sponsored by the President’s Board of Advisors on Private Sector Initiatives.

1987

February  Reagan selects John O. Koehler, Wick’s special adviser and consultant, to be his new communications director. (The Christian Science Monitor, 2/20/1987)

April  Wick receives the award of the Order of Duarte, Sanchez y Mella, Gran oficial grade, while in the Dominican Republic.

May  For the first time in seven years the Soviet Union stops jamming Voice of America radio broadcasts. At the same time, the Soviet Union begins broadcasts to the U.S. from Cuba using the 1040AM frequency assigned to the U.S. by the International Telecommunications Union. (The New York Times, 5/26/1987; St. Petersburg Times, 5/28/1987)

June  Wick meets again with Yakovlev and other Soviet officials. He breaks off talks with the Soviets when he learns of a dispatch from the Novosti news agency claiming the CIA has a biological weapon designed to be lethal to non-Caucasians. (The Associated Press, 6/5/1987; The Seattle Times, 6/6/1987)
October Thirty-four countries send representatives to the first meeting of the USIA International Council.

December Wick leads a three-hour meeting with Soviet information officials and press during a Reagan-Gorbachev summit.

1988


June Voice of America officials says that Soviet authorities have agreed informally to permit the opening of the first VOA bureau in Moscow. (San Francisco Chronicle, 6/16/1988)

July Wick says he will recommend that the U.S. terminate its participation in the Beirut Agreement—an international treaty governing the exchange of educational materials—if a U.S. District Court upholds a ruling that strikes down USIA’s attempts to regulate foreign distribution of documentary films. (Los Angeles Times, 7/28/1988)

August Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) television begins transmissions.

September Wick announces that recent attacks against USIA facilities in South Korea will not interrupt operations. (Japan Economic Newswire, 9/21/1988)

For the first time, the Soviet Union gives permission for the VOA to station a correspondent in Moscow. The news is given to Wick during a visit to the Soviet Union. (San Francisco Chronicle, 9/29/1988)

November George H. W. Bush is elected president.

1989

January Reagan awards Wick the Presidential Citizen’s Medal.

Wick leaves USIA on the 20th.

February Wick establishes Charles Z. Wick and Associates to provide expertise in the field of international communications.

1991 The Wicks serve as leading fundraisers on the Board of Trustees of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation, which runs the Reagan Presidential Library. (The Washington Post, 8/1/1991)
The Early Years with Reagan
- How did you come to know the Reagans?
- At what point did you become involved in Ronald Reagan’s political career?
- What made you decide to become involved in his political career?

The 1980 and 1984 Campaigns
- What role did you play in the 1980 campaign?
- When and why did you decide to commit yourself full-time to the campaign?
- How much input did Reagan have into fundraising efforts in the 1980 and 1984 campaigns?
- On which aspects of the campaign did Reagan focus the most? Did this change during the 1984 campaign?
- Did President Reagan plan to run for a second term from the beginning of his time in office or was this a decision made during his first term as president?
- Were you involved in the 1984 campaign?

1980 Transition
- Discuss your roles as a member of the Executive Advisory Committee and the Presidential Appointments Committee during the transition from the Carter to the Reagan Administration.
- Describe your relationships with Edwin Meese, James Pendleton and other key players in the transition.

United States Information Agency
- How did you come to be appointed USIA Director?
- Were you given a particular mandate when taking office at USIA or did you have free reign to set USIA’s agenda?
- What were your priorities upon taking office? Were there any specific changes that you wanted to be made immediately?
- Discuss the major events at USIA under your watch (Worldnet, Radio Martí, RAIS-TV Berlin, Artistic Ambassador Program, International Youth Exchange Initiative).
- Discuss the nature and frequency of your interaction with President Reagan in your position as USIA director.
- How interested was Reagan in the activities and the mission of USIA?
- What do you consider your greatest accomplishment as USIA Director?

The Reagans
- As a long-time friend of the Reagans you have a unique perspective on the evolution of Reagan’s political career. How did Reagan change over the years? How did his leadership style and priorities change? How did his political ideology change
from the California years to his second term in the White House?

• What role did Mrs. Reagan play in President Reagan’s political career? How did her role change during his time as Governor of California and over his two terms as president?

• How did the assassination attempt on President Reagan affect the Reagans?

• Was Reagan a natural-born politician?

• What, if any, were Reagan’s most serious disappointments while in office. How did Reagan react to these disappointments? How did they affect his self-confidence?

• How did Reagan handle conflict among his senior staff? For example, what did he think of Weinberger and Shultz’s differences over the role of the U.S. as a superpower?

The Reagan Presidency in Retrospect

• What features of the Reagan presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press?

• How effective was Reagan as a public leader, a legislative leader, a foreign policy leader, and a party leader?

• How should the Reagan presidency be viewed in history?
TIMELINES


SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY CHARLES Z. WICK


1980 ELECTION AND TRANSITION


UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY

USIA


  For response to this editorial see tab 5, “Selected Writings and Public Statements of Charles Wick,” for:


Soviet Union


**Worldnet**

**Voice of America**

**Radio Marti**

**RIAS-TV**

**Miscellaneous**