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InterMedia Research Institute

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978-1-58901-942-3



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Washington, DC • www.press.georgetown.edu

# PERSUASION AND POWER

## THE ART OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



**JAMES P. FARWELL**

Foreword by **JOHN J. HAMRE**



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## Foreword

The late Senator Russell Long once told a story, making fun of his own experience. It seems that two different cities in Louisiana were competing for a federal project. A delegation from each city contacted his office asking for his special help to sway the process in their favor. Senator Long's scheduling secretary became confused, not realizing there were competing delegations. She arranged for both city delegations to meet with Senator Long at precisely the same time. Senator Long walked into the meeting, and, realizing the peril in the situation, drew upon his vast reservoir of humor: "Look here, friends. If you want me to agree with you, you are going to have to come in here separately."

This rather simple story contains vast wisdom for our age. We live in a time when it is no longer possible to take two different positions to a problem, thinking they will never be exposed to reconciliation over time. There was perhaps a time when differing messages could be offered to different audiences to no ill effect. This is no longer the case. In an era of global and near-instantaneous communications, there is no practical way to segment different themes to one's motives or actions.

Democratic governments have an inherent problem: they need to undertake some activities of state in secrecy. But democracies ultimately have to take all matters to the public for open debate. Private, secret actions may represent an initiative of an administration, but they do not represent a commitment of the nation until they are forged through public debate into a national consensus. The so-called WikiLeaks controversy in 2010 was illuminating. Tens of thousands of secret cables were suddenly released to newspapers for public display. Importantly, there were no disconnects between secret policy and public debate. Certainly, there were important details in the secret cables, and sometimes salacious details that would be embarrassing when exposed to the public. But there was no fundamental disconnect in our secret diplomacy and our public debate about national intents and purposes. The WikiLeaks incident demonstrated a fundamental integrity in American democracy, where our secret diplomacy was fully faithful to our democracy.