Total Cold War Roundtable Review
Introduction by Scott Lucas, University of Birmingham

Reviewed Work:

Roundtable Chair: Scott Lucas
Reviewers: Sarah-Jane Corke, Chris Tudda, and Hugh Wilford.
H-Diplo Roundtable Editor: George Fujii

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Introduction by Scott Lucas, University of Birmingham

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Osgood and all the discussants for a stimulating exchange that I am certain will not only further debate on the concept of “psychological operations” but also lead to re-interpretation of U.S. foreign policy in the early Cold War.

Ten years ago “information services”, if they received any recognition, were an adjunct to areas of historical concern. There were some good, if dated, studies such as Wilson Dizard’s insider history of the United States Information Agency and excellent but often overlooked surveys of Radio Free Europe by Robert Holt and Sig Mickelson.1 These stood apart, however, from opening approaches to the cultural prosecution of the Cold War, namely Frank Ninkovich’s *The Diplomacy of Ideas*, or ideological constructions of the conflict, for example, the overview offered by Michael Hunt.2 Re-conception of U.S. foreign policy was still dominated by, some might argue hostage to, “national security” and its ongoing contest with the foe of “economic hegemony”.

It was then, possibly because of openings offered by the supposed end of the Cold War, possibly in response to the prevailing discourses of “what we now knew”, possibly by happenstance, that a number of studies began to place “information” in broader analytic contexts. In the United States, Walter Hixson published *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* and there were studies of specific initiatives from


Penny Van Eschen on the promotion of jazz to Michael Krenn on the framing of American art. In Europe, Reinhold Wagnleitner’s *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War* and Frances Stonor Saunders’ provocative narrative on the C.I.A. and the cultural Cold War intersected with a series of articles and monographs on the “State-private network” from Hugh Wilford’s readings of the non-Communist left and the Agency to Giles Scott-Smith’s critique of the Congress for Cultural Freedom to Anthony Carew’s work on covert operations and US labour. At an immediate level, such scholarship offered an essential presentation of the dynamic between the Government and “private” groups in the construction and projection of US foreign policy and the cold war. Beyond this, it opened up the prospect of a reconsideration of strategy, policymaking, and operations in relation not only to security, economics, and geopolitics but also ideology and culture in both domestic and international environments.

I first met Professor Osgood when he was developing his initial articles on psychological strategy and the Eisenhower Administration. There had been some attention to the topic, namely H.W. Brands’ chapter on C.D. Jackson, Eisenhower’s Special Assistant for psychological operations, or an examination of special cases such as Walt Rostow’s critique of the response to Stalin’s death, but this tended to be a narrative limited to the President and his inner circle of advisors. Professor Osgood’s work offered a significant advance through his consideration of psychological warfare within the Eisenhower Administration’s strategic approach towards the Soviet enemy. For the first time, information operations, structural changes such as the creation of the U.S.I.A., and initiatives such as Eisenhower’s Chance for Peace and Atoms for Peace speeches were situated within the “New Look”.

To state what may now be obvious, Professor Osgood was bringing in and interrogating the dimension now labelled as “soft power”, often overlooked or marginalized because of the focus on the New Look’s “hard power” attention to atomic weapons. Articles such as “Form before Substance: Eisenhower’s Commitment to Psychological Warfare and Negotiations”


with the Enemy” and “The Perils of Coexistence: Peace and Propaganda in Eisenhower’s Foreign Policy” led to and complemented the book highlighted in this roundtable.6

I heartily endorse the comments made by Professors Corke and Wilford and Dr Tudda and welcome the discussion furthered by Professor Osgood’s response. From my vantage point, I would like to set a further challenge.

This dynamic of psychological warfare, policymaking, and operations still rests on a fundamental assumption of strategic coherence. Professor Osgood usefully critiques the deliberations that led to high-profile initiatives and sets out the attendant bureaucratic reorganization, but the “New Look” itself remains largely untouched. The standard narrative remains that NSC 162/2 offered a reconciliation of means and ends, following the extrication from Korea, through atomic weaponry, alliance politics, and economic measures. That presumption is reinforced and extended with the inclusion of psychological operations, both in Professor Osgood’s presentation of “the Eisenhower Administration’s evolving Cold War strategy” (p. 75) and by Professor Corke’s assertion of “the development of a unified and integrated Cold War strategy”.

I am not so sure of this. The Eisenhower Administration had entered office behind the allegation of its predecessor’s incoherence and the “negative, futile, and immoral” policy of containment, but the fundamental issue— to liberate or not to liberate? — would hover, unresolved, throughout Eisenhower’s first term. The hesitant and confused response to Stalin’s death and the East German demonstrations of June 1953 highlighted the problem, and all of the discussion of Project Solarium and the deliberations over NSC 162/2 came no closer to resolution.

My suggestion is that any success of psychological operations under Eisenhower was not that they fulfilled a global strategy that encompassed both American positions of strength such as Western Europe and disputed areas in Europe, Asia, and beyond but that they covered up the tensions and contradictions that were present in the strategic approach throughout the 1950s. C.D. Jackson’s resignation and lingering bitterness, the futile efforts of Nelson Rockefeller as Eisenhower’s Special Assistant in 1955/6, the moment of hope offered by Khruschev’s Secret Speech followed by the disaster in Hungary: all pointed to indecision within the Administration about the fundamentals towards which a psychological strategy should be directed. And, far from seeing US policy and operations moving systematically from the “core” towards regions such as Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, one might reconfigure the Eisenhower approach — complete with psychological operations — as a necessary shift to evade and even obscure the issues raised across the European divide.

To be provocative while paying tribute both to this book and the responses it has brought, the easy framing in these times is to hold up the Eisenhower Administration’s development of psychological operations as a wise approach that has not been ignored but betrayed by its 21st-century descendants. The harder task is to acknowledge that maybe we have it the wrong way around: the issue of psychological operations and its “soft power” incarnation has always been secondary to the global strategy that these operations/soft power are supposed to serve. In Professor Corke’s response, the ends are still coherent and the problems is the “images that were impossible to maintain in the face of perceived strategic interests”; an alternative is that the present Bush Administration’s distinction has been to offer a comprehensive strategic vision — the pursuit of a “preponderance of power” against any rival or group of rivals — that Eisenhower failed to establish in the 1950s. From that “success” has come the failures, highlighted by the discussants, that both reinforce and take us beyond the historical analysis offered by Professor Osgood.