Total Cold War Roundtable Review

Review by Chris Tudda

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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http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/
25 February 2007

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

*Note:* The complete roundtable is also available in one PDF file and in Microsoft Reader format, at [http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/).

**Review by Chris Tudda, State Department, Office of the Historian**

*Note:* The views presented here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the United States Government. I would like to thank my colleague Douglas Kraft for his helpful comments and suggestions.

Kenneth Osgood has written an excellent account of how the Eisenhower administration used psychological warfare in the form of public diplomacy, propaganda, and other informational campaigns in order to sway American and international audiences against the Soviet Union during the 1950s. He has also made an important contribution to the recent emphasis on the uses of public information programs, ideology, and rhetoric in the historiography of Eisenhower administration diplomacy. Marked by the exhaustive use of primary and secondary sources and a creative use of case studies, *Total Cold War* deepens our understanding of the successes and failures, both anticipated and unanticipated, of Eisenhower’s public diplomacy.

Osgood convincingly argues that President Eisenhower and his national security team considered the struggle with the Soviet “a different kind of war,” given the destructive nature of atomic weapons. Osgood contends that the new war had to be actively “waged by other means”, such as the competition of ideas, culture, and science, all on a global scale (p. 1)

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2). Thus propaganda, which he defines as “any technique or action that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, or behavior of a group, usually to serve the interests of the sponsor”, became as important as the more “traditional” forms of policy such as diplomacy, military force, and political pressure. (4, 7)

After a brief but comprehensive history of the U.S. government’s public information programs from World Wars One and Two, Osgood, like a number of historians, notes that the Eisenhower administration took its psychological warfare cues from the Truman administration.\(^2\) Truman created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which covertly supported the establishment of the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE) and its programs such as Radio Free Europe (RFE), Radio Liberty (RL), and domestic campaigns including the Crusade for Freedom. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was heavily involved in both the Crusade for Freedom and the NCFE in the late 1940s.

Domestic and international audiences could have been forgiven for not realizing Eisenhower’s close involvement with Truman’s informational programs, since by 1952, Republican presidential candidate Eisenhower and his foreign policy advisor, John Foster Dulles, repeatedly excoriated Truman for his failure to adopt an aggressive psychological warfare program. Eisenhower and Dulles criticized Truman’s static and weak “containment” policy and promised a new “dynamic” policy centered on the “liberation” of the “captive peoples” caught behind the Iron Curtain. Osgood argues that Eisenhower and Dulles offered a “notably coherent and sophisticated understanding of psychological warfare” aimed at winning over domestic and international audiences (p. 48).

Osgood supports his argument by examining the administration’s efforts to establish a global informational program. Eisenhower’s close confidante C.D. Jackson, formerly of *Life* magazine and now the head of the National Security Council’s (NSC) Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), scrambled to adapt the administration’s program of anti-communism to fit different countries. On one hand, for NATO members, the administration pushed the solidarity of the collective security alliance and the prevention of any drift toward “neutralism”. On the other hand, when trying to convince pro-U.S. authoritarian dictatorships, they emphasized the fight against communist or leftist insurgencies and the perils of destabilization. In left-leaning countries, the administration employed covert information programs to destabilize those nations.

Osgood demonstrates that the Eisenhower administration viewed with disdain any resistance from targeted countries, in particular those third world countries that

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questioned the United States’ devotion to democracy and anti-colonialism. In response, such countries pointed out that the U.S. practiced racial discrimination at home and repeatedly sided with its NATO partners during disputes with their colonies. (pp. 106-10, 125-27). Ultimately the administration enacted a program that Osgood characterizes as a “form of secret empire building that used covert forms of coercion and manipulation to draw countries into the American orbit” (p. 107). Such intervention became “standard operating procedure”, in particular when the administration helped overthrow governments in Iran and Guatemala in 1953 and 1954 and tried to overthrow the Indonesian government in the late 1950s (p. 150). This interventionism led to resentment towards the U.S. in the developing world and ran contrary to the administration’s democratic rhetoric.

Cogent examinations of Eisenhower’s arms control initiatives, in particular the “Chance for Peace” and “Atoms for Peace” speeches and his “Open Skies” proposal from the 1955 Geneva Conference, highlight Total Cold War and expand on Osgood’s earlier articles. Characterizing Atoms for Peace as “a political warfare tactic” designed to “discredit Soviet peace overtures” that occurred in the wake of Stalin’s death in 1953, Osgood contends that, even as Eisenhower claimed the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, his administration adopted massive retaliation as a strategic military doctrine (p. 155). Osgood also deftly describes the subsequent United States Information Agency (U.S.IA) campaign that sent Atoms for Peace exhibits throughout the world to promote the “friendly uses” of the atom. These exhibits proved to be hugely popular, especially in Eastern Europe.

Osgood also perceptively critiques the Geneva Conference, noting that Open Skies was only a “secondary objective of U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union. Far higher on the list of priorities was the use of negotiations to influence the attitudes and perceptions of domestic and international audiences.” (p. 183) Osgood also provides an excellent examination of U.S.IA’s “People to People” program. People to People successfully used trade fairs, dance, music (in particular jazz), movies, and athletic events to “sell” the advantages of the U.S. to international audiences (p. 220).

The weakest part of Osgood’s analysis is his examination of the Eisenhower administration’s psychological warfare program, which Shawn Parry-Giles first explored in two articles. Eisenhower, Osgood argues, believed that “audiences would be more receptive to the American message if they were kept from identifying it as propaganda” (p. 77). The President’s solution to this dilemma, as Parry-Giles contends, was to “camouflage” the government propaganda program by having U.S.IA work closely with private sector groups, such as media organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and presenting propaganda as a public “information” program. This blurred the lines between

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the federal government and the private sector, and, more importantly, those between overt
and covert programs (pp. 78-80).

To his credit, Osgood admits that it is very difficult to discern where the government
program left off and private programs began. Indeed, given the fact that the Soviet Union
had already thrown down the gauntlet and challenged democratic capitalism, it would
seem logical that the U.S. government, corporations, and individuals would work together
to highlight the differences between democratic capitalism and totalitarian communism.
Regarding the arms race and peaceful uses of the atom initiative, Osgood also concedes that
Eisenhower “had tapped into a psychological need to find something redeeming and
worthwhile in this technological marvel threatening the very existence of mankind” (p.
180). Osgood is on much safer ground when, as noted above, he describes the gap between
the administration’s rhetoric and its actual policies.

Whatever its minor shortcomings, Osgood’s book clearly demonstrates that because the
Cold War was such a new and different conflict, marked by the possibility of nuclear
annihilation, the Eisenhower administration needed to establish an innovative strategy
that deployed the nation’s intellectual rather than military resources against the Soviet
Union and communism. Osgood concludes that the administration decided to use
propaganda, public information programs, and other forms of psychological warfare to
convince its domestic and international audiences of the advantages of democracy and the
dangers of communism. A significant contribution to our understanding of how
psychological warfare can fit into national security strategy, Total Cold War should be read
by all historians of U.S. foreign relations.

Chris Tudda is a Historian in the Declassification and Publishing Division in the
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for the Foreign Relations of the United States series and co-produces the Office’s
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