THE BIRTH OF POST-WAR U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA:
THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION AND ITS IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE WITH
THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (USSR)

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ABSTRACT

The Problem

The birth of post-World War II U.S. government propaganda was a turning point in U.S. foreign policy. It came at a time when the United States had to act to protect itself against a possible nuclear war with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In a post-war political climate, the actions of the USSR to promote communism and to dominate many areas around the world politically and economically were ominous to the United States. In response, the United States used propaganda and diplomacy to contain Soviet expansion, walking a line between self-defense against Soviet propaganda and efforts to challenge the USSR in an ideological battle. Since both the United States and the Soviet Union had nuclear arms, they realized that the stakes were extremely high. With propaganda as a key weapon, the Americans and the Soviets fought for political and economic advantages in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East.

This thesis investigates how the Truman administration used propaganda as a foreign policy instrument against the Soviet Union during the early Cold War. Secondary sources were used to examine the evolution of U.S. propaganda (1750-1900); the historical background of U.S.-Soviet relations (1918-1948) leading up to the beginning of the Cold War; the key messages of U.S. government propaganda during World War II;
the Truman Administration’s propaganda agenda, organization and dissemination (1945-1953); and twenty-first century challenges to the relevance of the Truman administration’s public diplomacy. This thesis suggests that strategic propaganda was important in defending U.S. interests and that the institutions and programs launched during Truman’s presidency helped ensure the ascendancy of the United States’ democratic values over the communist ideology of the Soviet Union.

The Procedure

The first chapter discusses the etymology of propaganda and its subsequent evolution as a tool for dissemination of political beliefs and influence in the context of warfare. The second chapter examines U.S.-Russian relations in World War I and the effect of propaganda as a tool for advancing U.S. foreign policy under Woodrow Wilson. The third chapter explores the propaganda initiatives, agenda, organization and dissemination of the Truman administration during the involvement of the United States in World War II. Finally, the fourth chapter summarizes Truman’s efforts in cementing the institutions and programs that shaped U.S. foreign policy and public diplomacy during the Cold War.

Results Obtained and Conclusion

Through its propaganda initiatives, the Truman administration laid the foundations for the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union during the Cold War – a war which, more than any other in the twentieth century, was fought in order to win over hearts and minds worldwide.
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INTRODUCTION

This study asserts that propaganda was an important weapon in the defense and preservation of United States interests at home and abroad during the presidency of Harry S. Truman, and that his administration was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the creation of a solid foundation for U.S. government information, educational, and cultural activities overseas that helped bring the Cold War to an end.

This thesis hopes to enhance understanding of how and when propaganda is utilized by nation-states and to underscore that ideology paired with effective institutions is a crucial factor in a country’s foreign policy.

The Procedure

Data were reviewed and extracted from documents, mostly secondary sources, and organized under chapter headings.

The first chapter discusses the etymology of propaganda and its subsequent evolution as a tool for dissemination of political beliefs in the context of warfare. The American Revolution, the U.S.-Mexican War, and World War I prompted the use of propaganda as a U.S. foreign policy tool and highlighted its role as an element in the growing and evolving American media of those times. These events were crucial in setting the early foundation for the U.S. government’s employment of propaganda during times of conflict.

The second chapter examines U.S.-Russian relations during and after World War I and the impact of propaganda as an instrument for advancing U.S. foreign policy under Woodrow Wilson. The United States, under Herbert Hoover, opted to employ less
propaganda and more traditional foreign policy strategies, including non-recognition of
the USSR, which proved to be less effective in the face of the intimidating ideological
influence of the Soviet regime. Franklin D. Roosevelt quickly reversed this non-
recognition policy in an effort to promote economic trade with the Soviets to ease the
effects of the Great Depression. His approach to foreign policy was a double-edged
sword in that it led to the resolution of Soviet debts and an agreement to safeguard peace
in Europe and Asia but it also led to concessions that increased Soviet dominance in these
regions.

The third chapter explores the propaganda initiatives, agenda, organization and
dissemination of the Truman administration during World War II and as the Cold War
began. During this time, intelligence agencies became regulators of the strategic
approach to the use of propaganda and the methods utilized to create and disseminate
wartime propaganda messages. Information agencies were institutionalized as news
agencies reporting on wartime events, as publishing bodies disseminating books,
magazines and leaflets in other languages, and as film producers. The proliferation of
Cold War propaganda made acute the utility of international information campaigns and
also legislative support for the U.S. government propaganda programs abroad. This
chapter delves into the degree and extent to which the Truman administration countered
the psychological warfare tactics employed by the Soviet propaganda machine from 1946
through 1953.
Conclusion

The presidency of Harry S. Truman was an important period in the history of the Cold War in that it laid the legislative and organizational foundation for the programs that the U.S. used in its ideological struggle with the USSR for over forty years. Not all the elements of this foundation – made into law by the Smith-Mundt Act (1948) – may be relevant or applicable today, but it did much to set the framework for the global ideological struggle between the U.S. and the USSR, as well as how the second half of the twentieth century evolved.
CHAPTER I
THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA

The Roots and Purpose of Propaganda

The term propaganda can be traced back to the 17th century when Pope Gregory XV “established the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith (‘de Propaganda Fide’), a body with a missionary role. In subsequent centuries the word was used to describe not only religious proselytizing but also the dissemination of political beliefs.”¹

The notion of using propaganda to assert one’s political views was apparent during the American Revolution, and indeed the Declaration of Independence can be called a propaganda document. Walter Isaacson, the historian and former head of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which handles U.S. government non-military international broadcasting, states:

Thus the Declaration of Independence is, in effect, a work of propaganda. Or, to put it more politely, an exercise in public diplomacy intended to enlist other countries to the cause. If you are trying to persuade people to join with you, there are three general methods. You can coerce them with threats, convince them by pointing out their own interests, or entice them by appealing to their ideals. Those who run businesses or, for that matter, who have teenage children, know how each of these approaches work.²

Propaganda was a consistent element in the ever-growing and evolving American media from the time of the American Revolution through World War I. Revolutionists used propaganda to their advantage at key moments such as the Boston Massacre of

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March 5, 1770, which was triggered by a dispute between a young American and a British officer over a dept resulting in the tragic killing of five people. This event became a launching pad for American revolutionists such as Sam Adams in furthering propaganda to drive the British out of the United States. According to Philip Davidson, “From the first issue of the *Independence Advertiser* in January, 1748, to the Declaration of Independence, Adams was constantly writing for the press under a variety of pseudonyms - at least twenty-five have been recognized as his.”

To rally the American public and organize revolutionary committees against the British colony, he “filled the pages of the *Boston Gazette*, writing essays, clipping items from other papers, extracting pertinent bits from his private correspondence, editing news items - all with the one idea of arousing anti-British feeling.”

Thus, propaganda in the media became a key political tool. During the U.S.-Mexican War, war correspondent George Kendall employed propaganda in exposing the lack of public support for the war and the government’s inability to provide sufficient materiel for U.S. troops. The formula for mass media propaganda was firmly in place by the time World War I began.

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4 Ibid.

U.S. Government Propaganda in World War I

In 1914, the United States became the propaganda target of two European powers, Britain and Germany, both of which sought American support in the World War I (1914-1918). Britain was quite successful with its propaganda campaign in the United States because at that time it controlled American cables and news agencies. According to a major study by George G. Bruntz, this gave the Entente Powers an advantage: “As a result of this propaganda there had developed, long before we [United States] broke diplomatic relations with Germany, a pro-Entente and anti-German feeling in America.” Britain worked to redefine its former colonial ties with the United States to one based on mutual respect and common interests. In 1914, the British Foreign Office formed an organization called the War Propaganda Bureau, which distributed “leaflets, pamphlets, and other material in Allied and neutral countries.” According to Kenneth Osgood, a historian, Britain’s propaganda consisted of “a low-key approach that selectively released news and information to win American sympathies.” The British were determined to pull the neutral United States to its side.

The single most successful propaganda campaign the British carried out in the United States was the exposure of the telegram sent by the German Foreign Secretary,


7 Ibid., 20.

Arthur Zimmermann, on January 16, 1917 to the German Ambassador to Washington, D.C., Johann von Bernstorff. Osgood writes, “the publication of the Zimmerman telegram in 1917 (in which Germany sought to enlist Mexico in a war with the United States) was undoubtedly the most important propaganda achievement of the British, and it helped to bring the Americans into the war on the allied side.” The information in the telegram led the United States to shift from a position of neutrality to considering war against Germany and its allies.

Germany was aggressive in its approach to the wartime propaganda of the U.S. and Britain, albeit less successful. Ross suggests that the “Germans did their propaganda best, countering the one-sided media coverage with their own newspaper and magazine publicity, promotional literature, direct mail, motion pictures, and speakers—but never on the scale nor of the consistently high quality of the British effort.” Although British war propaganda was successful in winning allies and undermining Germany’s efforts, the Germans were determined to turn the table to win the war. Ross notes that “Propagandists from overseas, both English and German, knew their targets well. There were segments of the heterogeneous American population initially predisposed to support Germany—or to oppose England or Russia.” Likewise, the United States hosted a large number of German immigrants - intellectuals who served in various sectors of American society such as university professors, authors, journalists and politicians. Many Americans loved

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9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.
the music of Beethoven, Bach, Wagner, and esteemed German Kultur; this was especially so on college campuses, where many of the top professors were German-trained.¹² Thus, American public opinion of Germany was initially mixed because there were proponents and opponents of war.

However, as British propaganda became rampant, U.S. public opinion increasingly swung to the side of the Allies (Britain, France and Russia). In May 1915, a German submarine attacked the luxury liner Lusitania, “torpedoed with the loss of more than a thousand lives, including one hundred Americans.”¹³ The U.S. public’s discomfort with Germany’s aggression grew rapidly, and Allied propaganda exploited these tensions to build and maintain U.S. support. Britain, France and Russia worked to strengthen economic ties with the United States by purchasing its raw materials such as steel, copper, rubber, petroleum.¹⁴ As a result, the U.S. economy grew from 1914 to 1916, with exports to Allies quadrupling and bonds purchased from Allies from 1915 to 1916 totaling about $1.5 billion. To the Germans, there was little neutrality on the economic front in the United States.¹⁵ As German attacks in Europe increased, it became apparent to President Wilson that he needed to mobilize the U.S. public to support U.S. involvement.

¹² Ibid.


in the Great War. Wilson felt that the loss of American lives as a result of the German submarine attack, and the need for the U.S. to defend itself, could no longer be ignored.

After declaring war against Germany in 1917, Wilson created the first U.S. government propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), for the purpose of winning domestic and international support for U.S. participation in the war. The CPI, with George Creel as its chairman, managed to launch U.S. government war propaganda, claiming to “disseminate the war’s available news without government influence, ostensibly allowing citizens to draw their own conclusions about the war effort.”

Wilson was determined to make his case to the public and to the U.S. Congress. In his address to Congress on April 2, 1917, Wilson argued that the United States must protect democracy in the world:

> For the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we dedicate our lives and fortunes, everything that we are and everything we have, with the pride of those who know that the day shall come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles which gave birth and happiness and the peace which she treasured.

The U.S. government needed public support to find ways to fund the war. Funding came from the Department of the Treasury’s sale of Liberty Bonds which the government encouraged the public to purchase, persuading Americans that it provided them with the

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opportunity to invest in the global struggle for liberty and freedom. This tactic aroused feelings of nationalistic pride; people wore badges and medals to display their patriotism.\textsuperscript{18}

The CPI used pamphlets, public speakers, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, and documentary films to disseminate war propaganda to the public. Working to promote Wilson’s arguments that the United States was fighting to uphold democracy, liberty and freedom, the CPI “coordinated a nationwide network of tens of thousands of speakers; prepared and placed advertisements in hundreds of newspapers and magazines; designed, printed, and distributed untold numbers of posters, which were pasted up all over the country; produced its own firm documentaries and rigidly controlled the content of Hollywood.”\textsuperscript{19} Chairman Creel defined the organization as an agency whose purpose was to “convince a lukewarm population that the nation was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the forces of darkness”\textsuperscript{20} and that one of its tasks was to inculcate the truths of the war to Americans so that they understood that “this is a just war, a holy war, and a war in self defense.”\textsuperscript{21}

The CPI became a dominant governmental organization, in control of communications such as publications and advertising initiatives. It wanted to know the type of articles, news stories, advertisements and books being released to the public. For

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ross, \textit{Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918}, 226.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
example, Creel exercised censorship on a multi-volume set of books titled *The Story of the Great War*. He wrote that “While a thorough examination of all six volumes had not yet been completed, enough had been found already to warrant almost any charge against the honesty and loyalty of the books.”

In correspondence with the publisher, he implied that the book supported an alliance with Germany: “Above all, I wish to know the name of the man responsible for the preparation of the material that is so peculiarly German in its very essence….I must insist that the changes be made that were suggested by me in my former letter.”

The CPI was determined to counter enemy propaganda in the United States that could undermine Wilson’s efforts in promoting peace and stability in the world. One of the most successful CPI propaganda publications in this effort was the *Official Bulletin*. According to Ross, the *Official Bulletin* “listed army and navy casualties and the names of men taken prisoner and those cited for bravery; it printed important military communiqués and papers, proclamations, and addresses by the president and the heads of the major government departments” The *Bulletin* provided a means for the U.S. government to convey news about the war to the public; it also promoted the idea that the government was being honest and forthright with the public about the war and its challenges.

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22 Ibid., 227.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 231.
Always looking for more effective means of reaching the U.S. public, the CPI started publishing wartime propaganda booklets, the goal of which was to provide busy citizens information on the war in a format that was “easy to read, with simple sentence structure and grammar, man-in-the-street vocabulary, short paragraphs, plenty of boldface headings and typefaces for emphasis, and white space to draw the reader along.”

The first presidential speech booklet focused on Wilson’s April 2nd speech to Congress, “War Message and Facts Behind it.” The booklet outlined American concerns about “the aggressor” and described Germany as a “breaker of treaties, torpedoer of hospital ships, drowner of American women and children, violator of American sovereignty, precipitator of war, and saboteur extraordinaire.” A series of presidential speech booklets followed with the same theme.

The CPI also used historical analysis to provide evidence of the German government’s determination to destroy the United States. Ross states:

[The] CPI academic annotators dug deep into past current German history to buttress with fatiguing footnotes assertions by the president, for example, that ‘we are fighting their [the German people’s] cause, as they will some day see it, as well as our own’ and that ‘extraordinary insults and aggressions of the Imperial German Government’ left American ‘no self-respecting choice but to take up arms in defense of our rights as a free people and of our honor as a sovereign Government."

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25 Ibid., 232.
26 Ibid., 233.
27 Ibid.
A portion of the booklets served to defend the position of the allies, such as Britain, in the war. For example, a booklet was dedicated to Britain’s declaration that it “could not be expected to accept a limit on its naval powers when its neighbors [i.e. Germany and Austria-Hungary] were unwilling to limit their land forces.” The U.S. government supported the security concerns of the British because it had to support key parties in the war.

Furthermore, the CPI never lost sight of the fact that it needed to provide the public with content that encouraged patriotism. In one its booklets, it presented various scenarios of what would or could happen if Germany invaded the United States. Ross gives an account of the wording one author used to generate a nationalistic response among readers:

First they set themselves to capture New York City. While their fleet blockades the harbor and shells the city and the forts from far at sea, their troops land somewhere near and advance toward the city in order to cut its rail communications, starve it into surrender, and then plunder it. One body of from 50,000 to 100,000 men lands, let us suppose, Barnegat Bay, N.J., and advances without meeting resistance.

The author describes a completely helpless America against German aggression, with humiliated citizens “thrown into a pig-sty, while the German soldiers look on and laugh.” This type of narrative promoted feelings of fear and boosted support for the war.

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28 Ibid., 234.
29 Ibid., 239.
30 Ibid., 233.
At times, the booklets revealed information unknown to the public. CPI Associate Chairman Edgar Sisson was working on U.S. propaganda efforts in Russia when he reported his findings of 68 documents which provided evidence that “Germany had materially assisted the Bolsheviks in their October Revolution but that the top Bolshevik leaders, Lenin and Trotsky included, were paid agents of the German General Staff.”\textsuperscript{31} It was later discovered that these documents were forged to undermine the Bolshevik regime.

The CPI expanded its propaganda campaign abroad. Its mission was to introduce the U.S. government and its people to the world in a truthful narrative and to counter any negative propaganda against the United States by Germany. The CPI Foreign Section added three divisions: Wireless and Cable Services, the Foreign Press Bureau, and the Foreign Films Division.\textsuperscript{32}

Wireless and Cable Services created the so-called Compub cables, which released presidential speeches from the United States into the allied territories in Europe. As cited by the historian Nicholas Cull, this type of news was what Creel called “a liaison between the U.S. government and the people of the world.”\textsuperscript{33} The cables provided war propaganda stories of tragedy and destruction caused by Germany in Europe. In addition, the CPI’s Foreign Press Bureau focused on the mail distribution of publications about U.S. justice, culture and society. Through this expansion, the CPI achieved a significant amount of

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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 241.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\end{small}
leverage and influence: “CPI officers around the world fed this material into the local press. Newspapers that failed to carry CPI stories suddenly found it difficult to obtain supplies of paper from the United States.”34 Creel wanted to create opportunities for the world to learn about the United States and its people. He accomplished this through CPI’s efforts to allow a number of foreign journalists to visit the United States and “see American military and industrial strength.”35 These CPI initiatives provided the United States exposure and recognition throughout Europe.

Another CPI propaganda venture in Europe was a division dedicated to film. The Foreign Films Division created documentaries that dramatized their narratives for maximum effects to convince audiences about the level of German aggression and brutality during the war. One of the most memorable CPI propaganda film was *Pershing’s Crusaders*. This film earned a rave review from the *New York Times*:

> [The] picture began with a representation of ‘Germany’s aggression’—a mailed fist rising from a map of Germany –and the cargo submarine *Deutschland* in Baltimore to show ‘the length of the German arm.’ The nation’s preparedness was detailed, and then scenes of American dough boys in ‘front-line trenches’ were shown, causing, according to the review, ‘one of the most pronounced thrills felt by the spectators.’ Finally, the theater audience ‘united in loud hissing when a pre-war picture of the Kaiser reviewing his troops was shown.’36

The CPI did not want to create competition between its film division and Hollywood, so it kept this division low-scale. Hollywood quickly learned that there was revenue advantage to making wartime movies and soon produced its own war-inspired

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
films such as *To Hell with the Kaiser* in which the dominant theme was good against evil. According to Ross, the movie “*The Kaiser, the Beast of Berlin* depicted a life-and-death struggle between the forces of good and evil and was filled with as many atrocities…as were acceptable on the screen.” Hollywood worked on the historical accuracy of the movies, which made them even more appealing to audiences. The Hollywood Kaiser movies became an overnight hit in the United States and Europe, especially in Britain and France.

With the rise of Hollywood’s popularity, Creel wanted to make a market for U.S. films abroad. He believed that CPI export of propaganda movies allowed the United States to “dominate the film situation in every country.” Foreign distributors found that if they wanted to screen Hollywood productions they had to stop showing German films and to screen CPI films with titles such as *Pershing’s Crusaders* and *America’s Answer*. This CPI strategy succeeded in shutting down German screenings in Sweden, Norway and Holland.

By 1919, the CPI’s propaganda work took root in Europe. President Wilson was recognized by many Europeans as one of the great leaders in the world, and his speeches and rhetoric found their way into the mainstream media abroad.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.


40 Ibid.
The Outcome of World War I U.S. Government Propaganda

Despite the CPI’s achievements, the U.S. public became disillusioned with its propaganda activities. Congress cut off all funding for the CPI, alleging that it had been partisan. In fact, the CPI propaganda campaign in World War I led to an anti-propaganda backlash in the United States. According to John Brown, professor at Georgetown University and an analyst of U.S. public diplomacy, scholar J. Michael Sproule contends that this sentiment of disapproval began “among American troops in Europe, where doughboys sent abroad to make the world safe for democracy discovered that atrocity stories had been false concoctions and that the Germans had behaved no worse than any other combatants.” U.S. soldiers deduced that their homemade propaganda had been misleading and untrue.

According to anti-propagandists, propaganda is guilty of “violence to language,” which dehumanizes and humiliates its target. Brown writes:

As early as 1915, the novelist Henry James said in an interview in The New York Times: ‘The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; they have, like millions of other things, been more overstrained and knocked about and voided than in all the long ages before, and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or, otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression through an increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk.’

Brown quotes the historian Allan Winkler regarding the anti-German sentiments stirred up by the CPI, “Portrayed as barbaric Huns, Germans appeared intent on


\[\text{42} \text{ Ibid.}\]

\[\text{43} \text{ Ibid.}\]
conquering the world for their own selfish ends. Germans spies, the CPI hinted, were everywhere … the CPI did spark support for the war, but it also helped stir up the hysteria that led unthinking Americans to rename sauerkraut ‘liberty cabbage’ and hamburger ‘Salisbury steak.’”

Moreover, Brown argues that the CPI propaganda in World War I distorted history, and thus these actions were incompatible with democratic values and practices. He states:

The opening of Russian archives by the Bolsheviks in November 1917 provided evidence against the assumption that Germany was the only guilty party in the war. Scholarly works argued that British propaganda machinations had led America into war: James Duane Squires' British Propaganda at Home and in the United States From 1914 to 1917 (1935), and H.C. Peterson's Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American neutrality, 1914-1917 (1939).

The American public, especially intellectuals, viewed the CPI propaganda as “antidemocratic in its techniques and aims, something that democracies should avoid being contaminated by.” By the end of World War I, the anti-propaganda mood that reverberated throughout the war was pivotal in the sense of caution that thereafter characterized the overt use of propaganda by the United States.

Some Americans, however, tried to validate their pro-propaganda sentiments. Brown states that Edward Bernays, the father of public relations, a Viennese-born

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
nephew of Sigmund Freud and an employee of the Committee on Public Information, wrote in his book *Propaganda* (1928) that “intelligent men must realize that propaganda is the modern instrument by which they can fight for productive ends and help bring order out of chaos.”

For all of its faults, the effects of the propaganda produced by the United States and the allies (Britain, France and Russia) helped unify them against the Central Powers and effectively damaged the morale of the German people and troops, weakening their government. Bruntz states, “The *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* (a German newspaper) went so far as to credit the allied propagandists with having taken over the leadership of the German people in the final months of the war. By the fall of 1918 ‘the majority of the German people placed greater trust in Woodrow Wilson than in their own leaders.’”

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48 Ibid.

CHAPTER II
U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR

Prior to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, Russia had suffered an economic depression. At the time, the United States saw this as an opportunity to win Russia as an ally in World War I\(^1\) by providing it with financial loans to sustain its war effort against Germany. However, as 1917 progressed, “the chaos and turmoil that characterized Russia in the final years of Tsarist rule continued unabated. As conditions worsened, American diplomats became increasingly pessimistic about Russia’s future.”\(^2\) When the Bolsheviks overthrew the Tsarist government, the United States and the Bolsheviks did not agree on the terms of loan repayment that the Tsarist government had made with the Americans. As a result, the relationship between the United States and the Bolshevik regime began on shaky ground. This was an awkward position for the United States. On the one hand, President Wilson was encouraging the Bolsheviks to continue in the war against Germany, and on the other, the United States wanted the Bolshevik regime to be replaced.

Russia’s participation in the Great War with its partners (United States, Britain and France) against Germany was put on hold when Russia descended into a civil war. In an effort to remedy this situation, the U.S., Britain, France, and Japan decided to intervene in Russia after World War I. “The primary objective of this action was the re-

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\(^1\) Mary E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles Over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 7.

\(^2\) Ibid.
establishment of an Eastern Front following the collapse of the Russian government during the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, but Allied fear of communist ambitions in other countries also played into the intervention.” Wilson reluctantly sent 13,000 troops to Arkhangelsk and Vladivostok regions. The U.S. involvement in Russia was short. “Once the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 the Wilson government began receiving letters and petitions to bring the troops home from Siberia and other regions in which they were deployed. Most were withdrawn from Russia by mid 1919, having lost several hundred men to combat as well as sickness.”

The Emergence of Soviet Propaganda

Vladimir Lenin placed great emphasis on domestic propaganda in order to mobilize the people of the Soviet Union to support their government. The Soviet regime utilized print and broadcast media to deliver its messages and appeal to the masses. According to Lyn Gorman and David McLean, “The Bolsheviks paid great attention to persuasion using new symbols, rituals, and visual imagery to instruct Soviet citizens and to transform popular attitudes and beliefs.” Over 50 percent of the Soviet public was illiterate; therefore radio broke this barrier by providing the Soviet regime the means to disseminate propaganda to its population. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks survived the civil war but they distrusted any entity they perceived as opposition. “Throughout the 1920s a

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4 Ibid.

5 Gorman and McLean, Media and Society in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Introduction, 79.
main task of propaganda was to persuade the unconverted and remind those loyal to the new regime that the revolution and its results were legitimate and that sacrifices should be endured for the sake of a better future.”

After the death of Lenin, Joseph Stalin rose to power in 1924, and he immediately passed a five-year economic policy intended to create a socialist economic system. Stalin used force to implement this policy, taking control of agricultural and production industries, which led to the further collapse of the Soviet economy. This created a huge challenge for the Soviets and once again the regime continued to rely on its domestic propaganda to convey positive messages about communism and the Soviet regime to its people. “Despite falling living standards, rationing, the devastation of agriculture, and the upheaval created by massive migration to urban areas, propaganda had to convey the message that the regime was responsible for significant accomplishments.”

Low literacy rates among the Soviet public forced the Soviet regime to create the Agitational-Propaganda Section within the Central Committee of the Communist Party to go out into communities in the countryside to create support for the policies and vision of the Soviet regime. Gorman and McLean state that the varieties of mass mobilization and propaganda “included canvas and parades, and in the 1930s the ‘public theater’ of the show trials.” Visual propaganda played a huge role. Posters were disseminated throughout cities and the countryside and in order to appeal to the illiterate population

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 80.
8 Ibid., 82.
they were kept very simple with minimal wording and expressive artwork. Poster art “stressed conflict and opposition: good and evil, worker and capitalist, peasant and landowner, revolutionary and counter revolutionary.”

Theater and film were other forms of visual propaganda used by the Soviet regime. Gorman and McLean write that “film promised to surmount the problems of widespread illiteracy and differences of language and culture in the Soviet Union and that unlike theater, it allowed the central government to exert tight control over political messages that could be reproduced and exhibited in all parts of the country.”

Soviet filmmakers and journalists were censured but given some freedom as long as their work was not considered threatening to the regime. Filmmakers “developed innovative techniques such as montage, [and] the juxtaposition of images to elicit a specific emotional response from the viewer,” In the case of the journalists, Soviet leadership created the “pressburo” to censure print and mass media throughout the USSR.

This focus on domestic rather than international propaganda lasted until the rise of Nazism in Germany. In 1941, the Soviet government felt the need to broaden its propaganda agenda beyond its borders in order to counter German attacks against the Soviet state. When Germany invaded the USSR, the Soviet regime responded by launching a propaganda attack in addition to a military offensive. An “example of the

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 83.
blatant use of film for a propagandistic purpose was *Alexander Nevsky,* a historical epic aimed at rousing Russian patriotism against the German threat. This film propaganda policy was suspended during a period of cordial relations between the two countries. The film was rereleased in 1941, however, during the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

In an effort to increase its influence, the Soviet Union sought to expand its print and broadcasting media into Europe and the United States.

[The] Soviet Union in the Stalinist period provided an example of the mass media being used as tools of the state, with the regime having achieved an effective monopoly on public expression. Newspapers, radio and film were used to spread propagandist messages about the cult of the leader, the successes of a progressive and modernizing policy at home, and insofar as they gave attention to events beyond Soviet borders, the dangers of enemies abroad.

After the 1930s, the most significant effect of Soviet propaganda was the recognition of the Soviet Union by the United States and the spread of communism in Eastern Europe and Asia.

**Post-War U.S. Foreign Policy towards the Soviet Union**

**Herbert Hoover’s Administration**

The United States did little to counter the growth of Soviet propaganda; the absence of an effective U.S. propaganda office was felt. During the interwar years, the United States resorted more to foreign policy strategies than propaganda. During the era of non-recognition policy towards the Soviet Union, the U.S. government felt the need to

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14 Ibid., 84-85.
15 Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles Over Foreign Policy,* 11, and 39-42.
educate and train State Department Foreign Service officers to become regional experts rather than propagandists. Select Foreign Service officers went through a rigorous 18-month training, and the Eastern European Affairs division of the State Department was created to serve this purpose. As part of their training program, the officers were sent on a mission to Eastern European countries. They were evaluated at the end of their service to work as regional experts, and those who passed the evaluation process were allowed to continue their studies at academic institutions in the United States.  

While the Department was making an effort to enhance its intellectual base with regards to Eastern Europe, the Division leader, Robert F. Kelley, was very “anti-Bolshevik.” His attitude affected the Foreign Service officers in training and his influence was evident in the abundant advisory memoranda on the Soviet Union that he submitted to the Secretary of State and the President. A Foreign Service officer, Loy W. Henderson, who came to the State Department after serving in the Republic of Lithuania with the Red Cross from 1918-21, was one of Kelley’s subordinates who also contributed to a forceful U.S. policy toward Russia. Glantz suggests that “In Henderson’s opinion, the Soviet government was illegitimate and dangerous, and it was the job of the Division of Eastern European Affairs and the U.S. legation in Riga to convince the State Department and the wider U.S. government of ‘the true picture of the situation in the

16 Ibid., 11.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.
Soviet Union.”¹⁹ The Eastern European Affairs division spent much of 1920s (and into the 1930s) taking a firm position against the Soviet Union, which profoundly affected U.S. and Soviet political and economic ties.

There was indecisiveness in U.S. foreign policy towards Russia, and one can speculate that the fluidness of this policy might have aggravated the relationship between the two countries. Glantz states:

[The] Herbert Hoover administration, for example, strongly supported the policy of non-recognition. Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson summed up the president’s Soviet policy with the following words: ‘political connections with all the trade we could get.’ With the change in administrations in 1933, their role as critical observers of the Soviet Union would often leave Henderson and his Foreign Service colleagues disappointed and bitter over the course U.S. elected officials chose to take.²⁰

The Soviet Union and the United States would soon come to learn that economic depression would force the United States to reconsider its policy position towards the Soviet Union. Glantz points out that “By the early 1930s, key critics of the Soviet Union began to prepare for the inevitable resumption of diplomatic ties.”²¹ Ironically, as the Soviet Union’s economic depression deepened, many Eastern European Affairs Foreign Service officers began to call for a re-evaluation of the United States’ harsh policies towards Russia. The main reason for this was to open more opportunities. As the call for recognition of the Soviet Union in the U.S. political sphere increased in volume, it was difficult for the Eastern European Affairs Department, (specifically for Robert Kelley), to

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¹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²⁰ Ibid., 12-13.

²¹ Ibid., 13.
ignore this overwhelming opinion.\textsuperscript{22} This led Kelley, on behalf of the State Department, to draft a new position for U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. Glantz states that Kelley outlined “areas of existing difficulty, which included the world revolutionary aims of the Soviet government, the Soviet repudiation of bonds and confiscation of property, and the question of the protection of the life and property of U.S. citizens in Russia.”\textsuperscript{23} Kelley’s carefully drafted memo argued that resolution of issues before recognition would further the likelihood of success but his critics highly contested the set of conditions he put forth. However, little did Kelley and his team know that the incoming President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, would recognize the Soviet Union regardless of their efforts to isolate and condemn the Soviet regime.\textsuperscript{24}

**Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Administration**

President Roosevelt took office in 1932, at a time when the country was facing over 20 percent unemployment. Economic hardship was rampant across all socio-economic levels of society. Roosevelt was determined to form new and effective social and economic policies to help pull the economy out of the Depression. The first order of business for Roosevelt was to acknowledge the United States’ outdated policies towards the Soviet Union. The President felt that it was time to join with European powers such as Britain in recognizing the USSR. Such recognition provided an unexpected political edge to champion a better direction in U.S.-Soviet relations. “Americans were calling for

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.  

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.  

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
it to help ease the United States’ economic difficulties, and finally, and most importantly, Roosevelt wanted to recognize the Soviet Union in the hope that it would provide a balance against the increasing potential hostility of Germany and, more imperatively, Japan in the Far East.25 Roosevelt’s vision was met with opposition from the Eastern European Affairs Foreign Service officers, who felt that Roosevelt was giving too much leverage to the Soviets.

As Roosevelt pushed back against a reluctant Eastern European Affairs Division, he quickly learned how unreliable the Soviet policies towards the United States actually were. Roosevelt proceeded to open talks with the Kremlin that resulted in the resolution of the Soviet debts owed to the United States and a security agreement to safeguard peace in Europe and Asia in the face of German and Japanese threats.26 These U.S.-Soviet agreements led to the establishment of diplomatic ties. The first Ambassador to the Soviet Union, William Bullitt, possessed a personality unsuitable for diplomacy. Described as ‘mercurial’ by his biographer, “Bullitt was given to emotional extremes and an arrogant belief that he was always right.”27 When he resigned in 1936 Roosevelt appointed a more effective staff to reform the Eastern European Affairs Division. The next U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Joseph E. Davies, tried to walk a fine line between maintaining U.S.-Soviet relations and tempering his own perception of the Soviet Union as a “violent” regime. According to Glantz, “To Davies, the Soviet government was oriental

25 Ibid., 18.
26 Ibid., 21.
27 Ibid., 23.
in its cruelty and in its complete disregard for individual life."²⁸ Davies found an ally in his assessment of the Soviets in Moscow in the person of Colonel Philip R. Faymonville, who believed a U.S.-Soviet alliance was possible but who also maintained an acute awareness of the military buildup and capabilities of the Soviet government. Glantz writes:

By 1937 it appeared that Faymondville[‘s] and Davies’s shared vision would shape the development of the U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. Recognizing the Soviet Union was not Roosevelt’s final act in his struggle with America’s career diplomats. It was merely an opening salvo in a struggle that continued throughout Roosevelt’s first term and into his second. Another episode in that conflict occurred in 1937 when the State Department amalgamated the Eastern European Affairs Division and the Western European Affairs Division into a new Division of European Affairs. Kelley was transferred to Ankara, Turkey, where he no longer directed the State Department’s analysis of Soviet policy. Although Roosevelt never made clear his motivation for the department’s reorganization, it is reasonable to assume that the president hoped to minimize resistance to his Soviet policy.²⁹

During Ambassador Davies’ time in Moscow, Roosevelt felt that he had effective representation, but this period would prove to be short-lived because in 1938, Davies accepted the position of Ambassador to Belgium. The United States did not have an ambassador in Moscow from July 1938 through August 1939, during which time the Soviet Union re-established its diplomatic relations with Germany.

In 1938, The United States felt increasingly isolated from Europe and the Soviet Union due to inadequate U.S.-Soviet relations and the ever-increasing possibility that Europe would fall into another war with the rise of Nazism. While the United States

²⁸ Ibid., 27.
²⁹ Ibid., 33.
attempted to redefine its role on the international stage, the Soviets believed that they were vulnerable to attacks from both east and west. Stalin thought that he needed to prepare his country for any possible war attacks. Glantz comments:

Stalin’s primary aims were to prevent a two-front war and to secure the breathing space he needed to rebuild the strength of his state. If the British and French governments were unwilling to provide that, an agreement with Germany would suit these exclusively defensive aims just as well. An agreement with the United Kingdom and France would have left the Soviet Union in much the same position as Russia in 1914. In contrast, an agreement with Germany meant that in the event of war, Germany would turn west and face off against Britain and France, while the Soviet Union gained valuable time to rebuild its military forces.  

Meanwhile, Roosevelt appointed Laurence Steinhardt as the new ambassador to Moscow. He is depicted as “persuasive in his advocacy; his colleagues in the State Department came to share his conviction that the Soviet Union only responded to tit-for-tat policies.”

On March 1, 1941, the U.S. State Department sent a telegraph to Steinhart in Moscow warning the Soviets of a possible attack from Germany, but the Kremlin ignored it. On March 3, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Roosevelt knew that the U.S. position in the Soviet-German war was important to Soviet-American relations. Roosevelt also realized that the U.S. would need to support the Soviet Union in order to defeat Germany. According to Glantz, “the Soviet position in the struggle with Germany was taking a dramatic turn for the worse.” The author relates that as Germans recovered

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30 Ibid., 41-42.
31 Ibid., 45.
32 Ibid., 82.
from their encounter outside Smolensk and pressed on toward the Soviet capital,
American observers stood in fear of a negotiation of alliance between Hitler and Stalin. 
The precarious situation brought home to many the importance of U.S. aid to the Soviet 
war effort. Although Roosevelt was eager to pull the Soviet Union onto its side, he was 
of the opinion that the Soviet Union was not fully a trustworthy partner. Nevertheless, to 
Roosevelt, it was strategically important to ensure the break-up of Soviet-German 
relations in order to secure a victory in the war against Germany and Japan. Roosevelt 
also wanted unconditional surrender from Germany and Japan, and minimal U.S. 
casualties in the war. To achieve this, he had to open the lines of communication with the 
Soviet Union by providing both economic aid and political cooperation. In return, the 
United States sought a Soviet alliance against Germany.

For this relatively cordial approach to foreign policy with the Soviets, Roosevelt 
received not praise but criticism from historians. According to Amos Perlmutter,

[The] detached and parochial management style of Franklin Delano Roosevelt 
contributed to the postwar failure of American foreign policy in Eastern Europe 
and the Middle East. Much of the nature of the Soviet-American relations, as 
well as the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe that emerged after the war, is the 
making of FDR, in perverse collaboration with Joseph Stalin. The Soviet alliance 
was the cornerstone of FDR’s European policy. ³³

For example, at the Big Three Tehran Conference in November 1943 (the “Big Three” 
being the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union), Roosevelt and Churchill tried to 
accommodate the Soviet Union’s demands to occupy East European countries such as 
Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania as well as the Balkan states. Roosevelt was keen on 

³³ Amos Perlmutter, FDR and Stalin: A Not So Grand Alliance, 1943-1945, (Columbia: University 
of Missouri, 1993), 1.
satisfying all of Stalin’s demands in return for the Soviet Union’s cooperation in the war against Germany. Roosevelt and Churchill discussed three major issues with Stalin: the Soviet Union’s involvement in the struggle against Germany, the execution of “Operation Overload” (a Soviet attack on Germany from the East), and further collaboration and support for wartime policies. Following Germany’s defeat, the Big Three met again at the Yalta Conference on February 4, 1945. The aim of this conference was to determine how the Big Three would govern Germany in the post-war era, and to address Polish grievances over the Soviet Union’s rule in Poland. In spite of the desire of the Polish people to self-govern, the Soviets had a vested interest in maintaining Poland as one of their Eastern Europe-controlled territories. Stalin made a number of concessions in addressing Polish grievances by agreeing to pay compensation and allowing limited self-governance. The Big Three agreed that Poland’s concerns would be addressed by the Soviet Union. Roosevelt was also interested in getting the Big Three to agree on the creation of the United Nations, and in securing a Soviet alliance in the war against Japan. Stalin agreed to a Big Three war alliance against Japan under one condition: the U.S. would support Soviet strategic and economic interests in Manchuria, and would also support Mongolia’s independence from China. Roosevelt initially agreed to these terms, but planned to rebut these issues through the United Nations.


By the end of World War II, U.S.-Soviet relations deteriorated. Kennedy Hickman states:

With Roosevelt's death in April 1945, relations between the Soviets and the West became increasingly tense. As Stalin reneged on promises concerning Eastern Europe, the perception of Yalta changed and Roosevelt was blamed for effectively ceding Eastern Europe to the Soviets. While his poor health may have affected his judgment, Roosevelt was able to secure some concessions from Stalin during the meeting. Despite this, many came to view the meeting as a sellout that greatly encouraged Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe and northeast Asia.36

Many Americans viewed Roosevelt’s cordial policies towards the Soviet Union as failed ones. Soviet dominance in Europe and Asia was increasing; other nations began adopting communist models of governance. The new U.S. President, Harry Truman, would consider the Soviet Union a threat to democracy and a danger to U.S. political and economic interests in Europe, Asia and around the world. After 1945, the U.S.-USSR relationship entered what came to be known as the Cold War era.

The Beginning of the Cold War

On April 12, 1945, Harry Truman was sworn into office as the new U.S. President. Truman was well aware of the Soviets’ violation of Eastern Europe agreements made with Roosevelt. Mark Byrnes argues that the Soviets hand-selected leaders for regions in Eastern Europe that had been liberated from Nazi Germany in order to have a full control of the regions and their resources: “While their actions could be seen as consistent with a simple desire for security against a resurgent Germany, Truman and others in the administration saw them as far more ominous. He feared that unless they

were faced with firm resistance, Soviet ambitions would become as unlimited and
dangerous as those of Hitler.”37 Truman was eager to get his point across to the Soviets
the same month he was elected into office. Byrnes notes that in “his first meeting with a
high-ranking Soviet official, Foreign Minister V. Molotov on 23 April 1945, Truman,
according to several accounts, gave the Soviet leader a stern talking to, warning him that
the United States expected the Soviet Union to live up to its agreements.”38 After this
meeting, Truman found himself in a position similar to that of Roosevelt. Truman sent a
representative to Moscow to smooth things out with the Soviets because he thought he
needed their support in the war against Japan. Regardless, Truman did not believe that the
relationship could work “unless the Soviets knew that the United States would continue
steadfastly to defend its own interests.”39

In July 1945, Truman participated in the Potsdam Conference, and found himself
playing mediator between Churchill and Stalin.40 According to Byrnes, through close
study of Stalin at the Potsdam Conference, Truman noticed that although Stalin liked to
get his way, he was willing to compromise when it was clear to him that he would not be
able to get exactly what he wanted. Truman and Stalin disagreed on almost every issue.
Byrnes notes that the “United States was looking toward rebuilding a strong Germany to
stabilize Europe, while the Soviets feared a revived Germany might once again present a


38 Ibid., 13.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
real threat to the Soviet Union.” At the time of the Potsdam Conference, Truman was not yet fully cognizant that the atomic bomb project would serve not only as a tool to end the war with Japan, but also as a means of reining in the unpredictable behaviors of the Soviets. Byrnes states:

At the first Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in London in September 1945, the Soviets served notice that they were not going to be intimidated by the atomic bomb. As differences emerged and agreement grew unlikely, Foreign Minister Molotov sarcastically asked Secretary of State James F. Byrnes if he had an atomic bomb with him. Byrnes replied that he would ‘pull an atomic bomb out of my hip pocket and let you have it’ if the Soviets did not become more reasonable.  

U.S.-Soviet tensions were even more palpable following Truman’s authorization of the use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Soviets had to cope with unease brought about by the United States’ action and as a result, on August 1945, the Soviets created a Special Committee to oversee the rapid development of their own nuclear program. By December of 1945, the Soviets continued to have strong political and military influence in Poland, Iran, Greece and Turkey. Truman had grown weary of the Soviets’ lack of commitment to end their Eastern European and Middle East influences.

The U.S. media extensively covered the Truman administration’s hard-nosed policy towards the Soviet Union. An article in Modern America points out that “Truman explained all this [policy] information to the American people, just prior to stating that the United States would be giving aid to Turkey and Greece in an effort to stop the spread

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41 Ibid.,16.
42 Ibid.
Anti-Soviet sentiment continued to spread in the United States to such an extent that many Americans were suspected to be Soviet sympathizers. *Modern America* writes:

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) became a permanent fixture in 1946 to investigate threats of subversion to the American Constitution. As the threat of communist infiltration grew, the committee turned specifically to the investigation of communist subversion. The committee was responsible for starting the Hollywood Blacklist in 1947. They are probably most famous for the trial and conviction of the suspected soviet spy, former State Department foreign policy advisor, Alger Hiss. The case only furthered the American public’s fear of Soviet infiltration in the U.S. government.\(^{44}\)

A telegram from George Kennan, a Foreign Service officer in Moscow, urged the U.S. government to revamp U.S. policy toward the Soviets in order to meet the existing and rising challenges. He suggested that the United States did not necessarily have to go to war with the Soviet Union to offset their growing influence and lack of commitment to any existing agreements. According to Kennan, it was enough “as long as the United States demonstrates its willingness to defend its interests. Only by firmly resisting Soviet advances could the west hope to modify Soviet behavior.”\(^{45}\) Byrnes writes that Kennan “saw Soviet policy as a combination of traditional Russian insecurity about the west and communist ideology. Sense of threat from the West was used by the party to suppress dissent at home and justify an aggressive policy abroad. Their ideology taught them that there could be no long-term peace with the capitalist west, and that only by disrupting the


\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Byrnes, *The Truman Years, 1945-1953*, 17.
United States and its allies could Soviet security be maintained.\textsuperscript{46} By this time, the Eastern European countries were ruled by police governments that had been appointed by the Soviets and Iran, Turkey and Greece were increasingly under Soviet coercion. Truman was determined to pressure the Soviets to retreat from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. There is an overwhelming consensus by historians and political analysts that the disagreements between the United States and the Soviet Union over Iran pushed the tensions over the edge, starting the Cold War.

Truman proved to be a different kind of leader from Roosevelt because he was prepared to hold the Soviets responsible for not following through with their agreements to pull out of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and he was not willing to allow the spread of communism in Europe, the Middle East and around the world. In addition, Truman aimed to see through major policies implemented by Roosevelt, such as the formation of the United Nations, stabilizing Europe and maintaining close ties with U.S. allies. In terms of tactics, Truman was “temperamentally and intellectually drawn to a no-nonsense, tough-talking approach” but this had the “potential to make cooperation difficult if not impossible.”\textsuperscript{47} He eventually settled on a policy of ongoing confrontation.

From 1946 through 1949, the Soviets developed enough plutonium to produce a nuclear weapon and tested the first bomb, RDS-1.\textsuperscript{48} After the testing of the RDS-1 bomb, the Soviets built a series of such a weapon. In 1951, they developed a more sophisticated

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.,13.

version, which was named RDS-2. The Soviets tested the RDS-2 by carrying out their first nuclear air drop. In addition, the Soviets developed a thermonuclear device, which was named RDS-6 and tested on August, 1953. The rapid development and the stockpiling of these nuclear weapons led to increased tensions between Moscow and Washington and caused considerable disquiet for President Truman.
CHAPTER III
THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION’S PROPAGANDA AGENDA, ORGANIZATION AND DISSEMINATION

World War II U.S. Government Propaganda Initiatives

To better understand the Truman administration’s propaganda programs, it is important to highlight the propaganda initiatives by the Roosevelt administration prior to Truman taking office.

In 1940, Roosevelt was concerned about the growing influence of German and Soviet propaganda in Europe and the Middle East. To learn more about their propaganda tools and strategies, he sent Army General William Donovan to England to work with Britain’s intelligence agency. Donovan’s experience with British intelligence convinced him that the U.S. should also have intelligence and propaganda agencies, and he urged Roosevelt to create them.¹

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in 1940 and the United States’ subsequent involvement in World War II was a turning point for the use of U.S. government propaganda. Roosevelt initiated the creation of the Office of Coordinator of Information (OCI, which became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in 1942) under the guidance of Donovan. According to Nicolas Cull, the OCI served as an intelligence agency and managed special operations and Foreign Information Service (FIS) divisions. The FIS division was under the direction of Robert Sherwood who recruited many analysts sharing his left-of-center antifascist ‘Popular Front’ political outlook. His “approach

rested heavily on the image of FDR as a symbol of peace and postwar idealism [and thus, argued that all] U.S. information should be considered as a ‘continuous speech’ by the president.” Sherwood and his team worked closely with the British Special Operations and Political Warfare Executives to lay the foundation for the FIS strategic approach to the use of propaganda and acquired valuable lessons from their collaboration with the British. According to Cull, “the British were midwives at the wartime birth of the American international intelligence apparatus; the same midwife delivered the new American U.S. propaganda apparatus.” Sherwood, in particular, “subscribed to the British idea of a ‘Strategy of Truth,’ holding that the best way to manage information in war was to aim for credibility and conduct propaganda with the facts.” Within a year, the FIS expanded and an additional ten offices were opened around the world under the name United States Information Service. However, these offices accomplished little because Donovan and Sherwood disagreed over propaganda messages. When the Office of Strategic Services was created in June 1942, the FIS became part of the Office of War Information (OWI).

Even so, many Americans were not comfortable with the idea of a U.S. propaganda office because they associated the term “propaganda” with Nazism, and the

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

use of untruths and atrocity stories during World War I. Elmer Davis, the OWI director, sought to use a journalistic model in the creation and dissemination of wartime propaganda messages put forth by his agency.\(^6\) The agency reported on wartime news, and created war films to rally the U.S. public.

The most significant initiative that came out of the OWI was the Voice of America (VOA). VOA’s first director was John Houseman, who was responsible for building the foundation of the organization. The goal of VOA, found in 1942, was to provide news in a truthful manner. Houseman worked to hire credible journalists for the VOA international branches and to create the right theme music to reach international audiences. Houseman “saw value in creating an image for VOA that would attract audiences and had decided on the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic,’ as a signature tune when an observant British advisor pointed out that that was the tune of the German army’s marching song ‘Laura, Laura.’ The Americans hastily settled on ‘Yankee Doodle’ instead and commissioned the composer Virgil Thompson to orchestrate a rousing version for use on air.”\(^7\) The tune turned out to be a perfect fit for VOA, which proved to be especially helpful during the Cold War for the Yankee Doodle tune actually helped block Soviet airwave static.

At first, VOA shared a long-range airwave transmitter with the BBC and a short airwave transmitter with WLWO Ohio (WLW Overseas shortwave radio station, Bethany Ohio). However, as VOA grew it needed to be able to transmit news and programs


twenty-four hours a day through American-based shortwave commercial transmitters to countries throughout Europe and Asia. By 1942, VOA was broadcasting news in German, French, Italian and English and worked to create programs that were culturally-oriented to attract audiences in specific regions. Cull states:

[The] VOA’s output included broadcasts made under the nom de guerre Commander Norden, aimed at German U-boat crews. The broadcasts mixed tabloid gossip about the German fleet and its commanders with material calculated to undermine the credibility of U-boat claims of success and undermine the confidence of crews. The VOA knew from POW interviews that they had an audience and ‘a crushing effect on morale.’

In addition to broadcasting, the OWI generated print propaganda. The OWI published and disseminated books, magazines and leaflets in French and Russian including information in “the newspaper for France l’Amérique en Guerre about the life story of Franklin Roosevelt in cartoon strip form.” Magazines included Victory and the Russian-language pictorial magazine Amerika in the format of Life magazine. Leaflets showcasing the American way of life included Small Town U.S.A., A Portrait of Alexandria, Indiana. The OWI worked to make its newspaper reports abroad effective by hiring journalists originally from targeted countries. Its Bureau of Motion Pictures based in Los Angeles, under the direction of Lowell Mellett, produced wartime movies and documentaries, which supported the U.S. and its foreign policy agendas. Cull gives details:

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8 Ibid., 15.
9 Ibid., 16.
10 Ibid.
Domestic audiences saw shorts with succinct titles such as *Salvage, Fuel Conservation*, or *Troop Train*, while overseas OWI released more elaborate products such as its monthly *Magazine of the Screen* and films that introduced the American way of life to neutral, allied, and newly liberated countries. OWI films for export included *The Town* (1944), introducing a typical American small town, and *The Cummington Story* (1945), which documented the process by which four immigrant families were assimilated. Particular hits included the light-hearted short *Autobiography of a Jeep* (1943), in which a jeep ‘narrated’ its own career from design through testing to war services as ‘pal’ of the American Soldier.\(^{11}\)

As a result of all these activities, the OWI made significant progress in creating a U.S. presence on the international stage. It joined forces with the British to form the Political Warfare Division (PWD) under the War Department. From 1942 to 1944, the PWD launched a campaign directed at German-controlled territories urging them to surrender. In the words of Cull, “PWD methods included leaflet drops and loudspeaker appeals for desertion and surrender, nicknamed ‘hog calling’ by the army.”\(^{12}\) The PWD also used the American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE) to broadcast its wartime messages. According to Cull, radio “transmitters captured from Radio Luxembourg appeals to particular towns or groups of enemy soldiers.”\(^{13}\) The PWD attained great success as illustrated by the fact that a group of German forces in Cherbourg surrendered after the distribution of PWD leaflets.

The OWI collaborated with allies to carry out successful propaganda strategies and disseminate messages in East Asia, Europe, and Africa.\(^{14}\) However, its activities

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 18.
were hampered due to a rift with the Office of Strategic Services over a territorial dispute regarding which department was responsible for psychological warfare. The OWI also came under extreme scrutiny by Congress for partisanship and for distributing leaflets supporting Black rights in the United States. Furthermore, its Overseas Branch came under fire for broadcasting commentaries about the fall of Mussolini at a time that the State Department was in post-war negotiations with the new Italian government. Cull states:

[The] Voice of America English language broadcast repeated a piece of news commentary on the fall of Mussolini by Samuel Grafton of the New York Post. Grafton decried the remaining powers in Italy as ‘the moronic little king’ (Victor Emmanuel III) and ‘a Goering-like….Fascist’ (Marshall Pietro Badoglio). A VOA commentary by James Warburg (using a pseudonym) reflected similar views. On the morning of 27 July 1943, the front page of the New York Times carried the story by Arthur Knock attacking the OWI for the broadcasts.  

As a result, the OWI was heavily criticized by many U.S. government officials, and the New York Times referred to it as “running its own idiosyncratic left-wing foreign policy.”

After the broadcasting crisis over Italy, there was a major overseas departmental reshuffle. In September 1944, Sherwood left as the head of the Overseas Branch to work on Roosevelt’s reelection campaign. Elmer Davis appointed Edward W. Barrett, formally the Associate Editor of Newsweek, to take over Sherwood’s position. After Germany surrendered, the overseas branch was no longer considered urgently necessary.

\[15\] Ibid. 
\[16\] Ibid. 
\[17\] Ibid.
In April 1945, President Harry Truman took office while the OWI’s fate was in the balance. According to Parry-Giles, “Because of the hostility projected towards the U.S. propaganda program, including the critique that such programs were ‘wartime relics’ the Truman administration deliberated over the need to dismantle governmental propaganda activities in the postwar years. As a temporary solution, President Truman abolished the OWI and transferred propaganda operations to a reluctant Department of State on August 31, 1945.”

The Truman Administration’s Propaganda Agenda

Truman’s decision to abolish the OWI was not necessarily based on a belief that a U.S. propaganda office was no longer important. In fact, he felt quite the contrary. Truman was determined to redirect U.S. propaganda in a way that best served U.S. foreign policy. Cull claims that Truman was familiar with a report by Arthur W. MacMahon titled “Modern International Relations.” In this report, MacMahon states:

International information activities are integral to the conduct of foreign policy. The object of such activities is, first, to see that the context of knowledge among other people about the United States is full and fair, not meager and distorted and, second, to see that the policies which directly affect other peoples are present abroad with enough detail as well as background to make them understandable.

MacMohan argued that the U.S. government wartime propaganda agencies should be kept and used as a resource to promote U.S. foreign policies. Truman was impressed by MacMohan’s recommendations and ordered the transfer of the OWI overseas information division and the Office of Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) initiated by

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Nelson Rockefeller to the State Department and urged the Department to bring all propaganda divisions under the designation Interim International Information Service (IIIS). Truman saw the creation of the IIIS department within the State Department as an interim measure until he was able to gain ground politically. He aimed to convince Congress that a U.S. propaganda agency would be vital in post-war peacekeeping and in the promotion of U.S. foreign policy. According to Cull, Truman described the IIIS’s brief as “to see to it that other people received a full and fair picture of American life and the aims and policies of the United States government.”

In September 1945, Truman appointed William Benton as Assistant Secretary of State for Public and Cultural Affairs (Benton later changed his title to Assistant Secretary for State Public Affairs to distance his position from an association with propaganda). Benton was smart, neat, a talker, and highly ambitious. He was a well-seasoned professional, having worked in advertising, served as vice president at the University of Chicago, and engaged in entrepreneurship (he purchased the Muzak Corporation, an aural wallpaper company, and eventually sold it at considerable profit). His initial exposure to propaganda was through his work with the America First Committee in 1940, an anti-war organization where he worked to promote U.S. neutrality in World War II. In addition, Benton also served as an advisor to Nelson Rockefeller’s Office of Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. As Assistant Secretary, he took on the task of selling America to the

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20 Ibid., 24.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 25.
world as well as the idea of overseas information to the American elite. Whether Benton’s version of American information would be “as multifaceted as the University of Chicago or as anodyne as Muzak” remained to be seen. Benton was under extreme pressure to provide leadership to the IIIS at a time of great uncertainty as to what the future of the new U.S. government information agency would hold. Since the IIIS housed several information entities, Benton was also expected to provide clear goals and directives to a staff of over five hundred under his leadership.

The Truman Administration’s Propaganda Organization and Dissemination

In 1946, the IIIS department was changed to the State Department Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIC). Secretary of State James Byrnes was supportive of a U.S. government information office, even though there were disagreements within the State Department about where it should be housed. Secretary Byrnes went so far as to allocate more money to the State Department budget to support the interim U.S. government information agency. The OIC consisted of 62 United States Information Service (USIS) posts and the VOA. According to Cull, “the OIC structure mirrored the desks of the State Department, with five area divisions and a further five ‘operating divisions’ comprising International Broadcasting; International Press and Publications; Libraries and Institutes; International Exchange of Persons; and International Motion Pictures, which commissioned or purchased documentaries for use

\[23\text{ Ibid.}\]

\[24\text{ Parry-Giles, The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955, 5.}\]
overseas.”25 The effective operation of U.S. government information dissemination needed to be guaranteed, and so U.S. embassies each had an OIC representative working on U.S. government information initiatives.

Truman aimed to promote post-war peace through the work of the OIC. The congressional debate over funding for peacetime U.S. government overseas information activities from 1945 through 1948 revealed the approach utilized by the Truman administration – that of a journalistic paradigm– to allay doubts of the media and Congress over the necessity for a peacetime propaganda program. “Such an approach equated propaganda with news and required the testimony of leading editors and journalists to testify to propaganda’s utility and constitutionality.”26 Benton saw potential in working with journalists to promote U.S. government information programs and the legislation formalizing them. Parry-Giles states:

Rather than promoting the legalization of propaganda from the bully pulpit, though, Truman instead relied on State Department officials and members of Congress to achieve the legislative feat. The campaign that William Benton spearheaded as the director of the interim program reflected his own rhetorical acumen domestically; members of the media and Congress became convinced of a governmental ‘news’ agency’s necessity in this new kind of war—a ‘war of words.’ As Benton and his congressional supporters urged, this word ‘war’ promised to forestall more war, promote peace, and fulfill the country’s international responsibility in the postwar world.27

Truman, in conjunction with the State Department, was eager to enact legislation that would support and fund the U.S. government overseas information agenda. Prior to the

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27 Ibid., 5-6.
renaming of the IIIS into the OIC, Benton approached Representative Sol Bloom (D-NY), chair of the Foreign House Affairs Committee, to support and introduce legislation that Benton’s office wrote (H.R. 4348, later named the Bloom Bill), which would allow the State Department to implement and maintain international information and exchange programs abroad.²⁸ Benton was ready to organize and launch a campaign to promote international understanding and a truthful image of the United States through radio, film, and cultural exchange programs.

**Institutionalization of U.S Government Information Agencies**

In early 1946, Benton received bad news regarding VOA. The Associated Press (AP) and the United Press (UP) canceled their newswire service to VOA because they were concerned that government-sponsored propaganda would negatively affect their public image as a press corporation, potentially sabotaging their chances of conducting business. VOA was leasing shortwave newswire from AP and UP because the OIC did not have the necessary budget to pay for its own shortwave transmitter. In addition, AP and UP did not see VOA as investment-worthy because VOA aired news for free to Soviet and European audiences, which did not generate revenue for these two news agencies. Because World War II had ended, Congress no longer viewed VOA’s role as a broadcaster of U.S. information overseas as vital to U.S. security interests, and the AP and UP decision to cancel VOA newswire further resulted in OIC budget cuts that reduced 19 million to 10 million. Benton decided to make VOA’s newswire

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independent. To gain ground from these major setbacks, Benton lobbied hard with
Congress to get the Bloom Bill passed. Cull states:

Benton concluded that the best way to neutralize the hostility of the commercial
radio sector was to create an independent Voice of America under a new
‘International Broadcasting Foundation of the United States.’ The foundation’s
board would include the Secretary or Assistant Secretary of State and fourteen
private citizens. The foundation would, he imagined, take over U.S. government-
controlled radio transmitters and VOA broadcasts would be subject to charter that
defined the VOA’s role as ‘to disseminate information pertaining to American
life, policy, industry, techniques, culture and customs.’

Benton worked to promote his vision of an independent U.S. government information
agency to Secretary Byrnes since he did not feel that VOA posed any danger to U.S.
press corporations. But Congress had reservations regarding the State Department’s
ability to oversee the dissemination of U.S. government information abroad. According to
David Krugler, “In April 1946, the House Foreign Affairs Committee Member John
Vorys stated that the AP/UP controversy showed that the Department was dragging its
feet on setting up a permanent standing for VOA. In May, Vorys complained that the
department was contemplating setting a monopoly on overseas information programs.”

The committee concluded that no funds should be allocated to information programs
because the State Department failed to effectively deliver information to key foreign
audiences. Rather, the committee stated, the task of delivering government information
should be given to the private media where news is best disseminated. The committee
was very much concerned about the truthfulness of the State Department’s message

29 Cull, The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and

content. According to Krugler, Representative Jones expressed concerns that “the State Department might use information programs to glamorize the administration in power.”

Representative Noah Mason (R-IL) was more direct than Jones with his pronouncement that the State Department could not be relied upon to convey truth because it committed perjury regarding the partitioning of Poland. Bound by all this criticism, Congress did not vote on the Bloom Bill. The concerns that the State Department was interfering with press freedom and the movement of private media continued to surface. After World War II, the U.S. government leased seven shortwave radio transmitters to private international transmitters to carry the VOA. In 1946, the State Department budget cuts resulted in delays in the renewal of the leased contracts. While Benton was working to get the Bloom Bill passed so he could get VOA back on the air, the Department conversely approved only six out of the seven contracts. Krugler states:

With the exception of World-Wide Broadcasting Foundation (WWBF), the transmitter owners signed new contracts. Founded by Walter Lemmon, a wealthy Christian Scientist, the WWBF had broadcast before the war cultural, educational and spiritual programs about the United States. Lemmon was eager to resume operations, but due to lack of international frequencies, the VOA’s output would have been reduced had the WWBF regained its transmitter.

In response to Lemmon’s complaints, Benton argued that the WWBF did not get its lease renewed because it was not capable of broadcasting news 400 hours a week in 24 languages. Benton’s arguments further convinced Congress not to vote on the Bloom Bill, and it was suspended due to fear of government interference with private media.

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31 Ibid., 41.
32 Ibid., 41-42.
Lemmon did not abandon his fight to get his contract renewed. He took his complaint to the Senate Appropriation Subcommittee. After hearing Lemmon’s case, Senator Walter White (R-ME) stated that the action of the State Department had no legal authority. After the hearing, the subcommittee urged the State Department to give WWBF three hours of broadcast time daily. Benton was not happy about this decision but the WWBF situation gave him the basis to advocate for the Bloom Bill. The Senate Appropriation Subcommittee decided to make an amendment to the bill, “prohibiting the State Department monopolization of information activities and required the use of private services wherever possible.” On July 20, 1946, the House passed the bill but was blocked by one Senate vote (Senator Robert Taft, R-NH). Benton was feeling trapped by Washington bureaucracy and politics. He would next take his fight for U.S. information programs to press, while also working Washington’s inner circle. Benton would introduce new legislation supporting U.S. information and exchange programs, the Smith-Mundt Act, which would prove to bring success to the OIC mission and vision because the bill strived to promote a good understanding of America abroad.

**National Security Act of 1947**

Meanwhile, Truman recognized the need for intelligence gathering in the face of Soviet psychological warfare against the United States. Existing intelligence such as the George Kennan telegram and OSS reports on the VOA service in Russia suggested that the Soviet propaganda campaign against the United States had intensified. Cull states that

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33 Ibid., 43.

34 The Kennan Telegram, chapter II of this thesis, 40.
“One policy officer went so far as to argue that the U.S.S.R. had ‘declared psychological warfare against the United States.’”\textsuperscript{35} Truman understood the Soviets’ intentions; he knew that the Soviets were more interested in psychological war than a physical war, through which they intended to undermine the credibility of the United States around the world.\textsuperscript{36} He called for the creation of an intelligence apparatus dedicated to countering propaganda messages from the Soviet Union. According to Cull,

In February [1947], the White House introduced a National Security Bill to establish a Central Intelligence Agency, a National Security Resources Board, a Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a single Defense Department. Above it all, a National Security Council (NSC) made up of the key senior figures in foreign and defense policy, would meet to coordinate the U.S. approach to the world.\textsuperscript{37}

Truman’s main vision was to create a U.S. intelligence agency to organize and analyze all intelligence information, and provide effective communication to U.S. government agencies. In his memoir, \textit{Years of Decisions}, Truman writes:

This scattered method of getting information for the various departments of the government first struck me as being badly organized when I was in the Senate. Our Senate committees, hearing the witnesses from the executive departments, were often struck by the fact that different agencies of the government came up with different and conflicting facts on similar subjects. It was not at first apparent that this was due to the uncoordinated methods of obtaining information. Since then, however, I have often thought that if there had been something like coordination of information in the government it would have been more difficult, if not impossible, for the Japanese to succeed in the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor. In those days the military did not know everything the State Department knew, and the diplomats did not have access to all the Army and Navy knew. The Army


\textsuperscript{36} The Kennan Telegram, chapter II of this thesis, 40.

and the Navy, in fact, had only a very informal arrangement to keep each other informed as to their plans.38

On March 7, 1947, Benton received reports that the Soviets were spreading propaganda in Europe claiming that the United States was a warmonger and was seeking to dominate other countries. Benton reacted swiftly, and wrote a memorandum to George Marshall, Secretary of State, that strongly advocated direct action against Soviet psychological warfare. Benton argued that Soviet propaganda was misleading and required full U.S. engagement to counter a corrupt and negative ideology. According to Cull, Marshall refused to commit to this plan of action. Replying from Moscow on April 15, he confessed (a little insultingly) to Benton, “I have not considered your proposals thoroughly” and argued that “The use of propaganda as such is contrary to our generally accepted precepts of democracy and to the public statements I have made.”39

Truman, however, recognized the need to push for U.S. intelligence and information abroad. In March 1947, Truman delivered a speech to Congress advocating containment of the Soviet Union, which paved the way for the National Security Act to be passed both in the House and the Senate in July of 1947. According to the act, the CIA, which replaced the OSS, had four major functions:

- To advise the National Security Council in matters concerning such intelligence activities of the government departments and agencies as related to national security.

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• To make recommendations to the National Security Council for the coordination of such intelligence activities of the departments and agencies of the government as related to national security.

• To correlate and evaluate intelligence related to national security, and to provide for the appropriate dissemination of such intelligence within the Government, using, where appropriate, existing intelligence agencies and facilities.

• To perform for the benefit of existing intelligence agencies such additional services of common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more effectively accomplished centrally [or to benefit existing intelligence agencies in areas of common concern which the National Security Council determines can be more effectively accomplished centrally].

• To perform other such functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct.  

The European Recovery Program of 1948 (The Marshall Plan)

The Marshall Plan had been proposed in 1947 by Secretary of State George Marshall as a means of providing economic aid to European countries in dire need of economic recovery. It was also called the European Recovery Program (ERP) and included an informational dimension. According to Cull, the “plan itself had a strong propaganda value, but its home agency –the Economic Corporation Agency (ECA) –had an explicit mandate for publicity.”  

The Marshall Plan was designed in part to educate the European public about the United States, its culture, society and democratic principles. However, the bill went beyond this realm. According to Cull, “the U.S. role


in reconstruction soon expanded into a large-scale attempt to project the American way of life and the virtues of the free enterprise system.”

**The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (Smith-Mundt Act)**

In his March 12, 1947 containment speech, President Truman intended to respond strongly to negative Soviet propaganda against the United States. Cull observes that during Truman’s speech to Congress, “the President plainly intended his words to rally opinion behind the confrontation with Stalin.” The Moscow embassy reported that Truman’s speech “clearly captured the political warfare offensive and put the propaganda machinery on the defensive.” The Truman containment policy (also known as the Truman Doctrine) called for substantial aid and U.S. involvement in Greece and Turkey to counter growing Soviet influence in the Middle East.

Benton moved quickly to disseminate U.S. information in Greece and Turkey by setting up VOA broadcasts and working with House Representative Karl Mundt (R-ND), who introduced the Information and Educational Exchange bill. According to Cull, the bill “proposed funding mechanisms to spread information about the United States, its people, and its policies.” If the bill were passed, the institutionalization of America’s communication and engagement programs with an international audience would see fruition. However, the bill came under scrutiny in Congress. Some congressmen

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42 Ibid., 38.
43 Ibid., 36.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
“opposed all state-funding publicity overseas.” 46 John Bennett (R-MI) argued that the world knew that the United States promoted freedom and therefore “Things which are self-evident require no proof.” 47 Benton was determined to rally support for the Smith-Mundt Act (also named for Senator Alexander Smith, who threw his support behind it) to pass by working with OWI alumni and promoting it through the media. Parry-Giles narrates:

In order to woo OWI alums into supporting the program Benton used his own money to purchase and present framed certificates of merit. He also tried, though apparently unsuccessfully, to award OWI propagandists with commendation medals. Clearly, Benton felt such recognition would produce more favorable coverage of the Smith-Mundt bill by those he identified as ‘back at their jobs on the newspapers and magazines, often writing editorials.’ 48

Benton also formed a committee consisting of media executives to review U.S. government propaganda program operations and to make recommendations for possible changes. Several members on the committee provided a glowing evaluation report of U.S. government propaganda efforts, including “David Sarnoff, RCA chair; Philip D. Reed, GE Chair; and Frank Stanton, CBS president.” 49 Benton also worked with radio executives to discuss the Smith-Mundt Act. The media executives strongly supported the bill because they saw it as a possible asset to the leasing of their shortwave radio tools. To highlight the media executives’ support for the bill, Benton described them as “the

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
people who are in the best position to judge its [international information] value.” In addition, he put together a Radio Advisory Committee to determine the effectiveness of U.S. government propaganda. Parry-Giles notes that “The committee assembled many notable individuals such as scholar Harold Lasswell and broadcaster Edward R. Murrow, in addition to Gardner Cowles, Jr., Publisher of the Des Moines Register and Tribune.” This committee’s final report indicated that funding for international information was vital “to avoid a serious set-back in the development of its proper relations with the rest of the world.” Moreover, Benton approached the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) to ask for their support for the Smith-Mundt Act. According to Parry-Giles, the ASNE was at first hostile to the bill but after discussing it with Benton, decided to form a committee to review the bill. The committee came to the conclusion that “present uncertainties in international relations justify an effort by the United States government to make its activities and its policies clear to the people of the world through the agency set up in the State Department.” Benton made the recommendations from these committees public. In addition, Truman made an effort to be open to discourse and criticism from the press regarding the U.S. government information program because he valued the support of the media.

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50 Ibid., 8.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
The Smith-Mundt Act continued on a rocky road of congressional scrutiny, failing to successfully pass during two House votes in May and July of 1947. In a last-ditch effort to pass the bill 54 Congress formed a special subcommittee to conduct an “on-the-spot investigation of U.S. propaganda programs abroad” 55 by traveling to twenty-two European counties in September and October of 1947. When the committee returned, many members of the Congress were impressed with its favorable report on the bill. The bill was finally passed both in the House and Senate, and President Truman signed it into law on January 27, 1948.

The prohibition by the Smith-Mundt Act of the U.S. State Department dissemination of information intended for foreign audiences to the American public was mainly due to the fact that “some members of Congress had concerns about the perception of the U.S. indoctrinating its own citizens, particularly in light of the domestic propaganda campaigns that took place in Germany and Japan during World War II.” 56 Furthermore, the increasing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union led some members of Congress to believe that there were many Communist sympathizers in the State Department, and that therefore a prohibition of domestic information dissemination would allow Congress to keep possible sympathizers in check. 57 It is

54 Ibid., 10.
55 Ibid., 11.
57 Ibid.
practically on this platform that Congress “sought to engage the private sector media in this effort, reflected by a provision in the Smith-Mundt Act that directed the Secretary of State ‘to utilize, to the maximum extent practicable, the services and facilities of private agencies, including existing American press, publishing, radio, motion picture, and other agencies.’”58

With the passing of the Smith-Mundt Act in January 1948, the Truman Administration was eager to test new U.S. information and cultural activities in the Third World. The Act became the foundation for propaganda to be edged out by “public diplomacy,” a term (coined in the mid-1960s)59 that seems to better reflect a modified perspective regarding government use of information. Parker states:

[The Smith-Mundt Act] reorganized the ad hoc arrangements inherited from the war years or created on-the-fly since, and articulated their Cold War mission. That mission still focused overwhelmingly on the East and West blocs. Although certain areas outside Europe, including India and Pakistan, would soon be designated a ‘danger zone’ in terms of American strategy and hence in terms of public diplomacy, they were still seen as ultimately peripheral.60

The Korean War, which began June 1950, provided an opportunity for the Truman Administration to implement the Smith-Mundt Act. In the case of Korea, the “military-run [U.S.] public–diplomacy aimed to demoralize North Korean troops and bolster South Korean troops and civilians. The VOA, balloons, pamphlet drops, and

58 Ibid.


comic books were the main media used. Cheap to produce and easy to ‘piggyback’ onto military operations, these were arguably the most that U.S. public diplomacy could hope to get out in the months between Kim’s invasion and the September counterattack at Inchon.”61 In Korea there was an immediate recognition that an “effective public diplomacy required a dedicated mechanism for the civilian sector before, during, and after hostilities.”62 As much as there was goodwill towards the launch of an effective civilian section public diplomacy, the efforts proved to be disorganized due the fact that there was continuing war crises leading up to the Inchon incident.63 U.S. public diplomacy in Korea was concerned with the regional balance of power, and its image in the region. According to Parker, “Guidance from Foggy Bottom to Far Eastern posts outlined the message, which was essentially the dissemination of Truman’s first Korea speech tailored to U.S. actions in Formosa, Indochina, and the Philippines. In Formosa, public diplomats were told to emphasize ‘that by this impartial act [of military response the] U.S. is creating a situation of peace in the Far East and is neutralizing a sterile conflict which is draining the strength of China.”64 Essentially, U.S. public diplomacy in Asia sought to keep the regional crisis in control, while at the same time ensuring that the Soviet influence in the region was kept in check. Parker further states that the Smith-Mundt Act, having been tested in Korea, seemed to have just barely passed: “Too many

61 Ibid., 244.
62 Ibid., 244-245.
63 Ibid., 245.
64 Ibid.
moving parts, some not moving enough, and some too far apart—and an inability to measure success hindered the enterprise even as its importance rose.”

By 1950 most parties were in agreement regarding the importance of information activities – but there still was the question of their chances for success.

While the Truman administration wrestled with Congress in passing U.S. government information legislation from 1946 to 1948, the Soviets were actively seeking to spread communism in Europe and Asia by glorifying its achievements and by undermining democracy including by the launch of the Hate-America propaganda. This new Soviet propaganda further fuelled an already intense U.S.-Soviet relationship. The Truman administration felt the effects of Soviet propaganda in 1950 when “North Korea and China both charged that the United States engaged in germ or biological warfare in North Korea, which ‘expand[ed] the aggressive war in Korea, and instigat[ed] new wars.’ Any disease, plagues, or outbreaks of insects were all blamed on ‘U.S. imperialist aims,’ illustrating to Truman officials that the ‘hate-American theme [would] play a major…role in Soviet psychological strategy.’ The Truman administration responded to Soviet aggression and identified it as “information designed to convince satellite countries that communism was superior to democracy.”

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65 Ibid., 251.


67 Ibid., 50.

68 Ibid.
As the Cold War intensified, the Truman administration launched its aggressive Campaign of Truth and utilized the CIA to counter the Soviet Union propaganda machine. According to the Encyclopedia of the New American Nation, “Under the Campaign of Truth, the State Department's budget for information activities jumped from around $20 million in 1948 to $115 million in 1952.”[^69] President Truman, with the assistance of the new Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Edward Barrett, gave numerous speeches to counter the effects of Soviet propaganda. According to Parry-Giles, “From April 1950, through January 16, 1951, propaganda officials gave some fifty-four speeches in favor of the Campaign of Truth.”[^70] After 1951 the number of speeches given for this purpose began to wind down; however, an information campaign to counter Soviet propaganda continued to unfold. “The Campaign of Truth also brought a change in the style and content of U.S. propaganda output, which shifted from objective-sounding news and information to hard-hitting propaganda in its most obvious form—cartoons depicting bloodthirsty communists, vituperative anticommunist polemics, and sensational commentary.”[^71]

By early 1951, Truman mobilized the CIA to launch covert operations against Soviet propaganda and established the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB). According to Parry-Giles, the “PSB acted as a coordinating body for all non-military Cold War


activities, including covert operations. It supervised programs for aggressive clandestine warfare and propaganda measures against the Soviet bloc. It also developed ‘psychological strategy’ plans for dozens of countries in Western Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{72}

**The Impact of U.S. Government Propaganda**

From a propaganda perspective, the most significant development of the CIA covert infrastructure was the creation of Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL). The RFE was established in 1949 “under the ‘government’s intelligence apparatus’ of the National Committee for a Free Europe (also known as the Free Europe Committee), an ostensibly private organization created to camouflage U.S. government involvement.”\textsuperscript{73}

The “RL was formed in 1951 under the sponsorship of the American Committee for Freedom for the Peoples of the U.S.S.R., Inc.”\textsuperscript{74} According to Parry-Giles, “As the title of the RL’s foundation implies, it existed to beam messages to the Soviet Union, using former Soviet citizens as broadcasters. RFE targeted Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Bulgaria. Both radios operated without congressional authorization, and little interaction existed between the two organizations.”\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955*, 52.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
In an attempt to maintain RFE’s and RL’s covert nature, the U.S. government refrained from mentioning the stations in legal government documents. If the government ever mentioned these broadcasts, it would simply refer to them as “other U.S. International Broadcasting.”

To run the RFE and RL, the CIA employed “exiled political leaders from the Soviet bloc, but the CIA maintained fairly loose control over their broadcasts through the National Committee for a Free Europe.”

The Truman administration authorized overseas information operations as part of the Campaign of Truth. In the Encyclopedia of the New American Nation we find that the CIA “botched an attempt to detach Albania from the Kremlin's grip, launched leaflet-dropping operations via enormous unmanned hot-air balloons, encouraged defections from behind the Iron Curtain, and sponsored provocative (and generally unsuccessful) paramilitary operations involving U.S.-trained émigrés from Russia and Eastern Europe.” The CIA also sponsored and coordinated covert grassroots programs that were carried out on the ground in Europe, subsidizing “noncommunist labor unions, journalists, political parties, politicians, and student groups. In Western Europe the CIA conducted a secret program of cultural and ideological propaganda through the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a purportedly private, but CIA-funded, organization that supported the work of anticommunist liberals.”

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76 Ibid.


78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.
covert propaganda, publishing more than twenty prestigious magazines and numerous books, holding art exhibitions, operating a news and feature service, organizing high-profile international conferences, and sponsoring public performances by musicians and artists. One of the countries in which CIA covert operations were particularly effective was Italy, where Communists failed to seize control of the government. According to William Blum, “American officials in Italy widely distributed leaflets extolling US economic aid and staged exhibitions among low-income groups. The U.S. Information Service presented an exhibition on ‘The Worker in America’ and made extensive use of documentary and feature films to sell the American way of life.” During the period that followed the Italian election, there was rise in the number of American documentaries released in Italy. Blum states that the 1939 Hollywood film *Ninotchka*, which satirizes life in Russia, was singled out as a particularly effective, and was shown throughout working-class areas. The Communists made several determined efforts to thwart its showing but after the election, a pro-Communist worker was reported as saying, “What licked us was ‘Ninotchka.’”

From 1952 to 1953, U.S. government psychological warfare against Soviet propaganda adopted a military tone. Parry-Giles tells us that “political officials relied

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82 Ibid., 31.
heavily on artillery metaphors when discussing psychological warfare, propaganda, and their appropriate structures.”

By the time President Truman left office, U.S. propaganda was having an impact on European politics, social structure, and public opinion. In the scope of the Cold War, psychological warfare against the Soviet Union was just beginning when Truman left office in 1953. It is exactly in this political climate that Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected in 1953. Eisenhower’s presidency further defined the legacy of U.S.-Soviet ideological struggle.

In summary, although the Truman administration’s propaganda began with uncertainty, Truman strove to find a solid ground for U.S. overseas information programs’ goals and strategies. The administration’s propaganda agenda went through several phases. The first phase was from 1945 to 1947, when the OWI was abolished and the new IIS department under Benton was created. The second phase occurred from 1947 to 1949, when the Truman administration recognized the communist ideological influence in Europe, East Asia and Africa and failed to rapidly counter this threat. During the third phase (1950 to 1953), the Truman administration declared a “Campaign of Truth” to aggressively step up the U.S. propaganda machine in order to counter a growing Soviet influence. Parry-Giles states:

Truman associated himself publicly with the propaganda program during the Campaign of Truth and fought for the necessary expenditures to keep it running at

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a strengthened pace. Most significantly, Truman’s rhetoric revealed the transformed tone of the U.S. propaganda as well as the newly implemented militarized structure. Truman’s attack on the communist Hate America campaign during much of the Campaign of Truth address, [was meant to expose] Soviet leaders as liars and imperialists.85

Furthermore, Truman recognized the need for the U.S. government to disseminate truthful information about the United States overseas. In addition, to counter negative stereotypes about U.S. government information, educational, and cultural programs abroad, he encouraged legislation that would institutionalize these programs in order to eliminate partisan politics, which could hamper American propaganda efforts overseas.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of propaganda by the U.S. government overseas to further its national interests highlighting the Truman administration’s ideological struggle with the Soviet Union during the early Cold War.

The first chapter discussed the etymology of propaganda and its subsequent evolution as a tool for dissemination of political beliefs in the context of warfare. In the United States, propaganda was used from the very first days of the Republic, and indeed the Declaration of Independence is considered to be a propaganda document.¹ In its modern form, propaganda as employed by the U.S. government in foreign affairs began during World War I, with the creation of the Committee on Public Information (1917-1919), whose mission was to encourage domestic support for the war and to inform/educate overseas publics about the United States and to offset the impact of the Central Powers’ enemy propaganda.

The second chapter reviewed the emergence of Soviet propaganda with the Bolshevik regime’s rise to power and the resulting non-recognition policy of the United States towards the USSR in response to the Bolsheviks’ refusal to repay a loan. This strained relationship engendered the strengthening of Soviet use of domestic print, broadcast, and visual media to convey communism in a positive light and the United States as “the enemy” abroad in the inter war years.

The third chapter explored the establishment of U.S. information programs during the early Cold War to counter Soviet propaganda. President Truman was willing to enact legislation

that supported and funded the U.S. government overseas agenda. The National Security Act of 1947 mandated the creation of an intelligence apparatus that organized and analyzed data, and supplied U.S. government agencies with reliable information. Covert propaganda measures included radio stations (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) that did not have congressional authorization yet broadcast news into the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The European Recovery Program of 1948 (also known as the Marshall Plan) helped educate the European public about the United States. The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (also known as the Smith-Mundt Act) provided the legislative framework for engagement of the U.S. information, educational and cultural activities with audiences around the world. The Truman administration contributed to the defeat of Communism during the Cold War- a war which, more than any other in the twentieth century, was fought on an ideological level. This is why, in part, Truman’s legacy is historically important.

**Current Debates on Public Diplomacy**

Today, the United States is facing new challenges. With the introduction of the Internet, related advances in communication technologies and the rise of cyber espionage and information leakage by rogue actors, the U.S. government cannot prevent Americans from accessing U.S. government information meant for foreign audiences.

Today, many critics ask if the Smith-Mundt Act, which created firewall between the dissemination of domestic and foreign information by the U.S. government, can respond to twenty-first century U.S. public diplomacy requirements. Some analysts suggest that the Smith-Mundt Act should be retooled because it has lost relevance. According to Jeremy Berkowitz, the

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2 According to the State Department website, public diplomacy is “engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences.” See http://www.state.gov/misc/19232.htm.
“Smith-Mundt Act is not only obsolete, but also hinders an effective 21st century public diplomacy strategy, given the economic, political, and technological changes in the sixty-one years since the Act became law.”³ In short, while the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 was effective in countering Communist propaganda during the Cold War, it is ill-equipped for the wars of the current era. Berkowitz further notes, “The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the ongoing turmoil between Israel and Palestinian forces in the past decade reflect a more complicated world that requires the U.S. to use new and innovative methods to reach populations in other countries.”⁴

According to Berkowitz, the “State Department needs to use the Internet to effectively engage with other countries, without fear of violating a law that no longer makes sense.”⁵ At present, the Smith-Mundt remains in force and officials cannot post information meant for international audiences onto the Department’s official website. The “continually evolving foreign policy of the United States and the rapid and significant advances in communications technology highlight the need for a comprehensive review of the Smith-Mundt Act.”⁶

Berkowitz provides a set of recommendations on how the U.S. government can reform the Smith-Mundt Act. He stresses the importance of providing guidelines to government agencies instead of enforcing specific rules, which can easily hamper their flexibility to adapt to changes. He recommends that the U.S. government utilize social media as a means to disseminate its message to a wide and young audience around the world. He also emphasizes the

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.
importance of accountability and consistency to ensure that government agencies are not engaging in unlawful actions or corruption. According to Berkowitz, “Accountability also ensures that agency action is coordinated, and the rules are appropriately applied as necessary. The reinstatement of a single agency to coordinate public diplomacy, like the former United States Information Agency\(^7\) (or USIA), would also increase accountability and further the public diplomacy mission.”\(^8\)

The Smith-Mundt Act, along with the National Security Act, is what provided the United States the edge it needed during the Cold War to win it. If the Smith-Mundt Act is improved to deal with twenty-first century ideological challenges, it will prove to be an effective and legitimate base for U.S. public diplomacy at a global level.

This thesis highlights President Truman’s legislative achievements in establishing institutions and programs that shaped U.S. foreign policy and outreach during the early Cold War. Further research is needed in order to assess how the U.S. government can best reform its public diplomacy, which was shaped by the Smith-Mundt Act, in order for America to maintain its significant role in the world.

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\(^7\) It was created in 1953 by President Dwight Eisenhower as an independent agency, and was consolidated into the State Department in 1999. It continued and expanded into many of the programs in the Smith-Mundt Act.

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