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Soft Power and Polite Propaganda:
Public diplomacy in the early Cold War

Jacob Antonio Aloï

An Honors Thesis

Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with honors in History from Hamline University

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PREFACE

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, a younger, fresh-eyed version of myself was at a crossroads. I have always had a deep fascination with the history of Southeast Asia and had always thought I'd conduct research on that area. Meanwhile, my first years in college had been spent in European history classes with a focus almost entirely in Russian cultural studies and history. So when I, a doe-eyed historian in training, was required to pick a topic to study for my methodology course I had the choice—delve into the history of Singapore's founding, or continue down the path of Soviet history, with a keen interest in Soviet-US relations. At the time, I could not have foreseen the relevance in picking the latter, yet, here we are.

Studying the lives of George F. Kennan and W. Averell Harriman, as well as things like *Voice of America*, World War II, soft power, and public diplomacy have broadened my understanding of not only the world during the Cold War, but also the world we live in today. Conducting primary research by poring over telegraphs, diaries, and interdepartmental notes has given me interesting insight into how America has viewed itself over time, and how it views those in foreign countries beyond the governments that represent them, especially the USSR. Even beyond their explanations and references in my thesis, the research has truly shaped my view of the practices of the United States in the realm of diplomacy and international affairs. While it may not be the spotlight of my paper, it is one of the many themes I hope to convey through my research and writing—along with the impact these topics and events have on the history of diplomacy and propaganda, and how their humble beginnings still affect and influence us.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, political scientist and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye coined the term *soft power*. As defined by him, soft power in a political and cultural context is “The ability to affect others and obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment.” It is important to note that while Nye developed the concept in an American context, it can be used in international and interpersonal contexts.¹ Nye believes that there has been a growing trend toward an interest in soft power, and sees America at the forefront of its evolution and development. While the term may have been coined in the 1980s by Nye, the concept existed well before him, and had effectively been put into practice decades before it received an official name.²

A primary example of the United States' aptitude for soft power lies in the early years of the Cold War, in particular the mid to late 1940s. The use of soft power was vital to the vision and mission of the US Embassy in Moscow. In turn, the State Department used soft power to shape the view of America abroad and forced the struggle of American ideals to be shared in a fair light in communist states. The efforts of ambassadors such as W. Averell Harriman and George F. Kennan in the creation of State Department programs such as the magazine *Amerika* and *Voice of America*, as well as other forms of polite propaganda, act as a litmus test for the development of American soft power in a diplomatic context. Through examination of State Department records and interdepartmental notes of the mid to late 1940s, as well as primary

¹ Nye, Joseph. “Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept”. *Palgrave Commun* 3, 17008 (2017). p.

1

² Nye, p. 3

and secondary resources concerning early US backed Cold War programs in the Soviet Union, I will make clear not only the use of soft power in late 1940s US-Soviet relations, but also the impact it had on the direction of the Cold War and future endeavors regarding public diplomacy campaigns.

To begin, an explanation of terms and concepts, as well as a summary of the research on these subjects will be given. Doing so will hopefully convey the history of research and analysis already given to these subjects and better frame the direction of the thesis conducted in this paper. Next, context for the historical time period will be given to better understand the setting which would have necessitated these soft power programs. It will be followed by background on some of the major diplomats at the US Embassy in Moscow, along with their outlooks on the early years of the Cold War to further examine the reasoning behind such policies. Following that will be analysis of these programs, their development, and their impact on the State Department's mission and goals in the Soviet Union throughout the end of the 1940s and soft powers changes into the 1950s. Finally, a conclusion will summarize the impact of the soft power in the early years of the Cold War and its effectiveness for the remainder of the century.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Research on the topic of American propaganda efforts in the USSR in the late 1940s and early fifties seems to fixate on its purpose and why such measures were required. Even as early as the 1950s, political scientists and cultural theorists began their dissection of American media efforts. In 1950, *New Yorker* contributor Creighton Peet published a review in the *College Art Journal* on such subjects. Peet posits that in the beginning of the Cold War, programs like the magazine *Amerika* were effective due to their ability to engage with the common class of Soviet citizens. *Amerika* was a magazine published by the US State Department and distributed within the USSR as the first in a series of US State sponsored propaganda. Its contents ranged from how the United States judicial system worked to pieces on American culture, such as industrial factories and technological advances in Aerospace.³ *Amerika* was seemingly created to give the US perspective of how capitalism had flourished, rather than its inherent evil as depicted by Soviet State sponsored media. Peet argues that the direct response the Soviet government had to the publication points to its initial success. At the same time *Amerika* had begun publication in the USSR, the increase in Anti-American rhetoric by the Soviet State owned paper *Pravda*—named after the Russian word for truth—gave the US State Department an indication that their efforts in soft power had not gone unnoticed. Peet also explains that this is one of the

³ Yarrow, Andrew L. "Selling a New Vision of America to the World: Changing Messages in Early U.S. Cold War Print Propaganda.", p. 24-25

reasons the State Department upped the number of magazines they published in the Soviet Union.⁴

Political scientist and professor Anita Mallinckrodt Dasbach also wrote extensively about American propaganda behind the Iron Curtain, also looking at it through the lens of cultural and diplomatic influence. In her writing, Dasbach focuses on the themes and topics covered in the magazine *Amerika* as a case study of the message the US was hoping to send to those in the USSR, such as the use of arts and culture sections to show American innovation and contributions to wider culture. Her research, however, is primarily focused on later editions of the publication as late as the 1960s, and is centered mostly on their influence at the time, rather than as a retrospection.⁵

Looking at the topic of US propaganda in the USSR and its impact with a historical lens has only become a more prominent conversation in the last two decades. Historian, professor, and journalist Andrew L. Yarrow takes a similar approach to Dasbach and Peet with one key advantage—the ability to view the past and its impact on the Cold War. For his research, Yarrow not only focuses on the extent of US foreign propaganda, or as he and others have called it public diplomacy, but also the long term impacts these early efforts in the 1940s and 1950s had on US policy changes and public perception in the Soviet Union. It is in this school of thought and study that a proper understanding of the historical impact of US soft power in the USSR can take place.⁶

⁴ Peet, Creighton. “Russian ‘Amerika,’ a Magazine about U. S. for Soviet Citizens.” *College Art Journal* 11, no. 1 (1951): 17–20.

⁵ Dasbach, Anita Mallinckrodt. “U. S. — Soviet Magazine Propaganda: America Illustrated and USSR.” *Journalism Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1966): 73–84.

⁶ Yarrow, 3–45.

THE EARLY 1900s

Before the Second World War, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States of America could be described as strained at best. In 1917, the Russian Empire collapsed, and from its ashes arose a new communist state. This cultural and political revolution, achieved through violent rebellion led by Vladimir Lenin, had successfully created a republic of the working class, for the working class.⁷ However, this momentous event in the USSR did not earn the reborn state many friends in the West, including the United States. The national sentiment in America at the time was one of apprehension and fear towards communism. The Red Scare, a general fear of communism expanding outside the Soviet sphere, was on the rise and taking hold of America. However, the US at the time was not interested in getting involved militarily. The events of the recently won First World War in many ways dissuaded President Woodrow Wilson and the government at large from pursuing military action.⁸ From the late 1910s until the 1930s, things would remain in limbo for the USSR and US, and the two countries would resume official diplomatic relations in the early 1930s.

⁷ Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, New York. 1994. p. 42.

⁸ Eugene P. Tranni, Donald Davis. *Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the Cold War: A Hundred years later and still relevant*. p. 27

WWII: Tenuous Allies

It would be impossible to discuss early American Cold War diplomacy without an understanding of the US and Soviet Union's interactions and allyship during World War II. Hopefully in providing context to the time, we can get a better framework of the United States view of the USSR leading up to the Cold War, and in turn understand how public diplomacy became a practical tool in achieving their goals.

By the start of the 1940s, the USSR and the US had both become involved in WWII. Through Nazi expansion in Eastern Europe, and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, both countries had been brought in by direct conflict. Their involvement in the war eventually led to the formation of the Allied powers—a united front of states working to combat Axis expansion. However, even within the Allied powers there existed a certain level of distrust. This was highlighted by anxiety surrounding the world's fate should the Allies win, especially for the Soviet Union. As an ideologically and culturally communist state, the Soviet Union not only looked to win its war with the German Reich, but also to insure its own prosperous future. This desire led to a number of tactical decisions by both the US and USSR, with the most notable of these taking place during the Tehran and Yalta conferences.

During the course of WWII, the Allied powers held a number of strategic meetings, known as conferences, in various locations. These meetings acted as a way for the Allied powers to develop inter-military cooperation and plan inter-military missions. One of the most famous of these meetings was the Tehran Conference. It was notable for a number of reasons, the first

being that it served as the in person introduction for Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin. Until the Tehran Conference, neither leaders had met in person, in fact this marked the first meeting of the “Big Three” of the Allied powers.⁹

The majority of the conference took place at the Soviet Embassy, with the emphasis of the meeting focused on the need for a secondary front and cross-channel invasion of Nazi territory to fight German forces back. Each leader of the “Big Three”—the United States, The USSR, and Great Britain—however, had come to the conference with different goals in mind. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, had come with the hopes of putting off a cross-channel offensive in hopes to bring attention to what he believed as an underserved operation against Italian forces in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, both Roosevelt and Stalin supported the advancement of “Operation Overlord”—more commonly known as the Battle of Normandy or ‘D-Day’. Eventually Churchill agreed to discuss the basic terms of the operation, negotiating to give it top priority in the following year.¹⁰

At first glance, the agreement between the Soviet Union and the US on “Operation Overlord” can be viewed as a step forward in Soviet-US relations, but it can also be viewed in a less favorable light. At the time of the conference, a level of skepticism was certainly an element of the Allies’ alliance. One of the greater fears of these uneasy relations was that of the war ending in a “separate peace”—meaning an end to the war by one nation signing an individual agreement with the enemy and the rest of the allies to continue to fight. Both the USSR and the

⁹ Hamzavi, A. H. “Iran and the Tehran Conference.” p. 193

¹⁰ Lyons, Micheal J. *World War II: A short History Fourth Edition*, p. 264-265

US feared that should they not agree on an Allied offensive, they could very well be left holding the line in a separate peace scenario.¹¹

This fear can be further supported by viewing the events and effects of the Second “Big Three” strategic meeting, the Yalta Conference. By February of 1945, the tide had turned and the Allies had victory in sight. The Soviet Union’s influence on Eastern Europe along with the decline of British influence contributed to how the Allies discussed the future of the continent, and by extension the world, in a post-war era. The conference ended in an agreement known as the “Declaration on Liberated Europe.” Sponsored and authored by the Americans, the hope in adopting it was to ensure that there would be no separate peace and that, once the dust had settled, the Allied powers would have near equal spheres of influence in the reshaping of Europe. As explained by World War I & II Historian Michael J. Lyons, the declaration sought to create an equal playing field in the newly liberated countries with coalition governments of communists and non-communists setting up democratic parliamentary elections. These actions, as Lyons argues, were “ [a] rather forlorn attempt to moderate Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe.”¹²

The events of the Tehran and Yalta conferences presented a theme in the WWII Allyship between the US and USSR, a clear and pervasive distrust, with the knowledge that should the war end with an Allied victory, America and the Soviet Union would be in a position to shape the future of the world. This theme would only be exacerbated by the invention of nuclear weapons of mass destruction, as well as other advancements in technology in the years

¹¹ Mayle, Paul David. "AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE: THE ANGLO-SOVIET-AMERICAN ALLIANCE AND THE TEHRAN CONFERENCE OF 1943." Order No. 8226935, West Virginia University, 1982. p. 24

¹² Lyons, p. 282-283

proceeding. For the purposes of the research presented in this essay, the important takeaway is the power which these states wielded and the US' views on Soviet expansion and its influential reach.

GROWING PROPAGANDA: Contextualizing American soft power

Before exploring the advances and developments made during the Cold War in the realm of soft power, it is important to understand US history with public diplomacy. American public diplomacy officially became adopted and utilized in the early 1900s. As mentioned before, the desire to soften the United States' image abroad had been around long before the Cold War. The difference being that, up until the 1910s, these efforts were almost entirely privatized. Examples of private companies engaging in soft power on behalf of the United States include cultural shows, like Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show touring Europe, and private scholarships from American businesses for international students to study in the US.¹³

The first substantial example of the US getting involved with public diplomacy was with the Committee on Public Information (CPI). President Woodrow Wilson started the committee, as historian Nicholas J. Cull describes it, "to sell the [first world] War to the American public."¹⁴ While it was created as a tool for propaganda in the US, it eventually became the office that oversaw the exportation of both in-house propaganda films and distribution of Hollywood films overseas that they deemed beneficial to their mission.¹⁵

If Wilson set the groundwork, Franklin Roosevelt began the construction and marketing.

A man ever interested in public opinion, Roosevelt invested in a number of programs

¹³ Cull, Nicholas J. *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, Cambridge University Press New York, New York. Pub. 2008.

¹⁴ Cull, p. 5-6

¹⁵ Cull, p. 7

throughout his presidency dedicated to international press and informational releases. These included the United States Information Service, The Office of Government Reports, and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. While this exercise of soft power was useful during WWII, a full heel turn to public diplomacy did not occur until the beginning of the Cold War.¹⁶

As already mentioned, at the dawn of the Cold War, the former Axis powers came under the auspices of both the United States and the USSR. This consisted of some being under the direct influence of both, and others only answering to one of the two remaining superpowers. With the US remaining in these former enemy nations, the opportunity for them to shape their image became one of importance. It is here that the United States began to see the usefulness of its already existing infrastructure for propaganda and influence via soft power.¹⁷

In these parts of the world, the American government looked to various forms of both direct and indirect exercises in culture building. An example of a more direct change includes the work done by General MacArthur to dismantle the Japanese military and set up a new form of democratic government.¹⁸ However, the more interesting was the first steps taken in creating a robust relaunch of the American brand in these nations, and implementing it via media, reeducation, and policy enactments.

A key aspect of this was print media, including various newspapers being printed in these nations. These papers laid out a way to connect with the general population and began to

¹⁶ Cull, p. 11-12

¹⁷ Cull, p. 26

¹⁸ Masuda, Hiroshi. 2012. *MacArthur in Asia: The General and His Staff in the Philippines, Japan, and Korea*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press., p. 193

redefine what culture looked like in these states, seemingly to push them towards accepting an American vision for their futures. While re-education programs were also a large part of America's early soft power efforts during the time, the works of these papers became a valuable asset, as they spoke to an audience outside of adolescence. According to historian of American public diplomacy Nicholas Cull, the German versions of these papers were influenced by both US war veterans and returned refugees, who worked together on the staff. Radio and film also played a large part in US public diplomacy in Austria, Germany, and Japan. With the experimentation of soft power showing signs of success in these newly US controlled nations, it was clear that soft power could play an equally, if not more important role in nations the US saw as potential enemies.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cull, p. 27

A COLD FRONT COMES: The spark of the Cold War

Once WWII had ended, a different conflict was starting to form. The desolation of Europe, both physically and economically, had left the United States and the Soviet Union as the only true superpowers in the wake of the war. This in turn would lead to further tension due to a number of factors. The first of prominence is the inherent difference in ideology. With the Soviet Union looking to expand the reach of communism by taking half of Europe under its control, the United States and other non-communist allies looked to influence the region as much as possible. Such efforts would lead directly to the formation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947.²⁰

The Truman Doctrine, though not publicly adopted until late 1947 (nearly a year after Churchill's Iron Curtain speech, in which he spoke of a similar effort to be made), is generally defined as the official stance of the US government's efforts to contain communism. Its origins can be found in President Truman's push for an increase in funding for military and economic aid to Turkey and Greece in the hopes it would help combat the expansion of communism. In his address to Congress concerning his plan, Truman said "It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."²¹ As argued by Dennis Merrill, a historian of US diplomacy, the Truman doctrine was the first of US international initiatives to be on a truly global scale. It served as the

²⁰ Lyons, 263; Merrill, Donald. (2006), The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36: 27-37.

²¹ Merrill, 27-37.

basis for a number of other political and military actions throughout the rest of the century, such as the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Korean and Vietnam Wars in later decades.²²

Among these efforts was also the Marshall Plan, an important economic plan developed for the parts of Europe under US support and protection following WWII. The importance of the Marshall Plan cannot be understated. In a working 1991 report for the National Bureau of Economic Research, economists Bary Eichengren and J. Bradford De Long argued, based on their findings, that the impact of the Marshall plan was well beyond immediate economic gains, but rather helped in transforming how “mixed economies” work in Europe due to the conditions in which the monetary allocations from the US had to be used.²³

While these policies and directives were implemented after the years in which the research presented here is concerned, it is helpful in understanding where the US would soon find itself in a quickly globalizing world, and how on a larger level the US government would view and combat the Soviet Union’s expansionist actions.

As the bedrock has been laid for the United States views on the Soviet Union at large, the issue now shifts to how the US decided to represent themselves in the communist state. To do so, an examination of the WWII era ambassador to the Soviet Union W. Averell Harriman and long term Soviet specialist diplomat and future ambassador to the USSR, George F. Kennan, will be used to show insight into the operations of the Embassy and actions of Americans in the twilight of WWII and the dawn of the Cold War in The USSR.

²² Merrill, 28

²³ De Long, Bradford. Eichengreen, Bary. “The Marshall Plan: History’s Most Successful Structural Adjustment Program.” National Bureau of Economic Research. 1991. p. 3-4, 9

W. Averell Harriman was born into a wealthy New York Family in 1891. A graduate of Yale, Averell Harriman had become an accomplished banker and investor by the 1920s.²⁴ In the 1930s, however, Harriman turned his interest to public service. After suffering some financial and personal losses due to the stock market crash leading to the Great Depression, Averell began to wade into the world of politics by taking a number of meetings with President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The nature of these meetings was to discuss economic matters, such as the railroad industry—on which Harriman was an expert. This in turn led to Harriman becoming an advisor on the President's New Deal policies for Wall Street and banks.²⁵ While he gained the respect of his fellow advisors in Washington, his connection to the administration would yield a very different effect on Wall Street, that being the admonishment of his fellow bankers and Wall Street executives, even viewing him as a traitor and “unfaithful to his kind”.²⁶

His loyalty to the President paid off however, and the 1940s saw Harriman become a full fledged diplomat. Starting off in the Office of Production Management, and eventually leading to becoming a special liaison of the President in helping manage the Lend-Lease program, an initiative designed to distribute material aid to the UK and USSR, Harriman quickly became a central figure in the FDR administration. By the time the US had become involved in the war, Harriman was being given increased responsibilities by the White House.

Eventually Harriman’s experience with the USSR via the Lend-Lease program, and his proven trustworthiness to Roosevelt, led to his appointment as the ambassador to the Soviet

²⁴ Abramson, Rudy. *Spanning the Century: the Life of W. Averell Harriman*, First Edition, p. 10, 94, 186-189

²⁵ Abramson, p. 242

²⁶ Abramson, p. 243

Union in 1943. At first reluctant to take the position, Harriman eventually acquiesced and took the assignment to the “most important diplomatic post” of the time.²⁷ Harriman’s reluctance came from a fear that he would not be able to find enjoyment or meaning in the work he was doing, or at least any more than he had already found in his position in London working on the Lend-Lease program. Harriman thought the job in Moscow was near impossible and incredibly difficult, no matter who tried to do it.

Near the end of his tenure as ambassador, Harriman had become keenly aware of what Soviet views of the United States were, or at least the image of the US they wished to present to their citizens. In his first documented correspondence with the State Department office in D.C. in 1946, Harriman wrote of the importance of maintaining American Media and messaging present in the USSR through funding and resources, as its availability to the Russian people was important in the shaping of a more positive image of the US. His emphasis on this seems to be rooted in his belief, and by extension a general thought in the wider department, that relations between the USSR and the US was one of utmost importance, if not the most important directive.²⁸ It is also in this message to the State Department that Harriman lays out the direct conflict the Embassy was seemingly in with the Soviet Government, almost a cold battle in this forming cold war.

“While we have no doubt that [the] Soviet people earnestly desire to understand USA and maintain good relations with USA, [the] policy of small group of men who rule USSR, as revealed in Soviet Govt and Communist Party propaganda, suggests that this small group of men have

²⁷ Abramson, p. 347

²⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, eds. Roger P. Churchill, William Slany. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), Document 463.

consistently sought to present to [the] Soviet people a distorted and unfavorable picture of USA.”²⁹

Harriman also asserted that given the history of the USSR, it would not be worth the time, energy, and resources to try and reason with those at the top of the Soviet Government. Instead, it was in Harriman’s opinion that projects aimed at the Soviet public would be a better investment in changing opinions of The US.³⁰

While Harriman was certainly a central figure in Moscow in the years leading into the Cold War, George F. Kennan was also a major player. Starting his diplomatic career before WWII, Kennan had spent a large part of his public service career up until that point almost entirely in the Soviet sphere of influence. A career Foreign Service Officer, Kennan first came into contact with the Soviet Government in 1934. In the years prior to his appointment, Kennan had been assigned to learn Russian history and the language while posted in Germany.³¹ Much of his time was spent not only learning about the pre-revolution history of the Russian empire, but also studying communist ideology in an effort to form his own opinion on the goals of the Soviet Government.³² However, seeing as the United States did not officially recognize the Soviet Union after the Revolution, formal relations had not taken place and Kennan moved around various locations in Eastern Europe. A chance encounter with the first ambassador to the Soviet Union landed him a position as a Soviet specialist. In 1934, Kennan finally made it to Moscow as a member of the first American diplomatic delegation to the newly recognized Soviet Union.

²⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Document 463*

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Document 463*

³¹ Frank Costigliola (Edr.). *The Kennan Diaries*, p. 56

³² Costigliola (Edr.), p. 59

Kennan would go on to serve as a Foreign Service Officer in Moscow for the first time from 1934-1937, but the first year in The USSR proved difficult for him. His fascination with the Soviet Union and his idealism led to disappointment and frustration with the mundane nature of the work he was focused on. All of this combined with having to exercise “...self restraint and objectivity” as a Foreign Service Officer led to a nervous breakdown in December of the same year. This led to nearly a year of leave from the State Department to rest and recuperate in Vienna.³³ In November of 1935, Kennan returned to his post in Moscow. His following years spent in the USSR would help to build his credibility as an expert on Soviet affairs, but would also inform his opinions of the Soviet Union. During the year of Kennan’s absence, the cultural attitude toward dissentants and foreign nations in the Soviet Union had changed. Upon returning to the USSR, Kennan noted that Soviets who had been hobnobbing with foreigners had in some instances been detained, exiled, or executed—all part of Stalin’s larger purges taking place at the time. For foreigners and US officials this meant, as described by Kennan, a period of extreme isolation and ostracization, leaving the young diplomat longing for a transfer from the state he had so long wanted to work in.³⁴

However, Kennan eventually found his way back to the Soviet Union as the Charge de Affairs for the Moscow Embassy under Ambassador W. Averell Harriman. His first year back in Moscow was certainly an eventful one, so much so that he did not keep a personal record for the year 1946, as he had for the majority of his life.³⁵ However, 1946 was indeed a major year

³³ Costigliola (Edr.), p. 95

³⁴ Costigliola (Edr.), p. 112

³⁵ Costigliola (Edr.), p. 199

for Kennan's writing, with perhaps his most famous contribution, "The Long Telegram" being penned that year.

Kennan's years of studying Russian history and communism, as well as his time spent as a US official in Moscow, made him one of the most qualified individuals to speak on the inner workings of the Soviet Union. In early 1946, the already strained relationship with the US had become even more tenuous.³⁶ It was at this time that Kennan penned his famous telegram. Kennan's long telegram is generally considered to be a major document that helped shape US foreign policy in the USSR for many years after it was penned. In it, Kennan detailed his thoughts on the USSR's own foreign policy and speculated about its potential future as a sphere of influence. The telegram began to take shape initially as a response to what Kennan had seen as the overarching theme of Soviet attitudes toward capitalist society—that conflict between the two ideologically different worlds would be constant and inevitable. However, it appears that the defining moment that led Kennan to pen the document was to respond to a speech given by Joseph Stalin in early February of 1946. According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, Stalin's speech seemed to imply that while communists were inclined to peace, they would be prepared to retaliate if the capitalist world began conflict, something the Supreme Soviet noted capitalists were inclined to do.³⁷

While the speech was "routine" to Kennan, its effect on President Truman was much greater. Along with reports of Soviet spies looking to steal American nuclear secrets, Kennan

³⁶ Ciment, James (Edr.) *Post War America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History Volume One-Four*. Routledge. 2015. p. 747.

³⁷ Gaddis, John Lewis. *George F. Kennan: An American Life*. Penguin, 2012. p. 216

was encouraged by both the State Department and Harriman, who had by that time left his ambassadorship, to express his thoughts on Soviet ideology.³⁸

Kennan's telegram featured his outlook on the Soviet position in the post-war world and how it would seek to accomplish its goals. Writing on the Soviet position post-war first, Kennan noted that the official stance of the USSR was that it could not exist in "permanent peace" while surrounded by capitalist nations. Also in his assessment, Kennan observed the Soviet outlook as breaking the world into two factions; communist and capitalist. In the Soviet point of view, the capitalist world would always be inherently fraught with internal and external conflicts. In doing so, Kennan brought to light the other common enemy of the USSR; moderate socialists, known as "false friends" by Leninists.³⁹ To this end, Kennan asserted that the USSR was set on advancing their strength in "international society" and looked to reduce the presence of capitalism throughout the world by directing their efforts to causing conflict between capitalist powers. By directly causing conflict within the "capitalist encirclement" and combating so called false friends, the USSR hoped it would achieve its goal in spreading communism globally.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gaddis, p. 217-218

³⁹ Kennan "The Long Telegram", p. 1

⁴⁰ Kennan "The Long Telegram", p. 2-3

THINGS HEAT UP: A push against censorship and Soviet propaganda

While the US was beginning to realize the Cold War it was getting involved in was one of cultural, scientific, and ideological battles, the US Embassy in Moscow was coming to understand its war was one of public image and censorship. After official diplomatic ties were reinstated between the USSR and the United States in the 1930s, only a decade later officials realized that a cultural shift in attitudes towards the US and the capitalist world in general had taken place. As noted by then Charge de Affairs George F. Kennan, an increase of hostility toward the capitalist world, and even socialists and leftists who had a working relationship with them, had taken root as a mainstay of the USSR's propaganda and had become a major part of the official party line. As detailed in Kennan's famous "Long Telegram", while the communist party's official stance was in opposition to capitalism and painted capitalist states as adversaries and devils, the people as a whole had a much more favorable view.⁴¹

In Kennan's assessment, both in his telegram and other State Department correspondence, the general public of the USSR was at least somewhat interested in what the western world was like. It was in Kennan's view that only the government and party officials were those looking to push a negative view of America, stating "[The Russian people], by and large, [are] friendly to [the] outside world, eager for experience of it, eager to measure against it[s] talents they are conscious of possessing, eager above all to live in peace and enjoy fruits of their own labor. Party line only represents [the] thesis which

⁴¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Documents 475*

[the] official propaganda machine puts forward with great skill and persistence to a public often remarkably resistant in the stronghold of its innermost thoughts. But [the] party line is binding for outlook and conduct of people who make up apparatus of power—party, secret police and Government—and it is exclusively with these that we have to deal.”⁴²

This hostility did not stop at the USSR’s borders, and extended into curtailing efforts of American journalists sending stories back to the States. While publications like *Pravda* looked to sell a bleak image of the United States and others in its own sphere, censorship laws and policies had also come into place to slow down American journalists' work from getting back to the US, and in some cases stopping it entirely.⁴³

By 1946, censorship of outgoing media had been taken over by the Soviet office that dealt with internal censorship in the country, the Soviet Chief Administration of Literary and Publishing Affairs, also known as Glavlit. The work, previously done by a different agency dedicated to external media censorship, was seen as harsh even in the early stages of changeover.⁴⁴ George Kennan describes the issues of the changeover in a correspondence to the Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. At the time, Kennan had received news from a number of US correspondents in Moscow that a number of stories they had written were subject to extensive censorship and alteration, and in some occasions did not make it all the way to the US. On March 6th 1946, Kennan wrote “I am worried about [the situation] of American correspondents here... A check now made by [an] AP correspondent with his central office indicates that on

⁴² Kennan, “The Long Telegram” p. 3

⁴³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 478

⁴⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 478

March 5 out of 24 telegrams delivered to [the] Soviet Post Office for submission to [the] Censorship Bureau, only 10 reached their destination. He has no way of ascertaining in what shape these were finally [dispatched].”⁴⁵

George F. Kennan seemingly had a firm grasp on the Soviet Government’s approach to media. It was Kennan’s opinion that the Soviet Government was interested in presenting their own views on the United States as objective truth, and were also interested in shaping how their messages were being portrayed. In mid 1946, former Prime Minister of Great Britain Winston Churchill delivered his “Iron Curtain” speech in the United States on the need for Anglo-American relations in defending against the growth of communism. In it, Churchill emphasized the possibility of military intervention and how Western democracies would need the US.⁴⁶

The speech was not popular among other world leaders in the West, however. Only a few days later, President Truman looked to distance himself from giving direct support or condemnation on the Prime Minister’s words. When asked by a member of the press what his opinion on the speech was he simply replied “I have no comment.”⁴⁷

To connect this to the Soviet Government’s media practices, Kennan gives insight into how this episode in global politics was portrayed in The USSR. *Pravda’s* coverage of the speech came out more detailed than expected considering the weight of Churchill’s words. Kennan asserts this is no accident, saying that its careful publication date and time was tied to seeing what the rest of the world’s views on it were, writing

⁴⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 479

⁴⁶ The United Kingdom National Archives, “‘Iron Curtain’ Speech,” The National Archives (The National Archives, May 30, 2019).

⁴⁷ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1946* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 144–148.

“This method of procedure was chosen after [the] Kremlin had carefully waited to see reaction to Churchill’s speech in US and England and indicates Moscow considers echo to Churchill’s statements to have been so weak that it is worthwhile to throw [Soviet] influence into scales of international public reaction. Had Churchill’s speech found greater support in English and American public opinion and [Government] circles, Moscow would doubtless have taken a much more serious view of it and drawn other conclusions as to treatment.”⁴⁸

As negative as the reaction and attitudes of the Soviet Government might have been at the time, the pushback stands in contrast to the attitudes of the general public. Even in the early days of publishing *Amerika*, it was the Embassy’s position that its readership and impact had grown beyond its initial circulation of 10,000 copies per month.⁴⁹ With the magazine consistently selling out, by February of 1946, Kennan had requested that the number of copies sent each month be increased to 50,000.

The magazine, described at the time as “handsome [and] slick” was unique in its contents.⁵⁰ The magazine itself was considered a tool of presenting the American way of life. Created to combat *Pravda*’s illustration of the US, it featured articles, photos, and information on “[the] Average American School” and “[the] American Kitchen,” and even depictions of the US judicial system. *Amerika* looked to showcase the standard of living Americans enjoyed, without directly criticizing the Soviet standard of living.⁵¹ The magazine was also noted for its

⁴⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Document 480*

⁴⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Document 463*

⁵⁰ Peet, p. 17

⁵¹ Yarrow, p. 22, 25; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, Volume VI, Document 468*

emphasis on pictures. This can be explained for a couple of reasons, the first one being that when the magazine was first published and put through the censorship process as foreign media, pictures were not subject to the same stringent guidelines that written word articles were. Secondly, through back channels and Soviet contacts, the Embassy had learned that illustrations and pictures were an effective way of refuting Soviet propaganda, even quoting one such contact in a telegram as having said “One good picture tells more about [the] USA than thousands of words.”⁵²

While *Amerika* was the first of these projects to explore public diplomacy directed at the public of the USSR, it did have its limitations. Since it chose to not directly challenge Soviet policies, it could not give an American response on issues facing the globe or Soviet citizens. With this limitation came the fact that the magazine had to remain primarily a cultural exploration of America that hoped to dispel myths about America. Another obstacle was Soviet censorship of both internal and external American media publication, as previously discussed. While the censorship cracked down heavily on outgoing media about the USSR, media coming in was also subject to harsh scrutiny. In turn, this led to the magazine having to be filled with evergreen content—articles and content that had a timeless quality—since journalists and contributors would have no idea how long it would take for the magazine to finally hit circulation, or in what form.⁵³

Other options for more polite propaganda had been proposed as early as Harriman’s tenure as Ambassador. One such idea was that of American radio programs and broadcasts. The

⁵² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 468

⁵³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 479

Embassy's initial interest in radio broadcasting was founded in the interest of creating an informational channel to communicate American ideals in a more free way. It was in the opinion of the Embassy that American broadcasts would be at an advantage over traditional means of informational media, such as Russian language pamphlets, leaflets, and papers. By investing in radio, Harriman hoped that there would be less interference upon the message that would be sent out.

Even so, Harriman warned those who would develop the project of the tense relationship the US and USSR shared, and gave advice on best practices as to not provoke further issues, even as his Ambassadorship was coming to an end. Primarily, the outgoing Ambassador emphasized the need to not criticize "[The] Soviet system, Government or personalities," warning that doing so could "on nationalistic and patriotic grounds, arouse resentment of Soviet listeners and would prejudice our relations with the Soviet Government," something echoed by Kennan in his "Long Telegram."

It seems that the Embassy, no matter the media in which they looked to extend their public diplomacy, was chiefly concerned with changing the narrative of America in the USSR from one of fear and villainy to one that would better suit their world image. Eventually, Harriman's vision of radio programs to advance America's agenda abroad would be fully realized in 1947 with the introduction of *Voice of America* to the Soviet world.

Originally created as a shortwave radio broadcast for an earlier propaganda effort during WWII, *Voice of America* became much more well known for its impact on public diplomacy during the Cold War. Originally, content for *Voice of America* was outsourced to NBC and CBS radio to create the programs featuring American News and cultural programming via a contract

with the Government. It is important to note that *Voice of America* was not exclusively broadcast in the Soviet Union. Rather, *Voice of America*, as lawyer and writer Ralph A. Uttaro argues, became the official mouthpiece for the United States abroad.⁵⁴ However, this is not to say the American diplomatic efforts in the USSR did not directly influence the longevity and programming of *Voice of America*. While it is true that the radio broadcast stretched the entire globe, the reason it was able to do so was at the behest of the American government's commitment to combating the spread of communism. It seems that in some ways, Harriman and other diplomats' position on the need for the American government to have a more immediate vocal presence behind the Iron Curtain helped lead to legislation that made *Voice of America* possible.

By the late 1940s, *Voice of America* was under the full control of the State Department and had become a successful endeavor for the United States' efforts in soft power and propaganda overseas, even leading to privatized sister programs. Broadcasts such as *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* were started as private broadcasts in an attempt to further a better image of America abroad. Interestingly enough, these other programs took a different approach to how they informed those in Soviet Countries of American life. While *Voice of America* served as the official voice of the US government on international affairs and focused on the policies of the US and Soviet Governments and looked to explain American organizations and structure, these other broadcasts looked to give a glimpse into the life of private American citizens, not unlike the State Department's own cultural project, *Amerika*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Uttaro, Ralph A. "The Voices of America in International Radio Propaganda." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 45, no. 1, p. (1982): 104-105.

⁵⁵ Uttaro, p. (1982): 106.

A SHIFT IN PRACTICE: Diplomacy gets a soft side

The Cold War brought about a time of massive change for the better majority of the world, as well as impacted the future of how wars were fought and won. While WWII certainly gave a glimpse into the influence that soft power could wield with the influence propaganda had both internationally and domestically, its aftermath proved its necessity in the field of diplomacy and international affairs surrounding countries in conflict. The use of media and cultural influence to aid in the mission of American diplomats in the USSR was invaluable, and proved the adoption of such policies on a primary basis could prove fruitful.

Having proved that informational campaigns and polite propaganda could work internationally in former enemy nations like Germany and Japan, the advancements made both in response to the USSR's policies in later 1940s undeniably impacted the future of the Cold War. It also aided in the evolution of diplomacy during the better half of the 20th century, and some would say even into the present day. Large steps such as the Marshall Plan are indeed a factor in the utilization of non-military means to influence other countries. However the ground level programs created to help in redefining the United States in the eyes of the USSR, and eventually others in the communist world, directly ties to the expansion of similar policies and an eventual shift in politics to favoring soft power intervention.

An argument could be made for this shift being owed to the advancements in technology and weapons of mass destruction. However, based on the research presented, it is not the primary factor for this shift in the culture of international affairs. On the contrary, factors outside of avoidance to military action seem to have had a more important emphasis, as

a battle of ideology and containment was the goal of the United States and other ally countries. Evidence of such a goal can be found in public addresses, such as Churchill's Iron Curtain speech and President Truman's own thoughts on the matter when pitching the Marshall Plan for congressional approval. It seemingly was also in the interest of USSR officials, as they began to see how the propaganda game could pay off.

The decision to implement US government sponsored propaganda as a tool was in large part taken as a defensive strategy to combat the USSR's own version of public diplomacy. By mid-1945, the USSR had begun making their own publications to showcase the success communism had seen in the Soviet sphere, in an attempt to push a positive view of communism to other countries. The then Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William B. Benton, in consultation with American academic Harold Lasswell, assessed that this would indeed be one of the hardest things to overcome. The USSR was riding high on the good will of the world following its efforts during WWII, and the US, at least according to Lasswell, was facing scrutiny of internal issues concerning racism, ultimately undermining the image of the US.⁵⁶ This was something echoed by Foreign Service Officers in Moscow, noting that Soviet publications often harped on the fact the United States had a long history of racial intolerance, with Harriman writing in a telegram to the Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, "To [the] exclusion of material favorable to [the] USA, controlled Soviet press and radio feature strikes, unemployment and other industrial strife, racial discrimination and crime."⁵⁷

These actions would in turn lead to a further push for American public diplomacy. However, the brand of US propaganda took on a significantly different role to that of the USSR's

⁵⁶ Cull, p. 29-30

⁵⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 468

efforts. For the Americans, the focus would be on incoming US state media aimed to target the general public in the USSR. While the US certainly looked to influence the views and opinions of nations outside of direct Soviet influence and control, programs like *Voice of America* and *Amerika* looked to reprogram the minds of Soviet citizens from one of indoctrinated hatred to, at least in their eyes, a more nuanced and “fair” opinion of the United States. In fact, the same telegram Harriman sent noting that Soviet state media had cast a dark shadow on the US, he also wrote of the importance and goal these efforts of public diplomacy would try to achieve, saying “[The] Only practicable alternative at this stage is [a] vigorous and intelligent American information program designed to bring somewhat into balance picture of [the] USA available to Soviet public.”⁵⁸

This assessment of the power Soviet media held was later addressed by Kennan’s “Long Telegram”, as well as by a report conducted by White House officials at the suggestion of Truman.⁵⁹ In his exhaustive report “American Relations With The Soviet Union,” Special Counsel Clark Clifford agrees with Kennan’s assessment that from the Soviet perspective, peace between the communist and capitalist worlds can never be. While the American position was to work toward a world of peace, Clark states that “[Soviet] leaders with whom we hope to achieve an understanding on the principles of international peace appear to believe that war with the United States and other leading capitalistic nations is inevitable.”⁶⁰ He also states that a challenge that exists is the growing military capabilities of the Soviet Union, and that the United

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union*, Volume VI, Document 463

⁵⁹ Cull, p. 32

⁶⁰ “American Relations With The Soviet Union”, September 24, 1946; Report by Clark Clifford, American Relations With The Soviet Union; Subject File; Conway Files; Truman Papers. Harry S. Truman Library, p. 71

States should be willing to show signs of power as it is the “only language which disciples of power politics understand.”⁶¹

However, while Clark was focused on the power of the US military, he was also aware of the efforts to discredit the United States via propaganda, and warned US officials to “avoid any actions which give an appearance of truth to the Soviet charges” of imperialism and other perceived offensives.⁶² Clark also stated that time and resources should be given for the purpose of creating a “determined effort” to dispel such propaganda, and suggested to push the notion to “friendly nations” that capitalism is at the very least as valid of a system as communism.⁶³

This direct objective would eventually deliver an outcome that at first glance would seem unplanned, but seemingly was the next logical step the United States could have taken. Efforts made by Benton and those serving in the foreign service in the USSR made it clear that an impact was being made via these public diplomacy efforts. In fact, it was Benton who fully realized the Soviet division of *Voice of America*. Benton also played a large role in bringing other types of American media to the USSR in 1949, such as Hollywood films and educational exchange programs.⁶⁴ However, both the newly appointed Secretary of State George C. Marshall—the man for whom the Marshall Plan is named after—did not believe in using propaganda as a tool for combating Soviet propaganda. This, coupled with internal issues and

⁶¹ "American Relations With The Soviet Union", September 24, 1946; Report by Clark Clifford, American Relations With The Soviet Union; Subject File; Conway Files; Truman Papers. Harry S. Truman Library, p. 73

⁶² "American Relations With The Soviet Union", September 24, 1946; Report by Clark Clifford, American Relations With The Soviet Union; Subject File; Conway Files; Truman Papers. Harry S. Truman Library, p. 75-76

⁶³ "American Relations With The Soviet Union", September 24, 1946; Report by Clark Clifford, American Relations With The Soviet Union; Subject File; Conway Files; Truman Papers. Harry S. Truman Library, p. 75

⁶⁴ Cull, p. 34

congressional debate about how effective these programs and plans were, led to budget cuts taking place.⁶⁵

However, this was not the death of soft power and public diplomacy, but seemingly a repositioning. Once the Truman doctrine had been created—which looked to aid countries hoping to fight communism and contain the Soviet Union as much as possible—a different need for soft power and informational warfare was arising.⁶⁶ During this time, the budget was severely cut for such programming. Despite this, some significant victories took place in the area of expanding the reach of State sponsored media that would be seen, heard, and read internationally, such as the Smith-Mundt Act which insured government funded infrastructure for distribution of US government media.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cull, p. 35

⁶⁶ Cull, p. 36

⁶⁷ Cull, p. 40, 42

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

In the United States, the use of soft power has had a long history, with varying degrees of importance. While the 1910s saw America's first foray into the realm of public diplomacy and exercised the use of soft power via government backed cultural exports, the importance of it was not fully realized until its necessity in the Cold War, specifically for those in the USSR and by extension others in the Soviet Bloc.

The push for such an emphasis on a global propaganda campaign and the development of a robust American public diplomacy apparatus was nurtured, developed, and necessitated by the nature of the Cold War. Advancements in weapons of mass destruction, military funding increases, and the shadow of WWII certainly gave the world pause at the thought of another global conflict and the hope to maintain peace was one that many seemingly looked to. The efforts of which determined the beginning of the groundwork being laid for the evolution of public diplomacy's influence in The USSR. While perhaps not the initial focus of the US in the early years of conflict, public diplomacy and cultural influence worked as a primary tool for shaping the opinion of capitalism in the Soviet World.

The early battle of paper and broadcast in Moscow, rather than of guns and bombs, would only scratch the surface of the game of soft power. Further programs in media and education developed well beyond the 1940s and 50s with the establishment of the United States Information agency in 1953. The USIA would continue as the US government's official office for creating, maintaining, and distributing media and literature dedicated to influencing the international world by means of cultural, societal, and arts focused approach.⁶⁸ While

⁶⁸ Cull, p. 96

American cultural influence has played a major role in the last century, reaching its way across the globe, the beginning of true American soft power had a humble start in conversations, telegrams, magazines, and radio programs in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself.

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