

Intensive Program: Europe and the US in the 1960s
Coming Together or Coming Apart? Europe and the United States in the Sixties

Session 10

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Ewa Hauser

American 'Public Diplomacy' and Communist Propaganda in Poland during the 1960s

Voice of America

A 'bumpy road' towards becoming a key instrument of American 'Public
Diplomacy'

Student: Franziska König-Paratore
Free University of Berlin
John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies

October 14, 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
1. VOA as a Propaganda Tool during WWII	3
2. The Fight for Survival	5
3. The “Free World” Against “Communism” – VOA Shapes a Powerful Narrative	8
4. Reconsidering VOA Broadcasting Style	13
5. Propaganda Problems Continue in the 1960s	17
Conclusion.....	20
Bibliography.....	22

Introduction

The Voice of America (VOA) is the official radio agency of the U.S. government since 1942. It is responsible for the dissemination of information, that is, the international communication of U.S. policies, American culture, institutions and thought. The very existence of the VOA and its broadcasting activities, however, give rise to numerous issues that challenge the legitimacy of state-funded international radio programming conducted by the United States. As a result, the purpose, style of programming and identity of the VOA have undergone significant changes since its inception in 1942. The fundamental problem of reconciling democratic morale, objective journalism and U.S. foreign policy guidance continues to force the VOA to reconsider and redefine its broadcasting activities.

The term propaganda requires some clarification since it is widely used to refer to the dissemination of information. The Oxford English Reference Dictionary¹ describes propaganda as “an organized programme of publicity, selected information, etc., used to propagate a doctrine, practice, etc.” First, I want to highlight the aspect of organization and coordination which informs a propagandistic approach. Secondly, the idea of “selected information” suggests that propagandistic activities deliberately omit or distort pieces of information in order to create a certain image and influence opinions. Propaganda in this sense is not only practiced by governments or totalitarian regimes but also by private individuals and enterprises. In the United States, however, the term propaganda conveys the most negative connotations. Inaccurate and prejudiced arguments and deliberate misleading communication that leave absolutely no room for free thought or unbiased opinion-making processes dominate the meaning of the term. Consequently, the word ‘propaganda’ has practically disappeared from public dialogue and professional discourse and is only used to describe the information services of totalitarian or one-party regimes. U.S. international broadcasting activities may not be referred to as ‘propaganda’ anymore, however, it will become apparent that the beginning of U.S. radio broadcasting was greatly informed by propagandistic initiatives.

This paper is an attempt to highlight some of the influences, forces and changes that led to the inauguration of the Voice and the subsequent reorganizations until the 1960s. How does the Voice cope with the influence of three major forces: the democratic principle of a free press, the aspiration to deliver balanced and factual news and U.S.

¹ Edited by Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble, Oxford University Press, 1995

foreign policy objectives? VOA faces an inherent dilemma, a constant identity battle, which mirrors the complexities of Cold War tensions, domestic challenges and self-proclaimed goals. With a variety of programs, ranging from news coverage to cultural programs, VOA pursued a systematic, eventually coordinated and highly institutionalized approach to promoting American culture, life style, political views and ideas.

While presenting American freedoms, VOA is constantly faced with the inherent dilemma of its dual identity as a propaganda tool for the U.S. government on the one hand and as a journalistic tool striving for balanced and fair programming on the other. During the post-war period, cultural programming was greatly underestimated, but further complemented VOA's programming during the 1950s and 1960s as the concepts of "objectivity" and "truth" were rediscovered and became crucial policy directives for VOA. Consequently, a less strident anti-communist Voice emerged and the U.S. government increasingly valued the advantages of alternative means of fighting a war and influencing foreign public. Eventually, academic and cultural exchange programs and cultural infiltration through broadcasting activities, motion pictures or books informed the development of 'public diplomacy' as a key instrument for U.S. foreign policy.

1. VOA as a Propaganda Tool during WWII

Before analyzing the influences, such as U.S. foreign policy objectives, on VOA programming and its content after WWII, I will evaluate VOA's inauguration as a propaganda tool during wartime. I will show how these circumstances contributed early on to VOA's inherent identity crisis.

The establishment of the Office of the Coordination of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) in 1940 initiated the first regularly scheduled international radio broadcasting activities of the United States. In response to the successful invasion of the German forces in Western Europe, the United States intended to vitalize the relationship between the US and Central and South America. In addition to an economic support system, Nelson A. Rockefeller suggested that the promotion of cultural relations should complement any means to create partners in the Western hemisphere (Pirsein 1979, 3f.). The United States realized that it had to break with its tradition of a fully privatized and independent information service in order to have the means of controlling information circulating in the Western Hemisphere. The CIAA, in cooperation with the State Department, was to employ

fields and media, such as the arts, travel, cinema or radio.²

In 1942, the Office of War Information (OWI) was established to reorganize U.S. information activities within a single agency and to inform the public in the United States and abroad about the government's objectives and the progress of the war effort using radio and other media.³ The FIS was established to deal with the increasing demand for foreign language radio programs and was soon understood as a useful political warfare weapon against the Axis powers, but also as a resource to strengthen relationships with allied and neutral countries. Thus, VOA was initially established to function as a propaganda tool for the U.S. government under the OWI.

Confronted with reconciling the mission of truthful reporting with VOA's status as a governmental institution, Joseph Barnes, Deputy Director of the Atlantic Operations, ~~defended in his article "Fighting with Information: OWI Overseas"~~ the Voice against the accusations of being deliberately used to manipulate the foreign public and emphasized the importance of "telling the truth" (Barnes 1943, 36). Although the concepts of truth and objectivity are ideal models and remain utopian in nature, they nevertheless served as an effective strategy to distance U.S. information services from common conceptions of propaganda. Propaganda was readily associated with "the technique of falsehood" or a "strategy of terror" as employed by Nazi propaganda. In order to receive support from the U.S. public and congress, Barnes was pressed to distinguish the propaganda effort of the Voice, that is, of the U.S. government from common conceptions of propagandistic activities in the 1940s.

Another firm proponent of the "strategy of truth" was Robert Sherwood. He also advocated for a more factual and educational approach of the Voice by stressing the importance of explaining democratic values and why they are the guiding principles for the U.S. government and the American society as a whole (Krugler 2000, 29). The presentation of American freedoms was used to promote America's ideological strength in addition to its military capacities. One could argue that striving for objective and factual news reporting increases credibility, which reflects positively on the presentation of American culture and freedoms, such as a free press, freedom of speech and religion. Furthermore, the air of truth and credibility generates trust; trust in the U.S. government to fight the war for the "right" reasons and trust in the United States as the liberator and

² The Executive Order from August 16, 1940, via the Council of National Defense underlines the CIAA's ties to the State Department as well as the coordinator's responsibility to report to the President and to ensure that "the basic objectives of the Government's program" are realized (Pirsein 1979, 524).

³ As stated in the Executive Order 9182, June 13, 1942 under 4 (a).

rightful representative of freedom and democracy. Moreover, credibility increased U.S. public support for and confidence in official propaganda.

On the contrary, Donovan, head of the Office of the Coordinator of Information (OCI), employed the FIS to disseminate propaganda and engage in “psychological warfare”. He understood propaganda as a war tool to fight fascism. As a result, espionage, sabotage, covert operations, disinformation and propaganda supporting U.S. interventions with armed forces were part of Donovan’s psychological warfare effort (Hixson 1998, 3). The COI was eventually terminated in 1942. The termination demonstrates how the different understandings and interpretations of U.S. information services created tensions that contributed to VOA’s inherent identity crisis.

While overseas broadcasting is reorganized by the U.S government under the OWI, VOA programming becomes even more tied to U.S. foreign policy objectives since any dissemination of information depends on its consistency with “the war information policies of the President and with the foreign policy of the United States” according to the Executive Order 9182 (Pirsein 1979, 539). On the other hand, the Executive Order underlines the goal of truthful information programming. Sherwood, Houseman and Barnes stress the importance of the ‘strategy of truth’ as a framework for news reporting and the presentation of war information. According to Barnes’ article, he firmly believed in striving for an encompassing and objective presentation of information about the war through every available medium and language. As a result, the position of the VOA under the OWI early highlighted the conflicting functions of the Voice as a propaganda tool on one hand and as a “weapon of truth” on the other.

The status of the VOA, however, continued to be vague, until the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 and the creation of the United States Information Agency (USIA) embedded the international broadcasting activities of the United States within an institutionalized and legislative framework for transmitting and coordinating information, that is, the U.S. propaganda activities after WWII.

2. The Fight for Survival

The end of WWII, the defeat of Nazi Germany and the Voice’s status as a wartime expedient seemed to make the need for a state-funded radio agency during the post war period obsolete. The existence of the VOA was challenged by extensive budget cuts, the

conviction that government-sponsored broadcasting activities contradict with American principles, such as a free press, and by the fact that VOA possessed no legislative authority for international broadcasting.⁴

The Associated Press (AP) and United Press (UP) stopped their news service to the VOA in January 1946 which presented one of the first obstacles for the VOA to overcome after 1945. The AP and UP saw their claim to journalistic objectivity compromised by VOA's ties to the State Department. Yet, William Benton, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs since September 14, 1945, persuaded the opponents of the Voice that a U.S. information service constituted a vital tool for the U.S. government (Pirsein 1979, 118), which became an even more convincing argument with the onset of the Cold War.

Averting the termination of the VOA due to budget withdrawal, Benton managed to convince the House Appropriations Subcommittee to grant the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIC)⁵ \$19,284,778, of which \$7,804,321 was for VOA operations for the fiscal year of 1947 (Pirsein 1979, 122 and Hixson 1998, 30).

In 1948, the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act, usually referred to as the Smith-Mundt Act⁶, is an important step towards giving the broadcasting activities of the VOA a legislative foundation. Public Law 402 contributed to clarify the fundamental problem of the Voice: What is the purpose of U.S. international broadcasting activities and its role regarding U.S. foreign policy? The Law also underlined the need for a U.S. radio agency and authorized the use of radio to disseminate information about the United States. The U.S. government was further authorized to spread this information in other countries to foster "mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries" (Knapp 1972, 25).

The wording of the law and a literal interpretation of the legislative text merely suggests that U.S. information services, such as the VOA, should be used to improve international relations, which is not surprising given that the world had, at this point, already experienced two world wars during the first half of the 20th century. However, the goal to create "mutual understanding" and to "disseminate information" has to be interpreted in the context of increasing Cold War tensions between the United States and

⁴ The Report of the House Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations from April 1947 underlines the lack of legislative authorization for broadcasting. Moreover, the committee concluded that VOA broadcasting disagrees with the American democratic morale and therefore considered to discontinue all VOA funds (Krugler 2000, 53).

⁵ In 1945 the VOA became a division of the OIC according to the Departmental Order of the State Department from December 31 (Pirsein 1979, 115).

⁶ Or Public Law 402.

the USSR. The East-West conflict further mitigated the perceived conflict of legitimate U.S. propaganda activities and democratic principles, because it defined a new enemy that did not only present a potential military menace but also an ideological threat that could not be fought with guns and rifles.

It is generally argued that the articulation of the Truman Doctrine, put forward in a speech on March 12, 1947, marked the onset of the hostile confrontation between the two postwar superpowers as an official policy (Stokes 1991, 33). By pledging to provide material and economic assistance to Turkey and Greece, Truman emphasized the need to support those people who yearn to be free and resist “attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures,” that is, communist oppression. He identified communism as a threat to all free people, thus regarding communism, and consequently the Soviet Union, not just as a threat to international peace but also to the national security of the United States.

In addition to the Truman Doctrine, George F. Kennan’s formulation of containment and his advice to rollback Soviet power became the central aspect of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Kennan’s Long Telegram mainly identified the Soviet threat as an ideological and political one. Consequently the United States assumed an offensive conduct towards containing Soviet hegemony using every available means that did not require the deployment of military resources to undermine Soviet power. Moreover, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 was conducive to the increased budget funds for the fiscal year of 1951, which elevated VOA’s funds by \$4,210,159 in comparison to the previous fiscal year (Pirsein 1979, 291).

Kennan’s Long Telegram and the NSC Paper No. 68 informed a more aggressive initiative to effectively weaken Soviet domination in Central and Eastern Europe. The National Security Paper No. 68 (April 1950) further shaped the image of the enemy, the Soviet Union, as a seeker of world domination and a major military threat to the United States calling for extensive U.S. armament and military preparations.

The two reports supported a fair presentation of the United States and suggested the neutralization of distorted conceptions and images about America by engaging in psychological as well as military counteractions (ibid., 201). Thus, the international world order was defined in terms of a bipolar power system with two political, social and ideological systems that defied any possibility of reconciliation.

Besides the bipolar distribution of power and the resulting ideological and military tensions between the two superpowers, advantages of the medium, which VOA used to

spread its information, also contributed to the survival of the Voice. Radio made it possible to quickly communicate ideas globally, that is, to immediately spread propaganda to a mass audience across the globe. Radio penetrated the Iron Curtain without armed forces or a time delay and had the potential to reach a broader public audience.

The jamming practices by the Soviet Union presented another technical challenge for U.S. international broadcasting activities, especially to Central and Eastern Europe. Jamming initiatives by the Soviets were also interpreted as a sign for the effectiveness of U.S. broadcasting activities in the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s jamming constituted a large portion of the Soviet effort to silence all Western broadcasts. A very ambitious plan suggested the development and implementation of high-powered transmitters. A group of scholars from Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology collaborated in a State-Department commissioned project, named TROY. Consequently, they proposed the realization of various facilities across the globe to overcome the complex Soviet jamming system. According to the proposed Ring Plan, facilities were planned to encircle the Soviet Union as well as the countries under Soviet influence (*ibid.*, 175f.). Project TROY further strengthened the position of the VOA. It emphasized the need for the Voice to expand on a massive technical scale which again underlined the vital role of U.S. propaganda activities in the Cold War conflict.

What are the implications for VOA? These developments, the international political tensions between the United States and the USSR, ameliorate VOA's reputation and help to overcome the domestic challenges described earlier. As a result, VOA became an indispensable tool for the Truman administration's Campaign of Truth and the subsequent revival of psychological warfare in the early 1950s (Hixson 1998, 14ff.).

3. The "Free World" Against "Communism" – VOA Shapes a Powerful Narrative

After overcoming the domestic and technical obstacles, the Voice emerged as an effective propaganda tool during the onset of the Cold War. VOA programming consequently assumed a more offensive and decidedly anti-communist tone which made it more difficult to convincingly present VOA programming as truthful and benefit from the image of a credible information agency. VOA applied comparative methods in its international broadcasts which shaped and disseminated the simple narrative of freedom vs. communism across the globe (Brewer 2009, 7 and 152). The Voice mainly told a story about the "free

world” which needed to be protected from the “communist threat”. This “tale” would serve as an important narrative to explain to the rest of the world why the United States pursued Cold War policies. What followed was a strident anti-communist offensive in Eastern and Central Europe through both news broadcastings and cultural programming.

The development of language sections was one way to reach a foreign audience. By 1948, VOA broadcasted its program in 18 languages.⁷ In 1951, more languages were added that could be understood by the people living in the Soviet Union, such as Estonian, Ukrainian or Armenian languages. Iron Curtain programming had significantly increased by 1953 and entailed broadcasting activities in 46 languages (Hixson 1998, 37). Besides the English language section, emigrants were largely responsible for presenting America’s message and juxtaposing American freedoms with the oppression experienced in the Soviet Union.

When it was feasible, VOA would make use of commentaries by U.S. politicians, foreign leaders or UN spokesmen (*ibid.*, 39). The use of credible sources further supported and legitimized the verbal assaults on the Soviet Union. Anti-communist propaganda, however, did not just mean to point to the weaknesses of the Soviet Union from the perspective of official U.S. spokesmen. As mentioned earlier, refugees and emigrants largely influenced VOA broadcasts. They supported the overall negative image of the Soviet Union and seemed to confirm U.S. foreign policy objectives and the constructed image of a ruthless and potentially dangerous enemy ready to take over the world while treating its own people like “slaves”. Thus, VOA offered a platform to refugees to share their experiences with and opinions about communism in the Soviet empire. While VOA benefited from the presentation of the United States as a symbol of freedom, it also welcomed the promotion of the grand narrative of freedom vs. communism by refugees who drew on first-hand accounts of their experiences with the communist social and political order.

In addition to political commentaries, cultural programming complemented VOA’s methods for presenting the United States in a favorable light. The cultural infiltration that accompanied VOA programming mitigated the aggressive anti-communist tone of most political commentaries. A multifaceted approach characterized the typical VOA broadcast.

⁷ Russian, which was repeated on a round the clock basis, Polish, Czechoslovakia, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Greek, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, Rumanian, Hungarian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Persian and Portuguese. (Pirsein 1979, 153)

One hour of programming incorporated news reporting as well as features, commentaries, interviews, music and special programs (ibid., 38). Cultural programs were embedded in an hourly cycle of world news providing a framework and a more multilayered set of channels to convey the message of anti-communist propaganda. In 1947, the first broadcast in Russian was transmitted and included 15 minutes of information on news of America but also music with the emphasis on “typical American” tunes. The program also featured discussions of problems concerning American life while at the same time providing solutions to these problems (ibid., 32).

The presentation of American freedoms was effectively contrasted with the presentations of the weaknesses and disadvantages of communism. VOA anti-communist propaganda was therefore characterized by two major themes. First, VOA programs constantly denounced communism and the Soviet Union which entailed hard-hitting propaganda attacks on its purpose and ideology, as well as on the state-controlled press, living and working standards or the role of religion in the Soviet Union: “Reams of scripts in the VOA archives attest to the vituperative propaganda on these subjects beamed day after day into the Soviet empire.” (ibid., 40). Secondly, the content of VOA programs highlighted the strengths and overall superiority of the United States.

Hixson (1998) gives numerous examples of VOA programs and features that draw on images of incompetence, shortage, terror, aggression and misrepresentation to describe the economic and political system as well as the life and press in the Soviet empire. These verbal attacks on Soviet hegemony can be found in Polish, Lithuanian, Czech, Albanian, Estonian, Russian or Latvian programs and features. VOA used documentary styles to depict “Life Behind the Iron Curtain” or historical reflections on “Ten Years of Poland Enslavement by the Communists”. Furthermore, VOA programming drew on satire to uncover the “Communist Paradise” which presumably deceives its people so they would not question the Communist regime. Commentaries by authors and prominent exiles but also religious programming and commentaries by U.S. theologian were a regular theme in VOA programs (41f.). Thus, the Voice touched on as many aspects of life in the Soviet empire as possible. VOA’s aims concentrated on exposing the perceived inherent and overall weaknesses and horrors of communist regimes, economies and even cultural, social and spiritual lives in the Soviet empire.

In stark contrast to the delineation of life behind the Iron Curtain stood the depiction and representation of the American way of life in the United States. First and foremost,

VOA underscored the superiority of the U.S. democratic system by giving exalting accounts of the U.S. electoral process as well as the federal system. VOA's religious programming would focus on Christian and Jewish holidays, provide interviews with clergymen or encourage listeners to defend their beliefs (ibid., 42). In addition to praising the freedoms represented by the electoral process, one of America's most celebrated and fundamental principle, freedom of religion, was used to demonstrate and simultaneously deepen the chasm between democratic and communist countries.

Another essential reference to American freedoms and life in the United States was the role of a free press. Given the domestic debates over VOA's legitimacy as a state-funded radio agency in a democratic society, the Voice had to maintain the image of a reliable radio service in order to concur with other presentations of the United States as the indisputable representative of freedom. VOA programming also emphasized the higher standard of living, better medical care, the wealth of consumer goods and free time to pursue hobbies. This one-sided presentation of American freedoms underscores the process of simplification which was needed to portray a clean image that was consistent with VOA's general depiction of the United States as the legitimate leader of the "free world". The presentation of the United States allowed no room for contradictions since the U.S. Cold War policy identified the enemy, that is, the communist threat, as the absolute arch-enemy. Acknowledging possible similarities between the two systems would have questioned U.S. official foreign policy objectives of containing communism. Moreover, the United States was prepared to use armed or nuclear forces to prevent communist regimes from "taking over the world" as was urged in the NSC Papers No. 68. In addition to confirming the very abstract conception of freedom vs. communism, VOA was pressed to justify a more concrete U.S. war effort and the decision to intervene in Korea.

A closer look at the terminology that dominated VOA broadcasts will show how simple and opposing images were used to "condense complex foreign policies into easily communicated messages (Brewer 2009, 4).

The strident anti-communist tone of the voice was dominated by the recurrent use of binary oppositions. It served as a simple framework in which the United States and the Soviet Union were defined as polar opposites divided by fundamental and irreconcilable differences. The use of this linguistic antagonism not only reiterated and enforced the "Us vs. Them" mentality; it also underscored the qualitative and moral implications of this divide. The overall theme of freedom vs. communism was further shaped by very plain and

at the same time abstract images of ‘light vs. dark’ or ‘good vs. evil.’ It glorified and elevated the unrepressed religious life of U.S. citizens and contrasted it with ‘godless communism’. This way, American freedoms were embedded in a framework of simple binary oppositions. Similarly, the idea of a classless and individualistic society was juxtaposed with the imageries of ‘communist slave labors’ (Hixson 1998, 45). VOA coined terms, such as ‘captives’ and ‘slaves’ in order to describe the people living in the Soviet empire, which evoked and embraced other powerful images, such as the ‘Iron Curtain’. The latter perception of the Soviet empire as a closed system that holds its residents captive also emphasized the need for liberation. In this story, U.S. actions, such as the implementation of the Marshall Plan or the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, were consolidated as purely defensive measures; whereas, Soviet propaganda activities or any other political, economic or military steps by the Kremlin were interpreted as acts of aggression. The Soviet empire, therefore, was given the role of the ‘evil aggressor’ which needed to be stopped, even if it demanded the United States to engage in propagandistic activities as well as military actions. Defining the Soviet threat as a holistic threat, which affects every sphere of life, VOA attempts to justify U.S. military actions, the superiority of American freedoms and democratic principles as well as the United States as the legitimate harbinger of freedom and democracy.

Consequently, communism and freedom were reduced to catchwords undermining the complexities of these concepts but also the complexities of domestic circumstances in the United States. For example, the precarious political, social and economic position of minority and ethnic groups in U.S. city slums was undermined by the vigorous presentations of comfortable and overall higher living standards in the United States. The grand narrative of freedom vs. tyranny also ignored the fact that some U.S. citizens were denied basic civil rights, which determined the experiences of African Americans, and which did not correspond with the glorification of the electoral process in the United States.

Krugler (2000) concludes that the formulation of U.S. foreign policy was in essence vague and general: “And what were the ultimate goals of American foreign policy? To contain communism, to liberate communist-controlled nations, to spread democracy – such generalities were of little use to writers and announcers with daily broadcast schedules.” (208). The onset of the Korean War demanded strong anti-communist sentiments which informed the formulation of U.S. foreign policy objectives; in addition, VOA’s direct ties to the State Department made it increasingly difficult to pursue a more objective and factual

mode of presentation.

The combination of blatant anti-communist propaganda and the constant flux of news from America determined the content of VOA programming during the early post war period. The use of binary oppositions encouraged the image of an irresolvable divide between the United States and the Soviet Union and more importantly justified U.S. military intervention and arms build-up.

The rigorous and at times alienating anti-communist tenor of VOA programs was questioned by Congress members and the U.S. public, although the need for disseminating information about the United States, and thus securing the loyalties of other nations, was generally recognized (Knapp 1972, 33). The U.S. administration, congress members and VOA employees, however, were pressed to reach an agreement on how to present American freedoms to the rest of the world, especially to the foreign public in Eastern and Central Europe. They agreed that public opinion mattered a great deal in order to win the war of words and ideas and that, therefore, it was necessary to inform and educate the foreign public about U.S. culture and society as well as political and economic goals.

4.ReconsideringVOABroadcastingStyle

The 1950s was a time when the Voice had to reconsider its baying anti-communist tone. The year of 1953 brought crucial structural changes. The United States Information Agency (USIA) was established to reorganize and centralize international U.S. information activities (Pirsein 1979, 323). The inauguration of the USIA both stabilized and restructured the Voice. The attacks by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy had not only weakened the morale of VOA employees but also the public support for the broadcasting agency (Hixson 1998, 54).

The Jackson Committee⁸ concluded that the psychological warfare strategy, implemented by President Truman, should be abolished. Subsequently, radio programs should embrace more factual and objective newscasts and avoid a hard-hitting propagandistic approach (Pirsein 1979, 320). Other committees, such as the Rockefeller committee, forged the creation of an independent information agency, which was also supported by the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Henderson 1969, 51). Eventually,

⁸ The President's Committee on International Information Activities was initiated by President Eisenhower on January 26, 1953 (Pirsein 1979, 318).

the USIA would emerge as an independent information agency; however, the State Department still exercised control over official U.S. comments on foreign policy issues:

He [President Eisenhower] spelled out the “clear authority” of the Department of state in the area of foreign policy and the responsibility of the Department to give guidance to all other agencies and stipulated that in overseas posts all U.S. activities would be coordinated by the chief of the diplomatic mission. (Pirsein, 53)

Thus the main goal of U.S. international broadcasting activities was to seek support for U.S. foreign policy. This basic mission did not differ from previous goals of U.S. information activities, as diverse as radio broadcastings, cultural exchange programs, motion pictures, press publications, overseas libraries or propaganda campaigns through presidential addresses. The establishment of the independent information agency and President Eisenhower’s declaration of its mission further stressed U.S. foreign policy aims as the guiding principle for USIA’s information transmission through the use of various media: “The purpose of the USIA shall be to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace.” (ibid., 331).

Despite the overall emphasis on U.S. foreign policy objectives as the guiding principle for the USIA communication activities and consequently for VOA programming, presentations of the American way life, culture and news followed a less propagandistic and aggressive approach under the Eisenhower administration. Instead, gradual cultural infiltration and positive communication was supposed to disseminate American values and freedoms over time. The more subtle approach of cultural penetration in the 1950s replaced psychological warfare efforts and its strident anti-communist messages (Knapp 1972, 33 and Hixson 1998, 114). The inception of Willis Conover’s music program *Music USA* in 1955 represents the attempts of the Eisenhower administration to use the appeal of U.S. popular culture for propaganda purposes.

The Cultural Agreement of 1958 supported and extended the mutual exchange of cultural goods, such as feature films, and information through the use of broadcasting services, such as radio and television. The exchange of personal, that is, the exchange of students, artists, scientists or athletes initiated a flow of people who travelled as ‘cultural ambassadors.’ The importance of the Cultural Agreement is stressed by Hixson (1998). Cultural infiltration of the USSR that came along with the exchange of students,

professors and artists proved to be one of the most effective initiatives of U.S. diplomacy efforts to undermine Soviet hegemony during the Cold War (153 and 227).

In the light of a more gradualist approach of U.S. propaganda activities overseas, the Voice also turned to developing a more tamed and thus credible information service. VOA was faced with its twofold character as both an instrument for U.S. government policies and a journalistic broadcasting entity striving for objective news reporting. The beginning of the 1960s represent a period for VOA that brought significant changes. Under the USIA directors George V. Allen⁹ and Edward R. Murrow¹⁰ as well as Henry Loomis, head of the VOA from 1958 until 1965, the Voice entered a period in which aspirations to become a credible source for news, ideas, culture and opinions from America were advanced and changed the tone of the Voice fundamentally.

One of these changes involved the role of English for VOA programming, which gained prominence under Allen, who initiated the expansion of Worldwide English Services.¹¹ Loomis underlines in an interview the possibilities an expanded English broadcasting service holds and boldly identifies three reasons:

First, many people wish to learn English and language teaching can be the best form of “brainwashing” possible, if handled right.

Second, we can do better radio actualities in English than in any other language because it’s our own language.

Third, most people who are politically curious, speak English and I believe a country is more credible when it speaks in its own language.

(Pirsein 1979, 382)

According to Loomis, the increase of English information services does not only improve the quality of VOA programming but also serves two important conflicting missions VOA is expected to perform. First, spreading the English language provides valuable means to influence the target audience. Secondly, the use of one’s mother tongue enhances credibility. Besides the advantages of the English language as a ‘propaganda tool’, Soviet jamming was not targeted at English broadcasts, which increased the possibility of penetrating the Iron Curtain. Other programming innovations at the time changed VOA’s presentation of America. Among other programs, *Panorama USA* was implemented and intended to broadcast interviews and reports that discussed American history and culture.

⁹ Agency director from 1957 – 1960.

¹⁰ Agency director from 1961 – 1963.

¹¹ The recommendations of the Ewing Report of 1958 supported Allen’s ambitious plan to expand English broadcasting services as much as possible (Pirsein 1979, 381).

American Forum, later called *Forum: A Meeting of the Minds*, featured interviews with American intellectuals, writers and experts (Heil 2003, 68).

In addition to the emphasis on English as a crucial asset, Allen underlines the significance of factual and truthful VOA programming. The presentation of American news, including the words and phrases that are used to broadcast information, should be “factual, straightforward and dignified” (ibid., 375). Allen recognized the need for VOA to match the reputation of the BBC as a credible source, in order to be taken seriously and to continue as an effective broadcasting agency.

Another step towards becoming a more credible Voice marked the approval of the VOA charter in 1960. Loomis felt the need to give the Voice an independent formal statement of its mission. The idea of an independent mission statement emerged in 1958 during a staff meeting and resulted in the final draft that reads in part as follows:

1. VOA will establish itself as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
[...]
3. As an official radio, VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively. VOA will also present responsible discussion and opinion on these policies.¹²

The charter combines the official mission of the USIA with VOA’s own ambitions to be perceived as a truthful and reliable broadcasting service. The charter underlines the attempt of the Voice to reconcile its status as an official U.S. government agency with the need to engage in factual and objective news reporting. The developments of cultural exchange programs, cultural programming and the overall strategy to gradually infiltrate the Soviet Union in the 1950s also required changes in VOA’s broadcasting style. The previous approach of constantly broadcasting blatant anti-communist messages seemed oddly out of place with initiatives pursued by the USA and the USSR, such as the Cultural Agreement of 1958 and the following American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959.

Although VOA programming was being tamed, propagandistic tendencies were still present. VOA remained to be the official ‘spokesman’ for U.S. foreign policy. The Voice was still responsible for explaining the intentions of the U.S. government to the rest of the world and gaining the loyalty of other nations and its people by presenting a positive and favorable image of the United States. Furthermore, VOA broadcasting activities mainly concentrated on Eastern and Central Europe assuming that people behind the Iron Curtain

¹² The VOA charter was signed into law by President Ford in 1974.

needed more information about U.S. policies, economics or culture than other parts of the world (Uttaro 1982, 114).

5. Propaganda Problems Continue in the 1960s

What had become clear in Eisenhower's declaration of the USIA's mission was reiterated and solidified in President Kennedy's memorandum on the mission of the USIA in 1963. Kennedy's declaration emphasized that

[t]he influencing of attitudes is to be carried out by the overt use of the various techniques of communication – personal contact, radio broadcasting, libraries, book publications and distribution, press, motion pictures, television, exhibits, English-language instructions, and others. [...]
The advisory function is to be carried out at various levels in Washington, and within the country team at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad.

(Knapp 1972, 56)

In addition to the obvious propagandistic purpose, the USIA assumed advisory function, which granted the USIA opportunities to influence U.S. foreign policy objectives and decisions. USIA director Murrow's relationship to the Kennedy Administration demonstrates the elevated status of the USIA and the close ties between the U.S. information agency and the U.S. government in the first half of the 1960s (ibid., 58).

The Berlin crisis is just one example of how the information service provided by the Voice had to serve propagandistic purposes. Once again VOA's internal identity battle between factual news reporting and propaganda activities for the U.S. government was stirred up. In its presentation of the Berlin crisis the USIA equated the fate of Berlin with the destiny of the "free world". West-Berlin became the symbol for freedom which would be jeopardized if West-Berlin was "lost". The divided city stood for the American commitment to contain communism. Propaganda activities also included comparisons between West-Germany and the GDR and pointed to the massive numbers of refugees coming from East-Germany to West-Berlin (ibid., 81). Once again, VOA had to compromise objective news reporting and draw on propagandistic methods, such as exaggeration, distortion or omission of information.

One of the most pressing propaganda problems that VOA faced was the problem of

racism in the United States. The promotion of freedom, equality and justice was ridiculed by the inherent racial inequalities that pervaded every sphere of American life and society. The African-American struggle for civil rights made a mockery of the glorified presentation of American freedoms. Racism was not only a problem of individual racist thoughts and actions that resulted in lynching and murder. Racial discrimination also permeated the political, educational and economic system. The fact that African Americans had to fight for basic civil rights, such as the voting right, required VOA to either omit, distort or downplay the situation of African Americans if the Voice did not want to alienate its audience.

For example, VOA had to explain why, in a free and democratic country, a Supreme Court decision was necessary to officially state that the situation in U.S. schools and universities is fundamentally unequal and unconstitutional. The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954 or the Voting Rights Act of 1965 contradicted VOA programming and called for propagandistic broadcasting. VOA was urged to emphasize the progress that was steadily made to improve race relations in the USA and the “fantastic” advancements of the social, economic and educational situation of African Americans (Hixson 1998, 130).

In addition to legal and legislative achievements that marked the struggle for civil rights, violence against African Americans was a part of the racial discrimination in the United States. Race riots, protests and murder were results of ongoing racial problems. The murder of Emmitt Till in 1955 underlines the profound contradictions of positive international VOA programming and the situation and developments at home. The story of Emmitt Till also underscores the importance and impact of photographs and films at the time. Emmitt’s mother insisted on an open casket for her son’s funeral. The picture of the mutilated body of a black 14-year-old boy did not just receive domestic media attention but international press coverage as well. Another example is the Little Rock incident that produced images of hatred and violence against African Americans. The USIA was aware of the influence these pictures had on the foreign public. In an attempt to counteract pictures of violent racial confrontations, U.S. propagandists published photographs of “well dressed, smiling ‘Negroes,’ often engaged in activities with whites” (ibid., 131f.).

The impact of the Civil Rights Movement and the questions it raised about issues, such as equal rights or personal freedoms went beyond the borders of the United

Sates.¹³ International solidarity with African American activists demonstrated the awareness of contradicting presentations of the US as the leader of democracy and freedom on the one hand and the violence inflicted on African American protesters in Little Rock on the other. Disillusionment and disappointment among young members of the SDS and German youth was the result of contradicting information they received from official U.S. information services, like the USIA, and news reporting from less biased sources concerning equal rights in the United States:

Their [German youth's] disappointment grew in proportion to the escalation of the Vietnam War, which provoked them to anger, cynicism, and frustration with the seeming hypocrisy of the nation they had admired: America's official portrayal as the leader of the "Free West" in the face of its political actions at home and abroad seemed false. (Höhn 2010, 116)

Although a large portion of VOA programming and the USIA's propaganda effort was directed at the audience behind the Iron Curtain, it was also responsible for strengthening the bond with allied countries and their people. The problem of VOA broadcasting activities in the light of the Vietnam War and the Civil Right Movement was twofold. Race riots and protests did not only question the positive image that was supposed to win the respect of listeners in communist countries. It also challenged the support of young people in West-Germany who had benefited from the U.S. reconstruction effort after WWII and who had embraced U.S. popular culture.

The 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s profoundly changed the way VOA engaged in presenting U.S. policies, culture and news. The inherent identity crisis, informed by domestic challenges and expectations, official mission statements of the U.S. government and internal aspirations of becoming a credible information agency, continued to influence VOA's self-perception as well as its international reputation. Discussions of the appropriate role of the VOA continue and underline the seemingly irresolvable problem of justifying U.S. propaganda activities.¹⁴ Moreover, discussions attempt to explain and justify the existence of a state-funded information agency in the United States whose declared purpose is to present U.S. policies, to "win the attention and respect of the listeners"¹⁵ and at the same time to produce balanced and objective news reporting.

¹³ The German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund) announced its solidarity with the black power faction of the movement in 1967 (Höhn 2010, 112).

¹⁴ See *Voice of America at the Crossroads. A Panel Discussion on the Appropriate Role of the VOA* in 1982.

¹⁵ Quoted from the VOA charter.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Voice before and under the USIA was subject to numerous debates between the US administration, the congress, VOA employees or directors and the U.S. public. The overt use of propagandistic methods after WWII had to be justified and reconciled with the democratic morale prevailing in U.S. society. With the strong anti-communist stance VOA could hardly claim to practice journalistic objectivity regarding its news coverage and other programming.

The USIA's ties to the U.S. State department and thus to U.S. foreign policy continued to challenge VOA's claim to objectivity as stated in the VOA charter from 1960. VOA's propagandistic programming during the 50s and the 60s constantly challenged the idea of the VOA as an objective source and hence as a reliable broadcasting network that provides a fair, balanced, accurate, and contextualized image of America and the world. The formulation of the VOA charter highlights the Voice's attempt to come to grips with its dual status, oscillating between the announced ideal of journalistic objectivity and the proclaimed relationship to U.S. foreign policy objectives.

Since its inauguration, the VOA has been increasingly institutionalized, coordinated and embedded into a system of information dissemination, that is, propaganda and later 'public diplomacy'. This development provided the US government with the means to control the content and form of VOA programs. The importance of international U.S. broadcasting activities in the war against communist regimes was crucial for the survival of the Voice. The VOA was revived and eventually endowed with higher funding. VOA, however, had to commit itself to hard-hitting propaganda practices and therefore compromise objective and balanced reporting and programming.

Cultural programming gained momentum during the 1950s. The United States pursued an evolutionary approach to undermine Soviet power. VOA's cultural programming was increased and effectively accompanied news reporting and underlined VOA's multilayered approach in reaching as many people as possible through various channels, such as Music programs, documentary features and special programming, such as book readings. VOA's notorious anti-communist tone seemed inappropriate in a time of gradual cultural rapprochement between the United States and the USSR.

Although the goal of truthful, objective, fair and balanced programming were restated by VOA officials, namely Sherwood, Houseman, Barnes or Allen, as well as by the mission statements of the U.S. government since the beginning, the Voice remains to be a

propaganda tool. Debates over its purpose, mission, programming style and the need to defend its very existence also underline the tensions and contradictions that the coexistence of democratic morale and propaganda create.

In the light of increasing political, social and military turbulences at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s, i.e. the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Berlin Crisis, the Vietnam War or the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. government relied heavily on VOA's propagandistic potential to explain U.S. military actions and foreign policy decisions and to restore the image of the United States.

Bibliography

Barnes, Joseph. 1943. "Fighting with Information: OWI." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, 1: 34-45.

Brewer, Susan A. 2009. *Why America Fights. Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq*. New York: Oxford University Press

Glade, William. 2009. "Issues in the Genesis and Organization of Cultural Diplomacy: A Brief Critical History." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 39, 4: 240-259.

Hanson, Allen C. 1984. *USIA. Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Heil, Alan J. 2003. *Voice of America. A History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Henderson, John W. 1969. *The United States Information Agency*. New York: Praeger Publishers

Hixson, Walter L. 1998. *Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan.

Höhn, Maria and Martin Klimke. 2010. "Revolutionary Alliances. The Rise of Black Power." *A Breath of Freedom. The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 107-122.

Knapp, Manfred. 1972. *Die Stimme Amerikas. Auslandspropaganda der USA unter der Regierung John F. Kennedys*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Krugler, David F. 2000. *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953*. London: University of Missouri Press.

Pirsein, Robert William. 1979. *The Voice of America. A History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government 1940-1962*. New York: Arno Press, 1979.

Stokes, Gale (ed.).1991. *From Stalinism to Pluralism. A Documentary History of Eastern Europe since 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ripmaster, Terence M. 2007. *Willis Conover. Broadcasting Jazz to the World*. New York: iUniverse Inc.

Uttaro Ralph A. 1982. "The Voices of America in International Radio Propaganda." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 45,1: 103-122.