



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Master's Degree  
in  
Comparative International Relations

Final Thesis

***Project Truth***

*How the USIA Tried to Shape the Soviet Union*

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**Academic Year**

2020 / 2021



## **Ringraziamenti**

La tesi in questione, come tutto il processo antecedente ad essa, è stato il frutto di un assiduo lavoro e di un insieme di sacrifici. Vorrei, in primo luogo, ringraziare a me stesso per aver continuato ad impegnarmi per conseguire il mio obiettivo finale di cui questa ricerca è il coronamento, nonostante tutte le avversità lungo e i momenti difficili lungo il percorso. Soppesando tutti i pro e i contro posso ricordare a me futuro, che adesso stai leggendo questo testo, che è stata una giusta scelta; magari non la più convenzionale però quella che ti ha dato più soddisfazioni. Non pentirti di niente, senza essa non saresti ciò che sei ora.

Inoltre, voglio dire un grazie enorme a mia mamma Inna, a mia nonna Lyudmyla, a mio nonno Enrico ed a Luca per avermi sempre sopportato durante il mio percorso e per avermi sostenuto nei momenti di maggiore difficoltà, sia economica che morale.

Per concludere, voglio ringraziare tutti i miei amici, quelli veri, che mi hanno sempre affiancato senza essere declassati nel tempo a delle semplici conoscenze, a pesare di tutte le disgrazie avvenute negli ultimi tre anni che hanno diviso e fatto scemare non pochi rapporti.

Grazie, perché sei stato abbastanza forte per riuscire ad arrivare fin qui: te lo meriti.



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## Abstract

La seconda metà del ventesimo secolo è stata segnata da molte tensioni nell'ambito delle relazioni internazionali, forse la più grande tra queste, che stette all'origine di molte altre, è stata quella generata dal rapporto tra gli Stati Uniti e l'URSS. Il confronto ideologico tra queste due potenze ha assunto dimensioni talmente grandi da essersi poi guadagnato un nome proprio: la Guerra Fredda. Questa contrapposizione si diffuse in molti ambiti, quello su cui si concentra questa ricerca è quello dell'informazione, o meglio, della propaganda.

Dall'inizio di queste relazioni tese, circa nel 1946, fino alla loro "fine", nel 1991, ci sono state molte campagne diffamatorie fatte da entrambe le parti. Il compito di questa indagine è ripercorrere e riassumere la storia delle relazioni tra gli USA e l'URSS per poi concentrarsi sul descrivere il percorso evolutivo dell'apparato propagandistico antisovietico statunitense, prima quello segreto, poi quello pubblico; per giungere alla campagna di contro-propaganda da cui prende il suo titolo la ricerca stessa: "Project Truth".

Il periodo storico nel quale nasce questo progetto è quello dei primi anni Ottanta, agli inizi dell'amministrazione di Ronald Reagan alla Casa Bianca. Rinomato per l'uso di parole forti nei confronti dei sovietici, come anche per la sua impassibilità nello scendere a compromessi con loro, è diventato l'artefice di uno dei periodi più floridi della propaganda antisovietica del suo paese.

Appena arrivato al governo, forte del supporto del movimento *New Right* che aveva una visione piuttosto spregevole del comunismo, percepito come un sistema ormai fallito e superato, Reagan non ha sprecato tempo ed ha messo subito in chiaro i suoi obiettivi riguardo i rapporti con l'URSS: piegare i sovietici intensificando la corsa agli armamenti, e così facendo, costringerli a spendere i soldi che non hanno per portarli allo sbaraglio per poi trattare con loro dalla posizione di superiorità, mettendo in questo modo fine alla Guerra Fredda.

Il problema del suo approccio si trovava proprio nei suoi toni aggressivi e nel rifiuto di negoziare, tant'è che nel 1983, successivamente al suo discorso in cui ha definito l'Unione Sovietica l'"impero del male", si è toccato il punto più critico: dopo l'abbattimento da parte dei sovietici di un aereo civile coreano che erroneamente si trovava nei cieli appartenenti al territorio dell'URSS e dalle tensioni generate intorno all'esercitazione

della NATO *Able Archer 83*, lo stesso Reagan ha capito che è arrivato il momento di cambiare la tattica. Mentre per la NATO la suddetta esercitazione veniva considerata come ordinaria, gli ufficiali sovietici, provati dai continui toni minacciosi di Reagan, credevano che fosse la preparazione per un attacco nucleare contro di loro, perciò, comprendendo che ormai la tensione è diventata incontrollabile, i rappresentanti delle potenze occidentali hanno deciso di riaprire il dialogo con l'URSS.

Proprio durante il periodo descritto, dal 1981 al 1984, è stato concepito il progetto volto a “combattere” la disinformazione sovietica, apparentemente ormai diffusasi nell'occidente. La campagna di contro propaganda “Project Truth” è stata una creazione del direttore dell'USIA (agenzia di informazione degli Stati Uniti), Charles Z. Wick. Wick era un fedele amico e collega di Reagan, ma anche un abile uomo d'affari con molta esperienza alle spalle nel mondo dello spettacolo. Dopo uno dei suoi svariati viaggi in Europa lui si era convinto che la propaganda sovietica, sfruttando la passività degli USA, stava facendo perdere agli americani il supporto degli europei. Spinto da questa convinzione lui ha raccontato a Reagan della necessità di creare un progetto intergovernativo che avrebbe coinvolto il Pentagono e la CIA e permesso agli Stati Uniti di intensificare la loro lotta alla disinformazione e di riguadagnarsi la fiducia della popolazione europea.

Questa iniziativa ha preso il nome di “Project Truth” – progetto verità -, come un omaggio a Harry Truman, ed è stato firmato da Reagan il 9 settembre del 1981. Tra i vari prodotti generati da questa campagna i più rinomati sono *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, una newsletter mensile volta a raccogliere e denunciare le accuse antiamericane presenti nei media sovietici in un determinato periodo, e *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, un insieme di report fatti tre volte a settimana e spediti nei 200 uffici dell'USIA sparsi nel mondo per “informare” i rappresentanti locali dell'agenzia su che cosa rispondere alle accuse sovietiche nel caso di necessità. Mentre la prima pubblicazione era destinata anche alla popolazione civile, prevalentemente ai giornalisti, la seconda veniva spedita solo ai lavoratori dell'agenzia.

Un'attenta analisi degli esemplari reperibili delle due pubblicazioni ha fatto capire che si trattava di un mezzo di contro propaganda molto ricercato, cui attività, nel caso di *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, è stata fruttifera ed intensa. Inoltre, una lettura dei suddetti documenti lascia intendere che l'USIA voleva mostrare solo ciò che le faceva comodo, offuscando



e non sviluppando alcune accuse sovietiche che, in un momento successivo, si sono dimostrate come veritiere. Tra queste ci sono l'invasione dell'isola di Grenada, l'intervento statunitense in Honduras ed in El Salvador, in più alcuni sospetti riguardanti la strategia politica reaganiana nei confronti dell'URSS, che sottolineava la volontà degli USA di piegare i sovietici economicamente accelerando la corsa agli armamenti. Nel *Soviet Propaganda Alert* questi temi, come molti altri, vengono semplicemente scartati come propaganda sovietica che una volta identificata dal lettore altrove, soprattutto da un giornalista, avrebbe dovuto essere immediatamente denunciata e cestinata. Proprio qui stava il pericolo di questa newsletter, era fatta per classificare tutte le denunce contro gli Stati Uniti esposte dai sovietici come propaganda, giustificando così la politica estera antisovietica dell'amministrazione Reagan.

La descrizione dell'URSS che viene proposta nel *Soviet Propaganda Alert* risulta molto piatta, poco fondata e volta a stigmatizzare sia il suo governo che i suoi cittadini come delle vittime di un'ideologia pericolosa, che li fece disumanizzare e diventare una minaccia per l'occidente. Il picco della distorsione con la quale l'USIA vuole presentare l'Unione Sovietica al suo pubblico viene toccato in un'edizione della sua rivista *Problems of Communism*. Pubblicata con una tiratura di 27.000 copie nell'ambito di *Project Truth*, il numero di novembre-dicembre del 1981 accusa i sovietici di essere pronti, per delle presunte ragioni storico-sociali, a schierare il primo colpo nel caso di un eventuale conflitto nucleare. Purtroppo, la stessa rivista poi non fornisce al lettore nessun documento ufficiale riconosciuto che avrebbe potuto comprovare questa teoria, la quale rimane quindi una teoria non verificata.

In quanto, invece, al *Project Truth* in sé, l'ultimo documento che ne dimostri l'esistenza è datato 16 maggio 1984, dopodiché se ne perdono le tracce. L'assunzione del sottoscritto, basata sui lavori di A. A. Snyder e J. L. Harper, è che dopo la crisi del 1983 e il cambio della rotta politica del governo Reagan, questo ha optato ad alleggerire la propria posizione antisovietica per riuscire a portare l'URSS al tavolo delle trattative per il disarmo. Questo, insieme alla successiva evoluzione tecnologica dell'USIA, che stava cercando di investire di più nello spazio televisivo, il punto debole di *Project Truth*, ed a dedicare sempre meno attenzione alla sua produzione cartacea, ha spinto l'agenzia a chiudere il progetto. La campagna *Project Truth*, come l'USIA stessa poco dopo, è stata dimessa dopo aver compiuto la sua funzione: essere un punto di appoggio

dell'amministrazione Reagan e della sua politica estera antisovietica, quando questa è stata cambiata non c'era più bisogno di continuare a finanziarlo.

## Introduction

Every person, sooner or later, starts to feel an inner need of returning to her roots, to stop and search for her origin with the aim to acquire a more solid understanding of her identity. In this case, as a student of international relations and a migrant, a necessity to achieve a clearer perception of my essence was expressed with a strong interest in the political past of my motherland Ukraine, which is the Soviet Union. More specifically, the relations between the USSR and the US during the second half of the XX century, which due to their high levels of tension are commonly called the *Cold War*. This very analysis is focalized on the American perspective on them. It is worthy of being reminded that the competition for ideological dominance was the main point of these tensions, which were highlighted by an informational duel of the propaganda apparatuses of both.

During the beginning of the first Eisenhower's mandate a decision to create a new US information agency was taken, so the USIA was born. This governmental organ was not like others, as its dependency on and participation in the US decision-making was very limited. Its main tasks were helping the spread of "correct" and "reliable" information about the US, from Washington's standpoint, and increasing the export of American printed, audio, and later video material around the world. Furthermore, over time it became responsible for producing counterpropaganda to answer the Soviet "disinformation".

In the context of its role as the White House's main propaganda tool, the USIA generated and organized a countless number of campaigns, publications, broadcasts, pamphlets, and exhibitions throughout its existence. Its final objective was to persuade as many people as possible of the benevolence of Washington's policies. Through almost fifty years of its existence, the agency's importance had varied with the changing of each administration, which had more or less every time decided to put a member of its entourage at the head of the USIA.

When it came to Ronald Reagan, his candidate for the chair became Charles Z. Wick, his close partner and an important part of his team. Wick's presence changed the agency's perspectives due to his ability to bring large amounts of funds inside to it in order to finance new big initiatives. Among his great proposals to Reagan, there was Project Truth. This anti-Soviet inter-agency aimed at winning back the support of the Western audience, which according to Wick, Washington was beginning to lose because of the Kremlin's

growing anti-American propaganda influence in Europe. The products of this project regarded information gathering and the exposure of the Soviet fabrications, as well as an analysis of the USSR itself. This investigation was born with the ultimate goal of deconstructing the image of the Soviet Union which the Reagan administration in its early years wanted to project to the world, evaluating how reliable or not it was, and then understanding its purpose. Some general conclusions one can make after having read this research are that Project Truth was, in effect, Reagan's counterpropaganda tool aimed at representing the vision of the USSR which his administration wanted to divulgate and inculcate in its audience, while simultaneously justifying his military build-up and aggressive position toward the Soviets.

# Chapter 1

## Context

### 1. The Soviet-American relations during the second half of the XX century

The relations between the U.S. and the USSR in the second half of the XX century were studied and analyzed innumerable times by scholars all over the world and due to the presence of a certain level of tension in the clash of the ideologies of the two countries, they are commonly defined by the academics with the name of *The Cold War*, so it will be used in this text to simplify the narrative. When we mention the mere term, today it often recalls us of a precise chapter in the history of the last century, when two politically opposite major powers on earth were competing for global dominance, both territorially and ideologically speaking. More specifically, the adjective *cold* here denotes the coldness of the relations between east and west, but even if the situation is belligerent, it is bounded, and it had not touched the point of the *hot* war. The original inventor of this expression was Don Juan Manuel, a Spanish writer of the XIV century, he had used it to describe the war against Muslims. He had differentiated between the hot and the cold wars by the way they end, the latter, in his words, would not bring peace nor give honor. While the first journalist to have ever used it to describe the period of time aforementioned was Walter Lippmann in 1947, an American columnist and a critic of the conflict. It should be specified though, that the severity of in Soviet-American relations was not consistent, and in effect, for how different some of those periods were some academics, like Fred Halliday, affirm that there were two *Cold Wars*. The first one had approximately lasted from 1946 to 1953 and finished with the end of the Korean War, whereas the second had started in 1979 with the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets and terminated with the fall of the USSR in 1991. These two stages were separated by the period of *Oscillatory Antagonism* in 1953-1969 and *Detente* in 1969-1979.<sup>1</sup> During the upon mentioned points of the Cold War different levels of intensity in the Soviet-American relations were recorded, as they had always oscillated between hostility and peace. One has to fractionate it in separated phases instead of seeing it as a whole thing to avoid an image of it as an incessant conflict between them, which would be misleading. Neither peace nor hostility was absolute in each moment of it, and even when there were no armed conflicts or

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<sup>1</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 3-7.

provocations going on between the opponents, the ideological friction and fierce competition for influence on both sides had persisted, with a distinct degree of involvement, all the time. It is important to recall the fact that the name Cold War itself is just a definition, whereas the political relationship, in this case like in many others, was changing constantly based on certain events or decisions of its protagonists.

It is of a common knowledge that the main point of the Cold War were the political tensions the USA and the Soviet Union, whose adverse ideologies of capitalism and communism were characterized as the cause of the clash, yet there is much more behind it. It must be clear though, that basically every single country on the planet was called to take a position in it, voluntarily or not. The conflict itself is generally considered to have lasted roughly from 1947 to 1991.

To get a clear vision of how it happened is necessary to start with the end of WWII. After the defeat of the Nazis, Franklin Roosevelt's Palladian temple vision of the world aimed to continue friendly relations with the Soviets and see them as partners. This phase, which lasted from 1941 to 1945 and was dominated by FDR's optimistic sight, is considered a moment of peaceful coexistence. After his death and the arrival of Harry Truman in April 1945, the U.S. government decided to change its strategy and pursue a hardline policy. The first step of the hardline approach was the Manhattan project's atomic test of July 1945, it was used on Hiroshima, and so it limited the gains of the Red Army on the Japanese territory by preventing it from conquest it. It had urged Stalin to find a way to get one himself, but it also had strengthened his Hobbesian tendency that brought him to do his famous speech on January 9, 1946, in which he warned the Soviet citizens of a new conflict that would come soon.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the very beginning of hostility in the relationship between the two is linked to a couple of quite specific events: *The Sources of Soviet Conduct* submitted by George Kennan to the American authorities in February 1946 (published on *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947) and the Straits crisis, in August of the same year. The former had put under question mark the efficiency of the Rooseveltian vision that, in the author's opinion, was still guiding American foreign policy, the given article had then pushed the U.S. Government to initiate a firm containment of the Soviet Union. Kennan described the

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<sup>2</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 38, 50-53, 64.

Soviet threat to Europe as a political one, not as a military menace. At the same time, the Straits crisis became the very first demonstration of the strength of the Truman administration, as it had refused Moscow's request for joint control of the territory and had threatened Stalin with war would his troops not leave Turkey immediately, so they did. According to J. L. Harper's citation of Zubok and Pleshnikov: '*Stalin's aggressiveness and miscalculations, for example in the Turkish Straits, were a basic cause of the Cold War*'.<sup>34</sup>

This manifestation of its power by the American government was mainly linked to its disbelief in the UK's capability to fight the Soviets back. It was the second compromise of the Soviets after they had left Iran some months before under the pressure of the United Nations. The third international conflict that saw the participation of two superpowers was the Greek crisis of May 1947, the USA was involved after the speech made by Truman in Congress on March 12, where he stressed that it was his country's duty to support free societies in the world. On February 26 of the same year, the under-secretary Acheson reinforced Truman's position during a meeting at White House, by making the American view of reality even more radically divided between good and evil, and by fomenting the anti-Communist position of the administration. Moreover, these years were those when U. S. Senator Joseph McCarthy had started his campaign aimed to stigmatize communism and to identify those who could have been linked to it as enemies and traitors.<sup>5</sup> It must be mentioned that as well Winston Churchill's *Iron Curtain* speech in Missouri on March 5, 1946, produced a massive effect on the relations between two superpowers with his famous words: "*From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent*"<sup>6</sup>.

After the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, the *European Recovery Program*, more known as *the Marshall Plan*, was approved in April 1948, which transferred \$12,6 billion to 17 countries in Europe. In April of the next year, the US along with Belgium, Britain, France, Holland, and Luxemburg signed the *North Atlantic Treaty*. The Truman Doctrine had brought Soviet-American relations to a completely new phase. Stalin's answer was quick, in September 1947, he organized a meeting in Poland between all the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 60, 80.

<sup>4</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 50-53.

<sup>5</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 63-65.

<sup>6</sup> W. Churchill, *Iron Curtain Speech*, 5.3.1946, available online at [shorturl.at/gmvAF](http://shorturl.at/gmvAF).

major European Communist parties. In January 1949, the *Comecon* (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) was founded to avoid that the countries under the Soviet sphere of influence would be tempted by the money of the West, it was tentative to create a socialist version of the Marshall Plan to help financially the member states and generate economic collaboration between them. The world now was divided into two coalitions. From now on Cominform was in charge of coordinating Communist activities, this led to the Sovietization of Eastern Europe and the hunt for the opposition. The highest moment of tension was reached on June 28, 1948, when 60 American long-range B-29 bombers flew over the sky of Berlin, it was done as a demonstrative threat to deter the Soviets from taking control of the city, apart from this, the US and UK used the airlift for ten months to bring the basic goods to the West Berlin due to Soviet's blockade of the city. All these events had brought to a final compromise between the West and the USSR: the division of Germany into two, officialized with the birth of the Federal Republic of Germany on May 23, 1949, and of the German Democratic Republic on October 7 the same year.<sup>78</sup>

The successful test of the Soviet atomic bomb was a quite stressful moment for the USA. The fact that Stalin now possessed the weapon was brought to the Truman administration in the *NSC-68* document, it had influenced the US policy of the *détente* which the country had followed till the end of the Cold War. The paper contained information about the Soviet atomic bomb, the Communist's takeover in China – the Sino-Soviet Treaty was signed on February 14, 1950 - and about the urge to act with force to protect the Western civilization and the allies from the Communist invasion. The *NSC-68* changed the past Kennan's perspective on the Soviets, who were no longer depicted as hostile yet cautious, but as perpetrators of a fanatic force whose aim was to dominate the world; from now on the goal was to control the friendly, democratic societies in order to *frustrate* the Kremlin. Soon after the administration had read it, the decision to send the troops to Taiwan was taken along with the reinforcement of the protection of the Philippines and with the sustainment of the French troops in Indochina. All of the aforementioned operations were suggested by the paper, so as the rearmament of the FRG and the increase of NATO's military force. Henceforward, the conception of the war fought on the territory of the "rest" of the world was considered by the U.S. government as a thing that touches its

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<sup>7</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 71, 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 60-65.



country directly, so every defeat against the Kremlin, no matter where would be unforgivable.<sup>9</sup> The first prove of force was already knocking at the door in Korea.

The Korean War started with the invasion by the DPRK of the South in April 1950, Kim Il Sung had received Stalin's permission before acting. Three months later the US sent 70.000 marines to support the Southern republic and then reconquered it, but as soon as the troops entered the North they were met by the Chinese and pushed back. The war came to a stalemate as Mao decided to stop at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The armistice was reached, only after Stalin's death, on July 27, 1951. The warfare led to a new *live and let live* phase.<sup>10</sup>

Soon after the death of the Soviet leader, the Stalinization program in the GDR was stopped, as it was causing mass migration to the West. Even if the unrest in Berlin was generating tensions, the new Eisenhower administration was much more afraid of Moscow now that it had the bomb, furthermore, the frequent confrontation between the two on the territories of other countries was preoccupying. The most reasonable decision was to '*choose stability over the status quo*' and avoid the risk of a nuclear war. Nevertheless, Eisenhower was aiming to use the *Solarium Project*, a program that would reduce the Soviet influence without risking the global conflict. Shortly after, the newly rearmed FRG entered NATO and the GDR the Warsaw Pact – signed on May 14, 1955 - , while the decisions to divide Vietnam into two different states and to demilitarize Austria were successfully negotiated and confirmed.<sup>11</sup>

The new First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev started his mandate in a quite peculiar fashion: the speech where he openly condemned Stalin's methods had been broadcasted all over the globe and produced a shocking effect. It had generated turmoil in some of the Warsaw Pact's member states where people were manifesting to lighten the Soviet repressions. Protests in Poland to obtain new reforms were satisfied, while in Hungary in 1956 the hard hand was used to suppress people's discontent and the tentative of shifting to a more independent government, which raise a great deal of skepticism and doubts in the eyes of the civil society. At the same time, Egypt was trying to conquest the Suez Canal and kick out Israel from the area. The former was backed by the USSR, whose

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 78-80.

<sup>10</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 100-101, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 113, 117.

position at that moment was to not permit any defeat due to a delicate situation in Hungary, meanwhile, the latter was sustained by the UK and France. In the end, Nasser's troops won and the rivals had to withdraw, at the time Eisenhower avoided sending aid to help Israel because of the elections at home, so it was not a good moment for him to do risky moves. This event, coupled with the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik on October 4, 1957, and their possession of transcontinental missiles, encouraged the Kremlin to adopt the tough approach, they were trying to show that they were confident that Communism will take over.<sup>12</sup>

The following years, especially the 1959, were those of arm-wrestling for Berlin between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, the latter spent September of that year making a tour through the US and its factories, by the fast development of which he remained quite impressed. Mainly, his trip was a sweetener offered by the West due to the Soviets' 6 months ultimatum - that did not bring to any solution - regarding the West Berlin issue: if no treaty would have been reached, Moscow would authorize the GDR to have sovereignty over it. In May 1960, the American U-2 spy plane was spotted during its fly over the USSR territory and raised many tensions between the countries. The images that the US received from the photos made by the plane contradicted the confident words of the superiority of their leader, it showed a poor situation compared to what they were expecting. The vis-à-vis meeting between the two in Paris was disappointing: they understood that they would not be able to finish this long political competition *single-handedly*.<sup>1314</sup>

In October 1959 the Sino-Soviet relations rupture happened, related to the dangerous behavior of Mao Zedong the Kremlin decided to cut the supply of nuclear technology to the Chinese. Subsequently, Khrushchev tried to build connections with the *Third World* countries, the most important among these new partners were the Cubans, fresh of the Communist revolution. Embargoed and sanctioned by the USA, the island under Castro's command was not in the greatest position to contrast the Americans, so it started to get closer to the Soviet Union to obtain protection, soon after it was recognized by Khrushchev as an ally, and as a sign of Communist victory. In the meantime, on January

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<sup>12</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 109-111, 12-114.

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 122-125, 127.

<sup>14</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 146.

3, 1961, John F. Kennedy became the 35th president of the United States and, willing to show immediately to the USSR the steadiness of his position, he answered Khrushchev with the readiness to attack would the latter dare to take over Berlin. After their meeting in Vienna the decision to build the wall in the middle of the city to prevent the war was made. JFK was firm about the reciprocal deterrence and started the reinforcement of the nuclear sector and the diversification of the military sector, which increased the military expenditure by 13%.<sup>1516</sup>

In April 1961 the covert operation *Bay of Pigs* aimed to hit Castro's communist government was approved by Kennedy. Simultaneously, the mission Vostok-1 to send the first man in space was accomplished with success by the Soviets, who then proceeded with the top-secret *Operation Anadyr*, by trying to transfer 40 ICBM missiles to the island and place them there as a response to Kennedy's previous attack. Yet the missiles were detected in Cuba by the American overflights in September of the following year. Negotiations between the two started immediately and ended on October 27 with a no invasion-no missiles deal, which also included a secret clause of the dismantlement of the American missiles in Turkey. It should be mentioned though, that the compromise was found largely as a consequence of secret negotiations between the Russian Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and Robert Kennedy. On June 10, 1963, JFK made his *A Strategy of Peace* speech at the American University in Washington D.C. where he highlighted the importance of complete nuclear disarmament for a pacific coexistence and the end of the arms race as the primary goal of his administration. Five months later he was tragically assassinated in public and democrat Lydon B. Johnson took the presidential office.<sup>1718</sup>

In July 1956 the US decided to replace the French army in Vietnam after its partition into the Northern communist side and the capitalist South. Initially, Eisenhower had sustained Saigon's leader Ngo Dinh Diem due to the conviction that he would be the strong man the country needed. Unfortunately, Diem's regime was an authoritarian and unpopular one. The evident weakness of the South encouraged the North to form the National Liberation Front in 1959 and to attack the southern neighbor. The victories of the NLF

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<sup>15</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 128-129, 131.

<sup>16</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 152-154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 158-162, 171.

<sup>18</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 132-135.

waved the Kennedy administration to act because the defeat in Vietnam, in their minds, would motivate other *Third World* countries to embrace communism. Starting from 1961, the US started to regularly send aid and weapons to Saigon.<sup>19</sup>

The situation had changed on November 1 1963, when Diem was murdered in a coup d'état organized by his military corps and co-directed by the nationalists.<sup>20</sup> The CIA officer Lucien Conein acted as a bridge between the militaries involved in the overthrow and the US embassy, he asked the American government to not intervene.<sup>21</sup> The general who had directed the takeover, Dương Văn Minh, then became the head of military council, before giving the office of civil prime minister to Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ.<sup>22</sup> The whole scenario changed with the arrival of the LBJ's government, henceforth, it became a large-scale conflict. In August 1964 President Johnson used an accident in the Tonkin Gulf to receive the approval of Congress to use force against communist aggression and sent air raids to bomb the installations in North Vietnam. The number of US soldiers in Vietnam reached 540.000 by 1968. Nevertheless, the position of Hanoi did not suffer from this, it grew stronger, and its anger was only fed by the resentment toward the Western invaders.

After some time, the cost of innumerable human lives and a huge increase of expenditures started to outrage citizens of the US. The last nail in the coffin was the offensive of Tet of January 1968, when the North and the NLF had gained control over Saigon, then they assaulted many military bases and even the US embassy: LBJ's reputation suffered a low blow and a complete loss of trust at home. On March 31, the president stated that he would not candidate for the next elections.<sup>23</sup>

The war itself was a failure for the US for multiple reasons. The main four causes of it were geographical advantages of the local population, the fighting preparation of the NLF and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the unpopularity of the Saigon regime, and the lack of a long-term strategy of the USA.<sup>24</sup> Still, it did not worsen the situation in other

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<sup>19</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 178-180.

<sup>20</sup> B. Diem & D. Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, USA, 1983, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> S. Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, USA, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> E. J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam*, E.P. Dutton, New York, USA, 1987, p. 300-301.

<sup>23</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 180-182.

<sup>24</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 156-159.

*Third World* countries: in Brazil, Dominican Republic, Congo, Ghana, Algeria, and Indonesia prevailed the anti-communist governments sustained by the US.<sup>25</sup>

From the standpoint of the Soviet-American relations, this given conflict did not do much, as after Khrushchev's resignation in 1964 and his replacement with Brezhnev the strategy of the USSR toward the US had changed. With the new leader the decision was made to avoid useless brinkmanship moves and threats, and just proceed with a relatively calm coexistence, by keeping a cautious increase of power and research of new opportunities. This period earned the name of *distension*, yet the future political actions of the First secretary will show the nonlinearity of this "peace". It is of great importance to acknowledge that even if a direct confrontation with the U.S. was discarded it was done with the view of force recovery and consolidation of Soviet dominance within the territory of the Eastern Bloc. At last, Vietnam per se represented quite a high risk to the Soviets due to the instability of their relations with the North-Vietnamese party and the pressure of the Chinese, whose influence there was much bigger. This search for a relative "peace" had brought to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons signed by 62 countries on July 1, 1968.<sup>26</sup>

After its first implementation, the Marshall Plan was starting to give the hoped results: Western Europe and Japan were consolidating their economic systems, moreover, they were now enjoying the economic boom. As Japan, West Germany, and other Western countries recovered from the consequences of WWII the equilibrium of the economic dominance in the world changed. By the 70s Washington's share of global GDP had dropped by almost 5%. Bretton Woods made so that the USA would maintain international monetary relations in balance by linking the dollar to gold and injecting a stable flow of its currency into the system. This Gold Standard mechanism had served its cause and the dollar's convertibility in gold was convenient to the Western partners, but it as well had obliged the U.S. to run a payments deficit to permit world financial rehabilitation and fast development.<sup>27</sup> Yet the economic situation of the US was not benefiting from this any longer, the exports were not bringing so many profits as they did in the past while the imports were growing fast. The financial instability coupled with the

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<sup>25</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184-186.

<sup>27</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 18-19.

huge expenditures for the Vietnam war had lacerated the US, the gold resources of the country no longer corresponded to the quantity of the dollars in circulation. The United States was asking more often their European colleagues to discuss the interruption of the Gold Standard to save its political and economic weight on the global level, though with no results. In fact, On August 15, 1971, the convertibility was unilaterally suspended by the Nixon administration, it was done partially to restore the US financial supremacy and to avoid further inflation damages to the currency; additionally, the import duties were increased by 10% to cut the concurrence from abroad. It symbolized the admission of American economic crisis.<sup>28</sup>

The undiscussed hierarchy and European dependence on the Americans were slowly fading, so much so that many of the West European countries started to reconcile relations with some of the Warsaw Pact's signatories. The most important step in this direction was made by the FRG's president Willy Brandt. His new *Ostpolitik* strategy was promoting the change through a rapprochement between East and West of Europe, and it aimed to the eventual reunification of Germany. The plan was to patiently rebuild the dialogue and economic trades with the east to ease the bipolar separation, Brandt thought that in this way it would incentivize the transformation of the communist regimes into more liberal countries. This plan of distension was then indeed strengthened by the *Helsinki Final Act* of 1975 when 33 European countries along with the US and Canada agreed on collaborating and defining the main points on which the western and eastern states of Europe could collaborate, the points of the sovereignty of national borders and protection of human rights were by far the most important of them, so were the principles of cooperation between the two sides of the *Iron Curtain*. It became a sort of guide for the Intereuropean relations.<sup>29</sup>

While from the other side of the iron curtain Brezhnev's period in the Soviet Union earned the name of *zastoj/zastoj*, which means stagnation, this term was used by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 80s to describe it as a phase of deep economic struggle with no progress for the country. It became clear that the main goal of the Soviet leader is relative stability and peace, to do so no progressive reforms were implemented, a low-efficiency economic model and no experiments of changing things were accepted. In general, the long cycle

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<sup>28</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 219, 195.

<sup>29</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 164-165.

of industrialization in the Socialist countries had come to an end, at this point they were trying to import as much of the consumer goods and advanced industrial technology from the West as they could, by generating so a massive number of debts. Along with economic repressions, also cultural censorship and rigid repressions were largely used to avoid the spread of rebellious ideas by intellectuals and Westernized youth. The costs of this autocratic politics were paid by the Czechoslovaks, where the new leader Alexander Dubcek was promoting progressive reforms, and it was immediately enthusiastically received by the population. As soon as the Soviets had seen that the situation was going out of control they intervened harshly. On August 21 of 1968, 300.000 Red Army soldiers were marching on the streets of the country. In 1968 the Prague Spring made it clear that the possibility to obtain new reforms in Communist countries was vane, although it reinforced Brezhnev's position as a conservative leader. It showed that the communist bloc was sticking together only due to the Soviet military corpus' threat and made every illusion of a potential progressive future for Communist countries die in the eyes of the Western Socialist left and opposition: USSR became a pure representation of a retrograde dictatorship.<sup>30</sup>

The US was projecting a new strategy headed by its new president Richard Nixon. The latter together with his adviser Henry Kissinger was planning a new approach to the Cold War, to reduce tension and maintain the peace. Their *gattopardesco* technique consisted in the creation of a new structure of global relationships to preserve the position of the US. It laid on three pillars: concreteness, mutual restraint in the *Third World*, and linkage of the most important issues. The biggest innovation became the triangular politics where Nixon would improve the relations with the PRC to at the same time worsen the relations of the latter with the USSR, and so to use this as a tool to reach their objectives. The first official visit to China was paid by Nixon, his wife, and his entourage between February 21 and 28 of 1971.<sup>31</sup> During his trip, the president traveled to the three major cities of the country: Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. He was received by Mao Zedong and by the premier Zhou Enlai, while the first lady was having a tour through the local schools and factories.<sup>32</sup> The major results of the journey were the *Shanghai Comunique*, which gave

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<sup>30</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 204-205, 206-208.

<sup>31</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 167-168.

<sup>32</sup> University of Southern Carolina, *Nixon in China Itinerary*, excerpted from "Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents", 28.2.1972, available online at <https://china.usc.edu/nixon-china-itinerary-feb-17-28-1972>.

the basis for the relations between the two states, and a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue, the objective of which was the withdrawal of American military troops from the island.<sup>33</sup>

Another very painful issue was that of Vietnam. The new administration elaborated the *Vietnamization* plan to end the war with the aim to leave the South to decide for itself: the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was heavily aided with weapons, a gradual withdrawal of American soldiers by 1972 had diminished the losses, an escalation of the air war in Laos and Cambodia used to detent Hanoi from attacking the south, and secret negotiations in Paris to end the war between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho (North Vietnamese representative). After the concession of a ceasefire, Hanoi accepted to make the Thieu government remain in the south. Long back and forth negotiations did not bring to the hoped effect: the South refused to see the northern troops on its territory. The deal was sealed only in January 1973 following the monstrous *Christmas bombing* by the US, during which 36.000 tons of bombs were dropped on the north.<sup>34</sup>

The Vietnam question once again raised tensions with the Soviets, which were solved thanks to the Moscow summit in May 1972, when the *SALT I*, the treaty to contain the arms race and ban tests and development of the missiles, was signed along with the *Declaration of Basic Principles*. Apart from this, the standpoint of the administration was that from that moment all the regional groups aided by the US would become responsible for their territories and would have to fight for themselves. His last operation was the destabilization of the Allende administration in Chile, considered to be too communist by the US, and secret support of Pinochet, that in 1973 escalated into a bloodless military coup by the latter. Exactly in the same year, the Arab-Israeli conflict had started, its immediate consequences were a package of measures by the OPEC (*Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries*, whose aim was to nationalize the oil resources by its member states) to lower the production, to put more convenient prices to those countries that were supporting the Arabs in the conflict, and impose an embargo on the exports to

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<sup>33</sup> Taiwan Documents Project, *Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China*, 28.2.1972, available online at [shorturl.at/hEPY0](http://shorturl.at/hEPY0).

<sup>34</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 173-175.



the USA (lasted one year). Eventually, Nixon's Vietnam gamble finished due to the Watergate scandal, after which he had to resign.<sup>35</sup>

Exactly during this phase of hardship for the West linked to the oil crisis, where a huge role was played by OPEC that used shortage of petroleum extraction in the U.S. to its advantage. Paradoxically, back then the USSR was enjoying its financial growth thanks to the increase in both oil price and demand, it became one of its biggest exporters. The money earned from the sales of the raw materials was then spent on the accretion of its armaments, which started to worry Washington very seriously, as it was putting its global military dominance under threat. Nevertheless, Moscow was still suffering from its old malaises: a stagnant economy, authoritarian politics, unfair and unhealthy top-down relations with its allies, and a hostile ideologic approach. So, by 1978-79, its economic situation had worsened dramatically till having touched the zero-growth point in 1980. The same year also the demographic situation was becoming tragic: life expectancy diminished by three years for men and by almost two for women, the fertility rate was in continuous decline and alcoholism was widespread. Moreover, the persistent shortage of basic goods was feeding the population with a deep sense of desperation, disillusion, and cynicism; the old preaches about values of heroism and the victory of communism were seen as a joke by the people. The Helsinki accords had given to the citizens of the Soviet bloc a ground to denounce the repression and the violence they were suffering and the possibility to realize how morally degraded their system had become: the dissent was fostering swiftly.<sup>36</sup>

Succeeding a reasonably quiet period of Gerald Ford, during which the Vietnam war was finally brought to an end when the communists seized control of the south on April 30 of 1975, James Carter's mandate started in 1977, was much more complicated from the standpoint of Soviet-American relations. Once the race to the Moon euphoria had finished, when the US triumphed with the Apollo 11 mission in 1969, the conflict seemed to fade with the common mission between Soyuz and Apollo spaceships that docked together in space on July 17, 1975.

Sadly, things changed suddenly four years later. On Christmas 1979, the USSR invaded Afghanistan, Carter described it as '*the most serious threat to the peace since the Second*

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 180-183.

<sup>36</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 26-32.

*World War*'. The Afghan conflict and this speech marked the beginning of the *Cold War II* (Halliday, 1986) with a bitter ideological controversy, a new arms race, and many indirect wars on the territories of third states. One year earlier the *Camp David Accords* were signed, partially due to Carter's mediation between the Egyptian and Israeli sides, these agreements put the end to the Egypt-Israeli conflict and dealt with the question of the position of Palestinians in Israel. However, Carter's largest political success did not come without its side effects. It had deteriorated his image in the pro-Israeli part of the US public and inside his Administration, he was considered as incapable of holding the line and of managing controversial issues.<sup>37</sup> Per se, the beginning of Carter's period as the head of the presidential office was very intense and filled with open war conflicts. Among those the aid to Somalis who then tried to invade Ethiopia, in its turn backed by Cuba and the USSR, and the American support of Chinese troops in kicking out the Vietnamese, sustained by the Soviets, from Cambodia.

The invasion of Afghanistan became the last straw, the Carter administration decided to act more decisively to defend Saudi Arabia and to protect the Persian Gulf region, so the *Rapid Deployment Force* was created. Immediately the Selective Service registration was reimplemented, a 5% increase of military expenditures for each of the following 5 years was approved and the US naval forces were called to be more present in the region: The Carter Doctrine was born. President was clear in his intentions, the USA was ready for a war in case of necessity, immediately anti-Soviet measures were taken as well: an embargo on grain exports, suspension of the freshly signed *SALT II*, and boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.<sup>38</sup>

Carter's decision to take hardline measures was mainly a result of a tense sequence of events: the Iranian Revolution, Sandinista overthrow in Nicaragua, Tehran Hostages crisis, Sunni attack on Mecca's Grand Mosque, and the invasion of Afghanistan, coupled with the upcoming elections.<sup>39</sup> A very important point here was also the presence of oil in the region and the firm wish of the US to not lose control over it or, even worse, leave it to fall in the hands of Moscow. He was trying to use the human rights to put the Kremlin under, by using both radio broadcasting programs like Voice of America in the countries

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<sup>37</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2nd edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 219-221.

<sup>38</sup> J. T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*, New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005, p. 123.

<sup>39</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 205.

of the Communist bloc and using them – precisely those concerning *integrity of the person, basic economic and social rights, and civil and political liberties* - to publicly condemn their governments.<sup>40</sup> The biggest issue that his administration could not overcome was the recession that discredited its reputation irreparably. Even though his choice of appointing Paul Volcker as chairman of Federal Reserve revealed itself to be crucial in the country's fight against inflation in the 80s. Another Carter's weak point was his powerlessness in front of Congress. The same was for the Soviets, who saw him as a frail, untrustworthy partner who could not fulfill his promises and agreements. After all, the public in the States did not perceive Carter as a decisive leader and they were quite disappointed by his weakness in managing difficult situations which coronation became the Tehran US embassy crisis, this was when Ronald Reagan appeared to rekindle the *Second Cold War* and to "make America great again".<sup>41</sup>

## **2. Reagan Doctrine**

As it was mentioned before, the *Second Cold War* had already begun with James Carter, nevertheless, it would be Ronald Reagan to bring it to its peak. The phase of Soviet-American relations between 1979 and 1991 is denominated by some scholars as *Cold War II*, owing to an increased level of war tension and the necessity for defense readiness against possible aggressions in respect to the previous period of détente. Its difference from the *Cold War I* consisted in its gravity linked to the existence of much more destructive force on both sides, and in the type of pressure under which the respective administrations were working, the economic recession and loss of confidence made the political leaders less cautious in their actions than before. Apart from this, the U.S. Government, at the time dominated by the right-wing Republicans, was elaborating a strategy to provoke the Soviets and make escalate the pressure to its own political ends.<sup>42</sup>

Reagan's victory in the elections of 1980 can be linked to many factors. The main root of his success lies in the will of the different categories of the Republican electorate that seemed to follow the same goals: the return of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy, more visible anti-Soviet measures, the hardline approach to the Kremlin, and no more

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<sup>40</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, p. 47, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 11, 21-23.

“oppressive”, Keynesian state interference in the socio-economic sphere.<sup>43</sup> Yet, frankly speaking, there is a much wider background to explore to understand how it happened. The socio-economic ground for the rise of conservatism had started to bloom in the 70s with the increasing importance of southern and western states’ electorate linked to their demographic growth in this decade. The peculiarity of these areas of the USA in that period was their preference for right-wing capitalism. A further element that can offer an explanation of the enlargement of the supporters of the Republican party during the 80s elections from the sociological standpoint is that among those who suffered the most from the economic recession were the blue-collar workers, whose 8.5% shift to the Republicans was quite significant.<sup>44</sup>

As for purely political factors that had affected the Republicans’ triumph, the role of the militant right’s faction called the *New Right* was particularly important in influencing public belief at the time. The movement itself had a long history in the U.S. and it resumed some of the most common conservative characteristics of the last decades of the country’s history: antagonism toward the eastern states (of the US), Europe, over-suspicious attitude to the opposition, a pseudo-naïve narrative of the foreign policy, and arrogant patriotism. Its vision of the Cold War recalled McCarthyism and a hardline approach to the USSR. A very important point of common agreement among certain Republicans was the rejection of détente and a desire for a more decisive and aggressive position. Some further objectives of the movement were reassertment of traditional family and religious values, internal repressions, no gun control, sustain of capital punishment, homophobic, xenophobic, racist, and misogynistic view of the society, and red paranoia. Still, the political success of the right depended not only on this given group but on the coalition of it with the freshly rebuilt Committee on the Present Danger and Committee for a Free Congress. The goals of all these factions of the Republican Party had overlapped in the refusal of the weak approach to the Soviet danger, which later permitted the uprising of the Cold War II policies. Ultimately, the crackdown on the left and the trade unions, an interest in keeping the employment high thanks to military programs, and the nationalism of the local working-class made it so that the right-wing could exploit this moment to regain popularity once again. The major push toward the New Right victory happened to

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<sup>43</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 206.

<sup>44</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 108-110.

be during the Panama Canal Treaties of 1976, both the movement and Reagan extended their reputation after having opposed it; in the end, it passed in Congress when the right to use the channel was guaranteed to the U.S.<sup>45</sup>

According to Federico Romero, the neoconservatives did not fear the USSR anymore, their standpoint was that it had already failed as the state model and there was no longer a need to pretend it was equal to the US. Reagan, coming from this kind of background, did not have problems with expressing his opinion in this regard in public, in fact, his open criticism of the Soviets became one of the elements of his future fame as one of the most anti-communist American politicians in history. His rhetoric was as well a result of a deep conviction that humanity was going through a decisive moment when it would have to choose between communism and freedom, it was seen by him as an ideological battle where the Western civilization would be inevitably triumphant.<sup>46</sup> His speeches were imbued with faith in the “American exceptionalism”, more specifically, that the USA, which embodies the West, has a special mission to spread and foster its values of freedom and justice all over the world; while communism must be “transcended”.<sup>47</sup> As for his fierce criticism of the Communist bloc, he explained it with his will at the moment to encourage its dissidents to condemn the communist regimes publicly and by doing so weaken their influence abroad.<sup>48</sup>

The two main objectives of the new administration were to increase the strength of the country, and by so gaining strategic and diplomatic advantages, and deteriorate furtherly the difficulties of the Soviets. To achieve them a program for enlargement and modernization of the military forces was launched: the defense expenditures grew swiftly year by year till they doubled the state’s military budget between 1980 and 1985. The aim was to put the Kremlin in the position of inferiority and negotiate with it on American terms of superiority.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the strategy of the defense intellectual Andrew Marshall had inspired Reagan to take this path, it stated that an increase in military expenditure could be advantageous for the US if it would tease the Soviets to spend unthinkable amounts of money to keep the rhythm in this “futile” competition. The arms race had to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 112-113, 115-120.

<sup>46</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 285-286.

<sup>47</sup> R. Reagan, *Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame*, 17.5.1981, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-commencement-exercises-university-notre-dame>.

<sup>48</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 285-286.

focus on Stealth technology and nuclear weapons to make the Soviets spend as much as possible to match with the American levels, by emphasizing projects that would be the hardest to realize for them. They would bring them at a crossroads between keeping with the race or countering their economic stalemate.<sup>50</sup> The “iron triangle”, composed by Congress, the arms industry, and the Pentagon was the main mechanism of the massive rearmament of the country even before the rise of Reagan, as each of these three actors had benefits from it. The last reason for the new red alarm and the increase in military expenditures was to redirect the public criticism from the problems of the country and to funnel it somewhere else, in addition, it permitted the government to exercise more political and social control over its citizens. The administration’s desired result of building up the Second Cold War was to erode the effects of WWII on politics and set its own new values and policies using the recession, anti-communism, and historical amnesia.<sup>51</sup>

In the USSR Brezhnev was succeeded by Yuri Andropov in 1983. The Union was suffering due to the expensive and delusional war in Afghanistan and to the crisis in Poland, where the workers’ movement, and later a party, *Solidarność*, was recognized by the Polish government. Its main purpose was the democratization of the country, nevertheless, the movement was crushed, when after threats from the Soviets, the defense minister Jaruzelski imposed martial law in December 1981.<sup>52</sup> The USA immediately put sanctions on both Moscow and Warsaw, vetoed the latter’s membership in the IMF, and blocked the postponement of its debt payments.<sup>53</sup> While in Poland the wounds of the public discontent were irreparable, so as those of the Soviet citizens, sick of continuous shortages of the basic products in the shops; they had lost any hope in a bright communist future. The Communist colossus had become an “entrenched, consensus-based oligarchy”<sup>54</sup>.

In a certain sense, the Regan Doctrine restored the bipolar vision in the US and its aim was to attack the Kremlin indirectly to debilitate its position in the *Third World*. So, the Americans furnished aid and weapons to the mujaheddin anti-Soviet army in Afghanistan

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<sup>50</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 77-79.

<sup>51</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2nd edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, 122, 126-131, 242-243.

<sup>52</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 209.

<sup>53</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 211.

and starting from 1983 built an international network to train the resistance back there. The same was done in Nicaragua, where a series of covert military operations was set in motion, along with the armament of the Contras in neighboring Honduras, and with support of authoritarian regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador.<sup>55</sup> Though the only country where a pro-Soviet government had been overthrown by a direct invasion of the US was Grenada in October 1983 due to the presence of American citizens on the island, which was the original cause of the mission. Reagan's objectives in this were the weakening of the new revolutionary countries, by generating popular discontent and lowering their appeal in the eyes of their neighbors, and the erosion of their connections with the Soviets and making them turn to the USA.<sup>56</sup>

Reagan's aggressive rhetoric provoked huge preoccupation in the citizens, and this brought to the creation of many anti-nuclear movements inside the country, in 1982 a petition to freeze the nuclear weapons was presented in Congress.<sup>57</sup> The *unilateralism* of his administration in running the American foreign policies often had generated discontent in representatives of other states due to its non-consideration of their needs and concerns.<sup>58</sup> The peak of his anti-Soviet speeches was reached in 1983 when he called the USSR the "evil empire" and in a couple of weeks announced the *Strategic Defense Initiative* to contrast the missiles of potential enemies, namely Moscow.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, this project was a result of Reagan's deep belief that it would influence the reduction of the arms race by making the missiles useless. On the other, he hoped that it would destabilize the Soviets because of its high costs in terms of money and high-tech innovation: it was a perfect trap for them as it would be very difficult to emulate and even harder to break. At the same time, it represented the superiority of the U.S. and the backwardness of the Communist bloc in the sphere of technological development.<sup>60</sup> The Kremlin took his provocation seriously and considered it as a real threat, in fact, the level of tension touched during this year was comparable only to those of the *Cuban Crisis* of

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<sup>55</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 294-296.

<sup>56</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2nd edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 239-240.

<sup>57</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 298-299.

<sup>58</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2nd edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 240.

<sup>59</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 300-301.

<sup>60</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 78-79.

1962.<sup>61</sup> At the end of 1983 Pershing-II missiles were deployed in West Germany, the tension point of this event made the *Doomsday clock* move to only three minutes from the end. At once, the South Korean airliner that by chance was flying near the territory of USSR was shot down by the Soviets, who answered to the UN's accusation by saying that it was a CIA's provocation.<sup>62</sup> Right before NATO's operation *Able Archer 83*, the British secret services revealed to the alliance that the Soviets were seeing it as coverage for a nuclear strike, it became clear that they could not go on like this. Moscow was immediately reassured that it was just an ordinary test operation, while Reagan understood that the time had come to reopen the dialogue.<sup>63</sup> Docufilm *The Day After* made it even more explicit to the president that the threat of a nuclear war is unbearable and the risk of it cannot be taken by any means. During his speech to the nation on January 16, 1984, he stated that the relations between the US and the USSR must be restored and that deterrence is not enough, the key is collaboration and partnership, his message to the Soviet citizens was: '*if your government wants peace, there will be peace*'.<sup>64</sup>

In 1984 Reagan was re-elected, while in the USSR both Andropov and his successor Konstantin Chernenko, unfortunately, lasted a very short time, and both deceased one year after having taken the office. The true change came with the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. He was the youngest head secretary in the history of the Soviet Union and he aimed to renovate it with the reforms that had to be done long ago, as he had to modernize the country after the long period of Brezhnev's stagnation. The main goals of the new leader were the improvement of the relations with the U.S. and the west, as well as the reduction of military expenditure. His *perestroika*, the restructuration, consisted in the diminishing of investment in the defense and the opening of the economy. In 1987, repressions and the Red Army interventions on the territory of the allies had been limited, the aid for Nicaragua and El Salvador leftists were cut, and the war in Afghanistan ended the same year on the initiative of the Soviets, in January 1988, the troops had been retired.<sup>65</sup> Gorbachev made it clear that he wanted a united world with no tensions and no conflicts he pursued with the transparency in national politics (*glasnost*), moreover, both

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<sup>61</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 302.

<sup>62</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 91, 93.

<sup>63</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 302-303.

<sup>64</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 214-215.

<sup>65</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 306-309.



intellectuals and ordinary people were now able to criticize the system, which they did abundantly.<sup>66</sup>

The first two meetings between the two leaders in Geneva and Reykjavik did not bring any substantial result, but they gave them the right tone and showed that there was hope for dialogue. The *Washington summit* in December of 1987 had publicly coronated Gorbachev, crowds of Americans came to greet the charismatic Soviet leader in the capital of the US. This enthusiasm was mainly amplified by the signing of the INF treaty on the entire destruction of many classes of weapons, including the Pershing-II in West Germany and then of its predecessor Pershing-I. Earlier the same year in Berlin Reagan's words had predicted the inevitable: '*Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*'<sup>67</sup> In 1989 the US president reassured the journalists that Gorbachev was a man with whom he could work and that his opinion about the Soviet Union had radically changed. Although, already in November 1986, the Republicans' party had lost its influence over the Senate. Later that year the news about sales of arms in Iran along with the payment by the US of ransoms to Lebanese kidnappers was a low blow to the reputation of the Republicans' faction leader, it was damaged permanently. At last, the elections of 1988 saw the victory of Reagan's vice president George H. W. Bush.<sup>68</sup>

On July 7 of 1989, the Warsaw Pact members were informed about the end of Moscow's vigilance over them, they were free to follow the path they would prefer. Even if the efforts of Gorbachev to change things were considerable and useful, the weight of debts with the West started in the 70s was too big and it eventually had suffocated the USSR. It could not afford to finance the other countries of the bloc because it did not have enough money even for itself; its economy was already too rotten to be repaired. This, added to a complete rejection of the use of oppression and violence from the new leadership, had brought to the domino effect. Soon after in Poland was elected the first non-communist government in all of Eastern Europe since 1945. Then came the turn of Hungary and the Czech Republic to leave socialism behind. On September 12 of 1990, the reunification of Germany happened, meanwhile, the wall was dismantled by the Berliners. It took just a

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<sup>66</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 227.

<sup>67</sup> P. Robinson, *Tear Down This Wall*, 15.12.2017, National Archive, Prologue Magazine, Summer 2007, vol. 39, n. 2, available online at <https://cutt.ly/jOMGhp0>.

<sup>68</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 225-226.

little more than a year when in 1991 the USSR collapsed officially, and the Cold War came to end.<sup>69</sup>

It is important to specify that the subject of this research is a project developed on the initiative of the Reagan administration during its years of a hardline approach to the Soviets, specifically between 1981 and 1983. Those years, as it was mentioned before, are the period of Reagan's fiercest speeches against the USSR with an objective to denigrate it by making public its violation of human rights. They are also characterized by the reinforcement of the U.S. position to show its superiority over the communists. Furthermore, a huge amount of effort was put back then to improve the American propaganda and anti-propaganda machines, guided by both the CIA and the USIA. In general, propaganda happened to be a large piece of the history of the Cold War and it requires an extended explanation on its own, as it follows in the following chapter.

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<sup>69</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 324, 332-334.

## **Chapter 2**

### **U.S. Covert Propaganda Apparatus and the Congress for Cultural Freedom**

It was said previously that the propaganda and the competition for global cultural influence were pivotal during the Cold War. The war of words between the two poles was conducted both covertly and publicly. For the covert propaganda, one intends the direct influence that the Government of a given country exercises on the supposedly independent or non-governmental means of communication. It can be referred to as the pressure that the public information agencies might put on the media completely or partially financed by the public funds to make them publish a determinate type of messages. So, as it can be a straight infiltration of governmental agents inside of them or the obligation from their side to print articles prepared by the State propaganda apparatus.

#### **1. The New Enemy: from Nazis to Soviets**

To obtain a complete picture of how the U.S. intelligence services, which stood behind almost every propagandistic project of the country, were born we have to go back to the exact end of World War II, precisely to Berlin. Back then the Office of Military Government U.S. was established there to spy on the allies and to check the Germans that wished to apply for a job on their past relations with the Nazis. There was one specific name that would always surface in case of necessity to settle something or to deal with Russians: Michael Josselson. This American occupation officer of Jewish-Russian origin born in Estonia was a perfect guide in the city, as he knew it as few and was fluent in German. A merchant in the past, he had migrated to the USA in the 30s, received citizenship, and during the war was immediately put in the Intelligence Section of the Psychological Warfare Division in Germany due to his peculiar background. There he entered to make a part of the interrogation squad that had to individuate among the locals those who could have been reliable “ex-Nazis” collaborators to maintain contact with for the Americans. After his discharge, he proceeded as a public affairs officer in the U.S. High Commission, where he had to check the employees in the German media to find those who had connections with Nazis and dismiss them. His partner there was a certain Nicolas Nabokov, a Russian dissident, and a composer with U.S. citizenship. But it was exactly then that the face of the enemy was about to change. Slowly between 1945 and 1946 the German defeat and submission had brought to a level of collaboration where the

American Government would finance the local artists to organize their concerts and hire some of the ex-Nazi officials and professionals to work for it. The nemesis now was red. As soon as the U.S. had it clear that Western intellectuals were starting to be infatuated to the Soviet propaganda, it began to prepare its arsenal for the psychological battle.<sup>70</sup>

As has been well documented by Frances Stonor Saunders, the first serious move of the Soviets on the field of its cultural influence became the opening of the House of Culture in Berlin in 1947, or at least it had been seen as such by the Americans. The US managed swiftly to make its move in the direction of popularization of its cultural heritage by inaugurating the American-Häuser the same year as its main cultural center to dismantle the stereotypes about its intellectual flatness spread among Europeans. One of the priorities became the promotion of African American artists as a response to the accusations of racial inequality in the country disseminated by Soviet propaganda. In general, a huge program to bring U.S. artists to Europe, namely Germany, was prepared. Its goal was to increase the American cultural influence across the continent with the import of books and theater plays sorted by the national authorities to represent the ideals of liberty, democracy, equality, faith, and pursuit of happiness. Needless to say, many classics were discarded because considered inappropriate. Also, a big translation campaign of the American classics had started which helped to promote many U.S. contemporary writers in the old continent, the European anti-Communist authors were promoted and translated in German massively as well. But soon the realization of how disastrous the local economic condition was pushed Washington to elaborate and approve the Marshall Plan which became crucial in the promotion of star and stripes colored ideals overseas. This was coupled by the born of the Truman Doctrine, and so, the beginning of the division among people who had now to choose the Soviet or the American way of life. The Plan was shortly later criticized by Pravda, which called it a tool to divide the fractions. On October 5, 1947, in Belgrade Stalin answered by presenting his Cominform to the European Communists.<sup>71</sup>

In Berlin, the echo of these events sounded prominently during the East Berlin Writers' Congress, organized by the Soviets. Especially when an American Jonah Lasky took the floor and delivered his speech, where he condemned publicly Stalin's repressions by

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<sup>70</sup> F. S. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, The New Press, New York, United States, 2013, p. 12-14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15-16, 17-19.

comparing his regime to Hitler's one. At the moment he was a journalist working for the New Leader and Partisan Review offices in Germany. His act of "rebellion" was then summarized in the Melvin Lasky Proposal where he highlighted the need of promoting the truth at any cost, aimed to become the monolith of the U.S. propaganda, that he sent to the general L.D. Clay. In a nutshell, he was stressing the fact that to win the Cold War the U.S. had on its side all the educated and acculturated classes in the West. This paper had permitted him to fund *Der Monat*, a magazine that would then create the connection between Germans and Americans to make it easier for the former to accept the latter's foreign policy. The journal was constantly financed by the Marshall Plan funds and by the CIA.<sup>72</sup>

The same act that established the CIA in July 1947 contained inside a sentence 'such other functions', due to its ambiguity it was then interpreted by its future presidents as an excuse to intervene covertly in the affairs of foreign countries. Initially, its officials were seriously inspired by their mission of "protecting" the Western societies from Communism. The author France S. Saunders defined the Agency's character as the heritage of its predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services. It was an assembly of élite people from the most important institutions and families of the U.S. One of the CIA's founders was George Kennan, an important diplomat, and columnist, he was among the fathers of the Cold War strategy of detention and of Marshall Plan, most importantly he was a big promoter of propaganda as a war tool and of the concept of the "necessary lie". His political philosophy had officially started to guide the country's foreign policy on December 19, 1947, when Truman's National Security Council was issued. An appendix inside it, called NSC-4, contained the directives for the CIA on how to conduct secret operations aimed to spread anti-Soviet policies. It was then consolidated by an even more explicit NSC-10/2, which indicated all the activities, like economic warfare and sabotages, to mold the world on the image of the USA, even if it was planned and run without being directly connected to the U.S. Government. The group for covert operations was named Office of Policy Coordination, headed by an OSS veteran Frank Wisner. Later, the CIA Act approved at Congress in 1949, had authorized the Agency to spend the public funds without indicating the reason for it. The CIA began to grow fast thanks to an organizational arrangement inside of it that generated constantly an internal demand

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 24-26.

for projects. As it has opened an office in Berlin, one of its first collaborators there became Michael Josselson who was hired by another OSS's ex-agent Lawrence de Neufville.<sup>73</sup>

## **2. Birth of the CCF and its net of influence**

On March 25, 1949, the *Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace* was taking place at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. It was sponsored by the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, though it was a Cominform's initiative, which had sent there its delegation represented by A. A. Fadeyev and Dmitry Shostakovich to confront the Americans on their own territory. The given conference had generated a huge wave of protests among the American right-wing alliance that called it a *front for the Soviets*. A big crowd was shouting loudly outside the building. The guests from the Western side were very big names at the time, such as T.S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell, and Igor Stravinsky. Nicolas Nabokov was there as well, specifically, he was the one who had provoked the Soviet side the most. During his speech, he asked Shostakovich directly whether he agreed with the accusations made by *Pravda* on the account of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, which described them as obscurantist, sold, and decadent characters whose music should not be played in the USSR. Shostakovich's answer was 'yes', soon it was discovered that he received the indications on what to say and how to act by Stalin himself. This became a demonstration of the level of repression inside the country and was denounced by Nabokov publicly the same day. Many were against this event, including T. S. Eliot. After it finished a large part of its American participants was scheduled by FBI's director J. Edgar Hoover because suspected of supporting Communism. The CIA had conducted a covert action inside the hotel by sending the anti-Communist Sidney Hook to guide a manifestation against Stalin's regime and the nature of the ideology itself. Then the Agency assured a proper cover of this story in all the U.S. biggest means of communication.<sup>74</sup>

In France the Office of Policy Coordination had established contact with the socialist David Rousset. He agreed to use his journal *Franc-Tireur* as a sponsor for the Agency's International Day of Resistance to Dictatorship and War in Paris, which itself was a response to the Kremlin's World Congress of Peace organized in the city in April of 1949. In fact, the event was organized shortly soon, on April 30, and was a complete failure which made the already present sense of anti-Americanism in the country increase even

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 32-35.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 39, 42-45.

more. In order to solve its “bad fame” in France, Lasky and Josselson had elaborated a counteroffensive to reconquest the NCL. Once ready, the project was then financed by the OPC and brought to the organization of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. The *Freedom Manifesto* was read at Funkturm Sporthalle – the place where it was held - by Arthur Koestler, drafted mainly by him along with Lasky, it was later adopted as the moral and philosophical guide of the organization that would bornt from this congress. It denounced the restrictions on freedom imposed by totalitarian states, which was called the worst of all regimes ever existed in history.<sup>75</sup>

In the meantime, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was permanently formed as an office and officially accepted by the Agency due to the success of the event in Berlin. It had received the codename QKOPERA, and its base was moved from Germany to Paris, France to avoid security risks. Josselson was chosen as the responsible for the project under the supervision of Lawrence de Neufville, who now was named to rule the French Labor for the CIA. Given his disobedience to the Government’s instructions, Lasky was excluded from the Congress, in reality, he had remained Josselson’s closest adviser in it for the whole time of its existence. Among the members of the freshly formed Paris collective, there were Irving Brown, famous for his tendency to use clandestine ways to achieve his goals, and James Burnham, ex-Trotskyist he had a large list of contacts among the European intellectual circles and was a bond between them and the CIA. The Congress followed the structure ideated by Lasky: International Committee of 25 members, plus 5 honorary chairmen and an executive committee of 5 checked by the general secretary.<sup>76</sup>

The first main objective of the Congress was to challenge the neutralism among the representatives of the intellectual groups and bring them to the “right” side, as it is described in the Koestler’s report *Immediate Tasks for the Transition Period*. Later he was removed from the central position inside the organization because of his aggressive standpoint, whereas the point was to follow a more neutral and moderate approach. In essence, to promote the freedom of thought, the CIA had to buy it first, and afterward restrict it. The same year of the Congress, 1950, also Radio Free Europe was inaugurated by the Agency. On the position of general secretary of the newborn office was hired a Josselson’s old acquaintance Nicolas Nabokov. During this period the CIA decided to

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 53-55, 57-58, 60-31.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 73-75.

fuse its International Organization Branch with the OPC to form the International Organizations Division, which coincided with the new NSC-68 packet of directives that collected some of the most anti-Soviet measures in the U.S. history. The IOD's purpose was to gather intellectuals who would then produce material showing that the West was devoted to freedom of expression without barriers, differently from the USSR. The amount of money it could spend was limited to sums the private organizations would be able to credibly spend, with the aim to avoid the evidence of the Government's participation in it as one of the strategies to direct the NCL projects inside the Agency. Furthermore, the IOD had classified the goals of the Congress, which now had to start a campaign of persuasion of small elite groups of the intellectuals in Europe who could directly influence the governmental policies to make them dissociate from Communism. In this way the British Society for Cultural Freedom and the Italian Association for Cultural Freedom were founded and sponsored by the CIA in the early 50s, the latter was responsible for the publication of the NCL journals *Libertà della cultura* and *Tempo presente* in Italy. Moreover, the Congress itself exploited the CIA's money to finance some British magazines, like *Twentieth Century* and *Nineteenth Century and After*, and *Tribune*.<sup>77</sup>

In 1951 N. Nabokov had started to elaborate the idea for a major festival of the arts that would have to take place in Paris. Shortly after it was approved by the Agency and during May of 1951 Nabokov took a long trip in face of the secretary-general of the International Secretariat to collect the artists and partners for the event, among them were the Boston City Orchestra, Igor Stravinsky, and the New York's Museum of Modern Art. The plan was to reunite all the artists whose art was defined as corrupted and despicable by the Soviets. The money for the given event was put by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom which served as a façade for the CIA's and State Department's funds, indicated under the name of the Farfield Formation. On April 1, 1952, the *Masterpieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* festival opened in Paris. On the one hand, it had only fomented furtherly the extensive sentiment of anti-Americanism in France. On the other, there were still some achievements: it launched the Boston City Orchestra as a representative for America's symphonic virtuosity and established the Farfield Foundation as a financial backer for the CCF.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 81-83, 85-86, 92.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 96-98, 104-105.



Many commercial companies were utilized as filters to finance the CIA's projects, they earned themselves the name of "quiet channels". The best way to wash money was through philanthropic foundations, which allowed the transfer of large sums without specifying their sources. By the mid-60s one-sixth of all grants offered by American foundations involved CIA funding, and a half of it was in the field of international activities. The most famous and exploited recipients were Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations. They authorized the Agency to support a limitless range of covert programs affecting youth groups, labor unions, universities, publishing houses starting from the early 50s. The Ford Foundation financed the Intercultural Publications program in 1952, which allowed the launch of the NCL magazine *Perspectives* that was published in four different countries under the guidance of James Laughlin; moreover, it was sponsoring Lasky's *Der Monat* since day one. When in 1953 John McCloy became its new president, he created an administrative unit within the foundation dedicated only to its deals with the Agency, which director back then was recently elected Allen Dulles. Since that time the fund had largely financed a consistent number of the CIA's initiatives linked to the propagandistic activities. At the same time, the Rockefeller Foundation created the Special Studies Project in 1957, which objective was to define the U.S. foreign policy, whereas the head of the fund Nelson Rockefeller was itself the Agency's co-worker and was nominated its responsible for covert operations during Eisenhower's mandate in 1954.<sup>79</sup>

Under the Truman administration, in 1951, the U.S. on the initiative of G. Kennan had created a specific body that would direct all of its secret psychological operations called the Psychological Strategy Board. The PSB then started to supervise and direct the Moral Rearmament Movement, the Crusade for Freedom, Radio Free Europe, Paix et Liberté, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, and many campaigns to broadcast the American movies and music from the ships. The American Committee for Cultural Freedom was founded in New York in January 1951 with Sidney Hook, who was also its consultant for the CIA, while Irving Kristol was hired as Committee's executive director. Right since its beginning, it was divided into moderates and militants in respect to the anti-Communism, thing that later would become fatal to its existence. Josselson was always more inclined to collaborate with the former group and kept it attached to his Congress. Among those moderate members was Sol Levitas, who was also

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 112-113, 117-118.

the editor for two influential anti-Stalinist NCL New York's journals: *Partisan Review*, *New Leader*, and *Commentary*.<sup>80</sup>

### **3. Contrasting anti-Americanism in the UK: the *Encounter***

Roughly during the same period, Josselson and the Congress were working at the launch of a new anti-Communist magazine in England to contrast the citizens' sympathy to the Soviets and fight their neutrality. This turned into a new London periodical the *Encounter*, which in time would become one of the most influential British anti-Soviet weapons. It was mainly dedicated to the cultural life and collected essays and publications of some of the most important intellectuals of that period like Vladimir Nabokov, Bertrand Russell, and Jorge Luis Borges. The financial liability for the magazine was laid on the Congress through funds of the Farfield Foundation, but it would function as a complete commercial firm. As editors were hired the executive director of the ACCF Irving Kristol and a British ex-Communist writer that switched to the NCL Stephen Spender. The publisher of George Orwell, Fredric Warburg agreed to give his firm's name to launch the journal. Malcolm Muggeridge was chosen as the liaison between the Congress, of which he was a member, and the English MI6; he would also be responsible for finding new wealthy credible backers for the *Encounter*, who would be Alexander Korda and Victor Rothschild. On April 30, 1953, the journal had started its activity and by June would become completely operative.<sup>81</sup>

June 19, 1953, turned to be a symbolic date for the American NCL: the Rosenbergs were executed in New York for passing atomic secrets of the U.S. to the USSR. The levels of anti-Americanism were rising consistently. In July *Encounter* had published Leslie Freidler's article *A Postscript to the Rosenberg Case*, where he criticized harshly the protests and denounced the falsity of the presumable empathy showed by the Communists on this occasion. The given number was completely sold out and generated numerous discussions around it. It was condemned by many intellectuals, like T. S. Eliot, for being only a tool in the hands of the US Government, it had reignited the anti-Americanism in the UK. This article had also generated a rupture between its readers, as well as it did between its editors. While Spender was against its publication Kristol accepted it, this conflict would later create big friction inside the office of the *Encounter*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 122-124, 134-136.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 138-138, 142, 147.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 150, 154-156.

It is worthy of mention that by the early 50s the US Government was particularly cautious with making public even among its own collaborators the linkage between its intelligence and the NCL, as it was the period of McCarthy's "purge". Senator Joseph McCarthy's campaign was deeply affected by Rosenberg's trial, which irritated him, even more, to proceed with his witch hunt, accompanied by the House Committee on Un-American Activities' blacklists for artists suspected of betrayal. The obsession with Communism started to paralyze the country in a serious way, especially when Roy Cohn was nominated as counsel of the HUAC and prohibited the sale of almost 30.000 books in 7 different countries, selected from the United States Information Agency's library during his inspection, all these periodicals were suspended because considered pro-Communist. The number of books shipped by the USIA abroad in 1953 dropped from 119.913 to 314. The McCarthyism hit hard the State Department's morale as well, as every liberal there was a suspect, and caused strong division among members of the ACCF. Contemporarily, the *Encounter* had never expressed its position in this regard and had always maintained neutrality. The same thing could not be said about the CIA's chief Altes Dulles, who after Senator's threats of making a public investigation into the Agency decided to go to Eisenhower and make him stop it, otherwise, he would resign. Ultimately, the President organized a private meeting between Dulles and McCarthy, where the latter complained about certain agents inside the organization which had to be deployed, the Agency's chairman accepted the deal. Also, the security standards inside the CIA were increased to prevent penetration of spies, the investigation was dodged. McCarthyism then had consumed itself completely by 1954, while its founder died from alcoholism three years later.<sup>83</sup>

By the mid-50s Josselson's Congress had built itself a very solid reputation in Europe as a serious circle of professionals dedicated to demonstrating the Western democratic system's superiority all over the Soviet regime. The CCF had launched other 5 journals all over the world, *Cuadernos* in Paris but addressed to the Spanish-speaking countries, *Forum* in Vienna, *Science Freedom* and *Soviet Survey* in the USA, *Quadrant* in Australia, *Quest* in India, and *Jiyu* in Japan. Josselson and Lasky were responsible for all this chain of newspapers, the latter then became a member of the Tri-Magazine Editorial Committee to coordinate only *Encounter*, *Preuves*, and *Der Monat*. The total expenditure for the Congress's journals was \$560.000 in 1961 and \$800.000 the year after, roughly the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 159-162, 175-176.

Farfield Foundation, so the CIA was spending 1 million dollars yearly to keep it all functional. In the meantime, the other renowned member of the Congress, Nicolas Nabokov, was in Rome planning the next music event to promote it after the Paris festival of 1952. The “International Conference of Twentieth-Century Music” was launched in April 1954 in the capital of Italy. Financed, as always, by the Farfield Foundation it was severely criticized by the press. Later in September the International Organizations Division, which handled the Agency’s covert political propaganda activities, launched its clandestine book campaign. Its target was the booksellers, who would be secretly financed to publish and distribute books that the IOD wanted them to sell. In total by 1977, the CIA was involved in the publication of approximately one thousand books.<sup>84</sup>

#### **4. Internal conflicts within the *Encounter* and sunset of the CCF**

After the invasion of Budapest in 1956, even Sartre and Camus had condemned the Soviets for their harshness, the Congress on its side put a great effort in distributing their indignation as widely as it could. But if the Hungarian rebellion was the demonstration of the USSR’s true bloodiness, also *Encounter* was about to learn the hard way that its tendency to accomplish the Congress’s request of neutrality had its side effects. In January 1958 Dwight Macdonald’s article filled with fierce criticism of the American society had furtherly opened the breach between the journal’s executives opened in 1953 with the Fiedler’s report on the Rosenberg’s trial. While Spender wanted to publish Macdonald’s text Kristol refused it categorically. The article was eventually dismissed under the pressure of the CCF and CIA, which were already informed about its content and had unilaterally vetoed it. Apparently, the inclusion of the description of an American soldier’s behavior during the Korean War became the last stroke that bring to its ban. This issue demonstrated to the staff of *Encounter* that it was not, in effect, free to publish whatever it wanted and a confirmation of its participation in the CIA’s chain of “lying for the truth”. As a further matter, it was not by far the only vetoed article in the history of the given periodical. After this scandal, Kristol left the magazine and was replaced by Melvin Lasky.<sup>85</sup>

In these years the European Movement was born. Headed by Winston Churchill and constantly checked by the Agency, it advanced the idea of a united Europe in partnership with the USA. Its activities encompassed political, military, economic, and cultural

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 182-185.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 255-257, 273-275.

integration. Along with the Centre européen de la culture, they were running a propaganda campaign for the acceptance of a moderated socialism. The American intelligence was supervising it all the time and getting rid of those branches of the movement that were spreading the image of Europe without the U.S. The Americanization was even reinforced especially in Great Britain, when the Labour Party won the elections of 1964, as it had many people close to *Encounter* and to the U.S. Government inside of it, so the latter could influence more directly the political agenda of the UK. While there were big changes at the Congress: owing to very poor health of Michael Josselson he was replaced by John Hunt and since then worked for the CCF only remotely from Genève. The only important operation handled by the CCF in the 60s was its whispering campaign against Pablo Neruda in 1963, mainly because of his possible candidature to the Noble Prize for literature. It all consisted of a report written by Julian Gorkin and René Tavernier, it claimed that the Chilean intellectual used his poetry as a tool to propagandize his support for the totalitarianism.<sup>86</sup> In the end it was Sartre who obtained the Nobel that year, meanwhile, Neruda would get it in 1971.<sup>87</sup>

In general, the 60s were not a great period for the CIA's reputation. Thanks to the works of John le Carré, Stanley Kubrick, and Joseph Keller the Cold War was demonized, contemporarily the New Left and Beatnik movements were spreading the culture of rebellion, sexual freedom, and absurdity. All of them were denouncing both American imperialism and Communism, the intellectual opposition to the Vietnam war was rising. Worried about its fragile situation, the Congress tried to put its man inside the PEN organization, as John Hunt was its member, with the objective to place an American writer as its new president. During an important PEN congress in Bled, Yugoslavia in July of 1965, the CIA paid with the Farfield's funds a delegation of writers that had to elect its new chief. In the end, Arthur Miller – who himself felt *used* by the State Department - was chosen for this role. In June of the next year the PEN conclave was aimed to be held in New York, so the Congress used all of its financial resources to publicize the event and infiltrate there as much of its collaborators as it could. The conclave was received quite well by the public, but at its very eve, it was heavily condemned by the New York University's professor Conor Cruise O'Brien. During one

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<sup>86</sup> K. Austin, *Foreign Debt and Literary Credit: Pablo Neruda and Walt Whitman*, 2010, Bulletin of Latin American Research, 29(1), 1–17, p. 5, available online at <https://cutt.ly/gO1wNnL>.

<sup>87</sup> F. S. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, The New Press, New York, United States, 2013, p. 275-279.

of his lectures, the academic stressed the dangerousness of the writer as a public figure and accused *Encounter* of having always followed a political line imposed by the Government in an effort to Americanize uniformly the British readers and indoctrinate in them the policies of the USA. The speech was published on New York Times and signed the end of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.<sup>88</sup>

In 1966, a Californian magazine *Rampants* was preparing an investigation about the Agency's network of organizations. As soon as the CIA discovered it the smear strategy to bury the journal was prepared with the FBI's help, various blackmailing articles were published. Nevertheless, the text was published in April 1967 and it was quickly picked by other national periodicals. Unsurprisingly, it confirmed O'Brien's words. Spender resigned immediately, leaving Lasky to handle *Encounter* alone. On May 13 a conference of the General Assembly of the Congress for Cultural Freedom was reunited to decide on the future of the organization and of Josselson. In the statement prepared afterward, it recognized its collaboration with the CIA and communicated the resignations of Josselson and Hunt. It all was set as the former had hidden the fact of the Agency's presence from his co-workers when the majority of them knew about it perfectly. Many preferred to lie and avoid public shame. The storm was even ulteriorly fed by the article written by an ex-member of the Congress Tom Braden for the Saturday Evening Post, where he described meticulously how the CIA had conducted its war against Communism, financed different journals, and influenced their publishing process. This publication became the last nail in the coffin and buried the covert collaboration between the Agency and NCL. It happened for a reason, though. Earlier, on June 14, 1965, American intellectuals had brought a petition denouncing the U.S. policy in Vietnam to the "White House Festival of the Arts". The reaction of Lyndon Johnson on this was ferocious, after having called them traitors he added that he did not want to have anything else to share with the liberals. With this optic it becomes clear that the link between the Government and the leftist intellectuals was no longer profitable. Both the President and CIA knew about the publication of the article, Braden himself stated that the Agency wanted finally to cut off its connections with the NCL at once. President Johnson's Katzenbach Committee in March of the same year had issued the report that prohibited any Agency's covert operation with the cultural organizations. However, it did not forbid relations with commercial U.S. firms and foreign international organizations. Long story short, it did

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 302-304, 306-309.

not change anything. Probably, those restrictions were used as a security measure to prevent further public disclosures. The Congress started to be financed by the Ford Foundation and was now guided by U.S., British, and French secret services which put their people at the top of it and ceased to exist in January of 1979, while *Encounter* closed in 1990.<sup>89</sup>

This overview of the history of the U.S. covert propaganda net and its largesse makes it clear how deep the American government was involved in the development of the cultural life of the West during the second part of the XX century. In some cases, its presence was very subtle, in others evident. The goal of all this web was to establish the USA in Europe as a culturally important country equal to the others and contrast the Soviet propaganda with the American anti-Soviet one. The White House had tried in many ways to hide its connection to the funds and periodicals mentioned above, but when its linkage had become public it confessed. Not all of the cultural projects financed by the CIA were aimed to be done with an exclusively American benefit, nor all of its propaganda messages were purely manipulative or hostile. The majority of the journals and people involved in the US “public diplomacy” machine knew they were working for Washington and that therefore they were limited in their liberty of expression. The myth of American freedom was true only to a certain limit: when the CIA’s financed periodicals were about to publish articles which content could have been read as anti-American it would be immediately communicated to the Agency and suppressed. There were not too many cases that can be mentioned in this regard, yet those that were analyzed previously are the evidence that the US government did censor even its “indirect” means of communication and controlled them. Nevertheless, after the investigation of the White House’s covert propaganda apparatus is concluded, the time has come to follow to its overt side, which main body is directly linked to the reason behind this research.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 321, 335-337, 341-342.





## Chapter 3

### USIA and the American Overt Propaganda Strategy

When we talk about the American overt “public diplomacy” tools it is of an absolute importance to mention the U.S.I.A., which was its very heart and soul. The U.S. Government was at the head of the largest public relations organization in the world, with a staff of 10.000 people in 150 countries that should have to idolatry the picture of America and to blackmail the USSR in 70 languages, with the investment of almost \$2 billion yearly.<sup>90</sup> The biggest part of this colossus was namely the U. S. Information Agency. Its objective was to propagandize position with a standpoint favorable to the United States.<sup>91</sup>

#### 1. USIA and its role in the U.S. foreign policy

The birth of the United States Information Agency is dated to June 1, 1953, when the Eisenhower Administration had officialized the foundation of a new foreign information agency through Congress Reorganization Plan No. 8, which would contain all the most significant foreign information programs and cultural exchange programs in order to provide unity and efficiency in the U.S. information system.<sup>92</sup> The director of this structure had to receive the directives from the National Security Council and then report about the USIA’s progress.<sup>93</sup> One of the causes of its creation was the inability of the State Department representatives to convince Hollywood to collaborate and put itself under the influence, so the alternative was to establish the governmental film unit which would spread the image of the country favorable to its reputation. In reality, a predecessor of the agency was projected during Thomas Jefferson’s mandate as the U.S. minister to France, when the first American information center was established there to promote the American culture. Later it was followed by Roosevelt’s Office of War Information in 1942, built to contrast German and Italian propaganda. Soon after, the first Voice of

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<sup>90</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. xi.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. xi-xii.

<sup>92</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 91.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 96-97.

America radio broadcast was transmitted in February of the same year. The OWI ceased to exist after WWII, as psychological warfare was no longer considered as necessary.<sup>94</sup>

Truman insisted on the creation of the Office of Education Exchange and Cultural Affairs, so that the American libraries could be exported to foreign countries. This was, obviously, connected to the new need of fighting back the Soviet propaganda and to Truman's "Campaign of Truth". Besides the Voice of America in the early 50s, two other radio stations were founded by the American government to inform the listeners over the Iron Curtain: Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Those two stations, initially supervised by the CIA, were aimed to tell the local news in the Communist countries, differently from the VOA, which was focused only on talking about the USA in those areas; all those broadcasting programs were now under the USIA. Since the beginning the White House was clear about what it wanted from the USIA: it had to persuade and not simply inform.<sup>95</sup> The main messages that the organization had to spread were the implementation of the idea that the future belongs to democratic societies, the U.S. wants to improve the technological progress of the retrograded areas, demolish the bad image of capitalism as exploitive and dominative.<sup>96</sup>

The first director of the USIA became a former radio executive Theodore Streibert. The overseas operations of the USIA were handled by its affiliate offices around the world under the name of United States Information Service (USIS). As for its activities, the very first big international operation that Streibert had to manage was the conflict in Iran of 1953. He ordered the Tehran office to launch a promotional campaign for the restored regime of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and to deny any information about the U.S involvement in the establishment of the new government.<sup>97</sup>

Soon the USIA was integrated into the US policymaking as a participant in the Operations Coordinating Board, which permitted Streibert to sit at all the NSC meetings. To coordinate USIA headquarters four areas of priority were created, respectively Europe and the British Commonwealth with 3.500 staff members and a budget of \$22.5 million, American republics with 500 staff and \$1.5 million of budget, the Far East with 1.300

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<sup>94</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 13-15.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 15-16, 19.

<sup>96</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 98.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 99-100.

staff and a budget of \$2.7 million and the Near East, South Asia, and Africa – reuniting 25 countries from Greece to Belgian Congo and India - with 1.200 staff and \$2.9 million budget. At the end of 1953, Eisenhower made his famous “Atoms for Peace” speech, which was transmitted live by the VOA in 31 languages, while the USIA spread the text around the world, by preparing translations, leaflets, and a film version. The agency’s Office of Private Cooperation contacted 266 American firms to generate and diffuse 300.000 translations of highlights of the President’s speech internationally. As for the movie materials, the USIA had stated that by 1953 it had a 500 million audience and served 210 U.S. film libraries around the world, those pictures were aimed to explain and spread American foreign policy and expose “Communist lies”.<sup>98</sup>

A USIA’s suboffice International Press Service in the meantime was producing 7.000 words a day for 66 countries. In 1954, it issued a special collection of 54 books exposing the “atrocities of communism”, while its journal *Problems of Communism* was constantly analyzing and publishing articles about Soviet propaganda techniques and repressions, it then was translated by the USIA in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Japanese, and Italian. Also, the exhibitions soon became a very known tool of the agency, the most famous one became *The Family of Man*. Started at the MoMA in 1955, it toured all over the world by visiting 91 locations in 38 countries, it had even won a place on UNESCO’s Memory of the World register; now it is permanently housed at the Castle of Clervaux in Luxembourg. While, in Asia, precisely in South Vietnam, the USIA was publicizing, on the request of the government’s request, the Ngo Dinh Diem’s campaign, it created new posts in Laos and Cambodia, and used mobile units to spread the anti-communist message inland.<sup>99</sup>

The agency’s most important input to the governmental anti-Soviet campaign in the fifties were the *Soviet Orbit Propaganda* – a periodical published three times a week with an update on the Soviet propaganda activity -, translation of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, and the revival of the *America Illustrated* (once *Amerika*) magazine – a Russian-language journal to inform Soviet citizens about the American way of life, which the Soviets agreed to sell on its territory with a limit of 50.000 copies. Later, the invasion of Budapest by the Soviets was massively exploited by the agency with its posts to publicize the U.S. aid to the Hungarian refugees. When the riots began, the VOA limited its output to a mere

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 101-103, 104-105, 108.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 112, 116, 124.

informative tone to not be accused of instigating the people, though the RFE broadcasters were blamed for having done that. At last, Eisenhower spoke in the defense of the radio, by stressing its independence from the government and the unknowledge of the latter about the issue. With the beginning of Eisenhower's second mandate on February 25, 1957, the agency's head became Arthur Larson, whose contribution is mainly remarked by the success of the Poznan fair in 1957: 70.000 Poles visited the US exhibition, later Poland received the most famous musicians America could offer at the time, the Glenn Miller band, and the Dave Brubeck Jazz Quartet.<sup>100</sup>

The chair of the director changed its owner in August 1958, when Larson resigned and was replaced by George V. Allen, whose biggest mission was the spread of the English language. He immediately developed a program of English teaching worldwide: he made the number of language students enrolled in the agency increase from 110.000 to 175.000 in just one year. Simultaneously, the agency was asked to focus on the spread of the concept of Americana, its posts started to report the nurturing program initiatives to the development of American studies at European universities, it also worked on establishing chairs inside the structures that would accept it with the help of the Ford Foundation.<sup>101</sup> While in South Vietnam the situation was escalating and the local USIS office tried to reinvent a strategy to blackmail Communists by calling them *Viet Cong* to denigrate their image, the name stuck, even if it revealed itself quite counterproductive in the long term.<sup>102</sup>

On January 27, 1958, the US and the Soviet Union signed a two-year "Agreement...in the Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields", in December of the same year the agreement about the exhibitions exchange was signed. The American fair took place in Moscow and the USIA tried to collect and bring there all of its greatest hits like *Family of Man* – from which the images of East Berliners throwing rocks at the Soviet tanks were tactically removed -, Disney's Circarama, RCA's color television, and RAMAC computer. The event was an incredible success: people flocked to the exhibition, a million souvenir pins and 2 million brochures were given away. By the time it ended the exhibition was visited by 2.7 million Soviet citizens, its Soviet counterpart in New York seemed quite insignificant in comparison. Unfortunately, the collaboration ended on May

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 127-128, 131-132, 141.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 153-154.

<sup>102</sup> N. Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, Vintage, United States, 1989, p. 189.

1, 1960, when the American U-2 spy plane was detected and shot down by the Soviets on the territory of the USSR.<sup>103</sup>

## **2. From tensions to détente, *Chieu Hoi* and JUSPAO in Vietnam**

The arrival of John F. Kennedy at the White House in 1961 was broadcasted by the VOA in fifty-six countries and sold in form of books and leaflets in thousands of exemplars by the agency. The new chairman of the USIA became the journalist Edward R. Murrow, while his key staff members had very tight connections with the new administration, which gave the agency big privileges. Kennedy stressed the concept of the country team for the US foreign policy, so the USIS officers abroad would be teammates serving the ambassador of every given country and would participate in the creation of the “country plan” for the place. Especially the President’s strategy of the “Peace Corps” was scaring the Soviets, which was immediately exploited by the USIA as a symbol of American benevolence.<sup>104</sup><sup>105</sup> After the meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev in Vienna in June 1961, Murrow instructed its media apparatus to use and spread the concept of “world of free choice” as an answer to Soviet’s “Peaceful Coexistence”. Once the Berlin wall was built the USIA did everything to distribute its images around the world, pictures of the wall and the East German refugees were collected in the photographic exhibition *The Wall* made by USIS Berlin, while the agency’s television network spread the documentary *Focus Berlin: Barbed Wire World*. To spread its message in Eastern Europe, the VOA started to use eight hours and eighty frequencies in Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, and English. While America Illustrated increased its production to 55.000 copies and was highly required on the black market in the Union, USIA’s propaganda comic books were given away in massive numbers; moreover, the third Regional Service Center was opened in Mexico City to spread the printing material in Latin America.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 161-164, 168.

<sup>104</sup> History.com Editors, *President Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps*, A&E Television Network, 8.2.2022, available online at <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/peace-corps-established>.

<sup>105</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 189, 194.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p. 199, 200-201, 204-206.

Then Murrow tried to create connections in Hollywood, there he hired a young director George Stevens Jr. to shoot the movie about Jackie Kennedy's trip to Pakistan, which became a success, it was followed by *Jacqueline Kennedy's Asian Journey* and were all highly appreciated by the President. On the wave of success, Stevens Jr. created a team of filmmakers to produce movies for the agency: in the course of 1962, the agency produced 36 films in the US, other 147 abroad, and issue 197 newsreels with an audience of 600 million people. The USIA covered also episodes of racism in the country, like the interception of a bus in Anniston by the Ku Klux Klan when its members beat the black passengers nearly to death on May 14, though it tried to give the impression that the "protector" of the civil rights movement was the federal government which assisted its black citizens.<sup>107108</sup>

On October 22, 1962, the Voice of America broadcasted Kennedy's speech on the Cuban missile crisis worldwide live, where he confirmed the presence of the Soviet weapons on the island and expressed his decision to blockade it. The new satellite Telstar was used to transmit images of the President's discourse to Europe and the power of fifty-two transmitters was exploited to send the message to the Eastern Bloc countries. The goal of the operation was to justify the action of the USA and show the pictures done by U-2 planes, 50.000 of them were distributed internationally and were the main persuasion weapon in the hands of the Americans. The role of the radio stations in this particular issue was massive: both the VOA and Radio Moscow served as tools of communication between the two countries that broadcasted their words and decisions, eventually, the Caribbean Crisis showed the true importance and influence that radio stations had at the time.<sup>109</sup>

One year before JFK's administration settled a counterinsurgency task force in Vietnam, the USIA was responsible for its information support and development of the South Vietnamese radio broadcasting. One of its most significant operations back then – at the end of 1963 - was the *Chieu Hoi* (Open Arms), a program to undermine Viet Cong's morale through the encouraging of desertion from it in collaboration with the South

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<sup>107</sup> T. Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, New-York: Simon and Schuster, 1988, p. 419-424.

<sup>108</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 207-210, 211.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

Vietnamese. The U.S. air force dropped the pamphlets and provided the loudspeakers for the action. Since February 1962, all the American public affairs officers were obliged to follow the government guidance “Cable No. 1006”, the war had to be presented as a South Vietnamese struggle, the mention of the U.S. being involved in the armed conflict had to be avoided. Concerning the coverage of this war back home, it depended on the successes of the South Vietnamese troops, when they were low it was not mentioned very often. Concurrently, the VOA became the most available source of news in Vietnam till the overthrow of Diem in November 1963, afterward, it silently decreased.<sup>110</sup>

In the fall of 1963, both the assassination of JFK and the presentation of Lyndon Johnson were carefully covered by the agency. In eight years after Kennedy’s murder, the USIA sent various types of printed material narrating his story in 110 posts distributed in 103 countries, it was also deeply discussed by all the sections of *America Illustrated*, while the movie *John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums* became the agency’s most widely seen one. As for LBJ’s 2.000 copies of his panel exhibit and a million introductory leaflets in eighteen languages were shipped worldwide stressing his foreign policy objectives. A TV program *Let Us Continue* was developed to present his biography that was distributed by the USIA in more than one hundred countries in four languages. All of this was done to exploit the wave of sympathy for Kennedy’s death that the US was receiving internationally at the time to popularize the new head of the state.<sup>111</sup>

In the meantime, Murrow due to a fatal disease had to leave his chair to Carl Rowan, an African American journalist who strongly supported the civil rights movement. One of his first missions was that of increasing the VOA’s broadcasting in the USSR due to the cessation of jamming in 1963. Shortly after many representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia, such as Andrei Tarkovsky, expressed their appreciation for the work of the Voice. Nevertheless, Rowan’s initiation was not all that easy, as the spread of anti-Americanism around Africa and Indonesia caused by U.S. intervention in Congo generated riots, especially in the latter the American Cultural Center was attacked by hundreds of angry students and destroyed, so the USIA stopped its activity there and all its staff was evacuated by 1965.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 218-220.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 229-231.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 234-236.

With the intensification of the war in Vietnam on June 2, 1964, it was decided to unify the governmental media working on the spot, moreover, a decision was made to nominate a public affairs adviser in the communication field, the director for USIA operations in Vietnam Barry Zorthian agreed to cover this role. The following month Congress adopted the “Gulf of Tonkin resolution”, the USIA’s personnel in the country doubled shortly after. In the meanwhile, Zorthian’s team was trying to “inculcate” the idea of the North Vietnamese invaders’ threat in its public, though it got off on the wrong foot they were spotted using ARVN troops to emulate battle sequences for the agency’s documentary *Night of the Dragon*. After the story was made public Rowan apologized and promised to erase those scenes from the picture, yet the final cut of the film proved wrong: they were kept. Still, the USIA successfully used the film to justify its budget and continued blaming North Vietnamese for wanting to invade the South due to its agricultural abundance and was exposing Viet Cong’s violence against civilians. After Rowan report on the need for propaganda reinforcement in South Vietnam on July 1, 1965, the Joint United States Public Affairs Office in Saigon (JASPAO) was created to combine press functions and tactical psychological warfare role, it included staff from the US military, CIA, USIA, and AID. With the enlargement of the agency’s office in Vietnam Rowan’s handling of the situation decreased, and the Presidential discontent with him pushed him to resign.<sup>113</sup>

The new director of the USIA became the manager of LBJ’s television campaign for the elections Leonard H. Marks. With his arrival, a new term was used to describe the agency’s activity: “public diplomacy”, which was implemented to replace the concept of propaganda and to give the USIA a more positive image. Whilst in Vietnam Zorthian’s psychological warfare was growing steadily, pictures of Southern prosperity, Communist violence, and warning of air raids were continuous: two million leaflets were dropped weekly. Then at the beginning of 1966, coinciding with the Tet festival, JUSPAO dropped ten million greeting messages on North Vietnam with the plead to cease the war, together with almost eight thousand gift packages with child products were delivered through the US air force. This campaign generated 1.672 defections in one month among the North Vietnamese troops. Almost at the same time, three constellation aircraft were transformed into flying TV transmitters with a 75-mile radius signal near Saigon; the U.S. imported 1.500 televisions in the country, in four years there were already 300.000 private TV sets

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 245-248, 252-253.



and 3.500 American funded ones. Always during this period Marks prepared the objectives of the agency in support to Johnson's "Great Society" project, the USIA launched a periodical *Topic* in 1965, targeted at sub-Saharan Africa in Arabic, English, and French and *DIALOGUE* in 1968, an intellectual magazine in English and Spanish that recollected all of the most important articles of the leading U.S. journals – in two years it was expanded to seven languages and 108 countries with 122.000 copies distribution. Marks' last big operation inside as the agency's director became the coverage of the Prague Spring, although the VOA broadcasted the invasion in all Eastern European languages – the thing that triggered the Soviets to restart jamming -, he was cautioned by the Policy Office to not mount a new anti-Soviet campaign and limit himself.<sup>114</sup>

With the arrival of Richard Nixon in the White House in 1972 the manager of his television presidential campaign Frank Shakespeare was nominated the new USIA's chairman. His direction had started with the decision by Henry Kissinger to exclude the agency from the NSC and reduce its tactical use in the government. In November of 1968, the VOA increased its broadcasting in the USSR to push the Soviets to quit jamming their sessions, the station stressed mostly such themes as the existence and content of the local underground press. Shakespeare developed the VOA's special broadcast for Soviet Jews and ordered its staff to refer to the people in the Union by their nationality. The high point for the USIA during the Nixon administration's years was undoubtedly its coverage of Apollo XI's mission: the Voice of America had an 800 million audience, and 125 exhibit posts were created worldwide to show the launch live.<sup>115</sup>

Yet the Vietnam question was still there. On November 3, 1969, Nixon spoke to the nation and emphasized the necessity of the support from the Silent Majority of the Americans in his plan of U.S. troop withdrawal and Vietnamization. The speech was distributed widely by the USIA to all TV stations and by the VOA in four languages. Unfortunately, Nixon's campaign was sabotaged by the My Lai massacre scandal on November 13, which was then covered by the VOA. While back in South Vietnam JUSPAO was falling deeper and deeper into the hands of the South Vietnamese government. With the objective of dismantling the office and bringing the staff home, Shakespeare sent there Robert A.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 257, 268-271, 278, 291.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 194, p. 299-305.

Lincoln to retransform JUSPAO to a normal USIS office, which was achieved by the end of 1972.<sup>116</sup>

At the beginning of Nixon's second term, Shakespeare was replaced with James Keogh, an ex-member of his election campaign's staff. Keogh was responsible for a new rapprochement between the agency and private enterprises, as well as for many new initiatives in the frame of the VOA enlargement. He also supervised the USIA's exhibition service, he brought the "Recreation – U.S.A." exhibition in Irkutsk in 1973 that was visited by crowds of Soviet citizens. Then Watergate happened. The VOA tried to deny for as long as it could the involvement of the President in the accident, but there was nothing it could do to slow down the investigation process, and Nixon's resignation was communicated on August 8, 1974.<sup>117118</sup>

### **3. Helsinki and Afghanistan**

On August 9 Gerald R. Ford was elected the president, but the agency's requests for interviews and collaboration were refused and the coverage remained minimal. Though good news came from the East: the USSR stopped jamming the VOA and the New York Jazz Repertory did his concert dedicated to Louis Armstrong's memory in Moscow that became a success. On August 1, 1975, in Helsinki, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was signed between thirty-five states, among which the US and the USSR, which stressed the mutual exchange between them: it represented a huge opportunity for the USIA to bring the American influence into the Eastern Bloc. With the increase of Communist conquer in Vietnam the USIA decide to evacuate its personnel from the country at the end of April 1974, the last members of the staff were carried away with a helicopter on April 29: it was the end of the American influence in the country after almost twenty-five years. Between 1974 and 1976, the agency organized multiple events dedicated to the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. The World of Franklin and Jefferson opened at the Grand Palais in Paris in January 1975 and was then moved to Warsaw, London, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Mexico City. In the Eastern Bloc, tours were made by historians teaching the meaning of the American Revolution, and the exhibition "America – The land, the people, and the idea"

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 307-311.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 321-327.

<sup>118</sup> C. Kilpatrick, *Nixon Resigns*, Washington Post, 9.8.1974, available online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/watergate/articles/080974-3.htm>.

was opened in Moscow at the end of 1976 that attracted 10.000 people per day. The image of America had started to regain a more positive tone after the bicentennial, everything was done to remind the people about the USA of Kennedy rather than that of Nixon; it had also generated many new courses dedicated to the American studies in different universities around the world, like in Helsinki and Tehran.<sup>119</sup>

The USIA did it all to introduce Jimmy Carter to the world, a set of satellite programs was elaborated to transmit them in six different countries apart from the US, each conducted by a famous national reporter, also a video series *Transition '77* in English, Spanish and French were made to present the new head of the state. As for the agency itself, Carter nominated an ex USIA's career officer John Reinhardt as its new director. The Reorganization Plan No. 2 approved by Congress on October 11, 1977, merged the USIA and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs into one organization named International Communication Agency, Reinhardt was chosen as the head of the new ICA. The new agency was split into four directorates: Broadcasting (VOA), Programs and Plans, Management and Educational, Cultural, and Exchange (ECA). Geography-wise it was divided into five areas: African, European, East Asian, Pacific and American Republics, and North African, Near Eastern and South Asian. During this period the ICA was deeply involved in the support and promotion of human rights across the world and was crucial in the creation of the South Asian Committee on Human Rights and Development.<sup>120</sup>

In 1979 treaties were signed with China for a cultural and exhibit exchange. Other cultural exchange programs were made with Hungary, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, where every country now had its USIS office. In the summer of 1978, the ICA answered to the discovery of a Soviet combat brigade on Cuba with material that emphasized the USSR's cooperation to sustain abusive dictatorships in Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, this was done along with an anti-OPEC campaign requested by the President. At the beginning of 1979, the US ambassador in Afghanistan was kidnapped outside of the USIS office and was killed during the rescue operation. Following the Afghani and Iran hostage crisis, by the end of the year, Carter's advisor Brzezinski ordered the ICA to launch a campaign to win

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<sup>119</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 333, 346-348, 355-357.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 360, 370-371.

the support of the Muslim population for the US and show that the latter is standing for the same values as Islam. On December 26 the VOA announced the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the whole story was covered in detail and was continuously updated, later Carter's message condemning the Soviet actions was broadcasted. Starting from early 1980 the ICA helped to build and sustain the birth of the Carter doctrine. One of its first important moves was the popularization of Muhammed Ali's visit to Africa and the unfair politicization of the Olympics in Moscow to justify the administration's decision to boycott them. It was then that the Soviets restarted their jamming of the VOA.<sup>121</sup>

#### **4. Ronald Reagan, Charles Z. Wick, and the end of the agency**

With Ronald Reagan's election in 1981, Charles Z. Wick became the new ICA's director. Wick was Reagan's close friend and raised money for his election campaign, so he was tighter linked to the White House than any of his predecessors. He established very close relations with and promoted the agency in the private sector by attracting to it collaborators in the fields of publishing, sports, cinema, labor, marketing, and public relations. He also was responsible for the enlargement of the ICA's budget, which increased by \$200 million in three years, and for the return of its original name USIA. Wick wanted also to strengthen the US grip on Western Europe and launch a counteroffensive against the Soviet propaganda. So, the "Project Truth" was born on September 9, 1981, in collaboration with the State Department, Pentagon, and CIA.<sup>122</sup>

After the repression of the protests in Poland initiated by the Solidarnosc movement, Wick decided to set up a TV program that would mix politics with entertainment, the show *Let Poland Be Poland*, that included the participation of Frank Sinatra and Pope John Paul II. The program was transmitted on January 30, 1982, and gathered 184 million viewers in fifty countries, though it was heavily criticized by the international press for its tastelessness.<sup>123</sup> On 8 June of 1982, Reagan presented at the House of Parliament in the UK a new US project to promote democracy by aiding anti-Communist political institutions, labor unions, and journals in the third world.<sup>124</sup> This initiative that took the

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 383, 385, 390-391.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 399-401, 405-406, 408.

<sup>123</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 6-9.

<sup>124</sup> W. Raymond, *President Urges Global Crusade for Democracy, Revives Flavor of 1950s in Speech to Britons*, 9 June 1982, New York Times, available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/09/world/president-urges-global-crusade-for-democracy-text-of-reagan-s-address-page-a16.html>.

name of the “Project Democracy” had to strengthen the political and social infrastructures that make the democracies functional around the world. Following a compromised plan built on the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) – independent of the government - that awarded grants to democratic political groups in hardship, periodicals, schools, and trade unions in the third world. The NED gave away millions of dollars of social aids to Afghanistan, Haiti, South Korea, South Africa, and Northern Ireland. It also financed Nicaraguan anti-Sandinista paper *La Prensa* with a \$100.000 grant and sustained the Panamanian army’s candidate during his campaign in 1985. It was immediately accused by the Soviets of being a tool in the hands of the USA to interfere in the internal affairs of the foreign states.<sup>125</sup>

On 31 August 1983 a tragedy happened, a Korean 747 airliner – KAL Flight 007 – was shot down by the Soviets on its way through the Sea of Japan. The day after the agency immediately created a task force to investigate the incident to reinvigorate the international attention toward the issue and to publicly denounce it. The VOA covered the tragedy in forty-two languages and Reagan’s condemning speech in both English and Russian. In this case, the film and TV had special roles, as an eleven-minute-long tape showing the last moments of the incident that was used on the UNSC on September 6. After the presentation, the Kremlin acknowledged that its pilots did do this. Even though the video reported mostly confusion, the Americans did everything to present it as a completely Soviet fault. The Russian pilot was accused of not having tried to contact the airplane and fired the warning shots, furthermore, the Soviet pilots were described as cold-blooded killers. The VOA delivered Reagan’s indignation about the Korean airline crisis and his request for peace on 24 September simultaneously in seven languages. The Americans swore that the tape was not cut, they lied. In reality, Moscow’s accusation of it being a spying plane was not completely unfounded, as an Air Force RC-135 reconnaissance plane had flown near the Korean jet for a short fraction of time over international waters near the USSR, nevertheless, it must be set clear that it had landed an hour before KAL 007 was shot. Moreover, a further analysis of the audio- and videotapes had shown that there had been attempts of contacting the Korean plane, and the fire bursts from the part of the Soviets. The U.S. hypocrisy became particularly

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<sup>125</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 421-423.

evident when on July 3, 1988, its Navy warship blasted out an Iranian passenger airliner in the Persian Gulf, afterward, the incident was classified by the President as an “understandable accident”.<sup>126</sup>

On October 25 of the same year another severe crisis occurred on the Caribbean island of Grenada, where due to the landing of Cuban troops the U.S. army was sent to evacuate 1.000 American citizens from its territory. The Voice broadcasted the whole operation live, while the USIA charged the Pentagon camera crews to interview the “liberated” citizens and Soviet arms caches. Immediately a local USIS office was set. The USIA-Pentagon cooperation on the issue followed to spread the evidence of the Soviet’s presence on the island. At the beginning of November, the Pentagon team created a series of leaflets covering a chronology of the American actions there and presenting the proofs of the Soviet and North Korean aid in Grenada that were distributed also by the UN delegates in New York. The findings inside of the Soviet archive on the island included their films which were by the USIA Disinformation Response Unit as evidence of the Soviet subversion and sent to foreign periodicals. The Grenadian invasion provided the USIA its first opportunity to use its new satellite TV broadcasting WORLDNET. It started with the linkage to five European embassies with USIA facilities in the US to permit interactive video discussions between journalists in their countries and American guests from political and economic spheres in Washington. It was engineered by the director of the agency’s television service Alvin Snyder. The first WORLDNET transmission was made on November 3 between the European editors and Jeane Kirkpatrick in New York, Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State Craig Johnstone and James Michael in Washington, and St Lucia’s PM Sir John Compton and Tom Adams of Barbados in Bridgetown to clarify the incomprehension that arose from the Grenada crisis. WORLDNET was planned to be structured on five regional systems: Euronet – serving Western Europe -, Arnet – for the American Republics -, Pacnet – serving East Asia and the Pacific -, Afnet

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<sup>126</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 46, 49-53, 70-71.

– for Africa -, and Mednet – planned for the Middle East.<sup>127</sup> In 2004 it was merged with the VOA to reduce the expenditures.<sup>128</sup>

When after Geneva meeting on March 12, 1985, the Soviets began to accuse the US of reinitiating the arms race, simultaneously, they also came up with perhaps their most famous anti-American propaganda campaign, which claimed that the US government used the AIDS virus as a biological weapon in Africa. The story became quite a scandal at the time, but without any substantial proof, it did not last too long, whereas Moscow continued to point on the print propaganda material the USIA was gaining more and more power thanks to its expansion in the international television field. One of the last biggest Wick's initiatives at the agency became the Afghan media project. The USIA awarded \$500.000 to the Boston University to teach journalism at Afghan Media Resource Center in Peshawar, Pakistan and financed the Hearst Corporation and King Features Syndicate to help it in the development of the project. The mujahidin soldiers were now not solely armed with classic weapons but also with USIA video cameras which they were taught to use. The whole thing was engineered to cover the Afghan conflict more thoroughly without the necessity to send directly there the American reporters, and it was achieved.<sup>129</sup> Notwithstanding, *glasnost* and *perestroika* were producing the desired effects and Soviet-American relations were improving steadily. The first move in that direction was Presidents' United States-Soviet Exchange Initiative", the cultural and students exchanges between the two followed.<sup>130</sup>

At last, WORLDNET was allowed to guide the Soviet television crew through the streets of New York, the documentary became a hit in the USSR even if it was not the exact intent of the Kremlin, people were pleased by the glimpses of the American cars and products. If the Grenadian crisis was the first test for WORLDNET, the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986 became its coronation: the USIA used satellites to bring the whole story worldwide. Once announced by the Americans, the news was picked by Austrian,

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<sup>127</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 432-434.

<sup>128</sup> Voice of America, *Innovations for a New Century*, available online at <https://www.insidevoa.com/a/a-13-34-2007-innovations-for-a-new-century-history-111602669/177527.html>.

<sup>129</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 119-120, 210-213.

<sup>130</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 454.

West German, and then by Hungarian and East German television services. Almost half of Eastern Europeans discovered what really happened through Western radios. Afterward, there was not much, the USIA returned to bring its exhibitions to Moscow and the Soviet disinformation campaign continued, even though with very slower rhythms than before, till the fall of the USSR. The end of the propaganda war deprived the USIA of its most powerful topic during appropriations hearings. Due to the agency's constant blame on Communism and its public image as a Cold War tool, it very soon became a target for new cuts. On September 30, 1999, ceased to exist and passed its functions to the State Department.<sup>131</sup>

By summarizing the mere evolution of the agency, the tightness of its connection to the U.S. government becomes evident, so as its role as a tool of the US administration during the second part of the XX century. The beginning of the Cold War marked its very birth, as the end of it also brought to the death of the USIA. It is not a secret that all the production of the agency was filtered through the eyes of the decisionmakers in the White House, and when it was classified as too far from the objectives of the American foreign policy, or, even worst, against them, it would not be published. It should remain clear though, that the USIA was de facto an organ of Washington's diplomatic relations apparatus, and its actions cannot be taken as neutral by any means: it was a propaganda tool. Yet its history is very useful to understand how the American propaganda strategy was transforming in years.

A pivotal moment in the agency's history that concerns the main argument of this research is the period between 1981 and 1983 when Reagan put Charles Z. Wick at its direction. Aggressive marketing methods of the latter were unique, once combined with his very strong connection to the President it gave him a considerable privilege compared to his predecessors. Reagan's hostile public diplomacy that initially wanted to demonize the USSR as the greatest threat to human existence, was the leading light for all the USIA projects, which became much more anti-Soviet oriented than before during the eight years of the Regan doctrine. This scenario must be clear to contextualize and introduce properly "Project Truth" campaign and its meaning to the U.S. government at the time. Wick's ability in convincing the Government to finance the USIA's initiatives became crucial to the birth of Project Truth in 1981.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 454, 457-458, 484.



## Chapter 4

### Project Truth

When Reagan was elected, he decided to bring his own entourage to the White House and started a project to build up a hard-liner foreign policy strategy against the USSR, accompanied by the military build-up, which would permit the US to negotiate with the Soviets from the top-down perspective.<sup>132133</sup> In the frame of this new plan, the hiring of Charles Z. Wick as the USIA's director had contributed to the cause.<sup>134</sup> Wick's desire to build a proper "public diplomacy" machine able to contrast the Soviet disinformation was accepted and signed by Reagan, in this context was developed "Project Truth".<sup>135136</sup>

Unfortunately, there is not much literature concerning this "anti-Soviet campaign", the only three publications that somehow talk about it are *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy* (2008) by Nicholas J. Cull<sup>137</sup>, *Warriors of Disinformation* (2012) by Alvin A. Snyder<sup>138</sup>, and *Beyond Fake News* (2021) by Gianluca Borzoni, Barbara Onnis, and Christian Rossi<sup>139</sup>; yet only the latter provides more or less a concrete analysis of its activity. The main source of information for this research was the USIA's internal report on Project Truth made on July 20, 1982<sup>140</sup>.

#### 1. Whose idea

In order to have a clear picture of what was this anti-Soviet campaign engineered by the USIA, it would be useful to understand who stays behind it. The project itself was directed and controlled by many State Department officials, though the very mastermind that had insisted on its creation was Charles Z. Wick. The successful Ohio-born businessman had started his career as a musician until he was pushed by Tommy Dorsey to become his business manager and music arranger, from there on Wick began his job as a promoter.

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<sup>132</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 286.

<sup>133</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 78-79.

<sup>134</sup> M. Douglas, *Charles Wick, 90, Information Agency Head, Is Dead*, New York Times, 24.6.2008. On <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/24wick.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, & C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021.

<sup>140</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (RoPT), available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

Soon after he decided to work as an agent for Hollywood stars, dropped the letter “Z” from his original surname Zwick and founded his own film agency.<sup>141142143144</sup> Nevertheless, the event that turned him into a millionaire was the foundation of a nursing home company United Convalescent Hospitals in the mid-50s that became one of the largest firms in the field in the US.<sup>145146</sup> At this point, he retired at age forty and lived in one of the most luxurious neighborhoods of the L.A.<sup>147</sup> For a coincidence, among his neighbors, there was Reagan family, with whom almost immediately Wick became friends.<sup>148149150151</sup> The connection between Charles and Ronald Reagan increased very fast, so much so that the former was asked to work as the principal fund-raiser for the latter’s forthcoming election campaign in 1980. Once elected, Reagan made him the director of the USIA.<sup>152153154</sup>

Wick’s closeness to the president was seen as a benefit for the agency since it permitted the USIA to considerably increase its budget and to gain a role in policymaking.<sup>155156</sup> Furthermore, he tried to bring collaboration between the agency and the private sector to

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<sup>141</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p.401.

<sup>142</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p.5.

<sup>143</sup> M. Douglas, *Charles Wick, 90, Information Agency Head, Is Dead*, New York Times, 24.6.2008. On <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/24wick.html>.

<sup>144</sup> G. Hodgson, *Charles Wick. Ronald Reagan’s Chief Propagandist at the US Information Agency*, The Guardian, 4.8.2008. On <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/04/usa>.

<sup>145</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p.401.

<sup>146</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p.5.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>148</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 5-6.

<sup>149</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p.403-404.

<sup>150</sup> M. Douglas, *Charles Wick, 90, Information Agency Head, Is Dead*, New York Times, 24.6.2008. On <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/24wick.html>.

<sup>151</sup> G. Hodgson, *Charles Wick. Ronald Reagan’s Chief Propagandist at the US Information Agency*, The Guardian, 4.8.2008. On <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/04/usa>.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5-6.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 403-404.

<sup>154</sup> M. Douglas, *Charles Wick, 90, Information Agency Head, Is Dead*, New York Times, 24.6.2008. On <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/24wick.html>.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>156</sup> G. Hodgson, *Charles Wick. Ronald Reagan’s Chief Propagandist at the US Information Agency*, The Guardian, 4.8.2008. On <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/04/usa>.

another level, by doing so he wanted to raise the awareness of the USIA nationally.<sup>157</sup> This belief was a result of his numerous trips to Europe during that period, it was there when he perceived the “crisis of faith” in the US in Western Europe that he linked to the abandonment from the part of the White House of its ideological battle there.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, there were some serious downsides during his rule. Wick himself described his temperament as not diplomatic, and since the beginning of his work inside the agency, the employees were scared by his aggressive tone and rough ways of dealing with the internal problems.<sup>159</sup><sup>160</sup> On top of that, he was a very paranoid individual, who on several occasions had exceeded limits of ridiculous: he insisted on the removal of a hot dog stand from its spot in front of the entrance in the USIA office, as he considered it to be a potential hiding place for explosives and then spent \$30.000 of the public funds for the security system inside his rented residency in Washington.<sup>161</sup> According to Wick’s vision the Soviet propaganda was seeding its distortion of reality in minds of the Europeans, therefore, the White House had to do something to prevent it.<sup>162</sup> His suggestion was to unite USIA’s best officials and make them create a new “coordinated strategy” to empower the US to express its vision of reality with one single voice that would contrast the Kremlin’s disinformation.<sup>163</sup>

## 2. What was “Project Truth”

According to Nick Cull, in the summer of 1981 Wick “became convinced” that the US had to build its counter-offensive system to counter the Soviet propaganda apparatus and its disinformation.<sup>164</sup> On August 17, 1981, Wick presented to the President, his top White House aides, and the NSC a plan for the *‘establishment of a committee on information policy coordination to arm the United States for effective battle in the war for men’s*

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<sup>157</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 408.

<sup>159</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 1-2.

<sup>160</sup> G. Hodgson, *Charles Wick. Ronald Reagan’s Chief Propagandist at the US Information Agency*, The Guardian, 4.8.2008. On <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/04/usa>.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 1-2.

<sup>162</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408-409.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 408-409.

<sup>164</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

*minds to which this administration is committed*'<sup>165</sup>. The very project was defined in the document that, according to the USIA, had marked its foundation as '*vigorous overseas public affairs campaign to accurately project American society and policies to counter Soviet propaganda*'.<sup>166</sup>

On September 9 of the same year, the authorization for the interagency counterpropaganda initiative headed by the USICA (before Wick managed to change its name back to USIA) "Project Truth" was signed by Reagan.<sup>167</sup> The State Department along with Pentagon, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, NSC, and CIA had to collaborate with the agency to collect the information which would then be published by the USIA, with the main goal to project an accurate image of the American policy and ideals and to answer to the KGB's disinformation machine immediately.<sup>168</sup><sup>169</sup><sup>170</sup>

The major two operational refinements of the project were the Policy Group and Executive Committee. The former was the Project Truth's bureaucracy system think tank, also responsible for its long-term plan, made of agents coming from the four participating agencies.<sup>171</sup> There were also other interagency mixed groups, coordinated by the State Department, which were divided to work on each priority area of the project: U.S. peace initiatives, Afghanistan, Cuba, Soviet chemical-biological warfare, Poland, Central America, and Nicaragua.<sup>172</sup> In fact, the Executive Committee had to reunite the leaders of these groups monthly along with those of the policy group, Public Affairs, and Human Rights staff of the State Department to implement their initiatives.<sup>173</sup> Reagan helped Wick to publish Project Truth's reports by allowing the declassification of other agencies'

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<sup>165</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (RoPT), p.5, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>167</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 408.

<sup>169</sup> C. L. Doggett, *The U.S. Information Agency*, Chelsea House Publishers, United States, 1989, p. 62-63.

<sup>170</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021, p. 99-100.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 409.

<sup>172</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (RoPT), p.6, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>173</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 409.

documents that otherwise would be marked as confidential.<sup>174</sup> The agenda of PT's personnel consisted in 'weekly or biweekly meetings of the Executive Committee and monthly meetings of the Policy Group' to discuss the main issues and fraction them to then appoint them to the sub-groups which would be then responsible for covering those given topics.<sup>175</sup>

When it comes to its products, it output its material through USIA's speakers and briefing teams, foreign press center, films and videotapes, special publications, magazines, exhibits, and the Voice of America.<sup>176</sup> Its main printed products were:

- *Countering Soviet Mis-statements*

It was a "fast response guidance" to the personnel working in the USIS posts that was aimed at helping them to answer to the Soviet "accusations" of different kinds – since it was a service made on request by the USIA officials abroad and it could vary from the US use of the chemical weapons to its intervention in Latin America -, so that they would be able to react should anybody ask them to explain the situation.<sup>177 178</sup>

- *Soviet Propaganda Alert*

The most famous and important Project Truth's initiative. It was a newsletter destined to U.S. diplomats and officials, newspapers, VOA, 200 overseas posts, and non-government audiences to inform them of Soviet "distortions" before they could start to circulate in the Western press.<sup>179180</sup> It had been published monthly by the USIA's research office.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> C.J. Lamb, F. Schoen, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, 2012, p.27.

<sup>175</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, & C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021, p. 105.

<sup>176</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 6, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH> (last accessed 4.2.2022).

<sup>177</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, & C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021, p. 106.

<sup>178</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 66, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH> (last accessed 4.2.2022).

<sup>179</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

<sup>180</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p.64, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH> (last accessed 4.2.2022).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

- *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*

It was as well a newsletter, which reported Soviet alleged “misstatements” about the US.<sup>182</sup> It was carried three times a week to two hundred USIA’s overseas posts through Project Truth UNINFO telegram channel and then distributed by the personnel of each USIS post.<sup>183</sup>

- *Dateline America*

It was a bi-weekly illustrated magazine – of which there is no sample available - consisting of a dozen articles from different government agency sources sent to the USIS overseas offices to be then distributed locally. First published on January 22, 1982, it was destined to ‘*counter misleading impressions about the United States generated by Soviet propaganda*’.<sup>184</sup>

### 3. Project Truth’s peculiarity

Project Truth was a result of merge between the Reagan administration’s more rigid politics toward the Soviet Union<sup>185</sup> and an initiative of Charles Z. Wick aimed at maximization of the American propaganda apparatus, fed by his experience in the private sector of the industry and his modern vision of the communication tools<sup>186</sup>.

The project’s most remarkable peculiarity was its size, by judging from the number of products and initiatives it handled listed in the USIA’s internal report, it is probably one of the biggest overt projects in the history of the USIA and of the whole U.S. propaganda apparatus, engineered to “counter” the Kremlin’s propaganda and to produce anti-Soviet propaganda.<sup>187</sup> According to Gianluca Borzoni, Project Truth ‘[...] *represented the implementation of an extraordinary government-wide effort to counter the massive Soviet campaign of disinformation [...]*’.<sup>188</sup> The only product that would be solely remotely comparable to this could have been *Soviet Orbit Propaganda*, though this three-time per week publication of the mid-50s aimed at exposing Moscow’s propaganda rumors –

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>185</sup> F. Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War (2nd edition)*, Verso Editions & NLB, London, United Kingdom, 1986, p. 112-113.

<sup>186</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 404-406.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p. 61-103.

<sup>188</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, & C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021, p. 110.

unfortunately, not available -, it was still just a USIA's publication, while Project Truth was a campaign in the context of which there were various anti-Soviet publications.<sup>189</sup>

In terms of numbers, it is known that *Problems of Communism* was a bi-monthly edition with a circulation of 27.000 copies per number and distributed in over one hundred countries;<sup>190</sup> the special publication *Soviet Military Power* had a circulation of over 12.000 copies printed in English, Arabic, French, and Spanish;<sup>191</sup> *Soviet Propaganda Alert* was sent monthly to over two hundred USIS posts around the world,<sup>192</sup> so as *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*.<sup>193</sup> Above that, there were other eleven USIA magazines in fifteen languages that supported Project's activity worldwide and that total amount would reach almost 500.000 copies per issue.<sup>194</sup>

The way Project Truth shaped the USSR was not objective, nor reliable. Its portrait was an American point of view on its alleged political opponent, whom it wanted to reciprocally denigrate. Certainly, the USIA used quite different methods from those of the Soviets and it tried to appear as more professional as it could, nevertheless, it was a producer of pro-American propaganda. The suppositions it made concerning the Soviet belligerent nature and cynical population were not, and possibly could not be, sustained by any survey or research, which can only mean one thing: it was a generalized picture of them, suitable at the time to the American government. Reagan's administration during those years had in some way to justify the aggressiveness of its foreign policy toward the USSR, and this specific task of Project Truth is visible in all of the previously analyzed samples of its products.

Concerning its existence, it is sure when it was born, yet not when it had ceased its activity. Its latest available publication is dated May 16, 1984, when Chernenko became the secretary of the Party. In fact, there is no evidence of Project Truth's materials published during Gorbachev's era, which gives a hint of some possible causes of its end. There are possibly two factors that could have brought to its suspension. On the one hand, the improvement of the US-Soviet relations with Gorbachev staying at the head of the

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<sup>189</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 127.

<sup>190</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 489, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH> (last accessed 7.2.2022).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p. 371.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 96.

USSR, due to the beginning of his glasnosts and perestroika programs, as well as to slow appeasement of the Soviet anti-American propaganda, at the light of these changes Project Truth was looking “out-of-time”<sup>195</sup>. On the other, a fast modernization and technological adaptation of the USIA thanks to its WORLDNET project, which apparently outplayed the Soviet “old-fashioned” printed material. Moreover, the TV material of Project Truth, according to Snyder, was “flimsy” and could not possibly produce a valuable product due to its “limited” budget of \$65 million.<sup>196</sup> Additionally, since the US wanted to show its reciprocal readiness to lighten its hard-liner position and adopt “constructive collaboration” strategy<sup>197</sup> and the Soviet propagandists could not blame Reagan administration for harsh anti-Soviet speeches any longer, apparently there was no more need of Project Truth explaining the ‘*American objectives to European allies and striking back the Soviet propaganda*’.<sup>198</sup> Ultimately, like the USIA itself, Wick’s project continued to exist till it was a useful tool in the US-Soviet relations, once this necessity disappeared so did the project.

#### **4. Soviet Propaganda Alert**

*Soviet Propaganda Alert* was first published in October of 1981. It was a synopsis and analysis of the Soviet propaganda medium and provided an overview of Moscow’s public affairs accusations against the US. The samples available of this newsletter on archive.org – taken from the internal report on Project Truth made by the USIA -, cia.gov, and on reaganlibrary.gov are eleven: from number one to number eight, plus numbers ten, eighteen, and twenty, going from October 15, 1981, to May 16, 1984. Unfortunately, there is no information about how many copies of it were published monthly, the only thing that is mentioned is that it was sent to 200 USIS posts each time to be distributed afterward.<sup>199</sup>

On the example of the first number’s format of the newsletter one can see that it has an introductory summary, followed by pieces of news concerning “accusations” against the

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<sup>195</sup> G. Borzoni, B. Onnis, & C. Rossi, *Beyond Fake News*, Franco Angeli, Italy, 2021, p. 116.

<sup>196</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 119-120, 77-78.

<sup>197</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 304.

<sup>198</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p.78.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.



U.S. particularly present in the Kremlin's propaganda during a given period, a tighter space then is dedicated to the techniques used to build these supposedly false claims, and the last part describes the regional disinformation spread by Moscow in different geographical areas of the world.<sup>200</sup> According to the USIA's list of the Soviet direct sources, which regrettably are not thoroughly quoted in each number of this newsletter, those charges are said to have been mainly spread by the printed journals *Izvestiia*, *Krasnaia Zvezda*, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, *Pravda*, *Selskaia zhizn*, and *Sovetskaia Rosiia*; as well as by the radio stations TASS and Radio Moscow.<sup>201</sup><sup>202</sup><sup>203</sup> Every topic is detailly reported, nevertheless, it must be said that Project Truth does not give any explanation or justification to the Soviet charges. Throughout all the numbers of *Soviet Propaganda Alert* the alleged anti-American news about the US foreign, which are said to be quoted directly from the Soviet periodicals mentioned above, are presented as there were nothing else to explain, as they were just another piece of "Soviet propaganda".<sup>204</sup>

In order to have a bigger picture of the structure of the *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, it is necessary to analyze some of its actual numbers of it. The wisest thing is to start with the number one, not only because it happens to be the first but also the most detailed one. It should be specified that the numbers of the newsletter going from one to eight, included, are the samples presented in the USICA's internal report on Project Truth<sup>205</sup>, the issues number ten and eighteen are copies of Project Truth's original publications taken from the CIA's online archive,<sup>206</sup><sup>207</sup> and the number twenty from a Charles Wick's "memorandum" to Michael K. Deaver inside the archive of the Ronald Reagan

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<sup>200</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 1, 15.10.1981, in RoPT, p. 181-195, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>201</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 8, 8.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 117-119, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>202</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 6, 26.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 137-140, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>203</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 5, 26.3.1982, in RoPT, p. 149-152, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>204</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 1, 15.10.1981, in RoPT, p. 181, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>205</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (henceforth RoPT), available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH> (last accessed 4.2.2022).

<sup>206</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, No. 10, 30.9.1982, available online at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00914r002100120030-7>.

<sup>207</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, No. 18, 31.1.1984.

Presidential Library & Museum's official website<sup>208</sup>. The first publication, dated October 15, 1981, has the vastest description of the Soviet propaganda strategy.<sup>209</sup> It begins with what Project Truth described as the very goals of the Kremlin external disinformation apparatus. Among them, the most important one is said to be that of allegedly persuading the foreign world that the USSR is a “progressive society”, firmly decided to follow the path of détente. To do so, Moscow propagandists supposedly used a ‘*systematic denigration of the U.S.*’ by depicting it as “decadent”, “immoral”, and without any hope for the future. The critique of this strategy is built by Project Truth in such a way to stress how unreliable every point of it actually was and how the Soviet effort to present the US as a bad example, in reality, had demonstrated that unconsciously the Soviets themselves were aware that it was a complete opposite of what they were trying to tell. A passage that better highlights this despicable USIA's vision of the Soviets the agency wanted to project would be the following: ‘[...] *Soviet propagandists hope to persuade target audiences that it is [the U.S.] not a fit model for their own countries*’<sup>210</sup>.

Another very “famous” way to denigrate the U.S. used by Moscow was, allegedly, to show the perfectness of its society by comparing “invidiously” – the term written in the text is ‘*invidious comparisons*’ - each aspect of its own to the American one. The very use of such an adjective – invidious - shows a clear desire on the part of the USIA to transmit how the Soviets were apparently deep-down hurt by their acknowledgment of American “superiority”. It is mentioned then that the Kremlin propagandists supposedly try to portray their country as a big supporter of the national liberation fronts in the Third World, since it “would assimilate” those states to the USSR, which is their natural ally against the imperialism.<sup>211</sup>

The next important section inside the document is that of the psychological and linguistic tools utilized by the Kremlin to structure its disinformation. The sentence which introduces the paragraph contains perhaps the harshest critique of the Soviets present in *Soviet Propaganda Alert*. Moscow's propagandists are at first praised by the USIA for being very good at what they do, yet then their skills are apparently justified by an alleged

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<sup>208</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 20, 16.5.1984, in Letters for Ronald Reagan, p. 5-18, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/dcos/deaver/box-018/40-137-7065105-018-018-2016.pdf>.

<sup>209</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 1, 15.10.1981, in RoPT, p. 181-195, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, p. 181.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p. 181-182.

absence of any morality in them that would limit their creative process, unlike the American journalists who are “bounded” by it in their profession: ‘[...] *Soviet propagandists are not restrained by truth, honesty, and morality; rather, they are guided by a new morality, defined by Lenin as that which serves the good of the party*’. Particular attention then is dedicated to dehumanizing Communism: ‘*Their ideology rationalizes the use of falsehood and deception by promising that the end [...] justifies all means and that shrinking from the use of all available means constitutes betrayal of the cause*’. This type of register is present in many parts of the publication as a whole. This bitter definition of the Soviets is concluded with: ‘*Soviet propagandists use selective information, half-truths, distortions, and innuendo, as well as outright lies*’<sup>212</sup>.

Immediately after this severe critique of the Soviet ideology and propaganda apparatus, the USIA personnel decides to switch to the Soviet society itself. The paragraph, exactly as the previous one, starts with the recognition that, presumedly, not all the claims of the Kremlin propagandists are necessarily false, though it might seem as such to the western readers who are “different” from the Soviet ones: ‘*Soviet ideologists have developed an array of philosophical rationalizations that make all Western actions appear to be threatening or malevolent regardless of their objective intent*’<sup>213</sup>. In this sentence, the comparison between the Western and Soviet populations is done through the lenses of the ideological differences, so it suggests that the latter ideology transforms the people and homologates its opinion. Seen from this perspective, Project Truth attempted to show how Communist persuasion had deprived people of having their own opinion and so, differently from the Western population, the Soviet government is able to put them against an alleged enemy, in this way the actions of the West will be automatically perceived as bad, regardless of their veracity. This accusation appears to be specifically far from being grounded on some evidence or research – or at least there is no mention of such -, moreover, it goes against Project Truth’s very statement that wants the Western journalists to be constrained by morality and necessity of telling the truth. All of this demonstrates that the authors of the given text are too, so to speak, “propagandists” that spread their ideology at the expense of giving quite subjective information.

Returning to the techniques the Soviets supposedly use in their propaganda listed by the USIA in the document. The first one is *indirection*: a piece of information from a western

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

or non-Soviet source that is quoted in support of a given thesis. It is stated that the same Soviets are “convinced” that the western periodicals can produce a greater effect. This statement, again, insinuates a presence of a certain inferiority complex in the Soviets toward the West. Some other methods they exploit are supposed to be *disinformation*, *imputation* of false motives to the US actions, *debasement* the meaning of words – use of Socialism as a synonym for Communism to treat every socialist country as its ally – and *diversion* – the act of turning accusations made against the USSR and to counterattack the opponent.<sup>214</sup>

As for the topics, in the first number, for example, big attention is devoted to the arms race and continuous interferences of the Americans in the internal affairs of other countries due to their “imperialistic tendencies”.<sup>215</sup> Project Truth tried to report all of the aforementioned information without any further clarification of the US actions, it provides us with no reaction of the representatives, nor it classifies them as purely defamatory. The main tool used by the USIA’s personnel here is a pseudo ironical presentation of those charges to transmit their “ridiculousness”: ‘[...] *aggressiveness of the U.S. as contrasted with the peace-loving nature of the USSR*’ and ‘*the USSR [...] continues to be dedicated to the struggle for peace*’. This, along with the description of Brezhnev’s peace offensive speech with the adjective “so-called”<sup>216</sup> gives the reader a sensation of how supposedly false the intentions of the USSR should be, that this country itself can only “dissimulate” to desire peace by “pretending” to be good, without ever really meaning it. This rhetoric of no argumentation and satiric presentation is the base for the first number of *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, there is no mention of the Western sources used by the Soviets to prepare their “farfetched” charges.

The second number of the publication, dated November 21, 1981, highlights the Soviet criticism of Reagan and his speeches on arms reduction.<sup>217</sup> The whole initiative is said to be called by Moscow - with no Soviet source mentioned to confirm it - “unrealistic” and engineered by the American administration to gain militaristic supremacy in Europe.<sup>218</sup> Unfortunately, there is no clarification of why Moscow accuses Washington of this, of

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>217</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 2, 21.9.1981, in RoPT, p. 173-180, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

why should the reader be sure that it is unfounded, whereas the aggressiveness and wrongfulness of the Soviets have to be automatically taken for granted. The only ground provided by the USIA to this is that the alleged Soviet campaign for peace had started with Brezhnev's interview with *Der Spiegel*, during which he denied his country's interest for superiority in the arms race.<sup>219</sup> Here again, no argument built by the Kremlin propaganda was deconstructed or explicated, it seems as those claims can be only considered as false, while the Soviet intentions cannot be potentially positive the Americans are not obliged to answer for anything, their purposes cannot be questionable.

A persistent presence of bias in the structure of the text creates a sensation of a black and white reality, where the audience is encouraged to accept and rely on the USIA's way of thinking, rather than having space and necessary information to make its own considerations. In simple words, the picture that one can get after such a reading is that it is naïve on the part of "malicious" Soviets to criticize the "good-willing" US. What follows this paragraph is the reason for the use of indirection by the Kremlin. It was mentioned that Project Truth claimed the Soviets tendency to quote the Western sources to give an appearance of officiality to their statements, but in this passage, the USIA tries to push the argument even further by claiming that '*Soviet propagandists know that their own and other publics tend to discount official Soviet statements, the quote [...] from American and Western leaders [...] to boost their quotes*'<sup>220</sup>. This Project Truth's statement highlights the supposed fact that even the Soviet citizens themselves believe more the American leaders than their own. That is to say, according to the USIA's logic here: the transparency of the US is not "questioned" even by the population of a foreign state, which is, moreover, portrayed as its rival on the international level, while the USSR government has "lost" its face to the point where even its own electorate refuses trusting it. It is also added that the Soviets' use of diversion is presumably linked to their wish to distract attention from their failed campaigns in Afghanistan and the Third World. Right after the topic of chemical weapons, Project Truth launches its first, allegedly, "founded" accusation against Moscow: it states that the US has the evidence of the supply of biochemical weapons by the Soviets in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan. The answer of Moscow was heavy charges of the American use of the chemical lethal weaponry in Cuba and Vietnam, those are commented only within the context of the Soviet use of diversion,

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

and nothing is said about the US position regarding it. The Kremlin's defensive reaction was also criticized in the light of the Pentagon report on its military power, Project Truth's added that it was another demonstration that the Soviets are only able of doing "name-calling" and "coverups and omissions"<sup>221</sup>. The second number continues to not supply us with a detailed exposition of which type of proof the Americans have of the use of biochemical weapons by the Soviets, furthermore, the very topic is not deepened in an enough distanced and explicative way, on the contrary, it persists with the despicable adjectives and a confrontational approach.

The following number, n.3 of January 11, 1982, is built upon the alleged Soviet classification of Reagan's "zero option" speech as an attempt to sweeten his administration's aggressive politics, the US is also described as an "unworthy participant" who tries to win a one-sided advantage position in the disarmament discussion.<sup>222</sup> Then Project Truth attributed the Soviet claims of the American intervention in Poland to their supposed desire to justify the introduction of martial law in the country and to not jeopardize their foreign policy seek for détente. At the same time, no comment is left about the role of the US in Poland and its connection, or an absence of such, with Solidarność. The Pentagon's "Soviet Military Power" report is said to have produced an apparently "deep effect" on the Soviets, it is specified that apparently *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *Literaturnaia gazeta* have mentioned it as an "attack" against the USSR, their more elaborated reply to it is covered inside the fourth number of the publication.<sup>223</sup>

In fact, in the fourth number, published on February 17, 1982, "Whence the Threat to Peace", a report prepared by Moscow on its own arsenal, is presented by the USIA as a document containing "facts and figures" on the American militaristic capacity, the whole thing is classified as an allegedly usual report made by the Kremlin, where "true and imaginary" information is said to have been mixed to show the US as an "aggressive imperialist" and the USSR as a "peaceful" country. Afterward, Project Truth underscores that the technique applied in this publication is so "sophisticated" to resemble a "Western style" one, while the information taken from the sources is said to be a result of indirection, so a pure manipulation of facts. At last, in this case, the reason for its non-

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p. 179-180, 181.

<sup>222</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 3, 11.1.1982, in RoPT, p. 167, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

validity is explained: the absence of a comparison of the Soviet data with those of the US and NATO in it would make the Kremlin's arsenal seem smaller than it actually is, which would permit it to follow the narrative of the American exaggeration of the Soviet-threat. The other crucial point in this edition is that the supposed accusation by Moscow of Regan's anti-Soviet approach are put in such a way to make them appear exaggerated. The words like '*much of ado about the revival of a "Cold War mentality"*' stress the amplification of the fact by the Soviets. A large space inside the given number is dedicated to the alleged Kremlin's propaganda pieces about the unrest in Poland and the role of the US in it. Project Truth stated the presumed cause of the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw, its organization by Moscow is linked to make the Poles understand that they still have their debts with the USSR. The nature of this passage seems purely intuitive, after all, no proof is provided to sustain it, furthermore, the very celebration is exploited by the USIA to highlight that the Soviets would not do such a thing with good intentions. When the so-called Soviet propaganda continues to push on the Reagan administration by criticizing it as a hypocritical one and blames it for the increase of the unemployment and poverty rates in the country, Project Truth does not give us any further data or statistics that would deny these charges, show that Reagan is not actually connected to the increase of those rates, or at least in some way would convince the audience of the opposite. The very last topic exposed in this document talks about an alleged linkage between the CIA and the Red Brigades responsible for the assassination of Aldo Moro. The whole "rumor" is said to be based upon some non-Soviet sources, which are again omitted. In general, the whole accusation against the CIA here is just discarded as "Soviet propaganda". The only "explanation" mentioned by the USIA, in the end, would be that Moscow propagandists supposedly exploited the poor level of selection of media material, which is said to be undocumented, inside some non-communist publications to quote them later as Western sources.<sup>224</sup>

Number five, March 26, 1982, covers the Geneva Talks. The leitmotif of all the disarmament discussions is reported to have been supposedly classified by the Soviets as a "smokescreen" for the US to secretly continue its military build-up. According to Project Truth the USSR allegedly tried to portray itself again as a "peace-loving" country, which sees itself obliged to answer to the American "provocation", although |

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<sup>224</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 4, 17.2.1982, in RoPT, p. 158-159, 160-161, 165, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

“unwillingly”. The chemical weapon topic reemerged after Washington had been accused of having apparently used them in Cuba and in El Salvador, it is written that the redounded information that served as a support for this thesis was gathered by different, mainly Western, not specified sources. On this occasion though, the USIA gives some credit to the Kremlin “propagandists” by calling some of the data from the sources “accurate”, while some others no, without showing which were actually valid and which were not. Meanwhile, the US influence in Poland continues to be a high topic material, especially due to the charges which are said to have been made by *Pravda* in its number issued on February 15, 1982, of the CIA’s alleged connection with the subversives. The USIA attention anew is devoted to the so-called “manipulation” of the Western sources by the USSR, in the absence of any specific name or suggestion about where they could come from. At the end of this issue, the supposed Soviet sources are quoted in the “selected bibliography”.<sup>225</sup>

Finally, the next number, n. 6, dated April 26, 1982, reports some direct denial from the USICA of the chemical weapons use by the US, linked to the charges supposedly made by an analyst of TASS radio Askold Biriukov on April 6, 1982; it is stated that they were based on a “non-existent UN report”.<sup>226</sup> While the chemical weapons saga follows in the seventh publication, April 30, 1982, where in an article attributed to *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, dated February 3, 1982, its correspondent Iona Andronov allegedly accused the University of Maryland’s Pakistan Medical Research Center of being sponsored by the CIA and making experiments to develop “poisonous mosquitoes” to use them afterward as a weapon.<sup>227</sup> This time the origin of the non-Soviet source is finally quoted – it was presumably an article of the *Kabul New Times*, written by Abdul Aziz Danishyar.<sup>228</sup> The research on the mosquitoes is defined to be based on “groundless rumors” with the objective to spread the fear among the local population concerning the CIA’s involvement in the operation. Project Truth states that the Third World readers normally become sensitive to the Agency’s name when it emerges. In regard to the CIA, its “complicity” in the kidnapping and murdering of Aldo Moro presumably mentioned in the journal

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<sup>225</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 5, 26.3.1982, in RoPT, p. 142, 149-152, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>226</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 6, 26.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 126-127, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>227</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 7, 30.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 121-122, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.



*Druzhba Narodov*, the date and name of the author are not indicated, though this time it is openly called “absurd”.<sup>229</sup>

The tenth number, September 30, 1982, is mainly focused on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, called a “genocide” by the Soviets, the Israeli repressions against the Palestinians were always harshly criticized – up to the point where such terms as “physical annihilation” were said. In all of this, the US is responsible in the context of the “complete” support it gave to Israel. Any denial from the US representatives or a reasonable explanation of the conflict is reported. According to PT, the Soviets supposedly intensified the spreading of the voice about their supply of aid to Poland through their propaganda channels, *Radio Moscow* and *Trud*, in this respect it is underscored how it was allegedly just an “excuse” to justify the entrance of their army in the country, described as “generosity”, by so trying to avoid the charges of the “invasion”. Also, the problem of the gas pipeline sanctions to the USSR was deeply covered, it is written that the criticism regarding these measures was supposedly “amplified” by reporting the complaints from the “Western sources”, while the American complaints against it were apparently defined as built on “pseudoarguments”. In the end, hard accusations were presumably launched by Moscow against Reagan and his entourage, defined as extreme right-wing and made of a small group of privileged, elite members that aim at world supremacy, and spend “insane” sums on their military build-up, followed by no commentary by the USIA.<sup>230</sup>

The number eighteen, January 31, 1984, already concerns the Andropov period in the USSR and it opens with the accusation against Reagan’s will to put an end to détente by re-evoking Truman’s hardline approach.<sup>231</sup> This specific phase of US-Soviet relations was also stigmatized by Reagan’s “evil empire” speech, which according to Project Truth, hurt Moscow propagandists deeply, as a matter of fact, it is stated that the columnists back there apparently tried to squeeze it as much as possible to “accuse” Reagan of doing an “anti-Communist crusade”.<sup>232</sup> Especially well-guessed sounds the following sentence - since it reminds to some features of Reagan’s actual vision of the international politics

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>230</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 10, 30.9.1982, p. 7-8, 9-10, 11, available online at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp83m00914r002100120030-7>.

<sup>231</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, No. 18, 31.1.1984, available online at <https://archive.org/details/CIA-RDP86M00886R001000030015-5/page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

as a “struggle” with the Communist ideology where Capitalism will “triumph”<sup>233234</sup> and not so a farfetched propaganda piece: “[...] *his (Reagan’s) goal of achieving “internal changes” in the USSR and his vision of the world as a struggle between the “empire of good” and the “evil empire”*”<sup>235</sup>. It was also a time of the Grenada operation and deployment of Pershing II. Due to the US participation in operations in Grenada, Lebanon, and Nicaragua, it was allegedly blamed by Moscow for “raising the international piracy” and “breaking international law”. The charges of deploying the missiles in Berlin were also apparently put on Reagan, moreover, it was described by the USIA as a “predictable move”.<sup>236</sup> In relation to this, it is reported that three-quarters of Germans were against this decision, and once more these “half-truths” was not apparently worthy enough to be investigated and properly explained – considering that there really was a big wave of discontent concerning Pershing II in FRG<sup>237</sup> -, they were classified as just “Soviet propaganda”.<sup>238</sup>

The last number of *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, dated May 16, 1984, starts with harsh criticism of the new secretary Konstantin Chernenko, who is accused of rekindling “previous rhetorical fervor” in the Soviet propaganda apparatus concerning its charges against the US, after a “restrained” period of “peace” with Iurii Andropov.<sup>239</sup> The denial of Moscow to the attribution to it of the use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Iraq by the US is newly reported.<sup>240</sup> While the Soviet claim that the US was allegedly “organizing a counterrevolution” in Central America under a flag of the defense of pluralism in the region, based on its intervention in Nicaragua, does not include a comment of the US position regarding the issue.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 285-286.

<sup>234</sup> R. Reagan, *Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame*, 17.5.1981, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-commencement-exercises-university-notre-dame>.

<sup>235</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 18, 31.1.1984, p.1, available online at <https://archive.org/details/CIA-RDP86M00886R001000030015-5/page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>237</sup> W. Drozbiak, *More Than a Million Protest Missiles in Western Europe*, Washington Post, 23.10.1983.

<sup>238</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, No. 18, 31.1.1984, p.8, available online at <https://archive.org/details/CIA-RDP86M00886R001000030015-5/page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>239</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 20, in *Letters for Ronald Reagan*, p. 6-18, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/dcos/deaver/box-018/40-137-7065105-018-018-2016.pdf>.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14-15.

After the analysis of all the above-seen material, it appears that the true main objective of *Soviet Propaganda Alert* was not so much to expose and study the Soviet anti-American propaganda as only to list it. The whole project looks like a big showcase that classifies all the information contained inside of it exclusively as propaganda, or at least there is no evidence of the contrary. The main problem of such a classification is that it draws a sharp line between what is true and what is false, meanwhile, all the “half-true” and manipulated facts remain in the dark, as there was no need to overexpose them. In a certain sense, it would be acceptable if there was any reference to some source or studies that one could check to see why it is a lie and what is the real situation, nevertheless, there is not. Only the Soviet sources are cited in their entirety, and not every time, many of those quotations are taken from radio programs – the most quoted one is the English language version of the TASS (Telegraphy Agency of the Soviet Union) radio. Unfortunately, at best some topics are fully explored: the charges against the University of Maryland’s Pakistan Medical Research Center are completely exposed and it is explained why they are not reliable, and what are the non-Soviet sources upon which the given news is based;<sup>242</sup> the other would be the critique of “Whence the Threat to Peace”, where it is elucidated why it is not allegedly “trustful”<sup>243</sup>. Many other topics are just listed. News that concerned the US foreign policy, some of which were partially true, like the presence of the American army in Lebanon, Nicaragua, and Grenada, are not explained at all; when they should have been. Obviously, some of the supposed Soviet “accusations” report partially – like in the case with Grenada - the cause of the American presence there, though how a reader can be sure that it is true since all of the text should be classified as a list of Soviet propaganda pieces. At last, this publication focused on the exposure of Kremlin’s propaganda could have been useful for purely informational purposes at the time, if we remove the critique of the Soviet society from it and consider it as a purely American-oriented governmental publication. Yet it would not give a clear, reliable picture of Soviet propaganda to a normal person who is not familiar with the US foreign policy. Surely, not everyone would visit the USIS office and grab material from there either, still, this publication was intended for civilian people as well – it provided ‘*government officials, VOA, 200 overseas posts, and non-government audiences with a general overview of*

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<sup>242</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 7, 30.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 121, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>243</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 6, 26.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 126-127, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

*Soviet public affairs attacks*<sup>244</sup> - rather than exclusively for the government officials or pro-American journalists and activists; most importantly it was also directed to newspapers<sup>245</sup> to “help” them “detecting” the so-called propaganda. Some of the passages of the periodical are too biased and openly anti-Communist, which does not help to understand how well-grounded the given information might be and how much of this is just a subjective point of view of the USIA. Even if a harsh criticism of the Communist regime can be acceptable to a certain limit, the image of the Soviet society that it gives to the audience is very flat and distorted, as well as undocumented. The Communist ideology is exposed in such a fashion that the effect of its alleged “dangerousness” on the Soviet citizens brings nearly Orwellian features in the text.<sup>246</sup> In fact, the population of the USSR is presented as presumably easily manipulable, very suspicious, and negatively oriented toward the West, even though simultaneously it has a propensity to trust the Western sources more than the Soviet ones, which sounds quite contradictory.<sup>247248</sup> In summary, this Project Truth’s product aims at exactly what its name suggests: it exposes all of the Soviet propaganda collected in a given period in a concise list to make its readers memorize it exclusively as propaganda. In this way, if afterward, they would see it anywhere else, they would automatically recognize it as propaganda and reject it or inform others that it is false. Its objective is to activate inside the audience an “alert” signal that will ring every time it would have a chance to stumble upon news that was reported in *Soviet Propaganda Alert*.

##### **5. Soviet Distortions and Fabrications**

*Soviet Distortions and Fabrications* was a short report, like newsletter, published by the Project Truth office three times a week and telegraphed to the USIS offices around the world. The objective of this product was to analyze and answer all the presumed

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<sup>244</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 64, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>245</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 408.

<sup>246</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 1, 15.10.1981, in RoPT, p. 183, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>248</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 2, 27.11.1981, in RoPT, p. 175, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

misstatements that the Soviet propaganda made about the US at a given moment.<sup>249</sup> The structure of it is quite simple: on the example of the first number, it is three-five pages long and starts with a short summary of the topic covered inside of it, then there are the alleged quotations of “charges” from Soviet and Soviet-oriented publications followed by the official position of the US representatives in regard to them, concluded by a USIA’s commentary of the “techniques” used by Moscow, as well as what supposedly stays behind the Soviet interest about it.<sup>250</sup> In this case, Project Truth’s explanation is more concrete and deep, it touches the alleged “weak points” of the Soviet propagandists and describes their “misuse” of the Western sources by citing them – like when apparently an article of the Austrian *Neue Zeit* was “summarized” by *Izvestiya* on March 26, 1982 to “denounce” the American pressure on Austria.<sup>251</sup> It maintains the line of the White House official statements and appears as more distanced and colder than *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, like the explanation of the cause of the US role in the Falkland Islands with the Secretary Alexander Haig’s quotation concerning crisis inside the number dated May 14, 1982.<sup>252</sup> The available material goes from April to May of 1982 and is taken from the USIA’s internal report on Project Truth.<sup>253</sup>

The topics handled by Project Truth in this publication are the same as those in *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, but they are much more unfolded. The most repetitive alleged charges launched by Moscow concern Reagan’s speeches, which are said to have been “exploited” in such a fashion to make him appear as a “hypocrite” and “cheater”<sup>254</sup>. For example, his discourse at the UN Special Session on Disarmament was supposedly defined by *TASS English* radio as an attempt to “distract” the international community from the US arms build-up.<sup>255</sup> The response right under the quotations of the Russian media’s “charges” reports the very speech, accompanied by the USIA’s answer that denies the accusations. Moreover, the words of the head of the state are directly aimed at the Kremlin’s propagandists – mentioned as “[...] those who challenge the truth”<sup>256</sup> - to remind them

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<sup>249</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 68, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>250</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 28.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 289-291.

<sup>251</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 30.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 286.

<sup>252</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 14.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 265-266.

<sup>253</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>254</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 22.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 215.

<sup>255</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 28.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 205.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. 206-207.

that the US could have already achieved the world domination, yet it did not since it would go against its moral principles – reassured with ‘[...] *we could achieve domination, but that was contrary to the character of our people*’<sup>257</sup>. The so-called “obsession” of Moscow with the President’s speeches is said to be linked to the “vulnerability” of the Soviets to the US efforts for peace.<sup>258</sup> The presumed accusations were as well launched against his discourse at the NATO Bonn Conference, which wanted Reagan’s hidden intentions of the American military superiority and of the escalation of “anti-socialism” to be at the basis of it.<sup>259</sup> The US authorities in its answer denied it and underscored the fact that the disarmament was allegedly at first the US initiative.<sup>260</sup> President’s speeches to the British Parliament and in Eureka College were as well apparently reported by the Kremlin. The former was mainly criticized by *TASS English* for the American presence in Lebanon and in the Falkland Islands while allegedly making his ambitions for the spread of democracy in the world -in the context of Project Democracy - hypocritical.<sup>261</sup> In the meanwhile, the latter was “judged” for the lack of a real intention to pursue the arms reduction in it, although here the charges came from the American NBC, which was used by the Soviets as a source.<sup>262</sup> Here Project Truth simply admitted that the whole issue was more connected to NBC rather than to the Kremlin, which by itself was a demonstration of the freedom of expression and of its importance in the US, unlike in the USSR.<sup>263</sup>

Apart from Reagan’s words, the Soviets supposedly “criticized” more thoroughly the US public position, the Versailles Economic Summit was “portrayed” by *TASS* and *Izvestiya* as a tool that the Americans used to put pressure on their partners to make them follow their anti-Soviet policies.<sup>264</sup> The State officials reacted by saying that they only made a “proposal” to restraint the credit the participant nations would supply to the European communist countries, which then was accepted by them.<sup>265</sup> According to Project Truth,

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p. 206.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, p. 207-208.

<sup>259</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 22.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 214-215.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 216-217.

<sup>261</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 18.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 219.

<sup>262</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 24.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 251-253.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 254.

<sup>264</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 15.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 227-228.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

the Kremlin prepared its ‘*accounts of the results of the summit before it took place and without worry about its actual course*’<sup>266</sup>.

An evergreen topic allegedly covered by the Soviet propaganda during this period was the issue between Israeli and Lebanon, the charges of American support to the former persisted.<sup>267</sup> The reply of the White House printed in the publication stressed that the only measures it would be ready to take in regard to the Middle Eastern conflicts can occur in connection with the Camp David process, it then added that ‘[...] *U.S. has consistently volunteered its services to the parties involved to ensure peace in the Middle East*’<sup>268</sup>. The USIA commented that these types of allegations are ways to presumably accuse Americans of acting like the Soviets do.<sup>269</sup> The aforementioned statement brings us back to the anti-Soviet, confrontational tone used in *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, on this occasion the intention seems to be to present the USSR as a country quite used adopting aggressive measures. Moscow’s alleged intention to “exploit” the crisis at American’s expenses to gain popularity among the Arabic countries is put then as an explanation for all this attention to it in the Russian press.<sup>270</sup> Along with the Israeli-Lebanon conflict, also the Iran-Iraqi one was linked to Washington. The supposed claims of Radio Moscow’s Arabic Service on May 25, 1982 were that the US would take profit from the split of the Arab world. On the example of these “accusations” Project Truth wanted to expose how the propagandists apparently “exploit” Western sources for their ends.<sup>271</sup> In brief, the quotation is allegedly never complete and so it becomes tricky to check whether it was correct, then the radio stations – here Radio Moscow – add their own text to the citation which in this way seems to be of a non-Soviet source and not of a given Soviet radio station to a casual listener. In conclusion, the USIA stated that supposedly only the USSR is interested in perpetration of the conflict since it supplies arms to both of the parties.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

<sup>267</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 24.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 209-210.

<sup>268</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 11.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 233.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p. 234.

<sup>271</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 2.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 244-245.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 245-246.

A big room – four different reports - in *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications* is dedicated to the Falkland Islands dispute between the UK and Argentina.<sup>273274275276</sup> The US is said to have been “accused” by the Kremlin of giving support to Great Britain in its imperialistic battle against the Third World, with the objective of gaining control over the Malvinas and withdrawing them from under the Argentinian sovereignty by so punishing the latter for its search for independence.<sup>277</sup> The replay of the governmental officials delineates the cause of the support to the UK and the US initial intention to act as a mediator in the given issue, once this role had brought to nothing it saw itself obliged to take sides of Britain, besides the obvious denials of the charges. The “rumors” presumably spread by the Soviets were defined as a “patent nonsense”<sup>278</sup> by the USIA, it stressed that the will of Moscow was to “blame” the Americans for employing its own strategy, ‘*which is to use the crisis to improve the Soviet Union’s position in the area*’<sup>279</sup>. Furthermore, it was then remarked that ‘*while the Soviets [...] attacked our efforts [...], they themselves have done nothing to [...] bring peace*’<sup>280</sup>. From these statements, it becomes palpable that Project Truth tended to follow its anti-Soviet rhetoric in all of its products, where every charge of the USSR corresponds to one from the US. It is then added that the USSR made these fabrications in an attempt to bring itself closer to Argentina and to the right-wing Latin American countries to start to exercise its influence on them and alleviate their suspicion of the Soviets.<sup>281</sup>

Another quite reported topic is the Western influence in Poland. The USIA underscored the apparent wish of the Americans to help Poland to find a suitable compromise without any intention to impose some “political formula”.<sup>282</sup> Shortly after, it is remarked that the Kremlin’s harsh criticism of the Radio Free Europe is allegedly connected to the latter’s “exclusiveness” in providing uncensored truth to the locals.<sup>283</sup> While the article of a pro-Soviet Polish journal *Zolnierz Wolnoscsi* about the “CIA collaboration” with some influential American periodicals was answered by Project Truth just with a

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<sup>273</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 17.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 223-226.

<sup>274</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 14.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 264-267.

<sup>275</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 5.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 278-280.

<sup>276</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 27.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 247-250.

<sup>277</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 17.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 223-224.

<sup>278</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 14.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 267.

<sup>279</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 5.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 280.

<sup>280</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 27.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 249-250.

<sup>281</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 17.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 226.

<sup>282</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 12.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 269.

<sup>283</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 9.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 238.



counteraccusation that allegedly in the USSR all the media are government-controlled whereas the journals mentioned by those propagandists – namely *Time-Life*, the *Rome Daily American*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* – are private organizations not inspired by the Agency.<sup>284</sup> The CIA’s involvement is said to be a usual tool exploited by Moscow in its “inaccurate stories” which is as well linked to its annoyance by the large journalistic coverage of the issue in the West.<sup>285</sup>

Another reemerged topic already mentioned in *Soviet Propaganda Alert* is the chemical weapons issue. Mainly, according to Project Truth, Moscow supposedly used it as a “counter-offensive” to the US accusations against the use of them the Soviets made in Southeast Asia.<sup>286</sup> Whereas the American investigation is described as built upon “scientific examinations”, evidence of which Washington apparently was ready to show at any time, that of Moscow is said to be “completely false” and it was denied by the State representatives.<sup>287</sup> On top of that, the White House apparently stated that its soldiers had never used toxins during the Vietnam war, while the deployment of the defoliant Agent Orange there was classified as allegedly never aimed against people.<sup>288</sup> The final commentary of Project Truth on this matter was that the arguments of the Soviets “break down under the sheer weight of fact”, as they, in view of the USIA, cannot provide proofs to them.<sup>289</sup>

Another “provocation” of the Kremlin, were the alleged charges by *Pravda*, on May 5, 1982, against the American role in “Ocean Venture 1982”, described as presumably linked to Washington’s desire of tension escalations with Cuba. The justification of Project Truth in this regard highlighted that it was a “regular yearly exercise” with an objective to test the readiness of the US Naval forces.<sup>290</sup> Speaking about the military forces, also the American TV networks ABC and NBC “attacked” the Kremlin in this matter for having allegedly developed a “satellite killer” able to shoot down the American satellites, these charges were recalled by *Sovetskaya Rossiya* on March 20, 1982 for being

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<sup>284</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 12.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 270, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p. 271.

<sup>286</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 4.6.1982, in RoPT, p. 239-240, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, p. 242.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 240.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, p. 243.

<sup>290</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 21.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 255-256, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

“propaganda ploy”. Yet Project Truth states, by quoting U.S. Deputy Representative to the UN Kenneth Adelman, that the USSR was supposedly the first to launch “the propaganda campaign, not the U.S.” and that the Soviets were the only ones to engage in “such practices”. Ultimately, the USIA stressed that while apparently the Soviets had been “admittedly” developing space weapons, the Americans had always remained consistent with the obligations of the 1967 U.N. Treaty. These interpretations are then accompanied by the criticism of the Soviet actions, it is written that they ‘*accuse the U.S. of doing what they themselves are engaged in, and the self-righteously castigate us [the US] for falsely accusing them of these same activities*’. Also, the manipulation of sources is again explained with the example of Adelman’s speech, where a view of a single individual was sold for governmental policy.<sup>291</sup>

The very last subject mentioned in the publication happens to be also the most directly related to it: accusations against the USIA. The agency was presumably blamed by *Izvestiya* on May 5, 1982, and by *Pravda*’s political observer Yuri Zhukov on May 7 of the same year for conducting “psychological war” against the USSR. Project Truth’s comment encompassed the alleged main goal of the project itself: to write the “truth” about the US and its policies to “lessen” international tensions; while the charges of being a tool of informational war were denied.<sup>292</sup> Concerning its director, according to the agency, he was called responsible for the unrest in Poland due to his role in the American propaganda apparatus by the Polish Government daily *Rzeczpospolita* on May 11, 1982. The deep interest of the Soviets in Wick is portrayed as connected to his recent trip to Europe, meanwhile, the USIA reputes the blackmailing of Moscow as a sign of the good work of the agency, so it is supposedly a “demonstration” that its anti-disinformation activity has been so far successful.<sup>293</sup>

The picture one can get of the Soviet propaganda after having read *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications* is a more complete one in comparison with *Soviet Propaganda Alert*. The western sources exploited by Moscow are allegedly exposed and analyzed, so as the techniques used to manipulate the information taken from them. Moreover, almost every edition contains the official position, according to the USIA, of the US officials in regard

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<sup>291</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 10.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 272-273, 274, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>292</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 19.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 258-259, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, p. 259-260.

to each given issue. Here Project Truth did not try to accuse the Soviet society or ideology. Nevertheless, the blaming of the Kremlin remains still thoroughly present, as it is called responsible for almost every charge it launched against the Americans. It seems an infinite blame game, where even the party which claims itself to be a “good-willing” one points the finger against its opponent every time there is an occasion or a convenience of doing so. The whole thing appears especially contradictive in the light of the statement of the USIA that wants Project Truth to be a way to ease international tensions, mainly because it apparently did not do this.<sup>294</sup> It continues to sound like an exclusively American and anti-Soviet point of view on the issue even in this specific publication.

At last, the given newsletter has a more complete comment of the Soviet presumed “disinformation” activity. The main problem of it is that it is not as close as well organized as its predecessor, either graphically or chronologically. Unfortunately, there is also no information about it being destined to civilians – it ‘*gives several examples of propaganda on a common theme and suggestions on how officers in the field can respond to the allegations*’<sup>295</sup>. The main objective of these reports was to give information which later had to be handled by the officials, therefore, it cannot be possibly confirmed that *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications* was ever seen by non-governmental audiences.

## **6. Overview of other special publications**

Among the special publications of Project Truth, there was a distinguished bimonthly magazine *Problems of Communism* – with a circulation of 27.000 per number<sup>296</sup> -, which contained reports about different issues inside the countries that embraced Communist ideology. The article most strictly related to the USSR inside an available sample of it inside the USIA’s internal report is “The Imperial Dimension of Soviet Military Power” by Rebecca V. Strode and Colin S. Gray, dated November-December, 1981, which supposedly explains which historic links might connect the Soviet Union to its “obsession” with militarization.<sup>297</sup>

The text summarizes the history of imperial Russia by stressing how much had the USSR inherited from it. The preservation of Russia’s imperial holdings after WWII is said to be

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 259.

<sup>295</sup> USICA, "Report on Project Truth", 20.7.1982, Limited official use (hencefort RoPT), p. 68, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, p. 489.

<sup>297</sup> USICA, *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1981, in RoPT, p. 490-492, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

the greatest achievement of the Red Army after the conflict. The victory in the war had then remained a dominant factor in the Soviet society, which is by itself filled with references to militarism, even in the language. It is then stated that the threat of war is permanently evoked to maintain its very culturally diverse population united under the threat of a new conflict, otherwise, it would have already turned against the Communist regime – namely, Ukrainians and Georgians would be the first. Under the nuclear menace, the people see the party as a “protector”, which has to remain such to not lose its power.<sup>298</sup>

The thesis of the document wants the Soviet Union to be still functional only because of its repressive ways of controlling its citizens and to a large number of soldiers it would be able to sacrifice for its eventual war campaigns. Furthermore, its tendency to follow Suvorov’s military strategy had indoctrinated in the Soviet strategists the preference to ‘*discuss the advantages of rapid tank advance and of a first nuclear strike*’. Besides this, there are some other very bold statements, like the introductory quotation which portrays all the Russians as suspicious people, who are not trustful and on whose words one cannot rely: ‘*the Russe neither beeleveh any thing that an other man speaketh, nor speaketh any thing himself worthie to be beleved*’. Additionally, there is a sentence that clearly claims “socialism having obviously failed”, this conclusion would have deserved much more contextualization and explanation to not appear just as a piece of anti-Communist propaganda. Still, this quite radical statement is then accompanied by another one that says, ‘*had Hitler been capable of a more humane policy of occupation, Stalin might not have survived*’.<sup>299</sup>

The entire picture one can get out of this research is redundant, while there are some apparently reasonable suppositions allegedly supported by facts, there remains a certain perception of speculation staying behind it which aims at underrating the importance of the Soviets during WWII and presenting it to its audience as a dangerous enemy capable of pulling the trigger for first, by so implying that one should be ready at any moment to react to it or to stop it before it becomes too late.<sup>300</sup>

Another rather peculiar product of Project Truth is the publication named *Soviet Military Power*, a of which, dated May 1981 of Department of Defense provides an extremely detailed analysis of the Soviet presumed military potential and the allocation in which

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 494, p. 502-503.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 494, 503-505, 506-507.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 507.

some of its most important objects can be supposedly found. The magazine aimed to show the “dangerousness” of the Soviet arsenal, the necessity of checking it, and be ready for ‘*the common defense, thereby deterring aggression and safeguarding the security of the world’s democracies*’. The given publication is a collection of very delicate and paramount information aimed at underline the alleged “true power” of the USSR. Right after, this text contains one of the hardest anti-Soviet claims of all Project Truth’s products. The paragraph begins with the statement: ‘*Violence and coercion have played a central role in the establishment and maintenance of the Soviet Union and its East European satellites*’. Then, it is added that ‘*they believe that military force is the major propellent of change in international affairs*’. The article concludes by saying that the will of the USSR to exploit anticolonial nationalistic sentiments against the Western nations is solely linked to bringing the states that are trying to achieve independence under its sphere of influence.<sup>301</sup>

Many of the “accusations” launched against the Soviets by Project Truth are very debatable and it is impossible to omit how much the USIA tried to put the facts in such a way that would make the Soviet Union appear as a “minacious enemy”, which by counting only on its presumed “dubious” contribution in WWII will follow its belligerent politics due to its historic tendency to “aggression” and which will not hesitate to pull the trigger for first in case of a threat.<sup>302</sup> Once summed to the assumptions that its support for the decolonization brings only exploitative character,<sup>303</sup> there is apparently nothing good left of it, so the USSR seems an “evil empire”. While the process of Russification is too simplistically depicted in *Problems of Communism*, although it undeniably had happened and was a part of the Stalinization process in the USSR.<sup>304</sup> However, by far the most dangerous insinuation in the text is that of the Soviet Union’s tendency to attack first,

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<sup>301</sup> USICA, *Soviet Military Power*, Department of Defense, May 1981, p. 1-5, 85-88, 89, available online at <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Military%20Power%201981.pdf>.

<sup>302</sup> USICA, *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1981, in RoPT, p. 507, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>303</sup> USICA, *Soviet Military Power*, Department of Defense, May 1981, p. 89, available online at <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Military%20Power%201981.pdf>.

<sup>304</sup> V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, The University of North Carolina Press, United States, 2009, p. 7.

which allegedly should be its inheritance of Suvorov's military strategy.<sup>305</sup> The hazardousness of this deduction lies namely in its characteristic of being a deduction, there is no reference to a document that would confirm such a theory to the point of making such adventurous statements publicly.

The documentation so far analyzed confirms Project Truth's role as a tool of the American propaganda apparatus, which could manipulate facts to its own ends, exactly like Moscow did. Certainly, some of the information it published could have been true and some of its sources are supposedly verifiable, yet when one goes beyond a mere deconstruction of the Soviet propaganda and reads how it portrays the USSR's role in the history of XX century, its reliability and will of "lessen international tensions" disappear.<sup>306</sup> The image we obtain of the Soviet Union from these documents is that of an alleged failed, aggressive, desperate country with no hope for future, besides of being well-armed and ready for attack, and so with which it seems almost illogical to negotiate on peaceful conditions. What it apparently tried to do though, it justified the US government's position to maintain hard line methods in negotiating with the Soviets, since – as the abovementioned papers want to suggest - there presumably could not have been others.

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<sup>305</sup> USICA, *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1981, in RoPT, p. 506-507, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>306</sup> USICA, *Soviet Distortions and Fabrications*, 19.5.1982, in RoPT, p. 259.

## Conclusion

This research summarizes all the history of the American propaganda apparatus during the second half of the XX century to come to one of its largest anti-Soviet projects in the context of the collaboration between the Reagan administration and the USIA.

By analyzing the initiatives and products of both covert and overt US propaganda machines, one can see how deeply present it was in the socio-political structure of the West. The aim of this informational pressure of Washington was to create a perception of the unity of the Western society regarding its position toward the Soviet Union, but this unilaterality had to be maintained and controlled. Therefore, often to generate this vision of an anti-Communist West, the American government attempted to take measures to incentivize it – for example, against the “anti-American” and pro-Communist sentiments in France and the UK -, in order to improve the perception of the local population concerning US foreign policies. Society as a whole was involved in the process of propaganda making; movies, music, and literature became its tools.

As for the USIA in particular, its past was quite intense and controversial, as its activity had always depended on the features of each given administration. It had multiple times confirmed itself to be a governmental propaganda tool and it was associated with many campaigns which sustained quite questionable decisions of the White House, exactly as it tried to avoid expressing itself regarding some other shadowy operations of the latter. Nonetheless, Project Truth was a great example of how great become the agency’s role politically speaking for the US foreign policy. Its production was very generous and demonstrates an obsessive and meticulous study of the Soviet propaganda with the goal of then generating its own “answer”, which had to hit Moscow in its weakest spot, while simultaneously supporting the position of Reagan’s administration. Exactly like the USIA had done on its own when it illustrated some controversial US operations by mentioning only a tip of the iceberg and by omitting their shortcomings – the support of Pinochet’s regime in Chile<sup>307</sup> and of Diem in South Vietnam<sup>308</sup> -, so did Project Truth – by not exposing thoroughly the Grenada crisis and the US government’s backing of repressive leaders in Central America.

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<sup>307</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 98.

<sup>308</sup> N. J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2008, p. 124.

Reagan himself is quite a debatable character, once one talks about his anti-Soviet views and purely conservative position. On the one side, John L. Harper suggests that he ‘*proved more open to persuasion by centrists*’ and later his contribution for having “ended” the Cold War was highly appreciated by the progressives who had criticized him previously.<sup>309</sup> On the other, according to Vladislav Zubok, the hard-liner approach was Reagan’s political choice to put the Soviets under pressure and force them to leave Afghanistan and improve the condition of the human rights in the country at once, but without renouncing to the SDA program nor to discuss the US involvement in Central America in their turn. Moreover, Zubok’s supposition is that in reality, the Reagan administration wanted more to “bleed” the Soviet troops in Afghanistan rather than see their complete withdrawal. The Kremlin was firm, even with Gorbachev to prepare de-escalation in stages, while Andropov and Brezhnev were irritated by the aggressiveness of the White House’s head, whose letters with the request of a disarmament meeting were denied by the Soviet leaders. It is, in the case of Gorbachev, also attributable to his fear of moving too far and so to his decision to “procrastinate”; since, apparently, he was not truly interested in keeping Moscow’s soldiers in the Third World countries. At the same time, it is important to stress that the Reagan administration continued escalating the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and doing “provocative maneuvers” in Moscow’s territorial waters. After the panic brought by *Archer 83* Reagan started to calm down his tone, after his “conciliatory speech” in January 1984, the administration had really changed its perspective, since it could at this point ‘*deal from [...] a position of strength than in previous years*’<sup>310</sup>; though it was not enough to convince the Soviets of its good willingness: ‘*they refused to notice the change*’.<sup>311</sup>

Concerning the perception the Kremlin had of Reagan, his peaceful intentions were doubted right until the Reykjavik summit in 1986, Gorbachev himself could not understand whether Reagan was bluffing or not; this thing was complicating Soviet President’s reformist plans. Only after their meeting in Iceland Soviet Secretary really become convinced that Reagan’s intention of pursuing nuclear disarmament was “genuine”. Afterward, he tried to do everything to “win” the West’s sympathy, which supposedly should calm down the US’ hardline position. It was not before the meeting of

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<sup>309</sup> J. L. Harper, *The Cold War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 208.

<sup>310</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 94.

<sup>311</sup> V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, University of North Carolina Press, United States, 2009, p. 276, 283-284, 286.



Gorbachev and Shevardnadze with George Schultz in April 1987, that the two countries could bring some real “wind of changes” – as by the time Soviet leader had already “nothing to fear”.<sup>312</sup>

But how true was the information exposed in *Soviet Propaganda Alert*? Here are some examples. In the first number of the newsletter, there is information presented as “Soviet propaganda” by the USIA, which claims that the US wanted to ‘*wage economic warfare against the USSR*’ with the objective of destroying its economy.<sup>313</sup> Now, from many sources, one can understand that, in reality, this information was true, as it was actually a strategy of the Reagan administration to bring the Soviets to the limit and crush their economic system by forcing them into an unrestrained arms race.<sup>314</sup> As for the famous Reagan’s project *Star Wars*, or the SDI, which stressed Gorbachev so much until the point when he started questioning himself whether it was just a bluff<sup>315</sup>, well, apparently it was more a tool of “immediate psychological pressure”<sup>316</sup> more than anything else: ‘*the U.S government’s bluff about Star Wars was a part of another round in the high-stakes propaganda poker game*’.<sup>317</sup>

Then there is the Central American issue. Inside the sixth number of *Soviet Propaganda Alert* there was a supposition, made presumably by TASS English, that the US was ‘*anxious to sustain the current “repressive” regimes in Guatemala and Honduras [...] to have bases for launching subversion against revolutionary Nicaragua*’.<sup>318</sup> According to Federico Romero, due to the impossibility of opening a direct war with Nicaragua to overthrow its “Communist” government, since the Congress would never be approved it after El Salvadorian crisis, the Reagan administration started a series of clandestine operations to provide arms to the opposition troops, Contras, which then would attack the country from Honduras. At last, it became a real war. Furthermore, the US government willingly supported the authoritarian regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala – the former

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, p. 294, 298-299.

<sup>313</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 1, 15.10.1981, in RoPT, p. 187, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>314</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 77-79.

<sup>315</sup> V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, University of North Carolina Press, United States, 2009, p. 287.

<sup>316</sup> H. Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Cornell University Press, United States, 2016, p. 89.

<sup>317</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 125.

<sup>318</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 6, 26.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 134, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

had been as well included inside the fifth issue of *Soviet Propaganda Alert* as another Soviet “accusation” of the American imperialistic ambitions<sup>319</sup> -, which silenced the opposition movements inside the countries through violence and physical threats, those “regimes” would eventually produce thousands of victims among civilians – 70.000 would be counted only in El Salvador.<sup>320321</sup>

The last one, not a “half-truth” that could serve as an example would be the Grenadian issue. It is mentioned on at least two occasions inside the Project Truth’s counter-propaganda newsletter. Inside the second number, issued on November 27, 1981, so way before the operation would start, the Soviets had allegedly written ‘*the U.S. plans to invade the Caribbean nation of Grenada*’,<sup>322</sup> at this point it would be useful to remind that the “invasion” of Grenada by the American troops happened on October 25, 1983. Then there is the eighteenth number, dated January 31, 1984, which reported the situation several months after the given event happened, by ‘*denouncing the “brazen aggression” on the part of the U.S.*’, additionally, the Reagan administration was supposedly charged for spreading “international terrorism”.<sup>323</sup> Alvin Snyder suggests that the Pentagon imposed news blackout while the operation was going on, so it was impossible to have a complete picture of the story. It was reported though, that the US Marines ‘*had stormed the Soviet Embassy in Grenada, killed several civilians, and confiscated records, including films*’. Among the casualties, there were 19 marines, 71 Cuban construction workers, and 110 Grenadian soldiers.<sup>324</sup> So, it turns out also this story was not that far from true.

At last, was all of the information reported in Soviet Propaganda Alert just “Soviet propaganda”? – No. - Was it all true? – Neither. There are some great exaggerations made up by the Soviets which are pure invention, like that the unrest in Poland in the early 80s was all a fault of the Western intelligence agencies, as well as the whole “poisonous

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<sup>319</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 5, 26.3.1982, in RoPT, p. 146, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>320</sup> F. Romero, *La storia della guerra fredda*, Einaudi, Italia, 2009, p. 296.

<sup>321</sup> R. Perry, *Lost History*, The Media Consortium Arlington, United States, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>322</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 2, 27.11.1981, in RoPT, p. 175, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>323</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, No. 18, 31.1.1984, p. 8, available online at <https://archive.org/details/CIA-RDP86M00886R001000030015-5/page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>324</sup> A. A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, Arcade Publishing, New York, United States, 2012, p. 79.

mosquitoes” story and many others.<sup>325326</sup> Nonetheless, there were still many pieces of information that were not that far from being truths or were such indeed, like the examples made above, which are only a few but there are many others “half-truths” which had been unfairly classified just as “propaganda” without any further explanation by the USIA.

As for the depiction that the USIA made of the USSR in Project Truth, it almost always follows specific ends of Washington’s foreign policy, which needed to highlight the Soviet dangerousness to justify its initial military build-up, anti-Soviet position, and its necessity of bringing it to disarmament negotiations by preserving a certain amount of advantage for the US. Once these objectives were overcome and the administration decided to lighten its approach, after 1983, Project Truth was no longer required. Its assumptions about the Soviet citizens’ way of thinking and picturing the West could have been only assumptions since there were no official surveys available upon which they could base their thesis. The same goes for Project Truth’s claim, inside the previously analyzed number of *Problems of Communism*, that the USSR is ready to pull the trigger for first, there was no confirmation from the part of the Soviet representatives, nor any kind of official document of the Soviet military corps provided to make such allegations credible.

In conclusion, it can be added that Project Truth’s portrait of the Soviet Union was not neutral, and it was done to serve a certain aim of the White House. There was undoubtedly a considerable amount of research behind it to make it sound as reasonable as it was possible, though it is not positively classifiable as a reliable or informative source, but rather a counterpropaganda tool. Still, it remains a useful artifact of the image the Reagan administration had, or wanted project, of the USSR, which at the same time was a result of its hard-liner policy.

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<sup>325</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 3, 11.1.1982, in RoPT, p. 168-169, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.

<sup>326</sup> USICA, *Soviet Propaganda Alert*, n. 7, 30.4.1982, in RoPT, p. 121-122, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ProjectTRUTH>.



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