Public Relations of the Cold War

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As an overarching theme of the period between 1945 and 1989, the Cold War still attracts scholars who study the ideological conflict from various angles. One aspect that has increasingly received attention in recent years is the way the Cold War functioned as a background for international activities in the field of culture and communication. Looking at cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and international propaganda campaigns thus provides new insights into developments that emerged in the context of the Cold War but often still influence today's world. What has received less attention, however, was how Cold War policies were 'sold' to national constituencies. The conference „Public Relations of the Cold War", held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at Cambridge University and convened by Hannah Higgin, Mark Miller, Martin Albers and Chen Zhong Zhong, had the aim to look at this process of how Cold War policies were communicated to the home front. One particular objective was to focus on controversial government actions that contradicted the ideological foundations of both camps. Nearly all major actors during the Cold War claimed to act in the name of the values of the enlightenment, namely peace, democracy and justice. In reality, however, the struggle with political enemies often required actions that did not at all correspond to these values.

How these contradictions were approached by governments in the field of sports and culture was the topic of the first panel. UMBERTO TULLI (Bologna) highlighted how human rights advocates helped President Carter to justify the Olympic boycott of 1980 at a moment when many Americans believed that a US participation could serve as a peaceful way to show the superiority of the West, following the American Ice-Hockey victory over the Soviets in the „Miracle on Ice" in early 1980. By turning the public attention from the conflict of Afghanistan that had initially led to the boycott decision, Carter could successfully claim that this was the only way to defend the moral standards of the United States and its allies. Looking at a very different period, TIM CROOK (London) showed how a democratic socialist like George Orwell served as a witness against communism. By comparing the two first radio adaptations of Orwell's „1984" in the US and in Britain, Crook argued that Orwell consciously accepted that his anti-totalitarian classic was used as anti-Soviet propaganda. The third paper, given by CHRISTOS LYNTERIS (Cambridge), took the audience to Cultural Revolution China and provided new insights in how the Chinese Communists defended the break with their former public allies in the field of medicine. Since Western medicine was associated with the Soviet experts that had helped to build the People's Republic in the 1950s, a successful 'Maoist' cancer surgery could serve as an occasion to highlight the superiority of the Chairman's thought and strategy.

American interventions abroad, still a very controversial issue in today's news, were in the focus of the second panel. Despite George Washington's famous recommendations not to meddle with the affairs of far-away countries in his farewell address, the US repeatedly sent troops overseas in order to enforce their power, particularly during the Cold War. Especially when such operations appear to fail, they quickly become serious liabilities to the governments in office who turn to various strategies in order not to lose domestic support. One such strategy was pointed out by SIMON TONER (London) who argued that the decision of the Nixon-Administration to hire Sir Robert Thompson, a British intelligence officer with substantial experience in the Malaya campaign was to associate its Vietnam policy with the successful British counter-insurgency of the 1950s. This move also aimed at creating the impression that the difficulties in Vietnam would be overcome by professionalising the Indochina-policy with the help of people like Thompson. STEVEN CASEY (London) also dealt with the Viet-

nam War in his paper, showing how the experience of the Korean War led to the publication of high casualty figures in the 1960s and 1970s. These had the objective of maintaining the public's confidence in the armed forces' commitment to transparency but paradoxically had the opposite effect of undermining public support for the war. CINDY MAY (Cambridge) then turned to the more recent American interventions in Iran in 1979 and Libya in 1986, showing how the aim of creating an image of strong leadership at home influenced decision making by the Carter and Reagan administrations. Such considerations not only played a role in the interventions carried out but also in planning attacks that eventually were not carried out.

The following panel moved away from the Anglo-American context to look at how PR and propaganda were used in communist one-party systems. The speakers of this panel challenged widely held notions about an alleged one-way flow of propaganda in dictatorships, showing that the interaction with the public was often rather complex. In his study of how the Chinese leadership prepared the public for the turnaround in Sino-American relations in 1971, YI GUOLIN (Detroit) showed that top- and mid-range cadres were often given a rather objective picture of the actual diplomatic situation whereas media that addressed the general public were laden with ideological justifications. VACLAV SMIDRKAL (Prague) discussed the attempts of the Czech government to improve the public image of its border policy by referring to symbols of Czech patriotism from the nineteenth century. He argued that such campaigns were rather successful as the government managed to recruit thousands of volunteer helpers to support the paramilitary border-guards. In the panel's final paper, MARTIN DEUERLEIN (Tübingen) looked at how the terms Public Relations and propaganda can be related to the context of the Soviet policy in Afghanistan during the 1980s. He challenged the view that there was no interaction between a public sphere and the state in the Soviet Union and similar systems, proposing that it is possible and necessary to pay more attention to Soviet public opinion by using sources such as intelligence reports, jokes and dissident groups' pamphlets.

Panel four looked at how Public Relations were employed in the context of the declining British Empire from the 1950s onwards. SCOTT ANTHONY (Cambridge) presented the Aims of Industry campaign to instil pro-free market values in the British public and its links to pre-1945 government programmes. CHRISTIAN SCHLAEPFER (Cambridge) also dealt with the contradictions between left-wing welfare state policies on the one hand and the necessity of British governments to show a clear anti-communist stance by looking at the purge of the British civil service from communists under Labour after 1945. In the following paper ROUVEN KUNSTMANN (Oxford) displayed the importance of Cold War images in the formation of nationalist identities in the colonial press of the 1950s in Africa.

The next panel looked at Cold War Public Relations in the context of Western Europe, taking up the issues of asymmetric power relations and European attempts to define national sovereignty in the context of superpower confrontation. SÖREN PHILIPPS (Hanover) showed the vast extent of covert activities by the Adenauer government in the FRG to raise support for Germany's rearmament in the 1950s and 1960s, often using propaganda specialists that had been trained under Hitler. This was followed by MARIANNE ROSTGAARD's (Aalborg) paper on how Denmark tried to reconcile Cold War embargo policies with domestic interests in trade with the Eastern Bloc. In the final paper SANDRA BOTT (Lausanne) and JANNICK SCHAUFENBUEHL (Lausanne) approached the question of Swiss neutrality during the Cold War, showing how the country's council of ministers went at great length to cover up its pro-western policies in such fields as arms exports or financial service activities in South Africa.

The last day again largely dealt with the Anglo-American context, beginning with panel six on the role of Public Relations in the field of intelligence and defence. The first paper, presented by GILES SCOTT-SMITH (Leiden), looked at Western European attempts to coordinate intelligence activities and covert propaganda through the creation

of the Interdoc-network and the difficulties Interdoc had in finding effective partners in Britain. JERRY LEMBCKE (Worcester, MA) raised the question of how non-representative images of pacifists spitting on US soldiers had become disseminated in the American public from the 1970s onwards to discredit opposition to the Vietnam War and militarism in the US. The much debated issue of popularising the Vietnam War was also discussed by STEVEN TREIBLE (London) who used the example of the Linebacker II campaign to show how a military operation that was supposed to be efficiently and professionally planned became a public relations failure at the home front.

Since most research on the history of government PR has been done in the US, the final panel of the conference raised the question for the role of propaganda in the formation of an American identity during the Cold War. TIM BORSTELMANN (Lincoln) showed how the underlying values of what was to be defended as „American" against the communist challenge changed during the Cold War. Whereas social differentiation and tradition – including racial discrimination – had been perceived as positive aspects of American society, these were replaced by egalitarian liberalism from the 1960s onwards. In this argument, the Cold War led to a shift in the public appreciation of two definitions of collective identity that had been present in American society since before independence. The interaction between Cold War propaganda and American self-images was also a topic of KENNETH OSGOOD's (Golden) paper on the Crusade for Freedom. He showed that the fund-raising campaign to support Radio Free Europe reached millions of people through commercials, newspaper advertisements and other channels. But since the actual contribution to the costs of Radio Free Europe remained minimal, Osgood argued that the real objective of the campaign was to popularise America's role in leading the „free world". In the conference's final paper, DAVID GREENBERG (Newark) raised the question of the role of government Public Relations in democratic societies. Asking why propaganda was generally regarded as negative, he argued that communicating policies to the public and presenting them in a positive light was a normal and necessary part of the political process, particularly during the Cold War.

Thanks to a range of distinguished academics who chaired panels and gave comments, including David Reynolds, Sarah Snyder, Kristina Spohr-Readman and Andrew Preston, a lively debate developed that helped to connect the papers with research in other fields and raise questions for further inquiry. Covering a wide range of topics and areas, the conference showed that the state of research in the field of government PR still is particularly developed on subjects related to the United States and Britain. But by bringing together researchers who work in this field with scholars looking at similar question in the European, Asian or African contexts, the debate went well beyond the often rather narrow geographical focus. Though highlighting the importance of the Cold War as a background for government activity before 1989, the conference also displayed that many of the developments studied have to be seen in a broader perspective ranging from the formation of modern political concepts of identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to today's media environment. It seems that these two trajectories of research – linking the research on the US and the UK with new studies on other regions on the one hand and questioning the impact of the Cold War as a framework for historical periodisation on the other – need further investigation in the future. But thanks to the participants and the financial support of CRASSH, the Faculty of History of the University of Cambridge and the Department of International History at the London School of Economics, the conference was an important step in this direction.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Sports and Culture

Umberto Tulli: Selling the Olympic Boycott. The Carter Administration, the American Public and the Decision to Boycott the Moscow Olympic Games

Tim Crook: George Orwell - Cold War Radio Warrior?

Christos Lynteris: 'Revolutionary scalpels': Sino-Soviet conflict and the battle over social-

ist medicine in the People's Republic of China

Panel 2: PR under Communism

Yi Guolin: Turning the Enemy into Your Friend: the Chinese Preparation for Rapprochement with the United States

Václav Šmidrkal: Sealed off from the West: Public Relations of the Czechoslovak Border Policy (1948–1989)

Ned Richardson-Little: Making Human Rights Socialist: The GDR Committee for Human Rights, 1959-1990

Panel 3: selling extra-European intervention

Simon Toner: 'What is it that we have to sell?': Sir Robert Thompson, Richard Nixon and Vietnamization, 1969-1973

Rouven Kunstmann: Cold War Images and the Imperial Press – British Journalism in the Colonies

Martin Deuerlein: 'On the Events in Afghanistan': Strategies to justify the invasion of Afghanistan to the Soviet public, 1979-1989

Keynote: Arne Westad

_Panel 4: Taking sides: CW PR in Western Europe§

Sören Philipps: 'Reptile Fund' and 'Working Committee of Democratic Circles' (AdK)1. How Adenauer 'sold' West German Rearmament to pacifist German public

Marianne Rostgaard: David against Goliath and other stories of how Denmark disciplined the US and outsmarted the USSR during the early years of the cold war

Sandra Bott and Jannick Schaufenbuehl: Taking sides while claiming neutrality: The Swiss Government's Cold War discourse

Scott Anthony: 'Tate not state': The Aims of Industry and 'British' public relations in the cold war

Panel 5: Military and Intelligence and the use of PR

Steven Casey: The U.S. Military & Cold War Public Relations: The Reporting of Combat Casualties during the Korean and Vietnam Wars

Giles Scott-Smith: The Challenge of Coexistence: The West European Intelligence Services, Anti-Communism, and Interdoc

Jerry Lembcke: 'Spat-on Veterans and „Hanoi Jane„': Lost-war Betrayal Themes from Vietnam in American Political Culture Today

Keynote: Christopher Andrew (University of Cambridge)

Panel 7: Cold War and the search for an American identity

Tim Borstelmann: From Hierarchical Conservatism to Egalitarian Liberalism: The Cold War and the Struggle for American Identity

Kenneth Osgood: The Crusade for Freedom and the Selling of the Cold War: Advertising, Intelligence, and the Making of the Cold War Consensus in the United States

David Greenberg: The Propaganda Myth: American Anxieties about Political Persuasion During the Cold War

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