

**CONTAINING LIBERATION: THE US COLD WAR  
STRATEGY TOWARDS EASTERN EUROPE AND  
THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1956**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the nature and significance of US strategy towards Eastern Europe between 1945 and the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Tension between the ideological goal of liberating the USSR's satellite regimes and geopolitical considerations restrained American policy, perpetuating a fluctuation between containment and liberation.

America embarked on a liberation policy under Harry Truman and strategists such as George Kennan, Charles Bohlen and Paul Nitze. Adopting salient strategic reviews like NSC 20/4 and NSC 68, policy oscillated between containment and liberation in response to external developments like Jozip Tito's defection, the Soviet nuclear bomb, the rise of Mao Ze Dong and the Korean War.

Proponents of political-psychological warfare during Dwight Eisenhower's administration like John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, Frank Wisner and C. D. Jackson struggled to resolve the tension between ideology and geopolitics ultimately paralysing the US ability to roll back communism. Joseph Stalin's death, the East German uprising and the Hungarian revolution illustrated Washington's impotence.

History fallaciously demarcates the death of liberation post-Hungary. Although Washington rejected its existing strategy, the long-term goal was not relinquished. Eastern European policy adapted to geopolitical limitations, through coexistence and liberalisation. Liberation shifted to the Developing World under the slogan 'nation-building.'

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**CIA**, Central Intelligence Agency  
**CIG**, Central Intelligence Group  
**Cominform**, Communist Information Bureau  
**DCI**, Director of Central Intelligence  
**EDC**, European Defence Community  
**ERP**, European Recovery Program  
**FRG**, Federal Republic of Germany  
**GDR**, German Democratic Republic  
**ICBM**, Inter-continental ballistic missile  
**JCS**, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
**MIT**, Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
**NATO**, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  
**NCFE**, National Committee for a Free Europe  
**NSC**, National Security Council  
**OCB**, Operations Coordinating Board  
**OPC**, Office of Policy Coordination  
**OSP**, Office of Special Projects  
**PPS**, Policy Planning Staff  
**PSB**, Psychological Strategy Board  
**PUSD**, Permanent Under-Secretary's Department (British)  
**RFE**, Radio Free Europe  
**RIAS**, Radio in the American Sector  
**RL**, Radio Liberation (renamed Radio Liberty)  
**SIS**, Secret Intelligence Service (British)  
**SPG**, Special Procedures Group  
**USIA**, United States Information Agency  
**VFC**, Volunteer Freedom Corps  
**VOA**, Voice of America

# INTRODUCTION

The decade following the cataclysmic Second World War has widely been recognised as a salient period of historical development. Its significance stems from the dramatic shift of geopolitical influence from old power bases to new that occurred on a global scale following the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945. Historical attention has naturally emphasised the new centres of power that emerged in the post-war world, the United States and Soviet Union, because these two nations and relations between them represented the most influential forces shaping the character of the modern world.

The international conduct of nations is not solely governed by geopolitical considerations of military security and political and economic influence. The presence of ideology in the course of foreign affairs is as universal and timeless as that of geopolitics. The beliefs and aspirations of nation states and cultures have always had as integral a part in influencing international behaviour as the tangible, practical factors that limit or motivate actions. Ideology and geopolitics are inseparable strains that constitute the composition of foreign policy, but the dynamic between them is not necessarily complementary. The tension between ideological aspirations reflecting a nation's ideas, values and beliefs and the geopolitical interests that comprise its strategic and security interests in economic, political and military power have often created difficulties in the running of foreign affairs. It is common for one element to either restrict the other or demand of it a contradictory objective.

American foreign policy has been no exception, combining geopolitical considerations with a significant ideological strain. The United States has traditionally been motivated in its international conduct by its economic and security needs, and also

the preservation of its political and economic principles at home and their projection abroad where possible. Accordingly, when America entered the Second World War President Franklin Roosevelt stipulated not only wartime military objectives but also post-war political goals in the Atlantic Charter of 1941. Based on the American principle of representative government and free elections, Roosevelt established that the “right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live”<sup>1</sup> would become a primary political objective during the post-war reconstruction of Europe. The Yalta “Declaration of Liberated Europe” marked Roosevelt’s efforts to forge a consensus among his wartime British and Russian allies that the American political vision for post-war Europe based on the Atlantic Charter principle of democracy would later be implemented.

However, the efforts of Roosevelt and then Truman to implement the Atlantic Charter and “Declaration of Liberated Europe” were complicated by restrictive geopolitical factors. During 1945 it became increasingly clear that the principles at the heart of US policy were at odds both with British and more seriously Russian plans. The application of the Declaration therefore represented the first test of the ability of the peacetime Truman administration to overcome restrictive practical factors in favour of its ideologically-rooted political agenda, not only for Europe but a new global order. Such a system would replace the former international order based on spheres of influence and power politics. Yet the new system based on international cooperation with a collective security organisation at its heart would require Soviet consent if it was to be successfully applied to Eastern Europe.

This study examines the ensuing conflict that evolved out of the fundamental ideological and geopolitical differences between the US and USSR from the perspective of American policy-makers. It aims to illustrate that Eastern Europe became an arena of primary significance in highlighting the antagonisms between the US and USSR as both sides disputed the primacy of their interests and projected their divergent values onto the region in the post-war era. Furthermore, the Eastern European theatre revealed the tensions within American foreign policy between its geopolitical power and ideological ambitions. This tension created antagonistic forces with which foreign policy had to cope and adapt under the shadow of increasingly powerful modern weaponry.

Historical analysis of the topic has grown in recent years, providing much needed modification to traditional accounts of America's role in the evolution of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> However, more recent studies have tended to emphasis either the geopolitical or the ideological factors that shaped the America's covert offensive against the Soviet bloc, thereby separating the philosophy of 'containment' from that of 'liberation.' This has involved a false dissociation in the historical analysis reducing one element in favour of the other. In fact the complex inter-relationship between ideology and geopolitics persistently influenced the course of US policy between 1946 and 1956 in the Soviet satellites. Despite inferior geopolitical influence, the post-war administrations of Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower waged an ideological and political warfare campaign against the Soviet Union shifting between containment and liberation objectives as it was affected by internal and external factors. The Hungarian revolution of late 1956 represents a symbolic culmination of this challenge to Soviet primacy in the region. The impact and significance of the revolution upon Washington's foreign policy

bureaucracy, its outlook and operations, and not the internal events themselves, constitute the primary focus of this study.

Chapter 1 of the thesis discusses the genesis of the conflict over Eastern Europe with the evolution of the Truman administration's policy from a peacetime to a Cold War basis and the subsequent emergence of tensions in strategic thinking between ideology and geopolitics. Chapter 2 examines the shifting nuances of policy in the final three years of Democratic office as developing external geopolitical factors affected the foundations of US strategy. Chapter 3 studies the Republican assumption of the struggle, with the Eisenhower administration's renewed commitment to the region and the oscillation of policy between containment and liberation between 1953 and 1956. Finally, Chapter 4 incorporates the events of 1956 as they led up to the Hungarian revolution, analysing the symbolic terminal point of America's efforts to liberate the region. The conclusion draws on the significance of US efforts and objectives during the post-war decade and assesses the historical record that has come to define the Hungarian revolution as the final vanquisher of liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bennet Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York and London, 1991), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Salient examples of traditional historical accounts of the early Cold War period include Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume Two 1952-1969 (London and Sydney, 1984), Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (Oxford and New York, 1997), Robert Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York and Oxford, 1981), John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford and New York, 1982), *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997), and Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York, 1982). Important texts that have revised the portrayal of US policy towards the Soviet Union and its satellites between the end of World War Two and the Hungarian revolution include Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston and New York, 2000), Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (London, 1997), Bennet Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York, 1991), Ronald R. Krebs, *Dueling Visions: US Strategy toward Eastern Europe Under Eisenhower* (2001), W. Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The US Crusade against the Soviet Union 1945-1956* (Manchester, 1999), and Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca and London, 2000).

# 1

## CONFRONTING THE KREMLIN

### *The Truman Administration and Post-War Eastern European Strategy*

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War America's ideological objective of establishing a global political system based on representative government and free elections was constrained by geopolitical factors. At Yalta in February 1945 President Roosevelt had hoped to secure the agreement of Marshall Stalin and Prime Minister Churchill to apply the US political programme based on the Atlantic Charter and enshrined in the "Declaration of Liberated Europe." When he returned to the US Roosevelt proudly announced the Declaration, framing its formulation in an atmosphere of "unanimous agreement" and "a unity of thought."<sup>1</sup> However, from the point of announcing the Declaration it became increasingly apparent that each of the Allied powers had independent and divergent foreign policy agendas. Compromises made with Stalin at Yalta had left the American political framework of self-determination without the machinery to ensure its implementation.

Following Yalta the Soviet Union pursued its own policy objectives based on establishing "friendly governments" on its borders. The political reality playing itself out was that Stalin was disinterested in America's abstract principles of "free" political systems and was determined to ensure that basic Soviet security requirements were met. Stalin believed that, just as the US claimed to have a special interest in Latin America, Russia should be protected by a security ring of pro-Moscow states along its frontiers.<sup>2</sup>

Stalin preferred the notorious ‘percentages’ agreement made with Churchill in Moscow in October 1944 based on the traditional system of Great Power spheres of influence to any conceptual American plan that did not guarantee fundamental Soviet security needs. Because the Declaration failed to establish sufficient implementing mechanisms as the war was coming to an end the military situation also gave Stalin a superior position in Eastern Europe from which to impose his own policy objectives. As the Wehrmacht receded the Red Army filled the power vacuum in the former Axis satellites of Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, as well as much of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia. In these countries local Communist governments were rapidly established and despite Anglo-American demands for representative interim governments based on the Atlantic Charter principles enshrined at Yalta, the geopolitical reality on the ground overruled western political and ideological preference.

In response to the emergence of Soviet-backed Communist police states throughout Eastern Europe the US stringently refused to accept Soviet violations of the Yalta agreements. Following Roosevelt’s death in April the Truman government failed to adapt to the political situation by seeking a compromise, resulting in a diplomatic impasse that was glossed over at the Potsdam Conference in July but was fully apparent to the public by the time of the Council of Foreign Ministers meetings in London and Moscow later in the year. By the end of 1945 minority unrepresentative Communist regimes had been established in every Eastern European country except Czechoslovakia, infuriating western diplomats that the Soviets had brazenly violated the terms of the “Declaration of Liberated Europe” agreed to at Yalta.

It was in this atmosphere of deteriorating relations and a stubborn refusal to compromise on both sides that the US became increasingly suspicious of Soviet intentions. The failure, beginning at Yalta, to avoid Europe dividing into two camps was entrenched by deep US suspicions of a wider significance to Soviet actions in Eastern Europe. As early as April 1945 US Ambassador in Moscow W. Averell Harriman was describing Soviet expansion as a “barbarian invasion of Europe” manifesting a “threat to the world and to us.” Harriman explained that the threat came not from the establishment of satellite states in Eastern Europe, but from the intention to expand further that he believed Soviet action illustrated:

“Russia is building a tier of friendly states [in Eastern Europe] and our task is to make it difficult for her to do so, since to build one tier of states implies the possibility of further tiers, layer on layer.”<sup>3</sup>

Over the next year US strategists, drawn towards the perception that Moscow was perfidiously expansionist, reached a general consensus that Soviet momentum should be confronted and checked. This stemmed from nervous interpretations of Soviet actions as increasingly ominous signals of the aggressive nature of the communist system. Stalin’s speech on February 9 1946 announcing a reversion to the Five Year Plans of the 1930s precipitated alarm bells. The State Department’s George Kennan wrote his influential Long Telegram from Moscow in response to the speech. Kennan did not interpret it in realist terms as an announcement of economic measures to reconstruct Russia’s post-war infrastructure. Instead he highlighted the belligerent ideological aspects of the speech in which Stalin claimed the “USSR still lives in antagonistic “capitalist encirclement” with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence.” This perfectly illustrated the symbolic threat now posed by Moscow. Although the basis of Soviet actions was a “traditional and

instinctive Russian sense of insecurity” Kennan proceeded to describe an ideologically-driven movement dedicated to expansion and absolute global power:

In summary, we have here a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure.

Kennan’s perspective necessitated a major theoretical leap in judging Soviet intentions, overemphasising the ideological premise of the Marxist-Leninist objective of global hegemony rather than balancing it with a realist evaluation of power politics. He argued that the desperate situation in war-torn Europe made US action urgent and that the scope of the threat necessitated the equivalent mobilisation of resources as in times of war.<sup>4</sup>

US fears were enhanced by Churchill’s speech on March 5 at Fulton, Missouri when he publicly articulated the growing perception of expanding Soviet power:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.<sup>5</sup>

Churchill’s reading of the nature and threat of Soviet expansion was consistent with Kennan’s hypothesis. Convinced that Soviet actions were symptomatic of long-term hegemonic objectives, Truman’s circle now interpreted Soviet actions beyond Eastern Europe as vindicating their suspicions. The continued presence of Soviet garrisons in Northern Iran in March 1946 appeared to justify American anxiety. Although US influence was extremely limited in Eastern Europe, Washington resolved to protect areas where it could exert its geopolitical power against Soviet interference. Western

pressure soon persuaded Stalin to withdraw Soviet troops from Iran but, consistent with Kennan's hypothesis, this illustrated not a willingness to cooperate with the West but rather the amenability of Soviet designs to force alone.

In July Truman instructed special counsel Clark Clifford to compile a list of examples of Stalin renegeing on his agreements. George Elsey joined Clifford and expanded the study to investigate Soviet aims. The report then compiled the judgements of all the major governmental departments including State, War, the Central Intelligence Group (CIG) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Handed to Truman on September 24, its conclusions represented the first inter-departmental consensus-building document of the Cold War.

The Clifford-Elsey report stated that America's "gravest problem" was its relationship with the USSR and concurred that the basis of the threat was ideological as well as military. The situation was so serious that it "may determine whether or not there will be a third World War." The combination of ideological fanaticism and geopolitical power proved that the Soviet leadership was pursuing "a course of aggrandizement designed to lead to eventual world domination by the U.S.S.R." Adhering to Kennan's interpretation, ideology based on the "Marxian theory of ultimate destruction of capitalist states by communist states" motivated Moscow's behaviour. The USSR's growing geopolitical power gave it the potential means to protect and consolidate its own security and adopt an opportunistic and flexible foreign policy of expansion. The report concluded that the "Kremlin acknowledges no limit to the eventual power of the Soviet Union" thereby posing an immediate threat to American security. This was further augmented by Moscow's belief in the inevitability of a war between East and West:

A direct threat to American security is implicit in Soviet foreign policy which is designed to prepare the Soviet Union for war with the leading capitalistic nations of the world.

The paper recommended US courses of action that became predominant in the evolving policy. Washington “should support and assist all democratic countries which are in any way menaced or endangered by the USSR” in order to prevent the successful opportunistic growth of communism into liberal societies. The provision of military aid “in case of attack” was deemed “a last resort” with direct economic intervention preferred to constitute “a more effective barrier to communism.”<sup>6</sup>

Truman was deeply impressed by the study.<sup>7</sup> The consensus in Washington was solidifying that the post-war Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was the manifestation of an intrinsically hostile ideological force. Ideology was becoming increasingly enmeshed with power politics. Entangling security strategy with its ideological perspective of international relations, Eastern Europe represented a paradox in US policy. Although Washington essentially consigned secondary geopolitical importance to the region, its symbolic significance contributed greatly to the deterioration of relations between the wartime allies. Washington’s rhetorical commitment to the rectitude of Western democracy shaped its interpretation of Moscow’s expansion as an antagonistic development representing the fate awaiting Western Europe and eventually the United States if allowed to proceed unchecked.

As early as 1946 therefore, US policy was moving beyond simply containing the USSR. Washington’s gravitation towards a strategy confining Soviet expansion within its present limits represented the limitations of geopolitical power. It did not represent a restriction of its ideological ambitions. While hoping to avoid a direct confrontation with Moscow and general war, Washington had reconciled ideological ambitions and geopolitical restraints into a confrontational strategy. The opportunity

to demonstrate this position came with Stalin's request for a Soviet presence in the Dardanelles Straits. Alongside the continuing civil war in Greece, Stalin's advances appeared to illustrate subversive efforts to gain undue influence in the Mediterranean, and Washington responded with a show of strength to deter any unilateral Soviet moves.

Truman then announced the decision to intervene in the Greek civil war. The unrest was framed as another Soviet stepping stone to global domination. The Truman Doctrine of March 1947 was not primarily significant for the military aid it offered to Greece and Turkey but for the wider ideologically-based commitment that it represented. Intervention was founded on the decision to challenge global communist expansion, rather than on the strategic importance of the countries in question. The 'loss' of Greece or Turkey to an engorged Soviet Russia would directly threaten American geopolitical interests, particularly in the Middle East and Western Europe. It would also pose an ideological threat to the value-system and institutions of the 'free world'. The infection of Western Europe could not be allowed, resulting in an unprecedented peacetime commitment to safeguard America's regional interests.

The Truman administration adopted a second means of containing communism following the recommendations of the Clifford-Elsey report, with economic intervention in Europe. In April Secretary of State George C. Marshall created the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) to design a European Recovery Program (ERP). The urgent humanitarian need to rebuild war-torn Europe through emergency economic relief also offered the US Government a means to politically stabilise parts of the continent not under Soviet control. Geopolitical and ideological interests complemented each other in rebuilding Western Europe's infrastructure and defending its free institutions from the insidious designs of communism. Economic

instability was regarded as a principal catalyst for the spread of communism so the injection of US aid could serve a double purpose by rebuilding and protecting Western Europe's economic and political institutions

ERP aid was offered to the Eastern European governments and the Soviet Union as well. The PPS anticipated that Moscow would compel its satellites to reject the aid package because "the Russian satellite countries would either exclude themselves by unwillingness to accept the proposed conditions or agree to abandon the exclusive orientation of their economies."<sup>8</sup> The conditions attached to ERP compelled the recipient countries to integrate into the US-led capitalist economic system. Soviet acceptance of these conditions would therefore enhance US ambitions of westernising the Soviet bloc politically and economically. The more likely scenario was that the Eastern bloc would reject the offer. This was also regarded as consistent with containment because Moscow would be compelled to assume sole economic responsibility for its satellites while its war-torn economy was still recovering. The ERP therefore represented an early example of political warfare in the Cold War by using economic means to indirectly place greater strains on the international communist system, thereby hindering further Soviet expansion.

The implementation of the Marshall Plan prompted Washington to seek ways to safeguard its economic investments. Strategists feared that France and Italy would succumb to legal communist advances in democratic elections to be held before US aid would bring stability. Now head of the PPS, Kennan suggested political warfare was the answer. The National Security Council (NSC) adopted NSC 1/3 which mobilised a covert propaganda campaign to strengthen the non-communist political parties in France and Italy. Political warfare could help to prevent a chain-reaction of

communist electoral victories in the rest of the Western bloc by preventing precedent gains:

With Communist control of France and Italy established, Communist influence might be expected to increase rapidly in other Western European countries and avenues opened up for extension of Communist activities in the colonial world from Dakar to Saigon. West Germany would become an untenable island in a Communist sea.<sup>9</sup>

“[C]overt psychological operations” were therefore formally established as a component of US foreign policy with Truman’s approval of NSC 4-A in December 1947.<sup>10</sup>

The rationale for adopting a policy beyond the containment of Soviet expansion further than Eastern Europe had been fed by the consolidation of Soviet power through local Communist Party domination of all the Eastern European governments (except Czechoslovakia at this point). The nature of covert operations suggested that they could be conducted in Eastern Europe as well as France and Italy. Kennan now pressed for the expansion of containment from simply a reactive, defensive strategy. In an article published pseudonymously in *Foreign Affairs* he elaborated on the defensive aspects of containment:

[T]he United States has it in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years.

Through the consolidation of a Western bloc led by the United States, Soviet power could be contained at least within its current limits. But Kennan left ambiguous the objective in moderating Moscow’s behaviour. His presentation implied that the US should, in the long-term, take the offensive and undermine communist-dominated governments antithetical to Western democracy in the satellite regimes and ultimately the Soviet Union itself. The logical culmination of this strategy would be the

liberation of the Soviet bloc. This exposed the geopolitical dilemma that liberation would effectively mean war, so Kennan evaded the complexity and equivocally described the ultimate goal of containment as “either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.”<sup>11</sup>

Because the utopian vision of a ‘free’ Eastern Europe was increasingly seen as compatible with the overall geopolitical need to challenge Soviet power it gave greater incentive to an aggressive strategy involving political warfare. A liberated Eastern Europe would fulfil America’s vision of democratic order and enhance its security needs through the retraction and possible destruction of antagonistic Soviet military power driven by its hostile ideology. As a consequence, the CIA’s Special Procedures Group (SPG) was authorised to begin a peace-time psychological warfare campaign through propaganda radio broadcasts and balloon drops behind the Iron Curtain.

Policy debate in Washington focussed not on the necessity of containment but the scope that it should involve. Charles Bohlen, another Russian expert at the State Department, advocated the containment of Soviet power as the means to ultimately defeating Moscow and liberating the satellites. Deterrence through Western unity and preponderant strength were required in the short-term:

The array of potential strength which would be lined up against the Soviet Union and its satellites [...] will in the last analysis determine whether war will result or whether the Soviet or non-Soviet world will be able to find a *modus vivendi* which will permit some stabilisation of the world situation for at least some period of years.

However, if the global schism was “to be solved short of war, it must result in a radical and basic change in Soviet policies.”<sup>12</sup> Like Kennan, Bohlen was unwilling to recommend a military conflict with the Soviet Union in order to overcome the Soviet threat. Instead he pointed to containment as a long-term strategy to fulfil American

objectives by eventually rolling back Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. The specific process of inducing this retraction of power was left undefined, but the creation of a covert branch of government offered a means of filling the strategic vacuum.

The ERP indirectly acted as another catalyst for the advancement of political warfare. When the Soviet bloc rejected the ERP as Washington had anticipated the threat of Western encroachment on Moscow's key security interests propelled Stalin to consolidate his grip on the region. In September 1947 Andrei Zhdanov announced the establishment of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) to coordinate political warfare against the ERP and to enhance the international communist movement. Stalin then terminated any previous tolerance of democracy in Eastern Europe, drawing the satellite economies and political systems closer to Russia's. The Czech coup of February 1948 represented the final nail in the coffin for independent regimes in the region. The PPS had anticipated that the ERP might directly lead both to a hardening of the Kremlin's position and to Czechoslovakia's total absorption into the communist bloc in November 1947:

The halt in the communist advance is forcing Moscow to consolidate its hold on Eastern Europe. It will probably have to clamp down completely on Czechoslovakia. For if the political trend in Europe turns against communism, a relatively free Czechoslovakia could become a threatening salient in Moscow's political position in Eastern Europe.

Although the PPS acknowledged that this would be "a purely defensive move" in response to the threat posed by the ERP on Soviet interests, the Czech coup generated a war scare in Washington.<sup>13</sup> Marshall aid had not been intended to encourage Moscow's "gradual mellowing" and ameliorate East-West tensions, but it did not offer an alternative strategy to induce the destruction of Soviet power either.

Meanwhile Stalin had raised the stakes and consolidated local communist party control in the satellites.

The US response was to formalise the role of political warfare as the primary means of challenging communist power in Eastern Europe. NSC 7 was formulated in March 1948 in light of the Czech coup. It reiterated the Machiavellian interpretation that the “ultimate objective of Soviet-directed world communism is the domination of the world.” The proof of Soviet Russia’s “drive toward world conquest” was the expansion of Stalinist power into Eastern Europe: “It has established satellite police states in Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia.” Emphasis was placed on the ideological nature of Soviet expansion as an immoral and alien doctrine, reducing Moscow’s geopolitical motivations. Reacting to the “alarming success” of the hostile communist system, Washington concluded that “a defensive policy cannot be considered an effectual means of checking the momentum of communist expansion and inducing the Kremlin to relinquish its aggressive designs.” Instead the situation required “a world-wide counter-offensive aimed at mobilizing and strengthening our own and anti-communist forces in the non-Soviet world, and at undermining the strength of the communist forces in the Soviet world.”<sup>14</sup>

On April 30 the PPS called for “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare” to fill the operational vacuum created by an offensive strategy. Describing the Truman Doctrine and ERP as overt measures of political warfare it concluded that the “time is now fully ripe for the creation of a covert political warfare operations directorate within the Government” to employ “all the means at [the] nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.”<sup>15</sup> By the summer the electoral crises in France and Italy had been averted. The perceived success of the

covert propaganda campaign in Western Europe strengthened the impetus for transferring these tactics to the Soviet bloc and Kennan urged that “[o]ur objective now must be to obtain the retraction of Soviet power from Eastern Europe.”<sup>16</sup> Under the direction of the PPS action plan to conduct political and psychological warfare behind the Iron Curtain, NSC 4-A was superseded by NSC 10/2, giving a broad definition to covert operations:

Specifically, such operations shall include any covert activities related to: propaganda; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world.

The integration of covert operations into foreign policy illustrated Washington’s growing entanglement of ideological and geopolitical objectives. The commitment to implement its ideological objectives generated the willingness to take the offensive in the evolving entrenchment with Moscow. But geopolitical restraints also shaped the character of the offensive. NSC 10/2 included a clause conditioning political warfare on the government’s ability to “plausibly disclaim any responsibility” for clandestine operations, reflecting its wish not to escalate operations into an overt confrontation with the Kremlin.<sup>17</sup> ‘Containment’ therefore disguised an increasingly aggressive and multifaceted branch of the emerging policy towards the Soviet Union and its satellites, but it did not go so far as to commit the US to an overt military confrontation. As Lucas observes, even before the first flashpoint of the Cold War, the June Soviet blockade of access to West Berlin, America was mobilised for a covert war offensive in an effort to implement its ideological objectives in areas beyond its geopolitical sway.<sup>18</sup>

The Office of Special Projects (OSP), soon renamed the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), was established under the authority of NSC 10/2 to conduct political warfare. Operational from September 1 under the leadership of Frank Wisner, OPC immediately took up its mandate and targeted Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, conducting paramilitary and guerrilla missions as directed. Albania was the first target, and Wisner described the operation as a “clinical test” of the feasibility of rollback.<sup>19</sup> Conducted with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), the long-running operation continuously failed to overthrow Enver Hoxha’s regime (partly due to the Soviet mole Kim Philby acting as SIS liaison in Washington), yet OPC operatives remained undeterred. Albania became the first target of OPC’s many paramilitary operations aimed at developing underground resistance groups for peacetime and wartime operations involving sabotage, guerrilla warfare and “wet” kidnapping and assassination missions behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>20</sup> The failure of the Albanian test case did not prevent OPC’s rapid expansion and the spread of its political warfare campaigns across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union by 1951.<sup>21</sup>

With covert warfare operations in place Washington now reviewed policy objectives. Approved by Truman on November 23, NSC 20/4 reaffirmed the ideologically-based premise that “Communist ideology and Soviet behaviour clearly demonstrate that the ultimate objective of the leaders of the USSR is the domination of the world.” The Soviet harnessing of military power was evaluated in the context of an ideological conflict between the insatiably aggressive communist doctrine and the democratic values of the ‘free’ world. The plight of Eastern Europe was testament to Soviet malignancy, yet more alarmingly the “immediate goal of top priority since the recent war has been the political conquest of western Europe.” Soviet domination of the satellites generated an American sense of vulnerability that the US-led democratic

order of the Western bloc was imperilled, shaping NSC 20/4's general conclusions of Soviet objectives. It also reinforced the conviction that US countermeasures were necessary to challenge and ultimately defeat the Soviet threat according to certain aims:

To encourage and promote the gradual retraction of undue Russian power and influence from the present perimeter areas around traditional Russian boundaries and the emergence of the satellite countries as entities independent of the USSR.”

Liberating Eastern Europe was a fundamental part of the overall policy aimed at overcoming the communist threat but the NSC was unwilling to provide the military commitment required to achieve this aim, stipulating that objectives should be fulfilled “by methods short of war.”<sup>22</sup> Soviet military power continued to be a sufficient deterrent in an area of secondary geopolitical importance to Washington, consecrating the space for covert warfare to operate. But this exposed other strategic tensions for it was by no means certain that the limited political warfare measures designed to avoid an overt conflict would be sufficient in fulfilling America's objectives.

This generated ambiguity in the policy directives as to what lengths the US should resort to. The goal of Eastern European self-determination was consistent with the “Declaration of Liberated Europe” made at Yalta yet this had failed to induce a willingness in American statesmen to wage war against Moscow. Truman remained averse to taking the ultimate step in confronting Russian domination because Eastern Europe was peripheral to America's primary geopolitical interests. A clandestine campaign compatible with containment because it would not provoke overt war was settled on, aiming to unsettle the satellite regimes and, at best, detach them from the Soviet orbit.

In 1949 policy specific to Eastern Europe was formulated. Washington searched for a more confrontational strategy to challenge Soviet power, arguing that the “time is now ripe for us to place greater emphasis on the offensive to consider whether we cannot do more to cause the elimination or at least a reduction of predominant Soviet influence in the satellite states of Eastern Europe.” But the danger of invoking a strong response inherent in decisive US intervention in its antagonist’s sphere of influence continued to pose a dilemma:

Were we to set as our immediate goal the replacement of totalitarianism by democracy, an overwhelming portion of the task would fall on us, and we would find ourselves directly engaging the Kremlin’s prestige and provoking strong Soviet reaction, possibly in the form of war or at least in vigorous indirect aggression.<sup>23</sup>

Policy papers glossed over the fundamental tension between strategy and objectives, retaining liberation as an ultimate aim. A progress report did acknowledge the practical difficulties facing satellite governments should they seek to break away from the Soviet orbit:

There are, however, great obstacles to our making any immediate or spectacular progress toward the goal [of satellite independence] in view of the presence in those countries of Soviet armed forces as instruments of intimidation and the police power in the hands of the present satellite governments.<sup>24</sup>

But this did not alter the fundamental dilemma. The mythical feasibility of liberation without war remained the preferred means of resolving the geopolitical and ideological antagonism in the minds of US planners.

An external development did produce a shift in policy emphasis, however. Washington turned to an intermediate objective considered both feasible and less likely to result in general war when Tito publicly split from the Soviet bloc in June 1948. Tito’s defiance of Stalin was regarded by the West as an example to be encouraged on the other satellite regimes in order to unsettle Moscow’s centralised

authority. If the US was “willing that, as a first step, schismatic Communist regimes supplant the present Stalinist governments, we stand a much better chance of success.” The second step would then be to encourage “national Communist” governments to reform themselves further and align with the United States:

The problem is to facilitate the development of heretical Communism without at the same time seriously impairing our chances for ultimately replacing this intermediate totalitarianism with tolerant regimes congenial to the Western world.<sup>25</sup>

The new policy suggested a precarious balancing act between nourishing national communist regimes still linked to some degree with Moscow and supporting the promotion of pro-Western democratic governments. Washington’s new short-term objective of fostering heretical communism was as ambiguous and precarious as the long-term goal predicated on aligning Eastern Europe with the West. The extent, short of war, to which the US was willing to encourage the satellite regimes to stray towards heretical communism was unclear. Should a communist government challenge Soviet supremacy as Yugoslavia had done it would risk provoking Soviet military intervention. Presumably Western military and economic aid would be extended to an emerging national communist regime, but a consequent conflict with Russian forces attempting to reassert their authority increased the likelihood of an escalation to general war between Russia and America. This contradicted the premise that heretical communism was less likely to induce war with Russia. In any case the new strategic emphasis was not transferred to an operational shift at the working level. OPC continued to infiltrate the Soviet bloc *not* to induce modification in the target regimes and foster national communist governments but to destabilise and overthrow them completely.

Washington considered the status of Finland a second model which might be replicated elsewhere. Helsinki enjoyed the unique acceptance of both blocs in the early Cold War division of Europe. America judged the Finnish government democratically representative. In turn, Moscow viewed Helsinki as tolerably aligned to Soviet foreign policy, signing a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance in April 1948 granting the Finns autonomy over their domestic affairs.

Unlike the spread of 'Titoism' aimed at creating and exploiting internal strains in the Soviet system, the promotion of 'Finlandisation' would move the satellites into a neutral position still representing an advance for US interests. A ring of neutral countries in Eastern Europe presented a further advantage in potentially providing the double containment of Germany as well as Russia. Whereas the spread of national communism or the complete rollback of Soviet power could raise the possibility of greatly increased German power in the region, a buffer of neutral states might yield a delicate balance of power on the continent between Russia, America and Western Europe, thus negating the threat that a reunited and ascendant Germany could pose in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Although Finlandisation seemed to offer some benefits over Titoism, it implied opening a dialogue with Russia. Washington was reluctant because of its scepticism of Moscow's willingness to make genuine concessions. It believed that negotiations should only be conducted to formalise Soviet concessions once containment had successfully coerced the Kremlin into modification. In other words, they would mark the end rather than the means of US objectives:

[I]t is important to emphasize that [negotiated settlements] can only record the progress which the free world will have made in creating a political and economic system in the world so successful that the frustration of the Kremlin's design for world domination will be complete.

Negotiations before this point would only lead to the formalisation of spheres of influence:

In light of present trends, the Soviet Union will not withdraw and the only conceivable basis for a general settlement would be spheres of influence and of no influence- a “settlement” which the Kremlin could readily exploit to its great advantage.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Finnish model was discussed during Truman’s tenure, its promotion gained wider currency from 1955 when the Eisenhower administration grew more amenable to opening discussions with the Soviet leadership. The Truman administrations hard line illustrated its persistent refusal to acknowledge Eastern Europe as a Soviet sphere and the continuing determination to roll back Russian power despite the inherent practical difficulties. The shifting dynamics of the Cold War confrontation would yet influence Truman’s strategy towards Eastern Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Etheridge Davis, *The Cold War Begins: Soviet-American Conflict over Eastern Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1974), 188-9.

<sup>2</sup> It seems the US did have some understanding of Stalin's more pragmatic position at this time though it failed ultimately to influence or shift the US position. For instance, after a meeting with Stalin in May 1945 US Ambassador to the Soviet Union W. Averell Harriman reported "I am afraid Stalin does not and never will fully understand our interest in a free Poland as a matter of principle. He is a realist in all of his actions, and it is hard for him to appreciate our faith in abstract principles. It is difficult for him to understand why we should want to interfere with Soviet policy in a country like Poland, which he considers so important to Russia's security, unless we have some ulterior motive." *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-8.

<sup>4</sup> Kennan recommended that the Soviet threat "should be approached with [the] same thoroughness and care as [a] solution of major strategic problems in war, and if necessary, with no smaller outlay in planning effort." George F. Kennan, Telegraphic Message from Moscow [Long Telegram], February 22, 1946. Excerpts contained in George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, (Boston, Massachusetts, 1967), 547-559.

<sup>5</sup> Winston Churchill's landmark speech at Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946 is available at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/h.j.harris/GOB45-46/460305ic.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Excerpts from the Clifford-Elsey study "American Relations with the Soviet Union: A report to the President by the Special Counsel to the President" are available at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/h.j.harris/GOB45-46/460924.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Locking all ten copies of the report in his office Truman declared, "If this got out it would blow the roof off of the White House, it would blow the roof off the Kremlin. We'd have the most serious situation on our hands that has yet occurred in my administration." See W. Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The US Crusade against the Soviet Union 1945-1956* (Manchester, 1999), 22.

<sup>8</sup> George Kennan quoted in Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy Towards Eastern Europe 1943-1947: Universalism in an Area Not of Essential Interest to the United States* (Tromsø, Oslo and Bergen, 1978), 401.

<sup>9</sup> Report on "Soviet Intentions" prepared by the Joint Intelligence Committee, April 1, 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948, *General: The United Nations*, Volume 1, Part 2 (Washington, 1976), 555.

<sup>10</sup> NSC 4-A, December 17, 1947, in Michael Warner (Editor), *CIA Cold War Records: The CIA Under Harry Truman* (Washington, DC, 1994), 174-175.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947).

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum by Charles E. Bohlen for the Department of State, August 30, 1947, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, General: The United Nations*, Volume 1 (Washington, 1973), 765 (hereafter cited as *Foreign Relations of the United States*).

<sup>13</sup> Report by the Policy Planning Staff, PPS/13 "Resume of World Situation", November 6, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Volume 1, 770-777. NSC 68 would later describe "the destruction of Czechoslovakia" as a "shock" though this can hardly have been the case in light of this document. See NSC 68 "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security", finalised on April 14, 1950 (though not approved by Truman until after the outbreak of the Korean War), *FRUS*, 1950, *National Security Affairs: Foreign Economic Policy*, Volume I (Washington, 1977), 237-292

<sup>14</sup> NSC 7 "The Position of the United States with Respect to Soviet-Directed World Communism", March 30 1948, in Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (eds.), *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-50* (New York, 1978), 164-169.

<sup>15</sup> Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Garson, "American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Power: Eastern Europe, 1946-50", *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (July 1986), 359.

<sup>17</sup> NSC 10/2, June 18, 1948, in Warner, *CIA Cold War Records*, 213-216.

<sup>18</sup> See Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA* (New York, 1995), 38.

<sup>20</sup> OPC's unit PB-7 undertook "wet affairs" connoting kidnapping and assassination missions. See *ibid.*, 85. The primary documentation on these political warfare operations is largely still deemed too controversial by the US Government to be declassified unfortunately.

<sup>21</sup> OPC's starting budget in 1948 of \$4.7 million had grown to \$82 million three years later and burgeoned to almost \$200 million by 1952. The same year OPC had a staff of 2,812, plus 3,142 overseas contractors. See Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron*

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*Curtain* (Boston and New York, 2000), 114. Although detailed information on OPC operations largely remains classified, paramilitary operations were conducted in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, the Ukraine and Moldavia at least.

<sup>22</sup> NSC 20/4 “U.S. Objectives with Respect to the USSR to Counter Soviet Threats to U.S. Security”, November 23, 1948, in *FRUS*, 1948, Volume I, Part 2, 663-669.

<sup>23</sup> NSC 58 “United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe”, September 14, 1949, in Etzold and Gaddis (eds.), *Containment*, 211-223, NSC 58/2 “United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe”, December 8, 1949, in *FRUS*, 1949, *Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union*, Volume V (Washington, 1976), 42-54.

<sup>24</sup> NSC progress report on the implementation of NSC 58/2, February 3, 1950, *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Woodbridge), Microfiche, (1988), 3446 (hereafter cited as *Declassified Documents Reference System*).

<sup>25</sup> NSC 58 in Etzold and Gaddis (eds.), *Containment*, 211-223.

<sup>26</sup> See Ronald R. Krebs, *Dueling Visions: U.S. Strategy toward Eastern Europe under Eisenhower* (2001), 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> NSC 68, *FRUS*, 1950, Volume I, 237-292.

## NEW THREATS AND OLD THEORIES

### *The Dilemma of Liberation for the Democrats, 1950-1953*

By the end of 1949 American foreign policy was faced with new complexities. The successful Soviet test explosion of an atomic bomb had turned the premises of Washington's general strategy upside down. The greatly enhanced Soviet nuclear threat was augmented by the 'loss' of China to communism, adding conventional and symbolic power to the Eastern bloc. The Truman administration needed to balance these developments against the provocative covert war being conducted behind the Iron Curtain.

The initial response was to establish a review of US military options in light of the Soviet atomic capability. But the study's scope was soon broadened reacting to the ideological as well as the military and geopolitical threat posed by the Soviet bloc, thus expanding the scope of 'warfare' options that the US could adopt to counter it. Truman only then approved NSC 68 a year after the test explosion and Mao Ze Dong's rise, when the outbreak of the Korean War seemed to vindicate its alarming tone. The assumption was that Stalin had instigated the North Korean invasion illustrating a new boldness in Soviet tactics.

NSC 68 strayed beyond a realist geopolitical review of policy examining the impact of the loss of America's nuclear monopoly. Instead American options and objectives were contextualised within an ideological struggle in which the life or death "not only of this Republic but of civilization itself" was at stake. The principal

conflict was over ideas and not military conquest. War with the USSR, therefore, would not resolve the present antagonism:

Military victory alone would only partially and perhaps temporarily affect the fundamental conflict, for although the ability of the Kremlin to threaten our security might be for a time destroyed, the resurgence of totalitarian forces and the re-establishment of the Soviet system or its equivalent would not be long delayed unless great progress were made in the fundamental conflict.

This conclusion represented an ideological response to the geopolitical reality now facing strategists. A military conflict with the Soviet Union could not be won in the nuclear age. NSC 68 responded by depicting an ideological and political struggle that could still be won with strategic sleight of hand representing an evasion of geopolitical realities rather than a coherent shift in policy.

Having ruled out the viability of war to achieve national objectives, all measures short of war would be engaged to win the political conflict. The malignant nature of communism protected American moral virtue assuring that the “integrity of our system will not be jeopardized by any measures, covert or overt, violent or non-violent, which serve the purposes of frustrating the Kremlin design.” These measures would be directed towards the strategy of assisting the internal collapse of the Soviet system in the long-term to illustrate the superiority of US ideology:

Practical and ideological implications therefore both impel us to the conclusion that we have no choice but to demonstrate the superiority of the idea of freedom by its constructive application, and to attempt to change the world situation by means short of war in such a way as to frustrate the Kremlin design and hasten the decay of the Soviet system.<sup>1</sup>

The preoccupation with ideology stripped policy-makers of their one clear means of defeating the USSR. Washington would still strive towards liberation, but the massive military build up and development of the hydrogen bomb were not planned for this objective but to deter retaliation: “it is clear that a substantial and rapid building up of

strength in the free world is necessary to support a firm policy intended to check and to roll back the Kremlin's drive for world domination." The lengthy ruminations failed to resolve how measures short of war would force the Kremlin's hand. The definitions of containment did not clarify this, shifting from an aggressive to a defensive tone within the document.<sup>2</sup> These inconsistencies confused whether the US would, in fact, also be open to negotiations over Eastern Europe, something compatible with the purported aim of gradually retracting Soviet power without war. But instead an escalation of covert operations was called for:

Intensification of affirmative and timely measures and operations by covert means in the fields of economic warfare and political and psychological warfare with a view to fomenting and supporting unrest and revolt in selected strategic satellite countries.

The short-term intensification of operations behind the Iron Curtain was totally inconsistent with the long-term goal of inducing the peaceful withdrawal of Soviet troops, as was the incitement to revolution of Eastern Europeans. NSC 68 entangled geopolitical requirements in the context of the nuclear age with the ideological imperative of challenging communism. The requisite course of action in the context of Soviet nuclear power was absolutely incompatible with the necessary means required to roll back and defeat communism. The former demanded a lessening of international tension and disarmament talks while the latter would ultimately require war. Geopolitical limitations did not result in the abandonment of liberation, however. The advocates of an activist strategy were as determined as ever that Washington's ideological goals be retained. Moral rectitude if not geopolitical reality vindicated the course of US policy, even in the age of nuclear proliferation:

Some further argue that the free world is probably unable, except under the crises of war, to mobilize and direct its resources to the checking and rolling back of the Kremlin's drive for world dominion. This is a powerful argument in the light of history, but the considerations against war are so

compelling that the free world must demonstrate that this argument is wrong.<sup>3</sup>

OPC's operations continued to meet stiff resistance in the satellites after NSC 68's implementation. Although covert warfare heightened international tension without producing any results, the review of NSC 68 did not question the strategic soundness of America's ideological struggle over Eastern Europe. On the contrary, by August 1951 NSC 114/1 evaluated that US countermeasures were increasingly needed as the West was "already in a period of acute danger [which] will continue until the United States and its allies achieve an adequate position of strength." The Korean War combined with the growing Soviet nuclear arsenal and delivery systems would presumably allow Stalin to take ever-greater risks, so it was exponentially more propitious to place Moscow on the defensive without provoking war.

Yet policy was formulated on the premise that the Kremlin believed "an armed conflict [...] is eventually inevitable" and would "[p]revent the development of any threat to the vital interests of the U.S.S.R or to Soviet control of the satellites." US covert efforts were directed towards detaching the satellites from Soviet control, but this would provoke war according to the estimates of Soviet intentions. Essentially NSC 114/1 spelled out the impossibility of liberation without war. Yet the belief that it was morally essential perpetuated the myth that peaceful roll back was geopolitically achievable. Rather than abandon liberation, America's quest for satellite independence was intensified.<sup>4</sup>

Debate within government continued to thrash over the inconsistencies and contradictions between objectives and the covert campaign behind the Iron Curtain. There was an increasing recognition that liberation was unachievable short of war. A full-scale conflict with Russia was becoming unthinkable with the nearing of nuclear

parity, and once a preventative war had been ruled out realists like Bohlen argued that the geopolitical situation dictated negotiations and coexistence with the Eastern bloc as the only feasible option.

The government could not simply drop its ideological goals, although calls for a political settlement and an end to international hostility provided compelling arguments:

Since this “containment” policy can eventually only bring us face to face with the threat of general war with the Soviets, is it not logical to proceed now to deal directly with Moscow on the political front?<sup>5</sup>

This was all the more perplexing because the US was waging a political and not a military war against the Soviet Union. But it was not prepared to resolve the war through the political medium of negotiations. The administration well understood that the political settlement of the Cold War would result in the confounding of America’s ideological goals. The US would not be able to bring democracy to Eastern Europe at the negotiating table but would instead be compelled to agree to mutually acceptable terms with Moscow. Talks would, in other words, expose the limitations of US power, rather than offer the US unilateral fulfilment of its objectives. Any peace settlement between the two blocs would focus on resolving differences over issues of primary geopolitical concern. Compromise solutions would naturally focus on Germany, Austria, Japan and Korea, not on the politically-peripheral Eastern Europe where the US possessed no diplomatic leverage over the USSR. In all likelihood the normalising of relations between East and West would formalise Eastern Europe as a Soviet sphere of influence. This was unpalatable to Washington.

Charles Bohlen mooted the emphasis in US policy papers of Moscow’s fundamental drive for world conquest as an accurate basis for determining policy. He consistently proposed that retention of Soviet internal power was, in fact, the

Kremlin's primary concern. In other words he posited that the Kremlin was driven by security interests ahead of ideological factors. This diverged from the fundamental assumption of Moscow's insatiable quest for global hegemony that had supported the entire ideological edifice shaping an integral part of US policy since the beginning of the Cold War. The incontrovertible fact of the Kremlin's aggressive design had justified whatever counter-measures short of war Washington responded with. Bohlen questioned the advisability of the current political warfare campaign for being too provocative and unable to win the political war against communism without taking America into a general military conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Nitze, now head of the PPS and principal author of NSC 68, remained committed to an aggressive covert strategy and the conviction behind it that Moscow was "animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world."<sup>7</sup> US counter-force was essential, not only to liberate the satellite regimes, but more immediately to destabilise the Soviet system thereby staving off the inevitable Soviet assault on the free world inherent in its desire for global domination. It was Nitze's line of thought rather than Bohlen's that was accommodated in NSC 10/5, authorising further enhancement of American covert warfare capabilities "when and where appropriate in the light of U.S. and Soviet capabilities and the risk of war, [to contribute] to the retraction and reduction of Soviet power and influence [...]"<sup>8</sup> The debate continued, despite the shift towards roll back.

Friction between an emphasis on long-term ideological objectives and short-term geopolitical realities continued to perplex. NSC 114/2 reiterated the limitations of US influence and the likelihood of war breaking out should Moscow perceive the imminent detachment of one of its satellites:

It is evident that our efforts to contain, limit and bring about by peaceful means a retraction of Soviet power and influence and a change in Soviet conduct of international relations will be opposed by the Kremlin and will be regarded by it as a threat to its security.

Although covert operations were now theoretically balanced against the risk of war, it was acknowledged that their successful conclusion could only provoke war. Therefore political warfare could only be provocative:

[T]he Soviet Union must be increasingly concerned with the pace of Western countermeasures, which it doubtless views as an ever more serious threat not only to the accomplishment of its overall objectives but eventually to the security of the Soviet orbit itself.

Despite a policy level recognition that liberation through covert warfare was either futile or unacceptably provocative, the moral exigency of defeating communism and establishing universal democratic systems of government was so ingrained that it could not be disentangled from the factors restricting it. The administration certainly could not abandon liberation as an aspiration, leaving both strategy and objective in place at the operational level.

In practice covert political warfare had completely failed to liberate any of the satellites despite OPC's numerous missions into the Eastern bloc (including Yugoslavia regardless of its growing links with the West). The effort to organise resistance groups, destabilise the communist regimes and have democratic elements overthrow them was as elusive now as it had been when covert warfare had first been integrated into overall policy. The lack of a tangible success, compounded by the provocative nature of political warfare, strengthened the case against the 'secret' war fuelling the debate between containment and liberation. The 'covert' war was also failing to fulfil its mandate of being plausibly deniable, and the exposure of operations and capture of US agents and equipment by communist authorities increased tensions and exacerbated policy disagreement. The most notable example, the bungled

operation to finance and equip the Polish anti-communist Freedom and Independence (WIN by its Polish acronym) movement in December 1952 brought the failure of liberation operations temporarily to the foreground, but it was not significant enough to persuade Truman to decisively relinquish the avowed aim once and for all.

Korea illustrated the dangerous geopolitical reality that restricted each side from intervening in the other's *de facto* sphere of influence. With the threat of nuclear escalation during the flash points of the war, engaging Soviet prestige by intervening covertly in Eastern Europe engendered high risks with negligible benefits. A progress report on NSC 58/2 in 1951 noted the indirect restraining influence of the Korean War limiting the implementation of Eastern European policy, but did not regard this as sufficient reason to relinquish the campaign:

Inasmuch as the USSR is not itself openly engaged militarily in the Far East, the restraint on United States freedom of action in Eastern Europe is not entirely limited.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of accepting that geopolitics made US policy objectives self-defeating as symbolised by the stalemate in Korea, in overall terms the conflict gave greater operational impetus to the covert branch of US policy in Eastern Europe and globally. It also led to a greater emphasis on coordinating and planning political and psychological warfare reflected by the creation of the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) half a year after NSC 68's implementation.<sup>10</sup>

The overzealous desire to confront Moscow was reflected by the inclusion of the Kersten Amendment in the Mutual Security Act of 1951. Congress allocated \$100 million "for any selected persons who are residing in or escapees from [the Soviet bloc] either to form such persons into elements of the military forces supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] or for other purposes."<sup>11</sup> Congressional belligerence in publicly endorsing US-financed émigré armies represented only a

naïve symbolic gesture, not a viable means of defeating communism. Misguided thinking was matched by the PSB. During the first meeting of the Director's Group programs were discussed that could achieve US objectives as stated in NSC 20/4 and NSC 10/5:

[The psychological campaign against Soviet rule] should be carried out as a high-hearted crusade- gay, dashing, gleaming, even hilarious- a crusade to let in light; to let people everywhere choose how they wish to be governed- a crusade that stands in warm psychological contrast to the deadly, cold, humourless "double-speak" of the Kremlin.

Such a psychological campaign run on a timetable and integrated with all departments of government could apparently achieve the "Collapse of the World Communist Movement [...] World Disarmament; Inspection-with-Teeth [and] Trade with [the] Russians and former Satellites" by 1956.<sup>12</sup> This was absolute fantasy. The Kersten Amendment and the PSB discussion neglected the fundamental necessary commitment of American military intervention, translating the conviction in the correctness of its mission into the certainty that moral justice (as it was perceived) would prevail.

Paramilitary and guerrilla operations were supplemented with propaganda as the covert effort continued to grow. Radio was the U.S. government's medium of choice for propounding its ideology and stirring up unrest in the satellites. The National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE) was established in June 1949, launching the émigré anti-communist broadcasting network Radio Free Europe (RFE). These organisations were ostensibly private but really received their funding from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The avowed purpose of RFE as defined by the official CIA handbook issued in November 1951 was "to contribute to the liberation of the nations imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain by maintaining their morale and stimulating in them a spirit of non-cooperation with the Soviet dominated regimes."<sup>13</sup>

The same question remained however. How could RFE and the other radio networks like the official Voice of America (VOA), West Berlin's Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) and Radio Liberation (RL) stimulate liberation without violence? American propaganda called for the indigenous satellite populations to free themselves from communist domination without firing a shot, but this was implausible in a totalitarian system. Moreover, the goal of peaceful liberation was pursued while OPC maintained its far from peaceful paramilitary operations.

Dissent over the misapplication of policy objectives and capabilities built up. At the CIA Frank Lindsay argued that the combined covert strategy of psychological and political warfare was insufficient to rollback totalitarian regimes in October 1952:

The instruments currently advocated to reduce Soviet power are both inadequate and ineffective against the Soviet political system. The consolidated Communist state [...] has made virtually impossible the existence of organized clandestine resistance capable within the foreseeable future of appreciably weakening the power of the state.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in some quarters the primary long-term and intermediate objectives of US policy as defined by NSC 20/4 and NSC 68, and the 'heretical communism' agenda of NSC 58 were considered untenable:

There was no evidence of progress toward the achievement of the basic objectives set forth in NSC 20/4, namely the reduction and retraction of Soviet communist power. Moreover, short term possibilities of any improvement in this respect appeared so slight as to be negligible.<sup>15</sup>

A policy aimed both at maintaining "the hope and morale of the democratic majorities" while simultaneously pursuing the rise of "non-Stalinist- even though communist- regimes as temporary administrations" was recognised as "incompatible." The validity of one of the central premises behind the encouragement of national communist regimes was also mooted. Would the Kremlin really react any less forcefully to the emergence of another Tito in the satellites, as US policy implied?

More likely Moscow would regard a national communist regime as threatening to its interests as a democratic government (Yugoslavia had received Western military aid, opened ties with the CIA and signed a mutual defence pact with US allies Greece and Turkey after all),<sup>16</sup> and therefore respond with like force:

Events since the winter of 1949 lead to the conclusion that USSR will react as strongly to the prospect of the emergence of Titoist regimes in the satellite nations as it will to the direct threat of the creation of non-communist regimes. There would seem no apparent purpose to be served, therefore, in limiting United States policies to the promotion of schismatic communist regimes as an interim objective in the satellite area.<sup>17</sup>

Ideological forces ruled out scaling policy down from fostering heretical communism to accepting the status quo. Titoism and liberation were declared unfeasible but activists actually called for the expansion of operations to liberate Soviet-occupied territory.

The 1952 policy papers continued to reflect the strategic divisions within government that highlighted the inherent tensions between ideological and geopolitical capabilities. Consequently the NSC 135 series represented as much a compromise strategy as it did a clear policy formulation. This was in large part due to disagreements between Bohlen and Nitze in the drafting stages of the policy statement. Nitze had vigorously attacked Bohlen's position as too moderate, believing it would abandon "any attempt now or later to roll back the Iron Curtain." This in turn would obstruct US assumption of "preponderant power" from which "opportunities will arise for inducing or compelling a retraction of Soviet power, not of course, without any risk but at acceptable risk."<sup>18</sup> The final version, NSC 135/3, approved by Truman on September 25, permitted the continuation of covert operations in order to induce "the exploitation of rifts between the USSR and other communist states thus possibly offering to certain satellite peoples the prospect of liberation without war."<sup>19</sup>

So long as undefined “unacceptable risks” were not entailed, “the United States should pursue and as practicable intensify positive political, economic, propaganda and paramilitary operations against the Soviet orbit.” Yet restraint and uncertainty due to the danger of Soviet reprisals against either the U.S. or Eastern bloc populations demanded that “we should not over-estimate the effectiveness of the activities we can pursue within the Soviet orbit,” therefore making it essential that psychological and political agitators “proceed with caution and a careful weighing of the risks in pressing upon what the Kremlin probably regards as its vital interests.”<sup>20</sup> Deficiencies were also conceded with the psychological warfare campaign:

U.S. capabilities for psychological action, within the limits of the world power position, are slowly but steadily improving, but they remain inadequate for taking immediately effective psychological action contributing to a retraction of the Kremlin’s power and influence.<sup>21</sup>

Compromise did not resolve the contradictions at the heart of the strategy. Ideology was so inseparably entangled with geopolitics that it disallowed one to be abandoned for the other. In truth, the government reconciled the antagonisms between these two intertwined strands of foreign policy by accommodating them both and the strategic contradictions they generated. In such a way cautious and aggressive positions were authorised despite their mutual incompatibility.

The Princeton conference of 10-11 May gathered together prominent members of the Truman administration, academics and private experts to discuss liberation strategy. Disagreement was again stimulated by the divergent strategic methods proposed by the realist camp and the ideologues in advancing the independence of Soviet-dominated territories. Reflecting governmental divisions, activists like Allen Dulles and C. D. Jackson argued for more offensive policies, emphasising the moral imperative of such actions. This contrasted with Bohlen’s cautious approach. He

maintained that liberation should remain the ultimate goal, but that geopolitical realities should be taken into due account and offensive strategies therefore considered too provocative. At the end of the conference the Princeton declaration announced America's long-term commitment to Eastern Europe's independence. It did not resolve whether this was possible without the adoption of a more aggressive policy.

During the 1952 presidential election campaign Truman's containment policy, as it was perceived by the American public, became a central issue. Nitze remarked that "the evolution of our policy had outrun public understanding and support."<sup>22</sup> The American public now widely believed it to be too passive. America's inability to effect democratic change in Eastern Europe was judged indicative of the government's negative strategy rather than its geopolitical limitations.

In fact the importance of the Democratic foreign policy in shaping the domestic political environment had been growing steadily during the Truman administration's second term. The unexpected defeat of Republican presidential candidate Thomas Dewey in the November 1948 elections encouraged more vociferous attacks by the opposition on Democratic foreign policy in a bid to gain maximum political advantage, terminating the post-war bipartisan approach to foreign relations. These attacks were heightened by the three 'shocks' of 1949, the Soviet atomic bomb, the communisation of China and also the perjury trial of former State Department official Alger Hiss. Each of these events, along with Hiss's conviction and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, was blamed by both moderate and hardline Republicans on a Democratic administration that was at best naïve and at worst treacherous. Republican criticism linked these events to Eastern Europe by what it now described as earlier examples of the Democrats' inability to run government

responsibly. The failure of the US to secure democracy and free elections in Eastern Europe, and particularly in Poland were now attributed to an appeasing and pro-communist foreign policy that stretched back to Roosevelt's alleged secret concessions made at the wartime Yalta conference.<sup>23</sup> In the McCarthyite era of suspicion and allegation of Truman's second term, several Republican congressional resolutions and constitutional amendments were proposed to both repudiate the Yalta agreements that had supposedly 'sold out' Eastern Europe to Stalin, and to curb executive authority which had allowed President Roosevelt to do so. Although none were actually implemented they added to the public's sense that the government had lost its way in its dealings with the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

Eager to make up for lost time in the political wilderness, the Eisenhower campaign team seized the opportunity to criticise the Democrats' "negative, futile and immoral" and "treadmill policies"<sup>25</sup> during the 1952 campaign. Determined not to repeat the mistakes of 1948, the Eisenhower platform aggressively engaged in partisan politics by stating that it had formulated a "more dynamic foreign policy which, by peaceful means, will endeavour to bring about the liberation of the enslaved peoples" in contrast to the Democrats.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Republicans pledged "to wage war against secret covenants" and to "repudiate all commitments contained in secret understandings, such as those of Yalta, which aid Communist enslavements."<sup>27</sup> Instead of criticising the flaws in Truman's liberation strategy, John Foster Dulles claimed to possess a versatile alternative policy to the current one that had been compromised ever since Yalta, simplifying the complexities of the problem by ignoring the contingencies of wartime diplomacy that had shaped the conference and glossing over the present viability of liberation without violent confrontation. Liberation would "activate the strains and stresses within the Communist empire so as

to disintegrate it [...]” But mysteriously “[a]ctivation does not mean armed revolt. The people have no arms and violent revolt would be futile; indeed it would be worse than futile, it would precipitate massacre.”<sup>28</sup>

This position was inconsistent and contradictory. On the one hand Dulles seemed to agree with British conclusions about liberation. The Permanent Under-Secretary’s Department (PUSD) paper “Future Policy towards Soviet Russia” of early 1952 had set out a gradualist approach. This endorsed Bohlen’s analysis that “operations designed to liberate the satellites are impracticable and would involve unacceptable risks.” Moreover, the PUSD paper raised concerns over US policy, fearing that the lack of strategic clarity might result in premature uprisings in Eastern Europe. This would result in a further deterioration of Western interests as it would “inevitably lead to a strengthening of the Soviet hold over the whole of the Soviet empire and the liquidation of all potential supporters of the West.”<sup>29</sup>

President Truman countered Republican attacks on containment by arguing that “nothing could be worse than to raise false hopes of [liberation] in Eastern Europe. Nothing could be worse than to incite uprisings that can only end by giving a new crop of victims to the Soviet executioners.”<sup>30</sup> This overlooked the liberation campaign inaugurated by Truman’s own Cold War policy. It also again raised the question of how to resolve the tension between aims and capabilities. Eisenhower limited declarations of a dynamic alternative strategy with the premise that liberation be accomplished peacefully because a Republican government would not wage war against the Kremlin to gain Eastern Europe’s independence. In such a way he never went to the extremes of his rival for the Republican presidential candidacy Robert Taft.

Eisenhower himself questioned Foster Dulles's strategy during the campaign. Although he felt "deeply impressed" with "the directness and simplicity of your approach to such complex problems", he wondered how Dulles proposed to liberate the satellites without provoking Soviet military intervention. Dulles admitted that Eisenhower had "put your finger on a weak point in my presentation", especially regarding the inadequacy of "massive retaliation" in deterring Soviet political warfare. Although he promised to "cover it in a revision," the fact was an election platform was necessarily simplistic, in contrast to the complexities of international relations. Neither Dulles nor Eisenhower had yet resolved the same antagonistic relationship between geopolitical constraint and moral aspiration that had perpetually exasperated the Truman administration, nor was it politically expedient to do so during the election. The irony was that the unresolved tensions in the Republican platform actually mirrored the debates within government. Dulles's call for a more vigorous strategy was comparable with the aggressive facet of containment while Eisenhower's desire for peaceful liberation was gravitating towards the realist position advocated by Bohlen and his supporters.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless Eisenhower and Dulles viewed satellite independence as a fundamental foreign policy objective. Moscow's domination of the region represented the moral dilemma raised by the spectre of the Soviet empire as well as the clear economic, political and military concerns invoked by the existence of a powerful enemy. The desire for Eastern Europe's independence went beyond campaign rhetoric and the ideological commitments made by Eisenhower were not extended insincerely during the campaign.<sup>32</sup> At this stage, however, Republican strategy was rhetorically-based and superficial. The new administration would persist in advancing democracy

in Eastern Europe, illustrated by their persistent interest in achieving satellite independence once in office, but they were yet to formulate a coherent policy.

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<sup>1</sup> NSC 68, *FRUS*, 1950, Volume 1, 237-292.

<sup>2</sup> One definition of containment was that it “seeks by all means short of war to (1) block further expansion of Soviet power, (2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, (3) induce a retraction of of the Kremlin’s control and influence, and (4) in general so foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to the point of modifying its behaviour to conform to generally accepted international standards.” Later in the document it is less aggressively described as a “more rapid building up of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world [...] with the purpose of reaching, if possible, a tolerable state of order among nations without war and of preparing to defend ourselves in the event that the free world is attacked.” *Ibid.*, 237-292.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-292.

<sup>4</sup> NSC 114/1 “Status and Timing of Current U.S. Programs for National Security”, 8 August, 1951, in *FRUS*, 1951, *National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy*, Volume 1 (Washington, 1979), 127-157.

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum by the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board, W. Stuart Symington, to President Truman, (undated, 1951), *FRUS*, 1951, Volume 1, 24.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see Bohlen’s Memorandum to Nitze on April 5, 1950, regarding drafts of NSC 68 in *FRUS*, 1950, Volume 1, 222-225.

<sup>7</sup> NSC 68, *FRUS*, 1950, Volume 1, 237-292.

<sup>8</sup> NSC 10/5 “Scope and Pace of Covert Operations”, October 23, 1951, in Warner, *CIA Cold War Records*, 437-439.

<sup>9</sup> Despite noting that a “situation foreseen as a deterrent to direct United States action in furtherance of its basic objective vis-à-vis the satellites has thus in large measure already evolved as a result of circumstances in an entirely separate sphere [Korea and the engagement of US-Soviet prestige].” See NSC, Third Progress Report by Under Secretary of State James E. Webb on the implementation of NSC 58/2, May 22, 1951, *DDRS* (1988), 1661.

<sup>10</sup> The Presidential Directive of April 4, 1951 that established PSB stated that its mandate was to “provide for the more effective planning, coordination and conduct, within the framework of approved national policies, of psychological operations.” *DDRS* (1992), 368.

<sup>11</sup> Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 46.

<sup>12</sup> First Meeting of the Director’s Group of the Psychological Strategy Board. November 6, 1951, *DDRS* (1991), 3539.

<sup>13</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (London, 1997), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 188.

<sup>15</sup> PSB “Status Report on the National Psychological Effort and First Progress Report of the Psychological Strategy Board”, August 1, 1952, *DDRS* (1992), 1715.

<sup>16</sup> Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> *DDRS* (1988), 1661.

<sup>18</sup> Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (Oxford and New York, 1997), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (Ithaca and London, 2000), 98.

<sup>20</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> *DDRS* (1992), 368.

<sup>22</sup> Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> For an account of the breakdown of bipartisanship in foreign policy and Republican attacks on the Truman administration see Athan G. Theoharis, *The Yalta Myths: An Issue in U.S. Politics, 1945-1955* (Columbia, Missouri, 1970), 23-153.

<sup>24</sup> The first of these was introduced March 28, 1950 by Republican Congressman Robert Hale. House Joint resolution 444 called for the US “withdrawal” from the Yalta agreements because of repeated Soviet violations of them and that such a repudiation would reaffirm America’s commitment to the principles of the Atlantic Charter over ‘secret deals’ and give new hope of liberation to the ‘enslaved’ peoples of Eastern Europe. Several other resolutions followed but none were ever acted on. A couple of noteworthy constitutional amendments were also proposed. The first of these, the Kersten amendment to the Mutual Security Act of 1951, proposed setting aside funds to establish special forces comprising exiles from the Eastern European nations to act as a springboard for liberation. Although this passed without prolonged debate, Kersten would be repeatedly disappointed by the failure of both Truman and

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later Eisenhower to act to implement the amendment's provisions. The other significant constitutional amendment, introduced by Senator John Bricker on February 7, 1952, proposed the requirement of congressional ratification of any executive agreement or hearing affecting domestic policy. This proposal implicitly criticised the executive abuse of power that had occurred at Yalta, but it was never acted upon because of the proximity of the upcoming presidential conventions and elections. See Theoharis, *The Yalta Myths*, 90-185.

<sup>25</sup> Prospective Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in his *Life* article "A Policy of Boldness" cited in Richard H. Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1999), 42, and Immerman (ed.), *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1990), 4. Despite these attacks, by 1954 Dulles had changed his mind and declared that "[t]he Eisenhower Administration inherited security policies that had much worth." John Foster Dulles, "Policy for Security and Peace", *Foreign Affairs* 32 (1954).

<sup>26</sup> Presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower quoted in Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Theoharis, *The Yalta Myths*, 143.

<sup>28</sup> Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 165.

<sup>29</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London, 2001), 324-325.

<sup>30</sup> Krebs, *Dueling Visions*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that Eisenhower and Dulles were never serious about liberation and invoked aggressive campaign rhetoric chiefly to attract votes from Americans of Eastern European descent, and to appease the right-wing of the GOP led by Taft which demanded tougher action against Soviet power. See, for instance, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford and New York, 1982), 128, H.W. Brands, *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1988), 10-13 and Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 204.

### 3

## ASSUMING THE MANTLE

### *The Eisenhower Administration and Eastern Europe, 1953-1956*

The incumbent Republican administration was partly elected on the understanding that it had a dynamic alternative strategy to liberate the nations of Eastern Europe. Several proponents of an offensive policy joined the government in top positions of power early in 1953. Secretary of State Foster Dulles was joined by his brother Allen as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). Other notable Cold Warriors included C. D. Jackson as the President's Special Assistant for Psychological Warfare, Frank Wisner as director of covert operations within the CIA, and Robert Cutler, Eisenhower's National Security Adviser. Despite this activist composition, the Republican campaign platform suggested a tension between the desire for a more decisive strategy and the practical restraints that had frustrated the previous administration.

Eisenhower took his first step towards establishing policy by ordering an investigation, chaired by William H. Jackson, into American "information policies" on January 24, 1953.<sup>1</sup> The Jackson Committee issued its conclusions on June 30, yet despite acknowledging that there "seems to be a large measure of agreement that we lack an adequate national grand strategy and that something other than the present policy is needed"<sup>2</sup> it failed to address the inherent contradictions within existing policy. The previous administration was criticised for failing "to define its specific goals clearly and

precisely” and for promoting “unrealizable goals arousing excessive hopes in the satellite countries or elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup> Psychological warfare operations had made “very little progress” and “must be considered unsuccessful to date.” Despite questioning “whether they should be modified or abandoned” the study failed to assert a clear resolution.<sup>4</sup> Instead the Jackson Committee made a scapegoat of the PSB, falsely accusing the department of separating psychological warfare from the other divisions of government. An interdepartmental Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) was established in its place to plan psychological warfare for the NSC, while the United States Information Agency (USIA) was formed to conduct ‘information’ operations. This did not resolve the real problem that psychological warfare was actually too entangled with geopolitical factors, resulting in the pursuit of contradictory policy objectives. On the contrary, it maintained that operations should strive towards doing “everything possible to aggravate internal conflicts in the hope that this will subsequently help to bring about a retraction of Kremlin control and influence.” Still left unresolved was how, after U.S. broadcasts had stirred up the desire for independence in the region, liberation would be achieved without either violent indigenous revolt or direct American military intervention.

The report recommended that the primary means of psychological warfare should be the ostensibly private psychological warfare channel NCFE:

Far greater effort should be made to utilize private American organizations for the advancement of US objectives. The gain in dissemination and credibility through the use of such channels will more than offset the loss by the Government of some control over the content.<sup>5</sup>

Surprisingly, the explicit understanding that engaging the state-private network would lead to governmental loss of control over the implementation of its policy was accepted. Instead of imposing strict operational control over the psychological warfare campaign to

insure its adherence to Washington's policy, radio broadcasters in the field would be relatively unrestrained. The ramifications of stimulating unrest through excessively provocative propaganda with the émigré networks were deemed less important than the advantages that could be gained from such autonomous operations. The intensification of propaganda was an inauspicious development while Washington rejected pledging the necessary military commitment to support rebellions once they had been stirred up.

Emphasis on the psychological campaign did not divert the Eisenhower administration away from political warfare. OPC continued to conduct paramilitary operations behind the Iron Curtain while Washington found its feet. Despite SIS's abandonment of the Albanian operation following persistent operational failures in 1950, OPC continued to believe that it represented the most vulnerable of the satellites and the most likely regime to be prised away from Moscow's authority. In 1953 political warfare still enjoyed generous financial backing with about half of the CIA's \$100 million budget allocated to paramilitary training and operations.<sup>6</sup>

The NSC signalled an early intention to adopt a more offensive strategy. On February 19 the creation of a Volunteer Freedom Corps (VFC) was discussed. The idea of establishing émigré battalions under US military command, resurrecting the Kersten Amendment initiative, gained popularity because it offered a cheaper alternative to training US combat soldiers. Deploying émigré rather than American troops to fight local wars in the American interest was also appealing. But the JCS, apprehensive about reallocating vital resources, opposed the VFC suggesting that "more good will be accomplished [...] by allowing the Kersten Amendment to lapse or at the most leaving it on the books with no actual implementation."<sup>7</sup>

Other concerns were raised over the US Government publicly and provocatively endorsing liberation. Charles Bohlen stated his disagreement at a Jackson Committee hearing:

We all want to see Eastern Europe free. There is no difference of opinion on this. There is a difference of opinion, however, as to the wisdom of proclaiming this as a national objective. If we make such a proclamation we are in a real sense committing ourselves to bring it about. This is a responsibility which a truly great power accepts when it speaks. At some point the commitment to such an objective may come into conflict with some other commitment; for example, we do not intend to start a world war and this goal may conflict with the goal of liberation for Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

As observed by Bohlen, US government actions could not be separated from the international perception of their symbolic meaning. Thus the establishment of émigré battalions was a simultaneous endorsement of their primary objective, the liberation of Eastern Europe. Bohlen's warning that the VFC might provoke a war the US was not committed to fight went unheeded. Despite the reservations it was established in May 1953 under the authority of NSC 143/2, although its implementation was continually delayed for fear of prejudicing passage of the European Defence Community (EDC).<sup>9</sup>

Dulles and Eisenhower also appeared to be reneging on their campaign promise to repudiate the Yalta agreements, curb executive authority and impose a bold new foreign policy to liberate the Soviet satellites. The administration's congressional resolution on Yalta introduced by Republican Congressman John Vorys in February 1953 frustrated the right wing of the party. This was precisely because it did not repudiate the wartime agreements but rather criticised Soviet violations of the "clear intent" of the "Declaration of Liberated Europe" in order "to bring about the subjugation of free peoples."<sup>10</sup> Rather than face infighting between the administration and the extreme wing of the party Robert

Taft killed off the resolution in committee on March 10 1953, thereby saving the blushes of Eisenhower and Dulles.<sup>11</sup>

The Bricker Amendment, introduced on January 7 1953 and proposing to limit the use of executive authority in foreign policy by requiring congressional ratification of all executive agreements and treaties affecting domestic politics met with a similar fate. The Eisenhower administration circumvented the dilemma of directly opposing another initiative it had supported during the election campaign by attaching an amendment to it that was defeated in February 1954.<sup>12</sup> The exigencies of incumbency had overruled any notions of fulfilling campaign bluster. Ultimately the VFC was only a symbolic gesture of US opposition to Soviet domination and the Vorys resolution and Bricker Amendment had been defeated because of the real detrimental impact they would have had on the administration's operation of foreign affairs. In any case, several momentous events shook the Soviet bloc providing rare opportunities of Russian vulnerability for Eisenhower and Dulles to exploit to make good their campaign pledges of liberation.

The first opportunity was Stalin's death on March 5. Instead of acting decisively on this unique occasion against a vulnerable Soviet leadership engaged in a secession struggle, US strategists actually became paralysed by bureaucratic division.<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower himself lamented over the lack of a clear strategy:

Ever since 1946, I know that all the so-called experts have been yapping about what would happen when Stalin dies and what we as a nation, should do about it. Well, he's dead. And you can turn the files of our government inside out- in vain- looking for any plans laid. We have no plan. We are not even sure what difference his death makes.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, contingency guidance under PSB D-24 "Program of Psychological Preparation for Stalin's Passing from Power" had been drafted under Truman.<sup>15</sup> The real problem

was that implementing an aggressive policy was inherently provocative even at this unique moment, making it unpopular with many key figures. Policy decision was blocked by the State Department where Foster Dulles now recognised practical geopolitical restraints and urged a cautious response to avoid aggravating a sensitive situation. Conversely, PSB D-24 and other offensive psychological-warfare measures were advocated by C. D. Jackson, Harold Stassen, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), plus prominent private advisers like Walt Rostow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The conflict of opinion reflecting the tension between a restrained and a belligerent strategy could not be resolved so Eisenhower adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

The cautious US response in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's death illustrated the preference for restraint germinating in the State Department in the first months of the new administration.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to C. D. Jackson and Rostow who hastily began drawing up offensive psychological warfare strategies to exploit the sudden weakness at the heart of Soviet power, State was unwilling to endorse provocative operations to probe Moscow's vulnerabilities.<sup>17</sup> The underlying ideological goal of liberation had not been abandoned, but the State Department believed that in the short-term, aggressive psychological and political warfare could prove too provocative in the unpredictable new climate.

Administrative indecision resulted in Eisenhower's official response to Stalin's death being made six weeks and twelve drafts later.<sup>18</sup> Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" speech exacerbated bureaucratic indecision by adopting a middle road between reconciliation and an offensive position. Instead of a genuine effort to negotiate with the new Soviet leadership, "Chance for Peace" was more a psychological warfare initiative to

win over international opinion. Eisenhower and Dulles were extremely sceptical about Georgii Malenkov's "peace initiative" initiated at Stalin's funeral, interpreting any reconciliatory Soviet overtures as part of a strategy to scupper Western military integration.<sup>19</sup> Eisenhower undermined his "serious bid for peace" by attempting to win a propaganda victory rather than open a dialogue, demonstrated by the conditions he attached as prerequisites to negotiation and the massive level of global distribution the speech received.<sup>20</sup>

The administration rejected pursuing serious discussions on the status of Eastern Europe, something Bohlen later regretted.<sup>21</sup> Even if Moscow had accepted American demands Washington would have considered any concessions made spoiling tactics.<sup>22</sup> As Eisenhower had also supported State's blocking of an alternative covert offensive the eventual strategy epitomised an ineffective compromise between these extremes. Liberation in the long-term was not ruled out, and rather than negotiate with Malenkov and raise the possibility of detente, Eisenhower preferred the route of Western integration and the rearmament of West Germany.<sup>23</sup> The decision to link political concessions with disarmament negotiations that it knew the Soviets would reject reflected the government's desire to bring about the liberation of Eastern Europe before talks could begin.<sup>24</sup> Secretary Dulles, who had opposed "Chance for Peace" all along, immediately hardened the US position after Eisenhower's address by publicly demanding that the Kremlin relinquish its control of the satellites. The new administration was committed to the ideological war, refusing to accept Eastern Europe as a Soviet sphere of influence.

American behaviour adversely affected the possibility of any modification in the Soviet position. Growing Western military strength and the rearmament of West

Germany represented a threat not only to Soviet control over its satellites but to Russian security itself. The US decision to rearm and militarily integrate the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) enhanced Soviet security interests in the region as a buffer against Western attack, resulting in both a hardening of Moscow's diplomatic position and further consolidation of satellite authority. This in turn perpetuated Washington's determination to strengthen the West's armed forces as a counter-balance to Soviet bloc power. The escalatory effect of this strategy culminated in Moscow's creation of the Warsaw Pact in May 1955 as a military counterweight to NATO.<sup>25</sup>

If Stalin's death came too soon in the incumbency for Eisenhower to adopt a coherent strategy, the autocrat's demise generated another opportunity several months later. Late in May unrest broke out behind the Iron Curtain in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and then more significantly in East Germany in June following Malenkov's conciliatory messages implying greater independence from Moscow. As riots broke out in East Berlin RIAS fanned the flames of discontent, influencing the spread of unrest to the rest of East Germany.<sup>26</sup> The consequences of the operational autonomy endorsed by the Jackson Committee were playing themselves out. US propaganda could effectively spread discontent through the satellite populations, but it needed the support of a resolute government stance to induce any Soviet shift towards the withdrawal of troops that was implicit in peaceful liberation.

Yet again Washington was divided as how best to respond. Even if a swift US response was hindered by a lack of intelligence in the Soviet zone, procrastination was due to the policy vacuum that reflected its unpreparedness.<sup>27</sup> Indecision reflected the administration's desire to exploit the situation without the knowledge or plan of how to

do so. Supporters of an offensive response including the arming of insurgents were immediately shackled. The president unrealistically hoped that riots in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would spread to China, and even then only a limited US response in supplying arms would be considered. Limited US intervention of this sort would only occur if the revolt was deemed to have “a real chance of success” (which the East Berlin uprising was not considered to have), highlighting that beyond rhetoric the satellite populations were on their own in physically achieving liberation.<sup>28</sup> This, of course, diminished their actual chances of success.

The strategy finally adopted once the revolt had been crushed by Soviet troops involving food kitchens in West Berlin for the GDR’s hungry in no way promoted the ultimate objective of East European independence. Eisenhower and Dulles had acted according to the limitations of their geopolitical power and the food aid program embodied a face-saving exercise for American prestige and an effort to enhance Chancellor Adenauer’s campaign in the September elections in the FRG.

Interim policy was drawn up in NSC 158 a week after the riots. Despite the disastrous consequences of US involvement in the violence through its broadcasts NSC 158 continued to promote American backing of indigenous resistance to Soviet authority, though with the caveat that “more emphasis be placed on passive resistance.” The interim paper left undefined how it proposed to “nourish resistance to communist oppression throughout satellite Europe, short of mass rebellion.”<sup>29</sup> The only feasible means of achieving liberation without direct American military assistance was mass rebellion. Despite the bloody evidence on the streets of East Berlin nullifying the viability of either

peaceful or violent indigenous liberation, Washington still refused to abandon its ideological agenda.

Foster Dulles received overwhelming criticism of covert warfare in response to the riots from ambassadors and senior diplomats at the State Department. In contrast to the Jackson Committee, State supported the strict control and review of psychological warfare:

Our psychological warfare effort should never be allowed to run ahead of carefully considered political objectives as there is always the danger if this is allowed to happen that psychological warfare can start to make policy rather than serve it.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of American, let alone émigré propaganda broadcasts behind the Iron Curtain as illustrated by the diffusion of unrest in the GDR made this imperative if US policy was merely to encourage peaceful resistance and await a Soviet military withdrawal. Where the PSB implied that political warfare was an effective medium as the uprising had “created the greatest opportunity for initiating effective policies to help roll back Soviet power that has yet come to light,” State recognised America’s very limited geopolitical influence short of war.<sup>31</sup> Covert warfare not only alienated Washington from its Western European allies, it also hindered the probability of stimulating a Soviet troop withdrawal that Moscow “will probably eventually consider.” Most importantly, the US “should never consider that Eastern Europe can be liberated by political warfare devices no matter how well planned and energetic they may be.” The covert campaign should accordingly be strictly limited to “assist in this spirit [of resistance] but should never incite [the satellites] to rebellion or revolts.” Although State’s response to the East German uprising proposed scaling down political warfare, it did not recommend its termination.<sup>32</sup> The tension still unresolved was that the revolt had graphically demonstrated that covert

warfare could not tread the fine line between fostering passive resistance and inciting rebellion. Psychological and political warfare operations were by their very nature provocative and the uprising illustrated Washington's inability to control unrest once it had had been generated.

The Solarium policy review that dominated the summer months and its culmination in NSC 162 also failed to address US liberation strategy and objectives. Approved by Eisenhower in October, his administration's "Basic National Security Strategy" was drafted in light of the inevitable Soviet development of the hydrogen bomb. It therefore emphasised defensive aspects of foreign policy like "massive nuclear deterrence" and "collective security" rather than the offensive political warfare campaign.<sup>33</sup> Begun in May, Project Solarium had been divided into Task Forces A, B and C to study three alternative approaches to national security ranging from traditional concepts of containment to more aggressive rollback operations. Disagreement over the alternative strategies could not be reconciled leading Eisenhower characteristically to compromise and not explicitly rule out one approach for the other.<sup>34</sup>

Though NSC 162/2 failed to impose a clear and unified strategy, it did mark a shift from rollback and the ideological fervour that had punctuated NSC 68. It sanctioned taking "feasible political, economic, propaganda and covert measures to create and exploit troublesome problems for the USSR [...], complicate control in the satellites, and retard the growth of the military and economic potential of the Soviet bloc," yet it also stated that US policy was not designed "to dictate the internal political and economic organization of the USSR."<sup>35</sup> Strategic contradiction was maintained, however, because a caveat designated that "this paragraph does not establish policy guidance for our

propaganda or informational activities.”<sup>36</sup> Here was the loophole allowing psychological warfare to continue. Moreover, the JCS still favoured a “positive, dynamic policy” and having gained Eisenhower’s concurrence a paragraph written by the State Department prohibiting the US from “initiat[ing] aggressive actions involving force against Soviet bloc territory” was omitted from the final document.<sup>37</sup> Despite recognising that the “detachment of any major European satellite from the Soviet bloc does not now appear feasible except by Soviet acquiescence or by war,” NSC 162/2 permitted psychological and political warfare operations to continue in the false hope that they could achieve exactly that- satellite independence with or without Soviet consent and certainly without war.<sup>38</sup>

American and émigré anti-communist propaganda outlets continued to expand operations after the completion of NSC 162/2. RFE unleashed two waves of psychological warfare through intensive broadcasting and leaflet drops haranguing the Czech leadership under operations “Prospero” and “VETO” in 1953. The next year Hungary was targeted by “Operation FOCUS” which demanded economic reforms and democratic elections from the regime. New and more powerful transmitters were added to enhance the campaigns. By 1954 RFE was broadcasting anti-communist propaganda almost twenty four hours a day with a burgeoning staff of operators and informants.

In addition, the OCB continued to plan for liberation. The draft policy paper OCB 16 “National Operations Plan-USSR and European Satellites” of November 1953 suggested that at the very least its author C. D. Jackson did not understand that basic U.S. policy was now containment and not rollback. Robert Cutler wrote of the still classified document that many aspects in it were “in conflict with policy [...] were unclear as to

whether or not they conformed to existing policy [...] or which seemed to venture into fields where there was no existing policy.”<sup>39</sup>

This confusion should have been resolved by NSC 174 “US Policy toward the Soviet Satellites”, the policy paper specific to Eastern Europe superseding the interim NSC 158. Responding to the East German uprising, NSC 174 reiterated the unlikelihood of a satellite breaking with the Soviet bloc without Moscow’s approval or war, as asserted in NSC 162/2. Military intervention was categorically dismissed:

A deliberate policy of attempting to liberate the satellite peoples by military force, which would probably mean war with the USSR and most probably would be unacceptable to the American people and condemned by world opinion, cannot be given serious consideration.

Instead diplomatic, economic, propaganda and covert pressure would be brought to bear “to maintain the morale of anti-Soviet elements, to sow confusion and discredit the authority of the regimes, to disrupt Soviet-satellite relationships, and generally to maximise Soviet difficulties.” How Washington proposed to gain the “eventual elimination” of Soviet control peacefully remained murky, as did its plan to incite satellite resistance without provoking violence:

In its efforts to encourage anti-Soviet elements in the satellites and keep up their hopes, the United States should not encourage premature action on their part which will bring upon them further terror and suppression. Continuing and careful attention must be given to the fine line, which is not stationary, between exhortations to keep up morale and to maintain passive resistance, and invitations to suicide.

The US had already failed to walk the tight rope during the summer of violence in the GDR. The lessons from that experience had not been learned because the administration’s determination to win the long-term ideological war endured. Instead of directing policy towards avoiding a repeat of that revolt, the government would prepare “to exploit any

further disturbances similar to the East German riots” while conversely refusing to support any “premature” revolts deemed unlikely to succeed. NSC 174 settled for a “middle course” between war and dropping its liberation aspirations which sounded prudent. In fact it disguised the perpetuation of tensions that ultimately left policy dependant on a Soviet willingness to withdraw its troops and satellite prudence in seeking independence.<sup>40</sup>

Washington also reviewed another of its middle course alternatives, the “heretical communism” strategy. NSC 174 distanced itself from NSC 58/2 by stating that it was extremely unlikely that a “satellite communist regime would or could break away from Moscow under its own power.”<sup>41</sup> But two months later policy guidance specific to Yugoslavia stipulated that “[p]olitically and psychologically, the “Tito heresy” has provided the West with an important asset.” Although the evidence refuted that another Tito would emerge to defy Moscow and align with the West, and despite the fundamental ideological differences between the American and Yugoslav regimes, NSC 5406/1 concluded that it was still “in the security interest of the United States to support Yugoslavia.” Accordingly, US policy reconciled to pursue a contradictory policy. Washington aimed to engineer the “[e]ventual fulfilment of the Yugoslav people to live under a government of their own choosing” while its simultaneous short-term objective to avoid actions “which would undermine that regime” was wholly incompatible with this:

Avoiding antagonizing the Tito regime to the point of jeopardizing realization of our immediate objectives or inducing political aspirations among the Yugoslav peoples likely to produce disorder or unrest.<sup>42</sup>

Judgement was again complicated by inherent ideological ambitions in concluding that a policy could juggle the short-term support for a regime while pursuing its collapse in the long-term.

Tito still represented an alternative model to the Kremlin-dominated satellite regimes in the eyes of the US, despite the clear tension with Washington's long-term goals. Strategic complications were compounded by the normalising of relations between Moscow and Belgrade beginning in August 1954 and reinforced by the "different roads to socialism" declaration of June the following year. Tito's usefulness as a Western asset in fostering satellite dissension would decrease exponentially with Belgrade's closer ties to the Kremlin. Yet Dulles and Eisenhower continued to assert their faith in retaining good relations with the dictator, and persevered to persuade Congress to allow American supplies of military aid to Yugoslavia to persist.

The promotion of national communism illustrated a significant shift occurring in the State Department where Foster Dulles was re-evaluating satellite independence according to its geopolitical importance. In light of the probable Soviet acquisition of thermo-nuclear weapons plus the inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) delivery systems that made the continental US vulnerable to non-conventional attack, Dulles assessed that the security risks inherent with the liberation of Eastern Europe no longer outweighed the ideological benefits:

[Liberation] in itself would not touch the heart of the problem: Soviet atomic plenty [...] [E]ven if we split the Soviet bloc, in other words, we would still have to face the terrible problem and threat of an unimpaired nuclear capability in the USSR itself.<sup>43</sup>

The basic goal of democratic change remained, but its strategic value against the backdrop of non-conventional war had become peripheral, determining that the US

“should forego actions which would generally be regarded as provocative.”<sup>44</sup> As a result, paramilitary operations were increasingly wound down and greater emphasis was placed on what Washington considered the less controversial psychological warfare campaign of its propaganda networks. The need to avoid provoking Moscow into retaliatory action that could set off a chain of events escalating into general war, and not the expectation that liberation was more likely to occur, determined this shift in State’s outlook.

Conflicting short-term and long-term objectives, now balanced with a drastically enhanced security threat, undermined any chance of the administration formulating a coherent and authoritative strategy. During 1954 and 1955 the government continued in its efforts to reconcile divergent policy interests into an overall compromise strategy that maintained the liberation of Eastern Europe as its ultimate goal but with a clear short-term shift in emphasis towards containment and co-existence. Malenkov’s approaches to open a serious dialogue with the US further pacified the belligerent edges of policy. The result was a strategy riddled with contradictions, which the NSC itself observed to some extent. A progress report on NSC 174 in July 1954 noted that “effective implementation of certain of the courses of action [...] is inhibited by the cautions and limitations written into that document.” It went on to acknowledge the tensions impairing effective strategy:

There are policy problems, for example, the objective is to restore freedom and roll back Soviet power in the satellites, but at the same time to avoid provoking war with the USSR, to ease international tensions, cooperate with our allies and avoid premature revolt.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the contradictions at the operational level the US was mobilised to conduct a vigorous covert campaign to liberate Eastern Europe.<sup>46</sup> Washington could not bring

itself to abandon its aspirations. Instead and despite all the estimates, the administration hoped a Soviet withdrawal might occur:

Although the time for a significant rollback of Soviet power may appear to be in the future, the U.S. should be prepared, by feasible current actions or future planning, to take advantage of any earlier opportunity to contract Communist-controlled areas and power.<sup>47</sup>

Yet “feasible” courses of action were rapidly diminishing. The US had been unable to liberate Eastern Europe in the late 1940s when Soviet power was still being consolidated and the threat to US security had allowed much more vigorous operations to be conducted against the satellite regimes. Notwithstanding the enhanced Soviet threat and consequent US determination to avoid war, the residual ideological strain that had remained constant since the war ensured that psychological warfare operations would continue. Paradoxically the administration estimated that the scale of covert operations required to achieve liberation would, in fact, provoke the war it was avoiding at all costs:

To be an effective contribution toward detachment, such covert support would need to be on a large scale [...] From a practical standpoint, it is doubtful; whether [...] support on the necessary scale could long be continued on a covert basis without precipitating strong retaliatory action which in turn would require [US] intervention [...] if the resistance elements were to be saved from annihilation. Large-scale covert support of resistance elements in these countries is probably tantamount to open hostilities.<sup>48</sup>

Superficially the NSC resolved the policy dilemma through another rhetorical shift from an offensive position. In January 1955 it issued a revised policy paper superseding NSC 162/2 and NSC 5422/2 that returned to Bohlen’s concept of coexistence. NSC 5505/1 trumpeted the objective of “evolutionary rather than revolutionary change” in the satellites. Emphasis was to be placed on Western unity rather than divisive unilateralist operations against the satellites: “It is to be emphasized that no political warfare strategy can in any sense substitute for adequate military, political, and economic programs

designed to strengthen the free world.” Yet the shift in language did not represent a modification of the fundamental tension. The US still hoped to “foster changes in the character and policies of the Soviet-Communist bloc regimes.” Washington’s ability to influence evolutionary change was as fictional short of war as revolutionary change, while the region remained a Soviet geopolitical priority. A strategy promoting passive resistance on the part of the satellite populations placed the burden of liberation entirely on an American military intervention or unforeseen Soviet acquiescence. In fact NSC 5505/1 was not laying liberation to rest, calling for “a flexible combination of military, political, economic, propaganda, and covert actions” in implementing “anti-regime measures.”<sup>49</sup> While Soviet garrisons remained and American propaganda incited anti-communist sentiment, policy teetered on a tightrope between ineffectiveness and disaster.

There were other indications that Washington had not actually dropped liberation. The Doolittle Committee Report investigating CIA covert operations called for “an aggressive covert psychological, political and paramilitary organization more effective, more unique and, if necessary, more ruthless than that employed by the enemy.” Shunning the reconciliatory line propounding peaceful coexistence with the Soviet bloc, the study reverted to the ideological belligerency of NSC 20/4 and NSC 68, demanding that the US ultimately defeat its “implacable enemy.”<sup>50</sup>

The Secretary of State and DCI Dulles emphasised that they too had not abandoned the goal of liberation. Although a dual strategy pursuing violent and non-violent modification of the satellite regimes was contradictory, they “did not wish the guidance provided by NSC 5505, on the exploitation of Soviet vulnerabilities along evolutionary rather than revolutionary lines, to destroy all possibility of seizing opportunities for

exploiting a different type of strategy if such opportunities clearly presented themselves.” Cutler informed them that NSC 5505/1 did not exclude this alternative.<sup>51</sup> Yet such an opportunity had already presented itself in East Berlin and geopolitical factors had prevented the government from intervening because of the strong likelihood of provoking a full-scale conflict with Moscow. Since then the determination to avoid war had risen, further undermining the possibility of constructing a coherent plan should another revolt flare up. Washington had itself recognised its inability to respond any differently should another revolt like the East German uprising occur in a satellite.<sup>52</sup> The unspoken conviction that the moral principle of democracy transcended geopolitical factors preserved the goal of liberation in the background.

Eisenhower was still enamoured with the VFC initiative, illustrating the contradiction in approach that reflected his desire to settle for nothing less than liberation. In August 1955 he attempted (and failed) to win the West German government’s support for VCF to “provide a cadre of trained personnel to form and control to U.S. advantage any large numbers of defected Soviet Orbit personnel in the event of war.”<sup>53</sup> This was consistent with OCB’s recommendation that the VFC finally be established.<sup>54</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles’s perception of the new “evolutionary” policy represented a shift in language and not the rejection of the ultimate objective. They still pursued the eventual overthrow of the communist authorities in Eastern Europe, and the modification towards greater Satellite domestic autonomy represented merely another interim objective.

Dulles took new heart from the rhetorical shift, believing that his moralistic agenda was closer to realisation. Détente with the USSR presented “a real opportunity in the present situation for a rollback of Soviet power. Such a rollback might leave the present

satellite states in a status not unlike that of Finland.”<sup>55</sup> Yet despite his new-found enthusiasm Dulles failed to place the status of Eastern Europe on the agenda at the Geneva Conference in July.<sup>56</sup> Without recourse to war, the only realistic alternative to achieve a Soviet withdrawal was to negotiate with the Kremlin. The US administration remained dismissive of this alternative, focussing instead on its primary geopolitical interests at Geneva like Korea, Indochina, Germany and Austria..

As the Eisenhower administration entered a presidential election year it had been found sorely lacking in one of its most trumpeted platform strategies. Yet a lack of public awareness had not compelled the government to fundamentally alter its policy. Contrary to the public perception of a new cordial international climate following the Austrian State Treaty, the Belgrade Pact and the Geneva Conference, liberation remained a distant goal and the bureaucratic apparatus supporting political and psychological warfare was renewed in December 1955.<sup>57</sup> Whether Eisenhower’s inconsistent policy would now adapt to the climate of ‘co-existence’ and abandon, once and for all, its ideological agenda for Eastern Europe was yet to be truly tested.

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<sup>1</sup> The President's Committee on International Information Activities was directed by Eisenhower "to make a survey and evaluation of the of the international information policies and activities of the Executive Branch of the Government and of policies and activities related thereto, with particular reference to the international relations and the national security of this country." *DDRS* (1987), 1120.

<sup>2</sup> *DDRS* (1988), 565.

<sup>3</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> *DDRS* (1987), 1120.

<sup>5</sup> Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 67, Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 219.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *The Very Best Men*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> From JCS 1735/170 "Report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Implementation of Section 101 (a) (1) of the Mutual Security Act of 1951", February 24, 1953, in Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 63. Also see Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 210-212, and Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> Report drafted by the Staff of the President's Committee on International Information Activities. Summary of the Testimony of Charles E. Bohlen, February 24, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, *Eastern Europe; Soviet Union; Mediterranean*, Volume VIII (Washington, 1988), 54-55.

<sup>9</sup> NSC 143/2 "Statement of Policy by the National Security Council on a Volunteer Freedom Corps", May 20, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 218-220.

<sup>10</sup> Theoharis, *The Yalta Myths*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, 154-165.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-185.

<sup>13</sup> Khrushchev later described the Soviet leadership as feeling "terribly vulnerable" when Stalin died. See Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* (New York, 1996), 179.

<sup>14</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 126.

<sup>15</sup> In NSC 142 it was noted that an "implementation plan and a contingency guidance for the event of Stalin's sudden death have been drafted" within PSB D-24 "Program of Psychological Preparation for Stalin's Passing from Power." *DDRS* (1992), 368.

<sup>16</sup> Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith indicated this when he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "the policy for the United States is to say we hope for freedom for all of the countries behind the Iron Curtain and for self-determination, and that is about as far as we can go." Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson and Rostow drew up PSB D-40 "Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death" with the objective of maximising the strains within the Kremlin leadership as well as the Soviet population and the satellites (including China) and PSB D-43 "Plan for the Exploitation of Dissidence in the Soviet Bloc and USSR Armed Forces" targeting the military in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's demise. See Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" address delivered before the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 16, 1953, is available at [www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/chance.htm](http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/chance.htm)

<sup>19</sup> At Stalin's funeral Malenkov had announced "there are no contested issues in US-Soviet relations that cannot be resolved by peaceful means." The US viewed this as a "peace offensive" rather than a "peace initiative." See Vladislav M. Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 155. Fearful that Soviet gestures might divide America from its allies while EDC was still being considered by European parliaments, the US was keen to portray the Kremlin as the sole obstructor of world peace.

<sup>20</sup> The US was willing to discuss disarmament if the Soviets showed their good faith in reaching settlements in Korea, Germany, Austria, ceased their involvement in Indochina and Malaya and relinquished their domination of Eastern Europe. See Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, Lucas, *Freedom's War* and "The Myth of Leadership: Dwight Eisenhower and the Quest for Liberation", in Constantine Pagedas and Thomas Otte (Editors), *Personalities, War and Diplomacy* (1997), Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, and Kenneth A. Osgood, "Form Before Substance: Eisenhower's Commitment to Psychological Warfare and Negotiations with the Enemy", in *Diplomatic History* 24, (Summer 2000) for historical interpretations of "Chance for Peace" as a psychological warfare initiative. Previously, historians had regarded this and other gestures like the "Atoms for Peace" and "Open Skies" speeches as genuine attempts to initiate talks with the Soviet Union. See particularly Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President*, Volume Two 1952-1969, (London and Sydney, 1984). The US Government arranged for "Chance for Peace" to be translated into 45

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languages, it was broadcast over radio and television networks throughout the free world as well by VOA and RFE into the Soviet bloc, and was distributed globally through press releases and over three million leaflets. See Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 120.

<sup>21</sup> The tactic of taking psychological warfare action under the guise of a genuine diplomatic initiative for propaganda purposes would be adopted again by the administration over the next couple of years. The “Atoms for Peace” speech before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in December 1953 and the “Open Skies” proposal made at the Geneva Conference in July 1955 followed a similar strategic pattern and assumed similar objectives as “Chance for Peace.” Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” address before the UN General Assembly, 8 December, 1953, is available at [www.iaea.or.at/worldatom/About/atoms.html](http://www.iaea.or.at/worldatom/About/atoms.html) Although Eisenhower suggested relinquishing the arms race and turning nuclear power over to the UN for peaceful means in his “Atoms for Peace” address, the US was actively expanding its offensive nuclear arsenal and developing production of a hydrogen bomb at this time. Three months after the speech America successfully exploded the world’s first hydrogen bomb in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean, casting extreme doubt over the sincerity of Eisenhower’s pursuit of genuine disarmament. Eisenhower himself admitted of the “Open Skies” proposal that “[w]e knew the Soviets wouldn’t accept it. We were sure of that, but we took a look and thought it was a good move.” See Michael J. Hogan, “Eisenhower and Open Skies: A Case in “Psychological Warfare””, Martin J. Medhurst (ed.), *Eisenhower’s War of Words: Rhetoric and Leadership* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1994), 147. Bohlen illustrated the administration’s real intentions, recalling that “Eisenhower did score a public-relations victory with his surprise “open skies” proposal [...] From my experience, I was sure that the Soviets would never tolerate any eyes prying into their secrets.” He also regretted not having done more to persuade Eisenhower to open talks with Malenkov. Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York, 1973), 384 and 371.

<sup>22</sup> PSB “Soviet Lures and Pressures since Stalin’s Death March 5 to 25, 1953”, March 26, 1953, stated that Soviet peace gestures “have tended to [...] [r]aise hopes and expectations, with [a] resulting tendency to delay Western defence efforts. [...] Whether or not the overtures made thus far result in negotiations over Korea or other major issues, it should be borne in mind that in communist doctrine the “peace offensive” and “truce talks” are both considered to be interim measures to achieve a lessening of enemy pressure while communist resources are consolidated.” *DDRS* (1986), 3571.

<sup>23</sup> Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> See Osgood, “Form Before Substance”, 428 and 433.

<sup>25</sup> NSC 5608/1 “Statement of Policy on U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” of July 18, 1956, acknowledged the knock-on effect of the FRG’s admittance into NATO on Moscow’s creation of the Warsaw Pact and subsequent enhancement of its military position in the region: “Formation of the Warsaw Pact in May 1955 as a counter to NATO, which had just admitted West Germany, institutionalized and extended existing Soviet coordination and control over the military potential of the Eastern European bloc.” *FRUS, 1955-1957, Eastern Europe*, Volume XXV (Washington, 1990), 217.

<sup>26</sup> A State Department official later commented: “It is now pretty clear that [RIAS] played a major role in spreading demonstrations from East Berlin to the [Soviet] Zone.” Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> See Christian F. Ostermann and Malcolm Byrne (eds.), *Uprising in East Germany, 1953* (Budapest, 2001), 220.

<sup>28</sup> See the Discussion at the 150<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, June 18, 1953, *ibid.*, 225-231.

<sup>29</sup> NSC 158 “United States Objectives and Actions to Exploit the Unrest in the Satellite States,” 29 June 1953, *ibid.*, 332-334. Also see 319 for PSB D-45 “Interim U.S. Psychological Strategy Plan for Exploitation of Unrest in Satellite Europe.”

<sup>30</sup> “Concept and Ideas for Psychological Warfare in Europe Developed by the Chiefs of Mission Meeting at Luxembourg on September 18-19, 1953,” *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume VIII*, 82-86.

<sup>31</sup> Ostermann and Byrne (eds.), *Uprising in East Germany*, 319.

<sup>32</sup> *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume VIII*, 82-86.

<sup>33</sup> NSC 162/2 “Statement of Policy by the National Security Council on Basic National Security Policy”, October 30, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954, National Security Affairs*, Volume II (Washington, 1984), 577-597.

<sup>34</sup> Although some members believed that NSC 162 was explicit in its conclusions, the fact that political and psychological warfare and the overall objective of liberation remained intact illustrates the opposite. For instance the head of PPS Robert Bowie recollected that “I think part of [Eisenhower’s] purpose was to make sure that everyone understood that the basic policy was containment and not roll-back. Realistically

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the conclusion was that if you tried to intervene you risked a Third World War.” Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, 335.

<sup>35</sup> In an NSC discussion reviewing NSC 162/1 on October 29, 1953, it was decided “to make clear to the leaders and people of the USSR that if the USSR foregoes external expansion, relinquishes domination of other peoples, etc., the United States would be prepared to accept continuance of the internal political and economic organization of the USSR.” *DDRS* (1991), 1988.

<sup>36</sup> *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Volume II, 577-597.

<sup>37</sup> See Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 161-163 and Krebs, *Dueling Visions*, 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Volume II, 577-597.

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum from Robert Cutler to Walter Bedell Smith in Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 153.

<sup>40</sup> NSC 174 “United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” December 11, 1953, Ostermann and Byrne (eds.), *Uprising in East Germany*, 392-406.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>42</sup> NSC 5406/1 “United States Policy Towards Yugoslavia,” February 6, 1954, *FRUS*, Volume VIII, 1373-1377.

<sup>43</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin.*, 164.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 160. At an NSC meeting in November 1954 Secretary Dulles asked “how were we to prevent the Soviet Union from achieving such a nuclear balance of power without going to war with the USSR? Certainly no actions on the periphery of the Soviet Union would stop the growth of the atomic capabilities of the Soviet Union.” See Marc Trachtenberg, “Wasting Asset: American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954”, *International Security* 13 (Winter 1988/9), 43.

<sup>45</sup> NSC Progress Report on United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe [NSC 174] by the OCB, July 16, 1954, *DDRS* (1987), 2875.

<sup>46</sup> The head of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) Theodore Streibert lamented in May that the conflict in policy guidance was obstructing any progress towards liberation: “We are now effectively organized to engage in psychological warfare but we have no long-term strategic plan.” United States Information Agency (USIA) Memorandum by Director Theodore C. Streibert to OCB Chairman Walter Bedell Smith, May 12, 1954, *DDRS* (1988), 437.

<sup>47</sup> Extract from NSC 5422/2 (August 7, 1954) contained in an OCB Memorandum, September 7, 1954, *DDRS* (1993), 575.

<sup>48</sup> OCB Working Group study into NSC174, “Analysis of the situation with Respect to Possible Detachment of a Major European Soviet Satellite,” December 30, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Volume VIII, 152-153.

<sup>49</sup> NSC 5505/1 “Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities,” January 31, 1955, *DDRS* (1992), 311.

<sup>50</sup> The report declared that it “is now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose objective is world domination by whatever means and at whatever cost. There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. If the United States is to survive, long-standing American concepts of “fair play” must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counterespionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us.” Report of the Special Study Group [Doolittle Committee] on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, September 30, 1954, William Leary (ed.), *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents* (University, Alabama, 1984) 143-145.

<sup>51</sup> NSC Discussion, January 27, 1955, *DDRS* (1992), 310.

<sup>52</sup> In a Memorandum from Robert F. Delaney of the Office of Policy and Programs, Soviet Orbit Division, USIA, to Francis B. Stevens of the Office of Eastern European Affairs, dated January 24, 1955, it was acknowledged that it “should an uprising similar to the abortive East Berlin riots of June 17, 1953 occur in the near future in Eastern Europe, the position which the U.S. Government must take would not differ materially from the stand we assumed in 1953.” *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 10-11.

<sup>53</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, 337.

<sup>54</sup> OCB “Report to the National Security Council on the Activation of a Volunteer Freedom Corps,” July 14, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 55-64.

<sup>55</sup> NSC Discussion, May 19, 1955, *DDRS* (1986), 3400.

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<sup>56</sup> *DDRS* (1987), 2875. This was despite NSC 5524/1 “Basic U.S. Policy in Relation to the Four Power Negotiations” of July 11, 1955, stipulating that one means of seeking the independence of Eastern Europe should be through talks with the Soviet leadership: “Existing policy (NSC 174) sets as an ultimate objective the elimination of Soviet control over the satellites. This objective is to be pursued by ‘appropriate means short of military force’, including ‘if possible, negotiation with the USSR’.” *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 46-47.

<sup>57</sup> NSC 5412/2 “On Covert Operations,” December 28, 1955, superseded NSC 10/2 and NSC 10/5. Leary (ed.), *The Central Intelligence Agency*, 146-149.

## YEAR OF UPHEAVAL

### *1956: Contradiction, Impotence and Revolution*

The Eisenhower Government entered its re-election year still unable to disentangle ideological ambitions for Eastern Europe from its geopolitical and military limitations in the region. The administration was still enamoured with projecting the wartime principles of democracy and a capitalist economic system on the Soviet-controlled bloc, but shifting political-strategic considerations had modified the policy-level approach that it was hoped could achieve liberation. The Soviet acquirement of the hydrogen bomb had enhanced its power to the extent that the lynchpin of US security policy was now to avoid a third world war at all costs. This imperative was in direct tension with Washington's continuing aspiration to liberate the satellites, especially because the psychological and political warfare methods it utilised were necessarily provocative. It also wrangled strategists more generally because the US remained ideologically at war with what it deemed the immoral communist bloc led by Moscow. This negated any serious consideration of pursuing negotiations to alleviate a fundamental source of ideological tension represented by Eastern Europe's status. Despite the so called emergence of détente with the "spirit of Geneva" the US concentrated on negotiating over the sources of tension that transcended its fundamental ideological and geopolitical interests, primarily the status of Germany.

In early 1956 the administration continued to come up against the contradictions between its ideological goals and geopolitical power. A National Intelligence Estimate

(NIE) in January recognised that the “military, political, and economic significance of the Satellites to the USSR is so great that Moscow almost certainly regards the maintenance of control over the area as an essential element of its power position.”<sup>1</sup> For the US to alter the status of Eastern Europe would therefore require war if its ideological objective remained true. The OCB observed the following month that public announcements by Eisenhower and Dulles did indeed reiterate this ideological aim:

[T]he U.S. intention [is] not to undertake any agreement which would have the effect of confirming the status quo in the satellite area and [...] it [is] the aim of U.S. policy that the satellite peoples should eventually obtain their independence and the right to determine freely their own form of government.

The progress report also surmised that “U.S. capabilities [...] which could basically alter the status of the satellites, remain limited” because the option of resorting to military conflict had been rejected. Although recognising that covert warfare “intended to encourage anti-communist activities and passive resistance are somewhat incompatible with a détente [and] evolutionary changes in satellite regimes” the report concluded that Washington would have to live with these inconsistencies, rather than abandon one strategy for the other: “It may be that the U.S. will have to undertake to follow simultaneously two policies with inconsistent courses of action, representing divergent approaches to the one objective.”<sup>2</sup>

On February 25 Nikita Krushchev made his landmark speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) denouncing the cult of personality that had surrounded Stalin allowing him to abuse his power. When Washington learned of Khrushchev’s call for de-Stalinisation and liberalisation of the Soviet system, along with the replacement of the hard-line Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, policy-makers immediately debated how best to exploit this rare example of the

Kremlin admitting its own fallibility. On the one hand restraint was necessary to not disturb the climate of relatively good relations with Moscow. The thaw in relations appeared to be paying dividends in light of the Khrushchev speech. But Washington interpreted Khrushchev's calls for reform in the Soviet-satellite relationship as symbolising a potential weakness in the Kremlin's geopolitical position, offering new opportunities to accelerate Eastern Europe's independence. While reviewing the text for the NSC on March 22, Allen Dulles asserted that Khrushchev's deliberate attempt to attack Stalin "afforded the United States a great opportunity, both covertly and overtly, to exploit the situation to its advantage."<sup>3</sup> Yet the requisite intensification of psychological and political warfare operations pursuant to this objective clashed with détente.

Eisenhower opted for the aggressive psychological exploitation of the 'secret' speech, endorsing its publication in the *New York Times* on June 4, but more importantly its wide dissemination into Eastern Europe through the NCFE propaganda channels to foster anti-Soviet and nationalist unrest. Foster Dulles enthused to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Khrushchev was "on the ropes and, if we can keep the pressure up [...] there is going to occur a very great disintegration within the apparatus of the international communist organization."<sup>4</sup> Although this "pressure" clearly contradicted with US efforts to foster peaceful change and the encouragement of Soviet concessions at the negotiating table, bureaucratic opposition to the speech's release surfaced for quite another reason. Frank Wisner and James Jesus Angleton at the CIA requested that the administration defer publishing Khrushchev's speech because of the lack of preparedness of the Agency's Operation Red Sox/ Red Cap.<sup>5</sup> Rather than seeking "evolutionary change in the Soviet system" as was the definition of US strategy in NSC 5602/1 of March 15,

the CIA hoped to augment its émigré paramilitary campaign to foment anti-communist uprisings through the timely circulation of the speech.<sup>6</sup>

The revolt by workers at the locomotive plant in Poznań in Poland on June 28 should have reminded the administration why it had (supposedly) modified its strategy towards peaceful change rather than the fostering of anti-Soviet rebellion. Washington was implicitly involved because of NCFE's dissemination of Khrushchev's speech throughout Poland, promoting anti-Soviet feeling which then turned violent in Poznań. As with East Germany in 1953, the US Government was powerless to influence events on the ground in Poland if it was not prepared to militarily intervene on the side of the rioters against the communist authorities. As had been the case three years before, having implicitly encouraged dissent the unrest was quickly quelled and Eisenhower and Dulles could only fall back on mild protestation in response.

The failure to resolve strategic inconsistency was exacerbated because Washington viewed evolutionary change as simply a shift in policy still seeking the ultimate aim of satellite liberation, rather than the abandonment of this aim for Soviet modification. As a result, ideological interests were still very much enmeshed with geopolitical constraints. The policy review series NSC 5608 issued over the summer in light of the ostensible shift to "evolutionary change" and the Poznań riots failed to resolve the strategic problem created by the tension between ideology and geopolitics. But this was in contrast to the administration's understanding of the new policy documentation. State believed that NSC 5608 had "redefined the general courses of action to bring them into conformity with the present situation in Eastern Europe and with a more realistic assessment of US capabilities to effect developments in that area."<sup>7</sup>

In fact the strategy paper represented only a rhetorical shift from the pursuit of the revolutionary overthrow of Moscow's hegemony to the "encouragement of evolutionary change resulting in the weakening of Soviet controls and the attainment of national independence by the countries concerned, even though there may be no immediate change in their internal political structure."<sup>8</sup> Despite the symbolic shift, the ideological imperative of liberating Eastern Europe remained fundamental. This could still be achieved by stimulating indigenous rebellion on the condition that it stood a good chance of success in overthrowing the communist authorities: "Avoid incitements to violence or to action when the probable reprisals or other results would yield a net loss in terms of U.S. objectives."<sup>9</sup> No indication of how Washington proposed to walk this fine line between promoting successful revolutions and discouraging "premature" revolts was suggested. Vice President Richard Nixon's explanation was semantically as clear as mud:

We are not saying that we are going to initiate uprisings and violence in the satellites. We are merely saying that we will not always discourage such uprisings and violence if the uprisings should occur spontaneously. The policy paper [...] should not be too 'soft' in character.<sup>10</sup>

At the operational level political and psychological warfare was being intensified rather than wound down because Washington believed that Moscow's grip on its satellites was slipping. Cracks were perceived in the Kremlin's armour both practically with its liberalising reforms, and symbolically with the acceptance of Tito and the "different roads to socialism" thesis plus Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. Although the NSC 5608 series remained pessimistic of the chances of success of any satellites breaking away from Moscow as illustrated by Poznań, the "fluid situation in the satellites has increased the previously limited U.S. capabilities to influence a basic change in Soviet domination of the satellites."<sup>11</sup> The desire to accelerate the process of

“evolutionary change” resulted in the US intensifying its revolutionary covert operations, implicitly encouraged by the policy paper despite the overall emphasis on peaceful means:

There is a possibility that an internal relaxation might result in the long run in the development of forces and pressures leading to fundamental changes of the satellite system in the direction of national independence and individual freedom and security.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently rhetoric papered over the cracks of contradictory strategies and covert warfare was allowed to continue at the operational level.

Washington interpreted the events of the “Polish October” as vindicating the new policy approach with its emphasis on evolutionary change while continuing to stir up unrest in the satellites to maximise strains in the leadership. Despite the emergency visit of the Khrushchev delegation on October 19 and intimidating Soviet troop manoeuvres towards Warsaw in response to signs that the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) was on the verge of undertaking autonomous reforms, the Polish leadership was able resist Soviet threats and appoint the moderate Wladyslaw Gomulka as First Secretary. On closer inspection however, the Poles had only been able to secure Soviet concessions on the condition that they remain loyal to the Kremlin and the Warsaw Pact. The Polish “October” did not illustrate further signs of weakness on Khrushchev’s part, as perceived by Washington. The much lauded Polish threat of armed resistance to a Russian invasion did not ultimately deter Moscow from intervening, as later events in Hungary would show, because the Khrushchev delegation was able to secure satisfactory assurances from the PZPR that its reforms were consistent with the Kremlin’s own moderate new policies.

Washington judged that its new evolutionary policy was influencing events in Poland. This was despite it following a self-imposed policy of inaction during the Polish

crisis in an effort to avoid provoking Soviet military intervention. On October 21 in a televised appearance Secretary Dulles announced that America would not send troops to assist Poland even should Moscow intervene by force.<sup>13</sup> This echoed the same geopolitical impotence that the US had suffered in East Berlin and Poznań. On October 23 the PPS recommended that the US should “encourage Poland to become increasingly independent of the Soviets” but that the imperative was to “avert Soviet forceful intervention in Poland, which would not only terminate that independence but might also involve a risk of spreading hostilities.” As a result a public posture of self-deference and non-involvement should be adopted:

We should strike a public posture which is restrained and which makes clear that while we welcome greater Polish independence we are not seeking to gain a position of special influence for ourselves in Poland.

Self-interest formed the basis of this strategy of non-involvement, as Washington’s fundamental objective was to avoid embroilment in an expanding conflict. Strategy was not necessarily founded on the basis that it provided the best chance of securing Poland’s liberation.

While the US claimed not to be seeking “special influence” in Poland it would simultaneously “make known quietly to the Polish regime our willingness to furnish economic assistance.”<sup>14</sup> Although the ostensible short-term aim of general policy did not include the cessation of a satellite’s ties with Moscow or its political, military and economic integration into the Western bloc because this was recognised as impossible without general war, in the long-term it was exactly the objective. Moscow understood that any true concession of Polish independence would only further encourage Washington in seeking its long-term aim. Furthermore, should Poland achieve

independence, the US would have made progress towards the fundamental long-term goal of lifting the Iron Curtain and liberating all the satellites, as a USIA memorandum illustrated: “It is in our interest to encourage the present developments in Poland towards an increase in Polish self-determination as a step towards weakening the power balance in the Soviet bloc.” In contrast to the public announcements, it was still this ultimate aim of retracting Soviet dominance that dictated US policies:

We believe that this can best be done by avoiding giving the Stalinist forces in the Soviet Union and in Poland any justification for arguing that the present anti-Stalinist developments in Poland are supported by capitalist enemies. In our output we should avoid inciting unrest in Poland and in other countries of Eastern Europe *to such a point* as to give the Soviet leaders any pretext for using force to subdue national communism in Poland and the other satellites.<sup>15</sup>

US policy was predicated on a public image that concealed its actual objectives, reiterating the notion that covert warfare was ‘plausibly deniable.’ This theory continued to assume that Moscow would be influenced either way by Washington and would not just pursue its own objectives. It also dangerously assumed that the US could exert a controlling influence on the satellite populations in order to incite them to or restrain them from rebellion at propitious moments as Washington judged.

Unrest in the Eastern bloc soon spread to Hungary, where anti-Soviet student demonstrations were staged on October 23 in solidarity with the Polish reforms. RFE intensively broadcasted “factual” information about the events in Poland throughout the satellites because it assessed that spreading the news of Soviet concessions to stir up anti-Soviet and nationalistic feeling did not cross the line to inciting rebellion. Despite the assessment, the result was the same. Violence soon flared up in Budapest as workers and students alike began rioting in reaction to the police firing into the crowd of

demonstrators. To what extent RFE had contributed to the outbreak is impossible to quantify, but the US was certainly implicitly involved because it had spread news of the Polish developments in order to induce exactly the kind of demonstrations that initially took place in Hungary. The transition of a peaceful demonstration into riots and then revolution illustrated the rhetorical fallacy that underlay the administration's strategy, because clearly there was no way to control the indigenous populations and prevent them from crossing the line between passive and violent action.

Washington was in a familiar quandary. The panicked Hungarian leadership requested Soviet military intervention to crush what was swiftly becoming an anti-regime, anti-communist revolution. Moscow hastily fulfilled the request recognising that without Soviet troops on the streets of Budapest events would most likely lead to Hungary's declaration of independence and rejection of the Warsaw Pact, eventualities unacceptable to the Kremlin. With Washington powerless to exert any influence and, due to patchy intelligence unsure of exactly what was happening, Soviet ground forces entered the capital during the night of 23-24 October and began to suppress the uprising.

Meanwhile back in Washington the Eisenhower administration attempted to formulate a strategy out of the tatters of its existing policy. The initial assessments should not have come as a surprise had the consequences of its policy been thought through. The latent anti-Soviet, nationalistic character of the revolt, while simultaneously representing a culmination of US psychological and political warfare, confronted Moscow with two options. As Allen Dulles observed, the CPSU could either "return to a hard Stalinist regime" or "permit developments in the direction of genuine democracy." Because "the revolt in Hungary constituted the most serious threat yet to be posed to continued Soviet

control of the satellites” it logically “risked the complete loss of Soviet control.”<sup>16</sup> US estimates had consistently repeated since NSC 20/4 that the Kremlin would not tolerate loss of its hegemony over Eastern Europe, evidently leaving Khrushchev with only one option once he had concluded that inaction would result in Hungary’s independence, to use force. In any case, that Moscow was confronted with only the two options of intervention or genuine democratic reform, as assessed in Washington, illustrated that the strategy of fostering national communism was obsolete because it did not offer a realistic third alternative.

Imre Nagy was appointed Prime Minister on the wave of the revolution and immediately began the impossible balancing act of appeasing the Hungarian population demanding independence and the CPSU which would tolerate only superficial reform and certainly no loss of ultimate Soviet control. Unable to accept its impotence, the Eisenhower administration debated its strategic ‘options’ ranging from a soft to a hard line. In truth, however, once military intervention had been ruled out whatever policy was settled on would have proved completely inadequate to influence events to Washington’s advantage. Belligerent proposals such as Robert Amory’s of the NSC Planning Board, to declare an ultimatum backed up by the threat of a pre-emptive surgical nuclear strike along the Red Army’s supply routes were immediately rejected by Eisenhower and Dulles.<sup>17</sup> The administration was absolutely unwilling to fire the opening salvo of a nuclear war over Hungary’s independence.

Unsurprisingly, C D Jackson also clamoured for an assertive US response to the crisis. He was desperately disappointed when the unfolding Suez crisis took precedence over Hungary:

The Middle East is our weak flank; Eastern Europe is the Soviet weak flank; and if we concentrate all our efforts on our own weak flank and do not exert any simultaneous pressure on theirs, we have in effect been sucked in to playing their game on their field in accordance with their timing.

Although Jackson's analysis was inaccurate because it implied that the Soviets had instigated both crises to manipulate them to its advantage, it did illustrate that beyond the rhetorical swagger of "massive retaliation" the US was not committed to a policy of "asymmetrical response."<sup>18</sup> All offensive proposals were immediately dismissed by Eisenhower and Dulles because they accepted that, in practise, without the commitment to fight for Hungary's sovereignty their hands were tied. It was very difficult for political warfare agents to recognise this fact, because their entire energy had been dedicated to preparing for this opportunity, but the claim that "a case can be made that [the CIA could have intervened] without involving the United States in a world war with the Soviet Union" is mistaken.<sup>19</sup> It was for exactly this reason that the US did not even consider getting involved.

An alternative conciliatory approach was put forward by Harold Stassen. He suggested that Eisenhower indicate to the Soviet leadership that "we are willing to have Hungary be established on the Austrian basis- and not affiliated with NATO."<sup>20</sup> However, this proposal to render Hungary politically neutral and militarily non-aligned as on the Austrian model, would have represented a unilateral concession inconsistent with its vital interests if accepted by Moscow. Khrushchev had willingly negotiated a treaty with the West granting Austrian neutrality because it had represented a compromise between the two blocs that furthered the interests of both superpowers.<sup>21</sup> A similar agreement over Hungary would have conflicted with the maximum concession of

extremely moderate reform along the Gomulka line that Moscow was willing to tolerate in one of its satellites.

In any case, Foster Dulles criticised Stassen's proposal, but not because he recognised that it was inherently doomed to failure. Rather, Dulles continued to entertain the misguided hope that the US could glean even greater concessions from the Kremlin beyond Hungary's neutrality, and that Stassen's proposal would in fact represent an American concession. The Secretary of State's scepticism stemmed from his continuing desire to see Soviet power rolled back from Eastern Europe and he therefore (mis)interpreted events as signalling the initiation of such a retraction. Subsequently the speech he gave in Dallas on October 27 embodied a far less concessionary proposal to the Soviets than the one originally suggested by Stassen. Dulles condensed the entire initiative into the one notorious sentence "[w]e do not look upon these nations as potential military allies."<sup>22</sup>

The day after Dulles's speech Nagy announced a cease-fire and the opening of talks with the Soviet leadership. Eisenhower promptly informed Bohlen, now US Ambassador to Moscow, to ensure that the Kremlin leadership be made aware of Dulles's comments in the hope that they would sufficiently reassure the Soviets that their security needs did not require them to impose military control over Hungary. This done, Eisenhower then reiterated the message himself "to remove any false fears that we would look upon new governments in these Eastern European countries as potential military allies" on October 31.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, this 'reassurance' was wholly inadequate in meeting Moscow's fundamental conditions in a country it considered to be of primary geopolitical-strategic importance. In any event, because of America's persistent overt and

covert commitment to the liberation of Eastern Europe, the Soviet leadership simply did not believe Eisenhower and Dulles and correctly assumed that over the long-term, the US would seek the military as well as political-economic integration of these countries.<sup>24</sup>

Negotiations between the Hungarian and Soviet authorities continued ostensibly until the second Soviet invasion in the early hours of November 4, though they had essentially ended when the Soviet decision to invade Hungary had been reached by October 31. The actions and strategies adopted by the Eisenhower administration played no significant role in influencing Soviet measures during the crisis or the final CPSU Presidium's decision to intervene decisively a second time. Despite its immense global power and ideological ambition, without committing military forces on the side of the Hungarian revolutionaries, Washington was utterly impotent. It could therefore in no way affect the Soviet commitment to a second invasion that came about following Nagy's publicly declared acceptance of the revolution's demands reflecting Hungary's rejection of Moscow's political and military authority.<sup>25</sup>

During the lull in fighting the NSC drew up a draft policy as a result of the events in Poland and Hungary. NSC 5616 of October 31 continued to endorse "the emergence of "national' communist governments" as a "first step towards full national independence and freedom." The pending second Soviet invasion had not yet clarified for Washington that the Kremlin would not tolerate the former if it threatened to lead to the latter. Yet this objective was retained because of the Polish experience:

Moscow is apparently willing to accept, however reluctantly, a communist government, which, while remaining loyal to its military and political alliance with the USSR, asserts its "national independence" and its right to pursue its own internal road to communism.

US policy still assumed therefore, that even if “national communist” governments could successfully hold power without incurring Soviet intervention, they would then be amenable to the West and would eventually reform into non-communist governments. This process of transition from one bloc to the other seemed to ignore any role that either the satellite regime or Moscow might play in obstructing the shift. It should have been considered highly unlikely that the Kremlin would tolerate Poland’s drawing closer to the West at any time during the foreseeable future, whether or not concessions of internal autonomy had been granted to the Gomulka leadership. Instead Washington wrongly interpreted the Polish developments as correlating with US national communist strategy whereby Gomulka would eventually accede to a democratic government.

The final significant policy guideline substantiated by NSC 5616 was to mobilise global psychological operations in an attempt to take maximum advantage of Soviet brutality.<sup>26</sup> The US believed it salient to intensify the current psychological warfare campaign in order to keep instability “at boiling point” despite the grave indications that this might well influence events towards a tragic conclusion. It also reflected the pre-eminence the Eisenhower administration gave to words over actions. Both NSC 5616 and 5616/2, drafted on November 19 (once the revolution had been crushed), gave highest priority to the propaganda value of the satellite revolts by making it their first policy recommendation.<sup>27</sup> Reflecting an inability to translate words into deeds, emphasis was put on exploiting the global psychological impact of the rebellions over studies promoting Soviet troop withdrawals from the bloc and US action in the event of future uprisings.

A propaganda offensive denoted the culmination of debate at the highest levels of government during the crisis, in which the administration had wrestled with how best to damage the Soviet Union's image in the Developing World. When Eisenhower learned of "moving pictures [that] had been taken of Soviet tanks killing Hungarians in the streets of Budapest" he "immediately asked whether such movies should not immediately be disseminated through our embassies all over the world." Despite the crudeness of the suggestion it was already, in fact, being done.<sup>28</sup> Eisenhower and Nixon were most keen to influence Indian and Indonesian opinion because these were two of the most powerful non-aligned nations. Washington was therefore determined to prevent them succumbing to Moscow's "peace offensive." In another conversation illustrating their frustration with recalcitrant global opinion, Eisenhower suggested that "it might be well for him to write to [Jawaharlal] Nehru, bringing out that we are witnessing colonialism by the bayonet in Hungary." Nixon replied that "if Nehru would line up with us in this matter, Russia would be ruined in Asia."<sup>29</sup> However, these debates over the manipulation of events in order to tarnish Moscow's international image evaded both America's role in the violence and the global perception of that role which would concomitantly blemish Washington's reputation with Moscow's.

A further distraction for the administration was the joint British, French and Israeli assault on Egypt. However, the Suez crisis in no way influenced US action concerning Hungary because a policy of non-intervention had consistently been upheld at least since the East German riots, and was illustrated again by Poznań and the "Polish October." Furthermore, by the time of the British-French invasion on October 31 the

administration had privately and publicly dismissed any US military intervention in Hungary, regardless of Moscow's actions.

Suez undoubtedly distracted Washington though. Such was the geopolitical importance the US attached to the region and the fact that the US was the pre-eminent power in the Middle East. America therefore had strategic influence over the Suez crisis that it lacked in Eastern Europe, and its close allies were also involved in the conflict. As a consequence, Eisenhower informed the NSC meeting on November 1 that he "did not wish the Council to take up the situation in the Soviet satellites. Instead, he wished to concentrate on the Middle East."<sup>30</sup> Although the US was impotent to influence events, during the crucial period before the second Soviet invasion three days later Washington was totally absorbed by Suez. Instead the administration adopted its familiar wait-and-see approach to Hungary, thus failing to bring pressure on the Soviets at the UN, for instance. British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden, though obviously following his own agenda, bemoaned US procrastination and the resultant failure of the West to seek UN mediation of the Hungarian crisis:

Five days passed without any further council meeting upon Hungary despite repeated attempts by ourselves and others to bring one about. The United States representative was reluctant and voiced his suspicion that we were urging the Hungarian situation to direct attention from Suez. The United States Government appeared in no hurry to move. Their attitude provided a damaging contrast to the alacrity they were showing in arranging the French and ourselves!<sup>31</sup>

US caution perversely resulted in its effectively ignoring Nagy's repudiation of the Warsaw Pact and declaration of Hungarian neutrality despite these actions conforming to Washington's policy objectives. Nagy's plea to the UN on November 1 to urgently consider "the defence of [Hungary's] neutrality by the four Great Powers" fell on deaf

ears.<sup>32</sup> Washington was concentrating on Suez and following a self-imposed cautious policy towards the Hungarian situation produced by its negligible influence in Eastern Europe. To have recognised Hungary's neutrality would have engaged Washington with Moscow's prestige before the Soviet response was known. The decision to effectively ignore Nagy was based on the premise that Moscow might take Hungary by force and Washington must not be obliged to defend its sovereignty. The status of neutrality that Nagy's Government urgently required to survive therefore had to be ignored.

On November 4, following the Red Army's launching of "Operation Whirlwind," another proposal for a firmer policy was suggested "even at this late hour" to impose political sanctions on the USSR should the invasion continue unabated.<sup>33</sup> Instead Eisenhower resigned himself to privately appealing to Bulganin to desist in military action, blaming the British and French for the strategic quandary he was in, and making public statements to the American public that attempted to conceal the administration's impotence:

I met today with the Secretary of State [...], the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and some of my staff to discuss the ways and means available to the United States which would result in:

1. Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary.
2. Achieve for Hungary its own right of self-determination in the choice of its own government.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, as Bulganin's reply bluntly reminded him, geopolitically Hungary was effectively "none of the business of the United States."<sup>35</sup> But this was election week for the administration and such powerlessness and inadequacy of policy would not likely impress the electorate. With great irony considering the timing of the crisis and the 1952 Republican campaign platform, the anxious presidential candidate Eisenhower informed the American public that the crises in Hungary and the Middle East "have no connection

whatsoever with matters of partisanship.”<sup>36</sup> The truth of the matter was quite the opposite; the revolution highlighted the flaws in a flagship strategy of the 1952 campaign that the administration had then perpetuated since its election. This was apparently missed by the American public on election-day when they overwhelmingly re-elected Eisenhower back into the White House.

Once the revolt had run its inevitably bloody course with the Soviet suppression and re-imposition of authority over Hungary the administration was left to dwell on its involvement in the affair. Eisenhower conducted some soul-searching over his government’s role in inciting and betraying the rebellion, expressing his “feeling that we have excited Hungarians for all these years, and [are] now turning our backs on them when they are in a jam.” Dulles consoled him with the same rhetorical excuse that had papered over the cracks of the flawed strategy: “we have always been against violent revolution.” Eisenhower replied that ‘amazingly’ US representative to the UN Henry Cabot Lodge “was in ignorance of this fact.”<sup>37</sup> If a high official in the US government had failed to comprehend the subtleties of a complex rhetorical strategy, the administration could not really expect the frustrated populations of Eastern Europe to grasp them. By December at least, there was a certain realisation that “the Hungarians for the most part did interpret our broadcasts in a manner probably never intended or foreseen.”<sup>38</sup>

Governmental responses to the revolution were varied though. C D Jackson acknowledged an administrative sense of contrition to Secretary Dulles, though he still clung to the hope of adopting a decisive policy even after the event:

America has a definite sense of malaise about Hungary, ranging all the way from embarrassed self-consciousness to a real guilt complex. America wants

*action* in the case of Hungary, and feels frustrated because it realizes how pitifully few are the possible, reasonable, feasible, courses of action.<sup>39</sup>

Richard Bissell recollected the dilemma posed by the revolution and the reaction to its suppression at the CIA:

Either you give assistance and get bloody results, or you don't and appear weak and mislead your friends. I don't remember any lucid conversations. I remember a lot of hand wringing. No one had thought it through.<sup>40</sup>

Although this illustrated that, to a certain extent it was recognised that US policy was complicit in the outbreak of the unrest, the highest members of the administration remained tight-lipped about the affair. For instance Allen Dulles washed his and CIA's hands of the events:

The chronology and nature of events in Hungary and the statements of the Hungarian Government itself prior to its overthrow make it clear that the uprising resulted from ten years of Soviet repression and was finally sparked by the shooting on 23 October of peaceful demonstrators, and did not result from any external influence, such as RFE broadcasts or Free Europe leaflets.<sup>41</sup>

There was some truth in Dulles's conclusions. The US alone did not cause the Hungarians to revolt and were very much a third party to the affair. Years of Soviet repression was undoubtedly the root cause of the revolution. But this avoided the role that US policy did actually play in influencing popular nationalistic and anti-Soviet feeling behind the Iron Curtain. The revolt represented the means to an objective that had been the lynchpin of US political-psychological warfare strategy for the entirety of Eisenhower's administration and before him Truman's. Efforts to foster indigenous dissatisfaction had in fact been intensified through the propaganda channels during the two years leading up to October 1956 because of the lack of an alternative strategy to liberate the satellites while avoiding war. The

retention of a consistently flawed strategy was testament to the magnitude of America's ideological conviction that liberation must ultimately occur.

Several investigations were conducted after the Hungarian tragedy to clarify the US role. The broad conclusions reached, that RFE had generally broadcast a moderate message during the period of unrest, did not alter the provocative nature of "straight news reporting." The deliberate targeting of the Hungarian population following Gomulka's progress in Poland had been "consistent with policy."<sup>42</sup> The US Government finally could not 'plausibly deny' its implicit influence of the abortive revolution which represented the culmination of a dangerously, even recklessly flawed strategy. The Bruce-Lovett report released late in 1956 was possibly the most critical of the postscripts:

The supporters of the 1948 decision to launch this government on a positive [psychological and political warfare] program could not possibly have foreseen the ramifications of the operations which have resulted from it [...] Should not someone, somewhere, in an authoritative position in our government, on a continuing basis, be counting the immediate costs of disappointments, [...] calculating the impacts on our international position, and keeping in mind the long range wisdom of activities which have entailed our virtual abandonment of the international "golden rule," and which, if successful to the degree claimed for them, are responsible in a great measure for stirring up the turmoil and raising the doubts about us that exist in many countries of the world today? What of the effects on our present alliances? What will happen tomorrow?<sup>43</sup>

Despite the criticism even this suggested that the administration could somehow have evaded its ideological interests and pursued an alternative strategy from the 1948 decision to wage political warfare against the Soviet bloc. The fact of the matter, borne out by the Hungarian revolution, was that ideology was in fact as integral as geopolitics in the formulation and conduct of foreign affairs.

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- <sup>1</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 12-56 “Probable Developments in the European Satellites through 1960,” January 10, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 115.
- <sup>2</sup> OCB “Progress Report on NSC 174, United States Policy toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe” February 29, 1956, *Ibid.*, 121-128.
- <sup>3</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 172.
- <sup>4</sup> Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 78.
- <sup>5</sup> See Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 79.
- <sup>6</sup> Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 101.
- <sup>7</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs C. Burke Elbrick to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, July 10, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 211-212.
- <sup>8</sup> Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*, 172.
- <sup>9</sup> Appendix to NSC 5608/1 “U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” July 18, 1956, *DDRS* (1993), 2271.
- <sup>10</sup> Lucas, *Freedom’s War*, 252.
- <sup>11</sup> NSC 5608 “U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” July 3, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 190-194.
- <sup>12</sup> From NSC 5608/1 “U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” July 18, 1956, *ibid.*, 216-221.
- <sup>13</sup> Csaba Békés, “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics”, *The Hungarian Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1995).
- <sup>14</sup> Record of a Meeting of the PPS, October 23, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 259-260.
- <sup>15</sup> Memorandum from the Chief of the News Policy Staff of the Office of Policy and Programs of the USIA, George W. Edman, to the Assistant Program Manager for Policy Application of the USIA, Barry Zorthian, October 24, 1956, *ibid.*, 270-271. [Italics added].
- <sup>16</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 301<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the NSC, October 26, 1956, *ibid.*, 295-299.
- <sup>17</sup> See Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges*, 95-96.
- <sup>18</sup> John Lewis Gaddis suggests that “the central idea [of the ‘New Look’] was that of asymmetrical response- of reacting to adversary challenges in ways calculated to apply one’s own strengths against the other sides weaknesses.” See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 147. Although this theory has been supported by other historians it breaks down when applied to practical tests such as the Hungarian revolution.
- <sup>19</sup> William Colby, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (London, 1978), 134-135.
- <sup>20</sup> Cited from a letter from Stassen to Eisenhower dated October, 26, 1956, though his suggestion was also discussed at the NSC Meeting of the same date. *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 305.
- <sup>21</sup> See Csaba Békés, “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics.”
- <sup>22</sup> Address by Secretary of State Dulles Before the Dallas Council on World Affairs, October 27, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 317-318.
- <sup>23</sup> In a telegram from the US Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State on October 30, 1956 Bohlen reported that “I told [Soviet Minister of Defence Georgiy] Zhukov and Molotov I wanted to direct their attention to [Foster Dulles’s] speech and paragraph in it concerning our policy in regard to Eastern European countries and gave them from memory translation text paragraph.” *Ibid.*, 347-348. Eisenhower’s comments were taken from his Television and Radio Report to the American People on the Developments in Eastern Europe and the Middle East of October 31, 1956, cited in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1956* (Washington, 1958), 1062. According to Eisenhower’s speech writer Emmet John Hughes, a draft of the address prepared by Dulles had to be discarded and references “to ‘irresistible’ forces of ‘liberation’ unleashed in Eastern Europe” toned down. *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 351. This indicated the tensions within the administration between adopting a hard line or a conciliatory approach.
- <sup>24</sup> Khrushchev’s absolute distrust of the West was indicated by comments he made to Tito during the Hungarian crisis: “If we let take their course then the West will say we are either stupid or weak, and that’s one and the same thing.” See Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 183.
- <sup>25</sup> For historical accounts of the revolution, especially from the Hungarian and Russian perspectives, see Csaba Békés, “Cold War, Détente and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution”, Working Paper #7, “The Cold War as Global Conflict” at the International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University (September

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<sup>26</sup> “As a matter of high priority, exploit fully throughout the world propaganda opportunities afforded by recent events in Poland and Hungary.” NSC 5616 “U.S. Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary” October 31, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 354-358.

<sup>27</sup> NSC 5616/2 “Interim U.S. Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary” November 19, 1956, *ibid.*, 463-469.

<sup>28</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 303<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the NSC, November 8, 1956, *ibid.*, 418-421.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum of a Conference with the President, November 5, 1956, *ibid.*, 394-395.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 302<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the NSC, November 1, 1956, *ibid.*, 358-359.

<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister Eden cited in Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller, *Hungary 1956 Revisited: The Message of a Revolution- a Quarter of a Century After* (London, 1983), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Imre Nagy addressed the following message to UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld on November 1, 1956: “I request your Excellency promptly to put on the agenda at the forthcoming General Assembly of the United Nations the question of Hungary’s neutrality and the defence of this neutrality by the four Great Powers. Signed: Imre Nagy, President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People’s Republic, designated Minister of Foreign Affairs.” Quoted in Bela K. Király and Paul Jónás (eds.), *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Retrospect* (New York, 1978), 146.

<sup>33</sup> See the Telegram from the Embassy in France to the Department of State, November 4, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 390.

<sup>34</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, November 4, 1956, *ibid.*, 390-392. Memorandum of Discussion at the 303<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the NSC, November 8, 1956, *ibid.*, 418-421. Statement by the President on the Use of Soviet Forces in Hungary, November 4, 1956, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1076.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 303<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the NSC, November 8, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 418-421.

<sup>36</sup> Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Developments in Eastern Europe and the Middle East of October 31, 1956, cited in *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1062.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Dulles and Eisenhower, November 9, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 424-425.

<sup>38</sup> Despatch from the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, December 18, 1956, *ibid.*, 520-522.

<sup>39</sup> C. D. Jackson to John Foster Dulles quoted in Brands, *Cold Warriors*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Bissell cited in Thomas, *The Very Best Men*, 146-147.

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum from DCI Dulles to Eisenhower, November 20, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Volume XXV, 473-475.

<sup>42</sup> Notes on the 46<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, November 13, 1956, *ibid.*, 436-440.

<sup>43</sup> The Bruce-Lovett report investigating CIA and clandestine anti-communist operations is still classified, but was noted in detail in Robert F. Kennedy’s personal files. See Grose, *Operation Rollback*, 219.

## CONCLUSION

### *The Impact and Significance of the Hungarian Revolution on US Strategy and the Historical Record*

The Hungarian revolution marked a symbolic culmination of a decade of US efforts to liberate Eastern Europe. The tensions between ideology and geopolitics had persistently hampered US strategy while simultaneously sustaining it. The ideological drive to project Western democratic and capitalist institutions onto the Eastern European theatre was continuously thwarted by the geopolitical limitations that reflected Moscow's superior power position over the US in the region. Oscillating between containment and liberation as it was affected by external factors, the US consistently rejected applying the requisite military commitment to fulfill its ideological goals in a region of secondary geopolitical importance and under the shadow of nuclear war with the USSR. Instead it intensified a covert political and psychological warfare campaign behind the Iron Curtain that often pursued contradictory objectives and demonstrated a breakdown between policy ends and operational means. Driven by ideology but hampered by geopolitics, the covert war was never waged on a sufficient scale to succeed in retracting Moscow's power. The fundamental paradox facing Washington was that the scope of political warfare required to bring about Eastern Europe's liberation would have provoked a general war with Moscow. Avoiding such a conflict was the lynchpin of American foreign policy because it would probably escalate into a nuclear war. Such a development bore the prospect of unthinkable destruction not only of the region the US was attempting to liberate but also of America itself.

The Hungarian revolution marked the symbolic point of acceptance of Washington's foreign policy bureaucracy that its policy was ineffective in achieving Eastern Europe's independence. The impotent "middle road" strategy that had attempted to assimilate containment and liberation ultimately paralysed American options. Unwilling to go to war with the Soviet Union over Hungary's independence, the Eisenhower administration found itself powerless to influence events in any way. Washington was left paradoxically supporting Gomulka's communist government in November 1956, rather than the popular movement in Hungary pressing for democracy and independence from the Soviet Union. The revolution that took Imre Nagy as its figurehead correlated with America's fundamental ideological objectives yet Washington was powerless to intervene, shackled as it was by geopolitical constraints.

The historical account of the Hungarian revolution has tended to emphasize the apportioning of blame on either the US or the USSR for the events of October and November 1956 as well as the influence of the Suez crisis. This has resulted in scholarly neglect of the nature of the US strategies that influenced the revolution. Moreover, the historical record generally closes the chapter on America's quest for liberation here, or makes vague links between the Hungarian revolution and the revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yet the assertion that the events of October and November 1956 irrevocably vanquished Washington's objective of liberation and settled for containment is fallacious. Implicit in this contention is that somehow the Hungarian revolution finally produced the separation of ideology and geopolitics in American foreign policy. Such a development overlooks the intrinsically-bound character of the two forces behind foreign policy. Every nation conducts its foreign affairs in a perpetual state of tension and balance between

these two elements. The decade leading up to and including the revolt in Budapest exposes lucidly that these two forces, being completely fused into the one product of foreign policy, can result in even the most powerful nations adopting contradictory and ineffectual policies. Even after November 1956 ideologues and activists like C. D. Jackson remained committed to the ideal of liberation despite its demonstrated infeasibility. An artificial division of ideology and geopolitics by historians creates a misreading or reduction of history that neglects the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in all human belief and behaviour.

In fact the revolution brought about another shift in policy, where the ultimate liberation of the satellites was retained as a goal but the means were modified in light of internal bureaucratic and popular international pressure. The shift towards more open relations with the Eastern European regimes did not represent Washington's eventual recognition of their validity over democratically elected governments but rather a modified interim measure to advance the fundamental long-term goal. As a result liberation settled into the background, but it did not disappear completely.

The fact that ideology remained enmeshed with geopolitics was more consequential for its influence on US policy in the Developing World. External Soviet action had contained liberation in Eastern Europe but Washington now transferred its energies to the poorer regions of the globe in an effort to build nations in the image of its democratic and capitalist institutions. This matched the ideological projection of Soviet values and institutions through Krushchev's support of "wars of national liberation" as the superpowers transferred their efforts from their spheres of influence towards the politically-independent non-aligned nations of the world. The tension between ideology

and geopolitical interests came to the fore most notably when the US committed itself to 'liberate' Vietnam from communist subversion. In this case the ideological objectives were deemed to outweigh the geopolitical-strategic (in)significance of Southeast Asia to Washington, resulting in a protracted violent and unnecessary war. The perpetual struggle to resolve antagonistic ideological and geopolitical forces continues unabated today. The contemporary world witnesses renewed evidence of this tension within American foreign policy as it pursues contradictory courses of action and objectives in the Middle East.

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