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Political Warfare

Lewis F. Powell Jr.

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June 30, 1970

POLITICAL WARFARE

Explanatory Note: The attached paper was prepared by a member of the Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, reflecting his concern as to this neglected area of national defense. The paper was not submitted to or considered by the Panel.

Recommendation

> That the President appoint a select non-partisan commission composed of qualified and distinguished Americans with authority to conduct an intensive study of the need for, and of the means to accomplish, an adequate political warfare strategy for the United States.

Brief Summary

Military strength is only one element of national power. In recognition of this, the major Communist states conduct extensive political warfare against America and other free societies. This warfare includes the entire spectrum of political, psychological and propaganda operations. In level of intensity, subtlety and skill, there is no precedent in history for the extent and success of these techniques employed against us for the past quarter of a century.

The United States has largely abdicated these arenas of conflict to the Communist powers. The consequences of this default are profound, especially in terms of the impact on the minds and judgments of citizens of the free world. Tens of

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Commission of Alabama Alabama
Alabama Press)

millions of people in non-Communist countries, including this country, have accepted Communist propaganda in varying degrees. Much of it is parroted daily throughout the free world in the communications media, on the campus, in literature, by the arts and theater, and on the public platform.

Much of the world has come to believe the lies that it is America - not the Communist superpowers - which is repressive, militaristic and imperialistic. Much of the world no longer believes there is a significant difference between totalitarianism and a free democracy. The credibility of our policies at home and abroad has been impaired.

In short, America is losing the ideological contest - not on its merits but because we have abdicated the field of political warfare to those who are committed to the suppression of freedom on this earth.

June 30, 1970

POLITICAL WARFARE

It is well to remember that military strength, with the supporting economic and technological base, is only one element of national power. In defending America, we are not just protecting the real estate and nationalism of this country. We are defending our philosophy and form of government against the system of totalitarian repression which classic Communist ideology requires every state to impose upon the world. The confrontation which has kept the world in turmoil for a quarter of a century is basically ideological.

Political Warfare

In this contest America has relied primarily on its military and economic strength to restrain Communist aggressions and to preserve a measure of world order. We have scarcely made any effort to oppose the Communist powers with the weapons employed in the ideological arena. In contrast with this default, the Soviet Union and Red China have

incessantly conducted political warfare against America and other free societies. This warfare continues with no end in sight. It includes the entire spectrum of political, economic, psychological and propaganda operations (herein called "political warfare").*

A thoughtful evaluation of the history of the post-World War II period indicates that political operations may be as important to national defense as military forces; that political and ideological combat ~~have~~ has been neglected over the past 25 years almost to the point of national negligence; and that, unless this neglect is repaired by appropriate and responsible action, in the long run other defense measures may be futile.

Recommendation

In light of this judgment, it is recommended:

That the President appoint a select nonpartisan commission composed of qualified and distinguished Americans with authority to conduct an intensive study of the need for, and of the means to accomplish, an adequate political warfare strategy for the United States.

*Subversion is also a principal component of Communist operations against non-Communist states.

The remainder of this paper will discuss - in brief outline - the background and reasons for this recommendation.

The Protracted Conflict

Since the end of World War II, world politics have been shaped by the bitter contest between the Communist superpowers and the free democracies led by the United States. The Communist states, unwilling to leave other systems alone, have sought to conquer by force where feasible and otherwise to undermine and subvert free governments by all means of political warfare. This policy of overt and covert aggression has frustrated all efforts to assure a genuinely peaceful world, and has forced the U.S. year after year to expend billions to maintain an adequate national defense.

In recent years the monolithic unity of the Communist nations has been fractured, with Red China emerging as the second Communist superpower competing for leadership with the Soviet Union. Although many perennial optimists hailed this development as the end of the cold war and the beginning of a new era, there is little hard evidence to support this view.

The truth is that the protracted conflict waged by the Communist powers against the free world continues, and only the naive can believe there is any real prospect of its

abatement. Protracted conflict against "imperialistic" and "capitalistic" societies is a basic Marxist-Leninist dogma which all Communists support. It contemplates the utilization of all available resources and techniques to extend Communist ideology and power throughout the world, and to weaken and eventually destroy American democracy as the only effective counterforce.

All Components of Power

Communist leaders have understood, far better than free world leaders, the interrelationship of the various components of conflict and power. They have not neglected conventional military strength, recognizing always the truth of Mao's aphorism that power derives from the "muzzle of a gun". But in the age of hydrogen weapons, in which a third world war would leave no victor, the Communist superpowers for the most part have avoided direct military conflict.* Instead they have concentrated on less conventional methods of conflict, including the fermenting and supporting of "wars of liberation" and the conducting of subversion, propaganda, political, economic and psychological warfare.

*Examples to the contrary include the Soviet Union's attacks on Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and Red China's conquest of Tibet and its border incursions against India.

Our government, as well as private centers of Soviet studies, have abundant documentation of the extent to which these conflict techniques have been employed. Suffice it to say here that in level of intensity, continuity, diversity, subtlety and skill, there is no precedent in history for the extent and success of these techniques as employed for the past quarter of a century against the free world.

Consequences of American Default

During this same period of time the U.S. largely abdicated these arenas of conflict to the enemy. There have been several efforts, confined largely to information programs.* But we have not engaged in any sustained way in propaganda, political or psychological warfare against either the Soviet Union or Red China.**

The consequences of this default are profound - especially in terms of the impact on the minds and judgments of citizens of the free world. The thrust of Communist political warfare against the West has been directed at a variety of

*See Appendix A hereto which summarizes past U.S. efforts in certain aspects of political warfare.

**This paper is addressed to the strategic, worldwide conflict which has continued since the end of World War II. During the Korean and South Vietnamese wars our armed forces have engaged, to a limited extent and in a strictly controlled sense, in "tactical" propaganda and psychological warfare in support of current military operations.

targets, all interrelated. It has sought to create doubt, division, distrust and disloyalty among the American people, and to undermine the faith and confidence of free peoples everywhere in the values of western culture. It also has sought, especially with respect to the peoples of undeveloped and uncommitted nations, to destroy confidence in the integrity, strength and will of the U.S.

The U.S. is branded as the enemy of "peace", as "imperialistic" and "militaristic" in its relations with other nations. The free enterprise system is attacked with special venom. American domestic policies are labeled as "fascist", "racist", "repressive" and "exploitative". No opportunity is lost to embarrass and defame the U.S.

This political warfare is massive in scale of effort and pervasive in scope.

Each of the basic charges made against the U.S. is actually a characteristic of Communist foreign policy or a reality of Communist domestic policy. Each of the wrongs for which America is blamed is in truth a wrong perpetrated - not episodically but deliberately as established Communist policy - by the Soviet Union, Red China and other Communist states.

The technique, quite simply, is the Hitlerian one of repetition of the big lie.

One would have thought that the odds were overwhelmingly against the Communists. The facts were almost totally against them. But the free world leaders, who put their faith in the ultimate triumph of truth on its own merit, grievously miscalculated. Tens of millions of people in non-Communist countries, including millions in this country, have accepted Communist propaganda in varying degrees. Elements of it are parroted daily in much of the communications media, on the campus, in literature, by the arts and theater, and on the public platform in this country and abroad.

The war in Southeast Asia afforded a unique opportunity for Communist exploitation. Legitimate questions have existed from the outset as to the wisdom of American participation in a land war in Asia. Moreover, a number of considerations - familiar to us all - have combined to make this war vastly unpopular at home and abroad. But unpopularity of a national commitment is one thing, and general acceptance of the enemy propaganda line with respect to such commitment is a far more serious matter.

Whatever the reasons may be, the lies of Moscow, Pieping and Hanoi with respect to American "aggression", "immorality" and "brutality" in Southeast Asia have been widely

accepted as truth by much of the civilized world. Arnold J. Toynbee, internationally known British historian, recently published a savage article attacking America on all of these counts. He said:

> "America now looks like the most dangerous country in the world. . . . In fact, the roles of America and Russia have been reversed in the world's eye. Today America has become the world's nightmare. . . ."*

The Toynbees, and the countless others who join in denouncing America, rarely if ever find any fault with the Communist enemies of freedom. In the frightening mindlessness of this age - when slogans are so often substituted for thought - the repressions of a regime which requires a Berlin Wall are largely ignored and its aggressions against others are even justified. Yet the freest and most compassionate society is pilloried and its efforts to protect the free world are condemned.

This incredibly false inversion of the facts of history attests to the extraordinary success of Communist political warfare.

It also accents the folly of our failure to mount or sustain an effective refutation of the propaganda and lies

*See Reston, N.Y. Times, May 27, 1970.

directed against us, and to take the offensive in waging political and ideological warfare against Russia, Red China and North Vietnam.

The cumulative results of this "no-contest" policy extend far beyond Southeast Asia. There are deep misgivings around the world about America. Millions of our people have turned against their own country to the extent of blaming America - rather than the Communists - for the level of international discord.

Our foreign and defense policies have been clouded, especially in the minds of the younger generations. Our military establishment is widely suspected and assailed, and our intelligence services reviled at home and abroad. Even on vital measures for the common defense of our country, the President and the Congress are seriously inhibited from taking appropriate action. Most disquieting of all, our national unity is fractionalized.

It is not too much to say that the entire foreign policy and influence of America have been impaired by the erosion of support at home and the undermining of confidence abroad.

Revulsion to the Vietnamese war no doubt has contributed significantly to the present situation. It is possible

that the war itself, without regard to our failure to contest Communist world-wide propaganda, psychological warfare and subversion, would have caused some of the present anti-Americanism abroad and lack of support at home.

But we would again miscalculate - perhaps irreparably - if we assumed that an end to the war would restore perspective and understanding of truth. The startling success of the Communist ideological assault on America and the values of the free democracies was clearly evident before our involvement in Vietnam. If this assault remains unchallenged it will in time destroy the free world's confidence in democracy as opposed to Communism, and this could mark the end of western civilization.

Our Country's Misconceived Reluctance

Future historians will wonder why America, with its immense communcations capabilities and with truth on its side, pursued this policy of self-imposed restraint in the critical war of words and ideas. The reasons given are varied, but the one most frequently voiced is that the American people consider political warfare to be unethical and immoral. Like espionage, it has been considered a dirty business to which we should not stoop.

There also has been the strongly held view that our actions would speak for themselves if objectively reported and portrayed. We thus have relied on the United States Information Agency which provides news, books and other factual information about America. Although the "objectivity" of USIA has at times seemed to lean over backward, there is no thought of discontinuing or changing the character of this useful American world-wide news service.

Rather, the need is for an effort of an entirely different character and dimension. The need is for a defense effort in political warfare comparable in scale to that conducted by the Soviet Union and Red China against the United States, through propaganda, political and psychological measures.

It is important here to note that political warfare, in the sense conducted against this country, is far more than a public relations program. It must be a sustained and coordinated effort - by all effective means - to discredit Communism as a system and the foreign and domestic policies of the Communist parties in the Soviet Union and Red China. In simplest terms, we are talking about conducting against these Communist regimes the type of political warfare which they have conducted against this country so mercilessly, except that full disclosure of

the truth about Communism would be employed to confront their "big lie" technique.

We must put aside the self deception that the techniques of political warfare are unethical or immoral. The fact is that on the domestic scene we employ many of these techniques against each other with considerable savagery. Examples include the political "warfare" constantly waged between Democrats and Republicans, between the New Left and the Establishment, and - at a different level - between labor and business. Even within the free enterprise competitive system, legitimate advertising regularly includes elements of propaganda and psychological motivation. No country has had greater experience in the creating and destroying of images, of likes and dislikes, in the generating of civilian attitudes, and in the winning and influencing of public opinion.

Why is it that we practice these skills with such relentlessness on each other and yet have been unwilling to employ them against an enemy which threatens our very survival?

Is it any less ethical for the U.S. to respond in kind to the political warfare of the Communists than for the Democratic National Committee to try to discredit the Republican Party (and vice versa)?

Our Restraint Has Not Worked

It will be said that the undertaking of political warfare by the U.S. will exacerbate relations with Communist countries, will heat up the "cold war", and will inhibit disarmament negotiations.

In essence, these are the same arguments which have been made for two decades. They are premised on the assumptions - demonstrated by history to be false - that Communist regimes are influenced by good example, by restraint, or by "turning the other cheek".

The total experience of dealing with Communist regimes indicates that they are never influenced by friendliness, gestures of goodwill, foreign trade, or by concessions made unilaterally without obtaining an equivalent consideration. As was true of Hitlerian Germany, conduct of this kind is regarded as evidence of weakness to be exploited.

In undertaking political operations it should be made clear that they are subject to "negotiations", just as we are willing to negotiate arms limitations. In other words, we should undertake political warfare operations, as a major element of national defense, on essentially the same scale as those employed against us. We should do not more, and certainly we should do no less.

We have tried for 37 years (since recognition of the U.S.S.R. in 1933) to bring the Soviet Union into the orbit of nations which conduct normal diplomatic relations without employment of propaganda, political and psychological warfare techniques. There has been no sustained response to this good example. Is it not time that we abandoned a policy which has failed so conspicuously, and confront the Communist superpowers with the same type of operations which they persistently employ against us?

The Decisive Advantage

Our reluctance to include this component in defense of our values and country is all the more bewildering in view of the opportunities for success.

If the peoples of the world understand the truth about Communism, as contrasted with the free democracies, there would be no contest of ideologies. Communism is an affront to the dignity of man, and once experienced it becomes anathema to most human beings. No people of any country have ever voted for the Communist system where elections were free and they had a choice. No Communist country has ever permitted free elections or even the expression of divergent views.

America has its faults, and no thoughtful person would minimize their seriousness or the intractability of many of our problems. But the issue is not whether one system is perfect and the other not. Rather, it is which system provides the greatest opportunities for mankind, for self fulfillment and for human liberty. Here indeed there should be no doubt as to the answer.

The single best evidence of this, despite 25 years of Communist propaganda, is that every Communist country has to restrain its own people from leaving by walls and barbed wires. No free democracy requires such barbaric restraint to keep its own people from fleeing.

America therefore has the most inviting opportunity to conduct dramatically successful ideological operations against the Communist powers. Moreover, such operations are essentially low cost when compared with weapons systems and conventional defense measures. In the end, the most humane type of conflict is to contest for minds of people rather than rely entirely on means to kill them.

Distinction Between Internal and External Operations

There is, regrettably, considerable evidence of the effectiveness here in America of Soviet propaganda, subversion

and political warfare. But it is not suggested that the federal government undertake any counter propaganda operations on the home front. Whatever the risk of Communist success may be internally, we do not want a federal ministry of propaganda. We must rely on the responsible political leaders of both parties to devote a greater effort to informing the public as to Communist activities. We must also rely on the private sector, and especially upon our educational institutions, to assume with greater historical perception the neglected responsibility of teaching the truth about the contrast between our system of freedom under law and Communism.*

The conducting of political defense operations internationally is a different matter. If these are undertaken, there should be a federal agency in charge. Whether it should be within the Department of Defense or a separate agency is a subject to be studied.

Whatever the agency may be, it should be organized, staffed and financed as a permanent part of our national defense structure, with established means of coordinating the efforts of all agencies of government which have international responsibilities.

*There is relatively little intentional pro-Communist teaching in this country. There is, however, a curious hostility among intellectuals to "anti-Communist" teaching. Possibly as an over-reaction to "McCarthyism", many leaders of intellectual opinion in the U.S. are more disposed to react adversely to "anti-Communism" than to "Communism".

Perhaps first of all there is the urgent need for bipartisan recognition of the fact that in the late 20th Century conventional armaments alone are not sufficient; that the Communist superpowers, through continued employment of the total arsenal of political conflict, can create a fatal paralysis of public support and will; and that the only effective way to counter such warfare is to employ appropriate political measures against those who seek to destroy freedom.

Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

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Prepared for
President Nixon

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In essence, these are the same arguments which have been made for two decades. They are premised on the assumptions - demonstrated by history to be false - that Communist regimes are influenced by good example, by restraint, or by "turning the other cheek".

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The Decisive Advantage

Our reluctance to include this component in defense of our values and country is all the more bewildering in view of the opportunities for success.

If the peoples of the world understand the truth about Communism, as contrasted with the free democracies, there would be no contest of ideologies. Communism is an affront to the dignity of man, and once experienced it becomes anathema to most human beings. No people of any country have ever voted for the Communist system where elections were free and they had a choice. No Communist country has ever permitted free elections or even the expression of divergent views.

America has its faults, and no thoughtful person would minimize their seriousness or the intractability of many of our problems. But the issue is not whether one system is perfect and the other not. Rather, it is which system provides the greatest opportunities for mankind, for self fulfillment and for human liberty. Here indeed there should be no doubt as to the answer.

The single best evidence of this, despite 25 years of Communist propaganda, is that every Communist country has to restrain its own people from leaving by walls and barbed wires. No free democracy requires such barbaric restraint to keep its own people from fleeing.

America therefore has the most inviting opportunity to conduct dramatically successful ideological operations against the Communist powers. Moreover, such operations are essentially low cost when compared with weapons systems and conventional defense measures. In the end, the most humane type of conflict is to contest for minds of people rather than rely entirely on means to kill them.

Distinction Between Internal and External Operations

There is, regrettably, considerable evidence of the effectiveness here in America of Soviet propaganda, subversion

and political warfare. But it is not suggested that the federal government undertake any counter propaganda operations on the home front. Whatever the risk of Communist success may be internally, we do not want a federal ministry of propaganda. We must rely on the responsible political leaders of both parties to devote a greater effort to informing the public as to Communist activities. We must also rely on the private sector, and especially upon our educational institutions, to assume with greater historical perception the neglected responsibility of teaching the truth about the contrast between our system of freedom under law and Communism.*

The conducting of political defense operations internationally is a different matter. If these are undertaken, there should be a federal agency in charge. Whether it should be within the Department of Defense or a separate agency is a subject to be studied.

Whatever the agency may be, it should be organized, staffed and financed as a permanent part of our national defense structure, with established means of coordinating the efforts of all agencies of government which have international responsibilitie

*There is relatively little intentional pro-Communist teaching in this country. There is, however, a curious hostility among intellectuals to "anti-Communist" teaching. Possibly as an over-reaction to "McCarthyism", many leaders of intellectual opinion in the U.S. are more disposed to react adversely to "anti-Communism" than to "Communism".

Perhaps first of all there is the urgent need for bipartisan recognition of the fact that in the late 20th Century conventional armaments alone are not sufficient; that the Communist superpowers, through continued employment of the total arsenal of political conflict, can create a fatal paralysis of public support and will; and that the only effective way to counter such warfare is to employ appropriate political measures against those who seek to destroy freedom.

Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

Summary of Past U. S. Government Activities

Following World War II, the United States dissolved its wartime apparatus for political communication even more rapidly than it demobilized its armed forces. On August 31, 1945, only sixteen days after the Japanese surrender, President Truman abolished the Office of War Information.

An interim program was developed at a very low level of expenditure. But in January 1947, the interim agency was granted permanent status as the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs. William Benton was the first director of this first venture of the United States into peacetime international political communication. Despite his energetic efforts, the agency was unable to operate very effectively, faced as it constantly was with threats to its very existence in Congress.

In 1948, the Smith-Mundt Act was passed as the basic charter of the role of the government in developing international information and cultural exchange. The names of the new agency were constantly changed and only meager appropriations were made. But beginning in 1950, the National Security Council inaugurated a policy of more aggressive use of propaganda and President Truman announced a "Great Campaign of Truth". The "Campaign", under the leadership of Edward W. Barrett, was designed to support

American leadership and to reduce Soviet influence in the international community, and to present America fully and fairly as a counter to Soviet propaganda.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, a further stepped-up program was developed to answer the defamation and false charges which were by then a constant stream from the Soviet bloc. Staffs and budgets were somewhat enlarged and the effectiveness of the agency improved to meet its expanded obligations. United States Information Service (USIS) posts were multiplied around the world, a corps of professional media experts began to develop and exposure for the agency's media products reached new peaks. Estimates are that the USIS film audience, for example, tripled during this period to a rate of 400 million persons a year.

These expansion years were marked by a change of emphasis in the agency's program. Aware that accurate portraits of American standards of living often induced envy or despair among poorer peoples, and convinced that persuasion, rather than information alone, was the agency's mission, the agency heads placed greater emphasis on a program of hard-hitting propaganda.

With increased success and visibility, the agency continued a political issue in Congress and in the presidential campaign of 1952. Several Congressional investigations occurred, some respon-

sible and some less so. The most exhaustive of them was by a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, headed first by Senator Fulbright and then by Senator Hickenlooper. Congress was obviously skeptical of the value and effectiveness of an expanded foreign information program. Several members suggested that propaganda ought to go beyond the "campaign of truth" to comment and argument of a more positive nature. Other criticism was directed at the lack of inter-departmental cooperation and the failure to assure effective operation of the information agency through giving it sufficient prestige as an independent agency and adequately trained personnel.

As a result of these and other investigations, the agency was again reorganized in 1953, by a presidential reorganization plan, submitted to Congress. The plan created the United States Information Agency (USIA) as an independent organization, while the overseas apparatus retained its wartime identity as USIS. (The educational exchange program was left in the Department of State.) The Agency, while receiving its foreign policy guidance from the State Department, was fully responsible for its own information policy.

USIA was to report to the President through the National Security Council. Gradually the Director became a voting member

of the Operations Coordinating Board and finally was accorded full Cabinet status in 1956. A succession of relatively well-known directors of USIA followed through the 1950's and early 1960's.

In the late 1950's, long-range education projects took their place along with more conventional information activities. The "People-to-People" project, involving contacts among private citizens of nations was developed and coordinated by USIA.

But the emphasis, especially after the misunderstandings apparently caused by some Hungarian-language broadcasts during the Hungarian uprisings and during the days following the launching of sputnik, was increasingly upon detached and accurate news reporting, with the hope of reinforcing the credibility of USIA, and of the United States.

USIA, under Edward R. Murrow, in the early 1960's, achieved an influence in foreign policy formulation that can be ascribed to the prestige of the Director himself. Budgets grew to $170 million by the time cancer forced Murrow to resign. Although preoccupation with events in southeast Asia diverted resources and attention from USIA, it has continued to be an important component in the foreign policy of the United States. It does not purport, however, to engage in propaganda or political warfare operations.

The Chief instrument of USIA, and the best-known, is radio, particularly the Voice of America (including RIAS [radio in the American sector]). In addition, the radio work of USIA is supplemented by several privately owned radio stations: the Worldwide Broadcasting System, operating for over a quarter of a century from Boston, the Committee of Free Asia, Inc., sending programs to Asia from San Francisco and Manila, Radio Liberation, operating from Munich, and Radio Free Europe.

The latter agency, non-governmental in nature, is permitted greater flexibility and freedom, including freedom from Congressional interference. It was started in 1949 under the initiative of George Kennan, Joseph C. Grew and Dewitt C. Poole, with the collaboration of Dean Acheson. The organization embarked on a number of ambitious enterprises, including the Free University in Exile, set up at Strasbourg, France, later discontinued. It is supported by funds from various sources through an independent agency, Crusade for Freedom. Other media efforts, as well as the vast education, library and exchange programs, are coordinated from Washington but directed largely from the USIS field offices. The effectiveness of these services is attested to by their broad popularity and by the violence with which the Communists often make USIS facilities targets of mob action.

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