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Political Warfare Psychological Warfare Strategy

Jackson Committee Constructivist Discourse Analysis

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*Recommending Political Warfare—The Role of Eisenhower's Presidential Committee on
International Information Activities in the United States' Approach to the Cold War*

Sonya Lynn Finley

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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In
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Gerard Toal (Committee Chair)

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By Sonya Lynn Finley

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Sonya Lynn Finley

ABSTRACT

In 1953 President Dwight D. Eisenhower charged an ad hoc advisory group with assessing the current U.S. Cold War effort and offering recommendations for an “unified and dynamic” way forward. This work investigates the case of Eisenhower’s Presidential Committee on International Information Activities and its role in the United States’ approach to the Cold War. Problematizing that which is often taken for granted, this empirical, interpretive study uncovers the discursive conditions of possibility for and the discursive activities taking place within Jackson Committee decision making processes.

Employing a constructivist discursive framework, this project builds on an understanding of policy making as a process of argumentation in which actors intersubjectively define problems and delimit policy and strategy options. Revealing discursive conditions of possibility enables a deeper understanding of the substance, tensions and discursive maneuvers informing subsequent U.S. strategy and policy choices during the Cold War and may offer insights into understanding and addressing geopolitical challenges in the 21st century.

The thick analytic narrative illuminates the “witcraft” involved in conceptualizing the unique threat posed by the Soviet Union whose practices challenged existing categories, and in extending wartime discourses to the post-war geopolitical environment. It examines discursive practices informing the nascent concepts of national strategy, psychological warfare, and political warfare, including arguments for constituent elements and relationships between them. In so doing, this dissertation conceptualizes national strategy as practices underpinning a prioritized drive for competitive advantage over adversaries. Additionally, political warfare represents practices intended to create and present alternatives to foreign actors that are in the U.S. interest through the integration and coordination of diplomatic, economic, military, and informational activities.

Based on its conceptualization of a long-term adversarial competition with the Soviet Union, the committee recommended solutions for a sustainable national strategy of political warfare prioritizing the free world and liberal world order. Its recommendations sought to recast strategic panic into strategic patience.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Within geopolitics, threats sometimes emerge that policymakers consider unique because of their goals and/or methods for challenging the status quo, including communicating directly with foreign populations to confuse or gain support. These can be periods of strategic panic and conceptual confusion as policymakers, the press, and even academics work to classify these new threats and develop appropriate responses. The reasoning process usually begins by using familiar categories which individuals extend through storytelling and debates as a means to develop a shared understanding and language to describe the new geopolitical situation and possible policy options.

Today the Cold War seems like a familiar and well-understood competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. However, in the early post-World War II years, policymakers wrestled with understanding and addressing Soviet actions, including Communist propaganda activities throughout the world. In 1953 President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked an ad hoc advisory group to assess the Cold War situation and offer new “unified and dynamic” ways for securing the United States and advancing U.S. interests.

This research examines the advisory Jackson Committee’s rhetorical activities informing its recommendations for a national strategy of political warfare that would create and offer alternatives to foreign populations that were in the U.S. interest. The Committee recommended prioritizing the development of a liberal world order as a way to gain a competitive advantage over the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. It offered solutions for directing and mobilizing integrated and coordinated national activities across diplomacy, economics, information, and the military. Additionally, the Committee envisioned the possibility of inspiring and guiding quotidian societal activities to reinforce the foundations of the aspirational world order.

This study stems from the premise that understanding how recommendations come about are as important as the recommendations themselves. Illuminating meanings and practices considered during the policy making process can provide insights into subsequent substance and tensions within national security strategies and policies. To do so, this study re-creates a narrative of the storytelling and debates involved in defining workable problems, addressing conceptual confusion, and developing solutions deemed sustainable over the “long-haul.”
