

Kenneth Osgood. *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. xiv + 506 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1445-5.



Reviewed by Hillary Gleason

Published on H-War (June, 2008)

Kenneth Osgood presents a well-researched and deftly executed study of propaganda in *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*. Utilizing numerous collections from the Eisenhower Library and Archives II, as well as oral histories and a plethora of secondary sources, Osgood propagates the overarching theme that "Far from being a peripheral aspect of the U.S.-Soviet struggle, the competition for hearts and minds--the cold war of words and deeds--was one of its principal battlegrounds" (p. 11).

In addition to the main theme of the book, the author explores five sub-themes: the impact of mass communications and politics on international relations; the way the need to influence popular opinion impacted policymaking; the implementation of psychological warfare; the intersection of state and private, as well as domestic and international propaganda; and finally, Eisenhower historiography. The book is arranged into two sections. Part 1 explores the theory and practice of psychological warfare in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, while part 2 exam-

ines case studies of psychological warfare in practice.

Osgood convincingly demonstrates that the advent of the era of mass communications necessitated a change in the practice of propaganda. Increasingly American officials moved away from traditional venues of propaganda such as radio (except behind the iron curtain) and into new forms such as movies and international fairs. However, even though this thesis is sustained in *Total Cold War*, the argument is neither new nor currently under serious debate. A more interesting discussion would have examined the impact of the new mediums on either their target audience or on a specific policy of the targeted country. Osgood, to his credit, recognizes this fact and calls for case studies of specific countries to fill in this historiographical gap.

The second theme Osgood explores is the way psychological considerations played into American policymaking. This theme is the most interesting of *Total Cold War*. Osgood boldly proclaims that "from the highest levels of the national security establishment to the remotest diplomatic out-

posts abroad, political warfare became *the* organizing concept for American foreign policy during the Eisenhower Presidency" [emphasis in the original] (p. 78). While the author does adequately show that psychological warfare was an important component in Eisenhower's foreign policy, the claim that it was the most important factor is a little too ambitious. This is particularly true because Osgood fails to take on other historians that place economics as the organizing principle of the Eisenhower years.[1]

Osgood's third theme--the implementation of psychological warfare--is the strongest section of *Total Cold War*. The author takes the reader through a series of initiatives sponsored by the Eisenhower administration such as "atoms for peace" and person-to-person exchanges, amply demonstrating how these events added to the United States' quest for hearts and minds. These sections provide a great overview of the often-ignored aspect of American cultural diplomacy during the Eisenhower years.

The fourth theme Osgood addresses is the intersection of the state/private and domestic/international aspects of psychological warfare. The author correctly points out that there is a fine line between what contemporary commentators would call "spin" and outright government propaganda directed at its citizens. A case in point was the government's "atoms for peace" campaign, which sought to quell Americans' fears of nuclear annihilation by stressing the peaceful applications of nuclear technology. Another way in which the government influenced the domestic marketplace of ideas was in its sponsorship of books by scholars who supported the administration's views in the Cold War. These private scholars blurred the line between the individual and the state.

The final theme addressed by Osgood is Eisenhower historiography. The author "sustains the revisionist view" that Eisenhower actively presided over his administration (p. 6). However, he also takes aim at other Eisenhower scholars such as

Robert Divine, Stephen Ambrose, and Richard Immerman by claiming that "Eisenhower publicly presented his diplomatic efforts as measures to promote world peace, but he saw diplomacy more as a psychological weapon for waging the cold war than as means for achieving détente" (p. 211). [2] Osgood cites disarmament talks and nuclear testing as evidence that "the objective became outmaneuvering the opponent in the battle for public opinion; positions were put forward more to win public acclaim than to pave the way for compromise at the bargaining table" (p. 213). This argument deserves further consideration by the academic community.

Overall Osgood maintains his overarching theme--that psychological warfare constituted a major component of the early Cold War. Even though the work is, at times, too ambitious, it adds to historians' understanding of how the early Cold War was waged and provokes some interesting questions. Scholars of Eisenhower, intelligence, and culture will find this book a welcome addition to their libraries.

Notes

[1]. See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, new edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2000).

[2]. See Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower, the President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); and Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: the Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 198).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Hillary Gleason. Review of Osgood, Kenneth. *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. June, 2008.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14590>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.