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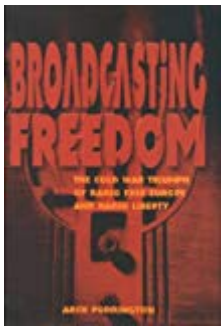
Arch Puddington. *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000. xix + 382 pp. $27.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-2158-1.



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SHOUT IT OUT: HOW OUR RADIOS WON THE COLD WAR

Well, no one can accuse Arch Puddington of a lack of enthusiasm about his subject. A former deputy director of the New York bureau of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, he exults, "The freedom radios proved to be one of democracy's most powerful weapons." (p. 313) His preface is a paean to the staff that brought news of Chernobyl and the fall of the Berlin Wall to listeners in Eastern Europe. To drive the point home, there are tributes from Richard Pipes and former CIA director James Woolsey ("No one measure won the Cold War --- but Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty should be in the first rank of those getting the highest medals.")

Puddington's sense of timing is pretty good, too. With many diplomatic historians beginning to acknowledge a "total" Cold War which brought together diplomacy, economic and financial power, military activity, and culture in campaigns of "psychological strategy", a new history of American's primary channels of propaganda to the Soviet bloc is overdue. Sig Mickelson's study, the best account of the stations, is almost 20 years old,[1] and only a few memoirs of RFE and RL have filled the void since then.[2] A comprehensive re-assessment, drawing upon Government documents as well as the RFE archives, could shatter standard "histories", establishing George Kennan's commitment to political activity to break up the Soviet sphere of influence, depicting the complex pursuit of liberation in both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, and tracing the radios' troubled adjustment from "revolution" to "evolution" in the 1960s.

But Puddington's book is not the one to provide this critique. At the "micro" level, there is some value in passages on political divisions amongst the staff, concern over the tone of broadcasts, and the problems of locating RFE's European headquarters in Munich, and the book, unsurprisingly given Puddington's position in the 1980s, has some broader insights into the tensions caused by the Reagan Adminstration's more aggressive broadcasting strategy. Apart from this, however, Puddington's only distinction is a gung-ho defence of RFE's troops and their mission. The

events --- the defence of the stations against domestic attacks, not from the Left but from the Right in the 1950s, involvement in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the reaction to the Prague Spring, the "crisis" of Congressional investigations in the early 1970s --- are the same as in much older narratives, as is the organizational detail of the managerial structure, the hiring of staff, and the acquisition of transmitters. Here it's the celebration of ultimate triumph that matters.

The problem is not exactly undeclared bias. Puddington, now Vice President for Research at Freedom House, is forthright about his past and present positions, explaining that he "was...acquainted with Americans who were organizing support efforts for the freedom struggles in Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba, and Nicaragua". (p. xi) Moreover Sig Mickelson, who had been a high-level official in RFE, established that involvement with the stations did not prevent one from writing an incisive history.

Indeed, on some long-time points of contention, Puddington is ready to give ground. Unlike some other authors, he does not accept at face value the official whitewashes of RFE's culpability for "inciting" the Hungarian Revolution, acknowledging questions over the competence of the Hungarian desk and a "generally hostile attitude towards [the new Prime Minister Imre] Nagy" (p. 108). The limited material on Radio Liberty (the book is essentially about RFE with a couple of chapters about Radio Liberty, heavily dependent on Mickelson and James Critchlow, tacked on) does at least consider the crippling of the station from the outset by the poisonous political, ethnic, and national rivalries amongst the staff.

Puddington's shortcomings are more fundamental --- a lack of material and of basic analysis. Inexplicably, he has presumed that a book on RFE need not have any primary evidence other than that from RFE's holdings. Perhaps, if RFE had truly been an autonomous body, the approach would be suitable but, given that the station was a creation of the State Department and the CIA, the lack of foresight in not consulting any Government material is remarkable. Indeed, Puddington has not ventured into the most revealing "private" collections on RFE, namely C.D. Jackson's papers at the Eisenhower Library and Sig Mickelson's documents, tape recordings, and research notes at the Hoover Institution at Stanford.

Thus, before he put pen to paper, Puddington had already sealed himself off from a broad evaluation of his subject. The outcome is apparent by page 10. Puddington cannot avoid the concession that the Office of Policy Coordination, the agency responsible for covert operations before its merger with the CIA in 1952) was involved in the creation of RFE but he can assert with misguided assurance, "There is no evidence that Frank Wisner [the head of OPC] or others envisaged RFE as having some sort of covert mission to advance the cause of liberation." (p. 10) He adds an unnecessary jibe which only points to the strengths in the approach of others, "Historians of a revisionist bent" --- a reference to the excellent ***Blowback*** by Christopher Simpson --- "have pointed to the Wisner role...as evidence that the real nature of the freedom radios was something different --- more sinister perhaps and certainly more provocative --- than that of a mere propaganda vehicle." (p. 10) [3]

Apparently unaware of recent work beyond Simpson's on psychological strategy, Puddington cannot comprehend that the US Government had gone far beyond "mere propaganda". As George Kennan's Policy Planning Staff set forth in "The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare" in May 1948, "What is proposed here is an operation in the traditional American form: organized public support of resistance to tyranny in foreign countries. Throughout our history, private American citizens have banded together to champion the cause of freedom for people suffering under oppression." The National Committee for Free Europe, of which RFE was only a part, was the first

systematic "private" effort to implement that strategy.[4]

Nor can Puddington move beyond a simplistic notion of "liberation". He would have done well to examine his own Appendix A, RFE's first policy guidance document, which noted succinctly, "It is absolutely essential to keep the hope of liberation alive," and then groped for a strategy to achieve the goal while avoiding another world war:

On every possible occasion [we should] make it clear that the existing world tension is not based upon a struggle for power between the United States and the Soviet Union...but that it is a recrudescence of the ancient struggle between freedom and tyranny, that in this struggle there can be no neutrals, that in this struggle we consider all of Eastern Europe, whether at present under Russian domination or not, by its whole history and tradition inevitably on our side. (p. 318)

Puddington might then have grasped the uncomfortable reality. The issue was not that of RFE restraining or eluding the excesses of an overzealous CIA but of the station and NCFE pressing the Government to make a decisive commitment to rollback. That effort would culminate in an extraordinary conference at Princeton in May 1952 of 'private' operators, led by NCFE President C.D. Jackson, and officials of the State Department and the CIA. While there was division over the extent and pace of operations, the gathering agreed to call for a Presidential statement (which they helpfully drafted) on US objectives in Eastern Europe. Truman would never issue the statement but the Eisenhower campaign, which also received the conference's recommendations, would make a series of speeches (some written by C.D. Jackson) on liberation and psychological strategy in autumn 1952. [5]

In short Puddington, ironically for a man engaged in psychological strategy in the 1980s, has little idea about the implementation of the concept in the early Cold War. Nor is he cognizant of the significant amount of scholarship that has appeared on the topic in recent years. Thus his consideration of RFE is inevitably limited, for it is always divorced from an examination of the station's place in US policy and operations.

That is a pity, for other opportunities are missed. For example, the best analysis of RFE covers its initial years; scholarship is limited on the period after Hungary to 1967, when RFE's relationship with the CIA was finally revealed. Too often general histories make the simple assertion that the US, after the failure of November 1956, shifted from "revolution" to "evolution". The reality is far more complex: while the National Security Council did move away from liberation, many in RFE persisted with an aggressive strategy. Key figures like C.D. Jackson pressed Allen Dulles for a continued commitment; meanwhile, the State Department protested vehemently that RFE was threatening the conduct of US diplomacy in Eastern Europe. [6]

Puddington stumbles upon evidence of this debate but can never appreciate the broader significance. For example, he notes that in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution Richard Condon, the director of Munich operations, raised "serious questions about the competence of the Hungarian staff" and urged a search for new personnel among the recent refugees from Hungary (p. 103). Thirteen pages later, there is a brief note that "Dick Condon was dismissed as director". What Puddington does not realize or reveal is that, in 1957, the "hard-liners" on the Hungarian desk demanded and got the dismissal of several colleagues who questioned the aggressive broadcasting during the Revolution and specifically the criticism of Imre Nagy. Condon tried to defend those who were under fire; his reward was his own ousting.[7] Despite these turmoils, RFE may have eventually become more "objective" in its news and commentary and "gradualist" in its attitude towards change in Eastern Europe, but more is needed than Puddington's account to consider the change in policy and implementation.

Puddington further limits his effectiveness with some intemperate narrative. Most egregious is his verbal assault upon Senator William Fulbright, who pressed for the closure of RFE and Radio Liberty in the early 1970s. Apparently this was a "single-minded" campaign waged with "distemper" by an "increasingly bitter" Senator, who was supported only by "marginal figures". Puddington's generalisations, based on little primary research, are not only unfair --- he himself notes that some of Fulbright's colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee "shared [his] skepticism" towards RFE --- they distort a fascinating case of Executive-Congressional co-operation to save a discredited operation. Despite the 1967 revelations, the Johnson and Nixon Administrations had maintained the CIA's support of RFE --- by 1971, one did not need to be "bitter" to suggest that the US Government should be relying on overtly-supported media such as the Voice of America. Yet the Nixon White House was able to work with the "liberal" Republican Senator Clifford Case, who had castigated RFE for its reliance upon the CIA, to push through the legislation providing open funding and an autonomous RFE under the umbrella of the Board for International Broadcasting. Interested readers are advised to put Puddington aside and turn to Sig Mickelson's account.

The strongest part of Puddington's book is thus in danger of being hidden. Chapter 15, "The Reagan Years", is based upon a number of interviews with RFE staff. What emerges is a story, paralleling that of other agencies such as the CIA who had supposedly gone soft on Communism, of how strident anti-Communists took over the direction of RFE's operations. It was a refrain of the post-1956 debate that gripped the stations --- Puddington again reveals his lack of historical sense when he claims, "The attempt by staff dissidents and their allies within the ethnic lobbies in Washington to use political clout to influence the direction of program policy was an entirely new development" --- as the new RFE director, George Urban, clashed with the State Department over strategy and RFE and Radio Liberty began to overstep guidelines on acceptable commentary.

Ultimately, the clashes over broadcasting would be alleviated by the rapid changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s. So is Puddington's analysis, for he does not have to consider problematic notions such as that RFE and Radio Liberty have promoted agendas such as Russian nationalism, monarchism, laissez-faire capitalism, and religious sectarianism which do not fit easily into a generic notion of "freedom". He can bask in triumph; unfortunately, it does not take us very far into the complexities of the cultural Cold War.

Notes

[1]. Sig Mickelson, ***America's Other Voices: Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*** (New York: Praeger, 1983). Earlier accounts of RFE, written before the 1967 exposes of State involvement include Robert Holt, ***Radio Free Europe*** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958) and Allan Michie, ***Voice through the Iron Curtain: The Radio Free Europe Story*** (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1963). Maury Lisann, ***Broadcasting to the Soviet Union*** (New York: Praeger, 1975) has some material on Radio Liberty.

[2]. Jan Nowak, ***Courier from Warsaw*** (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982); James Critchlow, ***Radio Hole in the Head/Radio Liberty: An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting*** (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1995), George Urban, ***Radio Free Europe and the Struggle for Democracy: My War Within the Cold War*** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)

[3]. Recent work with material on the US intelligence services, RFE, and the goal of liberation includes not only Christopher Simpson, ***Blowback: America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effect on the Cold War*** (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988) but also Burton Hersh, ***The Old Boys and the Origins of the CIA*** (New York: Scribner's, 1992); Evan Thomas, ***The Very Best Men: Four who Dared in the Early Years of the CIA*** (New York, 1995); and Scott Lucas, ***Freedom's War: The***

US Crusade against the Soviet Union, 1945-1956 (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

[4]. The first ad hoc US campaign of political warfare had been waged in 1947/1948 to prevent Communist success in national elections in France and Italy. Perceived success fostered the proposal of a general campaign. See Scott Lucas, "Mobilising Culture: The State-Private Network and the CIA in the Early Cold War," in Dale Carter and Robin Clifton (eds.), *Global Horizons* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, forthcoming).

[5]. Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 152-154.

[6]. Lucas, *Freedom's War*, 267-269.

[7]. See Condon to Egan, 1 March 1957, US Declassified Document Reference System, 1991 1287.

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