

AUNTIE GOES TO WAR AGAIN: The BBC External Services, the Foreign Office and the early Cold War

Alban Webb, *Queen Mary, University of London*

In 1945, after years of struggle and sacrifice, Allied victory in Europe and Japan suggested the possibility of 'peace in our time'. Out of the wreckage of the Second World War the ideal of a United Nations with common standards on human rights and a shared interest in a peaceful future was forged. But it was not long before British political and military assessments began to come to terms with what they perceived to be the growing threat posed by the policies of the Soviet Union to the prospects for a genuine peace. The end of wartime cooperation between Russia and her Western Allies had given way to older and deeper tensions. These resurfaced in a new geopolitical environment that saw the Soviet Union occupying large swathes of Continental Europe, in addition to maintaining a post-war presence in Iran and engineering anti-British propaganda campaigns in the strategically sensitive Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Reporting to the British Chiefs of Staff in March 1946, just a few weeks before the BBC began broadcasting a Russian language service, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), then as now the coordinating nexus of British intelligence, reported their considered view that:

The long-term aim of the Russian leaders is to build up the Soviet Union into a position of strength and greatness fully commensurate with her vast size and resources. They are convinced of the greatness of Russia's future under the Soviet system. We believe it to be their firm conviction that, within the next fifty years or perhaps a hundred years (unlike Hitler, they are not pressed for time), the Soviet Union will inevitably become the most powerful, the richest and the best ordered country in the world.¹ (Hennessy 1)

What was being envisaged, at least by intelligence/military evaluators in 1946, was a protracted struggle, characterized at that time by Russian attempts to create a "belt" of satellite states with governments subservient to their policy' as part of a defensive strategy.² By the beginning of 1948, and after almost another two years of post-war treaty negotiations and frustration at Soviet refusals to cooperate with the West, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, reported to his Cabinet colleagues that:

It must be recognised that the Soviet Government has formed a solid political and economic block behind a line running from the Baltic along the Oder, through Trieste to the Black Sea. There is no prospect in the immediate future that we shall be able to re-establish normal relations with European countries behind that line.³

For the BBC, this break-up of Europe recalled an assessment made by the Corporation's own Overseas Intelligence Department in July 1940, after the *Wehrmacht* had routed the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. 'Broadcasting', it said, 'is now our only means of addressing a great part of Europe' (Briggs *The War of Words* 228), and less than a decade later this was again the case. In addition, British interests in the Middle and

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Far East were now also threatened by Soviet expansionist adventurism. As frictions between Russia and her wartime Allies worsened, the ability of the BBC External Services to broadcast into these areas and breach the descending Iron Curtain considerably increased its value as a means of projecting the British counterpoint to Soviet propaganda.

As a response to these developments, Bevin set about altering Britain's overseas publicity policy and in doing so put in train a profound change that would affect all British publicity to foreign countries, as carried out, for example, by the British Council and government information and cultural departments, in addition to the External Services of the BBC. This new policy, arrived at and agreed by Cabinet in January 1948, was to set the official tone within which the Government intended the voice of Britain to be heard in the context of the cold war. As such, the output of the Corporation was rightly considered as having a major role to play in beaming the British assessment of world events directly into the homes of a global audience.

Lord Briggs' multi-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* remains a treasure-trove for historians seeking to understand the role of the BBC in the life of the nation and as such, is still the most complete text on the relationship between Bush House and Whitehall. Nevertheless, Briggs somewhat understates the significance for the External Services of the Government decision to re-orient British overseas publicity and propaganda policy in a cold war mode. More recently, however, Michael Nelson has properly identified the January 1948 Cabinet decision as a turning point for the BBC within his comparative examination of British and American overseas broadcasters in *War of the Black Heavens* (26–31). Nelson also took good advantage of newly declassified Foreign Office files relating to information policy when they started to arrive at the Public Record Office in 1995. This flow in official documentation has continued and in the last decade a far more detailed examination has been possible of the development of official overseas publicity policy by, for example, Hugh Wilford, Paul Lashmar and Oliver James, Tony Shaw ('Information Research Department'), Richard Aldrich (*Hidden Hand*) and, most recently and comprehensively, by Andrew Defty. These have consequently been able to extend earlier analyses by Lyn Smith, Richard Fletcher, Scott Lucas and C.J. Morris and others which had to contend with an extremely limited official record.

Overseas broadcasting by the BBC, beyond the official history project, has also received far less attention than it deserves in light of its key role in representing Britain abroad. Although a number of accounts about the life of the organization have been written it is a far from complete picture and with more material on Britain's overseas information policy being revealed in the archives, one that is increasingly in need of review. One of these accounts, Peter Partner's 1988 history of the Arabic Service, *Arab Voices*, remains nearly 20 years on the most sustained examination of the BBC's oldest vernacular language service despite the continued interest in, and strategic importance of, the voice of Britain in the Middle East. Other insights into life at Bush House, however, can be drawn from the memoirs of BBC staff such as in Harman Grisewood's highly entertaining account of his time at the Corporation *One Thing at a Time*, and John Tusa's reflections in *A World in Your Ear*. Biographers such as Charles Richardson and Michael Tracey have also added to the picture with their respective renditions of the lives of Sir Ian Jacob and Sir Hugh Carleton Greene. In *Let Truth Be Told* Gerard Mansell goes one step

further and combines the sensitivities of the insider with an historical analysis of the External Services.

In all of these, to greater or lesser extents, a clear theme has been the BBC's 'Co-habitation with Whitehall', as Anthony Adamthwaite has put it. Naturally, as more has become known about the Government's cold war publicity campaign, so attention has increasingly been paid to developing an integrated history of the BBC External Services and these policy developments. This type of contextualized assessment can be seen in the work of Gary Rawnsley (*Radio Diplomacy; 'Cold War Radio'; Cold War Propaganda*) and Tony Shaw (*Eden, Suez; 'Eden and the BBC'; 'Information Research Department'*) where the focus rests on key cold war events such as Korea, Suez and Cuba. There is still a long way to go, however, before the story of the BBC External Services in relation to anti-communist publicity can be told in full. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to advance this latest approach through a close analysis of existing relations between the BBC and the Government in the early cold war with emphasis being paid to contemporaneous events, particularly in Europe, the specific experiences of the BBC Eastern Services and the nature of liaison between the two institutions. In this way it is intended to arrive at an appreciation of the way in which the External Services were able to assimilate the January 1948 Cabinet decision into their strategic outlook and global remit, and interpret its meaning.

A Foreign Publicity Policy for the Cold War

In November 1947, Ernest Bevin raised the question, with his Cabinet colleagues, of what the Government's attitude should be towards 'the rapid extinction of human rights and the fundamental freedoms' in Central and Eastern Europe.⁴ Two years previously he had addressed the same problem in relation to Poland and Czechoslovakia, where he asserted that 'the provision of information about British life and culture' – essentially the remit, outside that of providing impartial news, of BBC overseas broadcasting – 'is probably our most effective single means of preventing them from being absorbed into a closed and exclusive Soviet sphere of influence and of keeping open the doors between Eastern and Western Europe'.⁵ This clearly had not worked by the end of 1947 and the earlier ominous assessments of the JIC and the military planners bore a terrible fruit in February 1948 when local communist forces in Czechoslovakia, with Russian backing, took to the offensive and ushered in a new and particularly belligerent phase in the developing cold war.

The dramatic events of the Czech coup and the West's inability to intervene did, however, set in relief the potential value of overseas broadcasting by the BBC at a time of international crisis in the context of the cold war. Before the coup, it had been estimated by the Czech Ministry of Information that one in five people listened to the BBC. After the coup, the US Social Services Research Council calculated that one out of every two owners of radios listened to the BBC – a number that increased to three out of every four when Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, the wartime head of the Government's Political Warfare Executive and a regular commentator for the BBC European Services, was broadcasting – and that the BBC's audience in Czechoslovakia 'is far greater than that of the Czechoslovakian Broadcasting System' (Briggs *Sound and Vision* 508). Therefore, while communist control

was exerted on broadcasting within Czechoslovakia it was clear that the BBC had a very important function to perform in 'letting in daylight from the whole of the outside world' ('Overseas' 101) – a task enhanced by the vivid first-hand accounts of the communist take-over transmitted by the recently appointed BBC correspondent in Prague, Patrick Smith. As the *BBC Yearbook* noted, 'it is no exaggeration to say that in Czechoslovakia in February and March almost every set capable of receiving London was doing so day by day' ('Overseas' 101).

In many ways the Czech coup (and later events in 1948, especially the Soviet blockade of the western zones of Berlin) provided a practical example of how broadcasting overseas, while not capable of affecting dramatic or immediate change, was an essential, and sometimes the only, means of maintaining a link with countries and their audiences either behind the Iron Curtain or in particularly sensitive regions where the strategic battle of the early cold war was being played out. There were, of course, limits to what broadcasting could achieve, but Bevin believed that in this cold conflict it was absolutely necessary that in light of the very limited range of alternatives available to prosecute foreign policy in this principal context:

We should organise our publicity with a view to appearing as strong as we can, lest other friends of Great Britain . . . should be encouraged to think that they must compound with the Russians while there is yet time. In the long run we shall only retain our friends if we are strong.⁶

Being strong in publicity terms was already, however, an issue that had received full ministerial attention over a month before the Czech coup, when the Cabinet had debated, at the Foreign Secretary's instigation, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy'. The failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting in December 1947 and Bevin's personal frustration at the refusal of the Russians to cooperate, allowed for a different tactical approach to be applied to foreign publicity that until then he had rejected. Before this point the overt policy of foreign publicity had relied on the principle, learnt during the Second World War, that 'answering back' to the propagandist attacks of other countries was neither desirable nor successful in the long term. Bevin reminded his colleagues of this in his Cabinet paper when he noted that 'our propaganda where Russia and Communism are concerned, has been non-provocative, and we have not attempted systematically to expose the myths of the Soviet paradise'. However, the paper went on, with 'the Russians and the Communist Allies . . . threatening the whole fabric of Western civilisation' there was a 'need to mobilise spiritual forces, as well as material and political, for its defence'. Therefore, Bevin argued:

It is for us, as Europeans and as a Social Democratic Government, and not the Americans, to give the lead in the spiritual, moral and political sphere to all the democratic elements in Western Europe which are anti-Communist and, at the same time, genuinely progressive and reformist, believing in freedom, planning and social justice.⁷

On 8 January 1948, these issues were brought to bear at a crucial discussion by the Cabinet on 'Foreign Policy in Europe' which coordinated several key policy strands. Before Ministers were four memoranda by the Foreign Secretary that reviewed Soviet policy, evaluated recent events in Eastern Europe, advanced the idea of a union of Western European countries, and laid out plans for the future of foreign publicity policy. In the last of these, Bevin told his colleagues that 'we must be prepared to pass over to the offensive

and not leave the initiative to the enemy, but make them defend themselves' and that to do this 'We should adopt a new line in our foreign publicity designed to oppose the inroads of Communism, by taking the offensive against it.'⁸ Ministers were, however, concerned about 'too much emphasis' being laid on the 'anti-Soviet aspect' and the fact that this would 'fail to rally the Socialist forces in Western Europe and would make it more difficult to foster cultural relations with Eastern European countries'.⁹ Nevertheless, the Cabinet endorsed the recommendations for future publicity policy and by doing so gave executive authority to embark on a non-shooting war against the Soviet Union and communist forces throughout the world in what was intended to be a 'vigorous systematic attack'.¹⁰

The Development of an Anti-Communist Publicity Policy

This decision was the culmination of nearly two years of policy development within the Foreign Office in reaction to the growing threat believed to be posed by an increasingly truculent Soviet Union. The first stage in this development began at the point of an institutional re-gearing within Whitehall towards a reappraisal of the Soviet Union and communism after the war. In March 1946, the same month as the JIC assessment mentioned above, a request was made by the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Orme Sargent, for a paper on how to counter Soviet propaganda. This was carried out by Christopher Warner, Assistant Under-Secretary responsible for Soviet affairs, and was one of the first papers considered by the newly established Committee on Russian Policy (Russia Committee) that had been set up in the Foreign Office to 'study Soviet activities and co-ordinate counter-action' (FCO 2). The paper, 'The Soviet Campaign Against this Country and Our Response to It', argued in favour of publicity denouncing communism as a form of totalitarianism although not directly attacking the Soviet Union – a 'defensive-offensive', as Warner described it (FCO 2). Endorsed by both Bevin and Attlee and with the backing of the Russia Committee, Warner's paper led to the setting up of a working party under Ivone Kirkpatrick, then Assistant Under-Secretary superintending Information Departments at the Foreign Office and, subsequently, a plan for a long-term propaganda campaign against communism (FCO 2; Defty 38). This proposal envisaged a collective effort involving British Missions overseas, the Central Office of Information (COI) and the BBC as part of the Government's information services machinery. The Foreign Secretary, however, considered the plan too negative and while still pursuing a settlement with the Russians and mindful of domestic and, particularly, Labour Party opinion at home, was unwilling to see it implemented.

This first attempt at a coordinated response to Soviet propaganda had moved too quickly ahead of the political and public debate and pre-empted the support that was required for its execution. However, what it had done was to bring together key officials at the Foreign Office – Sargent, Warner and Kirkpatrick – in agreement on the principles of how a counter-offensive should be conducted. In addition, the new and increasingly significant Russia Committee, which effectively set the background tone of the Government's policy towards the Soviet Union, provided an institutional forum within which such ideas could be maintained. Therefore, when the next stage in the development of this policy emerged there was already a constituency of thought and

prepared action from which it could feed. And this time there was to be no political embargo.

Soviet withdrawal from Marshall Aid talks in July 1947, the establishment at the end of September of the Communist Information Bureau (or Cominform) to coordinate the actions of Communist parties in Europe,¹¹ and the failure of the Council of Foreign Ministers in December, marked the end of hopes for a constructive post-war settlement between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. In October, in preparation for this, Bevin had requested that plans be drawn up for a new and more aggressive propaganda offensive (FCO 4). Bevin's willingness to look again at publicity policy alternatives coincided with the submission to him at the beginning of December of a paper by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Christopher Mayhew, on 'Third Force Propaganda' as a riposte to what Mayhew, then travelling back from the United Nations, saw as Stalin's as yet unanswered 'worldwide campaign of subversion and propaganda' (Mayhew 18). With the approval of Bevin, Mayhew met with the architects of the earlier proposals – Sargent, Kirkpatrick and Warner – in preparation for drafting a paper for the Cabinet that consequently emphasized Britain's social democratic strengths over American unfettered capitalism and Soviet communism. Mayhew also discussed his paper with the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, at Chequers on 27 December (Mayhew 21). The resultant Cabinet paper on 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy', drafted with the help of Warner who watered down some of its Third Force elements, laid out the anti-communist publicity campaign that Ministers approved on 8 January 1948 and which, after the long gestation period, now had the political support it required and would soon have the necessary machinery with which it could be carried out.

In the Cabinet debate, Ernest Bevin had argued that the 'most effective method of countering Soviet propaganda was to provide specific information refuting the misrepresentation made by the Soviet Government'¹² – the answering back thesis. 'The only new machinery required,' the Mayhew/Warner/Bevin Cabinet paper set out, 'would be a small Section in the Foreign Office to collect information concerning Communist policy, tactics and propaganda and to provide material for our anti-Communist publicity through our Missions and Information Services abroad.'¹³ This Section became known as the Information Research Department (IRD) and while the existence of the department was not concealed, it was felt that 'to avoid creating embarrassment for the Foreign Secretary in his dealings with foreign Governments through diplomatic channels',¹⁴ its output should be non-attributable (FCO 9) and its specific anti-communist function should be kept a secret (Mayhew 23).

Negotiating the Relationship: BBC External Services and Whitehall

How, though, was this new policy to be integrated with the work of the BBC's External Services? In dealing with this, the Cabinet paper had been observant of the constitutional niceties between the BBC and the Government in terms of the Corporation's independent status, when it stated that the 'fullest co-operation of the BBC Overseas Services would be desirable'.¹⁵ However, to really understand if, and in what manner, such cooperation would be forthcoming, it is essential to appreciate the nature of the existing working relationship between the External Services and the Government machine by 1948,

in order to see how this significant alteration in Britain's foreign publicity policy impacted on the Corporation.

The orchestration of effective liaison between the two institutions had, by this time, become a complex operation that by design was intended to be kept fluid in relation to needs. In the run up to the January 1947 Charter, the Director-General of the BBC, William Haley, had emphasized its asymmetry as a virtue when he noted in his paper to the Board of Governors on the 'Principles and Purpose of the BBC's External Services', that the 'methods of liaison to reach the understanding adumbrated by the Lord President vary from service to service. It is – to my mind rightly – not formalised throughout the Corporation.'¹⁶ This related to the stipulation in the Government's July 1946 White Paper on Broadcasting that the BBC would:

remain independent in the preparation of programmes for overseas audiences, though it should obtain from Government Departments concerned such information about conditions in these countries and the policies of His Majesty's Government toward them as will permit it to plan its programmes in the national interest.¹⁷

The result was a hierarchy of evolving linkages from the most senior level of the BBC down to the individual language services that collectively formed the relationship between the External Services and Government.

On issues of outstanding importance the Director-General and the Chairman would consult with Ministers. Other major matters would then be mediated by the Controllers of the European and Overseas Services and their counterparts in the Senior Civil Service.¹⁸ There was then another level of liaison for the regionally grouped foreign-language services. The Latin-American Services were in touch with the Head of the Latin-American Department in the Foreign Office and took it upon themselves to be proactive in consulting the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Admiralty on related matters of guidance.¹⁹ The Director of Eastern Services attended weekly meetings at the Eastern (Political) Department of the Foreign Office, in addition to going to monthly meetings of the Middle East Information Department (MEID) in the same Ministry.²⁰ By March 1947 the Far Eastern Services had arranged, using as its model the Eastern Services meeting with MEID, to attend the Foreign Office's Far Eastern Information Department Weekly Directive Meeting along with the British Council.²¹ On a micro-management level institutional links were also being developed. For example, there were regular meetings with the Colonial Office about Palestine and telephone contact with the Foreign Office over Persia and Egypt.²² In addition to guidance by phone on day-to-day questions, the Board of Trade established regular Conferences at its Overseas Information Division where between 12 and 14 BBC representatives would mix with Information Officers of the Foreign Office and representatives of the COI to discuss economic and industrial subjects.²³ In a similar, but reversed, manner the India Office briefed the Director of Eastern Services (DES) as a channel to all BBC departments concerned,²⁴ while in the European Services there were 'individual contacts between the various service directors and their regional opposite numbers in the Foreign Office'.²⁵ It was within this network of institutional and personal links that the material nature of the relationship was revealed and worked through. And it was here that the future purpose of overseas broadcasting would be interpreted in the light of developing practices – and where the line between Government influence and the Corporation's independence would be drawn in detail.

In the autumn of 1946, Haley acknowledged that there 'have been occasions when it has been necessary for the BBC to take a firm line to distinguish "information" or "guidance" from "directives"'.²⁶ It was to this effect that the then DES, Donald Stephenson, had felt it necessary to inform the Director of MEID, Major-General A.J.C. Pollock, that 'while we would always do our best to interpret British Government policy in our broadcasts, we nevertheless reserved absolute discretion in regard to content and presentation'.²⁷ But now that the External Services' 'fullest co-operation' was being asked for in the prosecution of Britain's new anti-communist publicity policy, how would an interpretation of Government policy and the Corporation's editorial independence be mediated under the rubric of broadcasting in the national interest in cold war conditions? In order to assess this, it is worth briefly examining a couple of the links in the relationship between the Government and the External Services that help explain the manner in which such a request would have been received.

The first is the very illuminating experience of the BBC's Eastern Services in dealing with the Foreign Office and what Stephenson termed the 'extra-constitutional practices' between them. In March 1947, after a sustained period of anxiety in British official circles about the growing extent of Soviet influence in the region, the Near East News Editor, Gordon Mackenzie, wrote to Stephenson on the problem of 'inspired' news items from the Foreign Office which had been of concern for some time. This particular episode was triggered by a BBC Arabic news bulletin that had reported the content of a letter to the Egyptian Gazette from 'An English Friend of Egypt' – a typical 'anonymous harangue' by the Foreign Office, as Stephenson might have called it. In light of this, Mackenzie set about trying to define 'a proper understanding . . . of the relations between the Foreign Office and the BBC',²⁸ and thought that 'the duty of the BBC is to follow in its broadcasts the general policy of HMG, but it is allowed the widest freedom in the selection, editing and presentation of day-to-day broadcast material'.²⁹

To this assessment, in which, interestingly, the national interest equates to broadcasting the 'general policy' of the government, Stephenson added that on issues where 'the Foreign Office want us to implement or support some point of policy, either by our own origination of broadcast material or by carrying the material originated at other sources, this must always be a matter of mutual agreement'.³⁰ However, in order to maintain 'a proper atmosphere of cooperation and assistance', he continued:

where the FO particularly press us, in circumstances of urgency, to carry an item . . . and when we are satisfied that the item is at least quite harmless, however ineffective we may consider it to be; then in such cases I think we are usually well advised to accede to such a request.³¹

This would then 'strengthen our arm in those other and more frequent cases where we feel that a request item is so inept or indeed harmful that we rightly refuse to have anything to do with it'.³² In effect, what Stephenson was describing was a qualified concept of independence that depended on a system of trades to ensure that it could ultimately be asserted on issues that were deemed of utmost importance.

Mackenzie's solution was to seize 'the initiative over these "inspired" items, and for an attempt [*to be made*] to get the whole thing on an organized and thought-out basis'³³ where, in future, coordinated activity between the Foreign Office, Press Attaches, diplomatic correspondents of the local media and the BBC would enable the government

line to be addressed without vitiating 'the value of an argument which might otherwise have some weight' by the use of clumsy techniques that are 'bound to be seen through'.³⁴ What he was proposing, therefore, was a coordinated system of disseminating what was, in effect, British Government propaganda which throws into relief the far more imprecise and evolving landscape within which relations between the External Services and Whitehall took place at the service level, as opposed to the more ordered and, on paper, simpler environment inhabited by the BBC's Charter and Licence. And it exposed a permissive zone in the relationship where definitions of the Corporation's independence were forced to face the practical as well as political realities of broadcasting overseas. Acting in support of government policy, albeit with an editorial veto, was clearly the policy and this was to be no less the case after the January 1948 Cabinet decision.

A second and exceptionally important link, in terms of setting the governing tone of liaison, relates to the instrumental relationship between Major-General Sir Ian Jacob, who became Controller of European Services in July 1946 and then Director of all the External Services at the end of 1947, and Ivone Kirkpatrick, who had a crucial influence on the relationship between the Government and overseas broadcasting in terms of the Foreign Office's interests. It was this special pair that not only patrolled the boundary between the two institutions, but effectively defined where that boundary lay. In trying to understand the delicate balance between control and independence and how any Government policy would impact on the External Services, it is essential to understand these men, the experiences they brought to their jobs, and the way they subsequently fulfilled what they considered to be their duty. Each was to have an indelible effect on how the relationship was to be negotiated for the next decade.

On 21 March 1946, the BBC's Board of Governors authorized the Director-General to approach Jacob to be Controller of the European Services and two weeks later his appointment was confirmed.³⁵ By doing this, the Board assigned to one of the most diplomatically sensitive and politically scrutinized jobs in the BBC a man who, during the war, had played a vital role right at the centre of Government. Since 1939 Jacob had been Military Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet and in this capacity had been at the very nexus of international policy development and the prosecution of the war. He had developed a close working relationship with Churchill and as he accompanied the Prime Minister to Allied summits he got to know, at close quarters, American and Russian representatives including Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and Stalin (Richardson 218).

Jacob had perfect qualifications for understanding post-war Europe, and from July 1945, in addition to being Secretary to the Defence Committee,³⁶ had sat on the Labour Government's standing ministerial European Control Committee that was tasked with handling 'the day-to-day problems arising in connection with the control or administration of ex-enemy territories in Europe'.³⁷ He was in the inner circle of the military, diplomatic, political and intelligence spheres of British Government by the end of the war and these were associations and links that he maintained and which were to provide him with a very subtle appreciation of international developments and governmental attitudes – the 'ideal man' as Haley, whose preoccupation was domestic broadcasting, described him (Briggs *Sound and Vision* 154).

Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, was a government official who then worked at the BBC before returning to the Foreign Office and ultimately becoming its Permanent

Under-Secretary. In February 1941, Kirkpatrick became the Foreign Adviser to the BBC and in September took charge of broadcasting to the Continent as Controller, European Services (Tracey 74). It was at first a controversial posting, but the European Services, unlike some of their other overseas counterparts, were of particular operational and strategic importance during the war and as this arrangement became accepted there was an increasing appreciation of the additional benefits that this new Controller's links with Whitehall could effect. As Lord Briggs has pointed out, 'With Kirkpatrick in Bush House, the BBC was sure of something more than mere protection' (*Sound and Vision* 154). Kirkpatrick understood the importance of broadcasting overseas, its value and its potential as an aid to Government objectives. However, after the war, as a member of the Government Information Services Committee, Kirkpatrick was clear in his mind that the new peacetime balance to be struck would mean that 'the Government would be fully entitled to bring pressure to bear on the BBC in order that the [overseas] service should accord with the aims of Government policy'.³⁸

Both men had been Government insiders who became central and influential personalities at a very senior level of the BBC. Kirkpatrick's time at the Corporation had been a necessary but temporary wartime secondment and consequently, when he returned to Government service and took on the responsibility for information services and, therefore, senior liaison with the BBC's overseas services, it was as a man who, on the one hand, understood what the Corporation could do and how it worked from the inside, but on the other, consistently interpreted the relationship in terms of politics and policy. Nevertheless, his experience of, and close ties with, the External Services engendered a crucially important legacy of informal negotiation that his successor as Assistant Under-Secretary and head of the Information Policy Department, Warner, was to follow from January 1948.³⁹ Meanwhile, Jacob's management of the European and then the whole of the External Services demonstrated an almost schizophrenic capacity to bestride the grey area between the two institutions, as he established himself as a facilitator when there needed to be cooperation between the Government and the BBC, and as a firewall when it seemed that the independence and integrity of the Corporation might be compromised.

At the beginning of his tenure at Bush House, Jacob had set out, in his first directive in the job, rules governing his staff's relationship with the Government's overseas departments. While Service Directors should project British 'activities and the British way of life', they should not be swayed by 'day to day fluctuations in political policy'.⁴⁰ Neither should they bend to pressure not to broadcast material uncomfortable for the Government. Ideally, the 'spread of truth, and the full ventilation of facts, are highly desirable in themselves'.⁴¹ However, Jacob was also supremely aware of the wider context within which the BBC broadcast overseas, and believed that Britain must continue:

to struggle against calumny and insidious propaganda poured out by upholders of a different way of thinking. Our part in counteracting this is not by refuting it, or by answering abuse with abuse, but by seizing and retaining the initiative.⁴²

As he noted in October 1948, 'it was more important to emphasize the advantage of living under a democratic regime than to try to explode the "myth" of the Soviet Union' (Nelson 29). From this analysis it would seem that Jacob's conception of the job to be done by overseas broadcasting was characterized by a sense of participating in a 'struggle'. Passive objectivity in output would not be enough and the Corporation's role would be to project

an image of Britain overseas that proactively confronted opposing and potentially damaging (to British interests) 'ways of thinking' and which would bluntly contradict misrepresentations. But in what manner would that struggle be fought by the BBC?

Jacob's governing influence was politically sensitive as well as profound. In what might be characterized as its public presentation he was clear that the BBC should not be conducting a campaign of political warfare. Writing in the *BBC Yearbook 1947* he imagined for readers the place in British society that overseas broadcasting inhabited. Philosophically, the Corporation was a representation of the society it served:

One often hears the phrase: 'The BBC says ...' But the BBC has no entity in the sense of having views and opinions of its own. It seeks to hold a mirror to British opinion, and to reflect what the ordinary man and woman in Britain feels. British public opinion finds its expression in the Press, in speeches and writings, in books and periodicals. By quoting this material, and by bringing a great variety of people to the microphone, the BBC tries to show to its listeners the different currents of thought, the full and democratic flow of ideas, and the diverse opinions, that go to make up the voice of the British people. (Jacob 16)

In this analysis, the BBC was a morally neutral organization that performed the function of a weathervane, signalling the prevailing trends of culture and thought in society along with the dissemination of impartial news – a national zeitgeist which then transmitted messages of British identity around the world.

In contrast to this, however, was his pragmatic appreciation that, 'any country deciding to embark on a service of broadcasts to foreign audiences does so because it wants to influence those audiences in its favour. All such broadcasting is therefore propaganda' (Nelson 29). Harnessed to a belief that 'the British people are engaged in a struggle to maintain their existence and way of life in the face of a campaign of propaganda and subversive activity, openly designed to overthrow them', Jacob thought that the External Services should consequently 'assist by all means in our power the national effort. Only in this way shall we be framing our programmes in the national interest' (Wythenshawe 154). On a practical level, providing assistance 'by all means' in the summer of 1946, as Kirkpatrick was preparing his proposals for an anti-communist propaganda campaign, involved Jacob approaching and discussing with the Foreign Office the nature of BBC broadcasts to Russia and advocating the use of more anti-communist material (Nelson 14). In fact, by October Jacob had been made a member of the Government's Russia Committee and as such, with Sargent, Warner, Kirkpatrick and Mayhew, was intimately involved in the very creation of the new publicity policy and Whitehall's plans for a propaganda campaign. Indeed, it was the Russia Committee that was given responsibility for guiding the activities of IRD and to whom the Department reported. So important did Jacob consider the articulation of Britain's part in this struggle through the BBC that by June 1948 he had appointed the Controller of Overseas Services, R. McCall, and the Editor of European Services, Tangye Lean, as the points of contact with the head of IRD, Ralph Murray, to assist cooperative flows of information in both directions.

Therefore, while in the Cabinet paper on 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy' it was deemed 'desirable' that the BBC cooperate, in practice such assistance could have been expected from Jacob. Support of British foreign policy from this perspective also included a proactive role in its formulation, as Jacob maintained the delicate balance between the

two institutions from the inside of both of them. This included putting forward suggestions such as his call for more Ministerial speeches containing material critical of the Soviet Union and/or communism that could then be reported across the world by the BBC's External Services and to particular target audiences (FCO 6). Already on 3 January 1948, before the Cabinet had approved the new publicity policy, Clement Attlee (with the scriptwriting assistance of Christopher Mayhew) (Mayhew 21) had 'illustrated how this could be combined with encouragement of Socialist principles'⁴³ when he criticized Soviet 'imperialism – ideological, economic and strategic' in a broadcast speech (Defty 66). However, beyond this strategic orientation Jacob continued to argue strongly against Government involvement in the actual making, putting together and presentation of the External Services programmes which he saw as the vital realm in which the editorial independence of the BBC was paramount. Advice on direction was to be permitted, but not interference in the process!

Conclusions

To use Jacob's analogy of the BBC as a mirror reflecting British opinion, the External Services, with their ties to the Government, inevitably reflected key trends and changes in foreign and publicity policy. The Government's relationship with BBC external broadcasting, through both institutional architecture and on more personal terms, with Jacob and Kirkpatrick being the prime example, effectively wired-up the Corporation to the development of policy in Whitehall right up to the Cabinet and the highest level of decision-making. This was not, however, hard-wiring and it was not the job of the BBC to conduct foreign policy as Bevin had made clear to senior ministers in April 1948. He was against the BBC accepting 'definite official direction as to their contents' as this 'would raise very serious issues here and might well diminish the influence and reputation in foreign countries of the BBC's broadcasts'.⁴⁴ Consequently, no change was needed to the BBC Charter after the shift in the Government's foreign publicity policy and the independence of the Corporation in the preparation of programmes for overseas audiences was still upheld. However, when changes did occur in the direction and administration of foreign policy, vibrations in the constitutional as well as the extra-constitutional connections between the BBC and the Government were most definitely felt in Bush and Broadcasting House.

Michael Nelson, in his revealing book *War of the Black Heavens*, notes that the 'relationship in 1948 seems a far cry from that described by Herbert Morrison in 1946, whereby once the general character and scope of the service had been laid down, the BBC would have complete discretion as to its content' (28). Nelson is certainly correct, but was there, in practice, such a significant shift from peacetime broadcasting to the requirements of broadcasting in the early cold war? Jacob had always been aware of the need to integrate key foreign policy objectives into the direction and output of the External Services in alignment with hardening cold war attitudes. As the experience of the Eastern Services suggests, even before the new Charter came into effect, overseas broadcasting was based on a continually negotiated understanding between senior programme-makers and Whitehall. It was not the case that independence was a working concept in 1946 that by 1948 had effectively been made redundant. The truth was that in 1948, as in the

previous years after the war, the nature of the External Services' relationship with Government was the result of a complex set of interpretations throughout the various levels of the Corporation and Whitehall that, in the light of national and international developments, represented shifting concepts of what it meant to broadcast in the national interest. This allowed the BBC both before and after the 1947 Charter to accept 'inspired' items in its broadcasts to foreign countries while strenuously arguing that its editorial independence should not be compromised, and allowed Jacob to participate in the construction of an anti-communist publicity campaign and the shift to the offensive of the Government's foreign publicity policy while arguing that the BBC should not be 'waging an ideological war with anyone' or interfere with 'the course of events within other countries'.⁴⁵

The period between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the 1950s represents a forging experience for the External Services of the BBC, as they initially defined themselves in an unfamiliar peacetime context before rapidly coming to terms with a cold war in which they again became a principal mediator between Britain and estranged or strategically important communities overseas – either behind the Iron Curtain or in regions such as the Middle East. The Cabinet decision on publicity policy in January 1948 was a pivot around which the tenor of the voice of Britain was attuned to these prevailing geopolitical considerations. Its working out in the BBC was, however, part of a continuing understanding of the purpose of broadcasting overseas that once it was set in its cold war mode, as it was in this period, defined policy and output for years to come.

Notes

1. The National Archive (TNA), Public Record Office (PRO), CAB 81/132, JIC(46)1(0).
2. Ibid.
3. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/23, CP(48)6, 'The First Aim of British Foreign Policy', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 4 Jan. 1948.
4. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/22, CP(47)313, 'Extinction of Human Rights in Eastern Europe', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 24 Nov. 1947.
5. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/6, CP(46)7, 'Publicity Services in South-Eastern Europe', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Information, 4 Jan. 1946.
6. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/25, CP(48)71, 'The Czechoslovak Crisis', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 3 Mar. 1948.
7. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/23, CP(48)8, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 4 Jan. 1948.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. TNA, PRO, FO 953/701, Note by Warner, 6 June 1950.
11. The original members of the Cominform were: Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia.
12. TNA, PRO, CAB 128/12, CM(48)2(5), 'Foreign Policy in Europe', 8 Jan. 1948.

13. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/23, CP(48)8.
14. TNA, PRO, CAB 128/12, CM(48)19th Conclusions, 'Foreign Policy in Europe', 5 Mar. 1948.
15. TNA, PRO, CAB 129/23, CP(48)8.
16. BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC), R1/82/3, G68/46, 'The Principles and Purpose of the BBC's External Services', Note by the Director-General, 30 Oct. 1946.
17. Broadcasting Policy, Cmd. 6852, HMSO, July 1946, para. 60.
18. This was Major-General Ian Jacob and J.B. Clark (who was in charge of all external broadcasting outside of Europe) until the end of 1947 when Jacob became the Director of Overseas Services (later, Director of External Services).
19. WAC, R1/82/3, G68/46.
20. Ibid.
21. WAC, R34/399, 'Liaison with Foreign Office, etc.', Memorandum from C(OS) to Mr E.D. Robertson and FESD, 27 Feb. 1947.
22. WAC, R1/82/3, G68/46.
23. TNA, PRO, CAB 134/545, OI(O)(47)4, 'Board of Trade Information Services to Overseas Countries', Note by the Joint Secretaries, 28 Jan. 1947.
24. Ibid., OI(O)(47), 1st Meeting of the Official Committee on Overseas Information Services, 29 Jan. 1947.
25. WAC, R1/82/3, G68/46.
26. Ibid.
27. WAC, R34/399, Memorandum from Director of Eastern Services to C(OS), 'Meeting at Middle East Publicity Department, Foreign Office', 8 Aug. 1946.
28. Ibid., "'Inspired" News Items from the FO', Memorandum from NENE to DES, 26 Mar. 1947.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 'News Items from the FO', Memorandum from DES to NENE, 1 Apr. 1947.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., Memorandum from NENE to DES, 26 Mar. 1947.
34. Ibid.
35. WAC, R1/12, Minute 87, 'European Service Direction', Board of Governors Meeting, 3 Apr. 1946.
36. TNA, PRO, CAB 21/823, 'Cabinet Committees: Composition, Terms of Reference and Organisation', 1945.
37. TNA, PRO, CAB 66/67, CP(45)59, 'Standing Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet', Note by the Prime Minister, 3 July 1945.
38. TNA, PRO, CAB 134/306, GIS(46)4th Meeting, 28 Feb. 1946.
39. The Information Policy Department consisted of six regional Information Departments that dealt with publicity abroad. However, in September 1949, as part of a Foreign Office reorganization, these regional Information Departments ceased to exist (except for the German Information Department) with the Head of each becoming a Regional Adviser to the Information Policy Department, Information Services Department, Information Research Department and Cultural Relations Department.
40. WAC, E40/251/1, Directive No. 1, 'Statement of Policy for the European Service', Ian Jacob, Controller (European Services), 29 July 1946.
41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.
43. TNA, PRO, CAB 128/12, CM(48)2(5).
44. TNA, PRO, CAB 130/37, GEN 231/1 'Anti-Communist Publicity', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 30 Apr. 1948.
45. WAC, E40/251/1, Directive No. 1.

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Alban Webb, PhD candidate in History, Queen Mary, University of London. E-mail: albanwebb@blueyonder.co.uk

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