

# Contest between foreign and domestic propaganda Voice of America broadcast to Czechoslovakia during late 1940s and early 1950s<sup>1</sup>



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The Voice of America (VOA) broadcasting addressed Czechoslovak listeners during two difficult periods in Czechoslovak history. At the time of the World War II, the VOA was sending to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia words of hope about the approaching victory of the Allies over Nazi Germany. During the Communist era, the VOA reported on topics made taboo by the Czechoslovak communist Government. The broadcaster tried to be an alternative to the communist mass propaganda which overwhelmed Czechoslovakia after the communist coup of February 1948. The VOA broadcasting in the Czech and Slovak languages started in March 1942, its main task being to support the war efforts in the fight against Nazi Germany by means of propaganda and information. After the World War II, its activities declined, but as a new conflict emerged between the East and the West, the VOA broadcasting regained its former intensity. The aim of this paper is to analyse the VOA broadcast to Czechoslovakia during late 1940s and early 1950s in the broader context of U.S. information program. On the example of the Korean War, it will introduce VOA broadcast as an alternative to the communist propaganda as well as the tool of U.S. government to spread its own propaganda aims.

## ORIGINS OF THE VOICE OF AMERICA BROADCASTING AND U.S. PROPAGANDA DURING AND SHORTLY AFTER THE WORLD WAR II

Promoting a positive image of the United States in the world as a component of foreign policy emerged in the U.S. administration as early as in the 1930s. One of the first areas where the U.S. government tried to improve its image in the eyes of the local population was Latin America which was considered the United States' traditional sphere of influence.<sup>2</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> This study is a result of the Specific Research Project of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, No. 265101/2012.
  - <sup>2</sup> More: HART, Justin, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York 2013, pp. 15–40.



After Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, it became apparent how important role could play propaganda not only in internal but also in foreign political affairs. The German Radio would be broadcasting twenty-one hours a day at the end of the 1930s, and had become a significant tool of the Nazi propaganda.<sup>3</sup> In the United States of America disseminating Nazi visions of the future structure of Europe and the whole world was more taken into consideration after German troops occupied Poland and when they, consequently, focused their expansive efforts on Western and Northern Europe. In 1940 U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson warned that Germans were in their propaganda attacking the American way of democracy, mainly the freedom of the press and speech, and that it was necessary to react to the situation. Some members of the U.S. Administration even called for an open propagandistic campaign against Nazi propaganda.<sup>4</sup>

The Japanese attacking Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States entered the Second World War and it was becoming clearer and clearer that the victory in the war conflict would not only be decided on in the war field but also in that of propaganda. In 1941 U.S. government initiated the birth of the Foreign Information Service (FIS), which later on got transformed into the Overseas Branch of the Office of War Information (OWI), the aim of which being disseminating information on American war designs both among the inhabitants of the USA and people living abroad. In less than six months from setting up the FIS, the president Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to set up a governmental radio station which should have fulfilled those plans. On February 25, 1942 the world could hear the first broadcast of the station Voice of America from New York which was held in German,<sup>5</sup> shortly afterwards followed by transmissions in other languages — French, Italian and English. Broadcasting in Czech and Slovak began in March 1942 and two years later the VOA would already broadcast twenty-four hours a day in more than forty languages.<sup>6</sup> It had become an important tool of the U.S. government in the sphere of international politics, and it was not only used for the purposes of propaganda within the territory occupied by Nazis but also for explaining their own war effort and objectives. An irreplaceable role was played by the VOA during the Allies's landing in Italy and France, and it had become a “Voice of Victory” for American government towards the end of the war.<sup>7</sup>

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3 SHULMAN, Holly Cowan, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941-1945*, Madison 1990, p. 4.

4 Ibidem, p. 5.

5 The announcer William Halle went on the air saying: „The news may be good. The news may be bad. But we shall tell you truth.“ Quoted in: HEIL, Alan L., *The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, in: JOHNSON, Ross A. — PARTA, Eugen R. (eds.), *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents*, p. 25. Thus the U.S. government wanted to declare that its primary objective be spreading as unbiased news as possible. Similar statements can be also traced in other key documents defining the U.S. information program.

6 HEIL, Alan, *Voice of America. A History*, New York 2003, pp. 37, 44.

7 SHULMAN, H. C., op. cit., p. 12.



With the growing importance of the United States in the international field after the World War II, it was necessary to present ideas and objectives which U.S. foreign policy was based on to the world public. However, the U.S. government did not have a clear conception of what its post-war information program should look like. On August 25, 1945 the new U.S. president Harry S. Truman signed an executive order which dissolved the Office of War Information. Based on this decision, the radio station Voice of America passed over to the State Department and its further existence should have been decided upon later. But neither the U.S. Congress nor the public shared the government's opinion that the information program carry on in the time of peace. A fundamental influence on its continuation — as well as on that of the Voice of America — was exercised by a newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, William Benton who, as the historian Robert William Pirsein put it, “saved the VOA from total extinction”.<sup>8</sup>

Even though Harry S. Truman decided that the U.S. information program continues after the World War II, the Congress pruned its financing,<sup>9</sup> which severely affected the Voice of America as well. By April 1946 nearly two thirds of employees had left the VOA and its broadcasting had been considerably reduced — from more than forty languages used during the war time, to only twenty-three, and of the total number of 1,176 hours a week to only 446.<sup>10</sup> The November elections to the Congress were seized by the opposition Republicans, a large number of whom opposed the governmental activities abroad as well as keeping the information program on in the peace time.

## THE STRATEGY OF CONTAINMENT AND THE BEGINNING OF PROPAGANDISTIC FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNISM

With increasing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union the importance of the public diplomacy increased not only in Czechoslovakia but also in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where the influence of Moscow was growing rapidly. On March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman gave a speech in front of the United States Congress, later known as “The Truman Doctrine”, in which he

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8 PIRSEIN, Robert William, *Voice of America. An History of the International Broadcasting Activities of the United States Government, 1940–1962*, New York 1979, p. 114.

9 Cuts in the American information programme showed themselves distinctly a few months later. Just to compare — the British Information Service employed 8,011 people in 1947 and it had at their disposal a budget amounting to 42 million dollars, whereas the American Information Programme had only 3,885 employees and its budget being cca 30 million dollars. To see more: SCHWARTZ, Lowell, *Political Warfare against Kremlin. U.S. and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War*, Basingstoke 2009, p. 101.

10 HEIL, A., *Voice of America. A History...*, p. 46; BELMONTE, Laura A., *Selling the American Way. U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, Philadelphia 2008, p. 17; SCHWARTZ, L., op. cit., p. 101.



laid the foundations of the U.S. strategy of containment of communism.<sup>11</sup> Since then, the U.S. administration started to give voice to opinions saying that the growing communist movement around the world had to be also fought by means of propaganda. In early April 1947, after the President's requests for financial aid of \$ 400 million to Greece and Turkey, William Stone<sup>12</sup> asked the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William Benton to restore the VOA broadcasting in Greece. He also made a request for an increase of \$1.1 million for information and cultural activities in Greece and Turkey, and a request for an additional \$ 10 million for programs in France, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Italy and the Far East.<sup>13</sup>

The views of American Congressmen differed on whether the broadcasting of the VOA in the world should be intensified. For instance, Representative George Bender (Republican, Ohio) said: "The VOA program is nothing more or less than the propaganda arm of the Truman Doctrine".<sup>14</sup> Others, however, thought otherwise. Senator Vandenberg claimed that "if we are now in an ideological contest with the Russians, I think we have to use all of our available resources too, and I do not think we do". At hearings on the aid to Greece and Turkey, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (Republican, Massachusetts) suggested that the United States should also start an ideological crusade against communism.<sup>15</sup>

During the spring of the conviction grew in the State Department that it was necessary to strengthen the connections between the VOA and the rapidly developing strategy of containment. Secretary of State George Marshall confirmed those tendencies in his letter from June 1947, addressed to the Congress: "I consider American security to rest not only on our economic and political and military strength, but also on the strength of American ideas — on how well they are presented abroad."<sup>16</sup>

However, the Congress kept its negative stand towards strengthening the U.S. information program abroad. Among the few Republicans who would realize the role of the propaganda were Senator Alexander Smith (New Jersey), and his party fellow, member of the House of the Representatives, Karl Mundt (North Dakota). The latter one instigated a bill in the House of Representatives through which sufficient financial means should have been found to fund the Voice of America broadcast, keep the United States Information Service Libraries, support financially student and research exchange stays, and to distribute propaganda publications and films all over

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11 See, KOURA, Jan, *The Truman Doctrine. Origin of Ideological Containment*, in: *The Twentieth Century*, 2010, No. 2, pp. 135–144; KOURA, Jan, *Zápas o východní Středomoří. Zahraniční politika Spojených států amerických vůči Řecku a Turecku v letech 1945–1953*, Praha 2013, pp. 115–138.

12 William Stone worked for the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs (OIC, that was outfit within the State Department responsible for the VOA and the other information and cultural programs).

13 KRUGLER, D., F., *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945–1953*, New York 2000, p. 57.

14 *Ibidem*.

15 *Ibidem*.

16 *Ibidem*, p. 60.



the world. As he put it, this was due to “misunderstandings about the United States in other countries, which constitute obstacles to peace, and to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries, which is one of the essential foundations of peace.”<sup>17</sup> Despite being backed up by Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs William Benton in his initiative, who would emphasize the importance of information and educational programs in fighting communism, these initiatives did not meet with a positive response in the Congress. That’s why Mundt together with his colleague Smith instigated the establishment of the overseas investigation committee, which included members of the House Foreign Affairs and the Senate Foreign Relations committees, which was also called the Smith-Mundt subcommittee. The subcommittee aimed at assessing the success of the U.S. information program in twenty-two European countries including Czechoslovakia. The final report criticized the weak points of program in Czechoslovakia recommending its considerable increase so that it could even out communist propaganda. The criticism also concerned the Voice of America broadcasting, as its 30-minute broadcast per day was considered insufficient, mainly because its “program was received only faintly and irregularly.”<sup>18</sup>

After the inspection journey around Europe was over, most members of the delegation agreed that it was necessary to boost the U.S. information program as fast as possible because the image of the United States in Europe was really bad and in a number of countries it was the communist propaganda that had the edge.<sup>19</sup> Although the Smith-Mundt subcommittee released its overall report as late as at the end of January 1948, the Congress had got familiar with its findings before and it changed its view of supporting the U.S. information program in the world; the so-called Smith-Mundt Act was passed on January 16, 1948. Eleven days later the act, the aim of which ought to have been “to promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations”, was signed by President Truman, thus becoming effective.<sup>20</sup> The act substantially increased the financial means to fund the U.S. information program in the world, including the Voice of America broadcasting. George Allan, William Benton’s successor on the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, called the Smith-Mundt Act “one of the most important, and even revolutionary, decisions, ever taken in the history of our foreign relations.”<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Europe was at that time inexorably heading for its division by the “Iron Curtain”, and as for Czechoslovakia, it was not possible to put the criti-

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17 Quoted in: KRUGLER, David, F., “*If Peace is to Prevail: Karl E. Mundt and America’s International and Education Programs, 1943–1953*,” in: *South Dakota History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 63–64.

18 Mudd Library (ML), Princeton University, Alexander Smith Papers, box 490, Report of the Special Mundt Subcommittee, p. 127.

19 KRUGLER, D. F., “*If Peace is to Prevail*”..., pp. 70–71.

20 HIXSON, Walter L., *Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961*, New York 1998, p. 11.

21 Quoted in: SCHWARTZ, L, op. cit., p. 109.



cal observations made by the Smith-Mundt subcommittee — boosting the U.S. information program in Czechoslovakia, mainly to increase the number of broadcasting hours of the Voice of America — into reality as the February communist coup d'état came very soon afterwards.

## COMMUNIST COUP IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND GROWING PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

The communist coup in Czechoslovakia from February 25, 1948, was another one in a series of events that confirmed growing Soviet influence in the countries of Central Europe. The U.S. response to the coup ensued promptly.<sup>22</sup> In his speech from March 17, 1948, in front of both houses of the Congress, President Truman stressed that the abrupt changes afflicting Europe were affecting the U.S. national security. Compared to his previous speech of March 12, 1947, Truman had changed tone and directly accused Moscow of hampering world peace, declaring that “[...] the Soviet Union and its agents have destroyed the independence and democratic character of a whole series of nations in Eastern and Central Europe, adding that the tragic death of the Republic of Czechoslovakia has sent a shock throughout the civilized world”.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the February coup, the importance of the VOA broadcasting to Czechoslovakia gained a whole new dimension. Just like in other countries, in Czechoslovakia the VOA became a tool of the U.S. Government in the fight against communism and the local propaganda as well. The Czechoslovak Government complained to the U.S. authorities as early as in 1948 that the VOA was broadcasting statements of the Council for Free Czechoslovakia, established in France in response to the February coup. The Czechoslovak Government was especially irritated when one of the State Department officials said one of the purposes of the VOA broadcasting to Czechoslovakia was “to encourage Czechoslovak listeners and let them know that out there people are working on their liberation from communism”.<sup>24</sup>

The Voice of America broadcast was becoming more and more inconvenient for the communist government in Czechoslovakia, especially when in 1950 it was joined by the Radio Free Europe (RFE) broadcasting. Before long Czechoslovakia, taking the example of the Soviet Union,<sup>25</sup> began to jam the foreign radio station broadcasts;

22 According to Gallup, after the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia 77% of Americans were convinced that the Soviet Union aimed at becoming the leading power of the world. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971*, Vol. 3, New York 1972, p. 1721.

23 Special Message to the Congress on the Threat to the Freedom of Europe, 17 March 1948, *The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman 1948*, Washington, D. C. 1964, p. 183–184.

24 Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV), TO-tajné, USA, 1945–1959, box 21. The archive also conserves the complete text of the protest note in English, addressed directly to the Secretary of State Marshall.

25 The Soviet government started to interfere with the foreign radio broadcasts as early as in 1948. More in: WOODARD, George W., *Cold War Radio Jamming*, in: Cold War broadcast-

these at the same time started to be attacked verbally in the Czechoslovak press as a tool of the U.S. propaganda and labelled as the so-called “inflammatory radio transmitters”.<sup>26</sup> According to one of the documents issued by the culture-propagandistic departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ), the most serious threat to the communist regime was represented by the Voice of America broadcasting, “not through its content but due to its possibility to be picked up in medium waves and also due to its intensity. Our listener, when tuned in to the Prague I station and then searching for Prague II, tends to come across this powerful station.”<sup>27</sup> Western propaganda was to — according to this document — be paralyzed in several ways both within the state as well as abroad. Within the state, these were regarded as the most potent tools: to encourage the interest of the inhabitants in their own constructive efforts and the popularization of the socialistic endeavour of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic; to saturate the interest of the people in the world affairs by means of the national press and radio; to set the propaganda news rights; to disclose the aims of enemy propaganda and their means; to ridicule enemy propaganda in humoristic magazines, newspaper columns, radio sketches, satirical reviews, etc.; to expose the leading figures of enemy propaganda to ridicule; to treat foreign news and commentaries with irony; to highlight the capitalist decline in the economic, social and cultural spheres of life taking advantage of the drawbacks of capitalism (e.g. unemployment in Germany and the U.S.A., strikes in the U.S.A and Italy, etc.). The last means should have also been applied abroad where life in the Czechoslovakia and other people’s democracies ought to have been elucidated duly and thoroughly on the strength of exact data (e.g. that concerning increase in production, increase in the standard of living, introducing socialistic conveniences, making progress in the spheres of culture and education of the public).<sup>28</sup> In the end the document mentioned that it “is necessary to ensure that all the data be as specific as possible, be easy to understand for the people and have a psychological impact — that is, show directly and clearly to each listener and each reader how they would be taken care of in a socialist state.”<sup>29</sup>

The communist coup d’état in Czechoslovakia, a threat of the communists’ victory in the elections in Italy and the beginnings of the Berlin crisis forced the American government to adopt a measure which would legitimize propaganda and its use as means of fighting communism. The National Security Council (NSC) adopted a document designated NSC 10/2 in June 1948. On the base of the document was

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ing..., p. 53; NELSON, Michael, *War of the Black Heavens. The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, p. 20.

26 To read more on foreign radio stations jamming see: PROKOP, Tomek, *Československá redakce Radio Free Europe*, Praha 2015, p. 298–314; TOMEK, Prokop, *Rušení zahraničního rozhlasového vysílání pro Československo*, in: Tábořský, Jan (ed.), *Securitas Imperii: Sborník k problematice bezpečnostních služeb*, p. 333–366.

27 Národní Archiv Praha (NA), A ÚV KSČ, Kulturně-propagační a ideologické oddělení, 19/7, a.j. 601, l. 86.

28 Ibidem, l. pp. 100–101.

29 Ibidem, l. pp. 101.





established the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), which fell within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), its aim being to “plan and conduct covert operations”.<sup>30</sup> The NSC 10/2 put it literally that “such operations shall include any covert activities related to: propaganda; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition, and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberations groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world.”<sup>31</sup> In the following years the radio broadcasting became an important element of U.S. propaganda and one of the simplest tools to import it to the states behind the Iron Curtain as well as an instrument of a psychological war.<sup>32</sup> However, the Voice of America broadcasting still aimed to: 1) become a reliable source of information; 2) show a balanced and synoptic picture of American way of thinking as well as that of U.S. institutions; 3) present — as an official radio station — the U.S. policy effectively and clearly, as well as discuss this policy and viewpoints regarding it.<sup>33</sup>

In spring 1950 the U.S. American government decided to embark on a vast propagandistic campaign entitled the “Campaign of Truth”.<sup>34</sup> It was officially commenced by President Truman in his speech before the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 20, 1950. His words clearly demonstrated that the starting conflict with the Soviet Union was necessary to be also waged in the field of ideology: “The cause of freedom is being challenged throughout the world today by the forces of imperialistic communism. This is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of men. Propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons the Communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion, and lies are systematically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy. This propaganda can be overcome by the truth — plain, simple, unvarnished truth — presented by the newspapers, radio, newsreels, and other sources that the people trust.”<sup>35</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War acknowledged that there was justification to the Campaign of Truth and that the United States had to necessarily present their view of both the causes of the origin of the conflict and the situation in the world

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30 ETZOLD, Thomas H. — GADDIS, John Lewis, *Containment. Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950*, New York 1978, p. 126.

31 Ibidem, p. 127.

32 HIXON, W. L., op. cit., p. 32.

33 TOMEK, Prokop, *This is the Voice of America. Československá redakce státní rozhlasové stanice Spojených států amerických Hlas Ameriky*, in: *Paměť a dějiny*, 2014, č. 1, p. 4.

34 According the Undersecretary of State for Public Affairs Edward W. Barrett Campaign of Truth had four main aims: 1) establish a healthy international community; 2) presenting America fairly and countering all the misconceptions and misrepresentations about the United States; 3) deterring the Soviets from further encroachments; 4) roll back Soviet influence (not by arms, but by all means short of force). BARRETT, Edward W., *Truth is Our Weapon*, New York 1953, p. 78–79.

35 *Public Papers of President Harry S. Truman 1945–1953*, Address on Foreign Policy at a Luncheon of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1950. Available on: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=715> [10 August 2015].



to the world public.<sup>36</sup> The Voice of America was to be one of the important instruments enabling to penetrate the Iron Curtain and create an alternative to communist propaganda. The early 1950s saw a boom of its broadcast; the number of languages used while broadcasting increased from 24 to 45 in 1951, being enriched by such languages as Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Tatar, Turkestani, Azerbaijani or Armenian.<sup>37</sup> The states behind the Iron Curtain were beginning to be given priority from the point of view of the U.S. government, as far as the Voice of America broadcasting was concerned. This can be also borne witness to by the Czechoslovak sources of early 1950s according to which „of all the programs for the USSR and people’s democratic states including China [...] 29 % of them are devoted to Czechoslovakia. As for the length of foreign broadcasting time, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic follows the Soviet Union.“<sup>38</sup> According to one of the CIA documents of 1952 the audience ratings were really high, 70–80 % of adult population would listen to at least two programs a week.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the document mentions that “there are only two small groups in Czechoslovakia that do not listen to foreign broadcasts; the ‘hard core’ Communist Party members, and the small group of over-intellectualized individuals, who hate Communism but have no faith in Western democracy”.<sup>40</sup>



## THE OUTBREAK OF THE KOREAN WAR IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONFLICT OF TWO PROPAGANDAS

One of the classic cases of a propaganda “wrestling match” between the American and the Czechoslovak communist propagandas was the Korean War reporting. The whole affair is all the more interesting knowing that the Czechoslovak propaganda used the conflict for one of its most absurd propagandistic campaigns of the 1950s: the campaign against the so-called “American bug”.<sup>41</sup>

36 After the outbreak of the war in Korea the Congress approved of the sum of \$ 79,1 million dollars to cover the U.S. information program; this sum being more than twofold in comparison with the previous year. BELMONTE, L., op. cit., p. 44.

37 HIXON, W. L., op. cit., p. 37.

38 These statistics do not include the English version of the Voice of America broadcast. NA, A ÚV KSČ, Kulturně-propagační a ideologické oddělení, 19/7, a.j. 601, l. 86.

39 It is not evident on the basis of which such audience ratings were determined. National Archives College Park (NACP), CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA-RDP82-00047R001004100009-5, Central Agency Intelligence Agency Information Report, Voice of America Broadcasts to Czechoslovakia, 20 May 1952, p. 1.

40 Ibidem.

41 This campaign was not only masterminded in Czechoslovakia, but also in the German Democratic Republic and Poland. However, the principle and the message of the propagandistic campaign were all the same in those states — the U.S. government started to disperse the potato beetle over the territory of the socialistic states in order to do harm to their crops. More for example in: LOCKWOOD, Jeffrey A., *Six Legged Soldiers: Using Insects as Weapons of War*, New York 2009, pp. 136–137.



The Czechoslovak VOA broadcasting started to report on the Korean conflict immediately after the North Korean attack of June 25, 1950, against the country's southern neighbour. In its first reports the VOA started to stress that most probably it was the Soviet Union who was behind the attack of the North Korean troops. The station also denied the information by Czechoslovak press claiming that it was the South Korea who started the war. As soon as on June 26, the Czechoslovak daily *Rudé právo*<sup>42</sup> published a comment saying that "the insidious attack of the fascist bands of the South Korean Li Syn Man's puppet government against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the result of a five-year policy of American invaders in South Korea [...] the army, which the American imperialists have been building for five years out of Japanese collaborationists and South Korean fascists, is meant to be the vanguard of belligerent bands of Wall Street."<sup>43</sup> The information was repeatedly declared untrue by the Voice of America. On 7 July the Czechoslovak VOA broadcasting said that "the Soviet claim that the North Korean regime has been fighting in self-defence was rejected by a large majority of the Member States of the United Nations and by the rest of the world, from which the communist propaganda could not hide the reality [...] the International communist propaganda is conducting a major campaign full of lies and distortion of the truth [...]"<sup>44</sup>

Even though the reports provided by the Czechoslovak VOA broadcasting were generally much more objective than those published by the Czechoslovak media, the VOA did definitely not elude a certain amount of propagandistic tone in some of its comments. For instance, when President Truman made a statement on the boost of the U.S. national budget for military spending due to the outbreak of the Korean War at the end of July 1950, the Czechoslovak VOA commented on it as follows: "It is now clear to every American that he and all the members of all free nations around the world will now have to, as they say, tighten the belt. Indeed, the strength of a free world cannot be built without victims. For Americans, this means higher taxes, a greater number of men at arms and therefore less consumer goods. The Americans are very well aware of that and that is why each and every one of them, fully conscious of all consequences, accepts with stubborn determination the sacrifices required by the international fight for democracy and freedom. Because in democracy, people are told the truth and citizens are treated like adults. They all stand up for Truman's message and its consequences."<sup>45</sup>

Only a few days before North Korea's attack against its southern neighbour, the Czechoslovak Government launched the propaganda campaign against the "American Bug". Contrary to the propaganda's assertions, five years after the war Czechoslovakia was struggling with serious economic problems. There still was rationing in place and the production of food and consumer goods was lagging behind. In this context, the overpopulation of the potato beetle in Czechoslovakia during the summer of 1950 meant a real threat. However, the ruling regime claimed this to be an

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42 For example *Rudé právo*, 26 June 1950.

43 Ibidem.

44 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra — monitor, 7 July 1950, box. 217.

45 Ibidem, box. 220.



artificially-induced situation, caused by the United States of America, its alleged intention being to harm Czechoslovak economy. The Czechoslovak government claimed that the United States of America were intentionally disseminating the potato bug from airplanes in order to harm Czechoslovak economy.<sup>46</sup>

The Czechoslovak Government used the outbreak of the Korean War immediately for this propaganda campaign and began to compare the fight with the potato beetle to the war conflict in the Korean peninsula. According to the Czechoslovak propaganda, the enemy could very well be a “mere” bug, but it “served” the same American imperialists against whom the “progressive forces” fought at the same time on the opposite side of the globe. All indications are that the link between the campaign against the potato beetle and the Korean War was made under the orders from the highest places. This is shown in one of the documents of the *Commission for action against the potato beetle*, which says that “all the search parties need to be reminded of the political connection between the fight against the potato beetle and the actions of imperialists in Korea”.<sup>47</sup> The press articles and slogans mobilizing against the potato beetle started to adopt war rhetoric, using such terms like “mobilization”.

The propagandistic campaign thus imposed the impression that while searching for the potato pest, the citizens of Czechoslovakia were actually taking part in the world fight against “imperialism”. For several weeks, the pages of newspapers contained side by side reports where the working people, toughened by just wrath, fight against the Colorado potato beetle, and reports from the Korean battlefields, where the “aerial manslayers of the American air fleet drop bombs on residential areas of Korean cities”.<sup>48</sup> The connection of the two “battlefields” in two different parts of the world was also expressed by means of imagery, for example, *Mladá fronta* daily published on July 23, 1950 a drawing showing an “American imperialist” throwing bombs on Korea with one hand, while pouring potato beetles over the map of Czechoslovakia with the other.<sup>49</sup>

The American embassy in Prague notified of the interconnection between the war in Korea and the potato beetle campaign as early as on June 29, 1950 recommending that the Czechoslovak broadcast of the Voice of America respond to this campaign appropriately.<sup>50</sup> The campaign against the potato beetle was commented on by the VOA, too, even repeatedly. In the session of July 1, 1950, for instance, it said that “while the whole free world is watching the emerging events in South Korea, where the Communists attacked an unprepared peaceful democratic State, while the newspapers of all the free world publish cover stories on the battles going on there, Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak press are busy reporting on a totally different kind of invasion. Invasion undertaken by a little, yet very dangerous beetle: the Colorado potato beetle. The Communist Government of Czechoslovakia sounds the alarm bells and mobilizes

46 See: FORMÁNKOVÁ, Pavlína, *Kampaň proti „americkému brouku“ a její politické souvislosti*, in: *Paměť a dějiny*, č. 1, 2008, pp. 22–38.

47 NA, f. 78, sv. 41, a. j. 560, l. 42.

48 *Lidové noviny*, 12 July 1950.

49 *Mladá fronta*, 23 July 1950.

50 NACP, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1950–1954, 511.49/6-2950, box 2381.



against the potato beetle using even a special proclamation. [...] The whole story of American pilots dropping potato beetles on the fields behind the iron curtain is just a propaganda fabrication and nonsense.”<sup>51</sup>

Ellis O. Briggs, U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia even remarked on the potato beetle campaign in his telegram of July 12, 1950 to the State Department: “While Czechoslovak press continues foam at mouth and scream itself hoarse over potato bugs, rest of country laughing at campaign and asking how long, if Kremlin suggested, it would take for Hradcany pygmies to change the two-tailed Bohemian lion into a Russian potato bug.”<sup>52</sup>

The example of the potato beetle campaign clearly shows how the communist propaganda in Czechoslovakia could take advantage of the outbreak of the Korean War and to use it to solve its own internal problems. On the other hand, records of the Czechoslovak VOA broadcasting show how the USA also tried to use the conflict for their own purposes and to present the United States to the Czechoslovak public as a superpower fighting for democracy and freedom in the world.

The Voice of America broadcast was already reproached for exaggerated promotion of the American way of life in the CIA document of 1952 mentioned before.<sup>53</sup> In concrete terms it reads: “To a people under Soviet domination such as the Czechs, the American way of life is not of primary interest; the most important thing is their own survival and liberation. They want to hear about the strength of the West and concrete comparisons between the Iron Curtain and free countries. The Czechs must be approached by VOA with absolute sincerity; any ‘all-wise’ teaching or preaching should be eliminated from broadcasts. The Czechs are fed up with such advice.”<sup>54</sup> According to this analysis, the Voice of America should in their broadcasting especially reflect on a possible liberation of Czechoslovakia and in this sense it should give hope, as many of its inhabitants had a feeling that the United States wanted to maintain the existing status quo, as far as the geopolitical division of Europe is concerned. “As opposed to the people of the free world, the people behind the Iron Curtain are not too happy to listen to peace propaganda. War is the only hope of the great majority of these oppressed peoples; they see no other chance to regain their freedom,”<sup>55</sup> stated the document.

But such recommendations would have only raised vain hopes in the people of Czechoslovakia. From the geopolitical point of view, the division of Europe was viewed by the United States as completely irreversible at the beginning of the 1950s,

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51 NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra — monitor, 1. July 1950, box. 217.

52 NACP, RG 59, Central Decimal File 1950–1954, 511.49.7-1250, box 2381.

53 The document has been partially declassified, and so it is not possible to determine who wrote such a cogent nine-page analysis. However, the context indicates that it must have been written by someone really well-informed about the life in the then Czechoslovakia and about the mood of the local inhabitants of early 1950s.

54 NACP, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA-RDP82-00047R001004100009-5, Central Agency Intelligence Agency Information Report, Voice of America Broadcasts to Czechoslovakia, 20 May 1952, p. 4.

55 *Ibidem*, p. 4–5.

which could be proved by the events in Poland and Hungary, while the Washington administration entirely respecting the autonomous development in the Eastern bloc. Soon the reactions of Washington made it clear that it did not intend to intervene in the developments. This was what the Czechoslovak exiles soon realized too; those exiles who after 1956 gradually came to terms with the fact that the “Iron Curtain” would not be lifted so easily and that American propaganda focused on Czechoslovakia would be part of psychological warfare between the United States and the Soviet Union.



## **ABSTRACT**

### **CONTEST BETWEEN FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA VOICE OF AMERICA BROADCAST TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING LATE 1940S AND EARLY 1950S**

The Voice of America (VOA) broadcasting in the Czech and Slovak languages started in March 1942. Its main task was to support the war efforts of the United States of America against Nazi Germany. After the World War II, its activities declined, but as a new conflict emerged between the East and the West, the VOA broadcasting regained its former intensity and became an important propaganda tool of the United States during the Cold War. The aim of this paper is to analyse the VOA broadcast to Czechoslovakia during late 1940s and early 1950s in the broader context of U.S. information program.

## **KEYWORDS**

Voice of America; Czechoslovakia; Cold War; United States of America; propaganda; information program.

## **ABSTRAKT**

### **ZÁPAS MEZI ZAHRANIČNÍ A DOMÁČÍ PROPAGANDOU VYSÍLÁNÍ HLASU AMERIKY DO ČESKOSLOVENSKA NA PŘELOMU ČTYŘICÁTÝCH A PADESÁTÝCH LET**

Vysílání Hlasu Ameriky v českém a slovenském jazyce začalo již během druhé světové války. Jeho hlavním úkolem byla podpora válečného úsilí Spojených států amerických vůči nacistickému Německu. Po druhé světové válce jeho aktivity zeslabily, ale poté, co začal vznikat konflikt mezi Západem, Hlas Ameriky opět získal svůj význam a stal se účinným propagandistickým nástrojem USA během studené války. Cílem tohoto příspěvku je analýza vysílání Hlasu Ameriky do Československa na konci čtyřicátých a v padesátých letech 20. století a je zasazen do širšího kontextu amerického informačního programu po druhé světové válce.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Hlas Ameriky; Československo; studená válka; Spojené státy americké; propaganda; informační program.

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