

University of Bristol

Department of Historical Studies

Best undergraduate dissertations of
2020

Rebecca Charlotte Bealing

**An Affair Cloaked in Secrecy: The Cold War
Relationship Between the BBC and the
Information Research Department**

The Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol is committed to the advancement of historical knowledge and understanding, and to research of the highest order. Our undergraduates are part of that endeavour.

Since 2009, the Department has published the best of the annual dissertations produced by our final year undergraduates in recognition of the excellent research work being undertaken by our students.

This was one of the best of this year's final year undergraduate dissertations.

Please note: this dissertation is published in the state it was submitted for examination. Thus the author has not been able to correct errors and/or departures from departmental guidelines for the presentation of dissertations (e.g. in the formatting of its footnotes and bibliography).

© The author, 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the prior permission in writing of the author, or as expressly permitted by law.

All citations of this work must be properly acknowledged.



**An Affair Cloaked in Secrecy: The Cold War
Relationship Between the BBC and the Information
Research Department**



Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1: The Establishment of the IRD. Reasons for secrecy regarding the IRD's relationship with the BBC	14
Chapter 2: A network of crucial connections: Examining the nature of the IRD-BBC relationship	20
Chapter 3: To what extent did the IRD influence BBC's domestic broadcasts?	25
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	32

**An Affair Cloaked in Secrecy: The Cold War Relationship Between the BBC and the
Information Research Department**

“We need to remind the BBC that they speak for England and we are taking an interest in what they put out! They always welcome our criticisms but clearly hate our guts for making them!”

– Reddaway’s (co-founder of the IRD) handwritten comment on a draft of a letter dated 12 September 1956, providing criticism of specific programmes of the BBC Russian Service¹

With its weekly audience in excess of 200 million in 1956, broadcasting in 38 languages, it is surprising that Reddaway – co-founder of the top-secret Information Research Department (IRD) – felt any need to ‘remind’ the BBC of their influence as the world’s most recognisable broadcaster.² The power of the BBC to inform world opinion was unsurpassed, hence Reddaway’s desire to ensure it was broadcasting in the national interest. Yet, readers should be more surprised to learn that the IRD were ‘taking an interest’ and making ‘criticisms’ of a broadcasting corporation empowered by Royal Charter to uphold the highest standards of journalistic independence.³ This relationship has been the subject of limited historical analysis, with scholarship tending to focus exclusively on examples of collaboration between the two organisations. However, from this one quote, released to the archives in 2019, we gain insight into the frictions which must have existed between the BBC and the IRD.

Whilst most, if not all, readers will be familiar with the BBC, few (if any) would have heard of the ‘IRD’, demonstrating the success of its covert operations. Kept secret from all those apart from the highest Foreign Office (FO), MI5, Government and BBC officials, the IRD was a Cold War propaganda department, established within the Foreign Office by Attlee’s government in 1948. With Britain on the brink of the Cold War, its explicit aim was to counter

¹ Kew, The National Archives (hereafter TNA) FO 1110/851 ‘Broadcasting; BBC Monitoring Service’, 1956

² A. Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) 2

³ BBC 1927 Royal Charter,

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/charter_agreement/archive/1927.pdf [accessed 20 May 2020]

Soviet propaganda which sought the global spread of Communism.⁴ Hence, this dissertation will develop historiography to ultimately challenge the view that the BBC was a tame mouthpiece for IRD propaganda.⁵ Instead, it shall propose that the IRD sought influence rather than imposition over the BBC, with a particular focus on the Home Service, hitherto obscured by studies focused solely on the Overseas Service.

Three unique angles of analysis shall be employed, starting with understanding why the IRD was required to be a secret organisation. Historians have repeatedly argued propaganda to have been instrumental to the state during World War II, so why was it essential to cover any trace of its re-emergence?⁶ Secondly, it shall examine the structural relationship between the BBC and the IRD, with a focus on an intricate network of personal connections which became more formalised with time but has received limited academic attention to date. Thirdly, it shall make use of a selection of documents from two thousand files released to the archives to demonstrate how the IRD sought to influence the BBC's domestic broadcasting.

This topic holds clear historic importance, enhancing our understanding of why the government saw the need to use a covert organisation to influence an 'independent' international broadcaster and informing us of how perceptions of the Communist threat altered throughout the Cold War. The source material reads like snippets from a Cold War espionage novel, yet the information it reveals is far from fictitious. It serves to challenge perceptions about the influence of the Foreign Office and the neutrality of the BBC – two organisations which remain at the forefront of international and national affairs. Moreover, the revelations force us to question the extent to which the BBC has been and continues to be, a truly neutral and independent broadcaster. In a contemporary climate of fake news and information manipulation, we must turn to the past, which until recently had quite intentionally remained cloaked in secrecy.

⁴ The IRD: Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department (1946-48), *'History Notes' Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 9 (Aug 1995)

⁵ M. Moore, *The Origins of Modern Spin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 170

⁶ See: D. Welsh, *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War II* (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2016); P. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the 20th Century Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999)

Literature Review

The IRD-BBC relationship began in 1948, but it was not until 1978, after the dissolution of the IRD, that first reports of its operations came to light. These were produced by journalists based on insights provided by individuals such as Christopher Mayhew, Under-Secretary in the Labour Government of 1948 and a key architect of the IRD.⁷ It was another twenty years until the first historical accounts emerged, stimulated by the 1995 release of classified IRD documents under the Public Records Act.⁸ The files are constantly accruing; however, the most significant recent release came in 2019, providing inspiration for this dissertation.

Whilst the secret nature of the IRD in part explains its relative lack of historiography, there is a broader deficit of scholarship concerning British Cold War propaganda and the media. One of Britain's leading propaganda historians, Phillip Taylor, explains 'the academic community has generally failed to integrate the media and other forms of cultural exchange into mainstream and administrative histories', relegating institutions as significant as the BBC to the shadows of scholarship.⁹ As a term, 'propaganda' has no single accepted definition. For the purposes of this dissertation, Lyn Smith's definition which classifies propaganda as 'an organised attempt to influence attitudes, beliefs and values through the media of communication' shall be used. Associations with deceit and distortion, explained further in Chapter 1, are implicit within public understanding of propaganda. However, Chapter 3 shall argue that whilst the IRD's concealed operations support its classification as a propaganda organisation, its primary aim to inform the public meant this was a milder form of propaganda. It must also be recognised that most nations, particularly Britain, hesitate to use the word 'propaganda' to describe their own activities but are very happy to apply it to what their enemies do.¹⁰

Importantly, in 1950 Mayhew recognised the value of propaganda in the ideological battle against Communism, commenting that 'the world balance of power at the present time depends

⁷ L. Smith, Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department. *Millennium*, 9(1), (1980) 67–83

⁸ Public Records Act 1958. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/6-7/51> [accessed 10 May 2020]

⁹ P. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1997) 4

¹⁰ Advanced information from upcoming book: S. Potter, *Wireless Internationalism and Distant Listening: Britain, Propaganda and the Invention of Global Radio, 1920-1939* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020)

as much on the ideas in men's minds [...] as on the weapons in their hands.’¹¹ Yet the IRD received limited academic attention until the late 1990s, which may be partly explained by government’s retention of sources with potential to inflame a late twentieth century world which rested upon the most delicate balance of powers. The Public Records Act concealed IRD operations from public knowledge whilst the organisation was functional, with much information redacted and many files held back until 2019.

Furthermore, historians such as Taylor and Cull have argued that the media was not traditionally seen as a legitimate area of study.¹² Nonetheless, a historian as revered as Asa Briggs produced the first ‘History of the Broadcasting in the United Kingdom’ in 1961, commissioned by BBC Director General, Sir Ian Jacob.¹³ However, this five-volume history contains no mention of the IRD. As we will later read, Jacob was a key contact between the BBC and the IRD, thus it must be assumed that either he did not divulge any information of the IRD’s existence to Briggs or, in line with the ‘national interest’, requested that the IRD remain secret.

Following the IRD’s formal dissolution in 1978, the first accounts of its work began to emerge through efforts of investigative journalists. These reports tended to be critical of the IRD, encapsulated in David Leigh’s 1980 assessment that the IRD ‘poisoned the wells of journalism’ and ‘required the BBC to accept batches of undercover materials’.¹⁴ Journalists at the *Observer* produced a similarly scathing report ‘How The FO waged secret propaganda war in Britain’, with the central accusation being that ‘by only presenting negative information about the Soviet Union, the Government deliberately suppressed a balanced analysis of Soviet actions’.¹⁵ At the time, the IRD’s files remained locked away, now they have been made public and allow this dissertation to challenge this early thesis, demonstrating how the IRD initially directed their focus on a ‘positive projection of Britain, rather than a direct attack on the Soviets’.¹⁶ This was

¹¹ C. Mayhew, British Foreign Policy since 1945, *International Affairs* (1950) 477

¹² P. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945*; N. Cull, ‘Book Review of War of the Black Heavens: The Battle of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War by Michael Nelson’. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20(1), (2000) 136

¹³ A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 1, the Birth of Broadcasting. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961)

¹⁴ D. Leigh, *The Frontiers of Secrecy: Closed Government in Britain* (London: Junction Books, 1980) 218-24

¹⁵ How the FO Waged Secret Propaganda War in Britain, *Observer* (London), 29 Jan. 1978; R. Fletcher, ‘British Propaganda since World War II: A Case Study’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 4 (1982), 97-109

¹⁶ W. Lucas and C. Morris, *A Very British Crusade: The Information Research Department and the Beginning of the Cold War* 82, in R. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51* (London: Routledge, 1992)

required given that the Labour Party governing at the time of the IRD's creation was split between those sceptical of, and those sympathetic to, the Soviet Union, thus would have initially refrained from an overt 'direct attack'.¹⁷

In 1980, Lyn Smith's 'path-breaking' article in the LSE's *Millennium* journal made use of a series of documents provided to her confidentially, as well as published files and private interviews with Mayhew. As a result, she was able to reveal the two main categories of information the IRD produced: secret and confidential studies designed for high-level consumption by heads of state, and files suitable for dissemination by British missions to local contacts to be used on an unattributable basis. Nonetheless, the article's conclusions are predominantly dependent upon insights provided by Mayhew, and in the absence of archival documents Smith was unable to corroborate his singular perspective. Papers released subsequently disprove Smith's finding that there was 'no evidence to suggest that any of these recipients were deceived about the origins of the material they received'. In fact, explicit instructions were often given to conceal the fact that the information passed to the press, government leaders and embassy officials had emanated from the IRD, to avoid 'the danger that it may be quoted as official British publicity'.¹⁸

Whilst the credibility of these early reports is compromised by their lack of source evidence and sensationalist style, as the sun set on the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new dawn emerged for historians of the Information Research Department. The opening of Soviet archives revealed extensive propaganda projects which pressed historians to consider whether British propaganda had been underestimated, substantiating pressure on the government to release new archive files about the Foreign Office's Cold War 'publicity' work.¹⁹ Subsequently, in August 1995 a batch of files covering the first year of the IRD's existence was released to the Public Records Office. This must be recognised as a turning point in advancing the historiography of the IRD, with journalists again being the first to illuminate the issue, which is understandable given the immediacy of their work in comparison with the time required to construct historical accounts. Lashmar and Oliver's 1998 work was the first to offer further insights into the structural organisation of the IRD.²⁰ Yet Defty astutely notes

¹⁷ FCO Historians, *History Notes: IRD*, 1.

¹⁸ TNA, FO 1110/181 PR94/8/913, Warner, 'Use of IRD material', 25th February 1949

¹⁹ A. Defty. *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53: The Information Research Department*. Studies in Intelligence Series. (London: Routledge, 2004)

²⁰ P. Lashmar and J. Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War, 1948-77* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998)

its limitation in that it ‘tends to repeat criticisms of the IRD expressed by journalists of the 1970s’ rather than making full use of new source material.²¹

More broadly, historiography of the 1990s was flawed for two reasons. Firstly, it tended to assume the U.S. had superior resources which deducted agency from British propaganda services. Frances Saunders’ 1999 ‘*Who Paid the Piper?*’ study of the CIA and cultural Cold War typifies this issue: it gained academic acclaim and was described by Edward Said as ‘a major work of investigative history’, yet it crucially underestimated the pioneering anti-communist activities of the IRD, which worked closely with the Americans.²² Secondly, scholars of the 1990s tended to approach the IRD with a framework focus on either intelligence studies or communications history.²³ In contrast, this dissertation seeks to find value in analysing the intersection between these two categories through the microcosm of the BBC-IRD relationship.

At the turn of the XXI century, three studies which provide stimulus to this dissertation were produced. Wilford’s 1998 article, whilst limited by its brevity, sets out an argument concerning the ‘proprietary relationship’ of the IRD towards the BBC, which this thesis shall seek to both challenge and expand.²⁴ Defty’s collaborative study of 2003 provided valuable details about the IRD between 1945-53, gleaned through personal interviews with those who worked for the department. However, given the secrecy of their work, Defty is unable to attribute the information to specific names, presenting challenges of verification. Most recently, Alban Webb’s ‘*London Calling*’, provides unique insights into the motivations of the BBC at the time of the IRD’s establishment.²⁵ His depiction of the ‘competitive impulse to ensure that people in other countries should be made aware of the British interpretation of events’ became a founding principle of the BBC and helps explain why the BBC was accommodating of the IRD’s interference concerning broadcasting to the Soviet Union.

Aldrich sets out the central challenge which lies at the heart of scholarship on propaganda and the media, in that ‘secret services will always enjoy an adversarial relationship with those on

²¹ Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 4.

²² E. Said, "Hey, Mister, you want dirty book?". *London Review of Books*. 21(19) (1999) 54–56

²³ Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 7.

²⁴ H. Wilford, "The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed." *Review of International Studies* 24(3) (1998) 353–69

²⁵ Webb, *London Calling*

the outside who wish to study government'.²⁶ Yet, the 1958 Public Records Act grants historians access to potentially controversial sources once the allocated thirty year period has elapsed. With the release of over two thousand IRD files to the National Archives in 2019, we can eagerly expect a new wave of literature examining the BBC-IRD relationship. This dissertation aspires to be at the forefront of this effort.

²⁶ R. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2001) 8

Methodology

The majority of this dissertation's sources are found in the file FO 1110 – 'Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Information Research Department: General Correspondence (PR and IR series)', held at the British National Archives. This series contains 2369 documents first acquired in 1995, covering the entire period of the IRD's existence from 1948 to 1976. Crucially, the series reveals the scope and importance of the IRD's work, documenting in detail its communication of anti-Communist information via outlets such as the BBC, the IRD's relationship with the Ministry of Defence, Central Office of Information and with various Western European governments. Most interestingly, the files reveal the 'difficulties encountered by the existing services in carrying out IRD work which fell outside orthodox Foreign Office activity', which Chapter 3 of this dissertation shall analyse in greater detail.²⁷

Moreover, a key impetus for this dissertation was provided by the release of a further 2673 IRD files to the National Archives between 2018-2019, contained within the FCO 168 file. These documents provide hitherto unknown details of BBC-IRD operations; they are central to the arguments of this dissertation and afford an opportunity for original historical analysis given that the most recent study of the IRD, namely, Alban Webb's *London Calling*, did not include this significant archival material. Additionally, the possibility of comparing this second set of files with the 1995 set allows us to determine the instances where historians were astute in their initial judgements and predictions about the BBC-IRD relationship. It also reveals points of analysis which can be contested by the release of new sources, for instance the depiction of a consistently harmonious and 'mutually advantageous' BBC-IRD relationship.²⁸ This dissertation has given particular attention to the tone of IRD sources for its ability to indicate the power dynamics between individuals in the BBC-IRD relationship at different times. This was, at times, a difficult task given that a tone of superficial affability, with letters such as PR 138/30 concerning Soviet Jamming of BBC Russian broadcasts opening, 'My dear

²⁷ Catalogue Description of FO 1110, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8409> [accessed 12 May 2020]

²⁸ A. Webb, 'Constitutional Niceties: Three Crucial Dates in Cold War Relations between the BBC External Services and the Foreign Office.' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 28(4) (2008) 557–67

Ralph', obscured the underlying political pressure applied through these key communications.²⁹

Certain unavoidable limitations hindered the methodological capabilities of this dissertation. It is primarily based on the information from the National Archives and would have benefitted from corroboration of its findings by data held at the Caversham BBC Archives or the Labour Party Archives which contain a 'large number of IRD briefing papers'.³⁰ Despite an application having been submitted, a visit was not possible due to the circumstances of Covid-19. The BBC's Written Archive Centre was also slow to respond to enquiries regarding this dissertation, reflecting the fact that 'it lacks the capacity and resources necessary to satisfy the increasing and important research demands made of it'.³¹ National Archives's practise of 'information management' means that sections of many files used within this dissertation were blacked out as part of the redaction rules of Section 3 (4) of the Public Records Act 1958.³² This enables the redaction of material of 'special sensitivity' such as 'intelligence agency material'.³³ Nevertheless, whilst frustrating, these limitations do not undermine the fact that from now on historians have access to a plethora of IRD sources which were once passed in 'locked boxes', solely for the eyes of the BBC Director General and the Prime Minister.³⁴

²⁹ TNA, FO 1110, PR 138/30, 'Agreement to the suggestion that full and consistent publicity be given to Soviet jamming of BBC Russian broadcasts'

³⁰ In particular, Box – *Anti-Communist Propaganda, International Department Papers*, Labour Party Archives

³¹ Webb, *London Calling*, 3.

³² Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, 1.

³³ Public Records Act, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/6-7/51> [accessed 4 May 2020]

³⁴ Marked on files within TNA FCO 168, including PR131/68/G, 'Publicity and Propaganda Policy towards the Soviet Union and the Satellites', 1956

Chapter 1:

The establishment of the IRD.

Reasons for secrecy regarding the IRD's relationship with the BBC.

The two and a half years between the end of World War II and the establishment of the IRD was a period of increasing political tensions. War had left the population of Europe exhausted and keen to move on from military conflict. In Britain, Churchill was unexpectedly voted out of power in favour of a socialist Labour government. However, friction between competing Communist and Capitalist ideologies posed a threat to the lasting peace which the populous desired.³⁵ Historians have thus tended to depict the IRD's establishment as a defence against Communism. The 'official' justification provided by the *'Foreign and Commonwealth Office: History Notes'* is that ministers in Attlee's Labour Government desired to 'devise means to combat Communist propaganda' given the threat posed by the Soviet Union and her allies. However, this analysis overlooks the fact that the Labour government had eagerly disbanded wartime propaganda units such as the Ministry of Information and obscures the initial resistance within Government to the reinvigoration of propaganda.³⁶ It would require two key events of political escalation – Cominform and the Czech coup – to trigger the reintroduction of a propaganda operation, which took the form of the IRD. Even then, Labour Party disunity over the USSR, public sensitivity to propaganda, operational concerns, and its relationship with the 'editorially independent' BBC forced the IRD to function in secrecy.

Historians have often understated the caution which preceded the IRD's creation, overlooking the Labour Government's early attempts to negotiate with the USSR in avoidance of further conflict post WWII. In contrast to Labour's hesitancy, apprehensions about 'Soviet subversion of democracy through the use of techniques short of war such as propaganda' were expressed by the Russia Committee (FO) as early as 1946.³⁷ However, the notion of an IRD-type organisation at this point would have been inconsistent with the Government's policy of non-provocative foreign relations. Consequently, Foreign Secretary Ernst Bevin initially resisted calls from colleagues, including Mayhew, to return to wartime methods of propaganda.

³⁵ For further detail see: M. Hopkins, M. Kandiah, and G. Staerck. *Cold War Britain, 1945-1964: New Perspectives*. Cold War History Series (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

³⁶ B. Maartens, 'From Propaganda to 'Information': Reforming Government Communications in Britain, *Contemporary British History*, 30(4) (2016) 542-562

³⁷ Defty, *Britain, American and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 27.

A key turning point came in October 1947 with the establishment of Cominform, an alliance of European communist groups which represented the homogenisation of Soviet authority and the extension of the threat of Communism.³⁸ This marked a clear escalation in the perceived Communist threat, reflected in Mayhew's comment in a significant paper *Third Force Propaganda* in which he outlined to Bevin that 'the foreign policy of Communist countries should be exposed as a hinderance to international cooperation and world peace'.³⁹ This notable change in Mayhew's opinion led him to pursue discussions about the potential for an organisation to combat Soviet propaganda. A key meeting was held at Chequers on 27 December 1947 at which Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernst Bevin gave their approval for the IRD's creation with the ambition of devising a 'highly organised, coordinated and global' operation, in contrast to the ad-hoc response to Soviet propaganda since the end of the war.⁴⁰ Also in attendance were Ivone Kirkpatrick (Assistant Under Secretary of FO Information), Christopher Warner (IRD Assistant Secretary) and Mayhew were also in attendance, foreshadowing their key leadership roles in the IRD.⁴¹

Initially the IRD was tasked with developing the 'Third Force' propaganda campaign – not opposing the 'inroads of communism' by a direct attack on the Soviet Union but rather through highlighting the principles of British social democracy as 'the best and most efficient way of life'.⁴² Yet, this restraint in the IRD's stance against Communism would last less than a year. As Warner recorded, the structure of the IRD changed from solely a 'defensive branch', concerned with responding to Soviet and Communism attacks, to include an 'offensive branch' attacking and exposing Communist methods and policy.⁴³ This should be seen as a direct response to the Czech coup of February 1948 which galvanised Western politicians into a unified stance against Communism. This included the US Senate approval of the Marshall Plan in April and the establishment of NATO twelve months later. Bevin's perception that Russia had now become 'a threat to the fabric of Western civilisation' mirrored a shift in public and political attitudes towards the Soviet Union– from sympathy to concern.⁴⁴ Its implication for the IRD's output was significant: shifting the focus from producing a 'positive projection of

³⁸ D. Healey, The Cominform and World Communism. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 24(3) (1948), 339-34

³⁹ TNA, FO 1110, C. Mayhew, 'Third Force Propaganda', 1947

⁴⁰ TNA, CAB 129/23, E. Bevin, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy', 4 January 1948

⁴¹ Smith, *Covert British Propaganda*, 68

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ TNA, FO371/71687, Christopher Warner, 'Russia Committee Meeting', 15 January 1948

⁴⁴ TNA, Bevin, 'Future Foreign Publicity', 4 January 1948

Britain' to a 'vigorous systematic attack' on the now unconcealed threat of Soviet expansion. It is therefore surprising that an event as significant as the Coup, marking both an escalation of Cold War tensions and the new aggression in IRD policy, has been so frequently overlooked in previous histories of the IRD, receiving mention only by Defty.

Despite the importance ascribed to anti-Communist efforts, only a select few of the highest officials were aware of the IRD's establishment, and we must question why Parliament was not informed about an operation instrumental to the Cold War. Primarily, Bevin would have been concerned about friction within his own party over the Soviet Union. Bevin's legacy memorialises his role in carving out Britain as a 'staunch ally' of the United States, and in opposition to the USSR.⁴⁵ However, at the time of Labour's election he was renowned for his remarks such as 'left understands left', suggesting the new government would be sympathetic to the requests of the USSR.⁴⁶ The establishment of an anti-Soviet propaganda department would have undermined this parliamentary and public expectation, which explains why the IRD's existence was highly confidential.

The sensitivity of the electorate towards propaganda was another factor which contributed to IRD's secret nature. Propaganda had become tainted in public consciousness due to its association with totalitarian regimes, popularised in its contemporary use by figures such as the Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. Those informed about the IRD were conscious that public cynicism towards propaganda could discredit the new Labour government if this operation became known. Affirming this, Aubrey Essex, who for twenty years worked as a researcher in the IRD, recalls that even amongst those aware of the IRD 'the idea of a department whose principle commodity was propaganda [...] was anathema to many'.⁴⁷ This evidences why it was vital to conceal the fact that one of the largest and best funded propaganda departments of Europe lay at the heart of the Foreign Office. Thus, even its title 'Information Research Department' was a reference to propaganda cloaked in a pseudonym of secrecy.

⁴⁵ BBC, 'Historic Figures, Ernst Bevin' https://www.ole.bris.ac.uk/bbcswbdav/pid-2352886-dt-content-rid-7145222_3/orgs/HIST_Main/Study%20Guide%20-%20History.pdf [accessed 22 May 2020]

⁴⁶ P. Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 54

⁴⁷ Aubrey Essex in a letter to Defty, January 2003. Recorded in Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 87.

An additional – and central to this dissertation - reason for the IRD’s covert nature was to facilitate its work with politically ‘neutral’ organisations such as the BBC. The *Future Foreign Publicity* Paper of 1948 informs that from the outset it was intended that the IRD would work with the BBC. Despite Government promises that the BBC’s overseas operations were to be ‘editorially independent with control over output remaining entirely within the corporation’, the BBC’s funding was partially supplied by the State, compromising its claims of complete independence.⁴⁸ A similar tension existed in the fact that ‘non-attributability was a central and defining feature of IRD material’, which would have been counterintuitive to journalists trained in the importance of source credibility.⁴⁹ Therefore, secrecy served as a double-edged protective sword for these two organisations. On one hand, it was protecting the identities of IRD’s intelligence informants from being broadcast, and on the other, protecting the BBC’s reputation as an independent broadcaster, despite the IRD’s monitoring of and influence over its output.

Though not often recognised in scholarship, the IRD’s creation was additionally motivated by the Foreign Office’s desire to challenge domestic sympathy for the USSR. Many in Britain were still convinced that Communism was a progressive force, whilst the USSR was ‘identified in many minds with peace and disarmament’.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a 1948 memorandum from Warner to Mayhew discloses that ‘much vague sympathy with the USSR derives from sheer ignorance concerning the conditions there and fed-up-ness with conditions in the UK’.⁵¹ In order to combat this ‘ignorance’, the IRD worked closely with the BBC Home and External Services, producing documents to help dispel the myths of Communism, including one of the earliest IRD reports, FO 1110/25, addressing ‘Conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’.⁵² Maintaining this secret relationship was crucial because the BBC served as a channel for informing the population and aligning public opinion with the Government’s increasingly anti-Communist stance.

Additionally, the IRD’s collaboration with MI6 demanded the highest level of secrecy to avoid putting field-operatives at risk. Importantly, although not always explicit in historiography, the IRD was not just producing propaganda, but rather using contacts across the globe to gather

⁴⁸ Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 4.

⁴⁹ FCO Historians, *History Notes*, 9.

⁵⁰ FCO Historians, *History Notes*, 1.

⁵¹ TNA, FO 1110, ‘Warner to Mayhew’, 1948

⁵² TNA, FO 1110/25, ‘Conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’

intelligence and information.⁵³ For this purpose it established intimate links with divisions such as the anti-Soviet Section IX of MI6 headed by Kim Philby.⁵⁴ This relationship was reinforced throughout the 1950s as ‘there was to be a steady traffic of personnel between the Secret Service and the IRD’.⁵⁵ Further, the Cold War intensified fears of Communist infiltration within British institutions such as MI6 and the BBC. File FCO/168/1796 released to the archives on 21 Feb 2019 typifies suspicions of ‘the enemy within’, detailing the IRD’s concerns about a Mr Pospelovski, an individual with suspected links to the KGB, whose ‘work at the BBC gives him access to almost the entire range of IRD productions’.⁵⁶ This report is significant, both in revealing the extensive transmission of information between the BBC and the IRD and in highlighting the necessity for secrecy in a climate of extreme anxieties over espionage. Ironically, aided by hindsight, historians recognise that the IRD’s agenda of concealment was futile in the face of Soviet double agents’ success. One of the infamous Cambridge Spies, Kim Philby, in his position of head of the MI6’s anti-Soviet Section would have been uniquely informed of the IRD’s work. Guy Burgess also served briefly on the IRD’s staff in 1948 until being dismissed for incompetent work, yet this year provided sufficient insights for him to pass onto the Soviets.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, at the time the IRD was oblivious to the work of these double agents and operated in a Cold War context where trust held unprecedented importance, so it can be concluded that the Department could function effectively only by cloaking its existence, operations and output in utmost secrecy.

Finally, it is important to establish how the IRD maintained this level of secrecy. Firstly, it was created and funded through ‘Secret Vote’ – an annual sum of £100,000 from the Secret Service budget devoted to clandestine activities.⁵⁸ Crucially this meant the IRD and its activities were not subject to Parliament’s ‘unwelcome scrutiny of operations which might require covert or semi-covert means of execution’.⁵⁹ Secondly, its output was of covert nature, with recipients consistently conditioned to maintain a high level of security. The majority of the files within FO 1110 are marked ‘TOP SECRET’ and a confidential letter from the Head of the IRD’s East European Desk, Howard Gordon, to another IRD member informs us that in 1966 procedural changes were enforced to ensure discretion in passing material to the BBC. The letter raises

⁵³ TNA, ‘Diagram of Psychological Warfare Organisation’

⁵⁴ Wilford, ‘The Information Research Department’, 356

⁵⁵ Fletcher, *British Propaganda Since World War II*, 98.

⁵⁶ TNA, FCO/168/1796, ‘IRD material for BBC Russian Service’, 1965

⁵⁷ C. Mayhew, *Time to Explain* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) 109-110

⁵⁸ Lucas and Morris, *A Very British Crusade*, 90-4

⁵⁹ FCO Historians, *History Notes: IRD*, 7.

the fact that Gordon is 'unhappy' (put mildly perhaps) about the IRD sending classified telegrams to Heads of BBC Services, as adequate security facilities for safeguarding of this material existed only in the Diplomatic Correspondents' Office of the BBC.⁶⁰ As such, he instructs that in the future the IRD must 'make a phone call' if 'they believe there is a telegram of particular interest to a BBC Service Head'. Further, he suggests viewing must take place right away in the Diplomatic Correspondents' Office, making clear the secrecy of communication which the IRD demanded throughout its existence. Evidently, the 'Secret Vote' and secrecy in communications were central to the IRD's covert operations. However, communication of secret information to the BBC demanded relationships of trust. Hence, understanding the networks of connection and control between these two organisations warrants further attention.

⁶⁰ TNA, 'Confidential Letter, Mr Howard Gordon. Mr Kay', 19th Oct 1966

Chapter 2:

A network of crucial connections: Examining the nature of the IRD-BBC relationship

To determine whether the IRD's relationship with the BBC was unprecedented, it is imperative to understand the nature of interactions between the BBC and Government, the Foreign Office in particular, prior to the establishment of the IRD. The Royal Charter of 1927, which formally established the British Broadcasting Corporation, is often cited to have 'guaranteed its independence'.⁶¹ Yet examination of the Charter reveals a clear condition for this autonomy, namely, that the BBC should act as 'trustees for the national interest'. Webb elaborates on this expectation, arguing that the relationship between the government and the BBC was deliberately ambiguous, given the 'wonderfully imprecise concept of national interest'.⁶² Consequently, it is clear that the 'national interest' as the foundation for the IRD's influence had existed for twenty years prior to the IRD's emergence and would continue until its dissolution.

There was a glaring paradox between the BBC's public projection of autonomy and the reality of restrictions under which they operated. In the BBC Yearbook of 1947, Jacob (then Head of Overseas Services) set out that the BBC intended to be 'straightforward, friendly, impartial speaking'.⁶³ Yet this was without a single mention of the 'powerful hooks' in the 1947 Constitutional Settlement which pressured the BBC to reflect government interest.⁶⁴ Notes from a Cabinet meeting reveal that until 1947 the BBC's funding was provided by the government 'on the basis of an approved programme' with the FCO 'fully entitled to bring pressure to bear on the BBC in order that the service should accord with the aims of government policy'.⁶⁵ By the time of the IRD's establishment in 1948, the BBC was no longer completely financially dependent on government, following the introduction of the License Fee. However, this dissertation shall argue that the implicit clause of 'national interest' remained, making it possible for the IRD to exercise a degree of authority over the BBC in order to ensure broadcasts were aligned with the ideological stance against Communism. Whilst this relationship was now strictly covert, the new Government-BBC relationship was arguably as

⁶¹ BBC, Royal Charter. <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/royal-charter> [accessed 15 May 2020]

⁶² Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 560.

⁶³ BBC Yearbook 1947, 19. PDF available at <https://www.americanradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1947.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2020]

⁶⁴ Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 559.

⁶⁵ TNA, CAB134/306, GIS(46) 4th Meeting, 28 February 1946

significant as during World War II, reflecting Wilford's assertion that 'the most important non-Foreign Office channel for the dissemination of IRD output overseas was, without question, the BBC'.⁶⁶

Despite recognising the importance of the IRD-BBC relationship, Storey has characterised it as one of ad-hoc interaction.⁶⁷ This is partly supported by Warner's (IRD) testimony in October 1948 that the IRD's given political direction to the BBC was 'still secured mainly by day to day oral discussions' rather than official policy.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, this assessment underestimates the speed at which IRD-BBC relations became frequent and formalised. Evidence of the IRD's editorial influence can be found as early as 1948, with Paper PO 10111/133 proposing a Friday morning meeting with BBC representatives for a 'weekly round-up and discussion of items on Soviet & E.European affairs', on which 'an exchange of views would be useful'.⁶⁹ The paper details that the meeting was attended by the Heads of the Soviet and Eastern European desks – Miss Storey, Miss Korentechevsky and Miss Harris. As evidenced by this source document, the BBC-IRD relationship depended upon personal connections with senior BBC officials, clarified later in FO 1110/2102 which summarised 'IRD contact with the BBC is not coordinated or centralised within the Department but operates on a desk to desk basis'.⁷⁰ Hence, it is important to ask how a new department, and more importantly a top secret one, was able to establish these crucial relationships with relative ease, facilitating the IRD's influence over broadcasting.

In understanding the nature of the BBC-IRD relationship Webb places emphasis on the 'amphibian nature of post-War public service' which developed a crucial network of personal connections.⁷¹ By 'amphibian nature' Webb refers to the crossover between the BBC and IRD, given that many individuals worked for both these institutions at different points. In turn, this fostered ready communication between the two organisations, developing a relationship based on mutual understandings of 'national interest'. Jacob's career perfectly encapsulates this crossover between the two spheres, that of the BBC and of Government. Serving as Churchill's military secretary throughout the War, he was responsible for advising the Prime

⁶⁶ Wilford, *The Information Research Department*, 364.

⁶⁷ TNA, PR 131/68, P. C. Storey, 'BBC Russian Service'

⁶⁸ TNA, FO 1110/4, Warner, 'COI memorandum: start-up of IRD work', 1948

⁶⁹ TNA, PO 10111/133, 'Proposal for Friday morning meeting with B.B.C representatives', 1948

⁷⁰ TNA, FO 1110/2102, 'Radio: IRD contact with BBC', 1966 Jan 01 - 1966 Dec 31

⁷¹ Webb, *London Calling*, 152.

Minister on communications, which would become the focus of his post War career when he headed the BBC European Service (1946-52) and eventually became BBC Director General (1952-59). Jacob typified a figure the Establishment, but more importantly, his experiences provided him with an innate understanding of ‘national interest’ and the occasional need to compromise on journalistic ideals of accuracy and impartiality, hence his close partnership with the IRD. By contrast, the career of Mary Adams was unprecedented in almost every sense: she became the first female producer of the BBC in 1936, remarkable as a married woman in a high calibre role and extraordinary in achieving equal pay with the men she worked alongside. Yet, in one aspect of her career she mirrored many of her BBC colleagues: she too served for the government during the War. Adams was Director of Home Intelligence at the Ministry of Information in 1939-41, later returning to the BBC as a senior producer.⁷² This movement between the BBC and government roles provided three key advantages which were central to the BBC-IRD relationship: an understanding of how the government operated, pre-existing personal connections in both institutions, and the prospect of transferring careers between the two establishments which favoured collaborative relationships.

Close connections between personnel of the two institutions was of clear benefit to the IRD on the issue of the USSR, with Webb proposing that Jacob considered ‘the best place to maintain the delicate balance between the two institutions was, at times, inside both of them’.⁷³ In 1947, as Head of the BBC’s European Service, Jacob approached the IRD for advice on British policy towards the Soviet Union, highlighting the disparity between the BBC’s theoretical independence versus the framework of government guidance in which it operated.⁷⁴ Importantly, Jacob’s involvement in government affairs escalated rapidly. By November 1948 he was no longer merely seeking advice but directly involved in political discussions. File FO 371 marked ‘HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL’ details his attendance at the meeting of the Russia Committee who initially worked closely alongside the IRD.⁷⁵

Despite evidence to suggest Jacob was an early collaborator within the BBC, the IRD still felt the need to exert further pressure to influence the BBC policy which Jacob oversaw. Consequently, Warner engaged in a ‘long term strategy of dialogue with Jacob and other senior

⁷² BBC Blogs, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/68cc5f84-700f-421e-a6ab-22df2d58b006> [accessed 18 May 2020]

⁷³ Webb, *London Calling*, 40.

⁷⁴ Lucas and Morris, *A Very British Crusade*, 92.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO371 ‘Russia Committee meeting’, 17 September 1948

BBC staff' to overcome 'intuitive resistance' to editorial interference.⁷⁶ The results of this strategy are made clear in a 1949 memo from Warner to Mayhew noting that 'after nearly a year of cajoling [...] my impression is that General Jacob has completely accepted that programmes to Eastern Europe should be almost entirely political, hard hitting and designed to enlighten the BBC's listeners on the matters which their Communist masters conceal from them'.⁷⁷ Hence, through the IRD's 'cajoling', Jacob's behaviour changed and his perspective became fully aligned with that of the IRD's broadcasting view. Historians must note, however, that this acceptance of the 'appropriate' tone of broadcasting would later re-surface as an issue, discussed in Chapter Three.

Historiography has not comprehensively traced changes in the BBC-IRD relationship throughout the time in question, in part owing to shortage of sources from the latter period of the IRD's existence. Yet new files released to the archives subsequent to the historians' initial accounts from the 1990s suggest that, whilst the practise of information sharing between the institutions became more established with time, the IRD remained dependent upon personal connections as points of influence, rather than on a formalised policy. By 1971 the expectations of these relationships had clearly become more precedented: a letter from 'Mrs O'Connor' to a colleague in the IRD regarding 'BBC/TV Contact' informs that Mr John Crawley (Editor of BBC News and Current Affairs) regularly receives the briefing papers, 'The Interpreter', 'Research Assessments' and 'selected blue briefs' from the IRD, whilst Christopher Serpell of the BBC Diplomatic Unit is a 'regular recipient' of 'The Interpreter', 'Asian Analyst' and 'African Review'.⁷⁸ Moreover, interaction with BBC contacts was discussed more explicitly by the 1970s, by which point the relationship had become more normalised. A letter from IRD employee N. H. Marshall to his BBC counterpart is particularly illuminating: Marshall informs he is switching departments but recommends correspondence with Mr Mervyn Jones 'in charge of East European Affairs' or 'Mr Roland who deals with Soviet affairs'.⁷⁹ Crucially, at the bottom of the letter he provides their extension phone numbers, illustrating the personal nature of BBC-IRD connections. Such direct contact in the early years of the IRD's existence is not reflected in any original sources. Yet, clear efforts to cultivate the BBC-IRD partnership, evidenced by the numerous lunch and dinner gatherings where IRD members sought to 'cajole'

⁷⁶ Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 561.

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 953/543, PE 233/1/967, Warner to Mayhew, 5 January 1949

⁷⁸ TNA, FCO 95/1270, 'UK: Recipients of IRD Material; BBC', 1971

⁷⁹ TNA, FCO 95/1270, N H Marshall, 19 November 1971

their BBC counterparts, should be seen to have successfully cemented the relationship, meaning that by 1971 personal contacts could be easily transferred between colleagues.

These relationships remained consistently vital for the IRD to continue exerting its influence, and this is explicitly revealed in File FCO 95/1270 in which Marshall (IRD) states he has three personal contacts whom he has 'been able to steer' and have them 'place some material to our advantage'.⁸⁰ Among these figures is 'Mr Tom Mangold, Current Affairs', one of the BBC's most eminent broadcasters, somewhat ironically known for his 26 years of investigative journalism work for *BBC Panorama*. Marshall does make clear that these specific contacts are 'ad-hoc' and have benefitted from 'informal access to the FCO research machine' (IRD), rather than 'regular output'. Yet, this does not undermine the significance of the IRD efforts to influence some of the most revered figures within the BBC. The details of these specific relationships are a promising area for further historical research which would benefit from recently declassified material.

Ultimately, the BBC-IRD relationship throughout the IRD's existence was characterised by a network of intimate personal connections, enabled by the 'amphibian' post-War worlds of the BBC and Government. Whilst cloaked in secrecy, this was a relationship of the highest importance; put neatly by Webb, 'without saying so explicitly, [Bevin] was putting the External Service of the BBC on the front line of the emerging Cold War', a position which the IRD would seek to influence at all times. Importantly, a memo of 1956 details 'close, continuous and generally mutually advantageous contact' between the BBC and the IRD, substantiating Webb's argument that the 'IRD took great pains to encourage rather than dictate change in the BBC's output'.⁸¹ The sources thus far have corroborated the notion that the IRD, through carefully cultivated relationships, influenced policy rather than imposed ideas. However, the details of IRD influence merit further examination with particular attention to questions of control and censorship which historians have previously associated with the BBC-IRD relationship.

⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 95/1270, N H Marshall, 19 November 1971

⁸¹ TNA, FO1110/873, 'Memorandum by P.M. Foster', 19 October 1956; Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 561.

Chapter 3:

To what extent did the IRD influence BBC's domestic broadcasts?

Depiction of the IRD as an organisation which sought dictatorial control over the BBC's output was initially crafted by journalists reporting immediately after the IRD's dissolution in 1978. Notably, an *Observer* article of January 1978 commented that the IRD's ambition was to 'concoct and devise' stories in a 'vigorous information offensive' against the Soviet Union.⁸² Audiences were captivated by these reports, owing to an understandable interest in the IRD's influence over the BBC – an institution which held a broadcasting monopoly until 1951.⁸³ Following the first wave of source materials released to the National Archives in the 1990s, new histories of the IRD began to emerge. The dominant argument, proposed by scholars such as Dorril, Lucas, Morris, Moore and Wilford, posited that the IRD exerted authority and, at times, censorship over the BBC's External Services, reflecting the Government's desire to 'communicate its policies unmediated to the people'.⁸⁴ However, this assessment is not unanimously accepted. Webb and Defty suggest that the IRD's ultimate ambition was to 'influence rather than totally reshape broadcasts'.⁸⁵ Yet, both schools of thought have focused predominantly upon the External Services. On the basis of recently declassified files, this dissertation shall examine the nature of influence over BBC's domestic output, ultimately aligning with the positions of Webb and Defty that the IRD sought influence rather than imposition over this content.

First, we must consider how World War II fundamentally changed the BBC's journalistic approach. Prior to 1939, broadcasting had been explicitly apolitical with listeners hearing news 'they had probably already read, toned down to remove any contentious element, without any BBC angle or reflection'.⁸⁶ This changed profoundly during the War when the BBC cultivated its own newsreaders and correspondents, broadcast its own news bulletins throughout the day and transformed the scope of its output exponentially.⁸⁷ Domestically, this fostered the perception of the BBC as a trustworthy, impartial broadcaster, summarised succinctly by Orwell who commented that by 1944 'I heard it on the BBC' had a new meaning – 'I know it

⁸² How the FO Waged Secret Propaganda War in Britain, *Observer* (London), 29 Jan 1978

⁸³ R. Coase, "The Development of the British Television Service." *Land Economics*, vol. 30(3), (1954) 207–222

⁸⁴ Moore, *Origins of Modern Spin*, 137.

⁸⁵ Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 5.

⁸⁶ Moore, *Origins of Modern Spin*, 168.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

must be true'.⁸⁸ Yet, Orwell meant this ironically. Having worked at the BBC External Service for two years, he knew that, on occasion, the BBC had broadcast crucial government wartime messages which were arguably more propagandist than factual, justified as serving the 'national interest'.

Nonetheless, approaching the end of the war in 1944, the new BBC Director General William Haley promised the Corporation would serve as a 'beacon of moral rectitude and objectivity',⁸⁹ apparently assuming that peace would see the end of the 'national interest'-driven government interference. However, the emergence of post-war East-West tensions would lead to the creation of the IRD, with its stated aim of weaponising information in a 'non-shooting war against the Soviet Union and Communist forces throughout the world'.⁹⁰ It is therefore crucial to understand how a covert propaganda unit sought to influence a broadcaster which proclaimed objectivity and impartiality.

Webb convincingly argues that the IRD 'took great pains to encourage rather than dictate change in the BBC's output', however, his focus on the 1950s overlooks moments of tension and influence in the infancy of the BBC-IRD relationship. Amongst the most pertinent of these is the 'Olga Watts incident' of 1948, documented in the archive sources.⁹¹ The incident involved a Russian woman, Olga Watts, who gave a description of Soviet housing conditions on a BBC Home broadcast. In response, the UK ambassador in Moscow, Maurice Peterson, protested to the IRD claiming it gave a highly misleading account of life in the USSR, criticising the BBC for disseminating such a 'misinformed' viewpoint.⁹² Sir Christopher Warren (IRD Under Secretary for Soviet Affairs) raised this matter with his colleagues, reaching the cantankerous conclusion that 'it is not much good our planning anti-communist psychological warfare if we are going to let Communist-inspired drivel of this kind into the inmost fortress of the BBC'.⁹³ The tone of this source clearly reveals both the IRD's frustrations that the BBC's broadcast failed to provide a balanced perspective and the sense of importance attached to the BBC, described as a 'fortress'. The issue was resolved by Barnes, BBC Director of Spoken Word, apologising for the talk and the 'unfortunate error', that is the

⁸⁸ Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War*, 19.

⁸⁹ William Haley broadcast, 'The Place of Broadcasting' (Third Programme), November 1947, HALEY 16-52, Churchill Archives Centre

⁹⁰ TNA, FO953/701, 'Note by Warner', 6 June 1950

⁹¹ TNA, FO 1110/16 PR 10, 'Discussions w/BBC', 1948

⁹² TNA, FO1110/16 PR10/10/913, Peterson to Warner, 17 February 1948

⁹³ TNA, FO 1110/16 PR 10, 'Discussions w/BBC', 1948

programme's failure to make clear that 'Mrs Watts was a privileged person in Moscow [...] describing the life of a Commissar'.⁹⁴ The incident and its closure demonstrates that the IRD were not dictatorial in their approach, instead, their sensitive handling and mediated discussion on this matter evidently ensured more factual broadcasting by the BBC.

Moreover, the IRD's frustration can be seen to have influenced the BBC's strategy more broadly. The next file in the Watts folder contains documents from a meeting on 'Broadcasting and the New Policy', explicitly stating that the BBC's broadcasting might be 'geared into the new policy much more than it is at present'. This substantiates the thesis of this dissertation that whilst the IRD did not censor broadcasts, its comments and criticism held sufficient weight to alter the BBC's domestic output. However, despite his stated intention to intervene, Warren relayed to ambassador Peterson that 'the fact I have written to Jacob (BBC Overseas Head) should be kept confidential'.⁹⁵ This informs us of the importance the IRD attached to keeping its influence over the BBC domestic output secret, in line with the secrecy of the Department's existence and the clandestine nature of its interventions.

Importantly, this was not an isolated incident of the IRD's domestic intervention; further examples are revealed in a set of files concerning the BBC Third Service series, '*The Soviet View*', which ran from 1948 to 1958.⁹⁶ This series sought to provide British listeners with insight into what the Soviet media were broadcasting to their citizens, both about life in the USSR and in the United Kingdom. Hypothetically, this ambition would have been unproblematic given the BBC's commitment to providing coverage of global viewpoints. However, according to the IRD, *The Soviet View* programme of 26 June 1948 repeated 'grotesquely distorted' information characterised by falsification, 'without any warning to audiences'.⁹⁷ The IRD complained that this led to misleading depictions of Soviet trade unions, lamenting that 'only people – and there cannot be many of them – who have examined Soviet trade union practises could get any impression from these quotations other than an enlightened, liberal, benevolent organisation'. Correspondence shows that the BBC attempted a defence against accusations of distortion, stating that 'the BBC agreement, so far as it has been expressed, is that anything other than to restate the Soviet statement would be propaganda',

⁹⁴ TNA, FO1110/16 PR10/10/913, Barnes to Warner, 10 March 1948.

⁹⁵ J. Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 49

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 1110/224, 'FO Views on BBC Series The Soviet View', 1949

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

which the programme claimed to refrain from. Yet, this justification was dismissed in a letter by an IRD employee, who commented: ‘the argument is invalid because the programme is propaganda – Soviet propaganda – and very effective at that’.⁹⁸

Dissatisfied with merely expressing criticism, the IRD subsequently sought to moderate the BBC’s output on this issue, attaining influence through their crucial network of personal contacts. An IRD letter regarding the issue of *The Soviet View* discloses ‘I know how difficult it is to penetrate the BBC on matters of this kind but surely some high considerations are involved worth the attention of high persons’.⁹⁹ This statement is vital as it reveals that the ease with which the IRD influenced external broadcasting was not mirrored by its attempts at shaping the domestic output. Nevertheless, some influence could be achieved through private discussion with the BBC’s most senior management who, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, frequently and fruitfully collaborated with the IRD. Specifically, following hostility from the BBC’s Diplomatic Correspondent Thomas Barman who ‘said he did not agree with the criticisms contained in these minutes’ (regarding the Soviet View programme), it is suggested that ‘Mr Warner might wish to take up the question with General Jacob or with somebody else at that level’. It is clear that, if met with resistance in the lower ranks of the BBC hierarchy, the IRD was prepared to escalate its concerns to Heads of Services, such as Jacob. Despite his role as Head of Overseas, Jacob’s collaboration with the IRD made him a crucial conduit for IRD’s influence over domestic broadcasts. Importantly, later files show that the IRD’s influence held sufficient weight to shift opinions at the BBC, notably that of Mr Barman who eventually agreed with the IRD’s assessment of the risks associated with *The Soviet View*, to the effect that ‘he took to reconsider the whole matter in light of them’.¹⁰⁰

This previously neglected source set afforded another important insight which concerns a sharp contrast between the aims pursued by the IRD with regard to the BBC’s external versus domestic service. Whilst the IRD insisted that all BBC broadcasts to the USSR were to give a ‘positive projection of British life’, domestically their agenda appears to have consisted in preventing foreign propaganda being broadcast without balance or challenge.¹⁰¹ Reflecting this, documents in this source set recommend that *The Soviet View* ‘should always carry some

⁹⁸ TNA, FO 1110/224, ‘FO Views on BBC Series The Soviet View’, 1949

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jenks, *British Propaganda*, 50.

¹⁰¹ Lucas and Morris, *A Very British Crusade*, 86.

information in every such broadcast which shows how fantastic the Soviet propaganda about this country is'. For instance, the absurd 'discovery' by the Soviet magazine *New Times* that 'the Battle of Britain never happened after all' or remarks in the '*Literary Gazette*' about British workers in suburbs trapping birds, squirrels and hedgehogs 'in order to increase their meagre rations'. The IRD's influence in this instance appears far from deceitful, instead it is seeking to make the BBC aware of the dangers of a journalistic approach which failed to distinguish between propaganda and information.

While more cautious than the authority exerted over the External Service, this approach was nevertheless highly effective at persuading the BBC to maintain balanced domestic broadcasts. By 1951 the BBC accepted the need for more 'sign-posting' of propaganda on *The Soviet View* (at the beginning, at the end and four times during the thirty-minute programme'), and, ironically, by 1958 the programme was 'actually using IRD material in its scripts'.¹⁰² These insights, provided by John Jenks and substantiated by the sources examined in this chapter, paradoxically undermine Jenks' conclusion that the IRD's approaches to the BBC were 'met with little success'. Instead, the IRD was a crucial mediating influence, able to intervene in the affairs of an 'independent' broadcasting organisation.

Ultimately, the sources analysed above reveal that the IRD held sufficient capacity to influence the BBC. However, this dissertation takes exception to Wilford's allusion that the IRD's approach was heavy-handed and autocratic, specifically to his conclusion that in the instance of *The Soviet View*, 'the Foreign Office explicitly acknowledged the Home Service's editorial independence yet [...] they chose to ignore it'.¹⁰³ On the contrary, the sources unequivocally illustrate that the nature of the IRD's intervention was based on the Department's conscious recognition of the BBC's editorial autonomy. Hence, its influence over the BBC Home Service was achieved through rational argument rather than Stalin-esque censorship.

¹⁰² Jenks, *British Propaganda*, 51.

¹⁰³ Wilford, *The Information Research Department*, 365.

Conclusion

Mainstream historiography has traditionally portrayed the IRD as a propagandist organisation which sought to persuade audiences of the superiority of Western social democracy compared to Soviet Communism. This dissertation has looked more closely at the relationship the IRD enjoyed with the BBC Home Service, employing sources including those released in 2019, to examine an area previously obscured by a focus on the BBC's Overseas Service. Wilford has argued the IRD held 'an almost proprietorial attitude towards the BBC's Overseas Services'.¹⁰⁴ This dissertation has sought to demonstrate that the IRD relationship with the BBC Home Service was far from proprietorial. Instead, it served as a check on the BBC to ensure balanced reporting, highlighting instances such as *The Soviet View*, wherein pieces of Soviet propaganda were broadcast 'with no poison labelled attached'.¹⁰⁵

The source material supports Webb's argument that the IRD 'took great pains to encourage rather than dictate change in the BBC's output'.¹⁰⁶ The dissertation has examined the nature of this influence in unprecedented detail. It has demonstrated how the interaction between the BBC and the IRD (explored in Chapter 1), and the network of crucial connections (explored in Chapter 2) created an implicit common understanding of 'national interest'. This ultimately enabled the IRD to influence domestic broadcasting and to shift the BBC's editorial parameters through rational argument rather than autocratic means. The secrecy of the IRD has also received thorough attention and should be seen as the result of four key contextual factors: a divide in the Labour Party over its approach to the USSR; cynicism of a post-War electorate towards propaganda; the covert nature of intelligence operations; and the need to facilitate the IRD's work with the politically 'neutral' BBC. To this day, the legacy of secrecy continues to limit contemporary understanding of the IRD, with the full history concealed by source redactions authorised under the Public Records Act.

Despite a clear history of IRD influence over BBC broadcasting which this dissertation has presented, the BBC continues to proclaim its 'values' as an 'independent, impartial and honest' broadcaster.¹⁰⁷ Yet, the relationship between the BBC and Government is not without tensions

¹⁰⁴ Wilford, *The Information Research Department*, 364.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, FO 1110/224, P. S. Fallia (IRD), 1949

¹⁰⁶ Webb, *Constitutional Niceties*, 561.

¹⁰⁷ BBC Mission, Values and Public Purpose, <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission> [accessed May 24 2020]

today. The 2016 White Paper *'A BBC for the Future – A Broadcaster of Distinction'* quoted the BBC's priority to serve the 'public interest' twenty-eight times, without giving a clear definition of this term. Just as 'information research' served as a pseudonym for 'propaganda', we must question to what extent 'public interest' serves as an alias for government interest and interference. In the contemporary age of misinformation and in the current context of the Coronavirus crisis, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowde warned that the spread of falsehoods and rumours in the media 'could cost lives'. The BBC has declared itself committed to 'fighting fake news', and largely retains its enviable reputation for trustworthiness. Yet, this reputation must remain under constant scrutiny. Conclusively, the BBC is not immune from government interference. This is vividly demonstrated by its past affair with the IRD, which for almost thirty years remained cloaked in secrecy.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archive Sources

The National Archives:

FO 1110 – ‘Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Information Research Department: General Correspondence (PR and IR series)’

FO1110/873, ‘Memorandum by P.M. Foster’, 19 October 1956

FO 1110/851 Broadcasting; BBC Monitoring Service, 1956

FO 1110/25, ‘Conditions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’, 1948

FO 1110, ‘Warner to Mayhew’, 1948

FO 1110/16 PR 10, ‘Discussions w/BBC’, 1948

FO 1110, C. Mayhew, ‘Third Force Propaganda’, 1947

FO 1110/181 PR94/8/913, Warner, ‘Use of IRD material’, 25th February 1949

FO 1110/2102, ‘Radio: IRD contact with BBC’, 1966 Jan 01 - 1966 Dec 31

FO1110/16 PR10/10/913, Peterson to Warner, 17 February 1948

FO 1110/224, P. S. Fallia (IRD), 1949

FO 1110/224, ‘FO Views on BBC Series The Soviet View’, 1948

FO 1110/4, Warner, ‘COI memorandum: start-up of IRD work’, 1948

FO371/71687, Christopher Warner, ‘Russia Committee Meeting’, 15 January 1948

FCO 168, PR131/68/G, ‘Publicity and Propaganda Policy towards the Soviet Union and the Satellites’, 1956

File FCO/168/1796, ‘IRD material for BBC Russian Service’, 1965

FCO 95/1270, ‘Uk: Recipients of IRD Material; BBC’, 1971

FCO 95/1270, N H Marshall, 19 November 1971

FO953/701, ‘Note by Warner’, 6 June 1950

FCO 95/1270, N H Marshall, 19 November 1971

FO 1110/4, Warner, ‘COI memorandum: start-up of IRD work’, 1948

PR 131/68, P. C. Storey, 'BBC Russian Service'

PO 10111/133, 'Proposal for Friday morning meeting with B.B.C representatives', 1948

CAB134/306, GIS(46) 4th Meeting, 28 February 1946

CAB 129/23, E. Bevin, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy', 4 January 1948

Folder number miscellaneous: (unable to clarify as The National Archives closed due to Covid-19)

Confidential Letter, Mr Howard Gordon. Mr Kay', 19th Oct 1966

TNA, 'Diagram of Psychological Warfare Organisation'

Memoirs

Mayhew, C. *Time to Explain* (London: Hutchinson, 1987)

Online sources

BBC Yearbook 1947, p.19, PDF available at <https://www.americanradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1947.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2020]

Newspapers

All newspapers accessed online at

http://www.cambridgeclarion.org/press_cuttings/fo_deceit_unit_obs_29jan1978.html

Observer (London)

Guardian (London)

Sunday Telegraph (London)

Times (London)

Secondary Sources

Articles

Becker, H. The Nature and Consequences of Black Propaganda. *American Sociological Review*, 14(2) (1949)

Coase, R. "The Development of the British Television Service." *Land Economics*, vol. 30(3) (1954)

Cull, N. 'Book Review of War of the Black Heavens: The Battle of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War by Michael Nelson'. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20(1) (2000)

Hallin, D. "Book Review: War and Television." *The American Historical Review* 98 (4) (1993)

Healey, D. The Cominform and World Communism. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 24(3), (1948)

- Maartens, B. 'From Propaganda to 'Information': Reforming Government Communications in Britain, *Contemporary British History*, 30(4) (2016)
- Mayhew, C. 'British Foreign Policy since 1945', *International Affairs* (1950)
- McGarr, P. The Information Research Department, British Covert Propaganda, and the Sino-Indian War of 1962: Combating Communism and Courting Failure? *The International History Review*, 41(1) (2019)
- Potter, S "Hearts, Minds, Voices: Us Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World/Cold War on the Airwaves: The Radio Propaganda War against East Germany." *Media History* 23, (3-4) (2017)
- Said, E. "Hey, Mister, you want dirty book?". *London Review of Books*. 21(19) (1999)
- Schneer, J. "Hopes Deferred or Shattered: The British Labour Left and the Third Force Movement, 1945-49." *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 56(2) (1984)
- Smith, L. Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department. *Millennium*, 9(1), (1980)
- The IRD: Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department (1946-48), 'History Notes' *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 9 (Aug 1995)
- Webb, A. 'Constitutional Niceties: Three Crucial Dates in Cold War Relations between the BBC External Services and the Foreign Office.' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 28(4) (2008)
- Wilford, H. "The Information Research Department: Britain's Secret Cold War Weapon Revealed." *Review of International Studies* 24,3. (1998)

Books

- Aldrich, R. (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Aldrich, R. *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence*. (London: John Murray, 2001)
- Ash, T. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Edited by Johnson A. Ross and Parta R. Eugene. (Central European University Press, 2010)
- Briggs, A. *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol. 1, the Birth of Broadcasting. London: Oxford University Press, 1961)
- Defty, A. *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53: The Information Research Department*. Studies in Intelligence Series. (London: Routledge, 2004)
- Gillespie, M. and Alban Webb. *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service (1932-2012)*. Culture, Economy and the Social (New York: Routledge, 2013)
- Hopkins, M. M. Kandiah, and G. Staerck. *Cold War Britain, 1945-1964: New Perspectives*. Cold War History Series (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
- Jenks, J. *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006)
- Lashmar, P. and J. Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War, 1948-77* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998)

- Leigh, D. *The Frontiers of Secrecy: Closed Government in Britain* (London: Junction Books, 1980)
- Moore, M. *The Origins of Modern Spin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
- Nelson, M. *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997)
- Potter, S. *Wireless Internationalism and Distant Listening: Britain, Propaganda and the Invention of Global Radio, 1920-1939* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2020)
- Taylor, P. *British Propaganda in the 20th Century Selling Democracy*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999)
- Taylor, P. *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1997)
- Webb, A. *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)
- Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988)
- Welsh, D. *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War II* (London: The British Library Publishing Division, 2016)

Websites

- BBC Blogs, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/68cc5f84-700f-421e-a6ab-22df2d58b006> [accessed 18 May 2020]
- BBC Mission, Values and Public Purpose, <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission> [accessed May 24 2020]
- BBC, 'Historic Figures, Ernst Bevin' https://www.ole.bris.ac.uk/bbcswbdav/pid-2352886-dt-content-rid-7145222_3/orgs/HIST_Main/Study%20Guide%20-%20History.pdf [accessed 22 May 2020]
- Catalogue Description of FO 1110, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8409> [accessed 12 May 2020]
- Public Records Act 1958. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/6-7/51> [accessed 10 May 2020]

Miscellaneous

Aubrey Essex in a letter to Defty, January 2003. Recorded in Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*

William Haley broadcast, 'The Place of Broadcasting' (Third Programme), November 1947, HALEY 16-52, Churchill Archives Centre