

**Aristotle, US Public Diplomacy, and the Cold War:  
The Work of Carnes Lord**

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## 1. Introduction

This article views the framework of Aristotelian political thought through the career and work of Carnes Lord, a classics scholar who has also served in several positions within the US government. The position that will most concern us here is Lord's role with the National Security Council in the early 1980s, during which he was responsible for drafting a new public diplomacy and information strategy for the Reagan administration. Public diplomacy here refers to the efforts of governments and private groups to influence public opinion abroad in order to create a favourable environment within which foreign policy activities will be positively judged. The coincidence of an Aristotelian scholar taking on an 'educative' role in the service of US foreign policy, in effect defining how the United States should be perceived abroad and what methods could be used to achieve this, provides an intriguing connection between philosophy and political praxis. Did Aristotle provide Lord with insights into how the US might influence other nations and win them over to its own agenda in the Cold War? How can we understand Lord as Aristotelian and Lord as information strategist, and how do the two identities merge? In order to examine the potential linkages, three themes of Aristotelian political thought will here be explored in relation to Lord's writings and the context of his government service: Rhetoric, Regimes, and Education.

## 2. Who is Carnes Lord?

Lord's own convictions on the value of Aristotle for modern politics are beyond dispute:

In an age when liberal democracy and liberal modes of thought are more dominant than ever before, a time indeed when modernity itself seems increasingly old-fashioned and the very memory of the pre-modern world risks disappearing from our education, it is remarkable to what extent contemporary academic debates on moral and political matters reflect the presence of Aristotle. (Lord, 2003c)

Aristotle, according to Lord, was long out of favour amongst political theorists because of the way in which he had been portrayed as preferring aristocracy in place of democracy and his elitist, conservative outlook in holding on to a traditional ethical code. For Lord, however, the context for interpreting Aristotle has changed dramatically in the last 20-30 years.

In the United States, the rise of an articulate and sophisticated conservative movement sparked interest in Aristotle and other older thinkers simply as alternatives to liberal

orthodoxy, itself in an advanced state of political stagnation and intellectual decay. At the same time, the increasingly evident failure of the Soviet experiment, and the bankruptcy of socialist thought more generally, encouraged a reorientation on the American Left, away from the ‘participatory democracy’ of the 1960s and towards more traditional models of social solidarity or community. This ‘communitarian turn’, with its rediscovery of the republican and civic humanist traditions of early modernity, inevitably invited a new openness to and appropriation of Aristotle, the remote inspiration of these traditions. (Lord, 2003c)

Since the 1970s Lord has criss-crossed the worlds of academia and government. He received his BA in Politics from Yale in 1966, and then went on to obtain two PhDs, from Cornell in Political Science (1972) and from Yale in Classics (1974). His teaching career in these fields began already in 1969 with a position at Dartmouth, followed by a place among Yale’s Classics and Political Science faculty in 1974-75. Lord then made his first move into government service, joining the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) where he stayed until 1977 (Lord, 1978). Returning to academia, he became an Assistant Professor in Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia up to 1981. In that year he made a major step into the inner circles of Washington policy-making, joining the National Security Council’s International Communication and Information Policy Directorate. It is this post, which he held from 1981-83, which is of most interest to us here. For the rest of the 1980s he remained in government service, first as a consultant to the ACDA, then as director of International Studies at the National Institute for Public Policy, and finally, in 1989-91, as Assistant to the Vice-President for National Security Affairs (that being Dan Quayle). Since 1991 he has held several top-level academic posts at the National Defense University, Adelphi University, and Tufts. He is currently a professor of military and naval strategy in the Strategic Research Department of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies, Rhode Island.

As one can perhaps imagine from this career, Lord’s bibliography makes very interesting reading. His first article, in 1978, focused on his work with the ACDA. This was followed by a longer article on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in the conservative journal *Commentary* in 1980, and many others on US security strategy have appeared since then. Yet what is most intriguing is that from the early 1980s Lord was also highly prolific in publishing on Aristotle. During his NSC years Lord was involved in formulating a whole new apparatus for US political warfare and public diplomacy initiatives against the Soviet Union, and his bibliography includes several contributions on the theory and practice of these

activities (Lord 1984b, 1988, 1997, 2003b). Significantly, during the same period he also published both an edited volume on the role of education and culture in the apparatus of Aristotelian political thought, and a new translation of the *Politics* itself (Lord 1982, 1984a). Lord's work and career therefore represents an interesting meeting-point for Aristotelian ethics, politics, rhetoric, and anti-communist psychological warfare strategy. When asked to consider the linkage in his work between Aristotle and information policy, Lord himself indicated the significance of an article from 1980, albeit in a circumspect way:

My early work on Aristotle focused on what you might call the (greatly neglected) ideological/cultural dimension of his political science and the role of education. In 1980, I think it was, I published a lengthy article on Aristotle's Rhetoric in the classical journal *Hermes*, and my study of the Rhetoric certainly prepared me in a general way for working on international communications issues (about which I confess I knew nothing when I went to Washington in 1981).<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Rhetoric

The article in question is entitled 'The Intention of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*', and in it Lord builds a case for interpreting the *Rhetoric* in such a way to distance it from the mere art of persuasion as expressed through sophistry. In Aristotle's view rhetoric was to be taken as 'the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion' (Aristotle, 2004 6). Three modes of persuasion within rhetoric could be identified: Credibility of the speaker, emotional impact on the audience, and the demonstration of proof in the argument. To successfully apply rhetorical skills, a speaker therefore needed 'to understand human character and goodness in their various forms' and 'to understand the emotions' (Aristotle 2004 7-8). To fit with his belief in the purpose of politics as the means to achieving a virtuous life, Aristotle confronts the then prevailing attitude towards rhetoric given by the Sophists who saw it as little more than a set of tools designed to enhance the status of the orator. Thus 'the political orator aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action; if he urges its acceptance, he does so on the ground that it will do good; if he urges its rejection, he does so on the ground that it will do harm' (Aristotle 2004 13). Instead of attempting to raise the reputation of rhetoric by developing it as a science, he instead subverts the Sophist position by freely admitting the intrinsic need to appeal to the passions of

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<sup>1</sup> Carnes Lord, communication with the author, 26 January 2006.

the audience, but then incorporates it as no more than another facet of political science as a whole. Lord thus argues the following:

Rhetoric is the method of communication of political men. More precisely, it is the method of communication of the political elite with the political mass, 'the many'; its character is determined above all by the requirements of persuading the mass. (Lord, 1980 334)

Even though the ideal, in the Socratic/Platonic tradition, would involve no more than the expression of reasonable argument and the search for Truth, Aristotle accepts that of necessity the arts of persuasion cannot be avoided, since 'rhetoric must take its bearings from probability as ordinary men conceive it, or from common opinion' (Lord, 1980 335). Nevertheless, for Lord it is self-evident that Aristotle is holding fast to a hierarchy 'governed by a conscious desire to emphasize what one may call the high-minded view of rhetoric, while de-emphasizing as far as possible or dissociating himself from those aspects of rhetoric which he considered low and potentially dangerous, yet necessary for effective persuasion' (Lord, 1980 336). Following this argument to its conclusion, Lord states that

this serves the important purpose of conferring on rhetoric a dignity capable of engaging the attention of men of intellectual and moral seriousness, and of ensuring that such men are encouraged to view rhetoric, not as an instrument of personal aggrandizement in the sophistic manner, but rather as an instrument of responsible and prudent statesmanship...Aristotle's art of rhetoric can afford to incorporate sophistic or morally questionable elements precisely because it is finally in the service of a political science which is centrally concerned with the education of political men in moral virtue and in that variety of prudence which is inseparable from moral virtue. (Lord 1980 336-337, 338-339)

This is the intellectual context within which Lord's planning of information strategy under Reagan should be placed. Clearly, it was not just about promoting the interests of the United States, it was about the necessary clarification and projection of a set of values that were, in themselves, morally superior. By taking his place within the NSC at such a crucial time for US foreign policy, Lord was exhibiting the kind of commitment and political agency that he himself recognised in Aristotle's *Politics*. In contrast to earlier interpretations which

emphasised the contemplative outlook of the work, Lord instead reads it as ‘a fundamentally practical book’ and Aristotelian political enquiry as ‘a practical science directed to action rather than a theoretical science pursued for the sake of knowledge’ (Lord 1984a 15).

#### 4. The 1980s: The Second Cold War

Lord joined the NSC’s International Communications and Information Directorate in February 1981 and remained there until December 1983. His entrée into the NSC came via his former boss at the ACDA, Fred Ikle, who recommended Lord to the new NSC director, Richard Allen. Appropriately, Lord was given a portfolio that principally covered human rights and public diplomacy. 1981-83 was a dramatic period when the Reagan Presidency escalated and intensified the US government’s information, public diplomacy, and psychological warfare strategy in order to counter determined Soviet efforts to cause divisions within the Western alliance. The decision taken by the NATO Council in December 1979 to initiate the Two-Track modernisation of tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Western Europe while simultaneously pursuing an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union had generated considerable resistance from West European religious and peace movements. As a result the Eastern bloc regimes were active in mobilising and utilising these Western dissident groups to their own advantage. From the late 1970s onwards Soviet psychological strategy in Western Europe against NATO itself followed a two-track approach, aiming simultaneously to influence policy-making elites and further foster existing fears and pacifist sentiments into a critical mass of popular opposition. Churches, youth groups, and trade unions were special targets in this campaign, particularly in West Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. The aim was to orchestrate their political outlook by bringing them within the spectrum of Soviet influence via international front organisations such as the World Peace Council and the Christian Peace Conference. Playing on fears of nuclear war, these efforts did succeed in gathering together a sort of transnational ‘united front’ sponsored by well-known figures such as Billy Graham. In line with the goal to undermine NATO’s cohesion by ‘de-coupling’ the United States and Western Europe, thereby promoting the ‘neutralisation’ of Europe under the hegemony of the Soviet Union, the USA was pictured as an aggressive, antagonistic power that could not be relied upon to maintain peace (Alexiev 1985; de Graaf 2004) <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See US Embassy Moscow to Secretary of State, ‘Soviet World Peace Conference shifts into High Gear’, 9 February 1982, available through Declassified Documents Reference System, Roosevelt Study Center, Netherlands (hereafter ‘DDRS’).

The US response began to be developed as soon as Ronald Reagan entered the White House in January 1981. Special attention was first given to arms control proposals, and to human rights by focusing on Soviet oppression in Afghanistan and US attempts to push for further reforms in the Eastern bloc via the Helsinki Accords process. But an overarching strategy was called for to move beyond ad hoc responses to Soviet pressure (Adelman 1980). This was reflected in a memorandum from head of the State Department's Europe Division, Thomas Niles, to Secretary of State Alexander Haig in August 1981. Niles outlined a need to encapsulate a broad agenda that would pitch Western values and democracy against the Soviet system. Niles wrote of the crucial importance of gaining support from other Western governments in order to prevent this being solely a US campaign. In order to generate a 'critical mass' of favourable opinion and 'build a new Western consensus, we need both to educate and to inspire.'<sup>3</sup> In the same month Charles Wick, Reagan's new appointment for Director of USIA, issued a proposal that soon became Project Truth, in which he called for 'a coalesced massive assault of truth against Soviet disinformation'. Wick, who visited Western Europe in the summer of 1981, had a sombre message:

The Western democracies are experiencing a crisis of faith. Faith in themselves and their ability to cope with the military, social and economic problems they face; faith in the United States' commitment to defend Europe; faith that the future will not lead to nuclear destruction.<sup>4</sup>

Wick's combative tone was reminiscent of the Campaign of Truth launched by President Truman in 1950, and it soon generated interagency efforts to expose and counter Soviet 'Active Measures' (disinformation, forgeries, use of fronts, etc) aimed at disrupting Western cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Wick, who wanted the campaign to reach the largest possible audience, first focused attention on upgrading and expanding the US broadcasting apparatus, such as with the creation of Radio Marti for Cuba.<sup>6</sup> In June 1982 President Reagan further outlined US determination to promote democracy around the world in a speech given in London. As a result, Project Truth was soon joined by what became known as Project Democracy. By January 1983 the effort to establish greater coordination between the different government

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<sup>3</sup> Niles (EUR) to Secretary of State Haig, 'Western Campaign: The Next Months', 6 August 1981, DDRS.

<sup>4</sup> Wick to David Gergen (White House), 'Countering Soviet Disinformation', 7 August 1981, DDRS.

<sup>5</sup> 'Western Political Offensive: Countering Soviet Active Measures', 19 December 1981, DDRS.

<sup>6</sup> See National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 45, 15 July 1982, available at Federation of American Scientists website, <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/index.html>> (16 November 2006).

agencies involved (NSC, Central Intelligence Agency, State Department, Agency for International Development, USIA, and the White House) had led to NSDD 77, which formed a Special Planning Group for public diplomacy, involving four main committees: public affairs (domestic information strategy), international information (to run Project Truth), international politics (to run Project Democracy), and international broadcasting.<sup>7</sup>

Information policy and public diplomacy were given further emphasis by NSDD 130 in March 1984, which stated that these programmes were ‘a strategic instrument of US national policy, not a tactical instrument of US diplomacy’.<sup>8</sup> Carnes Lord was, at the NSC, deeply involved in this whole process of building an offensive US information strategy. Initially focused on international broadcasting, during 1982 Lord became the NSC’s overseer of USIA to ensure policy-information coordination at all levels (Marks et.al. 1982 132).<sup>9</sup> From his position as information specialist with the NSC, Lord was a central figure in the drafting of NSDD 45, NSDD 77, and NSDD 130 which sought to streamline and focus the information policy apparatus at the top of the US government.<sup>10</sup> NSDD 130 in particular emphasised the need to improve the levels of resources, expertise and coordination of all information activities operating within the government. Not since Kennedy had information affairs been placed so directly at the centre of the US foreign policy-making process, and Lord, who witnessed at first hand how these moves ‘instilled a dynamism that had long been lacking,’ later described this period under Reagan as ‘the golden age of Cold War American public diplomacy’ (Lord 1998 50).

## 5. The Influence of Leo Strauss

But Lord was far more than an administrator – he had a mission of his own. He entered government convinced that the United States needed ‘a better grounded set of general ideas to frame its official discourse – if you will, an “ideology”’.<sup>11</sup> This had been a consistent demand of various ‘Cold War warriors’ since the ideological contest with Soviet communism had been engaged in the late 1940s.<sup>12</sup> What did the United States stand for, what did it represent –

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<sup>7</sup> See NSDD 77, ‘Management of Public Diplomacy relative to National Security’, 14 January 1983, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See NSDD 130, ‘US International Information Policy, 6 March 1984, *ibid.*’

<sup>9</sup> The papers of Lord’s time at the NSC are held at the Reagan Presidential Library, and they cover a broad range of material on Project Truth, broadcasting, arms control, human rights, and psychological operations. Unfortunately none of the material in the papers has yet been declassified.

<sup>10</sup> ‘I basically wrote all three myself, obviously with vetting by others in the NSC staff. You are certainly entitled to conclude that much of the language and thinking is directly from me...’ Carnes Lord, communication with the author, 13 December 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Carnes Lord, communication with the author, 13 December 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Emblematic of this approach was James Burnham, whose trilogy in the late 1940s and early 1950s (during which time he served as consultant to the Office of Policy Coordination, soon to become the CIA’s covert action



and once a coherent set of worthy values could be identified and formulated, how could they best be communicated to others to demonstrate its superiority to all other value systems (in particular the most threatening, communism)? At this point it is necessary to introduce another major influence into the story – Leo Strauss, one of the influences behind neoconservative thinking at the University of Chicago. Lord was not a student of Strauss, instead studying with Strauss's acolyte Allan Bloom at Cornell. However, Lord did gain access to him via Bloom, so much so that he was asked to provide the translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* for Strauss's study of that text in 1970 (Strauss, 1970). Lord himself recently confirmed the link by saying 'I have no problem with being considered a Straussian,'<sup>13</sup> and others have also made this link (Norton 2004).

Strauss himself was not foremost an Aristotle scholar, and what he did write reflected more the contemplative side to Aristotelian political thought rather than the engaged, activist side later emphasised by Lord (O'Connor 2002). What Strauss did provide, and what had the greatest effect on Lord, was his interpretation of regimes, in particular the American regime itself. In Book IV of the *Politics* Aristotle had discussed the characteristics of the different political regimes – democracy, oligarchy, monarchy – in order to set up the question pursued further in Book VII: What is the best possible regime? Aristotle mixes two strands of analysis: The empirical, which focuses on how various regimes are in practice, and the ideal, which presents the best possible regime in all circumstances. While the first strand accepts that particular socio-cultural characteristics and material needs set the context for particular types of regime, the second is strongly normative in prescribing 'the city that is to be constituted on the basis of what one would pray for.' Some, such as renowned Aristotle scholar Werner Jaeger, have consequently drawn the conclusion that the practical and the ideal were incompatible in the *Politics*, a result of it being not one singular work but separate sections posthumously linked together to give the impression of a singular work (Jaeger 1948). For Lord there was no such contradiction, since by determining that the *Politics* was above all about the application of the political meant that the ideal came within range as an eminently realisable project.

For Strauss it was essential to retrieve and revive the foundations of Western philosophical and political thought in order to give it a firm basis for the challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Central to this approach was an attack on the relativism of Liberalism, which led to

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wing) argued strongly for this cause: *The Struggle for the World* (New York: Day, 1947); *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (New York: Day, 1950); *Containment or Liberation* (New York, Day, 1952).

<sup>13</sup> Carnes Lord, communication with the author, 13 December 2006.

not only the weak hedonism of modern Western societies but also the possibility for the emergence of destructive nihilist ideologies such as Nazism and Marxism-Leninism. There was a Natural Order to existence, based on a universal Natural Right, but it was vulnerable and it needed to be defended. Rejecting the fact-value distinction of Max Weber and Positivism, Strauss instead argued that human excellence and political virtue were as vital components for the good society as individual liberty (Strauss 1948, 1953, 1959). The way forward had to be the formulation of a moral politics that could lay the basis for the re-education of declining Western society, thereby enabling it to face the imminent threats it was increasingly choosing to ignore. Referring to Strauss (who died in 1973) in the context of the Cold War, Gregory Bruce Smith points out how he did believe in political conflict short of war as a necessary feature of maintaining ‘the political’ as an essential activity in the technology-driven world of late modernity. Thus ‘for Strauss, the political implies a serious conflict over the nature of the good which given the mystery at the core of Being can never yield apodictic answers.’ Bruce Smith continues:

Be that as it may, there is no mystery why, in the aftermath of Nazi inhumanity, and throughout the Cold War threat of universal tyranny, Strauss could be a perfectly unproblematic defender of Washington. Openness to debate about the good was precluded by both. Acceptance of natural human diversity, no matter how defined, was openly opposed...Strauss asserted that it was an affront to common sense not to see the clear superiority of Washington to either Moscow or Berlin. This was true whether we looked at the matter from the rarefied perspective of philosophy, or the more straightforward common sense articulation of reality shared by millions of individuals in everyday life. (Bruce Smith 1999 122)

Significantly, this is close to the position adopted by Lord at the moment when he entered the service of the US government. Lord wrote in the same volume as Smith that ‘for those arriving in Washington in the 1970s with direct or indirect exposure to the teachings of Strauss, the prospects for the republic could hardly have seemed bleaker’ (Lord 1999 414). Vietnam, Watergate, the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis ‘all seemed to point to an America in retreat and decline’. It is easy to see how the Reagan presidency, with its call to return pride and power to the USA, would have appealed to someone such as Lord, concerned as he was about the ‘education of political men in moral virtue.’ On the specificities of the American regime, Lord says this:

Strauss' early concern with the question of tyranny, and the failure of Western social science to address it adequately, was probably his most important contribution to the debate over American policy toward the Soviet Union in the decades following World War II, and it was central in shaping the orientation of those students of his who were interested in security questions. More generally, Strauss' development of the theoretical issue of the 'regime', and his emphasis on the fundamental differences among regimes, flew in the face of fashionable social scientific thinking during the 1960s and 1970s. It provided a vital intellectual anchor for those inclined to resist the notion that the West and the Soviet bloc were on a course of convergence as a result of economic and technological processes of modernization....Strauss clearly viewed Western liberal democracy as the only viable alternative to the totalitarian temptation, and the closest approximation to the 'best regime' of the philosophers that is possible under modern circumstances. (Lord 1999 413)

Here we reach the nexus between Aristotelian politics and ethics and the ideological contest of the Cold War. Strauss laid the philosophical groundwork for this, but it was Lord in particular who acted as the channel between the two fields in linking theory with practice. For those like Lord who felt they were witnessing the crumbling of Western values, it was no longer acceptable to simply defend the American regime against the threat of Soviet communism, but to proselytise exactly why Western values were both better *and* universally applicable. To avoid the accusation of propaganda, Western information programmes had generally bent over backwards to present the facts alone and allow others to make up their minds. In contrast, while at the NSC Lord participated in introducing a (Straussian) value-laden approach that dismissed the fact-value distinction as self-defeating and bankrupt. The destructive relativism of the Détente years and US-USSR rapprochement had to be abandoned in favour of a clear-cut distinction between various regimes. Reagan's legacy as President has been hotly debated over the past decade and a half, but his interpretation of the Cold War as a straight-up 'struggle between right and wrong, good and evil,' as he declared in a speech in March 1982, epitomised this distinction more than any other. Above all, he re-ignited the 'Cold War warrior' stance that issued 'a simply stated, direct challenge to the legitimacy of everything that the Soviet Union stood for' (Arquilla 2006 150-151). This black-white imagery laid the basis for the upgraded information strategy that Lord played a central role in establishing during 1981-83. Referring to Projects Truth and Democracy, Lord states that

‘when Reagan spoke publicly of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire”’ he pitched ‘the US-Soviet conflict not merely in political or ideological but in moral terms.’ It was the all-encompassing American ideology that had up till then been missing. By exposing Soviet duplicities and putting democracy promotion at the centre of US foreign policy objectives, these two Projects finally committed the government to a positive moral cause as opposed to a negative anti-communism or the relativism of Détente. Lord emphasises how many observers have missed the importance of this; instead, ‘American public diplomacy in the Reagan years rested on a faith in the principles of liberal democracy and a confidence in the democratic future that spoke not merely to the oppressed of the Soviet empire, but to people everywhere’ (Lord 1998 60-61) This was US information policy effectively simplifying and amplifying the Straussian line into a coherent combative ideology, in this way demonstrating ‘American self-confidence and political will’ (Lord 1984b 48).

#### 6. The American Regime: Universal or Particular?

What about the clash between the universal message of US ideology (truth, democracy) and the Aristotelian acceptance of differences between regimes? There was an awareness from the beginning that different cultures and traditions would affect the reception of such a message. NSDD 130 notes that ‘the habits, interests, expectations and level of understanding of foreign audiences may differ significantly from those of the domestic American audience, and require different approaches and emphases in the selection and presentation of information.’<sup>14</sup> In one of his astute reflections on the theory and practice of public diplomacy, Lord emphasises the need to get away from the assumptions of the 1950s and 1960s that all nations were effectively on the same path of modernisation and economic development. They may have been at different stages in the process, but Enlightenment rationality ensured that they were progressing. However, the surprisingly resilience of the Soviet-Chinese communist model and the dramatic rise in influence of religion (Islam and Christianity) had damaged the credibility of the orthodox standpoint. In place of the juggernaut of economic development providing the conditions for democracy, effort had to be made to nurture a democratic political culture – in effect, a form of citizenship. Lord’s interest in the role of education in Book VIII of the *Politics* now comes more firmly into view, since at this point US public diplomacy basically took on the task of educating others in the identities and roles of responsible citizens in their

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<sup>14</sup> NSDD 130, ‘US International Information Policy, 6 March 1984, available at Federation of American Scientists website, <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/index.html>> (16 November 2006).

respective political communities.<sup>15</sup> Under a liberal democratic regime civil society was meant to be an autonomous realm, and the state was not meant to formally define the ‘Good Life’ or citizenship *per se*. Nevertheless, it was vital to nurture the private sphere, and this could best be done via the application of political science in order to educate citizens in ‘the relationship of doctrines, actions, and structures’ for maintaining particular regimes (Ceaser 1990 39). The importance in US public diplomacy on state-private cooperation, which emphasises a leading role for private sector organisations in foreign relations, also enabled the US government to utilise its activist citizenry in support of these objectives abroad. Thus Lord frames the goals of Reagan’s ‘Project Democracy’ speech of June 1982 in this way:

The ‘infrastructure of democracy’ is made up of those mediating structures or institutions, whether public or private, which connect the individual to the state, develop habits of political participation and responsibility, and form a democratic political outlook – that is to say, which create a political culture of democracy even in the absence of democratic political institutions. (Lord 1984b 49)

This approach accepted that religion and tradition were forces not to be dismissed but respected. ‘The universalist premises of Western political culture,’ in particular its fundamental individualism, needed to be couched in such ways as to prevent them from being seen as a threat to other cultures (Lord 1984b 49).<sup>16</sup> Ideally this would avoid pitching Western values as a direct challenge to other regimes, instead accepting the many contingencies and contexts within which democracy, from the bottom up, would need to develop. Nevertheless, the moral dimension remained paramount, especially on issues such as human rights. This was most obvious towards the Eastern bloc, where the strategy meant highlighting the repression, supporting dissident movements and calling for the creation of a ‘public sphere’. Outside of Europe the aim was not to deny the universal applicability of the Western conception of human rights, but to present them as a positive addition to, or even protection of, traditional cultural beliefs and practices (Lord 1984c). This is not far from the idea of Western values as representing a ‘human rights culture,’ applicable outside of the West not because they are inherent everywhere but because in practice they do provide the basis for the

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<sup>15</sup> For Lord’s views on the importance of the education-politics connection see his ‘Introduction’ in *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, pp. 17-35.

<sup>16</sup> Among Lord’s still-classified papers at the Reagan Library is a report entitled ‘Culture and Ideology’. One can assume that this deals with these issues as a background paper for drafting US information policy for different regions and audiences.

most morally acceptable society – in short, they direct the way towards the chief good, *eudaimonia* for all. After all, although regimes were influenced according to the context of place and the particular “mores” or “political culture” of the people, these factors “do not fully bind human action” (Ceaser 1990 46). The subtlety of this US approach towards the Soviet bloc is summed up well by Lord himself:

There can be little doubt that US public diplomacy operations played a vital strategic role over many years in providing an alternative vision of reality to millions within the communist orbit. It is a mistake to identify this role simply with tub-thumping anticommunist polemic or patronizing democratic tutorials....The most vital service these operations performed over the years was rather to provide nourishment to national cultures at risk of extinction at the hands of totalitarian simplifiers. The re-emergence of national identities and traditions throughout the former Soviet bloc at the end of the Cold War was surely a tribute to the resistance of the human spirit to the universal and homogeneous tyranny that the communists sought to impose. But it also reflected in significant part the deliberate nurturing of cultural memory in the East by Western public diplomacy. (Lord 1998 65-66)

One final point on this theme, concerning the actual morality of such a public diplomacy programme itself. As Aristotle sketched out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the primary purpose of political activity is to realise the ‘chief good’ of happiness, or *eudaimonia*, among all citizens (Aristotle 2002). Fulfilling an educative role, the political leadership should set the standard for the rest of the citizenry in developing the ‘excellences’ of civic identity: courage, modesty, wisdom, honour, virtue. Crucially, however, Aristotle denied that every political decision had to be driven by the promotion of the chief good. Philosophy could not provide general rules for all conduct, and, as Lord himself has remarked on this point, ‘we must not expect the same consistency in politics that we do, say, in mathematics’ (Lord 2003a 30). Certainly, politics was all about creating the institutions to realise the good, moral society. But the space was left open for articulating ways of doing this that, in time of necessity, allowed a certain ethical manoeuvrability, the limits of which being defined by the circumstances at hand.

What were the limits to this manoeuvrability? The decisive factor for Aristotle was the application of prudence on the part of the political subject, analysing the context and thereafter charting a morally correct path to deal with it. Lord took a slightly different route.

Having worked closely with the Pentagon during his time at the NSC, he presided over the increasing input of psychological warfare approaches from the US military into the overall information campaign. Reagan's determination to undermine the legitimacy of the Soviet regime led to the introduction of a 'cost-imposing strategy' that sought to raise the stakes at every opportunity. This meant siding with and supporting – illegally – decidedly undemocratic forces such as the Contras in Nicaragua and the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, since these were considered expedient moves in the greater cause of the defeat of communism. This approach was also apparent in the information realm, where specific issues were seized to damage the Soviet image as much as possible, the prime example being the media blitz following the downing of the Korean airliner KAL007 by a Soviet jet on 30 August 1983. Although the Russians had tried to communicate with the airliner and force it to respond, the American accusation of indiscriminate violence against civilians was the interpretation that stuck. Some observers have pointed out how the necessity of damaging the opponent sometimes justified the deliberate distortion of the truth (Arquilla 2006 153-155). For Lord, however, the remains more one of selectivity, not distortion. In his more recent work on public diplomacy and psychological-political warfare he emphasised the following:

Some will say that ...the term 'public diplomacy' is simply a euphemism to disguise what remains a fundamentally sordid business of manipulation and deception. This is to misunderstand fundamentally the reality of the issue we are dealing with. The nub of the case is nicely stated by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, the oldest treatise on this subject and one that is still worth reading: 'The things that are truer and better are more susceptible to reasoned argument and more persuasive, generally speaking.'  
(Lord 2006 22)

## 7. Conclusion

It may seem that this paper overemphasises the contribution of Lord within the apparatus and direction of US public diplomacy during the early 1980s. However, there is no doubt, as shown by Lord's own writings, that an Aristotelian understanding of politics can be read into the decisions and formulations taken at the top of the US government during the early 1980s. His personal engagement at the centre of these deliberations adds to this conclusion. Yet it would be insufficient to present this as purely the intersection of Lord the Aristotelian scholar and government information specialist. Some elements of Lord's perspective are clearly Aristotelian. One example is the application of methods adopted from the *Rhetoric* and

of Book VIII of the *Politics* in terms of the educative function of US public diplomacy and encouraging and nurturing a form of enlightened democratic citizenship worldwide. Another Aristotelian-based position was the understanding that although the different cultural characteristics of other regimes were to be respected, fundamental Western values such as human rights were adaptable and ultimately essential for the improvement of living standards in those regimes.

But the influence of Leo Strauss never seems far away, and it was Strauss, despite his own distance from political events, who gave Lord's Aristotelian stance its edge of Cold War ideology. Thus the couching of the values of the American regime within a powerful moral message (Truth, Democracy) designed to engage with the aspirations of others, a standpoint compatible with the *Rhetoric*, was extended with the Straussian-based determination to defend the values of American liberal democracy against the encroaching ideology of a rival regime. In the age of Détente, Strauss gave Lord the conviction that there were fundamental differences between regimes and that it was self-evident where the superior 'best possible regime' was located. But Strauss and Lord also diverge on key points, the most fundamental being the issue of praxis. Lord's motivation to enter government service was not based on purely theoretical grounds but was obviously a means to understand and improve the methods and goals of political practice. Politics was a goal-driven 'practical science', not an art of contemplation. Political science was the key to nurturing the necessary political culture for liberal democracy, and US public diplomacy, with its combination of state and private actors, was the means to projecting these values around the world.

Untangling the lines of thinking present in Lord's *oeuvre* (both theoretical and practical), it seems clear that he followed a path grounded in Aristotle but further energised by (indeed, in some sense as a reaction to) the standpoints of Strauss. The fundamentals are there, but it is not possible to claim that Lord is an Aristotelian *pur sang*. Decisive in this respect was the political context of Cold War and Détente during the 1970s and 1980s, which set the context for how Lord read Aristotle through the overarching vision of Strauss. In this way a combination of Aristotelian and Straussian insights, applied by Lord according to his take on the demands of the global political environment, found their way into the American information campaign in its ideological struggle with Soviet communism. The American regime was, in the global context of the Cold War contest of ideologies, without doubt the 'best possible regime', and it needed to be promoted globally in order to sustain not just its own self-belief but also the belief of others in the possibility of the Good.



It is worth concluding with some observations that take their lead from the reflections on regimes discussed above. For Aristotle no regime, even the best possible regime, was permanent, since all were vulnerable to change and all needed to be consciously maintained if they were to survive. This required a constant self awareness and self-analysis within each regime to assess and maintain the integrity and durability of its ideological and material components. As some have argued since, liberal democracy can only flourish if continuous attention is given to its “superintendence”, a process ideally grounded in a political science devoted to this task (Ceaser 1990 19-25).

The spread of liberal democracy around the globe has been one of the defining features of the post Cold War era. Under the tutelage of Francis Fukuyama, it was almost presented as if this would be an inevitable process (although Fukuyama was saying more that, rationally speaking, it *should* be inevitable). This approach has been raised to the point of militancy under the Presidency of George Bush, where the ambition to secure the democratisation of the Middle East by means of large-scale invasion and regime change makes Reagan’s foreign policy look positively timid. In the process, the presentation of the American regime of liberal democracy as the best possible regime has lost all its previous subtlety. In recent years Lord has commented on this process, and it is apposite to conclude by quoting him at length:

Not so long ago political scientists and practitioners alike saw liberal democracy in much the same way Aristotle understood the abstractly best regime – as a demanding ideal that could not be expected to take root everywhere. Today, we are much more inclined to see liberal democracy as a practical model for most if not all nations on the world scene, one that can be exported with only minor adjustments to societies that have had no experience of it...There may well be sufficient justification for treating liberal democracy today not as an ideal but as the regime Aristotle would describe as ‘most fitting for all cities’.

On the other hand, this approach is not without its risks...The democratic ideal itself tends to be reinterpreted – ‘defined down’ – so that it becomes easier to attain or to claim to have attained...For many in the West today, to pronounce a nation democratic it is enough to know only that it holds reasonably free and reasonably frequent elections...Politically, it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the argument that democracy demands effort and sacrifice from citizens or that it has unique social, educational, or cultural preconditions. Contrary to Aristotelian regime

analysis, democracy tends to be treated simply as a collection of institutions and procedures rather than as a substantial ideal. (Lord 2003a 48-49)

The Aristotelian elements that gave form (both ideologically and institutionally) to the 'golden age' of public diplomacy under Reagan are now, according to Lord, being abandoned in favour of a shallow democracy-promotion effort that seizes on any kind of electoral activity as proof of democratic superiority and legitimacy. The danger is of course that this discredits the worth of liberal democracy and necessarily undermines the very integrity of the American regime that promotes it as 'success'. Lord's critique is a timely clarification of his relationship with the neoconservative Straussians. He may share certain elements of their thinking, but he remains too close to Aristotelian political science to accept the desire for a quick fix.

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