

International Propaganda: The Russian Version

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a number of the key instruments used in Russia to influence foreign attitudes and improve the country's reputation and image abroad. For decades, the battle for the hearts and minds of people around the world was fought with propaganda, which is defined by one commentator as "the engine of mental corruption" operated for manipulative purposes. The paper offers a snapshot of the Soviet-era propaganda tools and brings the discussion into the context of the present-day Russia. The development and deployment of the new instruments intended to "affect others" takes place in the environment in which "softer" approaches play an increasingly important role. Based on the argument that current Russia's efforts represent a significant degree of continuity with those of the Soviet past, where soft forms of power bordered on hard power applications, the paper questions their effectiveness. Finally, the paper concludes that in today's world, propaganda becomes either limited in its effect or counterproductive. To achieve current goals, Russia needs to focus attention on matching words and deeds in its policies and avoid manipulative tactics for the sake of attraction.

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What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Background

Recent years have been marked by significant changes in the distribution of power on the international arena. The current environment is typically characterized by power shifts and the formation of a new polycentric system of international relations (UNDP, 2013; NIC, 2013). According to Harvard professor Joseph Nye, power represents “the ability to affect others to get the outcomes you want,” which can be achieved by “coercion and payment (hard power) or attraction and persuasion (soft power)” (Nye, 2013). As previous observations demonstrate, in many situations, countries found it easier to use military or economic means (which represent a “straightforward matter” of hard power) to obtain a particular outcome than soft power. The latter requires substantial investment of time and effort and, importantly, the willingness of the audience to accept it (Nye, 2004).

With increased understanding of the importance to win the hearts and minds of the people in the battle to persuade, proponents of two major approaches sought to determine “how the government should invest in soft power” (Nye, 2004). As Nye (2004) explains, throughout the Cold War, “[t]he tough-minded” did not shy away from direct propaganda while the “tender-minded” argued that changing foreign attitudes is a gradual process that needs to be measured in years” (p. 103). For quite some time, the approaches suggested by the “tough-minded” dominated and, as a result, certain countries developed extensive propaganda machines.

In the 20th century, propaganda, which some commentators describe as “organized persuasion” (DeVito, 1986), developed as one of the principal means of social control. To win over the public the propagandists strived to “manipulate cognitions” and shape particular perceptions (Sproule, 1994; Jowett & O’Donnell, 1999). Edward Bernays (1928) defines propaganda as “a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group” (p. 52). In Bernays’ opinion, propaganda serves as a powerful social instrument capable of “organizing chaos,” which, according to the scholar, should be done by the “intellectual minorities” that form an “invisible government” and manipulate the organized habits and opinions of the masses (p. 37).

Although during certain periods in history criticism of propaganda was marginalized, a number of commentators voiced their concerns about the influence of propaganda as early as after the First World War. For example, one article that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* suggested that,

... war left us with a habit of the multitude and a devilish skill of the minority in wholesale, inspired lying, and in hypocritical, pious adroitness in untruth ... [T]o my mind the greatest humiliation of war is that the minds of men and women can be poisoned, fevered, corrupted, deluded and hoodwinked until they run like a stampeded herd, red-eyed and panting, after a lie or two. (as quoted in King, 1989, p. 37)

In a related vein, Robert Herrick (1919) writing in the *The Dial* described propaganda as the “engine of mental corruption,” which operated by “suppression, distortion, as well as misrepresentation and direct falsehood.” Herrick predicted that the propaganda efforts will continue and expand after the war:

The real menace of propaganda is the discovery by governments and other interested agencies that this extension of advertising – for that is what propaganda essentially is – can be readily utilized to sway and control democratic masses. Hereafter no government will confront its electorate without a secret or open bureau of propaganda, and every great ‘interest’ will organize propaganda as an essential activity. (*Ibid.*, p. 36).

Within this context, the propagandist typically uses all instruments available to reach the target audience and shape required perceptions (Davison, 1971). Among those instruments are the mass media, personal contacts, international conferences and so forth. As Ellul (2005) explains, the goal is to achieve acceptance of a particular idea or a course of action and, if necessary, to “win over the adversary and at least use him by integrating him into its own frame of reference.” In some cases, the “enemy” may become a “supporter of the regime,” which would inevitably help to “avert [potential] threats” to its “stability or existence” (Ellul, 2005; Selznick, 1949).

Since the early 2000s, the term “propaganda” has been often used interchangeably with the other, comparatively new term “public diplomacy” to “characterize all foreign information activities.” For example, Richard Holbrooke wrote the following in his article in the *Washington Post*: “Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or – if you really want to be blunt – propaganda.” Similarly, Kim Andrew Elliott described public diplomacy as “the current and gentler term for international propaganda” (as quoted in Zaharna, 2004).

Some scholars, however, believe that there are important differences between propaganda and public diplomacy. For instance, Zaharna (2004) argues that propaganda “deliberately manipulates the communication” and embraces “information control and deception.” Public diplomacy, on the other hand, rejects manipulation, coercion, and

control; the foundation of public diplomacy is “open public communication in a global communication arena.”

Fahnrich (2013) provides another useful explanation highlighting the differences between propaganda and public diplomacy: according to Fahnrich, while propaganda implies *persuasion through manipulation*, subordinates truth, and develops in the environment of intransparency, the essence of public diplomacy is in *persuasion through attraction*. Public diplomacy is an important “means of promoting a country's soft power” (Nye, 2008), which is based on such ethical standards as “true and consistent information, transparency, dialogue” (Fahnrich, 2013).

A country's attraction to a significant extent depends on credibility and is immediately related to the notions of reputation and image. In the early 2000s, Russian president Vladimir Putin emphasized the importance of projecting a favorable image of the country abroad. That statement was interpreted “as a call to revive foreign propaganda” (Feklyunina, 2008) that lost its grip with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Starting with a snapshot of the Soviet-era propaganda tools, the following sections will discuss some of the key instruments utilized in the present-day Russia to affect the international audience, change foreign attitudes, and improve the country's image.

A Legacy of Soviet-Era Propaganda

The Soviet Union participated in the battle for hearts and minds using multiple propaganda tools, including (but not limited to) state-run radio stations, television channels, and newspapers, which provided officially-approved information to the public. It was typically believed that for quite some time radio served as a “prime propaganda instrument”

(Davison, 1971). According to Soviet ideologues, state ownership of the media was required in order to ensure that with the "means of communication" in the hands of the workers, their freedom of speech would be protected and realized (Lasswell, 1951).

Having a monopoly on information, the state extensively used the propaganda vehicles to spread its ideology by emphasizing the advantages of the socialist system over the capitalist one. To achieve that objective, general narrative was structured by means of presenting positive characteristics and actions of "us" and negative actions/characteristics of "them." The contrasting language focused on such themes as peace vs. war, freedom vs. reactionary forces, democracy vs. imperialism, etc. This black and white view of world events dominated Soviet propaganda efforts.

A textbook example of Soviet propaganda is the depiction of injustices, violations, and hypocrisies in American life, which served as one of the regime's main tactics of highlighting negative events in America, while not mentioning information about those that occurred domestically (Radosh, 2012). By demonstrating the bad in American society such as, for example, racism and strong socio-economic distinctions, the Soviet regime could make its own characteristics and policies (e.g., those of equality) look like the better alternative, and themselves look like the more moral people.

A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report on Soviet propaganda published in 1946 described that contrast in the following way: "Soviet foreign policy is presented as consistently directed toward the establishment of peace, democracy, international cooperation, and universal security," while American policy is to "dominate the world by means of the atomic bomb." Radio broadcasts emphasized events that reflected negatively

on Western nations, such as, for example, strikes and, within the United States, the activity of the Ku Klux Klan. The Soviet Union was portrayed as defending countries from the advances of the West, particularly the United States (Central Intelligence Group, 1946).

The Soviet leadership made substantial investments in the propaganda efforts; for example, in the 1970-80s, government spending on propaganda was estimated at \$3.5 - \$4 billion per year (Staar, 1991). The effectiveness of those efforts, however, was limited due to the fact that a number of countries did not accept Soviet policies in different domains. As Nye (2004) explains, in particular respects, "Soviet propaganda was inconsistent with its policies:"

At home Soviet claims were undercut by the revelations that followed de-Stalinization in 1956, and later by an economic downturn as the central planning system failed to keep pace with markets that were becoming ever more flexible in the advancing information age. In foreign policy, Soviet claims to leadership of progressive anti-imperial forces were belied by the invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the crackdown in Poland in 1981. (p. 75)

Additionally, Soviet propagandists were guided by and tried to utilize the same methods of manipulation (which worked in their own country with a static social structure) on the international arena (Nagorski, 1971). As a result, in many cases propaganda aimed at the countries with open societies had little effectiveness. Within that context, more than a few commentators argued that the Soviet leadership needed to find new directions, build more flexibility, and gain deeper understanding of the Western world to construct a more effective message to the international community (Nagorski, 1971). Those issues, however, remained largely unaddressed.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, coordinated propaganda efforts were placed on hold. Within the context of advancing national interests and attempting to achieve

desired policy outcomes, attention to propaganda-related activities returned in the early 2000s and has continued through the present day. One of the most recent developments is the acceptance and integration of the concept of soft power into the Russian foreign policy agenda. According to Konstantin Kosachev, director of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (the CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo), Russia does not know yet how to use this power effectively. At the same time, as Kosachev (2013) argues, it would be “a mistake to consider [current] interest [in soft power] as an attempt to [revive] the Soviet-style propaganda.”

Russia’s Battle for Hearts and Minds

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation approved by the Russian president on June 28, 2000 identified the creation of a positive perception of Russia as one of Russia’s foreign policy priorities. Additionally, the Concept emphasized the importance of “developing Russia’s own means to influence public opinion abroad.” In 2004, speaking at the meeting of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives of the Russian Federation, Putin declared that there existed “deliberate campaigns to discredit” Russia and emphasized the importance of establishing a positive image of Russia abroad. Another idea that emerged at that time was that the existing image of the country was significantly different from reality. To change that situation, the media offensive was initiated.

Major Media Projects

In 2005, a significant step was taken to advance the president’s agenda when the decision was made to launch an informational TV channel Russia Today (later rebranded as

RT). According to the ambitious plans of RT's founders, the new media project was to compete with prominent international channels, such as CNN International and BBC World. Mikhail Seslavinsky, head of the Russian Federal Agency for Print and Mass Media, pointed out that the main objective of the new channel was to create a positive image of Russia abroad. Today, RT, which broadcasts in English, Spanish, and Arabic and has a global reach of over 630 million people in more than 100 countries, is considered Russia's main weapon of soft power.

From the very outset of the project, the Kremlin assigned the mentors – the Assistant to the President Alexey Gromov and the Advisor to the President Mikhail Lesin, as well as the founding organization – the Russian Information Agency (RIA) Novosti, a state-owned news agency. To support the new channel, funds were allocated from the state budget. The initial amount of funds provided to RT was estimated at \$30 million. In the following years, the government's support of RT grew and RT expanded its reach. In 2007, RT's budget grew to \$90 million, in 2008—\$150 million, and in 2012—to more than \$200 million.

RT supports the official political agenda and, to a significant extent, creates an idealistic picture of modern Russia, which - in the Soviet-era propaganda tradition - is often contrasted with America facing multiple challenges. Much of RT's narrative is structured on the basis of contrasting effects, such as, for example, "Turkey bad—Syria good; ... shale gas bad—Gazprom good; ... U.S. bad—USSR good" (Brooke, 2012). Not surprisingly, one might notice a particular spin on the events the channel chooses to cover, including deemphasizing or diverting attention from certain problems in Russian society. For example, although RT informed the audience about the 2011 protests in Russia, it largely

created the impression that nothing serious was happening. On the other hand, protests in the UK and the United States received significantly greater coverage.

Another interesting example is the discussion of discrimination against gay people in Russia. The conclusion of one program that was broadcasted on RT and talked about Russia's gay rights issue is quite optimistic: "Even though gay rights are being squeezed and LGBT people have been abused and killed, it is possible for young gay men and women to have a happy, healthy, and safe life here." Additional comments made in the same program attempted to persuade the audience that Russia "is not alone" in terms of anti-gay violence; "useful statistics" offered by the host of the program showed that in 2013, there was a 70% rise of anti-gay crimes in New York, while in the UK, 98 anti-gay crimes are recorded each week.

RT has had a hard time dealing with criticism of its anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism – the sentiments that have most of their roots in the Cold War era. In one particular example, NPR commented on RT's "extremely confrontational stance when it comes to US." In reaction, RT responded that "[w]hile RT is delighted to be recognized by NPR, their choice of expert used to profile the channel raises some questions about NPR's own stake in the media war" (NPR calls RT anti-American, 2011). At the same time, RT's choice of experts and analysts invited to share their opinions with the channel's audience is quite unconventional. For example, in a significant number of cases, RT invites individuals critical (or hostile) to the US official agenda (e.g., Lyndon LaRouche, Julian Assange, Lawrence Freeman, Lawrence Korb).

As part of the overall coverage, RT periodically communicates content that supports conspiracy theories. Among the most recent theories of that kind is the one suggesting that the tragedy at the Boston Marathon was the US government conspiracy. Daniel Bushell who hosts the program “The Truthseeker” and “exposes the BIG STORIES Mainstream Media dare not touch and SEEKS TRUTH FROM FACTS” pulls back the curtain of a mystery surrounding the Boston bombing. One of the statements is that “politicians and the media ... already using the incident to call for more interference from Chechnya to the Middle East.” To support his argument, Mr. Bushell asks one of the commentators – James Corbett of the Corbett Report, invited to offer his expert opinion from Osaka, Japan – “In whose interest is another invasion?” The answer is that it is the [American] political class that benefits from these types of attacks ... to extend their power and authority over their own citizens and as an excuse to go to the Caucasus region.

Another interesting point made by the host of “The Truthseeker” is that “investigation finds the FBI practically behind every so-called terrorist plot in the United States. Agents find someone poor enough to bribe and set up the plot up for them from start to finish.” No information about the “investigation” or the source from which the evidence is obtained is offered. The truth-seeking exercise continues and another expert, Dr. Kevin Berret, author of “Questioning the War on Terror” brings the discussion to a new level, making the unknown story even more “intriguing.”

In the words of RT’s editor-in-chief, a former pool reporter for the Kremlin, Margarita Simonyan, the channel does not serve as a propaganda instrument. In Simonyan’s view the goal is to offer the international audience “an alternative to the mainstream media.”

Additionally, according to RT's editor-in-chief, the channel is a powerful resource that Russia would "need to use during the next information war, so that the war is not lost as it happened during the South Ossetia conflict of 2008," when Mikheil Saakashvili appeared on all channels to condemn Russia as an aggressor (Azar, 2013).

In 2012, Vladimir Putin ordered that "full support" be given to the budget requests of the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), Russia Today, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Kolesnikov, 2012). It was expected that in 2013 approximately \$355 million will be allocated to RT. With the president's support and an allocation of \$156 million in funds in 2013, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, has become another key player in the system.

Abroad, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, is intended to serve as a powerful tool strengthening Russia's image. Since 2007, as part of the project *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (RBTH), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* has published monthly supplements in 21 leading foreign publications, including *The New York Times*, *Le Figaro*, and *China Business News*. It currently claims a readership of 32 million for its print division alone. RBTH defines its mission as bringing Russian stories to foreign audiences, and informing readers of Russian news and events. According to some estimates, over 40 percent of the readers of the foreign newspapers in which the supplements are published look through RBTH paying particular attention to such sections as politics and economics.

While RBTH portrays itself as a neutral and reliable source of news regarding Russian events and culture, its content mostly reflects or supports the official agenda of the government. In many respects similar to RT is the presentation of events: the RBTH uses

“we” vs. “them” narratives and often portrays Russia’s actions as positive, while actions of the West/the U.S. as negative and/or targeting Russia unfairly. For instance, an article on Ryan Fogle's arrest, an American spy found in Russia, juxtaposes the United States' use of deception with Russia's grace in the handling of the affair. The article mocks the spy and the establishment that sent him, framing the Kremlin as "offering Washington a fair game with new rules." Even a piece regarding a Russian movie is described as an “answer” to the American movie *Chariots of Fire*. In quite a few pieces, Russia is presented as a lone country standing strong against the rest of the world.

Another illustrative article entitled *The Dangers of American Exceptionalism* builds upon the recent President Putin’s op-ed in *The New York Times*. The author of the article questions “America’s credentials to claim exceptionalism” and in a relatively short piece lists a whole range of issues supporting, in his opinion, the argument that the US claims are false. Among those listed are America’s high homicide rate, selective application of values, the “numbers of wars fought and acts of aggression committed,” actions violating international laws, Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, different kinds of inequality and so forth. In the same vein, speaking about inequality, an opinion piece, *As the West Sinks into Despair Russia Rises*, among other things suggests that it is better to be poor in Russia than in the United States.

Global PR Agencies

In an effort to improve Russia’s image and build a better reputation for the country, the Russian authorities did not limit themselves to launching and supporting media projects. Since 2006, one of the leading public relations agencies in the world – Ketchum – has been

employed. Additionally, the Russian government signed an agreement with Ketchum's sister-company – GPlus Europe – which was to address the same problems in the European market as Ketchum did in the United States. In 2006, the PR-agencies faced a complex challenge—to win approval of Russia's work in the G8 at a time when the international community was becoming increasingly concerned with the regime's repression of democracy and its oil and gas policy.

Ketchum's first contract was signed with the Russian bank *Evrofinance Mosnarbank* for consulting and communication services during the period of Russia's G8 Presidency. Ketchum's services were to include: arranging interviews with members of the media, media coverage of the G8 Summit, supporting Russia's press-center at the summit, preparing press-releases, and arranging meetings with leading international relations experts. In addition, Ketchum was to advance the key themes of Russia's G8 Presidency: energy security, fighting infectious diseases, and education. The initial amount paid for Ketchum's services during the period from April to December 2006 was estimated at \$2 million.

Close work with Ketchum continued after that. For example, in 2007, Russia signed an \$845,000 contract with Ketchum Inc. and The Washington Group for the period from January to February 2007. The PR agencies' major tasks included assisting Russia's representatives in establishing and expanding relations with the governments and the media from WTO countries (particularly those who are G8 members). They were to present Russia as a country with a favorable investment climate and capable of influencing WTO positively upon its accession. In the same year, a \$1.2 million contract between Ketchum

and *Gazprom Export* was signed to help the Russian company to “communicate with the media.” According to *The New Times* (Morar, 2009), over the period of only two years the total amount of contract payments to Ketchum and The Washington Group reached about \$8 million.

In 2007, Ketchum lobbied *Time Magazine* to select Putin as its Person of the Year. A year later, the conflict in Georgia took priority and brought new challenges. Ketchum and other influential supporters of Russia, were tasked with winning support for the Russian version of how the war in Georgia began and Russia’s decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. One of the main goals of Ketchum, however, has been to prepare a narrative that would help the Russian government “to tell the story of economic growth and opportunity for its citizens” (Farsetta, 2008).

The International Expert Community

In an effort to secure greater support from international opinion leaders, Russia, in 2004, created the Valdai International Discussion Club, which arranges exclusive meetings among Russian and international experts in history, politics, and international relations. Annual meetings of the Valdai Club organized by RIA Novosti are attended by a number of leading foreign journalists, scholars, and analysts who specialize in Russia. Over the last few years, the Valdai Club conferences have had over 600 attendees, coming from more than 50 countries, with a heavy focus on American and British representatives. This year’s conference that was held in September brought together over 200 experts from more than 30 countries.

At the meeting, participants spend considerable time with Russian officials, opinion leaders, and analysts. It is believed that the goal of obtaining stronger support to the state policies and the regime can be achieved if foreign guests have an opportunity to talk in person with Russian politicians and get information directly from the source. Shevtsova (2010) calls the Valdai Club “another example of the Kremlin’s policy of co-optation.” For example, at the Valdai Club conference in 2008, it was critical for the Russian government to put an end to its international isolation that resulted from the Caucasus war and its recognition of South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s independence. At the gathering, the Kremlin had to do much more than just “retouch its image;” it was necessary to secure at least some degree of support from the foreign guests (Roxburgh, 2011). Alexander Rahr, a well-known German political scientist and, more recently, a Research Director of the German-Russian Forum, suggested that after listening to Putin’s and Medvedev’s emotional addresses to the Club’s gathering, 80 percent of the participants supported Russia’s position.

Some commentators consider the Valdai Club as an institute of “blatant propaganda.” Remarking on his participation in the Valdai Club conference, Andrew Kuchins, Director of the Russia and Eurasia Programs at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said:

My head is spinning after a week in Russia as a guest of the Valdai Club, one of the most effective Kremlin PR projects. I came away with the impression that the Kremlin boss is like the Wizard of Oz, who is revered and feared, but who actually is improvising desperately, pulling various levers in the vague hope that his efforts will be effective" (as quoted in Shevtsova, 2010).

In theory, the Valdai Club has no political agenda. According to the mission statement found on the Valdai Club website, its purpose is to "foster a global dialogue about

Russia" and to "provide an independent, unbiased, scholarly analysis of political, economic, and social processes in Russia and the world." The meetings consist of a few days of discussion and debate among the invitees, and culminate in a question and answer session with the Russian president. After the Valdai Club meets, it is expected that the attendees will return home and write about their experience there, or use what they have learned in academic work.

Rossotrudnichestvo

An increasingly important instrument for changing foreign attitudes is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (the CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) established in 2008. In May 2013, the Russian president signed an executive order making Rossotrudnichestvo a key vehicle for advancing soft power. According to official reports, in the present-day environment without efforts to employ solid resources of soft power it may be impossible to promote national interests (Pchel'nikov, 2012)

Currently, the Agency operates in 75 countries maintaining 83 offices, including 58 Centers for Science and Culture. Konstantin Kosachev, head of the agency, expects to expand the presence of Rossotrudnichestvo to 104 countries and 140-150 centers by 2020. In Kosachev's view, Rossotrudnichestvo represents a form of "civilized lobbyism." Among the main activities of the Agency are strengthening ties to Russians living abroad, organizing visits of young leaders from foreign countries to Russia, and spreading Russian language and culture. The latter activity is conducted in collaboration with the Russkiy Mir

Foundation and the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.

By hosting events such as conferences, informal discussions, seminars, and exhibitions the agency hopes to expose foreigners to aspects of Russian culture that “are often overlooked.” The agency is also trying to strengthen academic exchange between Russia and other countries; for instance, the website for the Rossotrudnichestvo office in the United Kingdom emphasizes its ties with major universities in the UK, and how these connections allow members of the Russian education system to connect to their colleagues abroad. Rossotrudnichestvo also provides Russian language classes, and promotes tourism to Russia.

It was in 2012 when it became clear that Rossotrudnichestvo was gaining weight and its activities were acquiring new significance. As one analytical document prepared for the fall 2012 meeting of the Russian Public Council for International Cooperation and Public Diplomacy entitled “Russia’s ‘Soft Power’ in the New Millennium: The Existing Potential and Perspectives for Development” pointed out: “Among Rossotrudnichestvo’s key objectives is the coordination of international propaganda efforts.”

The September 2012 meeting of Rossotrudnichestvo representatives to foreign countries considered different ways to promote Russia’s positive image abroad, including hiring a new PR agency, a return to the Soviet propaganda structure, extensive utilization of social media, and more. Reportedly, all these seemingly different ideas shared a common way of expressing their approach - if everything is properly explained to foreigners, Russia’s reputation will start improving dramatically. In Kosachev’s view, it is strange that

the international audience cannot rid itself of the “myths about Russia which still persist in the world,” even though Russia started explaining to this audience what the truth is - in their own language - as early as in the mid-2000s.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the changing system of international relations, the role of “softer” approaches to foreign policy has been increasing. Within this context, Russia has developed new instruments to “affect others” (Nye, 2013), influence foreign attitudes, and improve the country’s reputation and image abroad. Despite the efforts and particular accomplishments, the official message has remained controversial. On the one hand, the authorities have continuously emphasized their commitment to ideas associated with soft power. Additionally, the concept of soft power was elevated to the level of a Foreign Policy Concept. On the other hand, one may observe a revival of propaganda of “the tough-minded” (Nye, 2005); it appears that the “engine of mental corruption” (Herrick, 1919) continues to run. The line between information and “organized persuasion” gets crossed and when it is crossed, public diplomacy efforts “degenerate into propaganda.” This inevitably undermines soft power and credibility (Nye, 2010).

Furthermore, the deployment of the new “instruments” takes place within the Cold War-style context shaped by anti-Western or anti-American rhetoric. Not surprisingly, a number of commentators conclude that Russia’s contemporary vision of power has remained virtually unchanged since the Soviet period (Cohen, Dale, & Smith, 2012; Shevtsova, 2010). The argument is that the core of the vision is shaped by the ideas of strengthening Russia’s international influence and, at the same time, weakening the

influence of the West, primarily the United States. As Shevtsova (2010) maintains, current efforts continue to be based on the Cold War principles of anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism:

Nothing has changed in the official propaganda: Americans can't be trusted; Americans are guilty; Americans are hypocritical; and the United States is a threat! Russian TV feeds this mantra to Russian society on a daily basis. And how could it be otherwise? The Russian system continues to rest on this anti-American pillar ... (p. 285)

Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center in Moscow, suggests that this approach is an effective means to consolidate society around the image of the enemy:

The image of the enemy is an extremely powerful means for internal consolidation, solidarity with the authorities. As soon as this image of the enemy gets formed ... there emerges a powerful mechanism for consolidation on the basis of the principle "us" vs. "them" and America becomes the main villain (Kiselev, 2008)

A recent poll conducted by the Levada Center shows that 38 percent of Russians see the United States as "the most hostile country" to Russia. The increased levels of anti-Americanism did not emerge from nowhere: within a comparatively short time, anti-Americanism became "one of the most dominant features" and "key element[s]" on the official agenda (Bohm, 2013; Trenin, 2013).

The spread of anti-American/Western rhetoric and sentiments revives negative images of the Cold War period, which, while still attractive for certain groups in Russia, are distasteful for many audiences abroad. Despite the fact that, ideally, soft power should be based on a firm foundation, coercion or confrontation are alien to soft power. In the present environment, strategies exclusively based on hard power considerations or motives are unlikely to bring long-term positive results. As former House Speaker Newt Gingrich argued in relation to the Bush administration's approach in Iraq, "The real key is not how

many enemy do I kill. The real key is how many allies do I grow. And that is a very important metric that they just don't get" (Nye, 2004, ix). The mentality and behavior of "the tough-minded," however, has remained virtually unchanged, reflecting significant aspects of coercion and manipulation.

Erast Galumov (2012), Director General of the *Izvestia* publishing house, once suggested that, "image is not reality, but, rather, its reflection, which can be made positive" (Galumov, 2012). Following this line of argument, one might assume that by means of "managing" (or manipulating) a country's image with the help of certain instruments, the image can become more favorable. However, little evidence suggests this might be possible, since "countries are judged by what they do, not by what they say" and cannot simply "advertise [their] own way into a better reputation" (Anholt, 2011, p. 6). Consequently, persuasion through manipulation becomes irrelevant; especially when the "polished product" presented to the international audience is found to be inconsistent with the reality or general context.

In today's world, in many situations, propaganda becomes either limited in its effect or counterproductive. A good example is China that spent billions of dollars projecting soft power abroad in many different ways, but has received a poor return on the investment - there is still a negative perception of China in many countries. A number of experts argue that despite the efforts, China's image has worsened in America, Europe, and the Middle East (Shambaugh, 2013). To a significant extent, this problem is a result of the mismatch between soft power projects and China's policies. As this paper suggests, similar

mismatch could be found in the Soviet times, where substantial investments were made to conduct propaganda, but its effectiveness was limited.

Russia currently faces similar challenges even despite launching large-scale international projects and achieving some impressive numbers (e.g., people reached by Russian international media). At present, according to the *Country Brand Index, 2012-13*, Russia is ranked very low, 83 out of 118. Similarly, a recent global survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013), shows that over the period from 2007 to 2013, the image of Russia improved relatively significantly only in two countries: Indonesia and Argentina (+7%). Compared with 2007, Russia's image has worsened in a large number of countries with "negative views especially pronounced in the Middle East, Western Europe and [...] Japan" (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Studies suggest that in the contemporary environment among the winners in the battle for hearts and minds are countries engaged in positive and formative activities beyond their borders, as well as in the open and constructive dialogue. These are the countries that give particular attention to addressing domestic issues and creating internal attractiveness, the effect of which freely spreads throughout the world. Within this context, the comment that "the best propaganda is not propaganda" (Nye, 2013) seems especially relevant: when governments are perceived manipulative in their approach to persuasion, credibility is destroyed.

One may believe that at present, "the essence of the problem is not to create an attractive image of the Russian state, but rather to make Russia itself attractive" (Neymark, 2012). Since soft power can be viewed as "growing out" of culture and policies (Nye,

2003), in the Russian context, this argument may primarily refer to the second component of soft power that often becomes an object of resentment. It may be argued that Russia primarily needs to “look within for the answer” and, using Nye’s words, focus attention on “match[ing] words and deeds in its policies,” avoiding manipulative tactics for the sake of attraction.

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