Putin's Propaganda Machine

Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy

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Introduction

During the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the world was confronted by the Kremlin's most massive and incisive propaganda offensive of the past seventy years. The Russian propaganda machine dwarfed even that of Saddam Hussein, who, in 1991, before Operation Desert Storm, promised the Western coalition that it would be defeated in what the Iraqi leader then called "the mother of all battles." According to Lev Gudkov, the director of the Levada Center, an independent Russian polling organization, one can observe today in Russia "aggressive and deceptive propaganda . . . worse than anything I witnessed in the Soviet Union,"[1] an opinion, shared by Irina Prokhorova, a well-known publisher, who did not hesitate in calling Putin's propaganda "Stalinist," comparing it with the anti-Western hysteria that characterized the repression of the late 1940s.[2] We should not forget, however, that "good" propaganda is not simply a matter of persuading the nonbelievers or just telling untruths and lies. As David Welch—rightly—remarked, there exist

> two common misconceptions connected with the study of propaganda. There is a widely held belief that propaganda implies nothing less than the art of persuasion, which serves only to change attitudes and ideas. This is undoubtedly one of its aims, but often a limited and subordinated one. More often, propaganda is concerned with reinforcing existing trends and beliefs; to sharpen and focus them. A second basic misconception is the entirely erroneous conviction that propaganda consists only of lies and falsehood. In fact it operates with many different kinds of truths—from the outright lie, the half truth to the truth out of context.[3]

Especially the last two categories, half truths and truths out of context, played an important role in the disinformation campaign that accompanied

Moscow's aggression in Ukraine. They were reminiscent of the period in which *Pravda*, the official paper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was considered in the West as quite the opposite of its title: *The Truth*. We should remind that even the word "disinformation" (in Russian, *dezinformatsiya*) seems to be a Russian invention. According to Michel Heller, "The word first appears in 1963, when the KGB creates a special section tasked with creating 'disinformation' about the real political objectives of the Soviet Union."[4] For the KGB, disinformation was not restricted to the dissemination of half truths: it also included "the distribution of documents, letters, and manuscripts, of falsified or forged pictures, the propagation of malicious or suggestive rumors and false intelligence by its agents, [as well as] deception of foreign visitors to the Soviet Union."[5] Disinformation in the Soviet Union was a tradition that can be traced back to Lenin, who founded the Cheka, the KGB's forerunner.[6] Interestingly, Lenin had already developed ideas that might have inspired Putin's tactic of sending anonymous "little green men" into Ukraine, wearing uniforms without insignia but apparently belonging to the Russian Spetsnaz troops. "During the war with Poland [in 1920]," writes Heller, "one can find, among other suggestions made by Lenin, a project that he himself calls a 'perfect plan.' . . . [He proposed] to cleanse that part of Polish territory which is occupied by the Red Army: 'We can do it by passing ourselves off as "Greens." . . . We hang the kulaks, the priests and the landowners.'" "The whole ingenuity of this plan," wrote Heller, "is to be found in the idea 'of being taken for Greens,' in other words for rebellious farmers, who supported neither the 'Whites,' nor the 'Reds.'"[7]

THE RETURN OF AGITPROP?

The early Bolsheviks were masters of modern propaganda. Their propaganda effort became more institutionalized with the establishment of an Agitation and Propaganda Department (*otdel agitatsii i propagandy*) in the Central Committee of the Communist Party. This department, the main organizer of Soviet agitprop, grew during the years of the New Economic Policy (1921–1928) "into an elaborate bureaucratic structure of more than thirty subdepartments of the press, publishing houses, science, schools, cadres training, cinema, the arts, theater, radio, and literature, to name only a few."[8] In the mid-1920s, "all these departments systematically monitored activities in their field."[9] In the beginning, the huge Bolshevik propaganda effort was directed primarily at the population of the Soviet Union, but soon it would be extended to foreign audiences as well. While propaganda was used to influence the mind, agitation worked on the emotions of the receiver and his or her propensity to act. The Bolsheviks were firm believers in the communist cause, and they thought that all means—including censorship, lies, the deception of others, as well as the production of fake realities—were permissible to force their ideas on the population. The Bolsheviks were early champions of modern propaganda and served as a model to be emulated by Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.[10] A high-ranking Nazi, quoted by an American reporter in June 1933, admitted openly: "We National Socialists have learned much from the Russian Bolsheviki."[11] The same journalist observed "Nazi placards with striking and colourful pictures of farmers, housewives and workers. . . . Quite often the posters are copied outright from those of the Russian or German Communists."[12]

The Bolshevik propaganda might have been a new phenomenon, but this was less the case with censorship, the invention of lies, the deception of others, and the creation of fake realities. These were already well-established practices in tsarist Russia. According to an early witness, Marquis Astolphe de Custine, a French nobleman who visited Russia in 1839 and published a famous book, *Lettres de Russie* (*Letters from Russia*), lies and deception were an integral part of Russian society. "Social life in this country," he wrote, "is a permanent conspiracy against the truth. Anyone who is not duped is regarded there as a traitor . . . to refute a lie, to contradict a political claim . . . is an attack on the security of the state."[13] It is a country, he continued, "where from birth minds are adapted to dissimulation."[14] "Only the truth shocks."[15] And he concluded: "One word of truth launched in Russia is a spark landing on a powder keg."[16]

Without doubt Lenin's and Stalin's propaganda machines continued an old tsarist tradition, and Putin, in his turn, emulated these Soviet models. However, Putin did not simply copy existing models; he is also an important innovator: the contemporary Russian propaganda effort has a completely new character, taking into account four developments: first is the unprecedented *generous budgets* allocated by the Kremlin to its propaganda efforts; second is the profound *modernization* of the propaganda machinery that has taken place under Putin. In a highly professional way, all media—not only TV, radio, and the press but the Internet and social media also—are employed in the promotion of the Kremlin's message. A third innovation is the *psychological know-how* with which this new information warfare is conducted, which is far more sophisticated and elaborated than in Lenin's or Stalin's time. The Kremlin is able to adapt its message with great ingenuity and flexibility to respective audiences in different countries. Finally, in the post–Cold War world, the Kremlin is able to make use of the relative *openness* of the Western media world for the Russian propaganda offensive, something that was not the case during the Cold War (with the exception, of course, of the Western communist press). These four factors—the Kremlin's exceptionally generous budgets, the professional and concerted media effort,

its new psychological approach, and Western openness—have provided the Kremlin with countless opportunities to expand its audience in the West.

THE "HYBRID" WAR IN UKRAINE: FROM DISINFORMATION TO MISINFORMATION

This is the reason why not only the Russian population but also a not insignificant section of the Western public tended to believe the Kremlin's message that the Maidan revolt in Ukraine was inspired and led by Western intelligence services, that the new Ukrainian government was illegal and full of fascists and anti-Semites,[17] and that in the Crimea and in the Donbas region there was no Russian military infiltration but a genuine local movement consisting exclusively of homegrown separatists. The Kremlin was able to present a shrewd mixture of real and invented "facts." Indeed, some Western politicians did visit the Maidan, and it was true that members of the fascist "Pravy Sektor" and the right-wing "Svoboda" party participated in the Maidan movement. It is equally true that there were Ukrainian separatists. However, by exaggerating the negative aspects beyond proportion and mixing them with invented "facts"—a tactic which is characteristic of disinformation—the Kremlin succeeded in convincing a section of the Western public of its version of the events. According to the Polish analyst Jolanta Darczewska,

> The Crimean operation has served as an occasion for Russia to demonstrate to the entire world the capabilities and the potential of information warfare. Its goal is to use difficult to detect methods to subordinate the elites and societies in other countries by making use of various kinds of secret and overt channels (secret services, diplomacy and the media), psychological impact, and ideological and political sabotage."[18]

As the conflict dragged on, the *dis*information campaign soon started to make way for plain *mis*information: the invention and dissemination of flagrant untruths and pure lies. One example of this misinformation is a news item broadcast on July 12, 2014, by the Russian Pervyy Kanal (First TV Channel). In an interview, a woman named Galina, who claimed to be a refugee from Slavyansk in eastern Ukraine, told how Ukrainian soldiers had taken a three-year-old boy and crucified him "like Jesus."

> One man nailed him, while two [others] held him. And all this happened before his mother's eyes. [Then] they took the mother. And the mother saw how the child bled. The child cried and screamed. . . . People fainted. When the child was dead after having agonized for half an hour, they took the mother, tied her unconscious to a tank and drove three times round the square. Each circuit of the square was one kilometer.[19]

This story led to great outrage in Russia, but it was soon exposed as pure make-believe.[20] Another example of such deliberate misinformation was an article in the Russian *Life News*, published immediately after the downing of the Malaysian Airline flight MH-17 over eastern Ukraine. A spokesman for Rosaviatsiya, the Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, said it was believed that the crash, in which 298 people were killed, was caused by a "Ukrainian missile" launched from the ground or by a plane and that the target "could have been the Russian president's plane."[21] The Malaysian Boeing and Putin's plane would supposedly have crossed at the same height through the same air corridor near Warsaw. There were, apparently, no limits to these morbid fantasies. On January 25, 2015, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, "head of state" of the "Donetsk People's Republic," said in an interview with First TV Channel that "Ukrainian forces had brought with them three portable crematoriums. They serve to burn the bodies. Afterwards they will say that your children have disappeared or have been taken prisoner."[22]

Confronted with the accumulation of lies, in March 2014 a group of Ukrainian journalists started a website, www.stopfake.org, run by the London-based Ukrainian Institute, with the aim of checking the facts and verifying the information disseminated by Russian news channels. One of the examples of misinformation they found was a video on YouTube of Russian soldiers throwing into a heap bodies of Dagestanis they had killed. This video was "recycled" and spread on YouTube with the text "Punitive Ukrainian National Guard Mission throwing dead bodies near Kramatorsk (Donetsk region) on 3 May 2014."[23] Another example was a report, shown in March 2014 in the United Kingdom on RT, the Russian cable TV channel, that Jews were fleeing Kyiv in fear of an anti-Semitic Ukrainian government. The report featured Rabbi Misha Kapustin explaining that he and his family were leaving for their personal safety. However, the truth was that Kapustin was fleeing not Kyiv, but Simferopol in the Crimea after the illegal Russian annexation of the peninsula.[24]

The Kremlin's information war machine was put into a higher gear after the annexation of the Crimea, when Russia started its offensive in the Donbas region. Unfortunately, however, Russian propaganda did not receive an adequate response from the West, where, during the past few decades, the foreign ministries of most countries—including the United States—had sharply reduced their media budgets. This was one reason for John Lenczowski complaining that "recent [US] administrations have failed to incorporate an adequate public diplomacy dimension into their strategies."[25] He added that "America's foreign policy and national security culture has rarely given public diplomacy a place of prominence in national strategy. Indeed . . . it has been systematically neglected and under-funded during lengthy periods of the post-World War II era."[26]

In 2011, then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton had already said that the United States had to do more to communicate its values and spread its influence to the rest of the world through government-backed media. "We are engaged in an information war and we are losing that war," she warned,[27] mentioning that China and Russia had started multilanguage television networks at the very moment that the United States was cutting back in this area. Hillary Clinton concluded that "we are paying a big price" for dismantling international communication networks after the end of the Cold War.[28] In December 2014, Peter Horrocks, former director of the BBC World Service, equally warned that Britain and the United States were losing the global information war. "We are being financially outgunned by Russia and the Chinese," he said, at the same time emphasizing that "the role we need to play is an even handed one. We shouldn't be pro-one side or the other, we need to provide something the people can trust."[29] Russia is not the only country where an increased interest in information and communication strategies is apparent. China, too, is actively preparing itself for forthcoming information wars. According to Stefan Halper, "The Chinese public information chief, Li Chang-Chun, explained his government's view that the global information space now ranks among the crucial battlegrounds for power in the twenty-first century." According to the Chinese official, "Communications capacity determines influence. . . . Whichever nation's communications capacity is strongest, is that nation whose culture and core values spread far and wide . . . with the most power to influence the world."[30]

THE START OF THE INFORMATION WAR ACCORDING TO IGOR PANARIN

When did the Kremlin's preparations start for this new information war with the West? And how, so far, has it been conducted? After the demise of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of a new world order by US President George Bush Sr., information wars between Russia and the West no longer seemed necessary. The former Cold War enemies expressed their confidence that they had become "partners," stakeholders in a new European security system which was no longer based on adversity but on mutual trust and shared security. In the beginning of the 1990s there was much talk about the "peace dividend," and most Western governments started to reduce their defense budgets. For Russia, the 1990s was a difficult decade, characterized by political turmoil, economic crises, and an unsuccessful war in Chechnya. Only with the advent of Vladimir Putin was order restored and, helped by the raising of oil and gas prices, Russian citizens began to enjoy a certain economic prosperity. However, the first decade of the twenty-first century was for the Russians not only a period of newly found wealth, stability, and

national pride, it was also a period in which suddenly the loss of empire was experienced with more intensity and grief than before. This post-imperial pain led in Russia to dreams of national greatness and restored imperial grandeur.[31]

During Putin's reign there took place a reinterpretation of the causes of the demise of the Soviet Union. There are different ways to explain the sudden breakup of the Soviet empire. One way is to consider the disintegration of this huge country as the result of a power struggle between the leading politicians of that time: a struggle between Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Boris Yeltsin, President of the RSFSR—the precursor of the present Russian Federation—on the other. The Belavezha Accords signed on December 8, 1991, by Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus—Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich—were, in this version of events, the instrument of a soft coup d'état staged by Yeltsin to remove Gorbachev and become himself the supreme and uncontested ruler of the Russian heartland. The loss of the non-Russian Soviet republics was according to this version the unintended consequence of this "soft coup"—a loss the instigators thought could be quickly recouped by founding a new organization: the Commonwealth of Independent States, an organization modeled after the British Commonwealth.

A second way of explaining the demise of the Soviet Union is to consider it the logical consequence of a historical process that other European nations had already gone through: namely, a process of *decolonization*. Lenin famously called tsarist Russia "the prison of peoples" (*tyurma narodov*), demanding the liberation of the colonized peoples. This did not prevent him and his successor, Joseph Stalin, from closing the doors of this huge prison once again after a short decolonization period following the October Revolution. Stalin even succeeded in expanding the empire and, additionally, in bringing a group of dependent countries into the Russian sphere of influence: the so-called Soviet bloc. Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium had lost their colonial possessions after World War II. Even Portugal, lagging behind, had been forced to give up its colonies. Why wouldn't the Soviet Union also—proudly claiming to be the champion of the "anti-colonial struggle"—be obliged in the end to accept the urge for freedom of its subjected peoples?[32]

However, there is yet another, a third and less obvious way to explain the demise of the Soviet Union: this is to consider it as the result of a *conspiracy* planned by hostile foreign powers. It is this third explanation that has won more and more adherents in contemporary Russia. The conviction that the Soviet Union has disappeared as the consequence of a secret plan by hostile powers is widespread. These conspiracy theories can be found not only among the uneducated but also in the writings of prominent intellectuals. One of these is Igor Panarin, a former KGB agent who is a professor at the

Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry in Moscow. Panarin considers the demise of the Soviet Union the outcome of "the First Global Information War" conducted by the United States and Great Britain against the Soviet Union. In his book, titled *The First Global Information War—The Collapse of the USSR*,[33] he accused the West of having planned this "global information war" as early as 1943 at a summit in Quebec. Its instigator was believed to have been Winston Churchill.[34] The objective of this information war was the "weakening of the competitor, [and] economic or geopolitical expansion, etc.,"[35] leading to "the destruction (disintegration) of its main ideological and geopolitical opponent—the USSR."[36] At first, however, this information war did not go well for the West, due to Joseph Stalin's successful resistance, for which Panarin praises the Soviet leader. Things began to change in 1953, when "the USSR began to lose the information war after the death of J. Stalin, the chief ideologist of the successful resistance to the ongoing information war against the USSR."[37]

According to Panarin, the second phase of the Western information war against the Soviet Union started after Stalin's death with the advent of Nikita Khrushchev. At that moment Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA, together with MI6, the British foreign intelligence service, allegedly started operation "Anti-Stalin." "Operation 'Anti-Stalin,'" wrote Panarin, "marked the beginning of the defamation of the history of our country. N. S. Khrushchev was a typical representative of the nomenclature's undereducated social climbers, who seemed to be the ideal target for psychological-informational manipulation by the Anglo-American intelligence services."[38] "The CIA and MI6 supported N. S. Khrushchev in his power struggle in the USSR," he continued.[39] The efforts of the Western secret services were crowned with success: "See how in 1953, after the death of J. Stalin, it was not Stalin-2 that came to power, but the anti-Stalin," a fact which gave the Anglo-Americans "the opportunity to break up the USSR."[40] The West's final victory came a few decades later. "The greatest success in the information war for the enemies of the USSR was the election of M. S. Gorbachev as general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. The promotion of Gorbachev was a strategic loss for the Central Committee of the CPSU, but at the same time it was a victory for those who put him forward."[41] The Western conspiracy worked, wrote Panarin, because "the directors of the information war against the USSR (A. Dulles, G. Kennan, D. Rockefeller, H. Kissinger, Z. Brzezinski, R. Reagan) were able to implement a strategic operation in order to promote the ascension in the USSR of the Trotskyites-globalists N. S. Khrushchev and M. S. Gorbachev."[42] In the end, it was Gorbachev, whose "cold eyes" the author evokes several times, who was to blame: "I consider that the key factor in the demise of the USSR is the anti-government course of M. Gorbachev."[43]

Panarin's book is a conspiracy theory *in optima forma*. According to Walter Laqueur, "The belief in conspiracy theory is much more widespread than generally assumed. It is usually present in paranoia—the assumption that there is a pattern (usually negative or hostile) in random events. Nothing in the world happens by chance; obvious motives of other persons are rejected, and in severe cases this mental attitude leads to vengeful attitudes and violent confrontation."[44] Conspiracy theory is "present in terrorist movements of the extreme right; the murderers of Rathenau (the German foreign minister) believed that he was one of the Elders of Zion; the doctrines of the American far right are constituted almost entirely of conspiracies against patriots—by the United Nations, by Freemasons, the Illuminati, and of course, Zionists as well as a hundred other evil forces. The same is true with regard to the ideology of the lunatic fringe of the Russian right."[45]

The problem is that in today's Russia, it is no longer only the "lunatic fringe" of the Russian right that develops these theories but analysts and ideologists who are taken seriously by the Russian intellectual elite, including government circles close to the Kremlin.

Another author who should be mentioned here is Aleksandr Dugin, the inspirator of Putin's "Eurasian Union" and referred to by some authors as "Putin's brain."[46] One of Dugin's main works is titled *Konspirologiya*, which leaves nothing to be guessed about how the author views the world.[47] This book is a potpourri of magical and mystical theories, mixed with fascistoid, neo-imperialist geopolitical ideas. In the table of contents one finds subjects such as "Count Dracula," "Against Demons and Democracy," "The Occult Sources of Feminism," "The Threat of Globalization," "The Economic Meaning of September 11," "Liberalism—A Totalitarian Ideology," and so on. According to this author, the KGB was infiltrated by "Atlanticists," and in the last chapter he calls Nikita Khrushchev—in the same vein as Igor Panarin—"an agent of Atlanticism," while Mikhail Gorbachev—nicknamed "Mister Perestroika"—is called a "double agent."

Theories like these form the background to the new information war started by Putin's Russia. The crux of these theories is that they don't consider the present Russian information and propaganda war as a new phase in the post–Cold War era, in which—after a period of relative rapprochement between Russia and the West—the Kremlin has changed its course and opted for a policy of aggressive territorial revisionism, internal authoritarianism, and ideological closure. On the contrary, both thinkers consider Russia's new information war as a *defensive maneuver*, accusing the West of being responsible for the breakup of the Soviet Union. According to Panarin, the "first information war" started in 1943, more than seventy years ago, and ended with the demise of the Soviet Union. Therefore, in another book, titled *Information War, PR, and World Politics*,[48] he calls the present information war the *second* information war. According to him, this war also was started by the West and began in the early 1990s. He predicts that it will be concluded in 2020 with a Russian victory. Such a positive outcome he deems possible

on the condition that "the Russian political elite must become *passionate* and be prepared for a global uncompromising informational-psychological confrontation with the global elites [i.e., the United States and United Kingdom]."[49] This confrontation includes not only actions abroad but also "defending the *consciousness* of Russian citizens from negative information flows, i.a. during elections."[50] Panarin emphasizes that the information war has an *offensive* ("uncompromising confrontation") as well as a *defensive* side (defending Russian citizens from "negative information flows"). It is clear that measures taken by Putin after his return as president in 2012, such as strengthening the control of the internet, restricting the freedom of action of NGOs, and muzzling the independent media, fit into this last category. Apparently, freedom of the press and the social media is incompatible with the Kremlin's understanding of the information war.[51] The war in Ukraine was an occasion for the Kremlin to further increase its already impressive propaganda effort abroad. In the federal budget for the year 2015, an increase of 41 percent is earmarked for RT—the Kremlin's international cable TV.[52] Some of these funds will be used to launch German-language and French-language channels alongside the existing channels in English, Arabic, and Spanish. The new propaganda unit Rossiya Segodnya, which combines the former news agency RIA Novosti and the radio station Voice of Russia, is treated with even greater generosity: in 2015 its budget will be increased by 250 percent.[53] In December 2014, Russia Segodnya launched an English-language online and radio service to replace Voice of Russia.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of three parts.

Part I: The Search for Russian Soft Power (chapters 1–7)

This part takes as its point of departure the concept of "soft power," which is defined by Joseph S. Nye Jr. as "the power of attraction." I analyze the recent introduction of this concept in Russia's official political discourse. The Kremlin's analysts, estimating Russia's soft-power potential to be "near to zero," undertook a redefinition of the soft-power concept, transforming it into "hard power in a velvet glove." In this redefined "soft-power" concept, I distinguish three components: "mimesis," "rollback," and "invention." "Mimesis" consists of attempts to copy Western public diplomacy, "rollback" is a strategy of attacking Western public diplomacy initiatives, and "invention" includes new methods of information warfare. One of these inventions is the hiring of Western PR firms to improve the Kremlin's image in the West. Another innovation is the organization of international seminars by the Valdai Discussion Club in Russia and Kremlin-funded institutes abroad. These initiatives not only serve the goal of creating goodwill but are also used by the Kremlin as a testing ground for Russian diplomatic initiatives. Helped by its newly acquired wealth, the Kremlin was also able to buy itself a place in the Western media landscape. I provide a detailed analysis of the impact of new projects, such as "Russia beyond the Headlines," initiated by the official Kremlin paper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which publishes monthly newspaper supplements with leading Western newspapers, and similar initiatives, such as RT (former Russia Today)—an international cable TV channel set up as a competitor of CNN and Al Jazeera, and "Rossiya Segodnya"—a revamped version of the news agency RIA Novosti, designed to make it the direct mouthpiece of the Kremlin's propaganda machine. I also discuss another new phenomenon, although it is probably not directly instigated by the Kremlin: Russian oligarchs who take over Western newspapers, such as *The Independent* (United Kingdom), which was bought by the ex-KGB agent Alexander Lebedev, and *France-Soir* (France), bought by Putin's banker Sergey Pugachev and his son Alexander. Attention is also paid to the growing grip of the Kremlin-friendly oligarch Alisher Usmanov on the social media in Russia, and the activities of Kremlin-inspired bloggers, the so-called "trolls," who are flooding the social media and Western discussion forums with pro-Putin comments. In a special chapter, I offer different examples of instances in which the Kremlin or Kremlin-related oligarchs were allegedly implicated in the financing of politicians and political parties abroad. The examples come from Britain, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia. This part concludes with a chapter on the recent increase in Russian espionage activities. Although in Western concepts of "soft power" there is no place for espionage, this is different in the Kremlin's "hard" soft-power definition. Recent efforts to place "agents of influence" in foreign governments and international organizations build on a well-established Soviet-era tradition.

Part II: Creating a New Missionary Ideology: The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church (chapters 8–11)

One of the Kremlin's most important new "soft-power" instruments is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Orthodox notions such as "spiritual security" had already been introduced by Putin in 2000 in the National Security Concept. I analyze the close, not to say "cozy" cooperation that in recent years has been established between the Foreign Ministry and the Orthodox Church, which work hand in hand in an offensive against universal human rights in international fora, such as the UN, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe. Claiming the defense of "traditional values," the Kremlin uses the Russian Orthodox Church as an instrument to spread a new, messianic, Russian state ideology, which is homophobic, anti-democratic, and anti-Western.

A new fact is that the Kremlin is trying to expand the Russian Orthodox Church beyond its historical geographical boundaries, making it into a genuine *global* church. By replacing communism with Orthodoxy, a new form of Russian messianism is emerging. This messianism, however, is no less illiberal and anti-Western than the former creed. In this new messianic effort, Russian oligarchs play a major role, acting as active sponsors of the Orthodox Church abroad. In the last chapter of this section, I analyze and summarize the reasons why the Russian Orthodox Church could so easily be instrumentalized by the Kremlin in its ideological war with the West. There are five reasons: first, the fact that the church is not independent but closely linked to the Kremlin and the secret services; second, that the church is not acting as a universalist moral standard-bearer—eventually able and willing to stand up against the state; third, that it is an adversary of freedom of religion—especially of Protestant denominations; fourth, that it is an adversary of Western democracy and universal human rights; and fifth, that it wholeheartedly supports Putin's neoimperialist policy in the Russian Near Abroad—especially in Ukraine.

Part III: Undermining Atlanticism: Building a Strategic Triangle Moscow-Berlin-Paris (chapters 12–16)

In this part I analyze the success of Putin's information war in two leading EU countries: Germany and France. I chose these countries because they constitute the Kremlin's main target in its "Two Triangles" strategy to counter US global influence. The first strategic triangle the Kremlin wants to create consists of an axis of Moscow-Beijing-New Delhi. The second consists of the axis of Moscow-Berlin-Paris. Moscow's propaganda efforts in Europe, therefore, are in particular targeted at these two countries. I will show how Putin's efforts to promote a Moscow-Berlin axis were helped by a wave of "Germanophilia" in Russia and analyze the psychological, historical, cultural, philosophical, geopolitical, and economic reasons for this Germanophilia. These include the Russian admiration for typical "German" virtues and the "double amnesia" in Russia: the fact that Russians try to forget communism as well as bad memories of the Nazi era and want to reconnect with the nineteenth-century friendship between Bismarck's Germany and tsarist Russia. Also noteworthy is the continuing Russian appetite for German ideology. In Putin's Russia, Marx's "German" communism has been replaced by German *Geopolitik*—an influence which can be traced in the writings of the Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin, who has been a great influence on Putin. Russian Germanophilia is met with German Russophilia in Germany: a majority of Germans have developed a positive view of the Russian-German relationship. What is surprising is the broad consensus in the German population: positive views can be found among parties of the right and the left, including the extreme left. What is interesting is the new, pro-Russian stance of extreme-right parties and the intellectual "New Right," which used to be vehemently anti-Russian and anti-Soviet. It is an indication that in recent years the Kremlin has become a beacon for Europe's extreme right. Apart from these ideological and psychological underpinnings, the Russian-German friendship also has solid economic foundations. The growing mutual economic interdependence (in German: *Verflechtung*) has led to the formation of a powerful pro-Russia business lobby in Germany, which influences Germany's foreign policy.

Russian efforts to build a European Moscow-Berlin-Paris triangle implied also a "soft-power offensive" in the direction of the EU's second-leading power: France. Under the presidencies of Jacques Chirac and of Nicolas Sarkozy, the Franco-Russian relationship began to blossom—in particular after Sarkozy's mediation in the Russian war with Georgia, which led to a personal relationship between the leading Russian "tandem" and the French president. Immediate outcomes were the organization in 2010 of a "Russian Year" in France and a "French Year" in Russia and the purchase of the "Mistral" helicopter carrier by Russia—the first important defense purchase ever made by Russia in a NATO country. Another Russian wish was fulfilled when Russia was able to buy a plot near the Eiffel Tower to build an Orthodox seminary and church for its Orthodox hub in Paris. France was even prepared to support the creation of an exclusive EU-Russia security committee, an idea that was supported by Germany. Like in Germany, in France there exists a powerful pro-Russia lobby of French companies with business interests in Russia. Another interesting parallel is that in France, the extreme right Front National has become a staunch supporter of the Kremlin—a fact that can be explained by the ideological affinity between Putin's regime and the West European extreme right.

NOTES

1. Bridget Kendall, "Russian Propaganda Machine 'Worse Than Soviet Union,'" *BBC* (June 5, 2014).
2. Kendall, "Russian Propaganda Machine 'Worse Than Soviet Union.'"
3. David Welch, "Introduction," in *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations*, ed. David Welch (London: Routledge, 2014), 2.
4. Michel Heller, "Analyse politique (physique et métaphysique)," in *La désinformation: arme de guerre*, ed. Vladimir Volkoff (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2004), 167.
5. John Barron, "Analyse par 'l'Ennemi principal,'" in *La désinformation: arme de guerre*, ed. Vladimir Volkoff, 179.
6. The Cheka was an abbreviation of the VChK (ВЧК), the All-Russian Extraordinary Committee (*Vserossiyskaya Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya*), founded by Lenin on December 20, 1917.
7. Michel Heller, "Analyse politique (physique et métaphysique)," 168.
8. Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin: Politics, Culture, and Society, 1921–1929* (London: Routledge, 1998), 81.

9. Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*.
10. The Bolshevik model of a propaganda department with many subdepartments might have inspired the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels, which comprised five departments: radio, press, active propaganda, film, and theater and popular education.
11. Roger B. Nelson, "Hitler's Propaganda Machine," *The New York Times* (June 1933).
12. Nelson, "Hitler's Propaganda Machine."
13. Marquis de Custine, *Lettres de Russie: La Russie en 1839*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 370.
14. Custine, *Lettres de Russie*, 367.
15. Custine, *Lettres de Russie*, 365.
16. Custine, *Lettres de Russie*, 370.
17. An example of this is an article, published in the *Huffington Post* one week after the annexation of the Crimea, in which the author wrote: "The Obama administration has vehemently denied charges that the Ukraine's nascent regime is stock full of neo-fascists despite evidence suggesting otherwise. Such categorical repudiations lend credence to the notions that the U.S. facilitated the anti-Russian cabal's [*sic*] rise."(Cf. Michael Hughes, "The Neo-Nazi Question in Ukraine," *The Huffington Post* (March 11, 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-hughes/the-neo-nazi-question-in_b_4938747.html.) Four days earlier, the BBC correspondent wrote: "[The far right's] role in ousting the president and establishing a new Euromaidan-led government should not be exaggerated. . . . Euromaidan officials are not fascists, nor do fascists dominate the government." (Cf. "Ukraine's Revolution and the Far Right," *BBC* (March 7, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26468720.)
18. Jolanta Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare—The Crimean Operation, A Case Study," *Point of View*, no. 42 (May 2014), Warsaw, Center for Eastern Studies, 5.
19. "Bezhenka iz Slavyanska vspominaet, kak pri ney kaznili malenkogo syna i zhenu opolchentsa," *Pervyy Kanal* (July 12, 2014).
20. During Putin's yearly news conference, Ksenia Sobchak from the Dozhd TV channel explicitly referred to this episode. "I get the sense that federal channels are deliberately fanning hatred in Russian society," she said. "Take for instance the episode about a crucified boy from Slavyansk that was shown on the first federal channel where the state has a controlling stake. This episode . . . was proved to be false, but nobody apologised for it." (Cf. "News Conference of Vladimir Putin," official site of the President of Russia (December 18, 2014), http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/23406/print.)
21. "Tselyu ukrainskoy rakety mog byt samolet Vladimira Putina—Po slovam istochnika v Rosaviatsii, bort rossiyskogo lidera i poterpevshego kryshenie 'Boinga' peresekalish na odnom echelone," *Life News* (July 17, 2014).
22. Cf. Isabelle Mandraud, "Télépoutine," *Le Monde* (February 12, 2015).
23. *Stop Fake*, http://www.stopfake.org.
24. *Stop Fake*, http://www.stopfake.org. Another example of misinformation took place on October 25, 2014—one day before the parliamenary elections in Ukraine, when pro-Russian hackers accessed electronic billboards in the streets of Kyiv and published images of alleged carnage wrought by Ukrainian troops in the east of the country. Russian state-owned Channel One broadcast a report on these photographs, describing them as "horrifying images of the events in Donbas." However, one of the pictures showed mass graves of civilians in Chechnya. The Russian soldier who figured in the original picture, taken in 1995, was removed. (Cf. Carl Schreck, "Ukraine Unspun: Chechnya War Pic Passed Off as Ukraine Atrocity by Hackers, Russian TV," *RFE/RL* (October 27, 2014).)
25. John Lenczowski, *Full Spectrum Diplomacy and Grand Strategy: Reforming the Structure and Culture of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 9.
26. Lenczowski, *Full Spectrum Diplomacy and Grand Strategy*, 10.
27. Colby Hall, "Hillary Clinton: 'America Is Losing' an Information War That 'Al Jazeera Is Winning,'" *Mediaite.com* (March 2, 2011), http://www.mediaite.com/tv/hillary-clinton-claims-al-jazeera-is-winning-an-information-war-that-america-is-losing/.
28. Hall, "Hillary Clinton: 'America Is Losing.'"

29. Josh Halliday, "BBC World Service Fears Losing Information War as Russia Today Ramps Up Pressure," *The Guardian* (December 21, 2014).
30. Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Our Time* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 10.
31. For more on post-imperial pain in post-Soviet Russia, see Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 76–97.
32. On the demise of the Soviet Union as a—late—process of decolonization, see my book *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), chapters 1 and 2.
33. Igor Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna: Razval SSSR* (Moscow: Piter, 2010).
34. Panarin is referring to the Quebec Conference, held in Quebec City between August 17 and August 24, 1943, with the code name Quadrant, in which Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King participated. According to Lawrence James: "[Churchill] was uneasy about Russia's long-term international ambitions. He confided his anxieties to Mackenzie King during the Quebec Conference. Soviet Communism exerted 'influence in all parts of the world' and Churchill believed that Russia was 'powerful enough to more than control the world'" (Lawrence James, *Churchill and Empire: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: Phoenix, 2013), 313). However, the concerns expressed by Churchill on this occasion cannot be taken as proof of a secret Western plan to start an "information war" with the aim of dismembering the Soviet Union.
35. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 12.
36. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 12–13.
37. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 14.
38. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 123.
39. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 123.
40. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 144.
41. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 9.
42. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 247.
43. Panarin, *Pervaya Mirovaya Informatsionnaya Voyna*, 228.
44. Cf. Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 155.
45. Laqueur, *No End to War*, 155.
46. Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thoburn, "Putin's Brain—Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 2 (March/April 2014).
47. Aleksandr Dugin, *Konspirologiya*, available at http://epop.ru/sub/trash/book/konspy.html.
48. Igor Panarin, *Informatsionnaya Voyna, PR i mirovaya politika* (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya, 2014).
49. Panarin, *Informatsionnaya Voyna, PR i mirovaya politika*, 133 (emphasis in original).
50. Panarin, *Informatsionnaya Voyna, PR i mirovaya politika*, 133–134 (emphasis in original).
51. As was made clear in February 2013 by Aleksey Wolin, the Russian deputy minister of mass communication, who explained to journalism students of Moscow State University that "any journalist must understand clearly that it is not his task to make the world better, to bring the light of the truth, to lead humanity into the right direction," adding, "we need to teach students clearly that they are going to work for the boss and the boss should tell them what to write, what not to write and how to write on these or other subjects, and the boss has this right because he pays them." (Cf. "Zaministr svyazi Aleksey Volin ustroil skandal na konferentsii v MGU," *AN-Onlayn* (February 11, 2013).)
52. "RT poluchit na 41% bolshe deneg iz byudzheta," Colta.ru (September 23, 2014). In 2015, RT will receive 15.38 billion rubles (approximately $365.1 million).
53. "RT poluchit na 41% bolshe deneg iz byudzheta," Colta.ru (September 23, 2014). The 2015 budget of Rossiya Segodnya is 6.48 billion rubles (approximately $153.8 million).

Chapter One

Russian Soft Power

Hard Power in a Velvet Glove

INTRODUCTION: US SOFT POWER AND THE FATHER OF PERESTROIKA

During Khrushchev's East-West thaw, US President Dwight Eisenhower made a proposal for something unheard of before: an academic exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. The proposal was accepted by the Soviets and started in September 1958. One of the seventeen students sent by the Central Committee was Aleksandr Yakovlev. Yakovlev studied for one academic year at Columbia University. Later he would become Soviet ambassador to Canada and a close friend and source of inspiration of Mikhail Gorbachev, which earned him the nicknames *godfather of glasnost* and *father of perestroika*. According to his biographer, Christopher Shulgan,

> Yakovlev sometimes denied the influence of the West on his political thinking. At various times, in various ways, he insisted his time in the West did not change him. "It simply did not," he said on one occasion. This attitude seems like revisionism. Yakovlev acknowledged, in more conciliatory moods, that his time in the West influenced his reformist convictions. He was particularly reluctant to discuss America's influence on him. However, his year at Columbia seems certain to have helped forge the unusually democratic sentiments that defined his 1960's work in Propaganda [Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party].[1]

Eisenhower's exchange program was certainly not set up to convert young Soviet academics (which, incidentally, would have proved difficult, since most of Yakovlev's Russian exchange colleagues were KGB spies). Howev-

er, giving young Russians a rare chance of living in the United States for a year exposed them to the "soft power" of American society. In the modern world you don't need to *live* in another country to become attracted by its soft power. Hollywood movies that were watched in the 1950s in the local cinemas of small towns in Africa, Latin America, and Asia did a lot more to propagate the "American way of life"—including its values and aspirations—than any US government–sponsored initiative could have done. The same is true for music and fashion. In a Russian book with the telling title *Glyadya na Zapad* (*Looking West*), the authors describe the attraction of Western pop music and fashion for Russian youth. "At the end of the 1990s," they write, "the West continued to be the most important orientation point in the cultural identification of 'progressive' [Russian] youth."[2]

WHAT IS SOFT POWER?

Soft power is not only an important concept, it is also a rather *new* concept. It was used for the first time by the American political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr., in his book *Bound to Lead*,[3] published in 1990. However, it only became a new catchword in the international political discourse after the publication, in 2004, of Nye's book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.[4] From that moment, "soft power" began to be used by a broader public. The new concept evoked what Germans call an *Aha Erlebnis*: it seemed to express exactly the meaning of an existing phenomenon for which one had not yet found an adequate description. Nye's introduction of the concept "soft power" resembled to some extent Freud's invention of the word "unconscious" in the nineteenth century. This, too, was a phenomenon many already had felt existed but for which they had not yet found an adequate expression. Why did this new concept of "soft power" find a worldwide reception so quickly? A key may well be found in the subtitle Joseph Nye gave his 2004 book: *The Means to Success in World Politics*. He presented soft power as a highly valuable and profitable asset for policy makers because of its purported impact on the success or failure of a country's foreign policy objectives. In the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union, it seemed one of the decisive factors that had contributed to the West's final prevalence over the Soviet bloc.

But what exactly *is* soft power? According to Nye, it is

> the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced. America has long had a great deal of soft power. Think of the impact of Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms in Europe at the end of World War II; of young people behind the Iron Curtain listening to American music and news on Radio Free Europe; of Chinese students symbolizing their protests in Tiananmen Square by creating a replica of the Statue of Liberty.[5]

The dynamic force of soft power, explained Nye, is *attraction*. This is, indeed, very different from more classical definitions of power. The sociologist Max Weber, for instance, defined power as "any opportunity to impose one's own will within a social relationship, even in the face of resistance, no matter what might be the basis of that opportunity."[6] For Weber, the essence of power is that one person prevails over the other *even in the face of resistance*. In a more extreme way, the same is expressed in the definition of power given by Mao Zedong, who said that "power grows out of the barrel of a gun." The characteristic of *soft* power is that there exists no resistance needing to be overcome, and certainly no guns have to be used: others adapt to our objectives because they feel sympathetic towards us and have interiorized our objectives as their own. This interiorization is based on the attraction of our political ideals and actual policies. On a lower level, soft power is based on the attraction of a country's culture, art, language, music, fashion, landscape, or cuisine.

Nye's concept has been criticized from many sides. David Marquand, for instance, called it "a slippery concept; and in real life the distinction between it and 'hard power' is apt to slither into a bog of semantic confusion."[7] Marquand added: "Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the twentieth century's supreme exemplar of soft power in action, but as he himself acknowledged, his success in using it depended on British willingness to allow him to do so. He would not have got very far if India had been ruled by the Nazis."[8] This last observation may be true; however, it does not invalidate the concept. Its essential characteristic remains: that soft power is based on attraction, on exemplarity, on its model function for others, making it a source of inspiration beyond national borders.

SOFT POWER IS A VARIABLE CURRENCY

Soft power is generally considered a characteristic *par excellence* of Western societies, especially of the United States. We should not forget, however, that the—now defunct—Soviet Union also had, in its time, its own soft-power sources—a fact of which Nye is aware. "In terms of soft power," he wrote, "following World War II communist ideology was attractive in Europe because of its resistance to fascism and in the Third World because of its identification with the popular movement toward decolonization."[9] Successes in space exploration also played a role in boosting Soviet soft power. According to Innokenty Adyasov, a Russian analyst, "Yury Gagarin was the best instrument of Soviet soft power: never, perhaps, in the post-war world

was sympathy towards the USSR so great and here also the personality of the earth's first cosmonaut had an impact."[10] This soft-power reservoir, however, was depleted when the Soviet leadership decided in 1968 to crush the Prague Spring and communism as an ideology gradually lost its appeal throughout the world. Soviet soft power reached its nadir in 1991 when the Soviet Union broke up and communism lost its status as official state ideology.

In 2009 Sergey Karaganov, a Russian analyst, wrote that Russia had to use "hard power, including military force, because it lives in a much more dangerous world and has no one to hide behind from it, and because it has little soft power—that is social, cultural, political and economic attractiveness."[11] And Konstantin Kosachev, a Russian Duma member, wrote: "We can say that practically the whole post-war period of our relationship with the U.S. and the West . . . took place under the banner of soft power. And clearly we should admit that, apparently, we were not up to the challenge—however, as concerns hard power, the field of *hard security* [English in the original] we were inferior to no one."[12] This assessment is shared by Joseph Nye in *The Future of Power*. "In terms of soft power," writes Nye, "despite the attractiveness of traditional Russian culture, Russia has little global presence."[13] Russians envied and resented Western soft power while at the same time criticizing it for its supposed hypocrisy. Yury Kaslev, for instance, in a book on the Helsinki process published in 1980, writes:

> In general, the discussion on human rights, artificially imposed by the American delegation during the meeting in Belgrado, showed, in the first place, that this was done for propagandistic reasons in the framework of the well-known policy of the administration in Washington to proclaim the United States "the champion of human rights in the world," secondly, that the United States in practice is not respecting human rights at home . . . , [and] was trying to use the human rights topic as a means to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.[14]

In the 1970s and 1980s Soviet Russia was clearly on the defensive. However, soft power is not an asset that can be taken for granted. After the subprime crisis in 2008, which was followed by a worldwide financial and economic crisis, Western, and especially US, soft-power attractiveness suffered a severe blow. A Japanese commentator wrote: "The Japanese are less and less attracted by American culture. American *soft power* seems to have diminished and according to specialists such a phenomenon has never been known before."[15] American soft power, he continued, "is diminishing progressively in the archipelago, although for the Japanese the United States represented a dream, with its technology, its democracy, its egalitarian relationships between couples. They were not only attracted by the 'city on the hill,' but also by its counter-culture, for instance the protests against the war in Vietnam."[16] This sentiment that US soft power has declined in the past decade was also expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who said that due to the war in Iraq, "I do think that we have unfortunately delegitimized ourselves."[17] He added: "Then, the American dream was widely shared. Today, it isn't."[18]

Similar observations were made in the French daily *Le Monde*, but this time on the declining soft power of Europe. Under the title "Europe No Longer Makes Asians Dream,"[19] the story explains that Asian countries—due to the never-ending euro crisis—began to question Europe's proud soft-power model: European integration. The fact that the EU received the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize probably did little to compensate for this loss of soft power. Even if the combined soft-power potential of the United States and Europe still remains considerable, one has to admit that it is a far cry from its strength at the beginning of the 1990s. In this period the Soviet empire crumbled, the United States organized a broad international coalition under the aegis of the UN against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and in Maastricht the European Community transformed itself into a "European Union"—ready to expand with fourteen new countries and to make an important next step towards integration with the introduction of a single currency. "The end of history," announced in 1989 by Francis Fukuyama in an article in *The National Interest* and further elaborated by him in a book in 1992,[20] was in fact nothing else than a celebration of the West's soft-power dominance at that specific historical moment. Fukuyama could not imagine that any other political and economic system could, in the future, compete with the West. He was wrong. Now, in the present day, we are witnessing the emergence of competing political models, of which Putinism is a leading example. These models, although superficially resembling the Western model and presenting themselves as democratic market economies, are, in fact, authoritarian semi-state economies. Competition from these alternative models is taking place at a historical moment when the West's soft-power dominance is no longer self-evident. According to Moisés Naím, "Soft power is, at the very least, a volatile concept, highly vulnerable to short-term twists in world affairs, in an environment where news travels more rapidly than ever."[21] We should, indeed, not forget that soft power is a currency that—as any currency—has no constant and stable value but undergoes important variations.

HOW TO MEASURE SOFT POWER?

One of the problems with Nye's concept of soft power was that it remained, indeed, a rather vague concept. Jeanne Wilson spoke about "the amorphous nature of soft power as a concept, the absence of a set methodology for measurement, a lack of comparable data, and the inherently subjective nature

of constructing indicators."[22] What also did not help was that Nye broadened his concept over the years. In his book *The Future of Power* (2008) he added economic resources and even military power as possible soft-power assets (the latter in the form of offering training facilities and disaster relief). The method most frequently used to measure soft power was through opinion polls. This was how Anholt-GfK Roper, for instance, composed its annual *Overall Nation Brands Index.* In the index for 2010, the United States ranked number one, followed by Germany, France, and the United Kingdom in second, third, and fourth places, respectively. Russia came in at twenty-first place, just before Luxembourg and China.

A more elaborate and objective method to measure soft power was developed by the London-based Institute for Government. In its 2010 report it weighed a number of objective criteria concerning culture, government, diplomacy, education, and business/innovation.[23] The outcomes of these objective criteria were complemented by a subjective evaluation by an experts' panel. In the resulting *Soft Power Index Results*, twenty-six countries were analyzed. The same four countries came on top as in the Overall Nations Brands Index, but in a different order: France was number one, the United Kingdom second, the United States third, and Germany fourth. Russia came in at the twenty-sixth and last place.[24] In the 2011 report the method was further fine-tuned and improved. Now the United States came in at number one, followed respectively by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Russia went down to the twenty-eighth place (of a total of thirty countries).[25] However, the author of the report warned against too much optimism. He wrote that

> Observed in isolation, the results of the index might produce a false sense of security for the world's developed countries. But comparing the recent approaches to soft power taken by the established and emerging powers throws up some interesting questions, namely how long can the West's soft-power hegemony last? In the current context of sustained fiscal austerity for the West, soft-power assets have been among the most tempting budget lines for governments to cut. [At the same time,] emerging powers have been investing in their capacity to generate and project soft power.[26]

"MYAGKAYA SILA": THE HISTORY OF THE SOFT-POWER DEBATE IN RUSSIA

In Russia the concept "soft power" attracted only little attention at first. Unlike in China, Nye's book *Bound to Lead*, in which the concept made its first appearance, was not translated. According to Jeanne Wilson, "The East-view Universal Database, the largest repository of journals and newspapers available in the Russian language does not indicate a reference to soft power until 2000."[27] In the period 2000–2012, this database listed 334 articles that referred to "soft power" in the text and 32 articles that contained "soft power" in the title.[28] Neither Putin during his first two presidencies nor Medvedev during his presidency seemed to have used the concept.

Several factors point to why in Russia the debate on "soft power"—in Russian, *myagkaya sila*—started rather late. First was the fact that a concept such as "soft power" was completely at odds with the Russian tradition and the Russian way of thinking. In tsarist Russia as well as in the Soviet Union, power tended to be unilaterally defined as *zhestkaya sila*, or "hard power." The foreign policy of both regimes was characterized by their emphasis on military power while internally the authorities often resorted to brutal violence and police repression. To understand the new concept of "soft power," a complete reversal of these traditional ways of thinking was necessary.

A second reason for the late reception of the "soft-power" concept was the fact that Russians considered "soft power" a typical *American* concept. From Russia's perspective, it looked like a new fad, invented by American political scientists, which had, maybe, relevance for the United States but no direct implications for Russia's situation. A real interest in the new concept arose only after the "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space: the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine—popular movements which swept away corrupt and undemocratic regimes. At this point, the Kremlin woke up to the new reality that soft power could, eventually, be used as a very effective weapon.

HOW DID RUSSIA ASSESS ITS OWN SOFT-POWER POTENTIAL?

The color revolutions were a watershed moment in the Kremlin's thinking on soft power. Russian politicians and political analysts suddenly recognized that in the modern, globalized, and interconnected world of the twenty-first century, characterized by a growing role for the internet and social media, soft power had become an important strategic asset. For the Kremlin it was a rude awakening. Observations about the dire state of Russian soft power, made earlier in the West, now also began to surface in the Russian media. Alexander Lukin, director of the Center for East Asian Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), for instance, wrote:

> The Soviet Union offered an alternative to bourgeois civilization and quite a number of people would long view it as a rising ideal society, for which they were ready to sacrifice their lives. Today's Russia does not offer anything—apart from its mineral resources—that would deserve at least some interest, to say nothing of sacrificing one's life. Its soft power, nonaggressive attraction, and moral and ideological influence have dropped to zero. It does not promote either a democratic ideal (similar to the United States) or a fundamentalist

> ideal (similar to some Islamic countries and movements). It does not serve as a model of successful integration on the basis of democracy (like the EU) or a pattern of speedy development (like China that has aroused global interest with the so-called "Beijing Consensus" as an alternative to the "Washington Consensus"). Russia is not a crucial and useful ally for anyone (the way Japan is for the U.S.) or anyone's bitter enemy (like Iran is for the U.S.). Naturally, someone can say that the world has a large number of countries that do not offer anything special to mankind (e.g. the small states of Europe). But they do not claim the role of independent centers of power, to say nothing of being separate civilizations, since they are part of the European one. In the meantime, an attempt to integrate Russia into Europe flopped, and that is why Russia must look for ways to consolidate its own soft power and seek things that it could offer to the rest of the world, albeit not on the Soviet scale of the past.[29]

Lukin's gloomy but realistic assessment was that Russia's soft power had "dropped to zero." While Lukin still stuck to Nye's definition that soft power is the power of attraction, this was no longer the case for two other Russian authors, Latukhina and Glikin, who defined soft power as

> the ability to influence the development of a political situation abroad with the help of specially deployed experts and polit-technologists—sort of agents of influence. Russian political scientists like to give the example of the local branches of the Soros Foundation and the Carnegie Center, which are in an effective way active throughout the world, "spreading democracy." We don't have such agents of influence in whom we can put our hope and whom we could finance. Russian soft power is completely powerless, we might even say that such a power, in general, does not exist.[30]

While these authors shared Lukin's observation that Russian soft power "dropped to zero," writing that it simply "does not exist," something else here catches the eye. It is the explicit redefinition of soft power, which is reduced to a simple tool of manipulation in the hands of hostile governments. American NGOs are considered to be "agents of influence" sent abroad by "polit-technologists." An "agent of influence" is defined by *Wikipedia* as "an agent of some stature who uses his or her position to influence public opinion or decision making to produce results beneficial to the country whose intelligence service operates the agent." Soft power here is put into a conspirational context and becomes an instrument in the hands of hostile secret services. Also the use of the word "polit-technologists" is telling. In Putin's Russia, "polit-technologists" are those experts who, like Vladislav Surkov, the former deputy head of the presidential administration, manipulate the political system, including the elections, in the Kremlin's favor.

THE TRIPLE REDUCTION: HOW THE "SOFT-POWER" CONCEPT WAS REDEFINED IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

This trend of changing the content and meaning of Nye's soft-power concept has become mainstream in contemporary Russia. The concept underwent, in fact, a *triple* reduction. The first step was to reduce the broad concept of soft power to one of its constituent parts: public diplomacy. This means that soft power—which in Nye's definition is a power emanating from *both* civil society and the state—was reduced to an instrument used by the state to influence foreign governments and manipulate foreign public opinion. The fact that it is a country's civil society in particular that produces soft power was lost out of sight. By reducing soft power exclusively to a policy of the state, conducted with the aim to enhance its hard power, the *focus* of soft power also was changed.

This was the second reduction: from a non-zero-sum game, soft power became a zero-sum game with winners and losers. In Nye's definition, the soft power of one country does not hinder or diminish the soft power of another country. The four countries that are the world's soft-power champions, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, do not fight a "soft-power war," nor do they "attack" the soft power of their "rivals" (assuming for a moment that this would be possible). The only way to become number one in the league of "soft-power champions" is to become more attractive. In this beauty contest, you don't become more beautiful by denigrating or attacking the other participants. You win because you have the best qualifications.

The reduction of soft power to political diplomacy, conducted by the state, led to an additional—third—reduction of Nye's original concept. Because the Kremlin regarded soft power exclusively as a constituent part of an overall hard-power game, the meaning of soft power became totally inverted, and even illegal activities, such as bribery and espionage abroad, could be presented as useful instruments of a country's "soft-power arsenal."

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S CONCEPT OF "SOFT POWER": HARD POWER IN A VELVET GLOVE

These three reductions of Nye's soft-power concept can clearly be observed in the way in which Vladimir Putin describes "soft power" in a manifesto for his third presidency published in the *Moskovskie Novosti* in February 2012:

> There is a concept, such as soft power, a complex of instruments and methods to achieve foreign policy objectives without the use of weapons, which include the use of information and other means. Unfortunately, these methods are often used to cultivate and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, ma-

> nipulation of public opinion, [and] direct intervention in the internal politics of sovereign governments. The distinction must be made clearly between where there is freedom of expression and normal political activity, and where illegal instruments of "soft power" are used. . . . However, the activity of "pseudo-NGOs" [and] other structures which, with outside support, have the aim to destabilize the situation in this or that country, is unacceptable.[31]

Putin spoke here about the soft power of the West and the activities of what he called "pseudo-NGOs" working within Russia and receiving financial support from the West. He could not believe that the activities of these NGOs could be inspired by a genuine desire to promote the cause of democracy, to protect human rights, or to work for an independent judiciary. For him, these NGOs were all "foreign agents."[32]

All the elements of the redefined, reduced version of Nye's soft-power concept are present in Putin's text. Soft power is defined as "a complex of instruments and methods to achieve foreign policy objectives." Soft power is conceived, therefore, as an exclusively *state* affair. Soft power is for him also an integral part of a *hard*-power game. The message is that Russia should develop its own soft-power arsenal in order to prevail in this zero-sum power game. The weapons in this soft-power game include "the use of information and other means." For Putin, the former spy master, "information" has a broad meaning, and it includes, undoubtedly, the intelligence of the secret services. This vision is shared by a Russian analyst, who wrote: "Putin emphasizes that his understanding of 'soft power' includes, quite precisely, the use of illegal instruments, 'undercover work' (*rabotu pod prikrytiem*)."[33] On September 3, 2012, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev reiterated in a speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry the need for Russia to further develop its soft-power tools. This "may look to an outside observer like an optimistic signal and a long-awaited change in Russia's foreign policy," wrote Dumitru Minzarari. "This benign view, however, could not be more wrong. Rather, the Kremlin is seeking to exploit the Western concept of 'soft power' . . . and reframing it as a euphemism for coercive policy and economic arm-twisting."[34]

We find this reframing of the Western "soft-power" concept already in the "Basic Guidelines Concerning the Policy of the Russian Federation in the Sphere of International Cultural-Humanitarian Cooperation," an official document published in 2010 as a complement to the Foreign Policy Concept of 2008. These "Basic Guidelines" begin with the observation that "culture, in the realization of Russia's foreign policy strategy, plays a special role."[35] "It is increasingly evident," the text continues, "that the global competition takes on a cultural dimension. Among the fundamental games in the international arena the struggle for cultural influence is becoming more intense."[36] Therefore, write the authors, the government should not only "actively support the competitivity of the [different] branches of the national culture" but also take care that an "objective and favorable image of our country" will be formed, that "the number of Russia's friends grows," and that "anti-Russian political and ideological attitudes are neutralized."[37] According to the guidelines, "Cultural diplomacy becomes [also] increasingly important in efforts with the aim of actively counteracting the propaganda campaign [conducted] under the banner 'containment' of Russia."[38]

What immediately catches the eye here is the martial, almost warlike terminology that is used. One speaks about a "struggle" that is "becoming more intense," about "anti-Russian attitudes" that should be "neutralized," about a Western "propaganda campaign" that should be "counteracted." Apparently, the authors of this paper have sought their inspiration in Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" rather than in Joseph Nye's soft-power concept. The authors claim to promote an "objective and favorable image" of Russia. A few lines further, they make this "objective image" more explicit, writing: "Making use of specific forms and methods of influencing public opinion, cultural diplomacy, as no other instrument of 'soft power,' convincingly expresses the rebirth of the Russian Federation as a free and democratic society."[39] The problem, however, is that neither foreigners, nor many Russians, consider today's Russian Federation "a free and democratic society." And only a few will agree with the statement that "Russia's dynamic cultural life [takes place] in conditions of pluralism and free creativity, pluralism of opinions, and absence of censorship."[40]

Putin, however, considers the negative image of Russia in the West not as a consequence of the immanent flaws of the Russian political system but rather as a result of actions of Western governments and the Western media to blacken Russia's reputation. In a speech to the ambassadors in July 2012, he said that

> Russia's image abroad is formed not by us and as a result it is often distorted and does not reflect the real situation in our country or Russia's contribution to global civilisation, science and culture. Our country's policies often suffer from a one-sided portrayal these days. Those who fire guns and launch air strikes here or there are the good guys, while those who warn of the need for restraint and dialogue are for some reason at fault. But our fault lies in our failure to adequately explain our position. This is where we have gone wrong.[41]

In the same vein, he stated in his concluding speech at the 2014 Valdai Club conference: "Total control of the global mass media has made it possible when desired to portray white as black and black as white."[42]

For the Kremlin, the solution seemed simple: Russian state agencies should get the task to debunk Western misinformation and to provide "real,"

"truthful" information. Giving truthful information on Russia is certainly desirable. As Greg Simons remarked, "Truth is the best propaganda and lies are the worst. To be persuasive, we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful. It is as simple as that."[43] He added: "One of the problems encountered by Russian public diplomacy relates to the credibility, and therefore to the believability of the messenger. This is especially the case if the messenger is tied to the Russian authorities, owing in no small part to the strong anti-democratic reputation that has been gained in the post-Yeltsin era (from the year 2000)."[44]

NOTES

1. Christopher Shulgan, *The Soviet Ambassador: The Making of the Radical behind Perestroika* (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart, 2008), 291.
2. Hilari Pilkington, "Pereosmyslenie 'Zapada': Stil i Muzyka v Kulturnoy Praktike Rossiyskoy Molodezhi," in Hilari Pilkington, Elena Omelchenko, Moya Flynn, Uliana Bludina, and Elena Starkova, *Glyadya na Zapad: Kulturnaya Globalizatsiya i Rossiyskie Molodezhnye Kultury* (Saint Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2004), 186.
3. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
4. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
5. Nye, *Soft Power*, x. In *Bound to Lead*, Nye spoke also about "co-optive power": "Co-optive power is the ability of a nation to structure a situation so that other nations develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with one's own nation. This type of power tends to arise from resources as cultural and ideological attraction as well as the rules and institutions of international regimes" (191).
6. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Erster Halbband, herausgegeben von Johannes Winckelmann (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1964), 38 (my translation).
7. David Marquand, *The End of the West: The Once and Future Europe* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 154.
8. Marquand, *The End of the West*, 155.
9. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 168–169. Cf. Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 188–189: "In the early postwar period, the Soviet Union profited greatly from such strategic software as Communist ideology, the myth of inevitability, and transnational Communist institutions."
10. Innokenty Adyasov, "Vozmozhnaya li rossiyskaya 'myagkaya sila'?" *Regnum* (May 7, 2012).
11. Sergei Karaganov, "Russia in Euro-Atlantic Region," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (November 24, 2009). English version available at http://karaganov.ru/en/news/98.
12. Konstantin Kosachev, "'Myagkaya Sila' kak faktor sblizheniya?" (May 18, 2012), http://baltija.eu/news/read/24577.
13. Nye, *The Future of Power*, 170, 209. In this book Nye introduces the new concept of "smart power," which combines hard- and soft-power strategies.
14. Y. B. Kashlev, *Razryadka v Evrope: Ot Helsinki k Madridu* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1980), 78.
15. "L'Amérique ne fait plus rêver" (originally published in *Tokyo Shimbun*), translated in *Courrier International* no. 1129 (June 21–27, 2012).
16. "L'Amérique ne fait plus rêver."
17. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "U.S. Fate Is in U.S. Hands," TNI Interview, *The National Interest* no. 121 (September/October 2012), 12.
18. Brzezinski, "U.S. Fate Is in U.S. Hands." 14.
19. François Bougon, "L'Europe ne fait plus rêver les Asiatiques," *Le Monde* (July 1–2, 2012).
20. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London and New York: Penguin, 1992).
21. Moisés Naím, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 148.
22. Jeanne L. Wilson, "Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China," *Social Science Research Network* (August 2012), 3, available at http://ssrn.com/abstract=2134457.
23. Jonathan McClory, *The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power* (London: Institute for Government, 2010). The culture subindex includes measures such as the annual number of incoming tourists, the global reach of the country's language, and Olympic sporting successes. The government subindex gives measures for the quality and effectiveness of the system of governance as well as for individual liberty and political freedom. The diplomatic subindex includes measures for the global perception of a country and its ability to shape a positive national narrative abroad. The education subindex gives measures for a country's ability to attract foreign students and the quality of its universities. The business/innovation subindex includes figures for openness and innovation, competitiveness, and corruption.
24. McClory, *The New Persuaders*, 5.
25. Jonathan McClory, *The New Persuaders II: A 2011 Global Ranking of Soft Power* (London: Institute for Government, 2011), 15.
26. McClory, *The New Persuaders II*, 20.
27. Jeanne L. Wilson, "Soft Power," 5–6.
28. Jeanne L. Wilson, "Soft Power," 6.
29. Alexander Lukin, "From a Post-Soviet to a Russian Foreign Policy," *Russia in Global Affairs*, no. 4 (October–December 2008), available at http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/print/number/n_11886.
30. Kira Latukhina and Maksim Glikin, "Politicheskie Zhivotnye," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (April 1, 2005).
31. Vladimir Putin, "Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir" (Russia and the Changing World), *Moskovskie Novosti* (February 27, 2012).
32. It is interesting to compare Putin's attitude towards foreign-government-funded agencies with that of the Indian leader Nehru. John Kenneth Galbraith, who was US ambassador to India at the beginning of the 1960s, told how Sargent Shriver, the founding head of the US Peace Corps, came to visit Nehru. "I warned him," wrote Galbraith, "that in the Indian mood of the time, and that of Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, the Peace Corps would be regarded as a rather obvious example of the American search for influence." Shriver presented to Nehru a project which would "help the most needy of the Indian needy" in Punjab. "When he [Nehru] eventually replied, it was to ask why the enterprise had to be so small, why it had to be limited to only one Indian state. He thought the idea excellent, regretted only the evident limitations." John Kenneth Galbraith, *Name-Dropping: From F.D.R. On* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 123–124.
33. Mikhail Moskvin-Tarkhanov, "Vladimir Putin i 'myagkaya sila,'" *Svobodnyy Mir* (February 27, 2012).
34. Dumitru Minzarari, "Soft Power with an Iron Fist: Putin Administration to Change the Face of Russia's Foreign Policy toward Its Neighbors," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 163 (September 10, 2012). We should emphasize, however, that this interpretation of soft power is that of the dominant *siloviki* faction of the political elite. Igor Yurgens, for example, the chairman of the board of the Institute of Contemporary Development, a liberal pro-business think tank, wrote: "Even if we . . . can tell the world about our culture, [and] historical heritage, we will not be attractive in Europe and North America if we have not completed the development of our democratic institutions and structures of civil society. Only these can become true ambassadors of Russian culture in the world." (Cf. Igor Yurgens, "Zhestkiy vyzov 'myagkoy sily,'" *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (September 16, 2011).)