THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF THE MASS MEDIA IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: COLD WAR VERSUS CONTEMPORARY STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

The manner in which the Russian Federation (henceforth often referred to here as the 'RF') utilises the power of information in compliance with its foreign policy objectives has become a frequently-discussed issue in the last few years. This debate has been reignited by the significant role that the Russian mass media played throughout the Ukrainian conflict which broke out in 2013 (Badrak and Kozlov, 2016; Carpenter, 2017; Mölder and Sazonov, 2018; Pynnöniemi and Rácz, 2016).[1] Since then, numerous works have emerged which have striven to assess the character of the Russian approach to the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media on the information-psychological level. In the backdrop of this debate, two dissonant strands have formed in this research area. The first group of authors has referred to the current Russian *modus operandi* in this field as a new phenomenon (Giles, 2016b; Rutenberg, 2017; Tolz and Teper, 2018; Bērziņš, 2019). On the other hand, some papers assert the fact that, in recent times, Russia first and foremost has revived old practices that were developed and tested during the Cold War period, thereby neglecting, to some extent, any claims of a new phenomenon (Ajir and Vailliant, 2018; Cull *et al*, 2017; Snegovaya, 2015; Kuzio, 2019). As a result, two more or less conflicting paradigms concerning the nature of the current Russian approach to the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media have been established in the academic discourse. Despite the increased interest in the issue, a study is still missing which would offer a consistent and systematic analysis, and which would strive to contribute to a solution for these contradictions stemming from the associated literature. This encourages further research to be undertaken which may lead to a better conceptual understanding of how the strategy behind the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media on the information-psychological level which was employed by Soviet Russia during the Cold War period differs from the strategic toolset being utilised nowadays by the RF.

In an attempt to address this lacuna, the article uses a diachronic perspective to carry out a variation-finding comparative analysis which will

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[1]   This paper uses a generally accepted definition of the term 'mass media' to refer to a set of various forms of media-based technology which allows mass communication, or transferring information content to the wider general public.

reveal the essential differences between the Soviet and current Russian strategies behind the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media on the information-psychological level. This perspective enables us to compare the approaches that have evolved over time in terms of Russian strategic thinking and generate a set of differentiating attributes which could determine the character of individual strategic designs. The article sets up four categories that outline the framework for analysis: a) conceptions (creating the rationale for mass media employment); b) mechanisms (techniques of employment within individual conceptions); c) methods of implementation (the application of mechanisms in practice); and d) goals (representing the expected outcomes). These categories are derived from the general definition of 'strategy' that is understood as referring to a plan (involving conception and mechanisms) which delineates the manner (involving methods of implementation) in which one uses their best means (via instruments and/or resources) to achieve the desired end (goals) (Mintzberg *et al,* 2002; Freedman, 2015). This procedure offers a structured examination of the crucial components constituting a strategic design and makes it possible to generate differentiating attributes in regard to the fundamental layers of a strategy formulation. In this manner, the article explains the variation in the characters of those approaches that have been examined against the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media as a direct consequence of a unique configuration in the structure of individual strategic designs. In that respect, the article suggests that different configurations for the crucial layers of a strategy formulation produce varying sets of differentiating attributes that, in turn, provide the strategic designs with specific characteristic features, and yield qualitatively distinctive modalities.

The article is comprised of four chapters matching the categories that have been listed above for analysis, with all of the chapters being structured in the same way. Each chapter begins with a description of the relevant component that forms part of the Soviet strategy in terms of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media in the appropriate category. The description is used to generate specific differentiating attribute(s) which serve to determine the character of the strategy for the corresponding layer. This step is immediately followed by the same technique that is employed to derive differentiating attribute(s) which serve to determine the character of those strategic modalities that have been utilised by the Russian Federation in recent times at the equivalent level. The

comprehensive sets of differentiating attributes which determine the variation in the characters of individual strategic designs are presented and interpreted in the discussion which concludes this article.

1. CONCEPTIONS

The strategy that involves the instrumentalisation of mass media in foreign policy which was used by Soviet Russia throughout the Cold War era, the rudiments of which were laid down in the late 1940s, was based on the concept of psychological warfare (Nietzel, 2016). From a holistic perspective, psychological warfare includes political, diplomatic, economic, and military actions, along with mass media information streaming in the enterprise to enforce one's will over that of the opponent, embracing the resultant power relations in the form of domination (Smith, 1953). In reference to psychological warfare, mass media is only one of a variety of tools that can produce an influence on the thoughts and actions of the target audience, whether they are meant to be political leadership members, specific segments within a population, or the general masses (Finch, 2000). Psychological warfare which has been conducted through mass media incorporates techniques to influence the belief system of the target foreign audience, along with its emotions, motivations, or reasoning, to induce confessions, reinforce attitudes, and provoke shifts in human behaviour that may be favourable to the state entity that employs this technique. Through this means, psychological warfare is meant to interfere with mental perception by intervening in the cognitive processes of the target audience (Doob, 1949). The key to understanding the Soviet strategy of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media is embedded in Marxist-Leninist ideology which grew for decades, inseparable from the concept of psychological warfare (Thompson, 1989; Pechatnov, 2001). For this reason, in the Cold War period, psychological warfare was understood as a means of non-military confrontation which had a substantially limited but still offensive nature. The offensiveness was not imminent; instead, it was hidden deep in the very essence of Marxism-Leninism, and it consisted of the effort to little-by-little strike at public discourse in the target countries and preponderate political support on the side of Soviet Russia or its sympathising groups (CIA – Office of Soviet Analysis, 1955). Mass media became an instrument that could be used to enforce an ideological struggle by encouraging dichotomised reality that portrayed a world which had been divided into two camps: the Soviet camp of social-economic equality, democracy, and peace against the Western world of the bourgeoisie, with its autocracy, conflicts for resources, and

war. Russian media promoted the vision of socio-economic order that was provided by Marxism-Leninism and defamed any other competing alternative (Bessonova, 2010). In short, the Soviet strategy, which was based on the concept of psychological warfare, was characterised by two mutually related differentiating attributes: an overarching ideology with a limited (but still) offensive character.

After the end of the Cold War, and with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rejection of Marxism-Leninism as a dominant theory which could shape the Russian worldview, the expert community in the newly-established multi-ethnic and multicultural Russian Federation formed an innovative perspective on Russian identity and its role in the changing international environment, which was termed the Russian World (Suslov, 2017).[2] Against this background, Russia started a process of forging a national identity by (re)constructing the discursive boundaries of nationhood. It did so by invoking a particular vision of what constitutes a new imagined nationalised political community and by promoting this amongst the population through speeches, interviews, various state agencies, and within the wider media landscape (Bolin, Jordan, and Ståhlberg, 2016). The foreign policy conception that was based on the Russian World construct, which has been saturated by neoconservative values with nationalistic overtones, has constituted a new ideational framework and has become the cornerstone of Russian soft power (Laruelle, 2015a; Suslov, 2017; Tiido, 2015). However, Russian political leaders have primarily interpreted soft power in a very instrumental manner (Laruelle, 2015a; Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015). As is maintained by the broader definition that distinguishes between the state-led category and the civil-society-led category, soft power can intentionally be employed by state institutions in compliance with foreign policy goals. Therefore, a country may achieve the outcomes it wants not solely because others admire its values, but also by deliberately setting an agenda (Burlinova 2015; Watson 2012). In the realm of international politics, the soft power, which combines the Russian World and neoconservative values, has retaken the role of an overarching ideology. This ideology has enabled an increase of

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[2]   The Russian World incorporates the following population segments: a) ethnic Russians who are living within the borders of the RF; b) residents of the RF who are not ethnic Russians; c) ethnic Russians who are living outside the RF's territorial borders; and d) non-Russians who are living outside the RF but who associate themselves with its cultural-historical heritage (Zevelev, 2001; Tiido, 2015).

Russia's foreign policy influence by employing enough vague and allur-ing combinations of cultural and value-based agendas with the potential to address sympathising groups among foreign populations no matter in which part of the world they live (Suslov, 2017; Wilson, 2015). Russia resorts to this ideological framework to bring together the interests of various ideationally associated groups, to encourage new or closer coop-eration with other states or sub-state political entities, and to enhance sup-port or legitimacy for particular actions (Lenczowski, 2009). With respect to mass media streaming, Russia interconnects the cultural value-based agendas with the effects of the expansion of large media corporations into foreign media markets (Laruelle, 2015a; Dimitrova *et al,* 2017). Thanks to this, soft power which can be channelled through mass media assets is treated rather as a source of international connections that help to facilitate an association with Russian interpretations of reality in the most prone segments within the target foreign audience (Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2017). In contrast to the role of Marxism-Leninism in the Cold War era, this conception is not engaged simply to combat hostile regimes, but to build transnational communities that are related to the RF by means of shared values, culture, and traditions (Keating and Kaczmarska, 2019). In this regard, the function of the current ideological framework, which is based on an amalgam of the Russian World and neoconservative val-ues, fundamentally differs from the role of Marxism-Leninism in Cold War-era psychological warfare. As a result, the current Russian strategy, which is based on the concept of soft power, has been characterised by the following differentiating attributes: as an overarching ideology with a non-aggressive unifying nature.

Following the war in Georgia in 2008, experts in Russian military circles fully entered the debate. Russia has developed a renewed and progres-sive approach that should help it to win contemporary interstate con-flicts, those in which a military confrontation has been marginalised to minimum rates, and non-military means have become the primary instruments of attacking the enemy to tamp down its ability to resist: new-generation warfare in its essence (Ermus and Salum, 2016; Rotărescu, 2015). As a consequence, Russia integrated information measures into the essential components of its contemporary warfare alongside mili-tary force, special forces missions, or economic measures (Hellman and Wagnsson, 2017; Pynnöniemi, 2018). This gives Russia an offensive capacity in times in which the public tolerance of military intervention

has rapidly decreased (Franke, 2015; Fedyk, 2017). In this context, the conception of information warfare provides a framework which can serve to drive the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media that fits with the changing Russian attitude to international conflict resolution which is provided by this sort of militaristic reasoning (Cockrell, 2017). The concept of information warfare is now understood in a purely offensive and utilitarian manner. This approach is deprived of any ideological obligations, as it is driven strictly by the principle of effectiveness (Thomas, 2016). Mass media assets are activated *ad hoc*, and with varying levels of intensity they are used to disseminate customised narratives that suit the desired intentions which themselves can differ significantly in individual media markets (Braghiroli and Makarychev, 2017; Ellehuus, 2020; Mankoff, 2020). The aim is not to provide a sole, unified narrative structure as given by Marxism-Leninism or the Russian World construct, but rather to create several customised narratives in order to give rise to the clashing preferences of different segments within a population in target states. Different audiences are targeted with different messages, as different societies can be fragmented by different issues (Fedchenko, 2016). Therefore, the contemporary strategic design of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media that has been built up in the concept of information warfare that is rooted in the militaristic thinking that has been detailed above makes it possible for Russia to carry out information-based assaults that serve to exploit a full scale of locally unique social, cultural, economic, or political community problems (Lucas and Pomerantsev, 2016). This approach is in sharp contrast with the Cold War conception of psychological warfare, which strived gradually to erode political regimes by employing generalised ideological content given by Marxism-Leninism in a long-lasting systemic rivalry (Bolsover, 1948; Barghoorn, 1964). Taking all this into account, the current Russian strategy, which is based on the concept of information warfare, has been characterised by the following differentiating attributes: theatre-based opportunism (deprived of any ideological doctrines) in combination with a purely offensive nature.

2. MECHANISMS

The pivotal mechanism in the field of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media within the framework of the concept of psychological warfare adopted and refined by Soviet Russia was propaganda (Nietzel, 2016). Propaganda is a process which serves to exploit the psychological effects of information dispersion that could concisely be defined as a set of systematic, deliberate communications practices that attempt to shape perceptions, and manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012). Most of the propaganda definitions are rooted in three fundamental features: direct social control; a narrowing of decision-making options; and explicit appeal to enforce change (Carey, 1996; Merrill and Lowenstein, 1971; Qualter, 1962). This requires the information message to be framed to significantly limit the space for opinion-making and channel the content in a considerably constrained manner which serves to close minds, does not allow questions, and leaves no alternative to choose from other than the one demanded by the propagandist (Black, 2001). In that respect, propaganda is unanimously defined as a deliberate attempt to form, control, and alter the attitudes of the target audience in such a manner that, in any given situation, the reaction of those so influenced will resemble the one desired by the propagandist (Carey, 1996). Soviet foreign propaganda was used as a mechanism of enforcement, as it deliberately strived to manoeuvre the target audience to accept the Marxist-Leninist worldview. Therefore, propaganda turned out to be a mechanism that was designed to lead the non-military confrontation in the geopolitical conditions of the Cold War (CIA - Office of Soviet Analysis, 1955). Information-psychological operations within the propaganda framework were designed to achieve as much direct social control over the target foreign audience as was possible to produce maximum social manoeuvring that could be carried out through the dispersal of information content and to directly guide the change in public discourse regarding a bipolar ideological confrontation that favoured the Soviet perspective (CIA - Office of Soviet Analysis, 1955; Darczewska, 2014). With this in mind, we can claim that the logic behind social control which enables direct public management became the critical differentiating attribute that served to characterise propaganda as

a mechanism of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media within the framework of the Soviet-style concept of psychological warfare used in the Cold War period.

If we switch our attention to the current Russian strategy, cultural diplomacy functions as a mechanism which provides a meaningful framework for mass media instrumentalisation in terms of the concept of state-led soft power (Simons, 2013). Russian mass media came to be understood as a bearer of a message that contained a culturally-tainted and value-based ideology which served to reinforce the country's political agenda; it has become a source of gravitation in terms of building links to its foreign audience (Rotaru, 2017). In that context, Russian cultural diplomacy simply employs different forms of manipulation by using mass media content to address communities at both civic and state levels in an effort to bind them with its cultural/value model and engage them in its foreign politics. This is why some authors classify such a practice as cultural propaganda or neo-propaganda (Jang, 2019; Zamorano, 2016; Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2017). The neo-propagandist approach suggests the intention to win over the public in terms of particular interests through a massive orchestration of seductive conclusions that are packaged to conceal their persuasive purpose (Sproule and Lewis, 1994). However, Russian cultural diplomacy differs from the Soviet-style propaganda in at least two important aspects: a) it is not a mechanism of enforcement; and b) it does not strive to maximise social control through managing public discourse by extensively narrowing the public space for decision-making (Melissen, 2005; Lenczowski, 2009). While Cold War propaganda directly enforced the target audience to embrace the one and only possibility of change that was being predefined by the information content, the current form of Russian cultural diplomacy is less insistent, looser, and more vague. It is much more dependent upon self-identification (Laruelle, 2015b). Russian cultural diplomacy, which is channelled through mass media, calls for support or active participation in a multi-national, inter-religious, Russia-centric civilisation-strengthening collective identity that is based on ideals of human rights, faith, spirituality, kindness, conservative ethics and/or morality, conscience, and a traditional attitude to sexuality in association with family life (Feklyunina, 2016). Cultural diplomacy in the form that is currently being employed by Russia rather tries to arouse sympathies for the proposed values and/or cultural framework that is embodied in the

Russian World construct, and which provides the target audience with the chance of becoming part of it (Laruelle, 2015a). It sounds more like an offer or an invitation. Cultural diplomacy relies on indirect influence; hence, it can provide much less straightforward control over decision-making in the ranks of the target audience when compared to Cold War propaganda driven by Marxism-Leninism (Klyueva and Mikhaylova, 2017). With that being said, the logic of social convergence that leads to the establishment of transnational communities has become the central differentiating attribute that characterises cultural diplomacy as a mechanism of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media within the framework of the soft power concept that is being utilised by the RF.

The mechanism behind the Russian concept of information warfare is weaponised media, which incorporates the entire scale of mass media technologies ranging from traditional newspapers and all types of broadcasting media, up to the new forms of social media (operating on internet platforms) which play a substantial role as multipliers of the impact of information streaming (Nissen, 2015; Partanen-Dufour, 2016). In this vein, mass media sources are considered to be an essential weapon through which a decisive offence that can capitalise on the information-psychological effects of massively dispersed information narratives can be launched in peaceful conditions as well as during wartime (Flemming, 2017). The core message of this changing strategic reasoning is the following: while traditional combat remains a possibility, it will no longer be the primary means of victory on the battlefields of the twenty-first century. In contemporary Russian strategic thinking, information warfare with a substantial position in mass media has taken over the reins (Bērziņš, 2019). The idea of a weaponised media goes beyond the propaganda framework. This is not about the propagation of any specific worldview, but more about the opportunistic utilisation of information to be able to strike the weakest or most sensitive points within the structure of the populations of the target states (Giles, 2016a; Pomerantsev and Weiss, 2014). Instead of gaining social control, weaponised media sources use information to carry out precisely aimed assaults which can seriously harm the target states by disrupting popular discourse, causing public disarray, and decreasing the ability of the affected population to assess the real state of affairs (Lucas and Nimmo, 2015). Therefore, mass media sources are employed to cause as many destructive, damaging, or detrimental effects as possible by

breaking consonance in the ranks of the target society across a variety of issues that are at hand (Doroszczyk, 2018; Szostek, 2017). From this perspective, the logic behind social fragmentation, which is motivated by a desire to cripple the social integrity of target states, is the primary differentiating attribute that serves to characterise a weaponised media as a mechanism of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media within the framework of the concept of information warfare.

3. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

At the level of practical implementation, Soviet foreign propaganda utilised the principle of ideological indoctrination. According to the common definition, the purpose of ideological indoctrination is to imbue the target audience with theories, doctrines, and beliefs that are provided by specific thinking in a dogmatic, unquestionable manner (Lammi, 1997). In the Soviet reality, ideological indoctrination worked on persuasion, as it strived to force the target audience to adopt the picture being presented to it in a way that was consistent with the underlining thoughts that were epitomised in Marxism-Leninism whilst at the same time constructing an image that portrayed a new state-social configuration and blackened competing alternatives (with capitalism/imperialism in the first place) (Cassinelli, 1960; Brandenberger, 2011). Although Soviet persuasion also used a positive form of motivation (an image that provided more than simply social order) within the framework of competing paradigms, and therefore, it encouraged self-identification to some extent, the practice of indoctrination did not leave any space for free independent decision-making. The target audience was not expected to question or critically examine the doctrine they had learned, but were supposed to accept it as an objectively-given reality. Soviet propaganda, which was based on persuasion through ideological indoctrination, demanded full-scale commitment; it appealed either for the recipient to be a follower, or to become a foe who must be defeated (Barghoorn, 1964; Brandenberger, 2011). This technique was designed to instil intentionally biased ideas into human minds to force people to behave according to the will of the propagandist while refusing any independent choice or doubt (Schweitzer, 1962). Therefore, persuasion here is perceived as a process through which one state imposes its beliefs on another by manipulating the target state's population through the means of deliberately created and ideologically-tainted information campaigns (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2012). Moreover, Soviet propaganda, which was based on persuasion through ideological indoctrination, portrayed international relations in a polarised perspective which invoked a vision of a world that was divided by pervasive and non-avoidable conflict embodied in the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and any other competing socio-economic or political theory (Brzezinski, 1960; Papp, 1979). The practice of indoctrination mixed with the polarised

worldview forced the target audience to think of international relations as a zero-sum game by drawing a world in which cooperation amongst states with differing ideological affiliations was not an acceptable possibility. As a consequence, Soviet foreign propaganda produced an image that showed social relations as a constant struggle for power domination and urged people to fight for the sake of Marxism-Leninism (Zimmerman, 1969; Buecker, 2003). Against this background, differentiating attributes which determined the specific character of Soviet Cold War propaganda have emerged at the level of practical implementation: dogmatism which encouraged an antagonistic polarisation both at the intrastate and the international level.

At this point, we should also turn our attention to the special information operations used in the Cold War era. Derived directly as a specific branch of propaganda, the special information operations in Soviet Russia were labelled 'спецпропаганда' ('special propaganda') (Darczewska, 2014). Special propaganda was employed in the form of: a) active measures, which were usually taken in the form of calculated information leaks that were published with no obvious relation to Soviet Russia or its allied organisations; or b) reflexive control, which intentionally conveyed to an opposing side certain aggregate information which would cause it to make a decision appropriate to the information it had received (Ajir and Vailliant, 2018; Giles, Sherr, and Seaboyer, 2018). Special propaganda refers to the clandestine methods used in enforcing Soviet authority abroad: efforts to control media in foreign countries; written or spoken disinformation which is retranslated by media assets that have been retaken by Soviet proxies in foreign countries; the use of communist parties and front organisations to disseminate information that favours Soviet interests on the ground; illegal transborder radio broadcasting; or information operations that serve to build up pressure on the political leadership (Fedchenko, 2016). As such, special information operations were employed when Soviet Russia attempted to increase the effects of persuasion through ideological indoctrination, especially by concealing links to the Soviet political regime for any disseminated information (Active Measures Working Group, 1987). Former Czechoslovak intelligence officer, Ladislav Bitman, who defected to the west in 1968, describes Soviet-era special information operations as manufacturing forgeries: 'Forgeries […] are classified into two major categories. The first category includes misleading information (disinformation) that contributes to

poor policy decisions among government leaders. This type of fakery usually does not require or receive widespread attention from the media. The second type, propagandistic forgery, seeks to mould public opinion in a target country.' (Bittman 1985, p 96). However, special information operations went only slightly beyond the generalised ideological doctrines and used several basic forms of narrative in many variations, repeating them over and over: a) portraying internal or regional interstate conflicts as a direct outcome of the imperialistic policies of the USA or other western (European) countries within the framework of colonialism, cultural oppression, or economic plundering; b) accusing the USA (or other countries that were labelled as being capitalist or imperialist) of arms proliferation, war-mongering, or supporting alleged terrorist groups; c) displaying the success of social revolutions (such as those taking place in Latin American states) in an effort to support the resolve of people to join the 'nation liberation' that was being led by Soviet sympathisers; or d) defaming figures and organisations that were held in high esteem within society where they opposed ideas that were being put forward by Soviet ideological propaganda (Barghoorn, 1964; Active Measures Working Group, 1987; Staar, 1991). For these reasons, the article understands special information operations as being an integral part of propaganda (as described above), the primary purpose of which was to multiply the effects of dogmatised ideological persuasion.

The form of cultural diplomacy which Russia utilises today is rooted in soft power. It employs persuasion through attraction, inducement, and co-option to shape peoples' actions and motivate them to support Russian policies (Lord, 2009). In contrast to the Cold War era, current forms of Russian persuasion through attraction allow different levels of self-identification. In essence, it does not force people to choose the only 'good' that is predetermined by the media content as did Cold War propaganda. It means that people can fall in with it only partially, to coincide with a limited volume of precisely-chosen pieces of a presented agenda (Rutland and Kazantsev, 2016). It must be mentioned here that Russian persuasion through attraction which employs the previously-defined ideological framework of soft power, which is based on neo-conservatism with nationalistic connotations and which is sometimes labelled as nationalistic neo-conservatism, has often been formulated in opposition to western globalist liberalism (Lukin, 2014; Shcherbak, 2019). Therefore, some arguments suggest that the relationship between

the current Russian nationalist neo-conservatism and western globalist liberalism resembles the geo-ideological polarisation of the Cold War era (Diesen, 2019; Karaganov, 2018), However, despite the nationalist neo-conservatism being promoted by Russia as being set out as an alternative to western globalist liberalism and often criticising liberal values, it lacks the antagonistic tendencies that were embedded in Cold War ideology. Current forms of Russian-led persuasion fall short of a direct appeal to carry out significant changes in the structure of other (competing) political regimes (Keating and Kaczmarska, 2019; Kortunov, 2019). On the contrary, Russian soft power media messaging portrays the Russian World and the value framework it embodies as a unique transnational civilisation that is increasingly endangered by globalisation that is spreading the westernised model of cultural liberalism (Meister, 2016). This is because Russia's soft power is not designed to seek out strategic superiority (Klyueva and Mikhaylova, 2017). In comparison, Russian messaging heavily advocates multipolarity, which can be comprehended as the central feature of any stable world order (Laruelle, 2015b). This vision rejects one or more dominant states when it comes to being able to impose rules on the rest of the world and prefers geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic pluralism (Hinck, Kluver, and Cooley, 2018). Russian narratives are based on the premise that all participants in international relations should respect each other's interests (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2020). Current Russian soft power reasoning upholds the idea of multiplicity and plurality in terms of world cultures, and argues that idiosyncratic cultural qualities must underpin all political systems and structures (Chebankova, 2015). Russian media messaging claims that countries with different socio-economic and political systems can interact peacefully and should play by existing rules. Still, it simultaneously justifies efforts to make international norms more appropriate to national interests. In the end, instead of the Cold War appeal to revolution, Russia's narratives stand for its cultural/value model, claiming the right to preserve equality among countries, and stipulating respect for its state and/or national concerns (Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015; Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2017). Therefore, Russia does not necessarily see other players as its adversaries, but rather as competitors. This logic portrays international relations as a non-zero-sum game, where multipolarity, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation (especially when taking into account economic affairs) are possible or even desirable options (Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015). In contrast to Cold War propaganda, the differentiating attributes determining the

specific character of Russian cultural diplomacy at the level of practical implementation are: self-identification, which allows cultural and political multipolarity both at the intrastate and the international levels.

Weaponised media sources employ traditional methods that were evolved and perfected in the Cold War era (Cimbala, 2014; Snegovaya, 2015; Abrams, 2016). Russia, in this regard, heavily relies on massive volumes of disinformation dispersed in systematic campaigns. It also employs reviewed, rebuilt, and transformed special information operations (Snegovaya, 2015; Lucas and Pomerantsev, 2016). Contemporary special information operations still utilise public figures of the state as primary targets. To undermine the prestige of target state authorities and tamp down their legitimacy, Russia carries out attempts to defame political leaders or reduce belief in their levels of honesty and reliability, or to discredit policies that are incompatible with Russian interests (Doroszczyk, 2018). Besides that, Russia still utilises forgeries and engages proxies that are situated in the target states as influencers to conceal the origin of specific information or disinformation to augment its impact on the affected audience (Ajir and Vailliant, 2018). In this aspect, weaponised media resembles Cold War propaganda. Notwithstanding, Russian media assets use these methods in a considerably distinctive *modus operandi*. Instead of indoctrinating the target audience with ideology or simply misleading it with disinformation, weaponised media sources are designed to attack the enemy directly and to harm the complex intrastate decision-making process in a bottom-up direction by pushing already-existing social grievances, stereotypes, and vulnerabilities (Meister *et al*, 2018). Russian information streaming utilises the full spectrum of available social discrepancies to arouse internal turmoil amongst religiously, culturally, nationally, value-based, or politically diverse segments that exist within the populations of the target states (Fedchenko, 2016). In that regard, the RF proactively utilises information content to spread hate speech, to destroy trust, sap morale, degrade the information space, erode public discourse, increase partisanship, or incite violence (Lanoszka, 2016; Lucas and Pomerantsev, 2016). Such forms of implementation demand extremely focused information narratives with a strong potential to encourage internal disputes between different segments within a target society, while also undermining trust in and the devotion of inhabitants to the central government authority, precipitating upheavals or even armed insurgencies, and 'decomposing' the social-political order from below

(Bruusgaard, 2014). This approach does not strive to persuade the target audience about a specific set of beliefs to generate control over them, but to exploit existing opinion and/or social incongruity to fuel an escalation of internal conflict. This form of implementation is not about achieving direct domination, but is about igniting strong enough division to reverse unfavourable tendencies in the political development of target states. In this sense, weaponised media sources are used to stop political processes that have a potentially negative impact on Russian foreign policy interests, no matter whether they are economic, cultural, or security processes (Bugajski, 2020). For these reasons, the characteristic features determining weaponised media sources in terms of practical implementation are: resentment stimulation producing socio-political disintegration both at the intrastate and international levels (such as narratives that are disseminated by Russian media outlets which target conflicting interests amongst EU or NATO member countries) (Hofmeisterová *et al,* 2018; Ellehuus, 2020; Mankoff, 2020).

4. GOALS

Soviet foreign propaganda was, first and foremost, devoted to a political-ideological mission: overthrowing capitalism, establishing socialism, and building up communism around the world (Bessonova, 2010). Therefore, the ultimate goal of the Soviet strategy was to support the territorial expansionism of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and thereby increase the foreign influence of Soviet Russia around the world to the detriment of its primary foe, the alliance of western states, which labelled as capitalist or imperialist (Marxism-Leninism defines imperialism as the last stage of capitalism) (Kuusinen *et al,* 1963). In Soviet strategic culture, psychological warfare did not solely target the enemy that was embodied in western capitalistic states but also neutral countries that stood in the middle without so far having aligned with either side of the bipolar confrontation (Triska, 1958; Light, 1991). The ultimate goal can be divided into several sub-categories: a) indoctrinate foreign audiences with the Marxist-Leninist ideology (implant sympathies that lead to the formation of groups of supporters who adopt Soviet ideology and persuade a foreign public to believe in systemic flaws within the western capitalistic and/or imperialistic states, such as moral depravation, socio-economic defectiveness, or aggressive expansionism); b) enforce the supporting groups so that they can undermine the political system in their countries and potentially spark off ideologically-motivated (socialist) revolutions; and c) support the process of building socialism in countries in which sympathising groups have retaken political power (Bolsover, 1948; CIA – Office of Soviet Analysis, 1955). In short, this is a revisionistic and non-systemic approach that seeks to change ideologically incompatible regimes and challenges the existing international order in the contest for ultimate victory which will grant the winner hegemonic dominance.

The ultimate goal of the current Russian soft power strategy is to enhance political influence in an environment of peaceful coexistence and to mitigate the negative effects of certain policies in regard to international reputation (Yablokov, 2015). This ultimate goal can be divided into three larger sub-categories: a) positive-image-making; b) legitimacy enhancement; and c) support-searching (Simons, 2014). This specific set of goals is designed to help Russia spread its influence abroad and allows it to

keep up in the geopolitical competition with other great powers like the USA, China, and India, when it comes to diffusing the world with their own socio-cultural paradigms (Isar, 2017; Krenn, 2017; Liu, 2019). In doing so, Russia strives to: a) attract foreign audiences to its socio-cultural value-based agendas; b) excite feelings of self-identification with this ideologised framework; c) encourage the target audience to engage in promoting and preserving this common legacy; and d) co-opt foreign audiences into cultural/political programmes that are organised abroad by Russian institutions (Hudson, 2013). Compared to the Cold War strategy, these goals are soft in nature, as they are short of revisionistic ambitions as well as any appeal for aggression or subversion. Instead, they try to profile the position of the Russian Federation within the boundaries of the existing system. Rather than seeking change or denigrating an enemy, current soft power goals are formulated in mild, unifying, or even appeasing overtones. They support legitimacy enhancement by promoting: a) multilateralism and cooperation; b) culture and values; c) human rights; and d) the historical importance of Russia (Klyueva, 2017). In relation to strategic goals, the current soft power approach tends to be a more-or-less cooperative strategy that seeks to increase Russian influence abroad, while not radically challenging the existing setting in the structure of the international system.

With regard to the concept of information warfare, contemporary Russian strategy derives much more tangible goals than simple regime overthrow. Information campaigns are now targeted at a particular audience in a considerably narrower way and with unprecedented precision, which allows certain levels of flexibility in stating the objectives. Although the current strategy is closely related to the 4D[3] approach, Russia does not strive simply to distort reality or distract attention (these two elements exemplify the primary fields for mass media instrumentalisation in the 4D design), either of the wider public or the political leadership in the target states (Snegovaya, 2015; White, 2016). The goals that are attached to current foreign Russian mass media offensive campaigns are tailor-made to specific conflict situations and to different geopolitical arenas, thereby representing distinctive operational environments (Perry, 2015). This means that the essential purpose of contemporary information campaigns is to paralyse the affected state's capability to

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[3]   Dismiss-Distort-Distract-Dismay.

mobilise the power that is necessary to counter Russian interests as much as possible in specific operational conditions (Fedchenko, 2016). This is achieved by limiting sources of internal sovereignty, and the extent of any limitation can significantly vary in accordance with specific needs and intentions in individual geopolitical theatres in the following forms: a) inflicting confusion to mitigate public reaction in terms of specific Russian policies; b) arousing the fragmentation of opinion and thereby limiting the space for manoeuvre for the target country when it comes to introducing counter-measures; c) disintegrating the target audience in an effort to paralyse the state's ability to raise internal support; and e) perhaps even initiating turmoil or motivating subversion (Meister, 2016; Pasitselska, 2017). The aim is to unfold the internal instabilities that may exist within individual target states and incite fragmentation processes within the ranks of the target society at the desired level of intensity (Bugajski, 2020). To give an example, this dynamic is particularly evident in the western Balkan states where Russian media exploits issues of frozen conflicts in the region, while also fostering nationalistic sentiment, and reviving inter-ethnic rivalry to thwart the ambitions of local governments to be able to associate themselves with Nato or EU institutions (Stefanov and Vladimirov, 2018). This strategic modality is designed to stop or change political development that is unfavourable to Russia, and thereby to revise the foreign policy course that has been fostered by particular states. Instead of exhibiting ambitions to change the existing structure of the international system, this approach strives to make the international environment more Russia-friendly by suffocating political developments at a national level where such developments have the potential to harm Russia's foreign policy interests. Therefore, we can claim that this strategy is partially revisionistic at the state level, but systemic at the international level.

DISCUSSION

In the Cold War period, solid foundations were set out. These served to drive the systematic utilisation of mass media power in compliance with foreign policy goals. In that regard, the current Russian strategic toolset reinvigorates the Cold War roots, as it strives to employ mass media sources to manipulate the thinking and doing of the target foreign audience through the means of socio-psychological manipulation. In this manner, contemporary Russian strategic modalities utilise information content, which has been massively dispersed into foreign media markets to influence the human perception of reality and to produce changes in behaviour in the ranks of the target audience abroad that is in favour of Russian interests. This article shows that at least two modalities have consequently developed in Russian strategic thinking: soft power and information warfare. It is apparent that the current developmental trends have reflected on some of the key characteristics that determined the nature of Soviet Cold War strategy. While the design of soft power revives the use of ideological content, information warfare restores the offensive reasoning through the means of additional disinformation campaigns and special information operations.

Despite this basic affinity, the diachronic perspective indicates that the Russian strategic toolset in the field of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media has been progressively adapting to the development of geopolitical conditions. It has responded to the changing position of Russia in the international system, and has directly addressed evolving foreign-policy ambitions. Within this context, the evidence shows that the Russian strategic toolset when it comes to the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media has undergone significant changes following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The article revealed fundamental differences that stemmed from varying configurations in the crucial layers of strategy formulation. Each of the examined modalities that has developed in Russian strategic thinking over time has been built upon different conceptions that function through distinctive mechanisms that in turn use idiosyncratic means of practical implementation that are tailor-made for achieving a precisely formulated sets of goals. These dissimilarities provided the individual strategic designs with unparalleled

sets of differentiating attributes according to which we can unambiguously distinguish between them. The aggregated sets of differentiating attributes that are generated for the given layers of a strategy formulation, and which serve to explain the variations in the character of individual strategic designs, are summarised in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1.

	cold war strategy	present strategic toolset	
strategic modalities	• psychological warfare based on marxism-leninism	• soft power based on russian world	• information warfare based on militaristic reasoning
conception	• overarching ideology • limited offensive	• overarching ideology • non-aggressive	• opportunistic • purely offensive
mechanism	• social control	• social convergence	• social fragmentation
implementation	• dogmatism • antagonistic polarization	• self-identification • multipolarity	• resentment stimulation • disintegration
goals	• revisionistic (state level) • non-systemic (international level)	• non-revisionistic (state level) • systemic (international level)	• partially revisionistic (state level) • systemic (international level)

These sets of differentiating attributes can be summarised into coherent characteristics that define the examined strategic approaches which have developed over time in Russian strategic thinking.

1. The Soviet Cold War approach to the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media at an information-psychological level, which was constructed on the basis of the concept of psychological warfare, is

characterised as: an ideologically-based offensive strategy that functions on the principle of social control, which is achieved through dogmatic content messaging that promotes antagonistic polarisation. This is a revisionistic, non-systemic strategy that is designed to initiate the overthrowing of incompatible regimes in an effort to gain systemic dominance.

2. The first approach in terms of the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media sources at an information-psychological level, which has been utilised by the RF in recent times and has been built on the concept of soft power, is characterised as: an ideologically-based non-aggressive strategy that functions on the principle of social convergence, which is achieved through self-identification, opening the way for cultural and political multipolarity. This is a non-revisionistic, systemic strategy that is designed to maximise power within a system of peaceful coexistence.

3. The second approach to the instrumentalisation of foreign mass media at an information-psychological level as has been utilised by the RF in recent times and which has been based on the concept of information warfare, is characterised as: an opportunistic, purely offensive strategy that is based on a militaristic rationale which functions on the principle of social fragmentation achieved through the stimulation of resentment to stir up socio-political disintegration. This is a partially revisionistic strategy that is designed to reverse unfavourable policies by particular players whilst not disturbing the existing structure of the international system.

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