

Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War media world: Articulations of global politics in
Russian and US mainstream and alternative media

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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June 2015

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank my advisors, Dr. Giovanna Dell'Orto and Dr. Catherine Squires for their invaluable support, guidance and mentorship over the years. I would also like to thank my committee members - Dr. Shayla Thiel-Stern and Dr. Thomas Wolfe – for their input and conversations that challenged and inspired me to think about scholarship in new ways. This project would not be possible without the intellectual and emotional support of my fellow graduate students; special thanks go to Stephen Bennett, Sarah Cavanah, Elizabeth Housholder, Brett Johnson, Jennifer Lueck, Meagan Manning, and Rodrigo Zamith.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Aleksandr Popkov and Svetlana Markosyan, who taught me how to think, dream and read between the lines.

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Introduction

On the bright morning of August 8, 2008, my family and I were having breakfast on the terrace of our cabin in Southern Central Siberia, near my hometown of Krasnoyarsk. As always, we turned on the radio to listen to the morning news, and to what we expected to be the main news of the day: the opening of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. However, the newscast did not start with the Olympics that day. Instead, we were told that hundreds of Russian citizens were being killed in South Ossetia – a breakaway region on the Russian-Georgian border – as a result of a military attack by Georgia that was attempting to regain the region.

The news updates were broadcasted continuously throughout the day. By the evening, it was clear that Russia had made a decision to enter the war in order to protect its citizens in South Ossetia. I returned to the city the next day, and my first move was to check what the foreign, and especially American, media had to say about the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia.

“Russian Air, Ground Forces Strike Georgia; Military Action Follows Georgian Offensive to Reassert Control Over Separatist South Ossetia,”¹ “Stopping Russia; The US and Its Allies Must Unite Against Moscow's War on Georgia,”² “Russia and Georgia Clash Over Breakaway Region,”³ proclaimed the headlines of some of largest and most influential US news media – apparently placing the blame on Russian aggression.

¹ Peter Finn, “Russian Air, Ground Forces Strike Georgia; Military Action Follows Georgian Offensive to Reassert Control Over Separatist South Ossetia,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 2008, A01.

² “Stopping Russia; The US and Its Allies Must Unite Against Moscow's War on Georgia,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 2008, A14.

³ Michael Schwartz, Anne Barnard and C.J. Chivers, “Russia and Georgia Clash Over Breakaway Region,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008, A1.

I was shocked, confused, disoriented but also certain that something was not quite right with the media coverage of the conflict. Russian and American news media told different stories. Moreover, as I kept reading the news reports, I couldn't help noticing how both Russian and US news media evoked the memories of the Cold War in their narratives. Whether it was the *New York Times* stating that “global politics have breathed new life into the conflict, making it a flash point for resurgent tensions between former cold war rivals”⁴ or the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* insisting that “Georgian military power has been gained largely due to the help of Georgia’s western friends,”⁵ media in both countries framed the conflict in terms that reminded the readers – more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War – of the proxy wars and the east-west geopolitical struggle. I kept wondering what kinds of political, historical and ideological forces clashed in the world’s media scene while the military forces clashed on the battlegrounds of the Northern Caucasus?

This project examines the role that the Cold War discourse plays in informing and structuring the Russian and US mainstream and alternative news media narratives about international events and controversies that occur in the post-Cold War time but trace their historical roots to the Cold War geopolitical struggles and expose disagreements between Russia and the United States in the 21st century. This project also seeks to identify what other discourses of global politics and international affairs are interwoven in media narratives examined in this study and how their interactions with elements of the Cold

⁴ Michael Schwartz, Anne Barnard and C.J. Chivers, “Russia and Georgia Clash Over Breakaway Region,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008, A1.

⁵ Dmitriy Litovkin, “Kak Gruziya Gotovilas’ k Voyne i Kto Ei Pomogal,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339510>. This and all further translations from Russian are made by the author.

War discourse work to create meanings for these media's audiences in the post-Cold War era. The Cold War discourse is defined here as a way of talking/writing about events and issues that explicitly or implicitly contextualizes them – through a set of corresponding references, metaphors and associational chains – within the oppositional dichotomies of “communism versus capitalism,” “authoritarianism versus democracy,” “East versus West,” the confrontation between the “two great powers” and the division of the world on “spheres of influence.” It is important to examine the role and place of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War news media narratives because media narratives influence in one way or another the public understanding of the world around us and of the roles that different actors play in global politics;⁶ media narratives also help create and sustain political and intellectual environments that enable the emergence of concrete policies that determine the “rules of the game” in global affairs.⁷ As Giovanna Dell’Orto put it, “the press matters in global affairs because the images of national identities it helps create and negotiate influence expectations and consequently policies.”⁸ The tragedy of the Cold War was rooted, among other things, in fundamental misunderstanding and miscommunication of American and Soviet state identities to each other and to their own populations as fixed and monolithic rather than as nuanced and fluid. Mass media in both states played important roles in constructing and disseminating the narratives that shaped

⁶ See, for example Robert Entman, “Framing US Coverage of International News,” *Journal of Communication* 41, no. 4 (1991): 6-27; David Perry, “The Image Gap: How International News Affects Perceptions of Nations,” *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (1987): 416-433; Yahya Kamalipour, ed. *Images of the US around the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁷ For comprehensive review of the scholarly literature on media-foreign policy relationship see Derek B. Miller, *Media Pressure on Foreign Policy: The Evolving Theoretical Framework*, First Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁸ Giovanna Dell’Orto, *American Journalism and International Relations: Foreign Correspondence from the Early Republic to the Digital Era*, Reprint edition (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

these identities.⁹ The end of the Cold War presented an opportunity for discursive transformation through re-articulation of state identities and re-imagining of the overall interpretive framework of international affairs and global politics. Indeed, on the one hand, the material reality of geopolitics changed drastically. The USSR collapsed and US – Russia relations do not constitute the centerpiece of global politics anymore; communist ideology not only doesn't structure life and politics in Russia, Eastern Europe and former USSR states but the region embraced a capitalist model of development domestically and is actively involved in global economy; the borders are open, making travel as well as educational and cultural exchanges a reality for all people (not only the political elites as during the Cold War); Russian and American astronauts explore space together and the two countries have made significant progress on mutually reducing their nuclear arsenals.¹⁰

Yet on the other hand, a number of events and controversies following the conflict in South Ossetia – from the Russia-US standoff at the UN Security Council in 2011-2012 over the peace resolution in Syria, to Russia's decision to provide refuge to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, to an ongoing Russia-NATO debate over the missile defense system in Europe and to the most recent conflict in Ukraine – have kept prodding frequent speculations as to whether “the Cold War was back.”¹¹ The escalation

⁹ James Aronson, *Press and Cold War*, Expanded edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); George R. Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War Within the Cold War*, 1st edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Louis W. Liebovich, *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1947*, First Edition (New York: Praeger, 1988).

¹⁰ Department Of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. The Office of Website Management, “New START,” November 1, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/>.

¹¹ See for example Eve Conant, “Is the Cold War Back?,” *National Geographic News*, September 13, 2014, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/140912-cold-war-geography-russia-ukraine-sanctions;>

of tensions associated with these events and the growing mutual discontent have been reflected both in the most recent policies accompanying US-Russia relations¹² and in the public opinion of the United States in Russia and of Russia in the United States.¹³ While there is a growing body of work by international relations scholars¹⁴ and foreign policy analysts¹⁵ addressing the question of the Cold War political discourse resurfacing in the post-Cold War political environment, no studies thus far focused on the role of news media in this process. This project aims to fill this gap.

Case studies

To analyze the role of the Cold War discourse in structuring Russian and US news media narratives, and thus to a certain extent structuring the post-Cold War environment, this study examines three events that speak to different aspects of the Cold War discourse and also take place in three different regions of the world that used to comprise the Cold War battlefields.

Simon Tisdall, "The New Cold War: Are We Going back to the Bad Old Days?," *The Guardian*, November 19, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/19/new-cold-war-back-to-bad-old-days-russia-west-putin-ukraine>; Robert Legvold, "Managing the New Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, August 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141537/robert-legvold/managing-the-new-cold-war>.

¹² The latest economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the US serve as a vivid example; on Russia's side, the most well-known examples include the "Foreign Agents" law (2012) restricting the work of foreign NGOs in Russia, as well as the "Dima Yakovlev" law (2012) prohibiting the adoptions of Russian children by the US citizens.

¹³ See, for example the following reports: Mark Adomanis, "Russian Opinion Of The United States Is At An All-Time Low," *Forbes*, February 16, 2015.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2014/07/23/russian-opinion-of-the-united-states-is-at-an-all-time-low/>; Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Increasingly See Russia as Threat, Top US Enemy," *Gallup*, February 16, 2015, http://www.gallup.com/poll/181568/americans-increasingly-russia-threat-top-enemy.aspx?utm_source=Politics&utm_medium=newsfeed&utm_campaign=tiles.

¹⁴ Richard Sakwa, "'New Cold War' or Twenty Years' Crisis? Russia and International Politics," *International Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2008): 241–67, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00702.x.; Richard Sakwa, "The Cold Peace: Russo-Western Relations as a Mimetic Cold War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (March 2013): 203–24, doi:10.1080/09557571.2012.710584.

¹⁵ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, Third Edition, Revised edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan Trade, 2014).

The project starts with the case of the war in South Ossetia. As some analysts noted, this war marked a turning point in Russia-US post-Cold War relations specifically and in the “East-West relations” in general¹⁶ as “the rhetoric, used by both sides, [bore] all similarities with the Cold War period.”¹⁷ Most importantly, this case allows for examining how the struggles associated with the non-Russian nations of the former Soviet Union wrestling with the questions of post-Cold War sovereignty and independence are presented in the Russian and US news media. The central aim of this case study is to uncover and analyze the range of interpretive possibilities that different Russian and US news media present to their readers in order to make sense of the conflict that has a complex history and dynamic but that also takes place in the world where foreign policy is still to a large extent guided by the realist approach that views post-Soviet space as a “buffer zone” between Russia and NATO forces.

The second case study examines the diplomatic debate in the United Nations Security Council over the peace resolution aimed to end violence in Syria in 2011-2012. The resolution was vetoed by Russia and China three times over the course of ten months, turning the process into a major international controversy and prodding observers to label the situation a “global diplomatic divide” with the dividing lines drawn between the “anti-democracy and pro-dictatorship” and “pro-democracy and anti-dictatorship” camps. This case study allows examining how different Russian and US

¹⁶ See, for example Arie Bloed, “Georgian-Russian War, the Turning Point in East-West Relations?,” *Security & Human Rights* 19, no. 4 (October 2008): 322–25; Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Fyodor Lukyanov, “The Russian-Georgian War as a Turning Point,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, November 24, 2011, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/The-Russian-Georgian-war-as-a-turning-point-15381>.

¹⁷ Bloed, 322.

news media make sense of the post-Cold War diplomatic debate over resolving a complex international crisis that occurs in the region with turbulent Cold War and post-Cold War history.

The third case study addresses the question of how the ideas associated with the socialist model of socio-economic development – the model that has “lost” the Cold War, according to the dominant interpretation of the end of the Cold War – are being discussed and presented to the audiences by various Russian and US news media in the post-Cold War time. The case study does so by examining how these media covered the death of Hugo Chávez – the former President of Venezuela who built and sustained “socialism of the 21st century” in “the US backyard” during fourteen years of his presidency. The case study aims to discover how the Russian and the US news media articulate the meaning of Chávez’s socialist legacy and how these articulations speak to the evolution of Russia’s and US’s own post-Cold War political identities.

Mainstream and alternative media

As Russian and US mainstream and alternative news media interpret and explain to their audiences these international events and controversies, they function as sites of meaning-making, constructing the reality of international affairs for the audiences by defining the key actors and their roles, the key settings and their significance, the causes of crises and conflicts, and the approaches to their resolution. As news media do so, they inevitably privilege some storylines over others (even when striving to achieve the ideals of “objectivity” and “balance” in news reporting), some sources over others, some ideas and interpretations over others, thus determining a specific range of interpretive

possibilities available for the audiences within these media texts. A comparative analysis across four very different types of media – Russian, US, mainstream and alternative – allows for identifying the key points of tension, contradiction, overlap or modulation central to our understanding of where and how the discursive boundaries that guide and possibly delimit the process of making sense of global politics and the identities of actors involved in it are being drawn.

The mainstream news media are defined in this project as legacy media outlets with a long-standing record of producing international news for domestic audiences in the United States and Russia, and generally following – though at different degrees at different historic times and circumstances – the official foreign policy line of the respective governments. The mainstream news media are important to analyze for at least two crucial reasons. From a sociological perspective of international journalism studies, mainstream news media function as the principal, and often the only, source of foreign news for domestic audiences, thus possessing significant power over “giving meanings to the world”¹⁸ and shaping public’s understanding of “what the world beyond our borders looks like.”¹⁹ From a critical media studies perspective, mainstream news media comprise an important part of a “power structure of elite groups and institutions,”²⁰ thus functioning as “engines of ideological production,”²¹ defining and legitimizing dominant understandings of social and political reality, and reproducing the consensus on which

¹⁸ Giovanna Dell’Orto, *Giving Meanings to the World: The First US Foreign Correspondents, 1838-1859*, First Edition edition (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002).

¹⁹ Dell’Orto, *American Journalism*, 1.

²⁰ Teun van Dijk, “Power and the News Media,” in *Political Communication in Action: States, Institutions, Movements, Audiences*, ed. David L. Paletz (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996).

²¹ Catherine Squires, “Black Talk Radio,” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5, no. 2 (2000): 73-96.

these understandings rest. Two US newspapers of record – the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* – are chosen as such mainstream news media for this study’s analysis. On the Russian side, newspapers *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* serve similar functions.

Alternative media are defined in this study as media outlets with a long standing record of producing narratives of international (and domestic) affairs that both challenge the dominant narratives and present perspectives and interpretations that are absent from or marginalized in the mainstream narratives. To follow Josh Greenberg’s and Heather Gilberts’ functional definition, “alternative media typically engage in efforts to create social, political, or economic change, and often promote a radical agenda.”²² It is important to examine the narratives produced by the alternative media because this study is concerned with discursive change as much as it is concerned with discursive continuity. As discourse analysis theory contends, discourses – even the most powerful ones – are not fixed and are being constantly rearticulated in the process of political struggle and contestation. Alternative media play a crucial role in discursive contestation since they “confront the biases embedded in established ways of viewing the world and offer possibilities for envisioning different ways of thinking.”²³ The US alternative media chosen for the analysis include such publications as *The Nation* and *Z Magazine*. The Russian alternative media selected for this project are the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and the magazine *The New Times*.

²² Josh Greenberg and Heather Gilberts, “Alternative Media,” in *Intersections of Media and Communications: Concepts, Contexts, and Critical Frameworks*, ed. Will Straw, Ira Wagman and Sandra Gabriele (Toronto: Emond Montgomery Publications, 2011), 199.

²³ Greenberg and Gilberts, 206 – 207.

Theoretical framework

This study brings together discourse analysis theory, Stuart Hall's theory of articulation and a set of concepts defining the debate on the forces of nationalism and globalization that shape the post-Cold War environment.

The discourse analysis theory allows approaching news media texts as sites of meaning-making,²⁴ and therefore also as sites of power struggle and political contestation.²⁵ Thus, while this project focuses on analyzing texts, its aim is not merely descriptive. Rather, this project's aim is to produce – through critical juxtaposition of different texts to each other – a thick comparative description that would uncover the meanings within the texts, and therefore help gain a deeper understanding of the social effects that these texts might have on both the public understanding of international affairs in the post-Cold War world and also on concrete policies that shape the material realities of international affairs. The power of discourse is especially important to consider and examine in the post-Cold War political context, which is characterized by increasing political, economic and cultural interconnectedness, rapid changes in communication technologies, proliferation of media and communication channels and, in part as a result of these processes, the growing popularity of the idea of “soft power,” which defines political success not only in terms of whose army wins but also in terms of whose story wins, to paraphrase Joseph Nye.²⁶ I would also add that it matters *what kind*

²⁴ David Reah, *The Language of Newspapers* (London: Routledge, 2002); Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Arnold, 1995a); Anne O'Keefe, *Investigating Media Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁵ van Dijk, *Power and the News Media*.

²⁶ Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power*, Reprint edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011); Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, 1 edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

of story wins, as this is what determines the discursive environment that enables or limits specific actions.

This project's goal is not only to identify the ways in which the discourse of the Cold War structures news media narratives in the post-Cold War time, but also to identify how other discourses of global politics participate in the meaning-making process. Thus, a theoretical approach that would allow for a meaningful interpretation of diverse and possibly contradictory discourses interacting within the same discursive terrain was needed. Stuart Hall's theory of articulation – a “theory of contexts”²⁷ that allows “characterizing a social formation without falling into the twin traps of reductionism and essentialism” – contributes to this project by helping to accomplish this task. In addition to working at the epistemological level of making sense of a wide variety of discourses defining the news media narratives analyzed in this project, the theory of articulation helps position the findings of this project at the political and strategic levels. At the political level, articulation allows determining how the interplay among the discourses and narratives identified in this project reflects the play of power and the relations of symbolic domination and subordination, which is precisely what makes this project important. At the strategic level, articulation “provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context,”²⁸ which for this project means identifying where and how alternative discourses of the post-Cold War

²⁷ Lawrence Grossberg, “Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (1993): 1-22. doi: 10.1080/15295039309366846.

²⁸ Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley (New York: Routledge, 2006).

global politics are being discussed in news media texts and whether these discussions can play a role in social and political change.

Contextualizing this project within the theoretical framework of the debate on nationalism and globalization further allows for addressing the question of power – and power struggles – specifically in the context of global communication, engaging in a conversation with the scholars working in this subfield. In a nutshell (I provide a more detailed discussion in Chapter 2), the debate centers on the question of whether the nation-state remains to be the locus of power in the post-Cold War world or, due to the process of globalization, the power is dispersed among multiple actors, including particularly non-state actors. The debate so far has mainly focused on actors – including media actors – and their actions. I propose expanding the debate to include the analysis of media discourses as examples of “ways of thinking” that characterize these two paradigms.

Thus, the goal of this project is twofold. First, the project aims to empirically assess to what extent the narratives created by the Russian and US mainstream and alternative news media rely on or depart from the discourse of the Cold War and what other discourses of global politics shape these narratives. Second, drawing on discourse analysis theory and Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation, this project seeks to uncover the political, strategic and ideological forces shaping the news media narratives of international debates and controversies that cause disagreements between Russia and the United States in the post-Cold War time. By doing so, this project aims to gain a deeper understanding of the role various discourses play in structuring the post-Cold War

environment that is characterized by power struggles between the forces of nationalism and globalization.

This project is guided by the following overarching questions:

RQ1: To what extent (if at all) does the discourse of the Cold War inform and structure the narratives created by the Russian and US mainstream and alternative media as they cover the events and controversies examined in this project?

RQ2: What other discourses of international affairs and global politics can be identified?

RQ3: How do the ways in which various discourses are articulated within the news media texts analyzed in this project expose the relations of symbolic domination and subordination that constitute the post-Cold War political and media environment, and how do these relations work to construct the identities of the actors involved in the events analyzed in this study?

RQ4: What possibilities and limitations for discursive transformation can be discerned from the analysis of overlaps and contradictions among the narratives, and how do these possibilities and limitations expand the theoretical debate on power struggles between the forces of nationalism and globalization in the post-Cold War era?

Chapter 1: Theory and Method

Discourses, narratives, power and the news media

This project is grounded in traditions of discourse analysis theory, which postulates that discourses – “particular way[s] of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world”¹ – structure reality by making certain ways of imagining it possible, true, legitimate and normal, and others impossible, faulty, unacceptable and deviant. By working in such ways, discourses help individuals, communities and nations make sense of themselves and of the world around them, while also influencing specific actions – decisions or policies – that shape everyday material realities. Discourses are thus both enabling and constraining, as they define the range of imaginable possibilities but also limit it by functioning as “repositories for the benchmarks of good and bad behavior.”² As Charlotte Epstein states, “a discourse is a cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations about a specific object that frame that object in a certain way and, therefore, delimit the possibilities for action in relation to it.”³ She further notes that “discourses and material practices are tightly bound up and mutually constitutive”⁴ – and this is why discourses are important to consider and to examine: they have very real and concrete social effects.⁵ This understanding is rooted in the works of Michel Foucault, who had shown how various discourses - “the sets of meanings and practices that contain rules about what is say-able and know-able and that create roles which actors

¹ Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse : Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

² Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2008), 13.

³ Epstein, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse*.

fill”⁶ – constitute various material practices.⁷ When it comes to international affairs and global politics, scholars working in the constructivist tradition of international relations also emphasize causal links in the constitution of discourses, stating that “how things are put together makes possible or even probable, certain kinds of political behaviors and effects.”⁸

This study distinguishes between discourses and narratives, following the argument that discourses are more stable and persistent entities that structure narratives, whereas narratives are more dynamic and thus are also often used by actors engaged in meaning-making (e.g. media producers or policymakers) strategically. As Alister Miskimmon and colleagues argue, “narratives can orient audiences to a future as leaders craft them out of discourses and frames. Discourses are the raw material of communication – bodies of knowledge about science, law, history, theology – that actors plot into narratives. ... Actors can only form and project a narrative based upon the discourses available to them in their historical situation, so discourses have a structuring effect upon narrative action. Actors reflectively work with discourse to construct narratives with the instrumental aim to influence the opinions and behavior of others. History, analogies, metaphors, symbols, and images can trigger and/or shape narratives.”⁹

As discourses and narratives constitute the production of meaning, they inevitably participate in generation and distribution of social power. Teun van Dijk defines social

⁶ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Routledge, 2014), 7.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Vintage, 1982); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁸ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 391-416, 394.

⁹ Miskimmon et al., 7.

power as “a social relation between groups or institutions, involving the control by a (more) powerful group or institution (and its members) of the actions and the minds of (the members) a less powerful group.”¹⁰ Discursive power is symbolic; that is, it works in ways that make domination and control feel natural and legitimate. Pierre Bourdieu analyzed this form of power as a “symbolic domination.”¹¹ Power exercised through symbolic domination does not need to work through coercion. Since it operates at the level of meaning and social interaction, it produces consent from within because it constitutes meaning and the rules of social interactions in the first place.

Since news media are among the key agents of meaning making, they constitute critical sites of production of symbolic power. As news media interpret various events and issues for their audiences, they draw on discourses available to them in their specific historical circumstances, and construct narratives that work to help their audiences make sense of the world around them. In doing so, news media inevitably privilege some discourses over others, often resorting to those that would resonate more with their specific audiences.

Important for this project is the notion that, as Norman Fairclough puts it, “there are alternative and often competing discourses, associated with different groups of people in different social positions.”¹² Indeed, every society and every culture always consists of a dominant culture and multiple counter-cultures, and any understanding of national and/or cultural identity is incomplete without accounting for the interplay (or a struggle)

¹⁰ van Dijk, *Power and the News Media*, 10.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu and John B. Thompson, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹² Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse*, 35.

between these elements and corresponding discourses. Edward Said described this dynamic as follows:

“...cultures are not the same. There is an official culture, a culture of priests, academics, and the state. It provides definitions of patriotism, loyalty, boundaries and what I've called belonging. It is this official culture that speaks in the name of the whole. But it's also true... [that] in addition to the mainstream or official culture, there are dissenting or alternative, unorthodox, heterodox, strands that contain many antiauthoritarian themes in them that are in competition with the official culture. These can be called the counter-cultures, an ensemble of practices associated with various kinds of outsiders, the poor, immigrants, artistic Bohemians, workers, rebels, artists. From the counter-culture comes the critique of authority and attacks on what is official and orthodox. No culture is understandable without some sense of this ever-present source of creative provocation from the unofficial to the official. To disregard the sense of restlessness... within each culture and to assume that there's complete homogeneity between culture and identity, is to miss what is vital and fertile in culture.”¹³

This interplay of competing discourses is reflected in the narratives produced by different news media as they make sense of events and issues and construct the identities of the actors involved in these events and issues for their audiences.

Mainstream news media and the dominant discourse of the Cold War

Mainstream news media played a leading role in constructing the hegemonic discourse of the Cold War. In fact, the term “Cold War” as a way of characterizing international relations in the 20th century was first introduced and popularized by journalists and public intellectuals.¹⁴ The Cold War as a rhetorical construction¹⁵ and the array of corresponding metaphors defined international affairs for a large part of the 20th century. From a geopolitical point of view, imagining international affairs within the

¹³ Edward Said, “The Myth Of ‘The Clash Of Civilizations’” (public lecture, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, 1998).

¹⁴ See, for example, George Orwell, *You and the Atomic Bomb* (Tribune, 1945); Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War. A Study in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947).

¹⁵ Martin J. Medhurst and H. W. Brands, *Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History* (Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

confines of the Cold War discursive framework was convenient: “the Cold War, for all its risks, was characterized by a remarkably stable and predictable set of relationships among the great powers. Virtually every foreign policy move and world event, from a coup in Central America to cultural legislation in France, was to a great extent judged by its relation to the Cold War.”¹⁶ The Cold War discourse presented a similar convenience for mass media. In the United States, “journalists quickly discovered that they could sell their editors – because their editors could sell the public – almost any story pegged to a Soviet or communist threat, from crises in Berlin to Vietnam to Angola.”¹⁷ This way, the commercial model of the free American media conveniently matched the ideological and geopolitical agenda of the US government. This approach further legitimized the Cold War model of global politics. As James Aronson noted, “the press helped to lead the nation into accepting a quarter century of the Cold War, with the awfulness that ensued.”¹⁸ It is important to note the difference between the mainstream press as an institution and the roles of individual journalists that worked for and in the system of the mainstream media. Several studies demonstrate how even though “the Cold War shaped understanding of all foreign events from the 1950s through 1991 for both journalists and policymakers, and correspondents had the difficult task of seeing through the simplification inherent in that frame to get at local realities,”¹⁹ individual journalists nevertheless tried to offer different understandings and interpretations of the Cold War

¹⁶ Henry A. Grunwald, “The Post-Cold War Press: A New World Needs a New Journalism,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 12–16, doi:10.2307/20045619, 14.

¹⁷ Garrick Utley, “The Shrinking of Foreign News. From Broadcast to Narrowcast,” *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 1997), 5.

¹⁸ Aronson, 288.

¹⁹ Dell’Orto, *American Journalism*, 114.

events and politics – sometimes more and sometimes less successfully, depending on various factors and circumstances.²⁰ Yet there are also studies that examine the US mainstream media during the Cold War as institutions situated within a larger political system and thus not entirely immune to its ideological effects.²¹ Together, these studies show that the mainstream media did function as sites of ideological and discursive struggle, where the agency of individual journalists sometimes clashed with dominant understandings and interpretations of the Cold War as first and foremost a struggle between the two superpowers, yet these dominant understandings did exist on a structural level – otherwise the journalists would not feel that their attempts to interpret the events differently represented a “fight.”

In the Soviet Union, where the media was controlled by the Communist Party, the dynamic was still rather complex. On the one hand, the media in the Soviet Union was “an integral part of the party apparatus.”²² Yet several studies also demonstrate how Soviet media – and journalism – changed during the decades of the Cold War. For example, Dina Fainberg demonstrates and discusses the differences in how global politics was reported by the Soviet journalists during Stalin’s leadership and after it, with journalists having (and taking advantage of) more freedom to report on issues in more complex ways in post-Stalin era.²³ Thomas Wolfe also demonstrates how the Soviet media of the post-Stalin era were part of a complex project of negotiation and redefinition

²⁰ Pippa Norris, *Politics and the Press: The News Media and Their Influences* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997).

²¹ Aronson; Edward Alwood, *Dark Days in the Newsroom. McCarthyism Aimed at the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

²² Thomas F. Remington, “Politics and Professionalism in Soviet Journalism,” *Slavic Review* 44, no. 3 (October 1, 1985): 489–503, doi:10.2307/2498016.

²³ Dina Fainberg, “Notes From the Rotten West, Reports From the Backward East: Soviet and American Foreign Correspondents in the Cold War, 1945-1985” (doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 2012).

of the Soviet system and Soviet ideology, thus not always and not necessarily functioning as simply the tools of Soviet state propaganda.²⁴ Yet these studies also note that the changes in Soviet journalism *followed* the changes in the Soviet political and ideological system, taking advantage of the opportunities opened up by, for example, post-Stalin's era of Khrushchev's Thaw, yet having to cope with the conservative conditions of Brezhnev's era that followed the Thaw.

The other history (or histories?) and the alternative discourses of the Cold War

While the mainstream media in the United States and the Soviet Union constructed the reality of global politics in ways that often (though not always, as the previous section argues) interpreted international events within the framework of the rivalry between the two superpowers, a careful look at history shows that in spite of the domination of such canonical interpretations, the Cold War era was marked by tremendous complexities, tensions and contradictions.

Several studies illuminate these complexities by introducing alternative ways of thinking about the Cold War. Penny Von Eschen, in her book *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, tells a compelling story of the US State Department-sponsored global jazz tours – a “cultural exchange” that had a strategic goal of “promoting black artists as goodwill ambassadors [and] symbols of the triumph of American democracy.”²⁵ Von Eschen's analysis brings to the surface the fundamental

²⁴ Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005). For similar arguments, though applied to Soviet film and television, see also Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

²⁵ Penny Von Eschen. *Satchmo Blows Up the World. Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 2004), 4.

contradiction between the image of the United States that the State Department sought to project to the rest of the world – one of the “land of freedom and equality” – and the reality of the United States still being a “land of Jim Crow laws.” The contradiction Von Eschen’s analysis reveals speaks directly to the question of state identity, and the roles of different populations and institutions in defining it. Though Von Eschen does not focus on examining the role of various media in covering the tours, she often cites the articles of the US mainstream newspapers; in her analysis, these mainstream media narratives support the image of the US crafted by the State Department, while the interactions of jazz musicians with different people on the tours often challenge this image.

Von Eschen’s other work, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, also challenges the bipolar framework of the Cold War. Here, Von Eschen’s analysis emphasizes the critical role that black press – an important, though not the only, segment of the various alternative US media – played in “reshaping international political debates and crafting new political strategies”²⁶ during the Cold War era.

James Aronson, in his work *The Press and the Cold War*, also discussed the role of the alternative press in challenging official US foreign policy and presenting “a counterweight to the general press which accepted and propagated without question basic United States policy and the virtue of the capitalist system.”²⁷ Drawing on his own experience of founding and publishing one of such alternative publications – the *National Guardian* – Aronson described the publication’s philosophy in the following way:

²⁶ Penny M. Von Eschen. *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5.

²⁷ Aronson, 281.

“The *National Guardian* regarded United States policy as the chief source of the world’s problems. It did not as policy advocate socialism as an alternative, but insisted that it be discussed as a possible alternative, and not as a horrid word. It offered a sympathetic presentation of news of the socialist world, while reserving the right to be critical. It held that the peace of the world depended upon an acceptance by the people of the West that socialism was here to stay. Whether the peoples of the Western world liked it or not was irrelevant.”²⁸

Historical research exploring the counter-hegemonic narratives of the Cold War produced in the Soviet Union exists as well. Much of this research became possible after the opening of the Soviet archives. As Vladislav Zubok writes in his book *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev*, “with all these sources, it became possible to write about the Cold War not just as a clash of great powers and as an accumulation of deadly weaponry. Above all, every history is the story of people and their motives, hopes, crimes, illusions, and mistakes. The Soviet Cold War had many fronts and dimensions – from Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin to Moscow kitchens, where dissidents spoke about Communism “with a human face,” from Politburo in the Kremlin to students’ dorms.”²⁹ Though Soviet Union did not have official alternative media, the intricate networks of *Samizdat* – Soviet underground press created and disseminated by the Soviet citizens – functioned as discursive spaces of political dissent. *Samizdat* and the counter-discourses it produced were a part of the USSR’s state identity, in spite of the fact that this aspect of state’s identity was inconvenient for the state and thus it was rendered invisible.

²⁸ Aronson, 281.

²⁹ Vladislav M. Zubok. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Nationalism, globalization and power in the post-Cold War world

The power dynamic that underlies the coexistence and the continuous struggle between the mainstream and alternative interpretations (and corresponding media discourses) of events during the Cold War and after it connects this project to the theoretical discussion of nationalism and globalization as key frameworks for imagining the “world order” after the Cold War.

At heart of the discussion is an idea expressed well by Nicholas Negroponte: “As we connect ourselves many of the values of a nation-state will give way to those of both larger and smaller communities.”³⁰ Much has been written about the “values of the nation-state,” along with a nation-state’s multiple definitions. However, some of the core characteristics of the nation-state are sovereignty, defined territory, and a sense of common identity that connects the people belonging to a nation-state.³¹ These characteristics assume and require maintenance of a certain degree of isolationism and a necessity to draw various borders (not only physical ones) to be able to distinguish one state from another, one nation from another: this is *us* - and we do things and think about them this way, and those are *them* – and they act and think differently. To guarantee the security of a state, a certain order must be maintained; that is, a nation-state assumes the presence of a hierarchy – even in democratic nation-states – between the State/Government and the people/governed.

³⁰ Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 7.

³¹ See, for example, John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005); Sheila L. Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Elizabeth Hanson, *The Information Revolution and World Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

The relative isolationism and an ongoing concern over security also assume the development and maintenance of unity and solidarity among the people constituting a nation – something that is best achieved (under the nation-state paradigm) through fostering of a sense of common identity among the members of a nation. Mainstream mass media historically played an important role in creating and disseminating discourses that supported and reinforced that sense of common identity – an idea well expressed by Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities.”³² Under the nation-state paradigm, the information about outsiders is only valuable if it concerns the interests or the security of the insiders, and the state. Some of the best-known conceptualizations of the process of news-making stress this point. For example, Michael Gurevich’s concept of “domestication” suggests that in order for foreign events to become news for the domestic audiences, it must be tied to *national* security or/and *national* interests.³³ Robert Entman also argues in his theory of framing that journalists, in order to present foreign news, search for frames that are “culturally congruent” – that is, resonate with the values and interests of the national audience.³⁴ At the same time, such discourses often overlap with discourses of security that draw sharp distinctions between insiders and outsiders, defining their identities as fixed and monolithic. Cold War discourse, with its heavy reliance on security themes³⁵ and on articulation of identities as monolithic and fixed

³² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

³³ Michael Gurevitch, Mark R. Levy and Itzhak Roeh, “The Global Newsroom: Convergences and Diversities in the Globalization of Television News,” in *Communications and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*, ed. Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (London: Routledge, 1993).

³⁴ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of power framing news, public opinion, and US foreign policy* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁵ Paul Chilton, *Security Metaphors: Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common European Home* (Berne and New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

rather than nuanced and fluid, corresponds to the nation-state paradigm, and perhaps even serves as one of its best, though extreme, illustrations.

The turn of the twentieth century brought about transformations that, according to a number of scholars, challenged the nation-state paradigm on multiple dimensions. Significant changes in world trade, communication technologies and migration patterns created conditions that allowed non-state actors to pursue leading roles in managing world affairs. As Elizabeth Hanson puts it, “the stage of world politics is becoming so crowded that it is sometimes difficult to see who the main characters are. The stars are supposed to be the ones who have the most lines and provide the most action. But occasionally minor characters lurking in the background, or even previously invisible ones, leap to the center of the stage or simply assume a more important role.”³⁶ Similarly, J. P. Singh argues that “the locus of authority, order, and legitimacy are shifting away from the state toward pluralism and actor advocacy”³⁷ The conditions accompanying this arguably ongoing “power shift”³⁸ create multiple opportunities for re-articulation and re-formulation of state identities: “Globalization means that the potential of the media to buttress the identity of the state and its inhabitants is altered. Globalization means that the cultural bonds and loyalties that seemed to be within the control of the state are now less so.”³⁹

³⁶ Hanson, 179.

³⁷ J. P. Singh, “Introduction: Information Technologies and the Changing Scope of Global Power and Governance,” in *Information Technologies and Global Politics: The Changing Scope of Power and Governance*, ed. James Rosenau and J. P. Singh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 2.

³⁸ Jessica Matthews’ term, first used in Jessica T. Matthews, “Power Shift,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 1 (January/February 1997): 2-10.

³⁹ Monroe E. Price, *Media and Sovereignty: The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenge to State Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 26.

The idea of the “power shift” has been disputed by scholars as well. For example, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argue that the changes, especially those in the structure of information and its distribution worldwide, still occur within the existing power structure.⁴⁰ Those who have more resources dictate the “rules of globalization.” Another line of criticism argues that states have always been challenged from inside and outside and always found ways of not only responding and adapting to those challenges, but also turning the challenges into opportunities for surveillance and more efficient order maintenance.⁴¹

Other scholars acknowledge changes in power dynamics but suggest that instead of interpreting these changes as a “power shift” it might be more useful to view them as an ongoing power struggle. For example, Manuel Castells argues that “the twin process of globalization and the rise of communal identities have challenged the boundaries of the nation state as the relevant unit to define a public space. Not that the nation-state disappears (quite the opposite), but its legitimacy has dwindled as governance is global and governments remain national.”⁴² Similarly, Ronald Deibert suggests that the state as power holder certainly exists and does not show signs of disappearance, but the political authority does not belong to the state alone anymore; it is dispersed among multiple

⁴⁰ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, “Power and Independence in the Information Age,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 5 (September/October 1998): 81-94.

⁴¹ See, for example, Stephen Krasner, “Sovereignty,” *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2001); Paul Heyer, *Communications and History: Theories of Media, Knowledge, and Civilization* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988); Joanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War: Is Media Technology Driving International Politics?* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

⁴² Manuel Castells, “Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society,” *International Journal of Communication*, 1 (2007), 258.

actors.⁴³ Thus, globalization does not necessarily exclude nationalism as a framework for defining state (and individual) identities. However, it introduces multiple additional possibilities for identity articulation that are not limited by characteristics set within the nation-state framework.

What is remarkable about the scholarly debate on nationalism and globalization is that it revolves exclusively around examining political actors and their actions. This project aims to shift the conversation to narratives and the nature of discourses informing these narratives in the post-Cold War world. If globalization means that power doesn't belong to the state alone anymore and is instead dispersed among multiple actors, do the narratives that accompany power flows in the post-Cold War era also reflect this dynamic? Do the ways in which we talk about international affairs and the identities of states involved in these affairs evolve under the conditions of globalization that characterize the post-Cold War era?

An insightful discussion by Clifford Geertz is particularly useful here. In his essay *The World in Pieces: Culture and Politics at the End of the Century*,⁴⁴ Geertz reflected on the complexity of the post-Cold War world, with all its newly formed entities, alliances, sets of relations and identities. As Geertz put it, “the world of compact powers and contending blocks” gave way to “a stream of obscure divisions and strange instabilities,”⁴⁵ to a world of “pressed-together dissimilarities variously arranged.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Ronald Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁴⁴ Clifford Geertz, “The World in Pieces: Culture and Politics at the End of the Century,” in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, ed. Clifford Geertz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

These relationships are “irregular, scrappy, ominously indeterminate;”⁴⁷ Geertz called them a “disassembly” and added that “in a splintered world, we must address the splinters.”⁴⁸ He then argued that so far there have been two general approaches to dealing with the world’s complexity: postmodernism, with its “neurasthenic skepticism about efforts to pull things together into encompassing accounts”⁴⁹ and one of “totalizing concepts” like Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations.” Neither approach is particularly useful in navigating the “disassembled world,” in Geertz’s view, so he put the following call out: “What we need, it seems, are not enormous ideas, not the abandonment of synthesizing notions altogether. What we need are ways of thinking that are responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called “deep diversity,” a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them – from it – a sense of connectedness, a connectedness that is neither comprehensive nor uniform, primal nor changeless, but nonetheless real.”⁵⁰

In this call Geertz pointed out – one more time – that cultures and identities are not fixed but rather dynamic, always-evolving and shifting, and that the end of the Cold War – the moment of rupture – had just increased and intensified the processes associated with cultural diversity and its negotiation by pushing individuals and communities to radically rethink and redefine who they are, where they belong, what they believe in and what is the best way to coexist. The post-Cold War conditions of globalization allow for

⁴⁷ Geertz, 219.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Geertz, 222.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 224.

multiple discourses to exist and function simultaneously, sometimes in complementary and sometimes in contradictory ways, making the role of context particularly important. This project engages with multiple contexts by examining the discourses that a) are constitutive of these contexts and b) inform the narratives produced by the media with very different historical, political, linguistic and ideological backgrounds, as well as with different political and strategic goals.

Articulation

A critical aspect of the globalizing post-Cold War world is that multiple discourses coexist, overlap and compete for dominance, with news media comprising one of the key sites of this discursive struggle. Stuart Hall's theory of articulation helps link various discourses that inform the media narratives about the events analyzed in this study and explain how they shape and reflect the power struggles and the relations of domination and subordination that structure the Russian and US mainstream and alternative media texts. Stuart Hall defines articulation as follows: "the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessarily, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be

connected.”⁵¹ Lawrence Grossberg uses the metaphor of an English 16-wheel semi-truck to explain how articulation works.⁵² He says that such a truck is described in England as an articulated lorry, where the cab and the trailer are linked together:

“The cab and the trailer can be separated, although neither piece would be very useful alone. The two pieces can be linked to other cabs or trailers to form a different truck, but neither half is a “truck” itself. The production of signs, texts, and meanings can be seen in similar terms. Signifiers are linked to produce signs; signs are linked to produce texts; texts are linked to produce interpretations. When someone uses language, he or she articulates signifiers together and codes together; this is how language makes signs, texts, and meanings. Meanings involve the articulation of relations between signifiers, relations that are themselves described in terms of codes. This process, at a broader level, implies that texts themselves have meaning only in relationship to the codes with which they are articulated or located, and hence in relationship to the broader set of other texts that carry those codes with them. The meaning of the message depends on the ways these codes are linked or articulated to other codes in and through texts.”⁵³

Articulation is a process, and thus articulation as a theory is rooted in the tradition of cultural studies that views theory as a “‘detour’ to help ground our engagement with what newly confronts us and to let that engagement provide the ground for retheorizing.”⁵⁴ As Stuart Hall remarked, “the only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency.”⁵⁵ Thus, articulation is not just a link or a connection but a process of creating these links and connections.

As Daryl Slack reminds us, articulation works at multiple levels. At the epistemological level, articulation is “a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in

⁵¹ Lawrence Grossberg, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1986): 45–60, doi:10.1177/019685998601000204.

⁵² Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella, D. Charles Whitney and J. Macgregor Wise, *Media Making. Mass Media in a Popular Culture* (London: Sage, 2006), 154.

⁵³ Grossberg et al., 154.

⁵⁴ Daryl Slack, 113.

⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 280.

the constitution of what we take to be unities.”⁵⁶ Thus, articulation enables us to think of the ways in which the contradictions that are constitutive of specific practices can be thought together, even though these contradictions may not all arise at the same time and in the same way. As Hall states, “the structuralist paradigm... enable[s] us to begin really to *conceptualize* the specificity of different practices (analytically distinguished, abstracted out), without losing its grip on the ensemble which they constitute.”⁵⁷ At the political level, articulation is “a way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination.”⁵⁸ Here Hall draws on the work of Antonio Gramsci on hegemony, interrogating the notions of power and privilege and arguing that certain articulations are more persistent and effective than others. Hall suggests that such articulations comprise “lines of tendential force,”⁵⁹ making re-articulation more difficult. At the strategic level, articulation “provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.”⁶⁰ Here articulation as a theory intersects with articulation as a method, allowing a theorist to examine how various social, political, economic, institutional forces are organized into units that are effective and are relatively empowering or disempowering.”⁶¹ As Daryl Slack notes, also quoting Hall,⁶² “the specificity of the domain of communication... requires that we examine the way in which these forces, at a certain moment, yield

⁵⁶ Daryl Slack, 112.

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” in *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1): 57 – 72, 69. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁸ Daryl Slack, 112.

⁵⁹ Grossberg, *On Postmodernism*, 53-4.

⁶⁰ Daryl Slack, 112.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶² Stuart Hall, “Ideology and Communication Theory,” in *Rethinking Communication*, vol. 1, Paradigm Issues, eds. Brenda Dervin, Larry Grossberg, Barbara J. O’Keefe and Ellen Wartella (Newbury Park: Sage, 1989): 40 – 52.

intelligible meanings, enter the circuits of culture – the field of cultural practices – that shape the understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations, construct them as potential social subjects, and have the effect of organizing the ways in which they come to or form consciousness of the world.”⁶³ Thus, the aim of a cultural theorist’s practice (a “theoretically-informed political practice,”⁶⁴ as Daryl Slack calls it) is to determine “when, where and how these circuits might be rearticulated.”⁶⁵

Method

This project is based on a combination of a qualitative textual analysis and a discourse analysis of the news media texts. Qualitative textual analysis was used to identify key themes and dimensions within the themes for each case study. The analysis for each case study was conducted in three steps. During the first step of open coding - “a process of unrestricted coding... during which an analyst goes through the texts line by line and marks those chunks of text that suggest a category”⁶⁶ – initial categories were identified for each case study. Next, these initial categories were integrated during axial coding – a stage in which “the codes are used to make connections between categories... thus [resulting] in the creation of either new categories or a theme that spans many categories.”⁶⁷ As a result, the categories were “collapsed” into “notional categories”⁶⁸ or themes, which comprise the final themes discussed in this project for each case study.

⁶³ Daryl Slack, 124.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods.*, 2nd ed. / Thomas R. Lindlof, Bryan C. Taylor. (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2002), 220.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Additionally, some categories/themes were “dimensionalized.” According to Spiggle, “dimensionalization involves identifying properties of categories and constructs... Once a category has been defined, the analyst may explore its attributes or characteristics along the continua or dimensions.”⁶⁹

Discourse analysis was used to determine how various elements of the Cold War discourse informed the narratives comprising the themes and how other discourses structured the narratives. The discourse analysis was guided by the following questions: Which voices and texts were included and which were excluded? What significant absences could be identified? Which roles did different actors fill in the scenarios presented by different news media? What was discussed as a problem and what was discussed as an opportunity? Which solutions to the identified problems were legitimized and which ones were marginalized? Thus, discourse analysis allowed determining how the correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions among the narratives and the discourses reflected the relations of symbolic domination and subordination structuring the texts, as well as how and where the opportunities for discursive transformation could be identified.

The texts for the analysis were collected via different means. All texts for the US mainstream newspapers (the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*) were obtained through the LexisNexis database accessed through the University of Minnesota library. The texts for the two Russian mainstream newspapers (*Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty*) were obtained by searching the archives of these publications; the texts of the news

⁶⁹ Susan Spiggle, “Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 21 (1994): 267-279.

articles were available free of charge. The same principle was used for the two Russian alternative publications (*Novaya Gazeta* and the *New Times*) and for the US alternative publications (*The Nation* and *Z Magazine*). All quotes from the Russian news media used to illustrate the points in the analysis section were translated to English by the author.

The New York Times and the *Washington Post* were chosen for the analysis of the US mainstream news media discourses. Both newspapers fit well the definition of the “major national newspaper” with high circulation rates,⁷⁰ robust readership base⁷¹ and editorial and news-gathering standards and practices that are considered professional and therefore authoritative and credible. In addition, both newspapers have foreign news bureaus - a resource that significantly widens these news outlets’ possibilities for covering foreign events and issues. Moreover, having foreign news bureaus increases the credibility of the news reports on foreign affairs in the eyes of the readers, serving as a powerful tool of legitimizing the narratives produced by both newspapers.

The newspapers of the Russian media environment that fit the definition of the “major national newspaper” are *Argumenty I Fakty* (Arguments and Facts) and *Izvestia* (The News). *Izvestia* is a daily with the audience of over 300,000 readers.⁷² *Argumenty i*

⁷⁰ Both newspapers have consistently made it to top ten US newspapers by circulation since 2008 (the year of the first case study in this project), with the New York Times staying in top three. See “Newspapers Geo/Circ,” *Alliance for Audited Media*, <http://auditedmedia.com/data/media-intelligence-center/in-depth-analysis/newspaper-geocirc/> (accessed on May 20, 2014).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Reitingi SMI – Pressa,” *TNS Gallup*, <http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/press/index.wbp?press.action=search&press.regionId=68CDA84F-6158-4F7C-A36A-7DAF207B88E1&press.regionId=C27FFFD9-CC9B-4AD1-B826-00B2CDE2B4AB&press.regionId=C9838420-042B-4B9E-B7A8-F228DB27C8E1&press.periodId=027D78AA-8118-4869-A2AC-BEBE02CB2229&press.smiId=FFE6B659-63E1-46F3-96E1-53EBD1D16CCE>.

Fakty is a weekly newspaper with a large audience of over seven million readers.⁷³ Both newspapers had correspondents reporting directly from the regions where the events analyzed in two of the three case studies in this project took place.

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* are well-known in Russia for reporting that challenges existing political order without advocating for specific political parties that comprise the Russian “official” political opposition. Both employ a number of journalists famous for their investigative and literary work; several of them, including Anna Politkovskaya, were murdered or physically attacked as a result of their reporting on sensitive political issues.⁷⁴ *Novaya Gazeta* has the audience of over 100,000 readers,⁷⁵ is published twice a week and has a well-developed and constantly updated website. *The New Times* defines its mission as “being a magazine for and of the civil society, which means writing honestly and objectively about the events in Russia and in the world”⁷⁶ and “about problems that others choose to ignore or silence.”⁷⁷

The Nation and *Z Magazine* have a long standing history of producing narratives that challenge dominant US discourses on domestic and international politics. The *Nation*, established in 1865, still follows the principles outlined in its founding prospectus: “*The Nation will not be the organ of any party, sect, or body. It will, on the contrary, make an earnest effort to bring to the discussion of political and social*

⁷³ “Reitingi SMI – Pressa.”

⁷⁴ Nataliya Rostova. “Istoriya Novoy Gazety,” *Slon.ru*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/history.html>.

⁷⁵ “Reitingi SMI – Pressa”

⁷⁶ Yevgeniya Albats, “Chasto Zadavayemye Voprosy i Otveti,” *The New Times*, <http://www.newtimes.ru/faq/> (accessed April 15, 2015).

⁷⁷ Yevgeniya Albats, “Svoboda Slova. Dorogo,” *Radio.ru* information portal, <http://www.radiportal.ru/region-news/18843/evgeniya-albats-glavnyi-redaktor-the-new-times-svoboda-slova-dorogo> (accessed April 15, 2015).

questions a really critical spirit, and to wage war upon the vices of violence, exaggeration, and misrepresentation by which so much of the political writing of the day is marred."⁷⁸ *The Nation* describes itself as "the flagship of the left," and is published weekly. *Z Magazine's* editor defines the publication's mission as "one of keeping the politics alive, focusing more on reimagining society, and hoping for some event or catalyst to break through the reactionary politics that seems to dominate the mainstream."⁷⁹ *Z Magazine* is published once a month.

It is important to note that the alternative publications both in Russia and in the US have significantly less resources than the mainstream news media, often existing solely off the readers' contributions, and thus sometimes experiencing lapses or delays in coverage of certain issues. In addition, alternative media tend to focus on producing analytic essays or longer investigative reports rather than up to date reporting more typical for the mainstream media outlets. Because of this specificity, I had to make the time frames during which I conducted searches for the materials pertaining to the case studies more flexible for the alternative media.

US and Russia during and after the Cold War: political context

This project focuses on Russian and US media coverage of selected events in the post-Cold War era. While the project does not directly compare media texts with policy texts or documents that pertain to these events, it is important to provide a basic historical context crucial for understanding the significance of these events in the post-Cold War

⁷⁸ "About the Nation," *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/about-and-contact> (accessed April 3, 2015)

⁷⁹ Lydia Sargent, "What Will It Take To No Longer Tolerate the Intolerable?" *Z Magazine*, December 20, 2011, <https://zcomm.org/zmagazine/what-will-it-take-to-no-longer-tolerate-the-intolerable-by-lydia-sargent/>.

era. Moreover, this project's engagement with the "Cold War discourse" necessitates a discussion of the politics and policies of the Cold War era that made up what is defined in this project as the discourse of the Cold War.

Thus, this section will first discuss the key directions of the US and Russian/Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War. Second, it will discuss how these directions changed and developed in the post-Cold War time.

US foreign policy during the Cold War: key directions

While there is a vast body of scholarship investigating and discussing the US foreign policy during the Cold War – with many disagreements, debates, controversies and unresolved questions – scholars tend to agree on some of the general foreign policy directions pursued by the United States between approximately 1947 (considerable debates exist regarding the official start of the Cold War as well) and 1991.

The first – and perhaps defining – direction was informed by the policy of containment, which assumed employing any means possible to prevent further spread of communism. George Kennan first formulated the principles of the policy of containment in 1947 in his famous article in *Foreign Affairs* titled "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" and published under the pseudonym of Mr. "X." In the article, Kennan insisted that a "policy of firm containment" must be "designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counterforce, at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world."⁸⁰

The policy of containment drew on some of the already existing elements of the Truman Doctrine – a perspective on the US foreign policy articulated by President Harry

⁸⁰ "X," "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* XXV (July 1947): 566-582, 570.

S. Truman in 1947 that framed conflicts between non-communist regimes around the world and communist insurgents as ones between free peoples (non-communist) and totalitarian regimes (communist). The Truman Doctrine is often represented by the following phrase from the speech President Harry Truman delivered to Congress in 1947: “It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”⁸¹ The Truman Doctrine and the policy of containment became important components of the US foreign policy during the Cold War and influenced – though in different ways and to different degrees – subsequent policies and actions. American support of the client states worldwide – nations ruled by non-communist dictatorships backed by the United States – was informed by the doctrine of containment; these states, sometimes also called the “proxy states” often became the sites of “proxy wars,” as different sides in local civil wars were backed by the US and the USSR. The doctrine of containment was evoked by various American presidents at different times during the decades of the Cold War. For example, President Lyndon Johnson cited containment to justify his policies in Vietnam in 1960s. Later, in late 1970s, President Jimmy Carter returned to containment when reacting to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Finally, Ronald Reagan built on containment in developing his “new Reagan Doctrine” in 1980s, which denounced the USSR as an “evil empire,” thus justifying the right for the US to subvert existing communist governments worldwide.⁸²

⁸¹ Quoted in Paterson et al., *American Foreign Relations: Volume 2: Since 1895*. 8 edition (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2014), 239-240.

⁸² Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008).

The doctrine of containment also informed the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, designed to expand American influence in Europe. Paterson et al. quote a popular saying that NATO was designed “to keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”⁸³ The creation of NATO was part of a larger political strategy of expanding American influence in Europe and containing the spread of communism in Europe. This strategy involved the European Recovery Program (ERP), more widely known as the Marshall Plan – a comprehensive, coordinated program intended to restore post-World War II Europe. In addition to the Marshall Plan, one of the pillars of the US foreign policy rooted in economic development was the support of free trade and international economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and the World Bank.⁸⁴ This way, containment of communism went hand in hand with active promotion of capitalism.

Another critical component of the US foreign policy during the Cold War was nuclear deterrence – a strategy based on the development of nuclear weapons as a credible threat of retaliation in case of enemy attack. The primary focus of the US deterrent during the Cold War was the Soviet Union, which also had built nuclear force targeting the United States. The situation was called “mutual deterrence,” or as it was more often called, “mutual assured destruction” (MAD). While some have argued that MAD kept the two superpowers from an all-out war, others also noted that the existence

⁸³ Paterson et al., 247.

⁸⁴ Paterson et al.

of nuclear weapons brought the world to the brink of nuclear war several times, most notably in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.⁸⁵

While containment and deterrence guided the US foreign policy for most of the Cold War, there were also periods of thaw in US-USSR relations. The most notable period occurred in the 1960s and 1970s and became known as *détente*. By then, the pattern of international relations became more complex, with Western Europe and Japan having recovered from the World War II destruction, and with the Third World nations forming alliances like the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Non-Aligned Movement, allowing these nations to assert their independence and resist the pressures from the US or the USSR. Particularly during the presidency of Richard Nixon, a strategy of “peaceful coexistence” was embraced by both superpowers, leading to the signing of the two arms control treaties – SALT I (the first limitation treaty signed by the US and the USSR) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.⁸⁶ Both treaties limited the development of anti-ballistic and nuclear missiles. The second period of the Cold War when the American foreign policy was guided by efforts to improve relations with the USSR occurred in mid-to-late 1980s. It was during this period when President Ronald Reagan agreed to renew talks on economic issues and nuclear arsenal reductions. A series of talks between President Reagan and USSR’s General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev resulted in several breakthroughs, such as, for example, the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This course of foreign policy continued with

⁸⁵ Richard C. Bush III et al., “U.S. Nuclear and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges,” *The Brookings Institution*, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2010/06/nuclear-deterrence>.

⁸⁶ Paterson et al.

President George H. W. Bush and ended with the end of the Cold War when the beginning of the new era called for a renewed foreign policy.

Russian/Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War: key directions

The Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War was driven, like domestic policies, by ideology of Marxism-Leninism, though at different times (especially in the later stages of the Cold War) changes in the Soviet leadership introduced changes in the extent to which the ideology affected Soviet foreign policy.

Immediately after the World War II, the USSR started to establish policies that would counter British and American power in Europe. This was reflected in “Sovietization” of Eastern Europe under the control and supervision of Soviet military forces, as well as in creation of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) tasked with establishment and coordination of Soviet-led policy in Europe.⁸⁷ Similar efforts extended beyond Eastern Europe later, with the creation of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) – an organization that served as a framework for cooperation between the USSR, its Eastern European allies and the Soviet allies in the Third World.⁸⁸ These initiatives were part of the Soviet reaction to the American doctrine of containment. Similarly, in 1955, the Warsaw Pact – a Soviet-led military alliance based in Eastern Europe – was created to counter NATO. The principles of spreading communism worldwide while countering Western capitalism and imperialism informed the Soviet foreign policies aimed at suppressing liberalization and democratization movements in Eastern Europe (with the Soviet violent suppression of such movement in

⁸⁷ Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Yale University Press, 2011).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 serving as particularly dramatic examples), as well as at supporting “national liberation movements” in countries of the Third World (for example, in Ethiopia, Angola, Nicaragua and El Salvador in 1970s).⁸⁹ This line of foreign policy was particularly strong under Stalin’s leadership, and then again, in the 1970s, under the leadership of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. The Brezhnev Doctrine postulated that a threat to socialism in one country meant a threat to socialism everywhere; such threats, according to the Brezhnev Doctrine, had to be countered with military force.⁹⁰ The doctrine persisted even throughout the détente period of US-USSR relations, culminating in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (informed by the doctrine) and ending the détente.

At the same time, other trends shaped Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War. For example, two years after Stalin’s death in 1953, the First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev took embraced the policy of “De-Stalinization.” He denounced Stalin’s politics and policies as careless and ruthless, as well as challenged Leninist notion about the inevitable warfare between Socialism and Capitalism.⁹¹ Khrushchev emphasized the policy aimed at achieving peaceful co-existence, especially in the face of the danger of nuclear war. Ironically, it was under Khrushchev leadership when the USSR and the US were on the brink of the nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis. It was also under Khrushchev leadership when the Berlin Wall was constructed in order to prevent massive emigration and defection from East Germany to West Germany.

⁸⁹ Haslam.

⁹⁰ Matthew Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁹¹ Raymond Pearson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

The sharpest turn in the Soviet foreign policy occurred in the mid-to-late 1980s with the reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, widely known as perestroika. The reforms aimed at improving Soviet economy, while turning away from the arms race with the US. This meant the recognition of the irrelevance of the buffer zone in Eastern Europe, and therefore the end of USSR's interference in the politics of the Eastern European states. This also meant consent to German reunification, which resulted in the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan under Gorbachev's leadership, and several mutual arms control agreements were reached with the United States in a series of arms control summits.

US foreign policy after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War introduced the need for the United States to reset its foreign policy goals and priorities. The chief enemy disappeared and while on the one hand this was a source of celebration and a "proof" of American superiority, it also, on the other hand, resulted in a sense of "loss of direction" in American foreign policy. One of the key questions that became central to the US foreign policy after the Cold War concerned interventions in conflicts abroad. If before the interventions were justified by the doctrine of containment, in the new political landscape marked by "the changing structure of the world power, the rising tide of nationalism and ethnic identity, the challenge of Islamic jihadism, the increased importance of world economics, and the prominence of relatively new foreign policy issues like the environment and drugs"⁹² making decisions regarding foreign interventions became much more complex. In light of

⁹² Jerald A. Combs, *The History of American Foreign Policy From 1895*, 4th ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 2012), 410.

this complexity, George H. W. Bush introduced a standard for intervention termed “prudent realism,” which meant that the US should intervene only when its national interests were at stake, when no other effective option were available, and when the use of force was likely to be effective. One of the first examples of an intervention based on “prudent realism” was the Persian Gulf War in 1991, where the US, several Middle Eastern countries and Gorbachev’s Soviet Union expelled Saddam Hussein’s Iraqis from Kuwait. In other instances – notably in Yugoslavia and Bosnia that both sunk into civil wars in the 1990s – the US did not intervene as Bush argued that no American national interests were at stake there. At the same time, several humanitarian interventions, notably in Panama and Somalia, occurred under the pressure by the American public, despite the fact that no vital US interests were involved.

Bill Clinton’s intervention policy shifted the focus from unilateralism to the involvement of multiple actors, notably the United Nations. It also put heavier emphasis on the idea that interventions are legitimate if they aim to “defend democratic principles and human rights against atrocious regimes.”⁹³ Interventions, however, were not the main priority of Bill Clinton’s foreign policy, despite three difficult intervention dilemmas – in Haiti, Somalia and the Balkans – Clinton faced early in his presidency. Instead, he focused more on expanding free markets, democracy and on “preparing the US for the challenges of globalization.”⁹⁴ One of the most notable trade agreements reached during Clinton’s presidency was NAFTA, which reduced tariffs and promoted investment between the US, Canada and Mexico. Clinton also expanded NATO in Europe, “reduced

⁹³ Combs, 412.

⁹⁴ Fraser Cameron, *US Foreign Policy After the Cold War. Global Hegemon or Reluctant Sheriff?* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 35.

the North Korean threat through a mixture of deterrence and diplomacy, and helped bring China into the global mainstream.”⁹⁵ Clinton also supported Russia’s transition to market economy and its membership in the G8. It was also under Clinton’s leadership when nuclear weapons were removed from Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Critics argued that Clinton’s foreign policy lacked strategic focus and was for the most part reactive. Cameron cited one critic who insisted that Clinton “stumbled from crisis to crisis, trying to figure out what was popular, what would be effective, and what choices would pose the lower risk to his presidency, and, especially, his reputation.”⁹⁶

George W. Bush’s foreign policy in many ways opposed Clinton’s and set the US on a different course. Bush announced the end of US’s engagement in the Middle East peace process, the suspension of the talks with North Korea, termination of sending troops to the Balkans and a push toward strengthening national missile defense. This agenda led to critics proclaiming Bush’s “retreat from US role as a peace broker.”⁹⁷ As Cameron noted, “the world has become accustomed to US participation in and general support for multilateral institutions during the Bush senior and Clinton administrations. Many world leaders, therefore, found it difficult to accept the new Republican view that international organizations often reflect ‘a consensus that opposes American interests or does not reflect American principles and ideas’.”⁹⁸ The biggest foreign policy challenge Bush faced also became the biggest turning point not only in the US post-Cold War foreign policy but in the entire US (and global) post-Cold War history. The terrorist

⁹⁵ Cameron, 22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 30, quoting Senator Trent Lott.

attacks of September 11, 2001 led to a new agenda in Bush's foreign policy. He articulated this agenda in a famous "you are either with us or with the terrorists" phrase. The global war on terror was proclaimed, leading to US's unilateral decision to first attack and defeat the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and later, in 2002, to start the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq became one of the most controversial wars in US's history, as it was grounded on allegations that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, which later turned out to be false. Additionally, the United National Security Council did not authorize the invasion of Iraq, yet President Bush chose to do so unilaterally. The war drew heavy international criticism, and gradually the domestic criticism as well (even though initially the American public supported the invasion). The post-9/11 "war on terror" foreign policy course changed the priorities for the US, shifting the focus to the Middle East, Persian Gulf and South Asia, and away from Europe, Latin America and Africa.

Barack Obama, as Combs put it, "promised a foreign policy profoundly different from the Bush Doctrine of unilateralism, preemption, and the massive use of armed force to spread American ideals."⁹⁹ Deeply critical of the war in Iraq, he made putting an end to the war one of his top foreign policy priorities. At the same time, Obama's foreign policy was "far from pacifist,"¹⁰⁰ and even though he explicitly rejected the Bush Doctrine, he stuck to some of its principles. While embracing internationalism and diplomacy, Obama did not completely reject unilateralism. "I – like any other head of state – reserve the

⁹⁹ Combs, 468.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend my nation,”¹⁰¹ proclaimed Obama in his Nobel speech. Obama continued the war on terror, though he narrowed down the focus, identifying al-Qaeda network as the enemy and authorizing drone strikes and special operations raids (one of them resulting in killing of Osama bin Laden) as one of the key methods of fighting al-Qaeda. Obama also negotiated the new START nuclear reduction treaty with Russia as part of the larger strategy of the US-Russia relations “reset,” though the effectiveness of the “reset” has been doubted as disagreements between the US and Russia grew during Obama’s presidency. Obama’s successes, at least according to Indyk et al., also include effective management of relations with China, rebuilding the United States’ international reputation and completing free-trade accords.¹⁰² Among the setbacks, Indyk et al. include “no progress on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, very little to show on combating climate change, the United States’ continued low standing in the Muslim world, deepening frictions in U.S.-Pakistani relations, a Mexico awash in drugs and violence, an Iran still bent on acquiring the means to produce and deliver nuclear weapons, and a North Korea still developing its nuclear arsenal.”¹⁰³

Indyk et al. characterize Obama’s style of foreign policy in the following way: “The Obama approach has been relatively nonideological in practice but informed by a realistic overarching sense of the United States’ role in the world in the twenty-first century. The tone has been neither that of American triumphalism and exceptionalism nor one of American decline. On balance, this approach has been effective, conveying a

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Combs, 469.

¹⁰² Martin Indyk, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Scoring Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* (June 2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-04-20/scoring-obamas-foreign-policy>.

¹⁰³ Indyk et al., 31.

degree of openness to the views of other leaders and the interests of other nations while still projecting confidence and leadership. Judged by the standard of protecting American interests, Obama's foreign policy so far has worked out quite well; judged by the standard of fulfilling his vision of a new global order, it remains very much a work in progress.”¹⁰⁴

Russian foreign policy after the Cold War

When talking about Russia of the early 1990s, many historians and political scientists refer to this period as one of the post-Cold War euphoria. This was the time when Russian leaders developed a pro-Western vision of Russian national identity and foreign policy. Fascinated by the economic and political rise of the West, leaders embraced such Western ideals as freedom, prosperity and justice. As Tsygankov wrote, “it was this fundamental belief in the superiority of the Western system that also shaped the minds of the emerged liberal coalition in Russia. Boris Yeltsin and his liberal foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev believed that history in a sense had ended and presented no alternatives to the pro-Western development.”¹⁰⁵ Kozyrev and other liberal Westernizers asserted that “the country’s very system of values was to be changed, as Russia was to accept the priority of the individual and the free market over society and the state. As a result, a “natural partnership” with Western countries was to develop, and Russia was to be brought to the front-rank status of such countries as France, Germany, and the United States within ten to twelve years.”¹⁰⁶ This new vision of national interest emphasized the importance of developing in three key directions: radical economic reforms, rapid

¹⁰⁴ Indyk et al., 31.

¹⁰⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, c2006), 56.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

membership in the Western international institutions, and isolationism from the former Soviet states.

The concept of national interest based on liberal Westernization was quite revolutionary and in many ways unprecedented. As Tsygankov put it, “never before had Russia’s officials been as supportive of dismantling their imperial institutions, as critical of their own history, and as trusting of Western intentions.”¹⁰⁷

The liberal Westernization course, however, began to lose its momentum towards the end of 1992, as it was challenged by other visions of Russia’s identity, foreign policy and national interest that were expressed by various political groups and existed in the society at large. There were competing visions among the Westernizers themselves; they split up into liberal Westernizers, social democrats and statist. Social democrats viewed Russia as an independent part of international society. Russia, in their view, had its own specific interests but also shared some common interests with others. The main threats to Russia were seen as coming from the violation of basic human rights and disrespect for cultural pluralism. Statists viewed Russia as a sovereign state and a great power with its own specific interests in maintaining the stability of the international system. Statists saw the main threats to Russia coming from state-revisionists seeking to change the existing balance of power. There were also views expressed by the so-called civilizationists, who also were represented by two “camps”: national communists and hard-line eurasianists. National communists perceived Russia as an independent social civilization and a great power/superpower whose interests were incompatible with those of the West. Russia’s interests, according to the national communists’ vision, included restoration of a balance

¹⁰⁷ Tsygankov, 60.

of power between socialism and capitalism and the spread of the influence of Russian civilization. National communists saw the main threats to Russia coming from the West and its imperial intentions. Hard-line eurasianists viewed Russia as a land-based geopolitical empire. Russia's interests were seen as mutually exclusive from those of sea-based powers and included the preservation and expansion of Russia's geopolitical sphere of influence. Hard-line eurasianists saw the main threats to Russia coming from the sea-based powers.

While each vision was quite strongly supported by different clusters of Russian population, the statist vision of Russia's development started replacing the liberal Westernization one by mid 1990s. This shift marked a new period in Russia's post-Cold War history termed by some scholars the Great Power Balancing.¹⁰⁸

The new course viewed geopolitics as a defining factor of Russia's development. The idea of the revival of Russia as great power became dominant. Although this position leaned towards viewing the world in terms of competition among great powers, it was not anti-Western and did not see Russia as hostile to the West. As Tsygankov summarized it, "the Statist worldview then was a familiar realist picture of power competition between sovereign states reminiscent of nineteenth-century European politics; that is, the world is not inherently hostile, but it does consist of selfish power-seeking state actors whose interests must be balanced in order to maximize peace and stability."¹⁰⁹

Statist view of Russia's national interest in mid to late 1990s was based on the idea of a multipolar world. In a nutshell, this meant that in order to restore and preserve

¹⁰⁸Tsygankov.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 96.

its significant geopolitical role of the great power, Russia had to become an independent power pole; otherwise it would not have an independent voice in international politics. Instead of succumbing to the rhetoric of the strongest (mainly the U.S.), Russia should use a combination of cooperation and balancing policies to undermine the unipolarity.¹¹⁰ Flexible alliances (not confrontation with other great powers), reintegration of the former Soviet region and economic reforms became the main means for achieving the desired ends.

While the course determined by the statist view continued throughout the beginning of 2000s, it took a new turn with Vladimir Putin coming to power in 2000. The new course, often labeled in political and historical literature as the Great Power Pragmatism embodied both a continuation of and a departure from the Great Power Balancing one.

Pragmatism, self-concentration and emphasis on modernization and economic growth were put forward, replacing the previous course's emphasis on the power balancing. Putin's vision of the early 2000s in a sense combined Westernist and Statist influences. As Tsygankov put it, "unlike Gorbachev..., Putin was not eager to replicate Western social democratic or liberal values on Russian soil, and he made it clear that Russia would never become the 'second edition' of... the U.S. or Britain."¹¹¹ Rather, he saw his country as a modern great power capable of adapting to a changing world under

¹¹⁰ Tsygankov.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

state leadership. In the tradition of Statism, the priority is given to governability and the state's ability to exercise its power, whereas democracy comes second."¹¹²

When it came to defining Russia's national interest, Putin's vision valued geoeconomics over geopolitics, thus emphasizing the idea of defending national interest by economic means rather than by balancing American influences in the world. The guiding principles of the Great Power Pragmatism were defined as follows: counterterrorist cooperation with Europe and the U.S. (after the terrorist attacks in September 2001), limited integration in the world economy and market-based principles in the former Soviet region.¹¹³

During the first term of Putin's presidency, the Great Power Pragmatism course stayed true to its proposed principles, for the most part. Russia's economic and social conditions improved significantly since the 1990s; as Edward Lucas noted, "... investments [were] pouring in and living standards [were] rising. Most Russians have never had it so good."¹¹⁴ Russia's relationships with the states of the former Soviet region were stable and even cooperative, including the relationships with the countries that went through the first wave of the so-called "colored revolutions."¹¹⁵ The new foreign policy course that focused on improving relations with the West on the bases of counterterrorism and energy issues also seemed to work more or less flawlessly, although

¹¹² Tsygankov, 131.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹¹⁴ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

¹¹⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 4 (October 2009): 307 – 326.

this course still “did not mean that Russia’s power to defend its own perceived interests at home and in the region was to be seriously curtailed.”¹¹⁶

Putin’s second term of presidency was marked by a new dimension of his Great Power Pragmatism of the early 2000s. This new dimension is commonly referred to as Great Power Assertiveness. The turn to assertiveness is often attributed to the external geopolitical factors that Russia confronted in the 2000s.

Particularly, Russian officials became increasingly critical of what they saw as American “unilateral” approaches to foreign policy. Putin expressed this view explicitly in his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February of 2007:

“One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? ... Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today.”¹¹⁷

The theme of Russia’s right to “decide for itself the pace, terms and conditions of moving towards democracy”¹¹⁸ became the most prevalent one in the speeches of Russian political leaders both on national and international levels.

The area where Russia’s national interests became highly contested during the Great Power Assertiveness period of Russia’s post-Cold War foreign policy was the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) space. Some consequences of the colored revolutions – former Soviet states’ aspirations to join NATO, presence of NATO troops on the territories that Russia has historically considered the “buffer” zone between itself

¹¹⁶ Tsygankov, 163.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Tsygankov, 171.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 176.

and the West, strong anti-Russian sentiments in those countries and their strengthening ties with the West – were perceived as threats to Russia’s national security. Russia’s rather harsh response to Georgia’s invasion of South Ossetia in August of 2008 was widely interpreted as a “high point” of the Great Power Assertiveness vision, and a “signal to the rest of the world that Russia continued to regard the CIS as its own sphere of influence, where it would not tolerate having its interests ignored.”¹¹⁹ Some researchers noted that “the Russia-Georgia crisis... became an indicator of a bigger Russia-West crisis.”¹²⁰

It is precisely during this period when the conversations about the “new Cold War” had started. Russia’s assertive approaches made observers talk about “Russia reverting to Soviet behavior”¹²¹ or “Russia’s return to the bad habits of its Soviet past.”¹²² Researchers started discussing “the rise of a new authoritarianism on the world stage,”¹²³ the “potential for the diffusion of autocracy,”¹²⁴ the “democratic recession”¹²⁵ and the “geopolitical balance between democracy and autocracy.”¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 264.

¹²⁰ Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 321.

¹²¹ Lucas, 2.

¹²² Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World. Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹²³ Azar Gat, “The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (July 1, 2007): 59–69; Robert Kagan, “The End of the End of History,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 23, 2008, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2008/04/23/end-of-end-of-history>.

¹²⁴ Thomas Ambrosio, “Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion: Concepts, Dynamics, and Future research,” *International Studies Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (November 2010): 375-393.

¹²⁵ Larry Diamond, “The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2008): 36-48.

¹²⁶ Ambrosio, 376.

Chapter 2: The War in South Ossetia

The five-day war in South Ossetia in August of 2008 can indeed be called “a little war that shook the world,” as the title of a recent book on it does.¹ It escalated and ended very quickly, resulting in enormous damages and a high toll of victims for a five-day war. Most importantly for this project, it was accompanied by a landslide of confusing, contradictory and often polarizing information about who started the war (Georgia, South Ossetia or Russia?) and whose interests (Georgian, American, South Ossetian or Russian?) were at stake, thus raising a number of critical questions about the political power struggles defining the post-Soviet space in the post-Cold War era. These questions pertain to the view that the post –Soviet space remains a territory of geopolitical contestation in the post-Cold War time, functioning as a “buffer zone” between NATO forces and Russia. As states and nations comprising this “buffer zone” negotiate their national identities, wrestling with questions of sovereignty and independence, they are also caught up in a bigger power play that traces its roots to the struggle over the “spheres of influence” that defined the Cold War.

As some analysts have noted, the conflict marked a turning point in Russia-US post-Cold War relations specifically and in the “East-West relations” in general² as “the rhetoric, used by both sides, [bore] all similarities with the Cold War period.”³ Indeed, as I noted in the introduction, this conflict drew my attention to the topic of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War media narratives on the first place, as I couldn’t help noticing how the differences in the ways US and Russian mainstream news media

¹ Asmus.

² See, for example, Bloed, Asmus, Lukyanov.

³ Bloed, 322.

presented the conflict revealed critical and unresolved tensions that the end of the Cold War claimed to resolve.

This chapter examines the narratives constructed by the US and Russian mainstream and alternative news media about the five-day war in order to determine to what extent (if at all) these narratives rely on or depart from the discourse of the Cold War and what other discourses informed these narratives as Russian and US news media explained and interpreted the conflict to their audiences. This chapter seeks to identify how – through articulation of multiple elements of various discourses – the US and Russian mainstream and alternative media communicated to their readers why they should care about the conflict and what about the conflict do they really have to know. The analysis is thus based on the following questions: how were the relations between smaller and bigger players imagined and re-imagined in media texts analyzed? How were the claims of smaller players for sovereignty and independence articulated and in what ways were they legitimized or marginalized? How were the roles and the arguments of the bigger players (and which players were defined as “big”?) articulated? Were the heroes, villains and victims clearly identified? What causes and consequences of the conflict were discussed and which solutions were offered in various media texts? These questions are important to examine as I would argue that the ways in which the key narratives and the images of the key actors involved in the war in South Ossetia in 2008 were articulated contributed to the creation and perpetuation of a particular discursive environment that privileges certain ways of talking about the conflicts in the post-Soviet space while marginalizing others.

To better understand the significance of the key points of discursive contestation revealed through the comparative analysis in this chapter, it is necessary to briefly discuss the historical and political background of the war in South Ossetia.

Historical background of the conflict

The initial start of the tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia can be traced back to the late 80s - early 90s. In 1989 South Ossetia declared political autonomy, and started operating as an autonomous region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). In 1990, the USSR passed legislation that gave the autonomous regions the right to either gain independence along with the Republic they belonged to or remain in the Soviet Union. When Georgia left the USSR in 1991, South Ossetia chose to remain a part of the USSR. Political tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia soon grew into an armed conflict, which lasted until 1992. Russia took part in mediating the conflict, and in 1992, after a series of negotiations a ceasefire defined both a zone of conflict around the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and a security corridor along the border of South Ossetian territories. Tskhinvali was isolated from the Georgian territory around it and Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian peacekeepers were stationed in South Ossetia under the Joint Control Commission's (JCC) mandate of demilitarization.⁴ During the 1990s, Russia granted citizenship to the majority of South Ossetians,⁵ which the Georgian government called the “annexation of Georgian territory.”⁶ A number of other events during the 1990s contributed to strengthening relations between South Ossetia and Russia

⁴ *Giorgi Sepashvili and Nino Khutsidze*, “South Ossetia: Mapping Out Scenarios,” *Civil.ge*, February 5, 2006, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11710>.

⁵ 80% of South Ossetians held Russian citizenship by 2006. From “Mekhanizm obruseniya,” *Vlast*, September 22, 2008, <http://kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1029343>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

on one side and to raising tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia and Georgia and Russia on the other side.

The tensions remained latent until 2003, when Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in Georgia's Rose Revolution. He started a program geared towards the territorial unification of Georgia, strengthening security and military state institutions and implementing what many viewed as a pro-US foreign policy.⁷ One of Saakashvili's main goals was Georgian NATO membership, which became a stumbling block in Georgian-Russian relations, as Russia opposed Georgia's NATO membership.

Georgia maintained a close relationship with the George W. Bush administration. In 2002, the United States started the Georgia Train and Equip Program to arm and train the Georgian military, and in 2005 the Georgia Sustainment and Stability Operations Program aimed to broaden the capabilities of the Georgian armed forces. These programs involved training by the United States Army Special Forces, United States Marine Corps, and military advisors personnel.⁸

South Ossetia, on the other hand, maintained a close relationship with Russia. In addition to granting Russian citizenship to South Ossetians, in 2006 Russia promised to help South Ossetia in case of a military offensive from Georgia.

Tensions between Russia and Georgia grew by 2008. Throughout the summer of 2008, clashes and shelling between Georgian and South Ossetian forces occurred. In spite of the fact that on the evening of August 7, 2008, President Saakashvili ordered a

⁷ Charles King, "The Five-Day War: Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November 1, 2008): 2–11.

⁸ Irakly G. Areshidze, "Helping Georgia?" *Perspective*, March–April 2002, <http://www.webcitation.org/5iUHZj6og>.

unilateral ceasefire, later that night Georgian forces began a major artillery assault on Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. The headquarters of the Russian peacekeeping forces also came under fire, and several Russian peacekeeping force soldiers were killed. Next day, Russia entered the war, and after five days of battles the war had officially ended. Russian President Medvedev ordered an end to military operations in Georgia. Later on the same day, he met the President-in-Office of the European Union, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and approved a six-point peace plan. Late that night Georgian President Saakashvili agreed to the text. By August 16 all parties signed the ceasefire agreement. On August 26, 2008, Russia officially recognized South Ossetia's independence.⁹ In response, Georgia cut diplomatic ties with Russia, and declared South Ossetia Russian-occupied Georgian territory.¹⁰

The war in South Ossetia lasted only a week but it received extensive news media coverage, which continued even after the war officially ended. Thus, the time frame for the analysis was extended from the August 7 – 16, 2008 period to August 7 – 31, 2008 in order to include more materials that played a critical role in the construction of meanings about the conflict. During this period, the *New York Times* published 98 articles related to the war, with 50 articles falling in the period of the actual war (before August 16th). Eighty three articles came out in *The Washington Post*, with 40 being published before August 16th. 164 articles were published in *Izvestia*, with 92 covering the events before

⁹ Sebastian Alison and Lyubov Pronina, "Russia Recognizes Independence of Georgian Regions," *Bloomberg*, August 26, 2008,

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=afAvlgTbOoAg&refer=canada>.

¹⁰ "Abkhazia, South Ossetia Formally Declared Occupied Territory," *Civil Georgia*, August 28, 2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19330>.

August 16th. *Argumenty i Fakty* contained 18 articles¹¹, with 8 materials published in the August 13th (3) and August 20th (5) issues. *The Nation* published eight articles, and *Z Magazine* featured one long analytical piece in its October issue. *Novaya Gazeta* published 38 materials, and *The New Times* featured six.

US mainstream media coverage

A Russia-Georgia war

Both US newspapers presented the conflict as one between Georgia and Russia, where the Georgian attacks on South Ossetia only “sharply escalated the fighting,”¹² and where the military power of the “emboldened Kremlin”¹³ was juxtaposed to the innocence of “the small, mountainous country ... taken by surprise by the intensity of the Russian response.”¹⁴ Interestingly, both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published short news reports on August 8 presenting the conflict as one between Georgia and South Ossetia, and quoting “experts” who stated that “the appearance [was] that the violence is linked to strategic moves by one or both sides to improve their positions.”¹⁵ Yet, next day both newspapers sharply reframed the conflict as one between Russia and Georgia. The analysts quoted in the August 9 articles said that “either Georgia or Russia could be trying to seize an opportune moment – with world leaders focused on the start of the 2008 Olympics this week – to reclaim the territory, and to settle the dispute,”¹⁶ with

¹¹ *Argumenty i Fakty* is a weekly newspaper.

¹² Anne Barnard, “Russia Broadens Military Campaign as All-Out War Threatens Georgia,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2008, A1.

¹³ Michael Schwartz, Anne Barnard and C. J. Chivers, “Russia and Georgia Clash Over Breakaway Region,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2008, A1.

¹⁴ Barnard, August 10, 2008.

¹⁵ Michael Schwartz, “Georgian Troops Enter Breakaway Enclave in Region’s Fiercest Fighting in Years,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008, A5.

¹⁶ Schwartz, Barnard and Chivers August 9, 2008.

Russian goals being to “do a creeping annexation of South Ossetia... and ... to overthrow Saakashvili, who is a tremendous thorn in their side.”¹⁷ Additionally, both US mainstream news media suggested that the reason Russia invaded Georgia was to “administer a quick military “punishment” to Mr. Saakashvili, and then restore some version of the unstable status quo ante.”¹⁸ Both newspapers made explicit references to the Cold War when commenting on a larger geopolitical context of the conflict. For example, the *New York Times* remarked that “global politics have breathed new life into the conflict, making it a flash point for resurgent tensions between former cold war rivals,”¹⁹ with another author suggesting that “for much of the diplomatic and policy-making world, the border where Georgia faces Russia, with South Ossetia ... between them, has become a new cold war frontier.”²⁰

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Georgia

Both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* depicted Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as an impulsive leader. However, “impulsive” was presented as romantic and passionate about democracy. “Some diplomats considered Mr. Saakashvili a politician of unusual promise, someone who could reorder Georgia along the lines of a Western democracy and become a symbol of change in the politically moribund post-Soviet states. Mr. Saakashvili encouraged this view, framing himself as a visionary who

¹⁷ Schwirtz, Barnard and Chivers August 9, 2008.

¹⁸ “Stopping Russia; The US and its allies must unite against Moscow's war on Georgia,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 2008, B06.

¹⁹ Ellen Barry, “Global Politics Add Oxygen to a Smoldering Dispute,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2008, A9.

²⁰ James Traub, “Taunting the Bear,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2008, WK1.

was leading a column of regional democracy movements,” stated the *New York Times*.²¹ Saakashvili was depicted as a leader, “who led his country from near bankruptcy into a golden age of economic growth and the world’s highest rate of foreign direct investment as a percentage of GDP.”²² While some articles acknowledged that Saakashvili was emotional and even “the most theatrical of presidents”²³ who “must think strategically about the future... and manage the situation [like conflict in South Ossetia] with greater care,”²⁴ the overall image of the Georgian President was presented as one of a hero who had the courage to play a game of “baiting the Russian bear.”²⁵

Georgia as a country was presented by both newspapers in a similar way: “melodramatic”²⁶ and “theatrical”²⁷, yet a “courageous democracy,”²⁸ a “beacon of democracy in the post-Soviet space”²⁹ and a “poster child for Westernization”³⁰ who historically “suffered from the Soviet rule.”³¹ Both newspapers argued that Georgia was now suffering from Russian “neo-imperialism” as Russia was “determined to turn

²¹ C. J. Chivers, “Two Countries, Girding for a Conflict, Create a Perfect Brew for a Blowup,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2008, A10.

²² Richard Holbrooke, “What the West Can Do,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2008, A17.

²³ Tara Bahrapour, “Georgia’s Defiant President Finds Support in Midst of War; As Russia Condemns Saakashvili, Internal Criticism Decreases,” *Washington Post*, August 13, 2008, A09.

²⁴ Bahrapour, August 13, 2008.

²⁵ Traub, August 10, 2008.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bahrapour, August 13, 2008.

²⁸ Ellen Barry and Graham Bowley, “Rice Presses for Pullout as Georgia Signs Cease-Fire,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2008.

²⁹ Helene Cooper, “Russia Steps Up Its Push; West Faces Tough Choices Bush Faults Advance Into Georgia - NATO to Meet,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2008, A1.

³⁰ Traub, August 10, 2008.

³¹ Ibid.

Georgia into the kind of vassal state that existed during Soviet times,”³² and therefore Georgia was fully “trusting the West to save it from a ravenous neighbor.”³³

While both newspapers made no explicit references to the Cold War within this theme, the image of Georgia was constructed almost exclusively by placing it in the context of the geopolitical struggle for power between evil “neo-imperialist Russia” and good democratic West.

Russia and Russian political leaders

Russia was depicted in the conflict’s coverage as the main aggressor, who “seeks to regain lost power”³⁴ and “wants to flex the muscles”³⁵ by “picking at those smaller than itself.”³⁶ The most often used characteristics of Russia pointed to its imperialistic desire to “demoralize and dominate Eastern Europe”³⁷ by “ruthlessly pressing at its borders [and being] implacably hostile to democratic neighbors like Georgia and Ukraine.”³⁸ “Russia doesn’t have limited aims”³⁹ and its real goal is to “get rid of Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's pro-democracy, pro-American president,”⁴⁰ as well as to “dismantle Georgia, a democratic state that is worth saving for itself but also because it is the first domino of the Near Abroad,”⁴¹ asserted both US newspapers. Additionally, just like the “conspiracy theory” about the United States orchestrating the conflict in South Ossetia gained

³² Michael Gordon, “Russia, Pledging To Leave Georgia, Tightens Its Grip,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2008, A1.

³³ Traub, August 10, 2008.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Cooper, August 12, 2008.

³⁶ April Dembosky, “In Brooklyn, Georgians Pray And Frantically Call Families,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2008, B1.

³⁷ Charles Krauthammer, “NATO Meows,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2008, A17.

³⁸ Traub, August 10, 2008.

³⁹ C.J. Chivers, August 11, 2008.

⁴⁰ Holbrooke, August 22, 2008.

⁴¹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, “Putin is the Shadow of the Red Czar,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2008, WK11.

popularity in Russian news media, the same, but reversed in terms of the “main actor,” theory unfolded on the pages of the two US newspapers⁴².

The image of Russian political leaders, and the image of the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was presented similarly. It is important to note that while Dmitry Medvedev was the President of Russia at time of the conflict, the US news media focused mainly – and overwhelmingly – on Putin’s persona. The newspapers questioned the authority of President Medvedev by calling him “Mr. Putin’s hand-picked successor,”⁴³ whose power is limited and “whose real job is to act as Putin’s lawyer.”⁴⁴ By stating that “the events of the past five days wiped away any pretense that President Dmitry Medvedev runs the country,”⁴⁵ both newspapers justified associating Russia’s politics during the conflict with the political image of Vladimir Putin.

In turn, Vladimir Putin’s political image allowed making the “natural” fit between his persona and the image of Russia as it was presented by both newspapers. Prime Minister Putin was depicted by both newspapers as the “former KGB officer whose views were shaped in the Cold War era,”⁴⁶ and who “systematically centralized power in his own hands.”⁴⁷ Putin’s goal, according to both newspapers, was to “destabilize the Saakashvili regime.”⁴⁸ The journalists went further and directly compared Putin to Stalin: “History offers no neat repetitions, but Russia’s power gambit in the Caucasus and

⁴² See, for example Krauthammer, August 22, 2008; Jim Hoagland, “A Measured Response to Putin,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 2008, B07.

⁴³ Schwirtz, Barnard and Chivers, August 9, 2008.

⁴⁴ Hoagland, August 17, 2008.

⁴⁵ Frederick Kunkle, “Conflict Makes Clear Who Rules in Russia; Putin Shown Giving Orders to Medvedev,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2008, A11.

⁴⁶ Kunkle, August 14, 2008.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Traub, August 10, 2008.

challenge to the post-1991 order would be entirely familiar to Stalin. After World War II, Stalin seemed at the height of his prestige after years of revolution, terror and war – just as today Mr. Putin's Russia seems muscular and resurgent after the humiliations of the 1990s.”⁴⁹ When connecting Putin’s persona to the politics of Russia in the conflict in South Ossetia, the *New York Times* made direct references to the Cold War: “If we are returning to cold war, the Berlin Crisis is the most useful precedent. Stalin tested the West in Berlin in 1948 much as Mr. Putin is doing in Georgia today.”⁵⁰ Referring to “Mr. Putin’s cold war mentality”⁵¹ and developing the narrative of comparing Putin to Stalin, the *New York Times* moved to a larger question of domination and spheres of influence: “It isn't just a question of spheres of influence; it's about domination. Stalin remarked that his armies would impose his political system on Eastern Europe. Likewise, Moscow's Georgian invasion aims to remove American-style democracy, replacing it with Russia's strain of managed authoritarian politics. The Kremlin, then and now, is basically against anything that we are for.”⁵² This last quote shows how the image of Russia and Russian politicians was presented through explicit juxtaposition to the image of the United States, placing the comparison squarely within the “us versus them” and “evil versus good” categories.

Russian mainstream media coverage

A Georgia-South Ossetia war

⁴⁹ Sebag Montefiore, August 24, 2008.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Traub, August 10, 2008.

⁵² Sebag Montefiore, August 24, 2008.

Both Russian newspapers presented the conflict as one between Georgia and South Ossetia, where Russia had to intervene to prevent Georgia from demolishing the much smaller republic of South Ossetia. Most news reports focused on the dramatic events taking place in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, depicting the brutality of the Georgian military, and juxtaposing the power of the “best-trained and best-equipped in all post-Soviet space”⁵³ Georgian army with the disempowered and demoralized South Ossetian civilians who were being killed, and who begged Russia for help.⁵⁴

Russian newspapers described the Georgian “invasion to South Ossetia” as “a well-planned by Saakashvili small, quick operation that would allow demolishing South Ossetia in a few hours and then, right before the opening of the Olympic games, would allow Saakashvili to state that South Ossetia does not exist anymore.”⁵⁵ Such interpretation of the conflict mirrored in a curious and twisted way the assertion in the US mainstream newspapers discussed earlier that Russia’s invasion of Georgia was planned as a “quick military punishment.”

The Russian mainstream newspapers were less explicit than the US ones about making references to the Cold War – at least the reporters did not use the term “cold war” – yet, for example, *Izvestia*, while emphasizing Georgian military power, noted that “such power has been gained largely due to the help of Georgia’s western friends.”⁵⁶ By stressing this connection, Russian media, although not directly, reminded the readers of

⁵³ “Gruziya Obyavila Voynu Yuzhnoy Osetii,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339513>.

⁵⁴ “Gruzinskaya Aviatciya Bombit Polykhayushiye Prigorody Tskhinvali,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/432195>.

⁵⁵ “Taynyi Rasschet Saakashvili,” *Arumenty i Fakty*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/5407>.

⁵⁶ Dmitryi Litovkin, “Kak Gruziya Gotovilas’ k Voyne I Kto Yei Pomogal,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339510>.

the East-West Cold War time opposition and the “great powers” supplying their clients with weapons. The theme of collaboration between Georgian and American militaries prior to the conflict, as well as the financial support the US provided for Georgia to enhance its military potential was one of the most prominent in the Russian news media coverage of the conflict. It also overlapped with the next theme.

Georgia and the Georgian President

Russian news media portrayed Georgia as an aggressive state that wanted to control South Ossetia in spite of the fact that South Ossetia opposed Georgian influence and strove for independence. Both newspapers depicted Georgia as a state where “emotions take over the common sense”⁵⁷ and as one whose leaders’ words and promises are “extremely difficult to trust.”⁵⁸ Georgia was also depicted as a pro-Western state seeking membership in NATO, and “hoping that the West will support, ideologically and militarily the Georgian aggression toward South Ossetia and help to fight Russia if it enters the war.”⁵⁹

Georgian president Saakashvili was depicted in Russian news media as an impulsive, “unpredictable leader who cannot control the territory of his own state”⁶⁰ and who “deceitfully invaded South Ossetia first and is now pretending to be the main victim suffering from the Russian aggression.”⁶¹ Russian newspapers also called Saakashvili a

⁵⁷ “Ne Prisoyedinit, Tak Unichtozhit,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339509>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Vladimir Kozhemyakin, “Eta Rana Ne Zazhivet Dolgo...” *Argumenty i Fakty*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/5408>.

⁶⁰ “Priznat’ Nepriznannykh,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/5409>.

⁶¹ “Saakashvili Prosit SSHA Obyavit Voynu Rossii,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/432260>.

“puppet of the West,”⁶² which inspired the conspiracy theory about the United States planning the conflict for a while and using Saakashvili as a pawn.⁶³ The aim of the conflict, according to this theory, was to provoke Russia to take military action and then label it evil, non-democratic, aggressive and violent, discrediting its reputation in the world community.

One interesting example illustrates the core differences in how Georgia and its relationship with the United States was portrayed by the Russian mainstream news media in comparison to the US mainstream news media. Two articles – one in the *New York Times*, another in *Argumenty i Fakty* – talked about one of the streets in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, being named after George W. Bush. The difference in the ways this fact was framed in the articles is evident from the following direct quotes. The *New York Times*: “Tbilisi is a charming city, its ancient Orthodox churches restored to life, the lanes of the old city lined with cafes and art galleries. Mr. Saakashvili has also made Georgia one of the world's most – or few – pro-American countries. President Bush received a rapturous welcome when he visited in 2005, and the road to the airport has now been named after him, complete with a large poster of the president.”⁶⁴ *Argumenty i Fakty*: “There is already the George W. Bush interstate in Tbilisi. But, of course, this isn't enough to satisfy the Georgian politicians. In order to make the friendship with the US firm and stable, all streets of the Georgian capital must be renamed. There should be a boulevard of John McCain, a square of Dick Cheney, the street of Brzezinski [former

⁶² Yurii Luzhkov, “Shakhmatnaya Partiya s Chelovecheskimi Zhertvami,” *Izvestia*, August 11, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339566>.

⁶³ “Gorbachev Obvinil SSHA v Podderzhke Agressii Gruzii”, *Izvestia*, August 11, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/432353>; “Tainyi Raschet Saakashvili,” August 13, 2008.

⁶⁴ Traub, August 10, 2008.

President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, who compared the actions taken by Russian prime minister Putin to the actions taken by Stalin and Hitler in the 1930s], the avenues of FBI and CIA and a few children playgrounds named after Kachinskii and Yushenko [the presidents of Poland and Ukraine who supported Georgia during the conflict]. It would also be useful to commemorate the contribution that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia made defending Saakashvili from the cannibalistic Moscow. And here it would be appropriate to install, of course next to the noble Georgian Capitol building, a group sculpture of collectively peeing boys. Obviously, they should be peeing in the direction of Moscow.”⁶⁵ Sarcasm and parody, in fact, were used in many opinion pieces in the Russian coverage of the conflict.

The United States and its politics

Additional themes are important to note regarding the image of the United States in the Russian coverage of the conflict. First, the articles in *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* frequently referenced the US aggression and military operations in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, arguing that by carrying out these operations the United States “demonstrated the irrelevance of ethical norms, ... and set the standard for use of force as a primary conflict resolution approach.”⁶⁶ “Georgia, being pro-American, eagerly learned from its patron and implemented the “use of force” approach to resolve the tensions with South Ossetia.”⁶⁷ The United States is described as a cynical manipulator who interprets the facts as it pleases and in accordance with its own interests: “Saddam Hussein, who

⁶⁵ Vyacheslav Kostikov, “Nu, Za Kondolizu!.. (Ispoved’ Obizhennogo Demokrata),” *Argumenty i Fakty*, September 3, 2008, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/5846>.

⁶⁶ Nikolay Zyatkov, “Screwed Up,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, August 12, 2008.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

destroyed several Shiite villages, of course, deserved a death sentence. But the actions of the current Georgian political leaders, who demolished ten South Ossetian villages, ran over children and elders with tanks and burned Ossetians alive in the locked houses, the actions of these leaders must be defended.”⁶⁸ “[America] takes for granted that it has the right to do anything it pleases, and that everybody else has no such right,”⁶⁹ stated *Izvestia*.

Frustration with the US media coverage of the conflict

Lastly, the theme of disappointment and frustration with the way US mainstream media covered the conflict were prominent in the Russian coverage. The American news media system was described as “well-trained and well-maintained mechanism that presents only the scenarios that fit well with the dominant way of thinking.”⁷⁰ “The lack of objectivity in Western [including American] news media shocked Russia. Freedom and independence of the Western press, the idealized image of the Western democracy that we have been praising for so long, turned out to be an illusion,”⁷¹ stated *Argumenty i Fakty*. Russian newspapers referenced the campaign the US media executed before the 2001 war in Iraq and argued that “a very similar campaign is being held now against Russia.”⁷²

⁶⁸“Putin Vozmushen Tsinizmom Zapadnykh Zashitnikov Gruzii,” *Izvestia*, August 11, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/432377>.

⁶⁹ Vitalyi Ivanov, “Mir ‘Posle Tskhinvala’,” *Izvestia*, August 13, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339698>.

⁷⁰ “Moskva Prizyvaet Zapadnye SMI Obyektivno Osveshat’ Sobytiya V Yuzhnoi Osetii,” *Izvestia*, August 10, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/432302>.

⁷¹ Vyacheslav Kostikov, “Kak My Rasporyadimsya Pobedoy?” *Argumenty i Fakty*, August 20, 2008, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/5555>.

⁷² Sergey Markov, “Saakashvili Pishem, Makkein – v Ume,” *Izvestia*, August 13, 2008, <http://izvestia.ru/news/339672>.

US alternative media coverage

US response and US hypocrisy

The Nation and *Z Magazine* critiqued the official US position in the conflict insisting that supporting Georgia and condemning Russia in this conflict reflected the politics of double standards. As one of *The Nation*'s contributors put it, "At the root of this conflict is a clash of two twentieth-century guiding principles in international relations. Georgia, backed by the West, is claiming its right as a sovereign nation to control the territory within its borders, a guiding principle since World War II. The Ossetians are claiming their right to self-determination, a guiding principle since World War I."⁷³ The author further added that in dealing with crises that are based on the conflict between these principles, "sometimes, the West takes the side of national sovereignty, as it is in the current war; other times, it sides with self-determination and redrawing of national borders."⁷⁴ Similarly, *Z Magazine*'s contributor stated that "the UN Charter and international law come and go in the US depending on whether the United States is ignoring and violating them or trying to use them for its own political ends."⁷⁵

Contributors of *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* also highlighted the hypocrisy in magnifying Russia's aggression while downplaying many US military operations around the world and throughout the history. For example, *Z Magazine*'s Edward Herman pointed out that "it is amazing to watch the US imperialist establishment, including the

⁷³ Mark Ames, "The War We Don't Know," *The Nation*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/war-we-dont-know>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Edward Herman, "Russia, Georgia & the US: A Double Standard in Action," *Z Magazine*, October 4, 2008, <https://zcomm.org/zmagazine/russia-georgia-and-the-u-s-a-double-standard-in-action-by-edward-herman/>.

media, wax indignant about "Russian aggression," Russian "brutality," and a renewal of Russian "expansionism." This establishment can never admit its own regular, serial, and massive aggressions—the word was never used by mainstream reporters or editors to describe the attack on Vietnam, 1954-75, or Iraq in 2003 and onward."⁷⁶

Both magazines also urged US policymakers to respect Russia's concerns for its own national security, pointing out that the United States valued its own security very highly. Edward Herman suggested an interesting hypothetical analogy:

“If the Russians (or Chinese) had entered into a military alliance with Mexico, supplied it with arms and military advisors, used a Russian or Chinese version of the "National Endowment for Democracy" and other agents to bring about political change in Mexico (recall that Mexico has had a series of elections won by fraud), and perhaps put some ABMs in place to protect Mexico against a possible threat from Colombia, can you imagine the frenzy of US politicians and the "free press?"⁷⁷

The Nation's Katrina vanden Heuvel articulated this idea in a more positive way through a narrative of using the conflict as an opportunity to “create the space for a different US-Russian relationship.”⁷⁸ She proposed that “a new approach must begin with recognition of Georgia's sovereignty but also recognize that Russia has legitimate interests along its borders and in areas that have been its traditional zones of security, from Central Asia to the Caucasus to Ukraine.”⁷⁹ The key step to such recognition would be putting an end to NATO's eastward expansion, from vanden Heuvel's perspective.

⁷⁶ Herman, October 4, 2008.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Katrina vanden Heuvel, “Blood in the Caucasus,” *The Nation*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/blood-caucasus>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Three more materials in *The Nation* supported this idea, with one of the contributors concluding:

“In fact, one of the most effective ways America could respond to this crisis is by rethinking its entire geopolitical approach of the past two decades, which has been hegemonic, arrogant, hypocritical and reckless. If we set a better example, then we could at least reclaim the moral authority, or "soft power," that we once had.”⁸⁰

US electoral politics

In August 2008, the US Presidential election campaign pitted John McCain against Barack Obama, and the authors of the four articles in *The Nation* argued that the war in South Ossetia was in best interests of “John McCain and the same neocons who led us into earlier disasters.”⁸¹ In order to demonstrate that McCain’s response to the conflict “offers a disturbing and somewhat surreal taste of what to expect from John McCain should he become our nation's Commander in Chief,”⁸² *The Nation’s* contributors developed two main narratives. The first one was based on detailed and revealing discussions of the political and financial connections between the Georgian President and the US neoconservative elites. All four articles emphasized that John McCain’s foreign policy adviser, Randy Scheunemann, was a paid lobbyist for the Georgian government in the United States until May 2008; he supported the initiative of Georgia joining NATO, the Georgian President’s program of “unification of Georgia” (which assumed making South Ossetia a part of Georgia) and “supported [Saakashvili’s]

⁸⁰ Ames, August 13, 2008.

⁸¹ Mark Ames, “Getting Georgia’s War On,” *The Nation*, August 8, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/getting-georgias-war>.

⁸² Ibid.

bellicose views toward Russia's Vladimir Putin.”⁸³ The second narrative portrayed John McCain as a “raving Russophob”⁸⁴ and as one of the leaders of “the army of neocons and old cold warriors who naturally gravitate to a fight with Russia.”⁸⁵ Together, these two narratives worked to support the idea advanced by another contributor that “these folks [neoconservatives] are always looking for a foreign enemy on which to base a new cold war, and with the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, it was Putin's Russia that came increasingly to fit the bill.”⁸⁶ The author underscored that under this scenario, “McCain gets to look tough with a new cold war to fight while Democratic presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama, scrambling to make sense of a more measured foreign policy posture, will seem weak in comparison.”⁸⁷

Critique of the US mainstream media coverage

The Nation and *Z Magazine* argued that the conflict in South Ossetia “has been flagrantly misreported in this country”⁸⁸ and that “the way in which US officials and the media handled the Russian response to the Georgian assault has been a lesson in bias, misrepresentation, decontextualization, and the applied double standard.”⁸⁹ *The Nation's* Katrina vanden Heuvel argued that the US media “have failed to provide the full backdrop,⁹⁰ supplying instead a “relentlessly one-sided commentary⁹¹ on the conflict.

⁸³ Ibid; Ames, August 13, 2008; Robert Scheer, “Georgian War? A Neocon Election Ploy?” *The Nation*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/georgia-war-neocon-election-plot>; Tom Hayden, “Warning to Obama on the New Cold War,” *The Nation*, August 21, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/warning-obama-new-cold-war>.

⁸⁴ Ames, August 8, 2008.

⁸⁵ Ames, August 8, 2008.

⁸⁶ Scheer, August 13, 2008

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

⁸⁹ Herman, October 4, 2008.

⁹⁰ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

Similarly, Mark Ames wrote in *The Nation* that “up until now, this war was framed as a simple tale of Good Helpless Democratic Guy Georgia versus Bad Savage Fascist Guy Russia [while] in fact, it is far more complex than this, morally and historically.”⁹² In the same article, the author underscored that in the mainstream Western media “you hear little if anything about the Ossetians, who seem to hardly exist in the West's eyes, even though their grievance is the root cause of this war.”⁹³ Katrina vanden Heuvel’s essay echoed this point:

“...commentary in the US media, almost without exception, has turned a longstanding, complex separatist conflict into a *casus belli* for a new cold war with Russia, ignoring not only the historical and political reasons for South Ossetia's drive for independence from Georgia but also the responsibility of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili for the current crisis. So eager have commentators been to indict Vladimir Putin's Russia that they have overlooked Washington's contribution to the rising tensions.”⁹⁴

Z Magazine's Edward Herman derided the mainstream media's attempts to depict Georgia as a victim of aggression on the one hand and as a supporter of the American war in Iraq (in order to show that Georgia has always been a friend of the US) on the other: “the editors of an ideological institution like the *Washington Post* are, of course, completely oblivious to the irony in their pat on the back for aggression-victim Georgia's support of the more massive aggression.”⁹⁵

Lastly, *The Nation*'s Mark Ames shared insightful details about the close political and business ties between the Georgian government and US political and financial elites. He

⁹¹ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

⁹² Ames, August 13, 2008.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

⁹⁵ Herman, October 4, 2008.

argued that these elites transmitted the Georgian version of the conflict to the leading US news media as part of Georgian “PR offensive”⁹⁶ that accompanied the conflict:

“The invasion was backed up by a PR offensive so layered and sophisticated that I even got a hysterical call today from a hedge fund manager in New York, screaming about an “investor call” that Georgian Prime Minister Lado Gurgenedze made this morning with some fifty leading Western investment bank managers and analysts. I’ve since seen a J.P. Morgan summary of the conference call, which pretty much reflects the talking points later picked up by the US media. These kinds of conference calls are generally conducted by the heads of companies in order to give banking analysts guidance. But as the hedge fund manager told me today, “The reason Lado did this is because he knew the enormous PR value that Georgia would gain by going to the money people and analysts, particularly since Georgia is clearly the aggressor this time.” As a former investment banker who worked in London and who used to head the Bank of Georgia, Gurgenedze knew what he was doing. “Lado is a former banker himself, so he knew that by framing the conflict for the most influential bankers and analysts in New York, that these power bankers would then write up reports and go on CNBC and argue Lado Gurgenedze’s talking points. It was brilliant, and now you’re starting to see the American media shift its coverage from calling it Georgia invading Ossetian territory, to the new spin, that it’s Russian imperial aggression against tiny little Georgia.”⁹⁷

Human tragedy

The Nation featured two detailed reports by a special correspondent who traveled to Georgia and South Ossetia to “report the conflict from both sides.”⁹⁸ The reports described in detail the chaos, panic and destruction caused by the war, while also emphasizing how difficult it was for the populations of Georgia and South Ossetia to make sense of the rapidly developing events in an atmosphere of fear: “Ossetians now blame Georgians for ethnic genocide; Georgians say Russia has broken an international

⁹⁶ Ames, August 8, 2008.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Margarita Akhvlediani, “Dispatch from Georgia,” *The Nation*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/dispatch-georgia>.

law and call for international help against the Russia's aggression. As for ordinary people on all sides of this conflict, anger and fear are the dominant emotions.⁹⁹

In the context of other articles, these two reports served as a powerful illustration of how the average people – Georgians, South Ossetians, Russians, soldiers and civilians – were caught up in what *The Nation's* Katrina vanden Heuvel called a “dangerous geopolitical gamesmanship.”¹⁰⁰ The lines quoting average Georgians begging the West for help (“Are they [the West] sending their forces to help us? "We need their guns, not words. We need them to help us to fight occupying Russian forces"¹⁰¹) stood in stark and bitter contrast with revelatory details other authors in *The Nation* provided about the strategic calculations and “national interests” of both the Georgian and the American political elites that led to the conflict but that also contributed to its framing as a “Russian aggression.” As the author of both reports summarized, reflecting on the sentiment widespread among the Georgian people, “it seems to people here that the West has a lot of issues with Russia that it considers more important than the fighting that now rages between Moscow and Tbilisi.”¹⁰²

The image of Georgia and Georgian President

The Nation and *Z Magazine* argued that the role of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili in the conflict was “whitewashed”¹⁰³ in the United States. Both magazines asserted that Saakashvili has not really been the kind of democratic leader the United States (and the US mainstream media) portrayed him to be. As Mark Ames wrote in *The*

⁹⁹ Akhvlediani, August 11, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Akhvlediani, August 11, 2008.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

Nation, “while Bush and McCain speak of Saakashvili as if he's a combination of Thomas Jefferson and Nelson Mandela, he's seen by his own people as increasingly authoritarian and unbalanced.”¹⁰⁴ *Z Magazine*'s Edward Herman underscored the same point: “A number of observers have pointed out that Saakashvili has displayed marked authoritarian tendencies. ... Election observers from the OSCE raised questions about election integrity based on claims of Saakashvili's use of state money, blackmail, and vote-buying.¹⁰⁵ Bringing in the question of South Ossetia's struggles for independence and Saakashvili's political course for “reunification of Georgia,” Mark Ames questioned US' reasons for supporting “a petty dictator like Saakashvili”¹⁰⁶ in his plan to “get control of a region that doesn't want any part of him.”¹⁰⁷ In another article, Ames developed this point, characterizing Saakashvili in the following way:

“When he first rose to prominence, the American-educated Saakashvili was often referred to as “Georgia's Vladimir Zhirinovskiy” – the Russian ultranationalist firebrand who once promised to retake Alaska. Although Saakashvili was subsequently rebranded as a Euro-democrat, he promised to reunite Georgia and bring his separatist regions to heel, by force if necessary, whether the aggrieved ethnic groups liked it or not.”¹⁰⁸

Contributors also commented on Saakashvili's domestic politics, pointing out that “Georgia's president has often seemed more intent on currying favor with the Bush Administration ... than on looking after the interests of his people.”¹⁰⁹ Five articles in *The Nation* mentioned Saakashvili's “violent crackdown on Georgian protesters,... his

¹⁰⁴ Ames, August 13, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Herman, October 4, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Ames, August 8, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Ames, August 13, 2008.

¹⁰⁹ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008.

rigged election, declaration of martial law, attacks on opposition media and jailing of opponents.”¹¹⁰

Russian alternative media coverage

More than two sides to the conflict – everybody guilty

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* offered various angles in interpreting the conflict, insisting that all sides – and there were more than two, according to both media – were responsible for the war.

First, authors argued that Georgian President Saakashvili “made a big mistake”¹¹¹ and “acted emotionally... breaking the rules of big politics where actors must approach issues rationally.”¹¹² Saakashvili’s actions were condemned as irresponsible, “especially if he knew that Russia would respond to Georgian aggression [in South Ossetia] the way it did, and if he knew that no one from his “big friends” would rush to help.”¹¹³ By acting this way, “Saakashvili discredited himself because he had been warned multiple times that Russia would inevitably respond the way it did.”¹¹⁴

Second, Russia was also condemned for “going too far”¹¹⁵ in its response to Georgian aggression. Here it is important to note that while Russia’s response in general was defended and justified – as one of the authors put it, “if one doesn’t supply weapons

¹¹⁰ vanden Heuvel, August 13, 2008; Ames, August 8, 2008; Ames, August 13, 2008; Hayden, August 21, 2008.

¹¹¹ Aleksandr Mineev, “My Prognozirovali Voynu V Abkhazii, A Vzorvalos’ V Yuzhnoy Osetii,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39141.html>.

¹¹² Andrei Ryabov, “Narody Ne Mogut Uchastvovat’ V Dvorovoi Drake,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 10, 2008, accessed October 15, 2013, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39056.html>; also “Komu – Voyna, Komu – Mat’ Rodna,” *The New Times*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/3791/>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Anatoliy Adamishin, “Kak Vosstanovit’ Mir,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39138.html>.

¹¹⁵ Mineev, August 13, 2008.

to its client, one can't just not protect this client, especially after making such promise"¹¹⁶

– Russia was criticized both for the magnitude of its attacks on Georgia and for expanding its military action beyond South Ossetia. One contributor to *Novaya Gazeta* even suggested that Russia had been in fact preparing for the war with Georgia for a while, and that South Ossetia – a devoted client – played its role by provoking Georgia to launch a massive offensive, which legitimized Russia's intervention."¹¹⁷

Third, some authors also blamed the West – the United States and Europe – for ignoring the complex dynamic of an ongoing conflict that preceded the war on the one hand,¹¹⁸ and, on the other hand, for pushing NATO expansion in the post-Soviet space despite clear objections by Russia.¹¹⁹ *Novaya Gazeta* published a piece by Mikhail Gorbachev who critiqued the United States for “talking down to Russia and ignoring Russia's interests and position.”¹²⁰ He also pointed out major deficiencies in coverage of the conflict by the US mainstream media who “launched a large-scale propagandistic offensive against Russia... lacking objectivity... and depriving the American society of complete and balanced information [about the conflict].”¹²¹

Lastly, two authors offered an insightful perspective on the political dynamics within South Ossetia, stressing the divide between the people of South Ossetia and the corrupt government of South Ossetia. This divide, according to the authors, mirrored a similar divide within Russia. Not unexpectedly, the corrupt political elites of South

¹¹⁶ Adamishin, August 13, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Pavel Felgengauer, “Eto Byla Ne Spontannaya, A Splanirovannaya Voyna,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39134.html>.

¹¹⁸ Ryabov, August 10, 2008; Pavel Felgengauer, August 13, 2008.

¹¹⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Predvaritel'nye Itogi,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 18, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39093.html>.

¹²⁰ Gorbachev, August 18, 2008.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Ossetia have similar interests with corrupt elites of Russia. The authors argued that despite the claims that the protection of South Ossetia served Russia's national and strategic interests, it in fact only served the interests of the corrupt elites in Russia and in South Ossetia. The following quote summarizes this perspective:

“This war involves not two and not three but four sides: Russia, Georgia, the government of South Ossetia who, together with Russia's national security elites became the shareholders of the enterprise that pumps money [out of the budget] for a fight with Georgia, and the people of South Ossetia who – as little as there is left of them – have to choose between Saakashvili who is destroying Tskhinvali, and Kokoity (President of South Ossetia) who turned into a South Ossetian Arafat.”¹²²

This perspective emphasized that the dynamics of the conflict are much more complex than presented in the mainstream accounts that of course omitted any references to corrupt Russian national security elites.

Human tragedy

Both *the New Times* and *Novaya Gazeta* emphasized in their coverage that the conflict was first and foremost a great human tragedy and an example of how civilians become the victims of political intrigues, calculations and, what is even more frustrating and depressing, miscalculations. In addition to publishing several reports by special war correspondents discussing the realities on the ground - in the hospitals,¹²³ in large cities¹²⁴

¹²² Yulia Latynina, “Chetyrehstoronnyaya Agressiya,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39057.html>. The comparison with Arafat is striking here, and it comes up later in the article by the same author titled “The Palestinization of South Ossetia” but this specific journalist is well-known in Russia for holding a strong pro-Israeli position (which in the context of Russia's official foreign policy is in fact oppositional).

¹²³ Olga Bobrova, “Gorod Odevayut V Khaki,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39051.html>; Mkhail Romanov, “Na Gruzinskom Fronte Peremeny,” *The New Times*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/3792/>.

¹²⁴ Bobrova, August 10, 2008.

and small villages¹²⁵ both in Georgia and in South Ossetia – some columnists approached the question of emphasizing the personal within the geopolitical creatively by, for example, concluding their opinion pieces and/or news analyses with heart-breaking testimonies from civilians who described how they survived the shelling in South Ossetia.¹²⁶ *Novaya Gazeta* also discussed the problem of assessing the casualties in the war, especially when it comes to estimating how many civilians died in South Ossetia.¹²⁷ The narrative of friendship between Georgian and Russian soldiers was also prominent within this theme. While one article pointed out that “only a few years ago Georgian and Russian officers studied together in the Military Academy in Moscow,” another featured a bitter remark by a Russian officer: “There are also personal relationships with the Georgian officers; we studied together in military academies and colleges, we fought together in Afghanistan and Chechnya, we were friends. Georgian President knew it and yet he ordered a massacre in Tskhinvali.”¹²⁸

The reports by special correspondents demonstrated – through detailed descriptions of the dire conditions in which people on both sides of the conflict found themselves as well as through numerous quotes by soldiers and civilians – how the people of different nationalities and ethnicities either cooperated in the face of common tragedy or, on the contrary, hated each other even more. All reports without exception quoted various people expressing their frustration with the actions of various

¹²⁵ Romanov, August 11, 2008.

¹²⁶ Latynina, August 10, 2008

¹²⁷ “Poteri: Kto I Kak Schital,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008,

<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39133.html>; Arkadiy Babchenko, “Gruziya-200,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/39130.html>; Olga Bobrova, “Kolonna Katafakkov,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39132.html>.

¹²⁸ Vyacheslav Izmailov, “Tekhnika Ne Vyderzhivaet S Obeyikh Storon. A Iyudi?” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39139.html>.

policymakers in this conflict. Thus, numerous stories and vignettes featured by the correspondents of *Novaya Gazeta* and *The New Times* demonstrated the complexity of human relations that constituted the conflict, constantly challenging various assumptions about the nature of the conflict being either purely ethnic or purely political.

Failure of Russian diplomacy and Russia's damaged reputation

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* argued that as a result of this war Russia lost its status as the “great moderator”¹²⁹ and “Caucasian peacekeeper”¹³⁰ and that “it is hard to even imagine the colossal consequences for Russia on the international stage.”¹³¹ Russia's response, according to both newspapers, had been clumsy both in terms of its military actions¹³² and especially in terms of strategic communication during the war. As one of the authors in *Novaya Gazeta* remarked, “everything seemed as if the Russian political leaders didn't feel like they needed to explain their position to the world beyond making the official statements. ... In the meantime, Saakashvili basically worked as his own press-secretary.”¹³³ Another author stated that “your image rather than who you really are makes a difference in the 21st century. The old God said, “Do not steal;” the new God says: “Stole something? Prepare to pay for an article about your generosity. ...

¹²⁹ Aleksandr Mineev, “Ne Sprashivai, Na Kogo Padayut Bomby,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39058.html>; Mineev, August 13, 2008; “Komu – Voina, Komu – Mat' Rodna,” August 11, 2008.

¹³⁰ “A Chto Potom?” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 18, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39091.html>.

¹³¹ Latynina, August 10, 2008

¹³² Adamishin, August 13, 2008.

¹³³ Nataliya Rostova, “Novaya' Sposila Professionalnykh Zriteley O Ikh Vpechatleniyakh Ot Prosmotra Zapadnogo TV V Pervye Chasy Voiny,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39065.html>.

Russia won the battle for Tskhinvali but it should have won the battle on television too.”¹³⁴

Conclusion

Mainstream news media both in the US and Russia placed the conflict squarely within the interpretive framework characterized by the “pro-US Georgia” versus “pro-Russian South Ossetia” dichotomy. The US mainstream media glorified “brave little Georgia” while vilifying “big brutal Russia”, and, in a very similar fashion, Russian mainstream media victimized “poor little South Ossetia” while vilifying “aggressive Georgia” and the grand mastermind and root of all evil: the United States of America. South Ossetia played a marginal role in the US mainstream media narratives, communicating the idea that the conflict only mattered for the United States (and for the American readers) because of the “resurgent Russia.” Such presentation of the conflict is indeed reminiscent of the Cold War era when regional conflicts were only considered worthy of attention if they brought the main antagonists together; consequently, such conflicts were presented in ways that followed the “great powers and their regional clients” scheme.

In the post-Cold War era, and in case of the conflict in South Ossetia specifically, relying on the time-tested simplified dichotomy of Cold War politics presents certain convenience for the mainstream media but also serves a strategic purpose. For example, bringing the South Ossetian story into the mainstream US narratives would make it significantly harder to justify that the story mattered to the American readers – after all,

¹³⁴ Matvey Maliy, “Uroki Gruzinskoy Voyny,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 18, 2008, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/39160.html>.

who in America would really care for a tiny breakaway region on the border of Russia and Georgia? When one crafts a storyline that needs to have villains and victims and needs to choose between South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia, Russia clearly becomes the best fit for the role of the villain, because American readers are already familiar with the “Russian bear,” and much of this familiarity traces its roots to the Cold War animosity. Georgia and South Ossetia would require additional and time-consuming contextualization.

Most importantly though – and this becomes evident only after analyzing *The Nation's* accounts – casting Georgia in a negative, or even in a more multidimensional light could interfere with larger political interests at play. *The Nation's* revelations of the ties between the American conservative political establishment and the Georgian government, and especially the role these ties might have played both in the conflict and in American electoral politics, introduce a completely different picture, widen the range of interpretive possibilities for the readers and re-articulate the dominant understanding of the conflict advanced by the mainstream media. One would think that this is precisely the kind of news American public would need and would want to know. However, it is also evident that the powerful elites are not in favor of revealing anything beyond the “mutual love of democracy” that comprises the US-Georgia partnership. This manifests itself in the mainstream media accounts where the image of democratic Georgia is conveniently – and strategically – juxtaposed to the image of authoritarian Russia. *The Nation's* and *Z Magazine's* interpretations also paint a different portrait of the Georgian President; this portrait challenges the mainstream narratives, complements the one

presented by the Russian mainstream media and certainly introduces an additional – and important – angle for understanding the conflict. However, again, this image of the Georgian President is absent from the US mainstream accounts, constituting an important “significant absence” that reveals crucial insights about the US mainstream media being not simply the sites of meaning making but most importantly the sites of ideological production.

The interplay between convenience and strategic discursive choices manifests itself in texts of the Russian mainstream media as well. Here the evil mastermind USA becomes the convenient cause of all of Russia’s misfortunes, especially in foreign affairs because it keeps meddling in the affairs of post-Soviet states, “dragging them into NATO,”¹³⁵ and antagonizing Russia. Of course, the Russian mainstream media completely neglect to discuss Russia’s own deficiencies in dealing with the post-Soviet states, as well as the failures of Russia’s own domestic politics that are, perhaps, the chief cause of alienation post-Soviet states feel toward Russia. The mainstream media presented the conflict as one between Georgia and South Ossetia, vilifying Georgia and victimizing South Ossetia, yet omitted the important information about the close political ties between the government of South Ossetia and the Russian national security elites that *Novaya Gazeta* brought to light. This finding mirrors in a curious way a similar insight discussed by *The Nation* regarding the ties between the American conservative elites and the Georgian government. These insights demonstrate that while the mainstream media both in Russia and in the US interpreted the conflict from the perspective of the “big players and their client states,” they omitted the important information about these

¹³⁵ Literal translation of the phrase that became one of the catchphrases in Russian political discourse.

“donor-client” relationships, focusing instead on the essentialist “good us versus bad them” juxtaposition. I would argue that in this case, the mainstream media in both states operated within the paradigm of nationalism, plugging in certain elements of the Cold War discourse to highlight the differences between the nations involved in the conflict. The alternative media, however, focused on if not smaller but certainly less visible yet more powerful players and issues, revealing insights that advanced the understanding of the conflict as being less about the similarities and differences of national interests but more about the similarities and differences of the interests of the political elites in different states.

The theme of “human tragedy” prominent in accounts by both US and Russian alternative media merits additional discussion. Clearly, this theme was downplayed in the US mainstream accounts, while in Russian mainstream accounts only the suffering of the South Ossetians was depicted, indicating that the narrative was used exclusively for strategic purposes in order to highlight Georgia’s brutality. The narratives comprising this theme both in Russian and US alternative media reflected the tremendous complexity of reality and human relations constituting the conflict. This was clearly a more complex picture of the world and also the one that focused on humans and human costs of the conflict rather than on great power politics. Combined with the insights that highlighted the roles of various political elites in the conflict, these accounts offered a drastically different understanding of who really were the villains and the victims in the conflict. The story here was not about Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia or the United States. It was about the people struggling to survive the war and make sense of it, and the political

elites competing for political and economic dominance and crafting the narratives of the war.

This is not to say, however, that geopolitics was not discussed in the alternative media. However, in contrast to the mainstream media who spoke with authority and confidence, quickly defining the heroes, the villains, the victims, the causes of the conflict and approaches to its resolution, alternative media struggled to make sense of the events, producing a wider range of narratives, perspectives and angles, and inviting the readers to think along and not jump to conclusions.

Thus, while the mainstream media presented a picture of the world where the conflict in South Ossetia only mattered because South Ossetia and Georgia happened to be part of the “buffer zone” between Russia and NATO (with the US being one of its key members), alternative media emphasized other, and perhaps more important, aspects of the conflict. The mainstream media tied the conflict to the Cold War animosity using the idea of the political struggle of the two great powers for spheres of influence as justification for importance of the conflict. In this case, this element of the Cold War discourse and its strategic use by the mainstream media both in Russia and in the US constituted what Stuart Hall termed “the lines of tendential force,” serving as a barrier for re-articulation. In contrast, alternative media insisted that the conflict was more complex than the Cold War-inspired binary constructs suggested. Most importantly, the conflict mattered because it showed, once again, as one of *Novaya Gazeta*'s war correspondents

remarked after describing his helicopter ride from South Ossetia alongside the burned corpses of young soldiers that “the lives of these boys are the currency of big politics.”¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Babchenko, August 13, 2008.

Chapter 3: The Syrian Debate

In January of 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held a meeting aimed at passing a resolution that would put sanctions on the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad who was accused of launching a violent crackdown on the anti-government protestors in Syria. The resolution was drafted by the United States, France and members of the Arab League and was based on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm of the United Nations. According to the R2P norm, “the international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means to protect populations [of sovereign states]”¹ from crimes and atrocities committed by the state governments against their populations. Russia and China – two of the five permanent members of the UNSC – used their veto right to block the resolution first in October of 2011, then again in early February of 2012 and then again in July of 2012, arguing that the proponents of the resolution were trying to use it to justify military intervention and regime change in Syria. It is a common practice in the UNSC that the first drafts of resolutions do not pass, but the second and the third vetoes created immense tension in the international community, pitting the resolution’s supporters and opponents against each other and prodding some officials to call the situation a “global diplomatic divide.”² Some of the leading media outlets remarked that “the unusually bitter atmosphere [at the Security Council] has been compared to the cold war.”³ *The*

¹ “The Responsibility to Protect,” *The United Nations*, n.d., retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml>

² Neil MacFarquhar and Alan Cowell, “Syrians Said to Approve Charter as Battles Go On,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/world/middleeast/syrian-violence-continues-as-west-dismisses-new-charter.html?_r=0.

³ Julian Borger, “Syria Crisis Widens Faultlines at Divided UN,” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2012, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/24/syria-widens-faultlines-divided-un>.

Guardian quoted France's UN ambassador, Gérard Araud, as saying that the Security Council "has never been as paralyzed as it is today since the end of the cold war,"⁴ *Reuters* asked whether "the Security Council [was] returning to the days of the Cold War when US-Soviet rivalry left the Council virtually unable to act?"⁵ and CNN's commentator G Lopez lamented that the situation "look[ed] like, fe[lt] like, sound[ed] like Cold War redux."⁶

Implicit in these comparisons was a concern of the policymakers and observers over the ability of the international community – in this case officially represented by the United Nations Security Council – to find a solution to an immensely complex international crisis. This chapter shares this concern but also asks whether the ways in which the diplomatic debate was covered by the US and Russian news media created and sustained the environment within which the discussions of certain arguments, diplomatic positions, actors and policy propositions reinforced the very same "Cold War atmosphere" that these media appeared to be concerned about.

It is important to note that when the United Nations was created in 1945, its founders intended for the organization as a whole and for its Security Council in particular to serve as guarantors of peace, international cooperation and security in the post-World War II world. However, as the Cold War ensued after World War II, the fundamental disagreements between the USSR and the USA often paralyzed the work of the Security Council. Its role was reduced to dealing with conflicts where the interests of

⁴ Borger.

⁵ Louis Charbonneau, "Russia U.N. Veto on Syria Aimed at Crushing West's Crusade," *Reuters*, February 8, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/08/us-un-russia-idUSTRE8170BK20120208>.

⁶ Lopez, George, "Russia and China: Sabotaging U.N. With Vetoes," *CNN*, February 8, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/02/08/opinion/lopez-russia-sanctions-cold-war/index.html>.

the “great powers” were not directly at stake, while some of the major conflicts and crises that indeed presented a threat to global peace and security brought the Cold War antagonists into direct confrontation.⁷ The end of the Cold War revived hopes for a new world order with the renewed role of the United Nations as a key organization where multilateral negotiations and recognition of the need for complex solutions to diplomatic problems are supposed to reign.

This chapter examines the narratives constructed by US and Russian mainstream and alternative news media as they covered the diplomatic debate at the UNSC, offering various interpretations of the roles different actors played in the debate. The chapter asks to what extent (if at all) did these narratives rely on or depart from the discourse of the Cold War and what other discourses informed the narratives as Russian and US news media explained and interpreted the diplomatic debate to their audiences? This chapter seeks to identify how – through articulation of multiple elements of various discourses – the US and Russian mainstream and alternative media communicated to their readers why they should care about the diplomatic debate at the UNSC and what about it was really important to know. The analysis is thus based on the following questions: which actors were identified as key players in the debate? How were the images of these actors constructed? Were the heroes, villains and victims clearly identified? Which arguments comprising the debate were legitimized and which ones were marginalized and how were various discourses used to do so? Which obstacles to overcoming the “diplomatic divide” were discussed and which solutions to the situation were offered in various media texts?

⁷ Stanley Meisler, *United Nations : The First Fifty Years*, 1st ed.. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995).

These questions are important to examine because the ways in which the key narratives and the images of the key actors involved in the debate are articulated contribute to the creation and perpetuation of a particular discursive environment that enables (and privileges) certain actions and policies as ways of responding to complex international crises, while limiting (and marginalizing) other actions and policies. While Russia-US relations do not comprise the centerpiece of global politics in the post-Cold War era, both hold seats in the UNSC and thus – as long as the UNSC remains the key organization for regulating international security and peace – the two will have to work together to find solutions to international crises. This case is also important for this project as the UNSC – and the discourses surrounding its activities – is perhaps one of the best illustrations of the interplay between the paradigms of nationalism and globalization.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the six month period between the second (February 4, 2012) and the third (July 19, 2012) vetoes, analyzing the articles published between February 1 – August 1, 2012 as it was during this time when most media coverage was generated. *The New York Times* published 67 articles, *The Washington Post* – 36, *Izvestia* – 59 and *Argumenty i Fakty* – 23. Nine materials came out in *The Nation*, five in *Z Magazine*, ten in *Novaya Gazeta* and three in *The New Times*.

US mainstream media coverage

Supplying weapons

The US mainstream newspapers paid close attention to Russia's arms sales/supplies to the Syrian government, and, though to a lesser extent, to the strategic importance of the Russian naval base at the Syrian port city of Tartus. The presentation of

both topics reinforced the “great power and its client” narrative – a classic element of the Cold War discourse.

Forty articles out of one hundred and four highlighted the fact that Russia was “Syria’s main weapons supplier.”⁸ Similarly, the articles described Assad’s regime as a “longtime Russian client and arms purchaser”⁹ and reiterated that “arms exports have long anchored the relationship between Moscow and Damascus.”¹⁰ Fifteen out of these forty articles also mentioned and discussed Russia’s naval base in Tartus, highlighting the fact that the base was the “only military installation outside the former Soviet territories”¹¹ – a clarification intended to underscore the strategic importance of the base. References to the Russian arms sales always accompanied remarks about Russia’s political and diplomatic support of the Syrian government, as exemplified by the following quote: “Throughout the nearly yearlong popular uprising in Syria and a lethal government crackdown, Moscow has thrown President Bashar al-Assad a lifeline, providing weapons and diplomatic support to help keep his government afloat.”¹² Highlighting the complementary nature of Russia’s “veto diplomacy” at the UNSC and its military support of the Syrian government reinforced the “great power and its client” narrative, thus resembling the discourse of the Cold War.

At the same time, several articles also interpreted Russia’s arms sales to Syria from a pragmatic perspective stating that “Syria places orders worth about \$700 million a

⁸ David Ignatius, “A New Road Map for Peace in Syria,” *Washington Post*, June 6, 2012, A19.

⁹ “Scapegoat For Syria,” *Washington Post*, July 8, 2012, A12.

¹⁰ David M. Herszenhorn, “For Syria, Reliant on Russia for Weapons and Food, Old Bonds Run Deep,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2012, A13.

¹¹ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Military Points to Risks Of a Syrian Intervention,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2012, A10; Herszenhorn, February 18, 2012.

¹² David M. Herszenhorn, “Russian Cultural Honor For a Controversial Syrian,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2012, A11.

year, making it a ‘major, very important, high-priced client by Russian standards’¹³ and pointing out that business rather than politics was at stake: “Moscow is keen to preserve Syria’s lucrative market for Russian arms, especially now that its weapons contracts in other Middle Eastern countries, particularly Libya, are in question.”¹⁴ One could argue that this pragmatic take on the issue of the arms sales undermined the ideological component of the Cold War discourse (Russia cares about its commercial contracts, not about promoting a specific political/ideological agenda). However, Russian pragmatism was also presented and interpreted in a way that portrayed Russia as cynical and immoral, demonizing Russia in a way similar to the demonization of the USSR by the US mainstream media during the Cold War:

At the United Nations, the American ambassador, Susan E. Rice, also criticized Russia for continuing to provide arms to Syria's government, most recently aboard a ship that docked Saturday at the Mediterranean port of Tartus. "It is not technically, obviously, a violation of international law since there's not an arms embargo," she said, "but it's reprehensible that arms would continue to flow to a regime that is using such horrific and disproportionate force against its own people."¹⁵

One editorial suggested that “Moscow valued arms deals with Damascus over the Syrian people,”¹⁶ while another argued that “Russia unconscionably refuses to halt its arms sales to the Assad government”¹⁷ and proclaimed that “the United States and its allies should publicly expose every shipment.”¹⁸ Similarly, a news report in *The*

¹³ Ellen Barry, “As Nations Line Up Against Syrian Government, Russia Sides Firmly With Assad,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2012, A8.

¹⁴ Michael Schwartz, “Russia Rejects Draft U.N. Resolution on Syria,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2012.

¹⁵ Steven Lee Myers and J. David Goodman, “Clinton Says Inaction by Russia May Lead to Syrian Civil War,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, A14.

¹⁶ “Russia's Bad Bet on Syria,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2012, A26.

¹⁷ “Killing in Syria,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2012, A30.

¹⁸ “Killing in Syria,” February 7, 2012.

Washington Post quoted Hillary Clinton: “We will work to expose those who are still funding the regime and sending it weapons to be used against defenseless Syrians, including women and children.”¹⁹

The narrative of condemning Russia for its arms sales to Syria persisted throughout the coverage. When controversial news about the Russian attack helicopters being sent to Syria appeared in the media in mid-June, the *New York Times* featured a harsh critique in one of its editorials titled “Russia, Soviet Style:”

“On Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton accused Russia of supplying attack helicopters to the Syrian government. Apparently, blocking the United Nations Security Council from punishing Syria isn’t enough for the Russian president. He needs to be actively helping the Syrian dictator, Bashar al-Assad, kill his own people more efficiently and in even larger quantities.”²⁰

The use of the “Soviet Union” historical analogy in the headline of this editorial also functions as an element of the Cold War discourse, further reinforcing the idea that Russia, just like the USSR during the Cold War, continues to supply arms to its “client state.” Another example of this discursive approach is from the news report referencing “amateur videos [showing] the forces of President Bashar al-Assad rolling through the besieged city of Homs in vintage Soviet battle tanks”²¹ and “satellite images released by the State Department, show[ing] deployments of Soviet-designed truck-mounted rocket launchers.”²²

¹⁹ Matthew Lee, “Clinton Calls for Multi-state Bloc to Act on Syria,” *Washington Post*, February 6, 2012, A10.

²⁰ “Russia, Soviet Style,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2012, A36.

²¹ Herszenhorn, February 18, 2012.

²² *Ibid.*

Lack of trust

One of the key themes that defined the discourse in the US mainstream print media coverage of the debate was an enduring sense of mistrust between Russia and the United States and its allies. The sense of apprehension toward Russia was particularly pronounced, and was articulated in a number of ways.

First, the articles discussing Russia's plan to send envoys to Syria to try negotiating with Assad were skeptical of Russia's genuine desire to improve the situation and doubted the success of this plan. This was expressed through such statements as: "Few believe that Russia has enough clout with either Mr. Assad or the Syrian opposition to broker a deal that could halt the violence."²³ Both newspapers stated that "[it was not clear] whether Russian diplomatic efforts could push Mr. Assad to a compromise"²⁴ and that "there was little chance that such a plan could succeed."²⁵ Both papers also referred to the British and French officials – also supporters of the resolution – "hav[ing] very little confidence" and "express[ing] skepticism"²⁶ about Russia's diplomatic success in Syria. The skepticism in the coverage grew as the crisis progressed in spite of the fact that earlier coverage expressed some hope for Russia's role in the conflict as well as Russia's commitment to resolving it: "At the same time, Russia has been eager to show that it is sincere about pursuing a diplomatic solution, and said Monday that it had

²³ Michael Schwartz, "Putin Warns of Growing 'Cult of Violence'," *New York Times*, February 9, 2012.

²⁴ Michael Schwartz and Rick Gladstone, "Stung by Criticism, Russia Sends Envoys to Syria to Defuse Crisis," *New York Times*, February 8, 2012, A12.

²⁵ "Saving Syria," *Washington Post*, January 31, 2012, A16.

²⁶ Neil Macfarquhar and Michael Schwartz, "Russia Defends Its Diplomacy in Syria Amid Accounts of Escalating Violence," *New York Times*, February 9, 2012, A11.

persuaded the Assad government to participate in mediation talks in Moscow.”²⁷ While this line gives an impression of challenging the theme of mistrust, it is important to note that it was followed by the statement that “the Syrian National Council immediately rejected the proposal.”²⁸ The article then laid out how the Syrian opposition members do not trust Russia and while they recognize that “Russia holds many keys,”²⁹ they consider “getting there without the Russians”³⁰ even if this implies a “more difficult and more costly process.”³¹ Every article in the coverage that discussed Russia’s diplomatic initiatives also mentioned the resistance of the Syrian opposition, attributing it to the fact that “Russians have been unable to gain the trust of the Syrian opposition.”³² When interpreted within the larger context of the debate where the United States openly supported the opposition, such discussion of Russia’s diplomatic efforts implied that the United States and other proponents of the resolution who support the Syrian opposition should not trust Russia, even if at times Russia seems “sincere about pursuing a diplomatic solution.”³³ This narrative was also supported and intensified by constant references to Russia as Syria’s “staunch ally,”³⁴ “most powerful supporter,”³⁵ “principal

²⁷ Neil MacFarquhar and Hwaida Saad, “Syria Fighting Escalates as a Mediation Offer Fails,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2012, A9.

²⁸ MacFarquhar and Saad, January 31, 2012.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Schwirtz and Gladstone, February 8, 2012.

³³ MacFarquhar and Saad, January 31, 2012.

³⁴ Barry, January 28, 2012; Thomas Erdbrink, “Russia and Iran Criticize the United States on Syria,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2012; Liz Sly and Colum Lynch, “U.N. Council Condemns Syria in Massacre of 116,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2012, A01.

³⁵ Ellen Barry, “Russia Seems To Soften Its Support For Syria,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2012, A6; Colum Lynch and Will Englund, “Russia Stands Firm Against U.N. Resolution On Syria,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2012, A10.

foreign defender,”³⁶ “primary ally,”³⁷ and “firm backer.”³⁸ “Moscow has thrown President Bashar al-Assad a lifeline,” stated the *New York Times*,³⁹ explaining that “Russia’s ties to Syria are old and deep.”⁴⁰ Similarly, *The Washington Post* proposed that “Russia’s stance underscores the strength and depth of its relationship with Assad’s regime.”⁴¹ Fifty one articles out of 104 contained similar references, further undermining Russia’s trustworthiness, as well as reinforcing the “great power and its client” narrative.

While references to Russia’s close ties with the Syrian government and Russia’s lack of credibility with the Syrian opposition served to challenge the idea that Russia could be trusted as a partner in a diplomatic process aimed to stabilize the Syrian crisis, Russia’s intentions and the transparency of Russian diplomacy were brought under scrutiny as well. The discussions of Russia’s diplomatic efforts were constructed in ways that conveyed skepticism about Russia’s intentions to stabilize the situation, thus questioning Russia’s trustworthiness. *The Washington Post* wrote in a news report: “A meeting scheduled for Tuesday between top Russian officials and Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad is being portrayed by the Russian government as an attempt to bring about “the swiftest stabilization of the situation in Syria” in response to the growing conflict.”⁴² The phrase “is being portrayed” suggests to the readers that the Russian government has different goals and tries to use the meeting as a cover up for something else that is going

³⁶ Isabel Kershner, “Just Passing Through, Putin Consults With Israeli Leaders on Syria and Iran,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2012, A6.

³⁷ “Saving Syria,” January 31, 2012.

³⁸ Alice Fordham, “U.N. Plan for Peace Falter In Syria,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2012, A01.

³⁹ Herszenhorn, February 23, 2012.

⁴⁰ Herszenhorn, February 18, 2012.

⁴¹ Colum Lynch, “Syria is Russia’s Latest Stand Against the West,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2012, A12.

⁴² Will Englund, “Russia Sends Mission to Syria,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2012, A20.

on “behind the scene.” Additionally, putting the quote about “the swiftest stabilization of the situation” in quotation marks serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, the phrase, indeed, is a direct quote by one of Russian diplomats, as evidenced later in the article. On the other hand, putting it in quotation marks without attribution to the author also serves to convey skepticism and perhaps even mockery.

The editorial that followed the news report advanced this narrative. The author ridiculed the Russian foreign ministry’s phrase about “the swiftest stabilization of the situation in Syria on the basis of the swiftest implementation of democratic reforms” by first noting that “the brutality increased during the hours that Lavrov spent in Damascus”⁴³ and second, stating that it is “hard to listen to the Russian foreign minister’s comments [about democratic reforms] with a straight face.”⁴⁴ The editorial argued that Russia’s statements about the “democratic reforms” are profoundly hypocritical because Russia does not support democracy in its own domestic politics in the first place. In addition to undermining the credibility of Russia’s diplomatic efforts in Syria (and Russia’s trustworthiness), this narrative resembled one of the key features of the Cold War discourse, which involved the US and the USSR pointing out flaws and hypocrisy in each other’s domestic politics in order to advance larger geopolitical goals. Curiously, the editorial used a Cold War inspired historical analogy to strengthen the argument about what it termed Russia’s “pretend democracy:” “Once upon a time, a Soviet envoy visiting the beleaguered head of a client state in a similar situation would have used words like ‘comradely solidarity’ instead of ‘democracy,’ and he would have brought along some

⁴³ Anne Applebaum, “Potemkin Democracy,” *Washington Post*, February 8, 2012, A19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

very visible military advisers for good measure.”⁴⁵ This quote also evokes the narrative of “great powers and their client states,” as well as overlaps with the theme of “arms sales” by hinting at the indispensable military connection between the “power” and the “client.”

The suspicion that Russia was “playing games”⁴⁶ and “providing cover for [Assad’s] regime to push forward with their approach”⁴⁷ only grew as the coverage (and the crisis) progressed. In the second half of the coverage, both US newspapers used quotes by US top officials to illustrate the idea that “Russians have done nothing to move the Syrian dictator toward the exit”⁴⁸ and that Russia’s efforts to negotiate with Assad were in fact double talk and in reality Russia was “propping up the regime.”⁴⁹ “The Russians keep telling us they want to do everything they can to avoid a civil war... and they are just vociferous in their claim that they are providing a stabilizing influence. I reject that”⁵⁰ (quoting Hillary Clinton). An editorial in *The Washington Post* supported Clinton’s position and called Russia’s actions “foot-dragging.”⁵¹ Interestingly, this editorial in fact advocated for striving to reach a compromise with Russia. However, the editorial argued for the need to engage in “realpolitik” and cooperate with Russia while still insisting that “the country did not deserve good press.”⁵² Thus, the only possible and acceptable scenario of cooperation with Russia was presented within the confines of the

⁴⁵ Applebaum, February 8, 2012.

⁴⁶ “Russia’s Bad Bet on Syria,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2012, A26.

⁴⁷ Ellen Barry, January 28, 2012.

⁴⁸ David Ignatius, June 6, 2012

⁴⁹ Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, “US Hopes Assad Can Be Eased Out With Russia’s Aid,” *New York Times*, May 27, 2012, A1.

⁵⁰ Steven Lee Myers and J. David Goodman, “Clinton Says Inaction by Russia May Lead to Syrian Civil War,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, A14.

⁵¹ David Ignatius, “A soft landing for Syria?” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2012, A17.

⁵² *Ibid.*

“realpolitik” doctrine, where pragmatism and short-term goals rather than long-term goals and trust determined relations and decisions.

Both US newspapers also frequently acknowledged that the Syrian crisis caused “damage to bilateral ties”⁵³ between Russia and the United States and that “relations between Moscow and Washington have worsened over the past year, as the cordial tone of the ‘reset’ between President Obama and President Dmitri A. Medvedev has been replaced by a drumbeat of criticism.”⁵⁴ While the *New York Times* characterized Russia-US relations as being in a “downward spiral,”⁵⁵ *The Washington Post* suggested that “US-Russia relations may have truly hit bottom.”⁵⁶ The idea of the “failed ‘reset’”⁵⁷ was very prominent in the discussions of Russia-US deteriorating relations, with *The Washington Post* explicitly asking “What happened to the US – Russia ‘reset’ button?”⁵⁸ and the *New York Times* answering that “the back-and-forth ... over Russian support for Syria's government ... underscored the limits of Mr. Obama's ability to “reset” ties with Moscow.”⁵⁹ The articles implicitly blamed Russia for a failed “reset,” putting forth such “evidence” as “traditional Russian suspicions of the West”⁶⁰ and Russia’s growing anti-Americanism: “... after a year of popular uprisings in the Arab world, which Russia has taken a dim view of, Moscow has become especially sensitive to American support for

⁵³ Joby Warrick and Will Englund, “Allegations of Combat Helicopter Sales to Syrian Regime Roil US-Russia Ties,” *Washington Post*, June 14, 2012, A09.

⁵⁴ Ellen Barry and Michael Schwartz, “Russian Says Western Support for Arab Revolts Could Cause a ‘Big War,’” *New York Times*, January 19, 2012, A4.

⁵⁵ Cooper and Landler, May 27, 2012.

⁵⁶ Al Kamen, “The Tattooed Trucker of State?,” *Washington Post*, February 29, 2012, A15.

⁵⁷ Will Englund, “Russian Proposal Likely to Impede Nonprofit Groups,” *Washington Post*, July 3, 2012, A10.

⁵⁸ Al Kamen, February 29, 2012.

⁵⁹ Peter Baker, “As Putin Returns and Syria Boils, US-Russia Ties Sour,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2012, A14.

⁶⁰ Ellen Barry, “For Putin, Principle vs. Practicality on Syria,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2012, A7.

civil society, an unfettered Internet and what Putin calls ‘exporting democracy.’”⁶¹ Citing an expert from Human Rights Watch, the *New York Times* stated: “There is a deep strain of anti-Americanism at the heart of Putin’s Kremlin. ... When a proposal is perceived as something the Americans want, it can automatically become less desirable to the Russians.”⁶² As evident from this quote, Russia’s mistrust of the United States was also connected to the figure of Vladimir Putin and, as the next few examples will demonstrate, to Putin’s K.G.B. past. The *New York Times* described Putin as “the grim former K.G.B. colonel,”⁶³ “deeply distrustful of the West’s intentions both in Russia and in the Middle East.”⁶⁴ *The Washington Post* also argued that Putin “sees Western influence behind nearly any mass protest”⁶⁵ and explained that “Mr. Putin’s intransigence was entirely predictable”⁶⁶ because “the KGB-trained strongman seethes at the notion of Western intervention to support a popular revolution against a dictator.”⁶⁷ The *New York Times* gave a similar explanation to the question of why Russia was supporting Assad:

Decisions are flowing from President Vladimir V. Putin, whose career has left him overwhelmingly wary both of revolutions and of Western intervention. This is a man who, during the death throes of the Communist system, personally defended the K.G.B.'s headquarters in Dresden against an angry crowd of Germans. And Mr. Putin's already suspicious view of street politics only deepened with the "colored revolutions" of the mid-2000s, in which pro-Western protests, some supported by the United States, ousted a series of Moscow-friendly leaders. Since the recent Arab uprisings began, Russian leaders have viewed them through this lens -- as a product not of social change but of interference by the West, intended in part to damage Russia.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Will Englund, “Russia’s Top Diplomat Lists Objections to US Policy,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2012, A09.

⁶² Cooper and Landler, May 27, 2012.

⁶³ Baker, June 14, 2012.

⁶⁴ Barry, January 28, 2012.

⁶⁵ Lynch, January 29, 2012.

⁶⁶ “Scapegoat For Syria,” July 8, 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Barry, July 1, 2012.

The *New York Times* cited an analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center saying that “the reset failed to change the underlying suspicion and distrust of America shared by a majority of Russians as well as Putin himself. America is seen as a threat, an agent seeking to undermine Russia, to weaken it, to do harm to it. Russia always has to be on the alert, on the defensive.”⁶⁹ Similarly, *The Washington Post* cited an “expert on Russia’s Middle East policy” as saying that “deep down, Putin believes the West is an opponent. Not an enemy; he doesn’t believe there will be American aggression against Russia, no. But he believes the West is always trying to find a weak spot in our armor, to enrich itself at our expense – and we must respond in kind.”⁷⁰ This quote reflects one of the key tensions marking the dynamics of the US – Russia relations in the post-Cold War time: the mutual fear is gone but other remnants of the Cold War like suspicion, mistrust and defensiveness still prevail, making it difficult to reach mutual understanding and gain mutual trust – conditions necessary for the success of the international cooperation on complex issues like the crisis in Syria.

One last episode in the coverage that merits a brief discussion is a report from a press conference where Vladimir Putin answered questions, including questions about Russia’s position on Syria, from the Western journalists. The report ended with a short summary of an exchange between a journalist and Vladimir Putin: “One reporter asked Mr. Putin, a former K.G.B. colonel, with whom he would most like to take on a spy mission. “With nobody,” Mr. Putin said. “I’m not a spy anymore.”⁷¹ The episode, though

⁶⁹ Baker, June 14, 2012.

⁷⁰ Englund, July 3, 2012.

⁷¹ Helene Cooper, “Putin Rules Out Intervention To Stop the Syrian Rebellion,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2012, A11.

certainly a minor one, illustrates well the tension that marks media's and policy makers' engagement with elements of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War time. The journalist asked a question that clearly attempted to cast Putin's identity in Cold War terms, tying his present role to his K.G.B. past and to the classic Cold War theme of espionage. Putin, however, did not play along and gave the answer that suggested a discursive break from the narrative of the Cold War. However, the *New York Times* still published the exchange, which, when interpreted in a larger context of the political identity of Vladimir Putin being constructed exclusively in Cold War terms, reinforced the Cold War discourse.

Isolating Russia

Another key theme in the US mainstream newspapers' coverage centered on the narratives that worked to isolate Russia as the player who opposes the ending of violence in Syria, and creates obstacles to the UNSC peace efforts.

First, both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* explicitly pointed to Russia's "growing isolation"⁷² and "the widespread international condemnation"⁷³ of Russia's actions. The *New York Times* emphasized that "Russia and China had set themselves against Arab opinion and world opinion,"⁷⁴ though in later coverage a similar statement was applied exclusively to Russia, as demonstrated by the following quote from an editorial:

⁷² Colum Lynch, "U.N. Votes to Condemn Crackdown in Syria," *Washington Post*, February 17, 2012, A09; Denis Corboy, William Courtney and Kenneth Yalowitz, "Russia's Veto Diplomacy," *New York Times*, August 15, 2012.

⁷³ Michael Schwartz, "Russia Rejects Criticism of Its U.N. Veto on Syria," *New York Times*, February 7, 2012.

⁷⁴ Neil MacFarquhar and Michael Schwartz, "Russia Defends Its Diplomacy in Syria Amid Accounts of Escalating Violence," *New York Times*, February 9, 2012, A11.

The overuse of veto rights -- such as blocking three United Nations Security Council resolutions on Syria -- has reduced Russia's international standing and contributed to its growing isolation. Unless the Kremlin becomes more pragmatic and softens its dealings with other nations and institutions, the country will see its influence further erode. ... now Russia is at the margins of international planning for a post-Assad future and assistance for Syria.⁷⁵

Interestingly, even though Russia and China vetoed the resolution, both newspapers seemed to be very careful about making statements that would isolate or condemn China and relatively early in the coverage (mid February) a *New York Times* editorial tried to cast China in a more favorable light:

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of China, speaking at a European-China summit meeting in Beijing, said, "What is most urgent and pressing now is to prevent war and chaos" in Syria. There is no evidence Russia has had similar second thoughts, but China is showing renewed interest in working with the Arab League. Beijing's shift could shame Moscow into reconsidering its support for Mr. Assad, and approving United Nations action, including sanctions.⁷⁶

In spite of the fact that all three vetoes were issued by Russia and China, the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* emphasized "intensifying diplomatic pressure on the Kremlin,"⁷⁷ and Russia (not China) "facing mounting international pressure."⁷⁸

Second, both newspapers blamed Russia (and in some cases China as well) for provoking further violence with their vetoes at the UNSC. This narrative singled out Russia and China as villains and pitted them against the proponents of the resolution who were portrayed as heroes committed to ending violence in Syria. The connection between the vetoes and the implied compliance with escalating violence was articulated in two

⁷⁵ Corboy, Courtney and Yalowitz, August 15, 2012.

⁷⁶ "The Enablers," *New York Times*, February 15, 2012, A24.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Schwirtz, February 7, 2012.

major ways: direct accusations and more implicit linking of the two ideas through specific sentence construction and paragraph ordering.

Direct accusations were more frequent in editorials, for example with authors arguing that “Moscow and Beijing now have the blood of Syria’s valiant people on their hands as well,”⁷⁹ and in direct quotes by the officials and/or experts presented in the news reports:

"The United States is disgusted" by the Russian and Chinese vetoes, Susan E. Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations, said after the vote. "A couple of members of this council remain steadfast in their willingness to sell out the Syrian people and shield a craven tyrant."⁸⁰

"To block this resolution is to bear responsibility for the horrors that are occurring on the ground in Syria."⁸¹

“The failure of the Security Council resolution after a double Russian and Chinese veto "appears to have fueled the Syrian government's readiness to massacre its own people in an effort to crush dissent," Ms. Pillay said.”⁸²

Some editorials and news reports also constructed sentences in ways that implied causation between the vetoes and the escalating violence:

“Two days after Russia and China vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a peaceful transfer of power in Syria, President Bashar al-Assad continued his killing spree” (editorial).⁸³

“The violence has gotten worse in the 11 days since Russia and China vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution” (editorial).⁸⁴

“The violence in Syria has escalated since Saturday, when Russia, seconded by China, vetoed an Arab League-backed resolution at the United Nations Security

⁷⁹ “Killing in Syria,” February 7, 2012.

⁸⁰ Colum Lynch and Alice Fordham, “Russia, China block U.N. Vote,” *Washington Post*, February 5, 2012, A13.

⁸¹ Neil MacFarquhar and Anthony Shadid, “Russia and China Block U.N. Action on Crisis in Syria,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2012, A1.

⁸² MacFarquhar and Schwartz, February 9, 2012.

⁸³ “Killing in Syria,” February 7, 2012.

⁸⁴ “The Enablers,” February 15, 2012.

Council that called on Mr. Assad to give up some powers as part of a plan to defuse the crisis, which increasingly resembles a civil war” (news).⁸⁵

Interestingly, the idea of Russia’s complicity with the violence in Syria was expressed as an opinion (through the direct quote) in the early coverage: “We all have a choice: Stand with the people of Syria and the region, or become complicit in the continuing violence there” (quoting Hillary Clinton).⁸⁶ However, later in the coverage the idea was presented as common knowledge: “Moscow faces frustration in Western capitals, where it is seen as complicit in the killings of civilians by forces loyal to Mr. Assad.”⁸⁷

News reports also suggested the connection between the vetoes and the potential for greater violence, stating that “the veto is almost sure to embolden the government of President Bashar al-Assad.”⁸⁸

“...the double veto at the U.N. Security Council that outraged the United States, its European allies and Arab leaders ... intensified fears that Assad would unleash even greater violence to crush protesters.”⁸⁹

“It’s quite clear – this is a license to do more of the same and worse. The regime will take it for granted that it can escalate further. We’re entering a new phase that will be far more violent still than what we’ve seen now.”⁹⁰

“The veto of the Security Council resolution appears to have emboldened the Syrian government to crack down even more harshly against protesters, and the conflict has increasingly taken on the cast of an armed insurgency as frustrated protesters gather weapons and fight back.”⁹¹

⁸⁵ Schwirtz and Gladstone, February 8, 2012.

⁸⁶ Lynch and Englund, February 1, 2012.

⁸⁷ Ellen Barry, “In Its Unyielding Stance on Syria, Russia Takes Substantial Risks in Middle East,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2012, A8.

⁸⁸ Schwirtz and Gladstone, February 8, 2012.

⁸⁹ Lynch and Fordham, February 5, 2012.

⁹⁰ MacFarquhar and Shadid, February 5, 2012.

⁹¹ Lynch, February 17, 2012.

Putting the blame on Russia's diplomacy for the escalating violence in Syria also created an impression that Russia's veto was the only obstacle to achieving peace in Syria:

“Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton signaled the Obama administration's mounting frustration with Russia over the unending violence in Syria on Thursday, saying that Russia's refusal to take decisive action against President Bashar al-Assad threatened to precipitate the very civil war that Russian diplomats have said they wanted to avoid.”⁹²

“The outlook for a peaceful outcome to the conflict darkened further on Thursday, when Russia and China vetoed a Britain-sponsored resolution at the United Nations Security Council that would have penalized Mr. Assad's government with sanctions for the first time for failing to implement the six-point peace plan negotiated by Kofi Annan, the special Syria envoy.”⁹³

Presenting Russia's intransigence in the debate as a principal cause of the “deadlock”⁹⁴ and the “diplomatic stalemate”⁹⁵ in the Security Council constituted the last key dimension of the larger theme of isolating Russia. The *New York Times* referred to the UNSC as being “paralyzed”⁹⁶ due to “Russia blocking constructive action.”⁹⁷ Similarly, *The Washington Post* asserted that the passed resolution would end “months of inaction on Syria”⁹⁸ but cautioned that “the entire proposal could unravel”⁹⁹ if Russia did not support it. The *New York Times* cited the US top diplomats contending that the UNSC

⁹² Steven Lee Myers and J. David Goodman, “Clinton Says Inaction by Russia May Lead to Syrian Civil War,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, A14.

⁹³ Neil MacFarquhar, “Residents Flee Damascus as Battle Enters Its Fifth Day,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2012.

⁹⁴ Lynch and Fordham, February 5, 2012.

⁹⁵ MacFarquhar and Shadid, February 5, 2012.

⁹⁶ Neil MacFarquhar, “At U.N., Pressure Is on Russia For Refusal to Condemn Syria,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2012, A1.

⁹⁷ “Russia's Bad Bet on Syria,” February 2, 2012.

⁹⁸ Colum Lynch, “US, Allies Drop Bid for Syria Sanctions,” *Washington Post*, February 3, 2012, A15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

has been unable to act because of the vetoes and, more specifically, because of Russia's (and in some, but not all, accounts China's) intransigence.¹⁰⁰

After the second veto in February, *The Washington Post* stated that such response "doomed any hope of a quick resolution at the United Nations"¹⁰¹ and that "White House officials acknowledged that the vote was a blow to diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian crisis."¹⁰² Similarly, the *New York Times* proclaimed that "a United Nations Security Council effort to end the violence in Syria collapsed in acrimony with a double veto by Russia and China,"¹⁰³ and that Russia "defied broad international consensus"¹⁰⁴ by rejecting the proposal. Later in the coverage, *The Washington Post* stated that "diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have been stalled since the Feb. 4 veto of the Security Council resolution,"¹⁰⁵ implying Russia's responsibility for the stalemate (and ignoring Russia's diplomatic efforts that already took place at that time). The discourse did not change as negotiations progressed and after the third veto in July, *The Washington Post* concluded:

"With the veto by Russia and China of a U.N. Security Council resolution aimed at Syria effectively heralding an end to diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, the spiraling violence seemed to leave little doubt that both sides are gearing up for a fight to a finish."¹⁰⁶

Articles were frequently composed in such a way that the potential benefits of the proposed resolution were listed and presented in a positive light first, raising readers' hopes for a possible solution to the crisis. The introductory paragraphs sometimes also

¹⁰⁰ MacFarquhar and Saad, January 31, 2012; Neil MacFarquhar, "All Eyes on Russia as Syria Cease-Fire Deadline Passes," *New York Times*, April 12, 2012, A4.

¹⁰¹ Lynch, January 29, 2012.

¹⁰² Lynch and Fordham, February 5, 2012.

¹⁰³ MacFarquhar and Shadid, February 5, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Schwartz, February 4, 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Lynch, February 17, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Liz Sly and Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Syrian Rebels Seize Key Border Crossings," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2012, A17.

listed the actors who welcomed the resolution, creating an impression of a wide consensus. Then a sharp turn would follow – for example, “and a day later, Russia had its say: Not a chance”¹⁰⁷ – creating the dynamic that not only pitted Russia against the proponents of the resolution but also portrayed Russia as a “spoiler,” as an evil character solely responsible for the inability of the UNSC to solve the Syrian crisis. The articles would then give updates on the escalating violence in Syria (often adding brief remarks about Russia’s arms deals with the Syrian government), creating a sense of urgency and emphasizing that the issue was extremely time sensitive and that immediate action from the international community was needed. Such structure of the articles worked to support the idea that the resolution put forth by the United States and the Arab League was the panacea, and if passed, would put an end to the crisis and the violence. Yet Russia’s veto (and Russia’s overall position regarding the crisis) created a “stalemate” at the UNSC and therefore contributed to escalation of violence and unraveling of the crisis in Syria.

Divided global community/spheres of influence

The US mainstream newspapers presented the debate over the resolution as being inherently about the competition for “spheres of influence” – a classic theme of the Cold War discourse. Additionally, this competition was presented as occurring in the “divided global community,” with lines of division closely resembling those that defined geopolitical struggles and the cartography of the Cold War. Forty one out of the total of one hundred and four articles evoked the narratives of “spheres of influence” and “divided global community” in various combinations.

¹⁰⁷ Lynch, January 29, 2012.

When discussing Russia's position in the diplomatic debate, both newspapers emphasized that the underlying reasons for Russia's intransigence had to do with its unwillingness, and even fear to lose its influence in the Middle East and its larger ambition of assuming "a proper role in shaping world affairs."¹⁰⁸ The *New York Times* referred to Syria as Russia's "last bastion of influence"¹⁰⁹ in the Middle East, suggesting that Russia always "used Assad to project its influence in the region,"¹¹⁰ and now Russia supports Assad because it fears losing that influence with Assad's fall.¹¹¹ In July, the *New York Times* published an op-ed piece written by Ruslan Pukhov, the director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies – a Russian research organization. In that piece, Pukhov argued that Russia's support of Assad's government was a matter of prestige and even national pride for "many Russians:"

"Many Russians believe that the collapse of the Assad government would be tantamount to the loss of Russia's last client and ally in the Middle East and the final elimination of traces of former Soviet prowess there -- illusory as those traces may be. They believe that Western intervention in Syria (which Russia cannot counter militarily) would be an intentional profanation of one of the few remaining symbols of Russia's status as a great world power."¹¹²

This quote suggests that Cold War past might have a strong symbolic significance for many Russians who feel nostalgic for the time when their country was "strong and powerful;" thus, any elimination of the link to this "glorious past" strips Russia of its desired status of a "great world power." This quote illustrates the tension between the reality of the post-Cold War time when Russia "cannot counter [the West] militarily,"

¹⁰⁸ Englund, January 19, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Cooper and Landler, May 27, 2012.

¹¹⁰ David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, "U.N. Suspending Syrian Mission, Citing Violence," *New York Times*, June 17, 2012, A1.

¹¹¹ Eric Schmitt, Mark Landler and Andrew E. Kramer, "Copters In Syria May Not Be New, US Officials Say," *New York Times*, June 14, 2012, A1.

¹¹² Ruslan Pukhov, "Why Russia Is Backing Syria," *New York Times*, July 7, 2012, A17.

and Russia's desire to reassert its superpower status through diplomacy and rhetoric that resemble the diplomacy and rhetoric of the Cold War. Implicit in this quote is also the idea that Russia can only "expand its role as a global powerbroker"¹¹³ if it engages in Cold War-style confrontation with "the West" – another dominant dimension of the "spheres of influence" theme. *The Washington Post* expressed the idea bluntly in one of its early news reports on the issue: "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin [stated] that Russia has to assume its proper role in shaping world affairs. That almost inevitably means sparring with the United States."¹¹⁴ The idea was echoed in the *New York Times* that argued that "Kremlin is eager to send a stern message to the West"¹¹⁵ and that "for Mr. Putin [brokering a peace deal in Syria] may not be as important as standing up to the West."¹¹⁶ Similarly, *The Washington Post* noted Russia's "growing willingness to challenge the United States and its European allies on a number of issues"¹¹⁷ and offered an interpretation of Russia's position being "an effort to seize the initiative on Syria from the Western powers - and from the United States, in particular."¹¹⁸ The argument resonated with the view offered by the *New York Times* through the expert's quote: "Russia's support for Mr. Assad gives it a 'huge role' and leverage over the West."¹¹⁹

Russia's opposition to the West as a grand strategy of what *The Washington Post* termed (referring to "one senior council diplomat") the "Putinization of Russian foreign

¹¹³ Herszenhorn, February 19, 2012.

¹¹⁴ Englund, January 19, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Herszenhorn, February 19, 2012.

¹¹⁶ Schwirtz, February 9, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Englund, February 7, 2012.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Barry, March 21, 2012

policy”¹²⁰ was complemented in the coverage by frequent references to Russia’s siding with states like China, Iran and North Korea. For example, when writing about the vote in the UN General Assembly, the *New York Times* noted that “Russia was one of just a dozen countries, among them China, Iran and North Korea, to vote against a General Assembly resolution urging Mr. Assad to step down.”¹²¹ Even though there were a dozen countries, the *New York Times* chose to single out China, Iran and North Korea – states that have already been worked up in the larger mainstream US news discourse as rather “unfriendly” (though to different degrees and for different reasons) toward the United States. Similarly, *The Washington Post* commented on the resolution’s veto:

“The Russian and Chinese veto of the U.N. Security Council resolution has left the international community divided between those who support the Syrian uprising's call for the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, including the United States, Europe and most of the Arab states, and Syria's allies who do not, including Russia, Iran and China.”¹²²

Thus, linking Russia to these states and juxtaposing this “group” to the United States, Europe and what *The Washington Post* termed “some Arab states” strengthened the idea of a very particular “divide” (along very particular geopolitical and perhaps even ideological lines) and implicitly articulated the connection to the Cold War discourse.

One news report in the *New York Times* was particularly powerful in articulating this dimension of the “spheres of influence” theme. The report discussed Vladimir Putin’s visit to China in June. The *New York Times* opened the report with the following statement: “The Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, arrived in China on Tuesday for

¹²⁰ Lynch, January 29, 2012.

¹²¹ Herszenhorn, February 19, 2012.

¹²² Liz Sly, “Arab Bloc Seeks Joint Effort With U.N. in Syria,” *Washington Post*, February 13, 2012, A09.

meetings aimed at strengthening a partnership between the two countries and offsetting the influence of the United States.”¹²³ The article juxtaposed this visit to Putin’s decision not to attend a summit meeting hosted by President Obama in the US just one month before and stated that “the talks between Mr. Putin and Mr. Hu, along with the two-day Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit meeting, are fraught with the symbolism of two major powers interested in further developing a multilateral organization that does not include the United States, and where Iran plays a role, if only as observer.”¹²⁴ This interpretation of the meeting expressed the interplay of the narratives of the “global divide” and “spheres of influence” and was echoed in *The Washington Post’s* interpretation of the resolution’s veto by Russia and China:

“Russia and China on Thursday vetoed a Western-backed U.N. Security Council resolution threatening the government of Syria with sanctions, leaving the United States and its allies grappling for a new strategy to end the violence at a time of spreading chaos within the country. ... It also placed new strains on relations between the United States and its European allies on one side and Russia and China on the other.”¹²⁵

In addition, the overall coverage often recreated an atmosphere of political battle between the two sides that “skirmished”¹²⁶ over the text of the resolution, “traded barbs”¹²⁷ with each other, sent “stern messages,”¹²⁸ prepared for “launching a major diplomatic offensive”¹²⁹ and “threatened” each other – linguistic choices highlighting military undertones of the discourse about the negotiations, conceptually overlapping with the “arms sales” theme and evoking memories of the Cold War confrontation.

¹²³ Jane Perlez, “Putin Arrives in China, Seeking Stronger Ties,” *New York Times*, June 6, 2012, A8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Colum Lynch, “Russia, China Veto Sanctions Threat,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2012, A17.

¹²⁶ MacFarquhar, February 1, 2012.

¹²⁷ Englund, February 7, 2012.

¹²⁸ Herszenhorn, February 19, 2012.

¹²⁹ “Saving Syria,” January 31, 2012.

Russia's fear of radical Islam

As previous discussion demonstrated, both US newspapers were highly critical of Russia's position in the debate. However, they also made a few attempts to explain Russia's position without demonizing Russia. In doing so, both US newspapers predominantly relied on the narrative of the "radical Islam threat" pointing out that "radical Islam is a huge concern for Russian leadership"¹³⁰ and that "some Russian analysts" fear that the fall of Assad will lead to "ethnic violence against Christian minorities and the spread of terrorism."¹³¹ The *New York Times* also brought up the concerns of the Russian Orthodox Church for the safety of Christian minorities in Syria (including a significant population of ethnic Russians residing in Syria), stating that "the Russian Orthodox Church... defended Mr. Assad's secular government, arguing that it protects religious minorities and acts as a bulwark against radical Islamism."¹³² Another article reiterated this point by stating that "the Russian Orthodox Church... fears that Christian minorities, many of them Orthodox, will be swept away by a wave of Islamic fundamentalism unleashed by the Arab Spring."¹³³ The article also quoted a Syrian living in Russia lamenting the fate of the Christian minorities after Assad's fall:

"Usama Matar, an optometrist who has lived in Russia since 1983, said he did not harbor any illusions about Russia's motives for defending Syrian Christians like himself, whom he called 'small coins in a big game.' But he said there were few international players taking notice of Eastern Christians at all. 'The West is pursuing its own interests; they are indifferent to our fate,' he said. 'I am not

¹³⁰ Englund, February 7, 2012.

¹³¹ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Warns It Will Not Back Britain on Syria Sanctions," *New York Times*, July 17, 2012.

¹³² Ellen Barry, "Russians and Syrians, Allied by History and Related by Marriage," *New York Times*, July 2, 2012, A1.

¹³³ Ellen Barry, "Russian Church Is a Strong Voice Opposing Intervention in Syria," *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, A14.

justifying the Assad regime -- it is dictatorial, we know this, it is despotic, I understand. But these guys, they don't even hide their intention to build an Islamic state and their methods of battle, where they just execute people on the streets. That's the opposition, not just the authorities. And we are between two fires.”¹³⁴

Interestingly, the quote reveals the interplay between the two security discourses. On the one hand, Usama Matar is explicit in articulating his fear of the “spread of radical Islam” and the violence that he associates with it. On the other hand, he simultaneously points out that Syrian Christians are “small coins in a big game,”¹³⁵ thus accepting the “great powers” logic of geopolitics that resembles the Cold War discourse. The phrase “we are between two fires” points to the tension between the two security discourses (and also corresponding approaches to policy) – one of the “clash of great powers” and another of the “clash of civilizations.” It also points to a conceptual similarity between the two discourses, since neither of them addresses the complexities represented by the “small coins.”

A similar interplay between the two security discourses is presented in the Op-Ed piece by Ruslan Pukhov, director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (a Russian research organization) published in the *New York Times* in July of 2012. The main goal of the piece titled “Why Russia is backing Syria” is to explain to the American readers “the real reason”¹³⁶ behind Russia’s position. The opening paragraph states:

“Many in the West believe that Russia's support for Syria stems from Moscow's desire to profit from selling arms to Bashar al-Assad's government and maintain its naval facility at the Syrian port of Tartus. But these speculations are superficial and misguided. The real reason that Russia is resisting strong international action

¹³⁴ Barry, June 1, 2012.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Pukhov, July 7, 2012.

against the Assad regime is that it fears the spread of Islamic radicalism and the erosion of its superpower status in a world where Western nations are increasingly undertaking unilateral military interventions.”¹³⁷

The author proceeds to debunk the “superficial and misguided speculations,” while also capitalizing on two key narratives: Russia’s role as a “superpower” and Russia’s fear of radical Islam. The former narrative supports the discourse of the Cold War and complements the themes discussed at length in the previous section. The latter narrative merits further discussion. The author of the article contends that “Russian observers believe that Arab revolutions have completely destabilized the region and cleared the road to power for the Islamists. In Moscow, secular authoritarian governments are seen as the sole realistic alternative to Islamic domination:”¹³⁸

“The continuing struggles in Arab countries are seen as a battle by those who wear neckties against those who do not wear them. Russians have long suffered from terrorism and extremism at the hands of Islamists in the northern Caucasus, and they are therefore firmly on the side of those who wear neckties. To people in Moscow, Mr. Assad appears not so much as “a bad dictator” but as a secular leader struggling with an uprising of Islamist barbarians.”¹³⁹

The narrative of the “Islamic threat” is evident in the quote above, as is the explicit essentialist juxtaposition of “those who wear neckties against those who do not.” Most importantly, while the US newspapers extensively critiqued Russia’s position in the Syrian debate (as exemplified by the discussion in the previous section), the critique never extended to Russia’s position regarding the “threat of radical Islam.” In addition, *The Washington Post* also talked about “growing concerns that al-Qaeda influenced

¹³⁷ Pukhov, July 7, 2012.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

groups may be trying to muscle in to the increasingly chaotic situation in Syria,”¹⁴⁰ though carefully noting that “US officials... added that there is no indication that the Syrian opposition is falling under the influence of extremist groups.”¹⁴¹ The clarification was followed by a claim in an article published just a few days later that “top US intelligence officials said... that they think members of al-Qaeda have infiltrated Syrian opposition groups... though in many cases the opposition groups may not be aware that [the extremists] are there.”¹⁴² Thus, *The Washington Post* brought in the narrative of the “Islamic threat,” yet tried to separate it from the Syrian opposition since the US official policy supported the opposition. In doing so, *The Washington Post* also used the narrative of the “Islamic threat” to further advance the US official position, arguing in one of its editorials that “a managed transition... could end the bloodshed relatively quickly and give the upper hand to secular and pro-democracy forces,” whereas prolonged fighting increased the chance that “Syria will be overtaken by a merciless sectarian war... [which] would empower Islamic extremists.”¹⁴³ A news report later in the coverage reiterated this point by quoting one of the State Department’s senior diplomats: “The longer this goes on, the deeper the sectarian divisions, the higher the risks of long-term sectarian conflict, the higher the risk of extremist involvement.”¹⁴⁴

Lastly, the theme of the “Islamic threat” also came up in two Op-Ed pieces published in *The Washington Post* that advocated military intervention¹⁴⁵ and arming of

¹⁴⁰ Sly, February 13, 2012.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Lynch, February 17, 2012.

¹⁴³ “Saving Syria,” January 31, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Karen DeYoung, “US, partners weigh military moves to curb Syrian carnage,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2012, A01.

¹⁴⁵ Max Boot, “Get Off the Sidelines with Syria,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2012, A13.

the Syrian opposition.¹⁴⁶ The author of the former article argued that “if we (the US) stand on the sidelines, worst-case scenarios – such as Syrian chemical weapons falling into the wrong hands or groups such as al-Qaeda developing havens – are more likely to result because of the Assad regime’s inability to control its own territory.”¹⁴⁷ This quote, in addition to playing on the theme of the “radical Islam threat,” also reflects paternalistic attitude and assumption that the US and its allies *will* be able to control the territory in Syria, unlike Assad’s regime that is being portrayed as not just brutal and autocratic (in a larger context of the coverage) but as incompetent and unable to stand up to the “terrorist forces.” The second article advocated for arming the Syrian opposition, putting forth two arguments that, once again, brought together the discourse of the Cold War and the discourse of the “threat of radical Islam.” The first argument was based on the idea that if Russia arms Assad’s forces, then the US has a right to arm the opposition. The author even brought up a historical parallel of how “arming the Afghan opposition in the 1980s succeeded in its aim of driving out the Soviet Union,”¹⁴⁸ though promptly adding that “US responsibility for the subsequent chaos lay in its abandoning the country after 1989.”¹⁴⁹ The discourse of the Cold War clearly surfaces in the narrative constructed by the author, yet it also takes an interesting twist in the concluding paragraph:

“...the United States has reason to provide material support for the Syrian opposition: precisely so it can be a player in Syria if and when Assad does fall. Western influence could be vital in shaping the post-Assad regime. Or would it be better to stand back while Saudi and Qatari fundamentalists ship weapons to their counterparts in Syria - and call the political shots afterward?”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Jackson Diehl, “Arm the Syrian opposition,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2012, A21.

¹⁴⁷ Boot, March 16, 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Diehl, February 10, 2012.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Diehl, February 10, 2012.

The concluding paragraph blends the discourse of the “threat of Islamic fundamentalism” into the larger geopolitical discourse of “spheres of influence,” which closely resembles the discourse of the Cold War, especially when interpreted within the larger context of the editorial and the coverage in general.

Russian mainstream media coverage

Russia’s respect of state sovereignty versus Western plan of intervention and regime change

One of the central themes in the coverage by *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* was the juxtaposition of Russia’s respect for Syria’s sovereignty, and therefore Russia’s commitment to diplomatic solutions to the crisis, to Western (and often time exclusively American) desire for intervention and regime change in Syria. Both newspapers supported the official Russian position that the resolution proposed at the UNSC “did not rule out military intervention,”¹⁵¹ and if such intervention was to occur, it would “shake the foundations of international order.”¹⁵² Both newspapers constantly emphasized Russia’s position that “it should be up to the Syrian people to decide the future of their country”¹⁵³ and therefore members of the UNSC should act as mediators instead of “taking part in the civil war by supporting one of the sides in the conflict.”¹⁵⁴ The United

¹⁵¹ “Lavrov i Fradkov Pribyli V Damask Dlya Vstrechi S Asadom,” *Izvestia*, February 7, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514506#ixzz29N1fg9Op>.

¹⁵² Konstantin Volkov, “Moskva Budet Rabotat’ Nad Siriey,” *Izvestia*, January 27, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/513381#ixzz29MJbw2xm>.

¹⁵³ Kirill Zubkov, “Fradkov Pomozhet Lavrovu V Peregovorakh S Asadom,” *Izvestia*, February 5, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514301#ixzz2A6FI7zYj>; Andrei Artemov, “Rossiya: Voennogo Vmeshatel’sstva V Siriyu My Ne Dopustim,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 16, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/50442>.

¹⁵⁴ Zubkov, February 5, 2012; Oleg Shevtsov, “Sarkozi Gotovitsya Svergnut’ Asada Po Liviyskomu Stsenariyu,” *Izvestia*, February 14, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/515280#ixzz29N5pX156>; Kirill Zubkov and Igor’ Yavlinskiy, “Rossiya Ne Uchastvuyet Vo Vstreche ‘Gruppy Druzei Sirii’,” *Izvestia*, February 21, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/516139#ixzz29N7FZAT3>.

States and its allies, according to both newspapers, were “trying to get UNSC’s approval for military intervention in Syria”¹⁵⁵ in order to topple Assad’s regime.

The situation with intervention and regime change in Libya was mentioned often. “Russia will do all it can to prevent the declaration of a “no-fly” zone in Syria, like it happened in Libya,”¹⁵⁶ wrote *Izvestia*. “No one should be allowed to implement the ‘Libyan scenario’ in Syria,”¹⁵⁷ stated *Argumenty i Fakty*, quoting President Putin and explaining the reason for such position:

“A string of military conflicts justified by humanitarian goals compromises the integrity of the centuries-old principle of state sovereignty. As a result, many nations become victims of “humanitarian” operations and of the export of the “rocket-and-bomb democracy.” Last time the aviation was used to topple the regime in Libya – an operation that culminated in a disgusting scene of Gaddafi’s murder (quoting Putin).”¹⁵⁸

This quote determined one of the key arguments advanced by *Argumenty i Fakty* throughout the coverage: “the proclaimed goal of any operation proposed by the United States and its allies is to defend civilians but in reality, like in Libya, the allies will take the side of Assad’s opposition.”¹⁵⁹ In advancing this argument, *Argumenty i Fakty* referred to some of the top Russian officials and diplomats stating, for example, that “Russia will not allow a military campaign in Syria resembling the one in Libya where Western allies attacked Libya under the pretense of protecting civilians, which led to the toppling of

¹⁵⁵ Volkov, January 27, 2012; Andrei Artemov, “SSHA Reshayut, Kogda Im Nachat’ Bombit’ Siriyu,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/50301>; Andrei Artemov, “Rossiya Obeshaet Ne Sdavayt’ Siriyu, A Zapad Gotovitsya Ee Atakovat’,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, May 30, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/52449>.

¹⁵⁶ Volkov, January 27, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Victor Yuryev, “Otvety ‘Dubine’,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, February 29, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/49925>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Artemov, March 12, 2012.

Gaddafi's regime."¹⁶⁰ It also quoted "average Syrians" worrying about NATO intervention. For example, one story (by a correspondent reporting directly from Syria) quoted a student shouting on the street during a heated debate: "First, the American planes will arrive. Then NATO people will pay the officers and sponsor a coup! All according to a well-known scheme just like in Libya!"¹⁶¹

When in February of 2012 (after Russia and China vetoed the resolution for the second time) proponents of the resolution initiated the creation of the "friends of Syria" group in order to develop measures for resolving the crisis independently of the UNSC, both *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* drew a parallel with the "friends of the Libyan people" group organized a year earlier:

"In early March of last year Paris initiated a similar political operation by organizing a "contact group on Libya." On September 1st it was renamed into a "group of friends of the Libyan people." In the next six months, as everyone knows, "the friends" bombed all military bases of the Libyan army and armed the opposition for a fight against Gaddafi. The present "group" – which the French diplomats are putting together according to a tested scenario – consists of pretty much the same members."¹⁶²

The main goal of the "friends of Syria" group was, according to both newspapers "the legitimization of military intervention and regime change"¹⁶³ rather than their declared goal of starting a dialogue in order to resolve internal crisis in Syria. One of the indicators, according to *Izvestia*, was that the "friends of Syria" only invited leaders of some opposition groups to the initial meeting of the group in Tunis and did not invite the

¹⁶⁰ Artemov, March 16, 2012.

¹⁶¹ Georgiy Zotov, "Zakhlebnetsya Li Siriya Krovyu?" *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/50335>.

¹⁶² Shevtsov, February 14, 2012; Zubkov and Yavlinskiy, February 21, 2012.

¹⁶³ Volkov, January 27, 2012; Artemov, March 12, 2012; Artemov, May 30, 2012.

representative of the Syrian government.¹⁶⁴ This, according to *Izvestia*, was not considerate of the interests of the large portion of the Syrian population that was supporting the government¹⁶⁵ and therefore such initiative would not help to start a dialogue. Instead, *Izvestia* argued, the group looked more like an “international coalition” aiming to “kick Assad out of Syria.”¹⁶⁶ Both newspapers argued that the West was “misleading the opposition [by insisting that Assad lost his legitimacy and must leave], signaling that starting a dialogue is pointless and that the opposition should count on Western and NATO help, like it happened in Libya a year ago.”¹⁶⁷ An op-ed piece in *Izvestia* reiterated this point:

“Interestingly, the United States and their allies, not Russia, provoke the growth of violence and chaos in the region with their actions. By taking a firm position that Assad must leave, they raise the expectations and the demands of the armed opposition. The opposition, aware of the Libyan experience, radicalizes its own demands. The opposition loses motivation for trying to negotiate with the existing regime in order to find a compromise. It demands external intervention and violent toppling of the Assad’s regime from its Western donors and their allies in the region. Thus, the West, by not suggesting any political and diplomatic solution to the problem, by not suggesting any alternative to the plan of Kofi Annan supported by Russia, enables further escalation of the conflict.”¹⁶⁸

Thus, from the perspective of the Russian mainstream media, the West acted as a “spoiler” in the process of the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis because the goal of the West was “military intervention and regime change.”

¹⁶⁴ Zubkov and Yavlinskiy, February 21, 2012.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Konstantin Volkov, “Mnogie V Sirii Schitayut, Chto S Konstitutsiyei Nado Bylo Nachinat’ Ran’she,” *Izvestia*, February 28, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/516761#ixzz29N9Vwmyu>.

¹⁶⁷ Artemov, March 16, 2012.

¹⁶⁸ Andranik Migranyan, “Nichego Lichnogo,” *Izvestia*, June 25, 2012.

Conversely, Russia was always portrayed in *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* as striving to “find a compromise,”¹⁶⁹ “bring stability to Syria through diplomatic negotiations and democratic reforms”¹⁷⁰ and as being “open to partnership with those who were seeking this partnership.”¹⁷¹ Russia’s key position in the debate, according to both newspapers, was that the main goal of the members of the UNSC should be to get both the Syrian government and the opposition to stop mutual violence and to get to the negotiating table. Thus, both newspapers devoted significant amount of coverage to discussing Russian diplomatic efforts in Syria, including multiple trips of the top Russian officials to Damascus and their initiatives on hosting negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition in Moscow. Both newspapers were optimistic about the potential of these efforts, calling them “timely and useful”¹⁷² and reporting that “Assad agreed to ceasefire and reforms”¹⁷³ and “is ready for a dialogue with all political groups.”¹⁷⁴ However, when these efforts did not produce any positive results, *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* argued that the reason for the lack of progress was the intransigence of both the Syrian opposition and of its foreign supporters.

Russian rational diplomacy versus Western emotional messianism

Izvestia and *Argumenty i Fakty* argued that Russia and Russian officials were embracing, and actively working toward, a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis while

¹⁶⁹ “Gosdep Nazval Veto Rossii I Kitaya Po Sirii ‘Karikaturuy,’” *Izvestia*, February 5, 2012; “Lavrov I Fradkov,” February 7, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Volkov, February 28, 2012.

¹⁷¹ Yuryev, February 29, 2012.

¹⁷² Andrei Artemov, “V Traditsiyakh Kholodnoy Voyny. Rossiya I SSHA Skhlestnutsya Za Siriyu?” *Argumenty i Fakty*, February 8, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/49364>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “Strany Persidskogo Zaliva Otozvali Poslov Iz Sirii,” *Izvestia*, February 7, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514568#ixzz29N2AoJOB>; “Asad Gotov Otpravit’ Pravitel’stvennyuy Delegatsiyu V Moskvu,” *Izvestia*, February 8, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514619#ixzz29N3PpPtt>.

the West, and the US specifically, were plotting intervention with the goal of the regime change. In constructing these narratives both newspapers emphasized that Russian diplomacy was rational and thoughtful, while the United States and its allies, blinded by the “regime change” idea, overlooked the important complexity of the situation in the region and therefore were more emotional rather than rational in their arguments and proposed actions. The juxtaposition of the two narratives was particularly pronounced in several instances.

First, in discussing the reaction of the proponents of the resolution to Russian and Chinese vetoes, both newspapers highlighted the comments by Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, who noted that “some of the comments coming from the West in regards to the UNSC voting results sound inappropriate and are close to hysteria”¹⁷⁵ and “urged [his Western colleagues] to assess the situation more thoughtfully.”¹⁷⁶ “I recall a proverb that one who is angry is rarely right,”¹⁷⁷ quoted *Izvestia*. In another report, *Izvestia* quoted a Twitter post by Gennadiy Gatilov (Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) stating that “undiplomatic reaction of Westerners to Russia’s position on Syria at the UNSC only confirms the correctness of our arguments. It is better to seek compromises.”¹⁷⁸ Articles were often composed in such a way that the diplomatic efforts – whether by Russia or by the special UN envoy Kofi Annan – were directly juxtaposed to United States’ and its allies’ alleged “non-diplomatic plans.” For example, *Argumenty i Fakty* stated: “While the special UN and Arab League envoy Kofi Annan tried to start the

¹⁷⁵ “Lavrov Zametil Isteriku V Siriyskom Voprose,” *Izvestia*, February 6, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514379#ixzz29N0PNJCY>.

¹⁷⁶ “Lavrov Zametil,” February 6, 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ “Lavrov i Fradkov,” February 7, 2012.

negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition, the United States and their allies started discussing intervention plans. Will the West dare to bomb yet another country?"¹⁷⁹ Similarly, when in February of 2012 the United States and several Western European countries either closed their embassies in Syria or summoned their ambassadors, *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* contrasted this "flight of ambassadors" with the diplomatic efforts of the top Russian officials – including especially their trips to Damascus – happening at the same time. The articles discussing these events were structured in a way that listed all the countries whose ambassadors left Syria, making it seem like an emotional and symbolic gesture indicating the end to those countries' diplomatic relations with Syria, and therefore those countries' unwillingness to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis. After that, the articles would point out that "at the same time"¹⁸⁰ Russian top officials and diplomats were meeting with Assad, working hard on trying to find compromises and foster a dialogue between multiple political groups in Syria. *Izvestia* also referenced Sergey Lavrov noting that "the situation [of the ambassadors leaving Syria] borders with hysteria and only leads to escalation of tensions in the country."¹⁸¹

Second, both newspapers accused the US officials of "relying on sensational media coverage rather than on thoughtful analysis of the situation"¹⁸² when making foreign policy decisions. Both newspapers asserted that the Western media and governments were working in unison to support and promote only the Western

¹⁷⁹ Zotov, March 14, 2012.

¹⁸⁰ "Strany Persidskogo," February 7, 2012.

¹⁸¹ "Asad Gotov," February 8, 2012.

¹⁸² "Lavrov Zametil," February 6, 2012.

perspective on the Syrian crisis and on ways of resolving it. When in early February of 2012 the Syrian city of Homs was shelled by the government forces, *Argumenty i Fakty* noted: “The city of Homs is a direct proof that the wars of the twenty-first century are not won with weapons. What wins is a picture on television or a video on the Internet.”¹⁸³

Dissatisfied with the Western media’s coverage of the shelling in Homs, *Argumenty i Fakty* sent its own correspondent to Syria, who frequently cited Syrian journalists and local organizers in his reports from Homs:

“Tell me – asks me Mohammed – we have walked through five districts – have you seen a single dead woman or a child? But if you watch CNN, all our army is doing is systematically murdering civilians. Actually, the army opened a corridor right before the shelling – all citizens left Homs. But has any single Western channel shown that?”¹⁸⁴

In the same report, the author acknowledged the atrocities committed by the government forces but also pointed readers’ attention to the violence coming from the opposition:

“I accept that civilians indeed died in Baba-Amr (a district in Homs): after all, tanks shelled the city directly. But there is also another truth. CNN and BBC don’t show it. Rebels murdered hundreds of civilians in Homs who were supporting Assad: not military personnel but civilians. For example, rebels shot a local school’s principal (like Assad, he belonged to the sect of Muslim Alawites) and his whole family, including three children, and threw the bodies down from the balcony. This immediately reminds us of the situation with Gaddafi: the global community loudly protested the crack down on the protestors but completely ignored videos on the Internet showing the rebels murdering Libyan soldiers.”¹⁸⁵

In this report, the journalist drew a comparison with the conflict in Libya – a frequent theme in the overall Russian media coverage that was discussed earlier – to

¹⁸³ Georgyi Zotov, “Fabrika Chudovish,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 21, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/50506>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

show “the history of Western double-standards” repeating itself. Another report in *Argumenty i Fakty* made a similar point, while also bringing up the Western media campaign accompanying the US invasion of Iraq:

Western mainstream media always support the official policy of their governments even if it involves telling lies and manufacturing truths. Recently, we had two cases when lies were used to start a war against a country. The first one was the US occupation of Iraq, when all mass media were insisting that Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear weapons. What happened next? After Baghdad’s fall, everyone found out that there were no such weapons. Most recently we had the case of Muammar Gaddafi. [The media] kept telling that he was burying protesters in mass graves, and bombing from the air. When this information was debunked, they buried Gaddafi himself. The West needs a reason to invade Syria – everything else doesn’t matter. This is a political theater where corpses serve as decorations.¹⁸⁶

Moreover, *Argumenty i Fakty* argued that in comparison to Libya and Iraq, Syria was in fact a progressive country with a progressive leader who was undeservingly demonized by the Western media:

“Before the ‘Arab Spring’ Bashar al-Assad was considered one of the most progressive leaders in the Middle East. He developed the Internet in the country, opened Syria for tourists, and Syrian people could openly criticize the government in conversations with the foreigners. This was impossible in Libya under Gaddafi or in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Now, due to the Internet and television, Assad is portrayed as a monster who eats babies for breakfast. It is impossible to prove this wrong – you will be told, again, about murdered women and children.”¹⁸⁷

To reinforce the point about the West manufacturing media coverage to justify intervention, *Argumenty i Fakty* also argued that Western media determined the roles of “bad guys” (the Syrian government) and the “knights in shining armor”¹⁸⁸ (the

¹⁸⁶ Georgiy Zotov, “Teatr Mertvetsov,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/52745>.

¹⁸⁷ Zotov, March 21, 2012.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

opposition) according to the official foreign policy, without taking into consideration the dynamic of the unfolding crisis:

“Any murder can be blamed on the regime in Damascus: no one will even listen to any other opinion. Why conduct an independent investigation? The West jumps to conclusions five minutes after listening to BBC. There is only one perspective: “freedom fighters” only tell the truth, the regime always lies.”¹⁸⁹

According to *Argumenty i Fakty*, such static view of “heroes and villains” in the crisis was impossible to change, even when facts contradicted this perspective:

“I turn on CNN and hear: ‘Hula was shelled with heavy artillery,’ – comments Ibrahim Salad, a military expert. Atrocities of the Syrian army are extensively discussed for two days. Then suddenly they say: ‘Almost all victims were stabbed.’ UN monitors go to Hula, put together a report, which has nothing about heavy artillery. So the artillery turned out to be a hoax? Well, this doesn’t bother anyone. The US and the E.U. already accused Syria, and summoned their ambassadors. Soon a new scoop appears: soldiers murdered the people in their homes. There is no proof but the West doesn’t need it. It’s pointless for Syria to try to prove otherwise – if rumors are not confirmed, no one believes Syria anyway.”¹⁹⁰

Similarly, *Argumenty i Fakty* quoted a Syrian journalist frustrated by Western media’s coverage and their source selection bias:

“It’s hard to be a bloody tyrant. You can tell the truth, and no one will still believe you. Note that during the first day of fighting in Homs foreign news agencies announced: 250 people were killed. The source? “According to the phone message from a representative of the Syrian opposition forces.” And that’s it, that’s enough! This means every person can make up some numbers and the West will accept it automatically! I will tell you honestly; I was in Homs that day and saw everything and the amount of killed people was not even close to that. But who will believe someone who is on the tyrant’s side? We can rip our throats shouting but no one in the West will hear us.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Zotov, June 13, 2012.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Zotov, March 21, 2012.

Bringing readers' attention to the pro-opposition, anti-Assad bias in Western media coverage supported the larger point about the intransigence of the West, its unwillingness to consider alternative perspectives and even facts. Moreover, the claims about the Western policy makers relying on sensational media coverage undermined these policy-makers' credibility, though *Izvestia* pointed out in one of its reports that "if the West decided something, it will not back down because there is no substantial counter-power to the power of the West in the world today."¹⁹² Thus, *Izvestia* recognized the unmatched power of the West. At the same time, the refusal to accept the Western perspective (powerful but wrong, according to the Russian mainstream media) evident in other dominant themes discussed above also points to the resistance to the post-Cold War "unipolar world" and to the desire to restore the "balance of power."

Divided Syria, fractured opposition

One of the key arguments advanced by *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* in order to support Russia's official position in the debate was that a large portion of Syrian population was siding with Assad. When Syria held a referendum on the new Constitution in late February of 2012 – an event resulting in 90% of Syrians supporting the modernization of the Constitution (at least according to *Izvestia*) – *Izvestia* declared that "the results of the referendum demonstrate that the argument about Assad's illegitimacy is false."¹⁹³ Moreover, *Izvestia* asserted that the results of the referendum also demonstrated "a change in the position of the people who previously supported [the

¹⁹² Konstantin Volkov, "SSHA Prizyvayut Protivnikov Asada Ne Stesnyatsya 'Al-Qaidy'," *Izvestia*, February 17, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/515823#ixzz29N6ftZRr>.

¹⁹³ Konstantin Volkov, "Polovina Sirtiyevev Otdali Golosa Za Asada," *Izvestia*, February 27, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/516692#ixzz29N9IFvy1>.

revolution]:”¹⁹⁴ “once people saw that weakening of the government leads to terrorist attacks and violence, they took Assad’s side [because he is] able to prevent Syria from falling apart”¹⁹⁵ – cited *Izvestia* a Russian expert on Middle Eastern affairs. *Argumenty i Fakty* supported this point by quoting Syrians in its report by a special correspondent in Syria:

““I also supported the revolution at the beginning – says Professor [Jamal al-Bahr]. ‘I was fed up with the corruption on all levels, with impossibility to resolve any issue without a bribe, with small salaries. But now my opinion drastically changed! The West portrays Bashar al-Assad as a bloody tyrant but compared to the real tyrants he is an angel. Bashar did not hang people on the streets, like Saddam, and his family did not steal millions, like Gaddafi’s relatives. Have you seen a sculpture of Bashar anywhere in Damascus? And you won’t see it. Syria has free health care and free education, and crime was unheard of before. I expected positive changes from the “Arab Spring” and what did I get? Money perished, there is fighting in cities and towns, burglars break into cars, my children don’t have jobs. To hell this kind of revolution!””¹⁹⁶

Every report in *Argumenty i Fakty* described in detail the dire conditions in which Syrians found themselves after the protests escalated into a violent conflict, implying that this situation was a “result of the revolution.” Several vignettes similar to the one above demonstrated that the “people of Syria” wanted peace and associated peace and stability with Assad, in contrast to the opposition that demanded Assad to step down and thus, according to the logic implicit in both newspapers’ narratives, was instrumental in exacerbating tensions and causing greater violence. *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* connected the idea of the opposition provoking violence to the argument that the opposition itself was fractured and that the opposition groups with most radical views

¹⁹⁴ Volkov, February 27, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Zotov, March 14, 2012.

were supported from abroad,¹⁹⁷ while some of the groups representing what *Izvestia* termed “internal opposition”¹⁹⁸ were more moderate and willing to negotiate with the authorities.¹⁹⁹

Thus, *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* developed the narrative of divided Syria where the majority – “the people of Syria” supporting Assad – were terrorized by the powerful minority – the opposition demanding regime change and getting substantial support from the “foreign actors.” According to both newspapers, the West and other proponents of the UNSC resolution who supported the opposition did not support “the people of Syria.” “Moscow believes that the global community should support the entire Syrian nation, not just its fraction,” stated *Izvestia* in a report discussing the first meeting of the “friends of Syria” group. Quoting one of the Russian top officials, *Izvestia* argued that because “the leaders of certain opposition groups were invited to the meeting and the Syrian government officials were not, [this meant that] the interests of the majority of Syrians who support the current government, would not be represented [at the meeting].”²⁰⁰ Similarly, *Argumenty i Fakty* quoted a Russian diplomat arguing that “none of the opposition groups have a right to speak on behalf of the Syrian people, and especially to represent them.”²⁰¹ This dichotomy – Russia supporting Assad and therefore the people of Syria, and the West (especially the United States) supporting the opposition

¹⁹⁷ “Siriyskim Povstantsam Pomogayet Britanskiy I Qatarskiy Spetsnaz,” *Izvestia*, February 9, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514856#ixzz29N40fZVq>.

¹⁹⁸ Volkov, February 17, 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Konstantin Volkov, “Siriyskaya Oppozitsiya Otvergaet Konstitutsiyu Asada,” *Izvestia*, February 8, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/514704#ixzz2A6HW4L4A>.

²⁰⁰ Zubkov and Yavlinskiy, February 21, 2012.

²⁰¹ Artemov, March 16, 2012.

– was evident in several stories by *Argumenty i Fakty* correspondents who portrayed Syria as divided into pro-Russian and pro-American forces:

“The entire way from Beirut to Damascus the driver Ahmed kept explaining: “Don’t mention anywhere that you are from Russia. The Islamists think that Bashar’s regime is holding only because of Moscow’s support. Here in Damascus you will be called a brother but in Homs the rebels swore to Allah that they will kill all Russians. If you go there, pretend that you are an American. You speak English with an accent? Well, then tell them you are from Finland; no one knows Finnish here.”²⁰²

Argumenty i Fakty also quoted some anti-Assad Syrians saying they “would rather clean the boots of the Americans than the Russians.”²⁰³ In another story, the author was describing an episode at a small café in Hula (a town in Syria where some of the most intense fighting occurred in May of 2012). As the author and the café owner drank tea in the darkness, they could see the flames and hear the shooting. The café owner said: “This is the sound of NATO guns – means the rebels are shooting. Once we hear Kalashnikovs – that’s our [Syrian] army.”²⁰⁴ These quotes and episodes reinforced the narrative of the divided Syria while also demonstrating Syrians’ recognition and acceptance of the “great powers and their clients” political order and discourse.

Threat of radical Islam

The main argument *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* presented when defending Russia’s support of Assad was that “if Assad falls, Syria will sink into sectarian war where Islamists, supported by the Persian Gulf monarchies, will gain strength”²⁰⁵ and

²⁰² Zotov, March 14, 2012.

²⁰³ Georgyi Zotov, “Luchshe Chistit’ Sapogi SSHA, Chem Rossii,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, June 27, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/53045>.

²⁰⁴ Georgyi Zotov, “Kupaniye V Krovi,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, May 30, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/52391>.

²⁰⁵ Volkov, January 27, 2012.

eventually seize power.²⁰⁶ *Argumenty i Fakty* quoted Syrians worrying about the prospects of a violent sectarian war: “If they kick Bashar out, everything here will choke in blood. Alawites and Sunni will fight, and then Shia and Christians will join too... You will see, there will be a big war.”²⁰⁷ Another person also noted that the “revolution” took an unintended, yet somewhat predictable turn:

“You know what sucks about all this? The protests of the “Arab Spring” were different – against corruption, against rich bureaucrats, against dictatorship. But is what’s going on in Hula now a democracy? No, this is called bloodshed. Rebels are not aliens who came from Mars: they always lived among us. Turns out, if a country has strong power, everyone is afraid of that power. But as soon as you loosen the grip, people who like to murder their neighbors immediately turn up. Syria is sinking in blood...”²⁰⁸

Izvestia emphasized in its reports that “there were many radical Sunni Muslims [in the opposition]”²⁰⁹ and that’s why Moscow was “insisting that the opposition members distance themselves from extremist organizations.”²¹⁰ *Argumenty i Fakty* quoted a Syrian fearing the “Islamic turn” of the revolution:

“I’m not happy with Bashar,” tells me Karim, a businessman and the owner of a local restaurant chain. “But I see who is about to replace him. Protests in Syria were started by students with stones in their hands, and then the initiative was hijacked by the Islamists with grenade-guns. If they win, they will kill everyone who supported Assad. Christians will have to flee, people who drink a glass of beer will be beaten with sticks on the streets of Damascus – just like in Iran. Thanks but I don’t need this kind of democracy!”²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Aleksandr Konovalov, “Grozit Li Nam Kholodnaya Voyna?” *Argumenty i Fakty*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/48572>.

²⁰⁷ Zotov, March 14, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Zotov, May 30, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Volkov, February 8, 2012.

²¹⁰ Konstantin Volkov, “‘Al-Qaeda’ Speshit Na Pomosh’ Svoim Lyudyam V Sirii,” *Izvestia*, February 13, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/515189#ixzz29N55KZDA>.

²¹¹ Georgiy Zotov, “Krovavoye Leto Sirii,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, June 6, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/52576>.

Izvestia noted in one of its reports that Israel has been surprisingly quiet about the Syrian crisis and explained to the readers that Israel’s cautious position could be easily understood because “Israel realizes that if Arab nationalists fail, their place in Damascus would be taken by Islamic fundamentalists who have ties to al-Qaeda.”²¹²

The “al-Qaeda connection” was discussed thoroughly throughout the coverage by both newspapers. In early February, *Izvestia* announced: “al-Qaeda officially supported the Syrian opposition and called on all Muslims to join the protests against President Bashar Assad.”²¹³ *Izvestia* noted that while it was still unknown how likely al-Qaeda’s direct participation in the Syrian crisis was, the Iraqi authorities admitted that al-Qaeda fighters as well as weapons did cross the border from Northern Iraq to Syria.²¹⁴ Similarly, *Argumenty i Fakty*’s special correspondent in Syria, while describing his experience of crossing the Lebanon-Syrian border, quoted a Lebanese border security officer saying that “only al-Qaeda fighters are crossing [into Syria] now.”²¹⁵ *Izvestia* quoted an expert saying that while the Syrian National Council rejected any ties to al-Qaeda (though also admitting that there are some “Salafi members in the opposition who promote religious rather than democratic ideas”²¹⁶), “there is a connection between al-Qaeda and radical Islamic groups among the members of the Free Syrian Army, like groups “Soldiers of Islam” who seek to establish sharia law in the country.”²¹⁷ This expert opinion was

²¹² Zubkov, February 5, 2012.

²¹³ Volkov, February 13, 2012.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Zotov, June 6, 2012.

²¹⁶ Volkov, February 13, 2012.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

complemented by the reports from Syria in *Argumenty i Fakty*. For example, in one report, the author described his exchange with a member of the Free Syrian Army:

“27-year-old Ayub is one of the officers of the Free Syrian Army. He was a member of the Syrian special forces but defected when he was sent to the city of Deraa and took the side of the rebels. He talks to me thinking that I am a western journalist; he doesn’t know that I am from Moscow: “Russians and Chinese are assholes, - he states bluntly. If it wasn’t for their support, Bashar would leave Damascus tomorrow.” He curses the West too. “Your politicians are dogs and cowards. If NATO troops come to Syria, we will wait till they topple Assad and then kill them all.” Who will be the new Syrian president doesn’t concern Ayub much. “Allah must rule Syria. Whoever doesn’t like it can get the hell out of here.”²¹⁸

This exchange with Ayub served to portray members of the Free Syrian Army – at least those who embraced radical Islam – as ruthless and violent. To underscore this point, another report quoted two Syrians complaining about the brutality of the “Islamists:”

“I had to flee al-Khamidia,” sighs Pierre. “My parents were born there. The rebels stopped by our place, demanded money for the “holy war.” They took my friend’s Toyota, said it was needed for the revolution. God, where did this all come from all of a sudden? Only recently young women were strolling the streets of Homs wearing open dresses and eating ice-cream...”

“Mohammad tells the news: last week Islamists shot three young men on the bus stop – for no reason. After the funeral, a local mullah spoke at the Mosque calling for the Muslims to stop killing each other. In the evening he was shot in the back next to his own house.”²¹⁹

Izvestia and *Argumenty i Fakty* also emphasized that the “spread of radical Islam” threatened Syria’s Christians. *Izvestia* reported, referring to the Catholic missionary news agency Fides, about the raids on houses and stores in the Christian district in the city of Al-Kusair in April. In the same report, *Izvestia* noted that “Salafi television called on the

²¹⁸ Zotov, June 27, 2012.

²¹⁹ Zotov, May 30, 2012.

Free Syrian Army to attack all Christians who support Assad's regime."²²⁰ In turn,

Argumenty i Fakty quoted some Christians who feared for their future or told stories of already experienced threats:

“Bashar is a dictator, no doubt about that,” tells me Michelle, the owner of a liquor store in a Christian district. “But I don’t want Damascus to become a battle scene. The Islamists will crash my store right away.”²²¹

“When they started shelling our city, I got really scared,” admits a 37-year old refugee from Homs Victoria Marmysh. “I live right next to the Baba-Amr district that was seized by the Islamists. I am so grateful to my neighbor who hid me when rebels were raiding the houses looking for Christians.”²²²

“28-year-old Yevkharstia with three children fled al-Kusair that was seized by the Islamist rebels. Local Christians were told that whoever doesn’t leave the city in three days, will be shot. “This is the apocalypse,” says Yevkharstia, while opening the water bottle for her daughter. “My grandparents and I were born in Syria but today we are being forced to leave because we pray to Christ and not to Mohammed.”²²³

These vignettes supported the key argument advanced by both newspapers that by supporting Assad, Russia was supporting stability in Syria. Moreover, by elaborating the link between the various fractions of the Syrian opposition and the radical Islamists, both Russian newspapers implicitly suggested that by supporting the Syrian opposition the United States and their allies are also supporting, paradoxically, the Islamists, including al-Qaeda. Thus, according to both Russian newspapers, demanding Assad’s removal while also supporting the opposition was an abysmal strategy that didn’t take into

²²⁰ Konstantin Volkov, “S Nastupleniyem Peremiriya V Sirii Uchastilis’ Terakty,” *Izvestia*, April 26, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/523156#ixzz2B4w7ONGV>.

²²¹ Zotov, March 14, 2012.

²²² Georgiy Zotov, “ ‘Sunutsya V Damask – Vrezhu Skovorodkoy!’ ” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/50702>.

²²³ Georgiy Zotov, “Plachushiy Angel,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, August 22, 2012, <http://www.aif.ru/society/article/54443>.

consideration what both newspapers presented as the rekindling of Islamic radicalism in the situation of political unrest.

US alternative media coverage

Opposition to arming Syrian rebels

Both magazines strongly opposed the idea of arming the Syrian opposition in response to Russia's military support of the Syrian government. As *The Nation* stated "arming the resistance is a dangerous idea that the administration should reject"²²⁴ because it would "cause more harm than good."²²⁵ *Z Magazine* was critical of the State Department "openly courting the Syrian opposition,"²²⁶ and *The Nation* argued that the US's "ever more active and unconditional support [of the] Syrian rebels" was a "flawed strategy... pushed by a chorus of both conservative and liberal hawks,"²²⁷ thus acknowledging that such approach to foreign policy transcended the liberal-conservative partisan divide but not in a productive way. Similarly, *Z Magazine* noted:

The calls for military intervention are coming from the media and some in Congress, from neo-cons who never gave up on their plans for regime change across the Arab world, and from hawkish liberal interventionists who again see military force as a solution to every human rights or humanitarian problem.²²⁸

²²⁴ "Why Washington Shouldn't Arm Syria's Rebels," *The Nation*, February 15, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/166300/why-washington-shouldnt-arm-syrias-rebels#sthash.WR7SNeIE.dpuf>.

²²⁵ Elizabeth Whitman, "Stalemate in Syria," *The Nation*, April 23, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/167510/stalemate-syria#sthash.kvrMGJIt.dpuf>.

²²⁶ Evan Taylor, "Militarizing the Conflict in Syria," *Z Magazine*, March 24, 2012, <https://zcomm.org/zmagazine/militarizing-the-conflict-in-syria-by-evan-taylor/>.

²²⁷ "Last Chance For Peace In Syria?" *The Nation*, August 22, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/169522/last-chance-peace-syria#sthash.OEd1qQlv.dpuf>.

²²⁸ Phyllis Bennis, "Syria: No To Intervention, No To Illusions," *Z Magazine*, June 27, 2012, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/syria-no-to-intervention-no-to-illusions-by-phyllis-bennis/>.

One article in *The Nation* mocked the idea of arming the Syrian opposition, concluding that “it’s a project that has ‘this can’t end well’ written all over it.”²²⁹ This same article linked the critique of the idea of arming Syrian opposition to a larger concern with what the author termed “Washington’s militarized mindset.”²³⁰ The author, Tom Engelhardt, argued that even though “Americans may feel more distant from war than at any time since World War II... the militarization of the United States and the strengthening of the National Security Complex continues to accelerate.”²³¹ Engelhardt particularly focused on what he termed “the militarization of solutions,” pointing out that “diplomacy, too, has been ‘militarized’” and that “diplomats work ever more closely with the military, while the State Department is transforming itself into an unofficial arm of the Pentagon.”²³² While Engelhardt noted that “the process hit warp speed in the post-9/11 years,” he also emphasized that “militarization in this country is hardly a new phenomenon [and] can be traced back decades.”²³³ Indeed, militarization marked decades of the Cold War too, with the focus on the arms race and nuclear threat shaping corresponding policies and security discourses. In the post-Cold War and post-9/11 time, “even [though] the US still lacks the classic look of a militarized society,”²³⁴ “Washington’s mindset,”²³⁵ according to Engelhardt, is transforming toward a greater “militarization of solutions” – a perspective echoed in *Z Magazine*’s assertion that in the

²²⁹ Tom Engelhardt, “Washington’s Militarized Mindset,” *The Nation*, July 5, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/168730/washingtons-militarized-mindset#sthash.HAG3JV89.dpuf>.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Engelhardt, July 5, 2012.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

case of the Syrian crisis, “Obama seems to be slipping toward militarization.”²³⁶

Engelhardt stated:

“If the institutions of American life and governance are increasingly militarized, then it shouldn’t be surprising that the problems facing the country are ever more often framed in militarized terms and that the only solutions considered are similarly militarized.”²³⁷

Engelhardt gave “a little regional scorecard of what American militarization had meant in the Greater Middle East” from 2001 to 2012, briefly discussing the results of US’ involvement in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, Somalia, Egypt and Libya. Next, in a section titled “how to set the planet on fire and learn nothing,” Engelhardt remarked that “the general lack of success from 2002 on and a deepening frustration in Washington have just led to a stronger conviction that some recalibrated version of a military solution (greater surges, lesser surges, no invasions but special forces and drones, smaller “footprint,” larger naval presence, etc.) is the only reasonable way to go.”²³⁸ Engelhardt concluded with a summary that pointed to a growing securitization of policies and decisions in the US foreign policy, and challenged the way of thinking about foreign affairs as a “chessboard”:

“Here’s a 2012 American reality then: as a great power, the US has an increasingly limited toolkit, into which it is reaching far more often for ever more similar tools. The idea that the globe is a chessboard, that Washington is in control of the game, and that each militarized move it makes will have a reasonably predictable result couldn’t be more dangerous. The evidence of the last decade is clear enough: there is little less predictable or more likely to go awry than the application of military force and militarized solutions, which are cumulatively incendiary in unexpected ways, and in the end threaten to set whole regions on fire. None of this, however, seems to register in Washington. The United States is commonly said to be a great power in decline, but the

²³⁶ Taylor, March 24, 2012.

²³⁷ Engelhardt, July 5, 2012.

²³⁸ Ibid.

militarization of American policy – and thinking – at home and abroad is not. It has Washington, now a capital of perpetual war, in its grip.”²³⁹

In another article published in *The Nation* on January 30, 2012, Tom Engelhardt discussed this idea again though focusing also on the hypocrisy of Washington’s foreign policy that creates “red lines... that others are prohibited from crossing”²⁴⁰ yet continues to cross these same lines across the world without facing any serious consequences. Focusing specifically on US – Iran relations and on United States’ enduring desire to overthrow the Iranian government, Engelhardt developed a more general idea of perceived US exceptionalism as a driving force behind the legitimization of a foreign policy aimed at “regime change” and “military solutions” in different parts of the world:

“Few in our world (and who else matters?) question our right to do so, though obviously the right of any other state to do something similar to us or one of our allies, or to retaliate or even to threaten to retaliate, should we do so, is considered shocking and beyond all norms, beyond every red line when it comes to how nations (except us) should behave.”²⁴¹

Moreover, Engelhardt contended that such strategy, while having “effectiveness, not legality or morality, [as] the only measurement”²⁴² is not particularly effective either and can only lead to “terrible miscalculation followed by inevitable tragedy.”²⁴³ This argument connects to the arguments of other authors listing the reasons for why the US should not arm the Syrian opposition.

The first argument focused on the idea that the initially peaceful protest in Syria gradually turned into violent civil war where the peaceful demonstrators became

²³⁹ Engelhardt, July 5, 2012.

²⁴⁰ Tom Engelhardt, “America’s Double Standards for Iran,” *The Nation*, January 30, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/165937/americas-double-standards-iran#sthash.6PhkiTQh.dpuf>.

²⁴¹ Engelhardt, January 30, 2012.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

marginalized and the dynamic is being increasingly determined by sectarian divisions and tensions within the fractured opposition.²⁴⁴ *The Nation* argued that “given Syria’s deep sectarian divisions, [arming the rebels] would intensify an incipient civil war and further marginalize the nonviolent democratic opposition.”²⁴⁵ *Z Magazine* suggested that the State Department was “‘betraying’ the pro-Democracy forces within the opposition.”²⁴⁶ Commenting on the meetings State Department officials held with the Syrian opposition, *Z Magazine* quoted Herbert London, the president of the Hudson Institute, who wrote: “Most of those invited, however, have links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Missing from the invitations are Kurdish leaders, Sunni liberals, Assyrians, and Christian spokespeople. According to various reports, the State Department made a deal with Turkey and Muslim Brotherhood representatives either to share power with Assad to stabilize the government or replace him if this effort fails.”²⁴⁷ An article in *The Nation*, referencing journalist Neil Rosen’s lecture at Columbia University in late March, echoed a similar point and warned that arming the rebels could “further exacerbate regional and sectarian tensions already evident in the opposition’s fractures:”

“The Syrian National Council, a group of opposition exiles, is notorious for its infighting and according to Rosen, is disconnected from internal opposition leadership. The Free Syrian Army, meanwhile, has “no structural order,” Rosen said. It is merely a “name for a phenomenon.” Arming the opposition would exacerbate pre-existing divisions, which in their present form do not bode well for post-Assad Syria.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012; Whitman, April 23, 2012; “Last Chance,” August 22, 2012; Engelhardt, July 5, 2012; Sharif Abdel Kouddous, “How the Syrian Revolution Became Militarized,” *The Nation*, August 23, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/169533/how-syrian-revolution-became-militarized#sthash.TuzYb6qe.dpuf>.

²⁴⁵ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁴⁶ Taylor, March 24, 2012.

²⁴⁷ Taylor, March 24, 2012.

²⁴⁸ Whitman, April 23, 2012.

Here *The Nation* highlights an important distinction between the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), as well as SNC's "disconnect" from internal Syrian opposition – something the US mainstream media did not emphasize in their narratives. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the US mainstream media highlighted the SNC's rejection of Russia's diplomatic initiatives in Syria, yet framed it as Russia's failure to gain the trust of the Syrian opposition in general, thus oversimplifying the situation in order to fit it into the "great powers and their clients" and "good versus evil" schemes. *Z Magazine* advanced the argument about the questionable legitimacy of the SNC and the FSA by suggesting that both groups have been "manufactured" for public relations purposes:

"Throughout the fall of 2011, groundwork was laid for the new policy of "helping to bring about" the fall of the Assad government. A semi-respectable opposition group was established, the Syrian National Council, led by a Paris-based exile, as well as an opposition militia, the Free Syrian Army. These groups were established as much for their public relations worth as their diplomatic value. The press, especially those relying on second-hand reports, need a good and evil dichotomy to report on, a brigade of "freedom fighters" to support against the brutal government thugs, and an "opposition leader" to quote on the political sanctity of whoever would replace Assad."²⁴⁹

Other articles in *The Nation* and in *Z Magazine* also emphasized that the opposition was divided²⁵⁰ and "completely lacked unity."²⁵¹ *Z Magazine* explained:

"The opposition was divided from the beginning over whether massive reform or the end of the Assad regime was their goal. It divided still further when part of the opposition took up arms, and began to call for international military intervention.

²⁴⁹ Taylor, March 24, 2012.

²⁵⁰ Barbara Crossette, "UN Human Rights Council Reports on Abuses in Syria," *The Nation*, February 28, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/166498/un-human-rights-council-reports-abuses-syria#sthash.XAWEEVxZ.dpuf>; Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁵¹ Whitman, April 23, 2012.

The non-violent opposition movement, which still rejects calls for military intervention, survives, but under extraordinary threat.”²⁵²

Both magazines also connected the issue of fractured opposition to Syria’s “deep sectarian divisions”²⁵³ or what one of *Z Magazine’s* authors called “sectarianism on the rise.”²⁵⁴ “Syria has become the epicenter of a regional Sunni-Shia conflict,”²⁵⁵ stated *The Nation* and explained the situation as follows:

“... the sides have become locked into all-or-nothing positions, with more extremist Sunni groups determined to wipe out the regime and its supporters, and the regime’s constituent groups—the Alawites, primarily, along with some Druze, Christians and Sunni bourgeoisie—ever more fearful of rebel reprisals and therefore convinced that they have no choice but to fight to the finish. This zero-sum tendency has been reinforced by the Saudi agenda, which is to bring about a sectarian reordering of Syria with a view to changing the balance of power in the Middle East.”²⁵⁶

The idea of the “balance of power in the Middle East” was linked to a second argument advanced by the critics of arming the Syrian opposition. According to this argument, the civil war in Syria with its “sectarian overtones”²⁵⁷ “threatened to further destabilize the region” since “Syria is so intertwined with its neighbors.”²⁵⁸ Quoting Patrick Seale, an expert who has written several books on Syria, *The Nation* warned that “internal problems... threatened to reshuffle the power dynamics among Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and beyond.”²⁵⁹ Similarly, *Z Magazine* noted:

“If the increasing sectarianism of the Syrian conflict extends beyond its borders, it could lead to regional conflagration involving even greater refugee flows and potentially battles in or around Syria’s neighbors Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey or

²⁵² Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁵³ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁵⁴ Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁵⁵ “Last Chance,” August 22, 2012.

²⁵⁶ “Last Chance,” August 22, 2012.

²⁵⁷ Engelhardt, July 5, 2012.

²⁵⁸ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁵⁹ Whitman, April 23, 2012.

elsewhere. Already, alongside the international power interests colliding in Syria, there is the beginning of a Sunni-Shi'a proxy war taking shape, with Sunni Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and Shi'a Iran, backing opposing forces."²⁶⁰

Because of the complexity of Syria's internal and regional political dynamics, *The Nation* also urged the US to "proceed with great caution,"²⁶¹ which stood in stark contrast to the narratives in the US mainstream media that interpreted the unraveling of the civil war in Syria as an emergency that called for a rapid response, and blamed Russia and China for stalling the process by vetoing the UNSC resolutions. More detailed discussions of the internal and regional dynamics also shifted the focus from the "divided global community" and Cold War-like "spheres of influence" to the complexity of the situation in Syria, even though authors recognized that "the conflict has become an 'existential struggle between two sides,' aided by foreign actors"²⁶² and that "an increasingly bitter and polarizing civil war... has become a theater for geopolitical interests."²⁶³

Rejecting the idea of arming the Syrian opposition demonstrated both magazines' intention to move away from scenarios – and corresponding discourses – that would resemble the dynamic of the Cold War, with "great powers" arming their corresponding "client states." On the other hand, some articles explicitly referred to the situation in Syria, with Russia arming the Assad government and US considering arming the opposition as a crisis resembling the Cold War era, where "leaders of countries who fight proxy wars... knowingly [give] client states or rebel allies the means to commit

²⁶⁰ Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁶¹ "Why Washington Shouldn't," February 15, 2012.

²⁶² Whitman, April 23, 2012.

²⁶³ Kouddous, August 23, 2012.

atrocities.”²⁶⁴ Another article warned that arming Syrian rebels “could set the stage for a dangerous proxy war... with Russia and Iran backing the Assad regime and the United States and its European and Arab allies – perhaps joined by Qaeda-affiliated Sunni jihadis – supporting the rebels.”²⁶⁵ Thus, strangely, even though *The Nation* critiqued any approach, strategy or action that could lead to a situation resembling the dynamic of the Cold War, its reference to the “danger of the Cold War-like situation” inevitably worked to recreate the very discourse of the Cold War. A similar tension marked some of the narratives in the next theme.

Calls for cooperation with Russia

Three out of nine articles in *The Nation* actively called for cooperation with Russia in order to resolve the Syrian crisis (*Z Magazine* focused more on a diplomatic approach in general as a better alternative to a militarized approach). As *The Nation* noted, “the administration must put aside its frustrations and re-engage Moscow as a full partner:”

“Whether Washington likes it or not, Russia holds one of the keys to such a strategy (a longer-term strategy of encouraging democracy), for only Moscow has the leverage and influence with Damascus to persuade Assad to constrain the violence and allow a democratic transition. The State Department has blamed Russia for the latest setback, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling its UN veto a travesty. But the administration must put aside its frustrations and re-engage Moscow as a full partner. Such an approach would attempt to build on the latest Russian mission to Damascus, reportedly aimed at encouraging Assad to open negotiations with the opposition over political reform and a new Constitution.”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Reed Brody, “If Charles Taylor Can Be Tried for War Crimes, Why Not Kissinger,” *The Nation*, May 9, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/167809/if-charles-taylor-can-be-tried-war-crimes-why-not-kissinger#sthash.iI5UeYvO.dpuf>.

²⁶⁵ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁶⁶ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

Thus, in contrast to the US mainstream media, *The Nation* insisted on having faith in Russia's ability to influence the situation in Syria, which included Russia's diplomatic mission to Damascus. Moreover, one of the later articles also argued that "any diplomatic approach that excludes Russia... will be... condemned to failure."²⁶⁷ The same article also critiqued US mainstream media for blaming Russia and China for the failure of yet another diplomatic mission in Syria (by Kofi Annan), stating that the US, Turkish and Saudi policies played their role in this failure too:

"Much of the US media blamed Russian and Chinese intransigence for the collapse of the Annan mission. But as veteran *Guardian* reporter and Syrian observer Jonathan Steele has pointed out, it was US, Turkish and Saudi policy as much as Russian and Chinese vetoes that led to the collapse of the Annan plan. The US demand that Assad be removed and sanctions be imposed before negotiations could seriously begin, along with the refusal to include Iran in the process, doomed that mission."²⁶⁸

Another article, by Stephen Cohen, titled "Is the US Returning to the Cold War With Russia?" also critiqued the US for the inability and unwillingness to work with post-Cold War Russia as an equal partner. Drawing on the history of the US-Russia relations, Cohen noted that "for the American political and media establishment, US-Russia relations always begin yesterday – without the pre-history of the relationship and thus without its essential political context."²⁶⁹ Cohen noted further:

"As Washington and Moscow sink deeper into another familiar cold war-like conflict, this time over Syria, American policy-makers and commentators, Democrats and Republicans alike, declare that President Obama's "reset" of relations with Moscow has failed. With equal unanimity, they blame only Moscow, in particular President Vladimir Putin, while entirely deleting

²⁶⁷ "Last Chance," August 22, 2012.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Stephen Cohen, "Is The US Returning To the Cold War With Russia?" *The Nation*, June 18, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/168460/us-returning-cold-war-russia#sthash.MeVt9S6G.dpuf>.

Washington's longstanding role in the deteriorating relationship, as they have done for more than a decade."²⁷⁰

Cohen's commentary speaks directly to some of the themes discussed in the section on US mainstream media coverage, particularly the US mainstream media's proclamations of the failed "reset" and their claims that Russia played a key role in the deterioration of the relations. Cohen further argues that post-Cold War US-Russian relations have been uneven and marked by "selective cooperation," with the US demanding (and getting) concessions from Moscow without corresponding reciprocity. Such dynamics, Cohen argues, characterized US-Russian relations throughout the entire post-Cold War period, leading to periodic "cold war-like conflicts."²⁷¹ Cohen draws a direct and explicit parallel to the Cold War by calling the debate over Syria a "familiar cold war-like conflict;" the words "another" and "this time" point to a pattern, a repetition, suggesting that the Cold War, or at least, the Cold War-influenced dynamic of Russia-US relations never really ended. Cohen is deeply critical of the US approach to US-Russian relations, and he is not hopeful either, ending the article by noting that Mitt Romney's declaration of Russia a "number one geopolitical foe" "confirmed [Cohen's] worst concern – that we are on the verge of, or already in, a new cold war."²⁷²

Cohen's article brings to light an interesting tension that was discussed earlier; this tension seems to mark any critical engagement with the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War time. He critiques policies and/or discourses that draw on the Cold War narratives, yet while doing so, he draws on the same exact narratives, thus inevitably

²⁷⁰ Cohen, June 18, 2012.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

perpetuating them further and contributing, paradoxically, to the re-articulation of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War time.

International law and the Libyan scenario

The Nation challenged the arguments put forth by the policy-makers and the mainstream media who insisted that the proponents of the resolution did not intend on turning Syria into another Libya because the Syrian situation was very different. Both magazines agreed that the Syrian crisis was different; however, they argued that this was precisely why neither a military intervention nor arming the Syrian opposition was a good idea:

“Some who favor arming the opposition cite last year’s Libyan intervention as a positive example. Not only does the continuing chaos in Libya call such claims into question; the Syrian crisis is vastly different from Libya’s. A protracted war in Syria would be almost impossible to contain, and would thus destabilize Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Israel and Iraq, setting democratization back decades.”²⁷³

Z Magazine echoed this point by quoting Kofi Annan who stated that “Syria is not Libya, it will not implode, it will explode beyond its borders.”²⁷⁴ *Z Magazine* also argued that just like the intervention did not help resolve the crisis in Libya, it will not help the situation in Syria:

“Like so many other times before, the human cost of this conflict is incalculably high. It’s not surprising that the normal human reaction is “we’ve got to do something!” But exactly what any army or air force might do that would actually help the situation isn’t very clear. US/NATO military intervention didn’t bring stability, democracy or security to Libya, and it certainly is not going to do so in Syria.”²⁷⁵

²⁷³ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁷⁴ Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Further, both magazines argued that the Libyan intervention went beyond the legal boundaries set by international law and thus “set a disastrous diplomatic precedent:”

“The Libyan intervention also set a disastrous diplomatic precedent: by violating the narrowly tailored UN resolution and openly fighting for regime change, the Western powers infuriated Russia, China and other countries, sowing the seeds of their mistrust and their resistance to Security Council measures on Syria.”²⁷⁶

“For some US supporters of western military intervention in Syria, last year’s assault on Libya provides the model of how to respond to a human rights/humanitarian crisis. They believe it was a victory for human rights when a couple of European leaders proposed a no-fly zone, and part of the anti-Qaddafi opposition eagerly accepted their offer, and part of the Arab League and part of Europe and part of the Obama administration and most of NATO agreed. With the fig leaf of Arab League approval (the African Union was sidelined as soon as it refused to support the military assault), the US/NATO warplanes quickly became the air force of the armed Libyan opposition, the “no-fly zone” was immediately transformed into an all-out air war and bombing campaign, and “protection of civilians” was instantly redefined as regime change.”²⁷⁷

Similarly, *The Nation* cited the Libyan example when it argued that the first priority of the proponents of the resolution was not to protect Syrian civilians but to help the opposition overthrow the Assad regime, “much like [they] did to help the Libyan rebels topple Qaddafi.”²⁷⁸

The Nation also argued that the Libyan precedent was at the heart of the opposition to the UNSC resolution on Syria as expressed by some of the UNSC members, while also pointing out that this reason is “not frequently mentioned:”

“Behind the interminable discussions about what to do to help the people of Syria, as carnage in Syrian homes and neighborhoods fills television screens and social media sites, is a serious global policy debate rooted in the Libyan experience that is not frequently mentioned but helps explain why some Security Council members—not only Russia and China, but also notably India—are wary of authorizing any direct military-style action in Syria. Simply put, they believe that

²⁷⁶ “Why Washington Shouldn’t,” February 15, 2012.

²⁷⁷ Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁷⁸ “Last Chance,” August 22, 2012.

resolutions passed in the belief that they would protect Libyans under threat from Muammar Qaddafi were hijacked by NATO and Arab League members and used as pretexts to arm rebel militias and overthrow the Libyan government.”²⁷⁹

The Nation explained to its readers that the proponents of the resolution cited the Responsibility to Protect policy endorsed by the UN in 2005. Under this policy, if a government of a sovereign state failed to safeguard its citizens from crimes and violence, outside nations could be asked to assist such government. *The Nation* explained:

“To many, the Libyan situation met the criteria for direct action under the responsibility to protect doctrine; it seemed a textbook case. But in the view of numerous nations what happened in Libya soon became something else: an invitation to regime change. They are hesitant to back a similar ploy in Syria, and that hesitation—in addition to the very different realities of Syria, a populous urban nation with a strong military and political structure and entrenched cultural or sectarian divisions—underpins the inaction so roundly criticized around the world.”²⁸⁰

Z Magazine also urged policy makers not to rely on the R2P framework because it “inevitably leads to outside military force”²⁸¹ – a move both *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* explicitly critiqued.

Hypocrisy of foreign policy and American imperialism

Both magazines frequently argued – with some articles discussing the idea at length – that American foreign policy had always been marked by deep hypocrisy and that the case of the Syrian debate is no exception. The argument was also tied to the idea of the “American empire,” with Washington “declaring the world its oyster”²⁸² and

²⁷⁹ Crossette, February 28, 2012.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Bennis, June 27, 2012.

²⁸² Engelhardt, January 30, 2012.

“projecting its imperial power”²⁸³ worldwide. Two articles in *The Nation* and two in *Z Magazine* articulated the point by drawing various historical parallels.

Edward Herman argued in *Z Magazine* that one of the main goals of American foreign policy for a long time had been the “manufacturing of failed states.”²⁸⁴ By a failed state Herman means “one that has been crushed militarily or rendered unmanageable by political and/or economic destabilization and a resultant chaos and is unable (or is not permitted) for long periods to recover and take care of its citizens’ needs.”²⁸⁵ Herman argued that “there has been a fresh stream of failed states brought about by US and NATO “humanitarian intervention” and regime change, carried out more aggressively in the wake of the death of the Soviet Union.”²⁸⁶ According to Herman, “humanitarian intervention” is in fact an “imperial intervention” that leads to the “manufacture of failed states”²⁸⁷ and is often carried out in the name of US national security. The “national security” framework often justifies “imperial interventions” and, Herman suggests, “has required bases, garrisons, assassinations, invasions, bombing wars, and the sponsorship of killer regimes, real terror networks, and programs everywhere in response to terrorist threats and challenges to the “pitiful giant.”²⁸⁸ This point was echoed in Engelhardt’s article in *The Nation* where he stated that “Washington has declared the world its oyster and garrisons the planet in a historically unique way – without direct colonies but with approximately 1,000 bases worldwide. What is called our

²⁸³ Edward Herman, “Manufacturing Failed States,” *Z Magazine*, August 27, 2012, <https://zcomm.org/zmagazine/manufacturing-failed-states-by-edward-s-herman/>.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

“safety” and “security” has been made a planetary issue.”²⁸⁹ While Engelhardt mainly connected this point to his critique of the “militarized approaches” to politics (also expressed in his other article that was discussed earlier²⁹⁰), Herman described other strategies used during the “imperial interventions” (though he also implicitly tied them to the problem of growing militarization of US foreign policy). For example, Herman referenced the case of humanitarian intervention in Yugoslavia as a model and argued that a “similar program [is being attempted] today in Syria.”²⁹¹

“One frequent feature is the rise and/or recognition of ethnic group rebels who claim victimhood, fight their government with terroristic acts, sometimes designed to provoke a violent government response, and who regularly appeal to the imperial powers to come to their aid. Sometimes foreign mercenaries are imported to aid the rebels and both the indigenous rebels and mercenaries are often armed, trained, and given logistical support by the imperial powers. The imperial powers encourage these rebel efforts as they find them useful to justify destabilizing, bombing, and eventually over-throwing the target regime.”²⁹²

Even though Herman didn’t explicitly mention Syria in this excerpt, the parallel, when conceived of in the larger context of *Z Magazine’s* coverage, resonates with the magazine’s skepticism regarding the US State Department’s support of the Syrian opposition and therefore a critique of the idea of arming its members. Herman also pointed out that “imperial interventions” are always accompanied by what he terms “atrocities management:”

“These programs always involve serious “atrocities management,” whereby the government under attack is accused of major acts of violence against the rebels and their supporters and is by this process effectively demonized and set up for more massive intervention. This was very important in the Yugoslav breakup wars and possibly even more so in Libya and Syria. The process is greatly helped

²⁸⁹ Engelhardt, January 30, 2012.

²⁹⁰ Engelhardt, July 5, 2012.

²⁹¹ Herman, August 27, 2012.

²⁹² Ibid.

by the mobilization of international agencies, which participate in the demonization by denouncing the atrocities and sometimes indicting and prosecuting the targeted villains.”²⁹³

Z Magazine discussed the same problem in another article titled “Outraged Over Atrocities, Unless They are Ours” by John Laforge.²⁹⁴ Laforge juxtaposed the public outrage expressed by the US officials and mainstream mass media regarding the massacres in the Syrian city of Homs to a complete lack of public outcry over the killings of civilians, “including women and children,” in recent years in various places in the world by the US military forces. Laforge discussed specific examples of such killings and a very mild reaction of the “international community,” as well as the perpetual framing of these incidents as “accidental” or as “unavoidable wartime errors.”²⁹⁵

Similarly, though taking a slightly different angle, *The Nation* questioned the legitimacy of US’ accusations of Russia supplying weapons to the Syrian government by reminding the readers that the US has frequently done the same in other parts of the world and at different times. The author gives a historical example of East Timor from 1975, where the US was supplying Indonesia’s military with 90 percent of its arms and where “Kissinger himself described their relationship as that of a ‘donor-client’.”²⁹⁶ The article condemns both Russia and the United States for “providing military assistance to abusive forces half a world away”²⁹⁷ but the author also concludes that “big players” will always get away with “big geopolitics:”

²⁹³ Herman, August 27, 2012.

²⁹⁴ John Laforge, “Outraged Over Atrocities, Unless They Are Ours,” *Z Magazine*, June 18, 2012, <https://zcomm.org/zmagazine/outraged-over-atrocities-unless-theyre-ours-by-john-laforge/>.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Brody, May 9, 2012.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

“To be sure, it is hard to imagine a case against a Russian or American leader reaching an international court. Neither country has ratified the statute authorizing the International Criminal Court, and both can veto any Security Council referral to the ICC. Unfortunately, the most powerful, and those whom they protect, still appear to be beyond the reach of the developing architecture of international justice.”²⁹⁸

Russian alternative media coverage

Pointless veto, reckless diplomacy

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* critiqued the Russian and Chinese vetoes of the UNSC resolution calling the vetoes “pointless,”²⁹⁹ “counter-productive”³⁰⁰ and “ill-advised.”³⁰¹ *Novaya Gazeta* argued that “because of the actions of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the UNSC, the space for political decisions on Syria has shrunk.”³⁰² *Novaya Gazeta* also published a special report by Carol Boggert of Human Rights Watch, where she argued that “Russia blocked the opportunity for diplomatic negotiations through the UN”³⁰³ in spite of the “Kremlin’s attempts to present the veto as part of the effort to prevent violent conflict.”³⁰⁴ Both newspapers lamented that the vetoes marked a “point of no return”³⁰⁵ on resolving the situation diplomatically and that the “moment for

²⁹⁸ Brody, May 9, 2012.

²⁹⁹ Pavel Fel’gengauer, “Siriyskiy Primer,” *Novaya Gazeta*, February 12, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/51001.html>.

³⁰⁰ Fel’gengauer, February 12, 2012; Arslan Khasavov, “Siriya, Grazhdanskaya Voyna. Reportazh Iz Myatezhnogo Khomsa,” *The New Times*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/50869>.

³⁰¹ Fel’gengauer, February 12, 2012.

³⁰² Aleksandr Shumilin, “Aziatskiy Instinct,” *Novaya Gazeta*, July 7, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/53410.html>.

³⁰³ Carol Boggert, “Dlya Sirii Bol’she Net Prostoykh Variantov,” *Novaya Gazeta*, March 4, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/51446.html>.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Aleksandr Mineev, “Siriya i Siesta,” *Novaya Gazeta*, August 3, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/53831.html>.

resolving the situation peacefully is lost.”³⁰⁶ They also noted that the vetoes resulted in Russia and China “finding themselves on the margins of the [diplomatic] process [on Syria],”³⁰⁷ with Russia being “kicked out of the group of states who make key decisions on Syria”³⁰⁸ while also “losing its authority within Syria.”³⁰⁹ Interestingly, both newspapers mentioned both Russia and China when discussing the vetoes, yet the critique was directed mainly at Russia. *Novaya Gazeta* also explicitly mentioned that while both Russia and China vetoed the resolution, “Russia faced harsher criticism [because] it is assumed that Russia is defending its pragmatic interests in Syria.”³¹⁰ The *New Times* discussed Russia’s arms trade with Syria as one of the key reasons for the Russian veto: “Russia has been losing its clients in the Middle East one after another; yet it strives to remain a big player on the region’s arms market and that’s why it tries to hold on to Syria at all cost. From the perspective of international law, there is no problem here. The problem, however, is that these weapons are later used to kill peaceful protestors. But Russian political leaders refuse to think morally and ethically.”³¹¹ Here *The New Times*’ argument echoed the “arms sales” theme prominent in the US mainstream media, though *The New Times* presented the arms sales narrative exclusively from the pragmatic, market-oriented perspective rather than one of the “great power and its client” that dominated the US media coverage.

³⁰⁶ Aleksandr Mineev, “My Ee Teryaem,” *Novaya Gazeta*, February 13, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/51052.html>.

³⁰⁷ “ES Prizval Siriyskuyu Oppozitsiyu K Obyedineniyu,” *Novaya Gazeta*, February 25, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/54433.html>.

³⁰⁸ Fel’ gengauer, February 12, 2012.

³⁰⁹ Baderkhan Khaysam, “Kurs – Naprolom,” *The New Times*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/48710/>; Khasavov, March 12, 2012.

³¹⁰ Mineev, February 13, 2012.

³¹¹ Khaysam, January 23, 2012.

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* emphasized that Russia's post-veto attempts at diplomatic negotiations with Assad were ridiculous³¹² and "no one, including Assad, took Lavrov's talk about a peaceful dialogue and a new Syrian constitution seriously."³¹³ *Novaya Gazeta* stated: "Assad promised Lavrov to 'stop the violence regardless of its source.' The very next day after the departure of the Russian delegation Syrian artillery shelled civilian districts of Homs with renewed brutality."³¹⁴ Here, again, the narratives closely resembled the doubts in the efficiency of Russian diplomacy in Syria expressed in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and discussed earlier.

When critiquing the "reckless diplomacy" of Russia at the UNSC in one of its articles, *Novaya Gazeta* made an interesting remark: "Russian diplomats behave as if they have, like in times of their youth, a powerful and merciless superpower behind them, with many complicit allies and client states. In 1980s the USSR unfolded its combat missile and air defense units in Syria and a powerful squadron with nuclear weapons was cruising in the eastern Mediterranean. There is nothing behind Russia's veto now."³¹⁵ Similarly, the author of another article noted that "the nostalgia for the times when 'everyone was afraid of us' is winning positions in Russian political circles."³¹⁶ These references to the "Soviet times nostalgia" echo the op-ed piece published in the *New York Times* and discussed earlier where the author "explained to Americans" that Russian Soviet nostalgia is just a nostalgia for the times when Russia was strong, while also a way

³¹² Baderkham Khaysam, "Kak By Vyborny," *The New Times*, May 14, 2012, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/51715/>.

³¹³ Fel'gengauer, February 12, 2012.

³¹⁴ Mineev, February 13, 2012.

³¹⁵ Fel'gengauer, February 12, 2012.

³¹⁶ Aleksandr Shumilin, "Aziatskiy Instinct," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 7, 2012.

to deal with the post-Cold War humiliation and multiple crises of the 1990s. *Novaya Gazeta* is deeply critical of this nostalgia and of the fact that it affects Russia's post-Soviet (and post-Cold War) diplomacy, yet, just like in *The Nation*, the critical argument recreates the Cold War discourse by merely referencing it.

Hypocrisy in defending international law

Both newspapers critiqued the argument that Russia's veto was based on defending the principles of sovereignty and "non-interference" in domestic affairs of the independent state. Such claims, argued *Novaya Gazeta* and *The New Times*, were deeply hypocritical because "Russian corrupted elites were defending first and foremost themselves."³¹⁷ Both newspapers tied Russian diplomacy on Syria to the concerns of the Russian political leaders about the growing protest movement within Russia.³¹⁸ "Today – Syria, tomorrow – Russia," cited *Novaya Gazeta*³¹⁹ one of the political slogans popular among the supporters of Kremlin's diplomacy, arguing that "by insisting on non-interference in domestic affairs of the sovereign state... [Russian] leaders [signal that they will not tolerate external support] to the growing protest movement for fair elections [in Russia]."³²⁰ Referring to the growing anti-Americanism among Vladimir Putin's electorate, *Novaya Gazeta* also noted that "in light of the upcoming elections, it is more important for Putin to show to his electorate that he doesn't succumb to the pressure from

³¹⁷ Fel'gengauer, February 12, 2012.

³¹⁸ Fel'gengauer, February 12, 2012; Shumilin, July 7, 2012; Khaysam, May 14, 2012.

³¹⁹ Shumilin, July 7, 2012.

³²⁰ Fel'gengauer, February 12, 2012.

America.”³²¹ *Novaya Gazeta* concluded that “Russia’s foreign policy today works as an ‘external cover’ for the realization of the domestic interests of the ‘national leader’.”³²² *Novaya Gazeta* also challenged the argument about sovereignty and non-interference in general, arguing that “the claims about sovereignty that date back to 1954 do not help resolving today’s global issues”³²³ and that “sacralization of state sovereignty at the expense of human rights more and more often leads to tragedies.”³²⁴ *Novaya Gazeta* also added that “interference from the outside has been going on for a while in Syria already with special forces from Iran’s Revolutionary Guard and from Hezbollah “helping Assad in punitive operations.”³²⁵ Both newspapers, similarly to *The Nation* and *Z Magazine*, expressed concerns that the conflict in Syria and the actions toward its resolution were becoming “increasingly militarized.”³²⁶ However, while *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* blamed “Washington’s militarized mindset,” *Novaya Gazeta* and the *New Times* emphasized that “more military officials and less diplomats are discussing the Syrian crisis in Moscow.”³²⁷

Critique of anti-Western/anti-American foreign policy

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* sharply criticized Russian foreign policy characterizing it as “increasingly confrontational, anti-Western, anti-American and Asia-centric.”³²⁸ This theme was best reflected and elaborated in a long analytical piece in

³²¹ Mineev, February 13, 2012.

³²² Shumilin, July 7, 2012.

³²³ Mineev, February 13, 2012.

³²⁴ Mineev, August 3, 2012.

³²⁵ Fel’gengauer, February 12, 2012; Shumilin, July 7, 2012.

³²⁶ Fel’gengauer, February 12, 2012; Boggert, March 4, 2012; Sergei Khazov, “Bashar Asad: Khronika Padeniya,” *The New Times*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/49907/>.

³²⁷ Shumilin, July 7, 2012.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

Novaya Gazeta by Alexander Shumilin. When interpreting and explaining Russia's "veto diplomacy," Shumilin tied it to a larger trend in Russian foreign policy where "the perception of the West as a 'wily adversary' who strives to 'destroy a powerful nuclear nation' and 'put it back on its knees' by undermining it from within through the 'colored revolutions'"³²⁹ determined "the ideological foundation of Russia's foreign policy today."³³⁰ Shumilin suggested that Russian position must be interpreted from this perspective. As he noted, "it looks like there is a new occasion to shake the Kalashnikov in the name of the big geopolitics today,"³³¹ while also emphasizing that "the problem of Russia's approach to Syria is not only rooted in geopolitics but is more so a question of values and ideology," where "a break from democratic values and a theme of 'getting up from one's knees' increasingly define Russian foreign policy."³³² Echoing a similar narrative in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, Shumilin noted that "the 'reset' of the relations with the United States seems to be ending."³³³ Shumilin also noted that "the speed of Russia's slipping into the 'Cold War 2' with the West is increasing"³³⁴ – an argument closely resembling Stephn Cohen's (*The Nation*), except that Shumilin holds Russia, not the US, accountable for this trend. Shumilin is also concerned with "Russia's growing cooperation with Asia on the basis of 'countering the Western threat'."³³⁵ This view, while critical, also re-introduces the view of global politics as the East-West antagonistic dichotomy and struggle.

³²⁹ Shumilin, July 7, 2012.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* supported the official position of the United States in the diplomatic debate, defending the resolution and critiquing the resolution's opponents. In doing so, they focused more heavily on criticism of the opponents, and, more specifically, on criticism of Russia, and on the idea of the "global community" being divided along the lines of "spheres of influence." Both newspapers blamed Russia (and to a lesser extent China) for undermining the efforts of the "international community" in finding a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis. The narratives accused Russia of being intransigent and hypocritical; both newspapers communicated in their texts that Russia's arguments about Syria's sovereignty were only a cover-up for Russia's real desire to keep its influence – and arms contracts – in the region. Both newspapers dismissed all of Russia's arguments and alternative diplomatic efforts as attempts to buy time for Assad rather than as a genuine desire to solve the crisis. The articles also remarked on the worsening of US-Russia relations but blamed Russia – and specifically President Putin – for it. The coverage glorified members of the Syrian opposition and used their rejection of Russia's proposals as an additional argument that marginalized Russia's position in the debate. Additionally, the coverage highlighted the calls for "isolating" and "shaming" Russia on the international stage.

Izvestia and *Argumenty i Fakty* presented a very similar coverage, except that the roles of the heroes and villains were reversed. Russia was presented as the only rational and sincere actor in this debate, while the West – and the US specifically – was vilified as an actor who plotted military intervention and tried to use the resolution to go around the

international laws that protected Syria's sovereignty. The arguments of the resolution supporters were presented as irrational and "driven by sensational media coverage." In addition, the Russian mainstream accounts presented Assad as perhaps not a perfect ruler but surely a guarantor of stability in Syria who also enjoyed popular support. Syrian opposition, in contrast, was depicted as fragmented, with those fractions of it that had "foreign support" being tied to Islamic extremists.

The coverage by both Russian and US mainstream media – especially when juxtaposed to each other – gave an impression of two strategic communication campaigns launched in support of the two conflicting policies rather than of journalistic coverage. Clearly, both sides vilified the opponents in order to legitimize their own political perspectives. In doing so, the US mainstream media relied more heavily on various elements of the Cold War, vilifying Russia by linking it to its Soviet past. Thus, Vladimir Putin was linked to KGB, "spying missions," anti-democratic trends and anti-Western foreign policy; Russia was frequently mentioned alongside with China, Iran and North Korea; and Russian arms trade with Syria – a narrative that in fact could be presented as clearly capitalistic and "post-Cold War" – was linked to the Soviet past through images of the "Soviet battle tanks" and "Soviet-designed rocket launchers." The only narrative that somewhat let Russia off the hook was one of the "threat of radical Islam." Russia's concern for security in the face of "Islamic extremism" seemed to be the only condition under which the US mainstream media were willing to discuss Russia's position in the debate without vilifying Russia or dismissing its arguments as insincere and illegitimate. This painted a picture of political reality where the compromise between conflicting

parties – who also happen to be former Cold War adversaries – can only be imagined if the two find a common enemy. In other words, an alternative to the security discourse of the Cold War is another security discourse – a newer and clearly a more powerful one in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 era – the discourse of “Islamic threat.” Thus, the reality of global politics and international affairs presented by the two US mainstream media through their coverage of the debate on Syrian resolution was defined first and foremost by security discourses, with the key message being that the two opponents can only become friends when they find a common enemy.

The Russian mainstream accounts relied more heavily on the discourse of America’s post-Cold War world domination, structuring the narratives in ways that problematized it and challenged it. The readers were reminded of previous “democracy promotion” and “peace restoration” campaigns that turned into military interventions. The frustration with the Western media coverage of the conflict served to convey the message of the “evil mastermind” also being a skillful manipulator of global public opinion. Russian mainstream media accounts also incorporated the discourse of the “threat of radical Islam” in their coverage with the goal of proving the Western perspective wrong and irrational. The coverage conveyed the message that by supporting the Syrian opposition, the West supported al-Qaeda. This, in turn, communicated to the readers that the “evil mastermind” in fact was prone to making important geopolitical decisions without carefully weighing all options, scenarios and potential consequences.

The Nation and *Z Magazine* offered interpretations of the debate on the peace resolution in Syria that challenged the narratives constructed by the *New York Times* and

The Washington Post and also in some ways corresponded with the narratives featured in *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty*. In commentaries on the debate in general and on its various aspects, such as the possibility of intervention, a prospect of arming the Syrian opposition, Russia's role in the debate, and the issue of the mounting violence in Syria, both magazines critiqued US official policy regarding the crisis and the UNSC debate, yet they did not succumb to the "global diplomatic divide" narrative and did not automatically support the arguments advanced by Russia. While many of the arguments mirrored those advanced by the Russian mainstream media, the discussions in *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* did not give an impression of being part of a strategic communication campaign. For example, both magazines featured elaborate critiques of the "Washington's militarized mindset" and called for diplomatic approaches – including those that would involve Russia – to crisis's resolution. *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* highlighted the same points. However, it was clear from the analysis that all these points were underscored in the Russian mainstream media in order to vilify the West, while in *The Nation's* and *Z Magazine's* case the concerns of authors for global peace and justice were evident from the way the arguments were presented. Thus, the same elements of various discourses were articulated differently by the Russian mainstream and the US alternative media, bringing to light the differences in political agendas and ideologies that guided the ways in which the narratives on the debate were articulated: conservative and pro-establishment in Russian case and progressive and fundamentally anti-establishment in the US alternative media case.

Surprisingly, the US alternative media did not comment on the security discourse of the “Islamic extremism” structuring the narratives of the US mainstream and being the only condition under which Russia’s arguments could be considered worthy of attention. The way in which this discourse informed the US mainstream media narratives certainly complemented the larger idea about “securitization of diplomacy” advanced by *The Nation* and *Z Magazine*.

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* covered the debate in ways that mirrored the US mainstream media coverage. Both sharply criticized Russia’s and China’s veto, accused Russia of hypocrisy in claiming that it defended international law and embraced diplomatic approaches to the crisis’s resolution. Similar to the US mainstream media, Russian alternative media argued that Russia’s position in the debate made it significantly harder to move forward with diplomatic solutions. One key difference, however, was that the Russian alternative media did not connect Russia’s present to Russia’s Soviet past in their criticisms. Instead, they presented a more sober picture of reality where Russia’s pragmatism, manifested in its concerns about continuing the arms trade with Syria (not just arms supplies to it) drove Russia’s policy and its position in the debate. They did remark, however, on Russia’s “nostalgia for the Soviet past,” but stressed in their accounts that this was not an ideological nostalgia but rather one that reflected the desire to be powerful again and to be taken seriously by other powerful actors on the world stage, especially by the United States. Additionally, Russian alternative media pointed out that Russia’s position in the Syrian debate reflected its domestic political struggles. Thus, by sharply critiquing Russia’s position in the debate – and highlighting the same

points of concern brought up by the US mainstream media – Russian alternative media still presented a more complex picture of reality and rearticulated Russia’s political identity as more multidimensional and complex.

Chapter 4: The Death of Hugo Chávez

One of the key points of contention that made up the Cold War was the fundamental disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union on what socio-economic principle - capitalism or communism/socialism - is best for society and the world. Active promotion of these respective socio-economic paradigms (and corresponding practices) in American and Soviet spheres of influence was at heart of the Cold War. Just like the Soviet Union faced opposition in much of Eastern Europe and several Soviet Republics as they embraced the capitalist lifestyle, the United States and its model of capitalism has always been challenged by the Latin American states. In 1999, almost ten years after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR, Hugo Chávez was elected President of Venezuela. His vision of “socialism of the 21st century” drove his domestic and foreign policies, with the former focusing on poverty reduction, expansion of government-subsidized healthcare and education, nationalization of several key industries (including especially Venezuela’s oil industry) and the latter emphasizing anti-imperialism, opposition to the United States and its foreign policy, and Latin American regional integration. Chávez closely aligned himself with the governments of Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, energizing what some analysts have termed a “pink tide” in post-Cold War Latin America. Chávez’s extraordinary

charisma combined with Venezuela's vast oil resources allowed him to successfully implement many of the projects that made the lives of Venezuela's poor better, although the drawbacks associated with the process and the results alienated much of Venezuela's middle-class population. Nevertheless, the success of these projects, as well as Chávez's electrifying international presence communicated to the world that despite the proclaimed victory of capitalism in the Cold War, socialism was not quite dead. While the United States and Venezuela were clear adversaries, Russia partnered with Chávez's Venezuela on a number of projects, particularly in the oil industry and in arms trade.

When Hugo Chávez died in March of 2013 after a long battle with cancer, news media around the world responded immediately, presenting a wide range of interpretations of Chávez's persona and his legacy. This chapter addresses the question of how the ideas associated with the socialist model of socio-economic development – the model that has “lost” the Cold War, according to the dominant interpretation of the end of the Cold War – are being discussed and presented to the audiences by various Russian and US news media in the post-Cold War time. Thus, the way Russian and US mainstream and alternative media write about Chávez and his legacy serve as a test of how the two nations articulate their understandings and interpretations of socialism - one of the key elements of the Cold War discourse - in the post-Cold War era, when the neoliberal capitalist model drives the global economy and global communication. The chapter also aims to discover how the ways in which Russian and US news media articulate the meaning of Chávez's socialist legacy speak to the evolution of Russia's and

United States' own post-Cold War political identities and what tensions and contradictions mark this evolution.

The chapter asks the following questions: How is Chávez's persona presented? How is Chávez's legacy discussed? What links are being made between Chávez's persona and his legacy? How is Chávez's vision of the "socialism of the 21st century" discussed? How do different media communicate to their audiences what makes Chávez's death newsworthy? To what extent (if at all) other elements of the Cold War discourse are being incorporated into the discussions and what other discourses structure the narratives produced? Finally, what ideological positions and political agendas can be discerned from the ways in which different media make sense of Chávez's legacy?

The chapter analyzes the articles published during the two weeks following Hugo Chávez's death: March 5 – 18, 2013. The *New York Times* published 21 article, *The Washington Post* – 11, *Izvestia* – nine and *Argumenty i Fakty* – six. Three articles came out in *The Nation*, eight in *Z Magazine*, two in *Novaya Gazeta* and three in *The New Times*.

US mainstream media coverage

Hugo Chávez – charismatic dictator, idiosyncratic autocrat

Both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* acknowledged that Hugo Chávez was an extraordinary person, but their accounts presented a picture of someone who was full of contradictions magnified by the strength of his character, will and charisma. Both newspapers admitted in almost every report that Chávez was a "gifted,

charismatic orator with a keen ability to connect with the poor masses,”¹ a “dreamer with a common touch and enormous ambition,”² “... a man who loved the limelight – a loquacious and bombastic leader known to give speeches lasting up to 10 hours”³ and “a populist hero leading the masses out of darkness.”⁴ Yet most articles emphasized that Chávez was “idiosyncratic and unpredictable.”⁵ One *New York Times* article, referencing a *New Yorker* article from 2001, cited Dr. Edmundo Chirinos, a psychiatrist who knew Chávez as a patient, describing Chávez as “a hyperkinetic and imprudent man, unpunctual, someone who overreacts to criticism, harbors grudges, is politically astute and manipulative, and possesses tremendous stamina, never sleeping more than two or three hours a night.”⁶ To complement this portrait, the *Washington Post* listed some of the strange and capricious policies and laws passed by Chávez.⁷ Describing Chávez as a “charismatic socialist”⁸ and a “populist leftist,”⁹ both newspapers remarked that “for an international left that was yearning for a passionate and magnetic leader, Mr. Chávez was a blessing.”¹⁰ Yet both newspapers emphasized that “the autocratic Mr. Chávez”¹¹ “mercilessly taunted and insulted those who disagreed with him, calling them fascists,

¹ Juan Forero, “Anti-US Leader Had Promised Revolution,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 2013, A01.

² Simon Romero, Maria Eugenia Diaz, “Hugo Chávez, Leader Who Transformed Venezuela, Dies at 58,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2013, A11.

³ Emilia Diaz, Juan Forero, “Chávez Supporters Mourn Loss, Brace For Next Chapter,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 2013, A11.

⁴ Juan Forero, Emilia Diaz, “Taking Up Chávez’s Torch,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 2013, A01.

⁵ Forero, March 6, 2013.

⁶ Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

⁷ Forero, March 6, 2013.

⁸ William Neuman, “Election to Select New Venezuelan President Is Set for April,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2013, A18.

⁹ Diaz and Forero, March 6, 2013.

¹⁰ Forero, March 6, 2013.

¹¹ Robert White, “After Chávez, a Chance to Rethink Relations With Cuba,” *New York Times*, March 8, 2013.

good-for-nothings, traitors, oligarchs, reactionaries and puppets of the United States.”¹²

The New York Times called Chávez a “master of political insult.”¹³ *The Washington Post* echoed this statement, describing how Chávez, “combative in olive green uniform and red beret, ... called his opponents “degenerates” and “squealing pigs,” referred to the Catholic Church hierarchy as “devils in vestments” and labeled critics “counterrevolutionaries.”¹⁴

Both newspapers frequently emphasized military undertones in Chávez’s communication style. For example, in one of the articles, *The Washington Post* quoted Chávez talking about the revolution in forceful, almost violent terms: “Oligarchs tremble, because now is when the revolution is going forward,” he warned in 2000, after the constitution had been redrawn and a new legislature dominated by his allies had taken over. “This is going to be delicious; we are going to deliver a knockout punch to the counterrevolution.”¹⁵ Similarly, the *New York Times* commented on the significant role military officials played in Venezuela’s politics, pointing out that “the influence of the armed forces... reflects the efforts of Mr. Chávez... to imbue society with military ideals.”¹⁶ Another article contended that “[Chávez] stacked his government with generals, colonels, and majors, drawing inspiration from the leftist military officers who ruled Peru and Panama in the 1970s.”¹⁷

¹² William Neuman, Christine Hauser, “Thousands Line Up For Last Glimpse of Chávez,” *New York Times*, March 8, 2013.

¹³ Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

¹⁴ Forero, March 6, 2013.

¹⁵ Forero, March 6, 2013.

¹⁶ White, March 8, 2013.

¹⁷ Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

Both newspapers described Chávez as an autocrat who “dominated Venezuelan politics for 14 years with his charismatic personality, populist policies and authoritarian methods.”¹⁸ It is important to note that this quote comes from an opening sentence of the *New York Times* editorial devoted to Chávez’s death. The sentence sets the interpretive framework for the readers right away, highlighting the most important aspects of Hugo Chávez’s personality and legacy, as understood by the *New York Times*’ editorial board. Indeed, all articles in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* pointed out that Chávez’s government “was marked by old-fashioned patronage and authoritarianism,”¹⁹ stressing that Chávez singlehandedly controlled Venezuela’s politics and economy and did not tolerate those who disagreed with him. “He purged opponents from the national oil company, expropriated the land of others and imprisoned retired military officials who had dared to stand against him,”²⁰ stated the *New York Times*, while *The Washington Post* featured a similar statement: “He was able to take control of the courts, the congress and all other institutions, while forcing some of his toughest opponents into exile.”²¹

Hugo Chávez’s “increasingly autocratic rule”²² led, according to both newspapers, to the deep divisions within the country – another prominent theme in the coverage by US mainstream newspapers.

Deep divisions in Venezuela

Both newspapers frequently emphasized that Chávez leaves behind a “bitterly divided”²³ and “polarized”²⁴ country, where, as *The Washington Post* suggested, “his

¹⁸ “Hugo Chávez,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2013, A26.

¹⁹ Forero, March 6, 2013.

²⁰ Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

²¹ Diaz and Forero, March 6, 2013.

²² “After Hugo Chávez,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 2013, A16.

supporters lionize him as a courageous rebel determined to take on the elites, and his foes paint him as a dangerous demagogue and strongman.”²⁵ Similarly, the *New York Times* stated that “he inspired a fierce, sometimes religious devotion among his supporters and an equally fervent animus among his opponents.”²⁶ Both newspapers put the blame for these divisions directly on Chávez, arguing that he “mined and deepened the divide between the masses of Venezuela’s poor and the middle and upper classes”²⁷ and that it was “his rule [that] widened society’s divisions.”²⁸ Both newspapers used various means of illustrating this argument. For example, the detailed descriptions of the scenes of Venezuela’s masses mourning Chávez’s death were frequently juxtaposed to the detailed descriptions of middle or upper-class Venezuelans celebrating it or at least not feeling devastated by the loss. The following excerpt from one *New York Times* article illustrates this point well:

“Mr. Chávez’s death prompted a massive outpouring of grief from his supporters as thousands waited outside the funeral for a chance to enter later to see his glass-covered coffin. But many other Venezuelans stayed home and expressed hope that his passing would lead to change.

“I hate the anti-Chavistas with all my heart,” said Nancy Cadena, 45, who sells plantains and bananas in a street market in Petare, a poor neighborhood. “They don’t want the poor people to catch up.”

A few miles away in a middle-class neighborhood, Luisa Mercedes Pulido, 69, said that while she and her sister Elenora, 64, were on opposite sides of the national divide, they got along fine as long as they avoided politics.

²³ William Neuman, “Chávez Dies, Leaving Sharp Divisions in Venezuela,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2013, A1; William Neuman, “For Good or Ill, Chávez Altered How Venezuela Views Itself,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2013, A10; Neuman and Hauser, March 8, 2013; Diaz and Forero, March 6, 2013.

²⁴ Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013; Forero, March 6, 2013.

²⁵ Forero, March 6, 2013.

²⁶ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

²⁷ Neuman, March 6, 2013; Neuman and Hauser, March 8, 2013.

²⁸ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

"She has her point of view that she isn't going to change, and I have mine that I'm not going to change," she said. "But it seems incredible to me that intelligent, thoughtful people, at this stage, continue to think as they do when what we have received from Mr. Chávez is misery, corruption, murders and a total reduction in our quality of life and so much crime. I don't understand how they cannot see that."²⁹

The polarized reactions among Venezuelans to Chávez's death were also frequently put in a curious geopolitical context of Venezuela-US antagonism. For example, the *New York Times* published two articles on March 5, 2013. One article depicted pro-Chávez Venezuelans in Venezuela devastated by his death and "crying openly in sadness and fear of what would come next."³⁰ Another one featured anti-Chávez Venezuelan immigrants in Miami where "news of his death elicited outpourings of raucous celebration and, to many, cautious optimism for the future."³¹ The two stories published on the same day conveyed the idea that anti-Chávez Venezuelans immigrated to the United States, reaffirming that "being pro-Chávez equals being against the US, and being anti-Chávez equals being pro-US"

What stood out the most within this theme of "deep divisions" was how both newspapers clearly linked Chávez's supporters and opponents to specific – and polar – categories of poor versus rich, rural versus urban, emotional versus rational, violent versus peaceful, perpetrators versus victims, masses versus elites, uneducated versus educated and finally socialist versus capitalist and, by extension, anti-American versus pro-American. Articles systematically highlighted how the poor masses were religiously

²⁹ William Neuman, "Dignitaries Pay Chávez Tribute, as Venezuelans Express Grief and Misgivings," *New York Times*, March 9, 2013, A8.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Lizette Alvarez, "Venezuelan Expatriates See a Reason to Celebrate," *New York Times*, March 5, 2013, A10.

devoted to Chávez,³² how they were highly emotional,³³ mostly older, uneducated,³⁴ coming from rural areas³⁵ and either involved in crime or having propensity toward violence.³⁶ At the same time, Chávez's opponents comprised a wealthy minority of educated, rational, mostly younger and urban working professionals who embraced capitalism (and America) and who were frequently the victims of crime³⁷ in Venezuela and thus did not just leave the country but escaped it (or dreamed of escaping it one day).³⁸

Another interesting, and somewhat similar, geopolitical twist to this theme was evident in another *New York Times* article talking exclusively about Cuba and people's reaction there to Chávez's death.³⁹ The article cited two people: a 48-year-old woman (no mention of her occupation), clearly a supporter of Chávez, with a very emotional response to his death; and a 39-year-old man, an engineer, who chose not to disclose his last name for security reasons (meaning that he probably wasn't a supporter of either Chávez nor the Cuban political system), who was more skeptical (and therefore more rational) and talked about economic implications of Chávez's death for Cuba. Here,

³² William Neuman and Ginger Thompson, "A Leader's Cry in Venezuela: 'I Am Chávez,'" *New York Times*, March 7, 2013, A1; Ken Belson, "Venezuelans Recall Leader's Love of Game," *New York Times*, March 7, 2013, B12; Neuman, March 10, 2013; Juan Forero and Emilia Diaz, "For Chávez, a Farewell in Streets of Caracas," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2013, A08; Juan Forero, "A Final Salute to El Comandante," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2013, A05.

³³ Neuman and Hauser, March 8, 2013; Juan Forero, "Chávez's Chosen Successor Maduro Sounding More Chávez-Like," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2013, A13; William Neuman, "Opposition Leader Will Seek Venezuelan Presidency," *New York Times*, March 11, 2013.

³⁴ Neuman, March 9, 2013.

³⁵ Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

³⁶ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

³⁷ Alvarez, March 5, 2013.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Victoria Burnett, "With Worries For Its Economic Future, Cuba Bids a Sad Goodbye to a Generous Ally," *New York Times*, March 7, 2013, A10.

again, the *New York Times* built on gender and class stereotypes, implicitly connecting them to political and ideological views.

The myth of socialism

While acknowledging that Hugo Chávez's socialist vision and charismatic persona made him the "champion of the poor"⁴⁰ who gave them a voice,⁴¹ "awoke a people"⁴² and "brought better living conditions to millions of poor Venezuelans,"⁴³ the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* repeatedly emphasized that this was not due to socialist policies but rather due to Venezuela's oil wealth. Moreover, both newspapers reiterated that Chávez's "redistributionist policies"⁴⁴ "left the country's economy in tatters and its cities plagued by crime."⁴⁵ The following quotes – one from the *New York Times* and one from *The Washington Post* – illustrate this point well:

"There is no denying his popularity among Venezuela's impoverished majority. He won elections by devoting a substantial share of the country's oil income to building public housing, creating health clinics and making affordable food available to the poorest citizens. But there have also been shocking levels of corruption, shoddy construction, chronic shortages of basic goods, and neglect in the investment needed to maintain and increase oil production. Billions have been squandered through inept and careless management. And the financial ability to sustain Mr. Chávez's social programs has been seriously eroded."⁴⁶

"Venezuela did lower poverty. But job creation came through inefficient, bloated and corrupt state agencies. The country is more reliant than ever on oil sales, imports more food than before and is buffeted by power failures and violent crime."⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Belson, March 7, 2013.

⁴¹ Forero, March 9, 2013.

⁴² Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

⁴³ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

⁴⁴ "Hugo Chávez," March 7, 2013.

⁴⁵ Belson, March 7, 2013.

⁴⁶ "Hugo Chávez," March 7, 2013.

⁴⁷ Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013.

Every single article in both newspapers mentioned Chávez's "rocky economic record,"⁴⁸ "economic orthodoxy,"⁴⁹ Venezuela's "crippled economy,"⁵⁰ "high inflation and chronic shortages of basic goods,"⁵¹ and its "lowest cumulative rate of economic growth among the seven largest economies in South America since 1999."⁵² These assessments of Venezuela's economy were accompanied by equally prominent references to Venezuela's "soaring crime,"⁵³ "highest rates of violent crime,"⁵⁴ "horrific crime rate,"⁵⁵ "cities plagued by crime,"⁵⁶ and Caracas becoming "one of the world's most dangerous cities,"⁵⁷ "more dangerous than Baghdad."⁵⁸

Such evaluations of Venezuela's economy and crime rates were contrasted with equally frequent statements about Venezuela's "world's biggest oil reserves,"⁵⁹ and about the country being "one of the world's great oil powers,"⁶⁰ the "South American energy giant,"⁶¹ an "oil-rich country of 29 million,"⁶² as well as about oil being "at heart of Venezuela's economy."⁶³

⁴⁸ Neuman, March 6, 2013.

⁴⁹ Forero, March 6, 2013.

⁵⁰ Marc Lavalley and Alexis Mainland, "The Revolution Will Be Tweeted!" *New York Times*, March 10, 2013, SR6.

⁵¹ Neuman, March 5, 2013; William Neuman, "On Eve of His Funeral, Debating Chávez's Legacy," *New York Times*, March 8, 2013, A4; Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

⁵² Neuman, March 6, 2013.

⁵³ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

⁵⁴ Neuman, March 8, 2013; Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013.

⁵⁵ Lavalley and Mainland, March 10, 2013.

⁵⁶ Belson, March 7, 2013.

⁵⁷ Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

⁵⁸ "After Hugo Chávez," March 7, 2013.

⁵⁹ Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013; Neuman, March 6, 2013; Neuman, March 8, 2013; Neuman, March 10, 2013.

⁶⁰ Forero, March 6, 2013.

⁶¹ Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

⁶² Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013.

⁶³ Neuman, March 8, 2013.

The juxtaposition of vast oil resources and struggling economy implied that socialist system was not well equipped for managing Venezuela's natural resources. In fact, two articles – one in the *New York Times* and one in *The Washington Post* – explicitly addressed this topic, critiquing Chávez for “poorly managing” Venezuela's oil reserves, production and revenues.⁶⁴ As the author of the article in *The Washington Post* concluded, “The refineries are in shambles. Fields are in decline. New investment is stagnant... Chávez did not deliver the sort of social revolution needed, but instead left Venezuela with high inflation, declining oil output and corruption.”⁶⁵

In addition, constant reminders of the dire material conditions in the country served to convey the idea that socialism ran counter to one's material and physical well-being, no matter how much this vision “pumped up the country's pride”⁶⁶ among the poor majority.

To further reinforce the idea of socialism being a utopian vision, the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* argued that Venezuelans supported Chávez exclusively because of his charisma, oratory skills and “visceral connection to the poor masses.”⁶⁷ In the larger discursive context comprised of the themes that presented socialism in a negative light, comments on Chávez's “cultlike following”⁶⁸ and “religious fervor [with which] Chávez was adored”⁶⁹ painted a picture of mass delusion and unsubstantiated devotion rather than informed and sincere support and loyalty. Such narrative implied

⁶⁴ Clifford Krauss, “Dwindling Production Has Led to Lesser Role For Venezuela as Major Oil Power,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2013, A8; Steven Mufson, “The Politics of Oil, Post-‘Chavismo,’” *Washington Post*, March 7, 2013, A12.

⁶⁵ Mufson, March 7, 2013.

⁶⁶ Belson, March 7, 2013.

⁶⁷ Neuman and Hauser, March 8, 2013.

⁶⁸ Belson, March 7, 2013.

⁶⁹ Neuman, March 10, 2013.

that people’s empowerment was solely dependent on Chávez and therefore his socialist vision didn’t really empower them; rather, it enslaved them like a religious cult or a totalitarian political system would. The narrative was supported by multiple direct quotes from ordinary Venezuelans who mourned Chávez’s death, and whose pronouncements of devotion had a strong totalitarian feel to them:

"He gave us the instructions and we will all follow them. We are all Chávez," said Elia Cuba, a 59-year-old accountant."⁷⁰

"He did so much for us, and as long as we Venezuelans keep that in mind, then everything that he did hasn't died," said Maria Andrade, 54. "Now is the time when we need to keep in mind the values Hugo Chávez gave us."⁷¹

Additionally, the descriptions of the crowds of mourners also were constructed in ways that involved totalitarian undertones, giving prominence to such elements as, for example, the synchrony in the movements of the masses, the “clenched fists thrusting in the air” in unison, and – a small but significant detail – the red shirts worn by the mourners:

“This week, many rank-and-file Chavistas - dressed in red, their eyes red from crying - spoke on the street of how they would continue to follow the directions of their dead leader.”⁷²

“The multitudes in red shirts, clenched fists thrusting in the air -- a dominant image of the political movement that President Hugo Chávez left behind -- convey a sense of followers united and loyal to the father of their revolution and his designated heir, Nicolás Maduro.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Juan Forero and Emilia Diaz, “For Chávez, a Farewell in Streets of Caracas,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 2013, A08.

⁷¹ Forero, March 9, 2013.

⁷² Forero, March 10, 2013.

⁷³ Simon Romero, “Chávez Heir Faces Challenge in Ties With Armed Forces,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2013, A4.

While on the one hand these images conveyed a sense of unity and determination, and therefore an idea that “the revolution will continue without Chávez,” they also, on the other hand, demonstrated that Chávez was the only guarantor of the socialist revolution and with his death the vision of socialism will also wither.

The idea of socialism having no future after Chávez’s death was also expressed through discussions of Chávez’s relations with other Latin American leaders. While both newspapers acknowledged that Chávez had a strong influence in the region, they also insisted that just like in domestic politics, the influence of his socialist vision was based exclusively on his charisma and Venezuela’s oil wealth. Both newspapers argued that regionally, Latin American states did not follow the socialist path⁷⁴ and only supported Chávez because of his subsidized oil: “Chávez... was one of the loudest voices in Latin America, pushing a vision of regional unity and defiance of Washington, sweetened with cheap oil shipments to needy neighbors. But the legacy of Mr. Chávez’s Bolivarian revolution remains more limited than he would have liked.”⁷⁵ *The Washington Post* explained: “Big, democratic Brazil and smaller fast-developing countries such as Uruguay, Chile and Peru were diplomatically close but followed an economic and political path far removed from Venezuela’s. Their governments are market-friendly and attuned to social needs, combining those philosophies to register fast economic growth and lift millions out of poverty. They also place an emphasis on good ties with the Obama administration.”⁷⁶ Interestingly, the *New York Times* published an op-ed piece by

⁷⁴ William Neuman, “On Eve of His Funeral, Debating Chávez’s Legacy,” *New York Times*, March 8, 2013, A4; Juan Forero, Emilia Diaz, “Taking Up Chávez’s Torch,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 2013.

⁷⁵ Neuman, March 8, 2013, A01.

⁷⁶ Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013.

Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva, the former President of Brazil who worked closely with Hugo Chávez on several projects. In the article, da Silva praised Chávez's passion for Latin American integration and overall painted a portrait that stood in stark contrast to the image of Chávez constructed in all other *New York Times* (and *Washington Post*) articles. However, next day the *New York Times* featured a report that, while acknowledging da Silva's contribution and perspective, rushed to point out that Chávez was nevertheless a "very polarizing figure."⁷⁷

"In an opinion article published in The New York Times on Thursday, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, whose policies are credited with the country's strong economic growth and poverty reduction, lauded Mr. Chávez for his commitment to improving the lives of his country's poor.

And he praised him for his pursuit of regional unity, including his role in starting groups like the Union of South American Nations, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas.

But some analysts point out that Mr. Chávez also clashed with some regional leaders and undermined efforts at integration that did not mesh with his ideological views. And his fiery clashes with the United States were seen by many as counterproductive."⁷⁸

The same article also added that "while poverty went down significantly during Mr. Chávez's years as president, other countries, like Brazil, Peru and Colombia, made progress in reducing poverty while following paths very different from that of Mr. Chávez."⁷⁹ This statement reinforced the idea that first, there were other (and better) ways to improve the lives of poor majorities than socialism, and second, that other Latin American states preferred the non-socialist path of development.

⁷⁷ Neuman, March 8, 2013.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Geopolitics and relations with the United States

Discussions of Chávez's foreign policy and his role in global and Latin American regional politics were very prominent in the coverage by the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Both newspapers frequently pointed out that "[Venezuela and America] have had rocky relations"⁸⁰ and that "[Chávez's] principal theme [in foreign policy] seemed to be taunting the United States."⁸¹ The *New York Times* mentioned how Hugo Chávez called George W. Bush a "devil" in his 2006 speech at the United Nations⁸² as well as how he called Barack Obama a "clown," following up with the tweet in which "Mr. Chávez decried both Mr. Obama and his 'gringo imperialist government.'"⁸³ Both newspapers emphasized the "anti-American thrust of [Chávez's] foreign policy"⁸⁴ in multiple ways.

First, both newspapers highlighted the fact that two American military attaches were expelled from Venezuela right before the official announcement of Chávez's death. Of particular interest is the placement of this piece of information by the *New York Times* in its first report on the topic of Chávez's death. The detail about the expulsion of the attaches comes up in the fourth sentence of the report, and seems to be oddly placed amid the details depicting the transformations in Caracas caused by the breaking news:

"In short order, police officers and soldiers were highly visible as people ran through the streets, calling loved ones on cell phones, rushing to get home. Caracas, the capital, which had just received news that the government was throwing out two American military attachés it accused of sowing disorder,

⁸⁰ Neuman, March 10, 2013.

⁸¹ "Hugo Chávez," March 7, 2013.

⁸² Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

⁸³ Lavalley and Mainland, March 10, 2013.

⁸⁴ Neuman, March 8, 2013.

quickly became an enormous traffic jam. Stores and shopping malls abruptly closed.”⁸⁵

By bringing up the detail of the expulsion of the American military attaches, the article immediately introduces the theme of geopolitics and sets up the readers to interpret the events in Venezuela – and Venezuelan identity – from an “anti-US” geopolitical lens. The incident was mentioned in one of the early *Washington Post* editorials as well, and in this piece the incident was presented as an indicator of Venezuela’s stubborn refusal to improve relations with the United States despite the attempts of the United States to reach out. The editorial also mentioned the accusations that the United States was to blame for Chávez’s illness:

“Anticipating the death of Hugo Chávez, the Obama administration began reaching out months ago to his designated successor, Nicolas Maduro, in the hope of bettering US-Venezuelan relations. On Tuesday, that strategy absorbed a body blow: Hours before revealing that Mr. Chávez had died of cancer, Mr. Maduro tried to blame the United States for his illness, and he expelled two US military attaches on charges of "proposing destabilizing plans" to the armed forces. So much for the "reset" with Caracas.”⁸⁶

It is interesting that the editorial mentioned the “reset” – a term usually applied to Russia-US relations, and one that was initially introduced to harmonize the relations but gradually grew to signify the failures associated with the “reset attempts.” Here the term is applied to Venezuela, and, just like in cases of discussions of Russia-US “reset” in the US mainstream media, the United States is presented as a party that constantly tries to reach out, so the failures of the “reset” are blamed on another party.

⁸⁵ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

⁸⁶ “After Hugo Chávez,” March 7, 2013.

This implicit reference to Russia and to Russia-US troubled relations was complemented by explicit and overwhelmingly frequent references to Venezuela's ties (and Chávez's friendships) with "assorted rebel groups, rogues and pariah governments."⁸⁷ As *The Washington Post* stated, "the United States and Venezuela were barely on speaking terms during Chávez's 14 years in office as Chávez accused Washington of a heavy-handed approach to the hemisphere and forged friendships with Cuba, Iran and others that the United States views as troublesome."⁸⁸ Similarly, the *New York Times* emphasized that "[Chávez's] legacy is strained by... the embrace of malevolent foreign leaders like Bashar al-Assad of Syria and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran."⁸⁹ The *New York Times* provided a bit of context reminding the readers of other recent international issues involving these leaders: "Mr. Chávez forged close ties with fellow OPEC member Iran, in defiance of the United States-led effort to isolate that country over its nuclear program. And Mr. Chávez shipped oil to Syria despite international repudiation of President Bashar al-Assad's aggressive response to an internal uprising."⁹⁰ More than a half of the articles analyzed for this case study mentioned in one form or another Chávez's friendships with the "rogue states," with most articles focusing on "communist Cuba, a country Chávez revered and whose octogenarian leadership gave him inspiration."⁹¹ The discussions of Cuba-Venezuela relations, however, were marked by two key narratives: one tying Chávez to Cuba to further vilify

⁸⁷ Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

⁸⁸ Karen DeYoung, "US Will Seek to Improve Ties With Venezuela," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2013, A08.

⁸⁹ "Hugo Chávez," March 7, 2013.

⁹⁰ Neuman, March 8, 2013.

⁹¹ Forero and Diaz, March 8, 2013.

him and his socialist vision, and the second one testing the ground for improving relations with Cuba now that Chávez's charismatic presence is not an issue.

Discussions of Venezuela's close ties to Cuba were also contextualized within the geopolitical framework of Chávez's relations with other Latin American states, his desire "to unite the region and erode Washington's influence"⁹² and his leadership of "a group of nations intent on reducing American influence in the region."⁹³ As the *New York Times* pointed out when talking about Chávez's role in Latin America, "With a defiant anti-imperialist discourse, he injected energy into a sector of the Latin American left and led a group of nations, including Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia, with leftist governments dedicated to diminishing American influence. And he helped form and strengthen Latin American identity and tilted the balance further away from the United States."⁹⁴ Similarly, *The Washington Post* proclaimed: "On the world stage, Mr. Chávez set Venezuela on a collision course with Washington, blaming American foreign policy and US-style capitalism for much of Latin American ills."⁹⁵ At the same time, *The Washington Post* emphasized that "... his ALBA block attracted as members only the anachronistic regime in Cuba and some of the poorest countries in the region"⁹⁶ while the countries considered by *The Washington Post* more "normal" "were put off by Mr. Chávez's revolutionary, anti-US, anti-capitalist rhetoric."⁹⁷ This narrative overlaps with the one discussed in the previous theme where both newspapers made it clear that more

⁹² Romero and Diaz, March 6, 2013.

⁹³ Neuman, March 5, 2013.

⁹⁴ Neuman, March 6, 2013.

⁹⁵ Forero, March 6, 2013.

⁹⁶ Forero and Diaz, March 7, 2013.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

“successful” countries in Latin America did not embrace Chávez’s socialist vision and sided more closely with the United States.

Russian mainstream media coverage

Extraordinary leader and a friend of Russia

Both *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* reiterated in their articles that Hugo Chávez was “a close friend of Russia”⁹⁸ who did not view Russia as “just another resource supplier,”⁹⁹ and that’s why Russia valued this friendship and partnership.¹⁰⁰ The articles, and especially the editorials, described Chávez as an “outstanding leader,”¹⁰¹ “an extraordinary and strong person who looked into the future and always set his bar very high,”¹⁰² a brave warrior “who could only be defeated by an incurable illness,”¹⁰³ “an incarnation of people’s soul”¹⁰⁴ and a “knight of freedom who brought independence to Latin American states.”¹⁰⁵ One editorial in *Argumenty i Fakty* praised Chávez as someone who seemed “as if he came from another epoch – an epoch of desperate lonely heroes ready to challenge the Evil and fight it without demanding a reward.”¹⁰⁶ An editorial in

⁹⁸ Yegor Sozayev-Guryev, “Putin Nazval Chavesa Blizkim Drugom Rossii,” *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546181#ixzz3MNYgMnyl>; Yulia Tsoi, “KPRF Predlagaet Nazvat’ Ulitsu V Moskve Imenem Ugo Chavesa,” *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546180#ixzz3MNYuPntk>; Aleksandr Yunashev, “Budushee Rossiyskikh Proektov V Venesuele Obsudyat V Mae,” *Izvestia*, March 7, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546344#ixzz3MNZT9jqw>.

⁹⁹ Sergei Osipov, “Kak Izmenit Smert’ Chavesa Otnosheniya Rossii I Venesuely,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 13, 2013, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/41389>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sozayev-Guryev, March 6, 2013.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Igor Yavlinskiy, “Ugo Chavesa Smogla Pobedit’ Tol’ko Neizlechimaya Bolezn’,” *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546174#ixzz3MNYMUQds>.

¹⁰⁴ Orkhan Dzhemal’, “Voploshenie Narodnoi Dushi,” *Izvestia*, March 7, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546239>.

¹⁰⁵ Andrei Sidorchik, “Ugo Chaves: Umirayu, No Ne Sdayus’,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 6, 2013, <http://www.aif.ru/society/people/41213>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Izvestia underscored that Chávez was “a leader, not a master,”¹⁰⁷ which meant that his followers – and specifically his “young brother” Maduro – will not give up Chávez’s principles and will continue his anti-imperialist course.¹⁰⁸ Another author of *Izvestia* editorial shared his personal experience of observing Chávez speaking (or rather performing!) in front of an audience of Russian academics during one of his visits to Russia. The author was struck by the “personal charm” of Chávez who “talked for two hours non-stop, quoted Marx and the Bible, recited poetry,”¹⁰⁹ and concluded the editorial with the description of Chávez as “not just a left-wing socialist but a poet, an artist, a commando, a revolutionary, A Robin Hood, and of course, a people’s soul.”¹¹⁰

One report in *Izvestia* was devoted to the initiative of the Communist Party of Russia to name several streets in Russian cities, including Moscow, after Hugo Chávez.¹¹¹ The article discussed the initiative enthusiastically and positively, though it noted that the party “Fair Russia” and human rights experts in Russia were skeptical about the idea and “urged not to approach the question emotionally.”¹¹² This detail matters in the context of Russian domestic politics – and in the context of the next theme – because “Fair Russia” is a Parliamentary opposition party that is least loyal to the Russian government and is often viewed, along with human rights experts, as “pro-Western.”

¹⁰⁷ Dmitriy Bal’burov, “Tanki v Venesuelskoy Sel’ve,” *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546192>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Dzhemal’, March 7, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Dzhemal’, March 7, 2013.

¹¹¹ Tsoi, March 6, 2013.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Anti-American rhetoric

The editorials in both newspapers explicitly praised Chávez for his anti-American rhetoric and admired his courage in “stepping on the tail of the hydra of American imperialism, ... and spitting on the damned Monroe doctrine.”¹¹³ They applauded Chávez’s ability to “never fear anyone, to say what he thought, and to meet with the leaders of the states that the United States declared ‘rogues.’”¹¹⁴ The same editorial also mentioned how Chávez called George W. Bush a “devil” at the 2006 United Nations meeting and added that “Americans could not forgive this, but it was impossible to scare Chávez; it was only possible to kill him.”¹¹⁵ Here the author implicitly referenced the accusations that the US Special Forces inflicted Chávez with cancer. Later in the editorial the author in fact stated that “it will take time for us to find out if Chávez’s illness, along with several other cases of Latin American leaders being diagnosed with cancer, was a twist of fate or whether it was the result of the activities by the special forces of one very democratic nation under the flag with stripes and stars.”¹¹⁶ Two more articles in *Argumenty i Fakty* brought up this question in a similar way as well.¹¹⁷

The narrative of anti-Americanism serving as a basis for Russia-Venezuela friendship came through in the articles discussing the prospects of Russia-Venezuela relations after Chávez’s death. For example, *Izvestia*, quoting a prominent Russian politician, suggested the following reasons for Nicolas Maduro being the preferred candidate for Russia: “A candidate who will maintain close ties with Russia is obviously

¹¹³ Dzhemal’, March 7, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Sidorchik, March 6, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Osipov, March 13, 2013.

better for us. Today it is Maduro because the opposition will first and foremost try to restore relations with the United States, while Maduro will continue, at least at the initial stages, the previous foreign policy course.”¹¹⁸ This quote exemplifies how the article counts on the readers’ already-existing assumption that anyone who is pro-Russia must also be anti-US. Here relations with Venezuela are evaluated and presented through the reductionist lens of pro-US versus anti-US paradigm. Venezuelan opposition is bad for Russia because it is pro-US – no other reasons are mentioned. Maduro, however, is better because he promised to follow Chávez’s course, which in foreign policy means being anti-US. Again, no other reasons for Maduro being the preferred candidate are mentioned. The language of the narratives comprising this theme closely resembled the language familiar to many Russians who remember the Cold War era and the language of the Soviet media. The Cold War discourse was particularly prominent in structuring the narratives within this theme. At the same time, the narratives within this theme coexisted with other, very different narratives within the next theme.

The future of business

The most prominent theme characterizing the Russian mainstream news media coverage was marked by pragmatic concerns about the future of Russia’s business with Venezuela. Six out of nine articles in *Izvestia* and two out of six articles in *Argumenty i Fakty* (two out of the three longest and most substantial ones) were devoted to the discussion of the future of Russia-Venezuela partnership in oil industry and arms trade. The articles conveyed a sense of grave concern by Russian policymakers about possible

¹¹⁸ Konstantin Volkov, “Nikolas Maduro Na Meste Chavesa Vygoden Rossii,” *Izvestia*, March 10, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546391#ixzz3MNZjcXgn>.

regime change in Venezuela, and therefore possible termination of valuable contracts.

Articles repeatedly mentioned that Venezuela's purchases of arms from Russia constituted one third of Russia's overall arms exports¹¹⁹ and that "Chávez conducted a very profitable business with Russia, which radically transformed Venezuela's army;"¹²⁰ equally important was the fact that Russia had five large ongoing oil projects in Venezuela¹²¹ – a result of the preferential access to Venezuela's oil resources Russian investors enjoyed. As one of the articles pointed out, "after the death of "the great Commandante," the world, and Russia, is anxious to know if the politic of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela's oil industry will continue or if it will change dramatically."¹²² Authors speculated about possible challenges and competitors Russia could face if the new Venezuelan government changed Chávez's political course and the corresponding economic policies and practices.

While this narrative worked to construct and present Russia and Venezuela as two business partners rather than ideological comrades – clearly a narrative of post-Cold War capitalism and also globalization – the discussions in *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* also revealed that this business partnership was possible largely because of Russia's Soviet legacy and Chávez's perception of this legacy playing a role in Russia's post-Soviet politics. For example, one article explicitly mentioned that "Chávez thought that Russia was a reincarnation of the USSR and would support his global initiatives. Meanwhile

¹¹⁹ Bal'burov, March 6, 2013.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Mariya Kuprenkova, "Rossiyu s Neftyanogo Rynka Venesuely Mozhet Vytesnit' Kitay," *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546227>.

¹²² Ibid.

Moscow preferred to develop economic relations rather than political ones.”¹²³ This interpretation constructed the image of Russia as a pragmatic actor who did not mind taking advantage of its socialist legacy as long as it benefited its present capitalist economy. However, the recognition of the important role that the Cold War legacy played in sustaining this post-Cold War economic partnership was reflected in other articles. For example, one editorial in *Izvestia* discussed the potential threats that the death of Hugo Chávez could pose for the Russian economy. The article speculated that the new Venezuelan government might be “not as extremely leftist as under Chávez... it will be more moderate, more pragmatic, which means it will be more open for partnerships with the civilized world, and not only with Comandante’s “friends.” This means there will be fiercer competition for the markets, economic projects, etc. Russian business is not very used to conducting business in such environment, to put it mildly.”¹²⁴

Two narratives overlapped within this theme. On the one hand, the overwhelming attention that both newspapers paid to the Russian-Venezuelan economic partnership in their coverage of Chávez’s death pointed to a very pragmatic – and capitalist – view of Russia-Venezuela relations within the Russian dominant political discourse. On the other hand, however, the nature of anxiety expressed by the Russian elites (and reflected in the media narratives) about the future of economic partnership with Venezuela revealed that the “business” conducted under the conditions of preferential treatment guaranteed by Chávez’s socialist vision and policies was much more desirable for Russia. In other words, the media narratives presented a reality in

¹²³ Volkov, March 10, 2013.

¹²⁴ Leonid Zlotin, “Kak Proshaem My Dolzchnikam Nashim,” *Izvestia*, March 6, 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/546238>.

which Russia preferred Chávez's socialist model because it allowed Russia to engage in capitalist practices.

Venezuela – a role model for Russia

The last narrative identified in the Russian mainstream media coverage of Hugo Chávez's death compared Russia's and Venezuela's "similar oil-based fates,"¹²⁵ concluding that "Venezuela distributed its wealth in a more fair and just way."¹²⁶ In discussing the legacy of Hugo Chávez, several commentators contrasted his socialist vision and practices with the capitalist path of development Russia embraced in the 1990s, explicitly praising Chávez's approach as a much better one. The following excerpt illustrates this point well:

"Chávez refused to negotiate with big business about their social responsibilities. He simply took everything away from all of them, instead of making an example out of one. The proceeds went primarily to free healthcare and education. In Russia, meanwhile, the commercial insurance model was being given Roman triumphs. Chávez didn't bother with national projects like "affordable housing", or palm off mortgage schemes on Venezuelans; he nationalized the cement factories that had been controlled by foreign companies, because, as he said "while you all are here living it up, regular folks don't have a place to live!" While RAO UES (Unified Energy System of Russia) was turning into a conglomerate of confidence scams, Venezuela continued nationalizing its energy sector. While Russia was in a fuss about attracting foreign investment, Chávez threw out American companies like Exxon and ConocoPhillips by the seat of their pants."¹²⁷

The author of another article – an editorial in *Argumenty i Fakty* – made similar points, applauding Chávez for "nationalizing large enterprises because they must serve

¹²⁵ Sergei Osipov, "Komu Bez Ugo Tugo: Komandante Oplakivayut Ne Tol'ko V Venesuele," *Argumenty i Fakty*, March 13, 2013, <http://www.aif.ru/politics/world/41387>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Dzhemal', March 7, 2013.

the interests of the people, not the interests of the oligarchs.”¹²⁸ The author also noted that “the oil industry, the main source of income for the country, must serve the development of healthcare, education and other social projects, and not the Olympic games, World Cups and the building of business centers.”¹²⁹ While the author didn’t make a direct and explicit comparison with Russia, the references to the oligarchs, Olympics, the World Cup and the business centers made it clear that the critique was directed at Russia’s current large scale projects.

US alternative media coverage

A grandiose visionary and a maker of dreams

Both *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* portrayed Chávez as “a grandiose visionary and a maker of dreams,”¹³⁰ someone who was “larger than life”¹³¹ and who “meant the hope of a better life, and the means to organize to accomplish it... for members of Venezuela’s grassroots movements.”¹³² Both magazines underscored that Chávez was genuinely devoted to making the lives of Venezuela’s people better and people responded to it by equally genuine love and devotion.

When discussing Chávez’s style of governance, with one of its cornerstones being his public appearances and speeches that were not “regular cabinet meetings,”¹³³ Oscar Guardiola-Rivera wrote in *Z Magazine* that “all this talking and direct contact meant the

¹²⁸ Sidorchik, March 6, 2013.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Eva Golinger, “Hugo Chavez, Dream Maker,” *Z Magazine*, March 7, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/hugo-chavez-dream-maker-by-eva-golinger/>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Michael Fox, “Chavez and the Dream for a Better World,” *Z Magazine*, March 7, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/ch-vez-and-the-dream-for-a-better-world-by-michael-fox/>.

¹³³ Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, “Hugo Chavez Kept His Promise to the People Of Venezuela,” *Z Magazine*, March 8, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/hugo-ch-vez-kept-his-promise-to-the-people-of-venezuela-by-oscar-guardiola-rivera/>.

constant reaffirmation of a promise between Chávez and the people of Venezuela.”¹³⁴

People responded and paid him back, most notably in 2002 when they demanded his release from prison after the US- sponsored coup d'état.

One of the articles in *Z Magazine* communicated this sense of connection between Chávez and Venezuelans through the following quote: “‘Chávez is like a guide. Chávez is a door – the door for the struggles that we want to carry out,’ said Iraida Morocoima, of Venezuela’s Urban Land Committees in 2009, ‘But in the other side of that door are the people.’”¹³⁵ Another article emphasized Venezuelans’ genuine love for Chávez, noting that they had “truly a love affair with ‘their’ president”¹³⁶ and pointing out “it was these people who had, more than any other group, experienced a dramatic improvement in their material conditions. They experienced at first-hand what can happen when a government is prepared to stand up for the poor and marginalized.”¹³⁷

Authors glorified Chávez as someone who “inspired a twenty-first century world to fight for justice, to stand with dignity before bullying powers that seek to impose their will on others. He raised his voice when no others would and had no fear of consequence, because he knew that truth was on his side.”¹³⁸ Similarly, another author called Chávez “a leader who embodied the region’s mass yearning for social justice and independence from US dominance.”¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Guardiola-Rivera, March 8, 2012.

¹³⁵ Fox, March 7, 2013.

¹³⁶ Pablo Navarrete, “Hugo Chavez: A Giant Has Left Us,” *Z Magazine*, March 6, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/hugo-ch-vez-a-giant-has-left-us-by-pablo-navarrete/>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Golinger, March 7, 2013.

¹³⁹ Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

When talking about Chávez empowering Venezuelans, authors in *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* also highlighted that this empowerment expanded beyond Venezuela, inspiring others throughout the world who shared Chávez's vision:

“Hugo Chávez galvanized the Venezuelan people into taking centre stage in the country's political process. He was a leader and a teacher but above all someone that demonstrated an unwavering faith in the principle that the people are the best architects of their freedom. In doing so he inspired not only millions of Venezuelans, but millions more around the world who believe in the urgency of building an alternative.”¹⁴⁰

Misrepresentation in the mainstream US media

Both *The Nation* and *Z Magazine* highlighted in their articles that “anti-Chávez mass media campaign systematically distorted events in Venezuela”¹⁴¹ and that even when reporting on Chávez's death the “mainstream editorials continued their media spin, decrying Chávez as a despot who led the country to ruin, amid marginal gains for the poor.”¹⁴²

Four articles out of ten in *Z Magazine* were specifically devoted to critiquing the mainstream media coverage of Chávez's persona, his politics and now his death, reviewing the coverage by such US media as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the CNN, *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, ABC World News, Fox News, CBS Evening News, the *New York Post*, Time magazine, NBC Nightly News, MSNBC, as well as

¹⁴⁰ Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Fox, March 7, 2013.

some British mainstream media, such as the BBC, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Telegraph*.¹⁴³

In the opening sentence of her article in *Z Magazine*, Eva Golinger boldly stated that “most of what you read or hear in mass media about President Hugo Chávez is always negative, his faults exaggerated, his discourse distorted and his achievements ignored. The reality is quite different.”¹⁴⁴ In addition to offering a different kind of Venezuelan reality to the readers, Golinger, as well as other contributors pointed out some of the key flaws in the mainstream media coverage of Chávez and Venezuela.

For example, as Pablo Navarrete suggested, “rather than try to explain Chávez’s appeal to large sectors of the Venezuelan population or understand the process of radical change underway in the country, the West’s media class preferred to focus almost entirely on the figure of Chávez.”¹⁴⁵ Even when the mainstream media made attempts to talk about the people’s support of Chávez and/or their involvement in politics, they still, as Gabriel Hetland reiterated in his piece in *The Nation*, portrayed Chavistas as “mindless drones,”¹⁴⁶ while in reality – and Hetland demonstrated it in his article – Chavistas were very diverse and the movement was multidimensional. The authors argued that the

¹⁴³ “In Death As In Life, Chavez Target Of Media Scorn,” *Z Magazine*, March 7, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/in-death-as-in-life-ch-vez-target-of-media-scorn-by-fair/>; Michael Rissler, “The New York Times And the Death Of President Hugo Chavez,” *Z Magazine*, March 8, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/the-new-york-times-and-the-death-of-president-hugo-chavez-by-michael-rissler/>; Pablo Navarrete, “Chavez Is Dead But the Media Vilification Of Him Is Alive And Kicking,” *Z Magazine*, March 14, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/ch-vez-is-dead-but-the-media-vilificaton-of-him-is-alive-and-kicking-by-pablo-navarrete/>; David Edwards, “Death Of A Bogeyman – The Corporate Media Bury Hugo Chavez,” *Z Magazine*, March 15, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/death-of-a-bogeyman-the-corporate-media-bury-hugo-ch-vez-by-david-edwards/>.

¹⁴⁴ Golinger, March 7, 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Gabriel Hetland, “What Next For Venezuela, After Chavez?” *The Nation*, March 8, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/173267/what-next-venezuela-after-chavez>.

“distorted picture of Venezuela generated by the media”¹⁴⁷ was partially a result of the minimal engagement – as Pablo Navarrete stated, “a deeper understanding of the specificities of the Venezuelan case is a prerequisite for purging prejudice”¹⁴⁸ – but for the most part it was a result of “the US media eagerly playing up” to the interests of the US government who “deemed [Chávez] a threat to US interests.”¹⁴⁹

A vision and a reality of a just society

The Nation and *Z Magazine* wrote with admiration about Chávez’s vision of the “socialism of the twenty-first century” and listed – with gratitude and appreciation – the concrete material and social gains that Venezuelan society achieved because of Chávez’s vision and policies. When talking about Chávez’s vision, several contributors mentioned the model of participatory democracy that “gave voice to those previously excluded from politics”¹⁵⁰ Another author described what he saw in Venezuela during his visit – from government-supported community radio and television stations being run by young people to government-subsidized supermarkets for the poor, and to the free cultural festivals on the streets of Caracas, concluding that “all this felt like being transported to another planet, one where social justice and social dignity were a priority.”¹⁵¹ He concluded the article with an assessment of Chávez’s Venezuela as a “noble experiment... that at its core was seeking to create a society where human needs are prioritized over corporate needs”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ “In Death As In Life,” March 7, 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Golinger, March 7, 2013.

¹⁵¹ Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

¹⁵² Navarrete, March 6, 2013.

Additionally, four articles referred to impressive statistics documenting dramatic poverty reduction rates in Venezuela,¹⁵³ pointing out that “this is not just numbers, this translates into profound changes in the lives of millions of Venezuelans who today eat three meals a day, own their homes and have jobs or access to financial aid.”¹⁵⁴

Finally, one article in *The Nation* and one in *Z Magazine* also discussed the important role race played in Venezuela’s politics and the contribution of Chávez to the struggle against racial discrimination not only in Venezuela but also worldwide. *The Nation* noted that “the esteem in which Chávez was held by the majority of Venezuelans, many of them dark-skinned, was matched by the rage he provoked among the country’s mostly white political and economic elites”¹⁵⁵ – a crucial point that the US mainstream media conveniently avoided. Another piece, by Janvieve Williams Comrie, eloquently titled *President Hugo Chávez and Race: the Shift from Avoidance to Inclusion* emphasized the point that Chávez “represented a refreshing lesson on upholding human rights, rather than talking about them, through his prioritization of African descendent issues and politics, not only within Venezuela, but also outside of Venezuela.”¹⁵⁶ Among other examples illustrating this statement, the author highlighted the fact that Venezuela has been helping Afro descendant communities in New Orleans and the South Bronx since 2005 by “providing [the poor and low income families] with discounted heating oil, free energy saving light bulbs... during the winter months, and providing grants to

¹⁵³ Golinger, March 7, 2013; Hetland, March 8, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Golinger, March 7, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Greg Grandin, “On the Legacy of Hugo Chavez,” *The Nation*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/173212/legacy-hugo-chavez>.

¹⁵⁶ Janvieve Williams Comrie, “President Hugo Chavez and Race: the Shift from Avoidance to Inclusion,” *Z Magazine*, March 7, 2013, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/president-hugo-chavez-and-race-the-shift-from-avoidance-to-inclusion-by-janvieve-williams-comrie/>.

community-based organizations to build self-sustaining institutions such as worker-owned cooperatives, and holistic healthcare for women.”¹⁵⁷

Russian alternative media coverage

Extraordinary person but an autocratic ruler

Novaya Gazeta and *The New Times* described Chávez as a “strong leader”¹⁵⁸ and an “extraordinary person who didn’t leave anyone feeling indifferent about him – for various reasons.”¹⁵⁹ *Novaya Gazeta* also noted that Chávez had “managerial talents and a natural ability to persuade people that he was right.”¹⁶⁰ The newspaper painted a portrait of a quirky, extravagant and groovy man who could didn’t mince words and said what he thought both domestically and on the global arena. Like all other media analyzed in this study, *Novaya Gazeta* recalled how Chávez called George W. Bush a “devil” in 2006, though the way *Novaya Gazeta* phrased the sentence conveyed a mild disapproval of such behavior. *Novaya Gazeta* also mentioned that Chávez “liked art, wrote poetry and short stories... and was extraordinarily hardworking and prolific.”¹⁶¹

At the same time, both newspapers stressed that Chávez was an autocratic ruler because he “built a ‘power vertical,’ bending all branches of power under his will and turning them into institutions that produced top-down decrees.”¹⁶² Both newspapers highlighted the fact that Chávez died on the 60th anniversary of Stalin’s death. *Novaya Gazeta* mentioned it twice in the same article: in the opening and in the closing sentences,

¹⁵⁷ Williams Comrie, March 7, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Yevgeniy Bai, “Chaves Umer, Show Prodolzhaetsya,” *The New Times*, March 6, 2013, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/63753/>.

¹⁵⁹ “Ugo Rafael Chaves Frias. Post Mortem,” *Novaya Gazeta*, March 6, 2013, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/57094.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

pointing out that this coincidence was “symbolic.”¹⁶³ *The New Times* compared the chaos, despair and what it expected to be a fight of pro-Chávez elites for power in post-Chávez Venezuela to what it saw as similar dynamic in post-Stalin USSR.¹⁶⁴ *The New Times* underscored that a sense of uncertainty after the death of a strong leader was a “marker of all autocratic regimes.”¹⁶⁵

Chaos in Venezuela

Both newspapers painted a bleak picture of Venezuela’s political, economic and social life. They presented Chávez’s model of twenty-first century socialism in a negative light, pointing out that his “socio-economic policies implied the strengthening of the government’s role, nationalization of key industries and limiting the role of the private capital.”¹⁶⁶ The results of this “incompetent management”¹⁶⁷ included decreases in oil production, poor functioning of the sea ports, closure of many factories, dramatic increases in imports of food and domestic goods, highest inflation on the continent and rampant crime.¹⁶⁸ *The New Times* presented statistical data for each of these problems. Both newspapers acknowledged that Chávez’s policies improved the lives of the poor Venezuelans. That’s why – explained *Novaya Gazeta* – he enjoyed such wide support among the poor majority. *The New Times*, however, insisted that Chávez’s “generous oil revenue supported social policies”... contributed to the poor masses becoming over

¹⁶³ “Ugo Rafael, “ March 6, 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Bai, March 6, 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ “Ugo Rafael, “March 6, 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.; Aleksei Slavin, “Po Tu Storonu Chavesa,” *The New Times*, March 18, 2013, <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/64260/>.

reliant on Chávez's social support programs.¹⁶⁹ One article in *The New Times* discussed the creation of what it termed "the poverty committees" in the barrios and stated: "The committees received money straight from the budget – this led to the incredible popularity of the president. And to incredible scrounging. Because the heads of these committees often had questionable reputations."¹⁷⁰ The article then quotes one of these committee heads who, as *The New Times* described, "showed up with a gun tucked into the back pocket of his shorts:" "have you seen the posters with the portraits of Chávez and his friend Lukashenko? – asks Julio spitefully – "Well, Lukashenko sent to Venezuela demountable wooden houses. These houses were given to residents of barrios for free but they quickly sold them to our people and went back to barrios. And we re-sold those houses and made good money."¹⁷¹ This quote is illustrative of the overall tone *The New Times* adopted when talking about Venezuela as a corrupt country with counter-productive socio-economic policies and people who did not want to work as a result of such policies. *The New Times* also devoted substantial attention to crime, also connecting it to Chávez's social programs and giving chilling statistics that supported *The New Times'* claim that "Caracas became the most dangerous capital on the planet."¹⁷² In another article that talked about the events in Caracas immediately following the news of Chávez's death, *The New Times* highlighted that fact that all stores were quickly closed down, explaining it in the following way: "there is a rumor going around that now the

¹⁶⁹ Slavin, March 18, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

supply of government subsidized goods will be terminated and the poor masses will start looting the stores.’’¹⁷³

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the coverage of Hugo Chávez’s death by Russian and US mainstream and alternative media shows that socialism as a model of socio-economic organization and perhaps also as an ideology or system of beliefs remains a polarizing topic, especially in the United States. The analysis shows how in the US mainstream media socialism was clearly vilified through vilification of Chávez, his governance and his legacy. Socialism was equated with poverty, crime, instability, bizarre and irrational governance, and inability to effectively manage the country’s vast natural resources. Socialism was also equated with authoritarianism, despotism and mass delusion.

In contrast, the US alternative media praised Chávez’s socialist vision and highlighted the positive improvements in Venezuelan society. They put accent on Chávez’s devotion to social justice, human rights and empowerment of the marginalized communities, arguing that people themselves recognized Chávez’s sincere commitment to making their lives better and thus their devotion was equally sincere and genuine.

Thus, the pictures of socialist Venezuela painted by the US mainstream and alternative media were drastically different. While the former presented to the readers a gloomy place plagued by poverty and rampant crime, the latter described “another planet” with neighborhood assemblies, government-subsidized supermarkets and free cultural festivals on the streets. The differences in how US mainstream and alternative media covered Chávez’s death and made sense of his socialist vision and legacy shows

¹⁷³ Bai, March 6, 2013.

that socialism remains a divisive topic in the United States, and that the lines of ideological division between the mainstream and alternative (though also decidedly leftist) media had not changed since the late 1940s when James Aronson – the founder of the *National Guardian* – wrote the following:

“The *National Guardian* regarded United States policy as the chief source of the world’s problems. It did not as policy advocate socialism as an alternative, but insisted that it be discussed as a possible alternative, and not as a horrid word. It offered a sympathetic presentation of news of the socialist world, while reserving the right to be critical. It held that the peace of the world depended upon an acceptance by the people of the West that socialism was here to stay. Whether the peoples of the Western world liked it or not was irrelevant.”¹⁷⁴

It is also notable how the media that continue discussing socialism as an alternative also focus on the pressing issues of race, gender and class and their indispensable connection to politics. In contrast, mainstream media either avoid these questions altogether or link those in privileged positions – male, educated, rich and white – to what these media articulate as preferred and legitimate social, economic and political models (though, again, in accounts about Chávez’s death both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* avoided mentioning race altogether, though it clearly lingered in the descriptions of Chávez’s supporters and opponents).

Russian mainstream media coverage of Chávez’s death and his legacy resembled the US alternative media accounts in parts where it glorified Chávez as a charismatic leader with the genuine commitment to improve the lives of his people, as well as the leader who “stood up to the West.” At the same time, the coverage by *Izvestia* and *Argumenty i Fakty* also conveyed a sense that all Russia was concerned about after Chávez’s death was the future of its arms contracts and oil projects – a profoundly

¹⁷⁴ Aronson, 281.

pragmatic narrative showing that even though Chávez was “a friend of Russia” and deserved that several streets in Russia be named after him, the profits that were now in danger were the number one priority. One might argue that this finding is not surprising in the context of contemporary global economy and that there are no “true friendships” in politics, yet, for example, the US alternative media did not rush to wonder about what would happen to the heating oil in South Bronx now that Chávez is gone. In fact, Russian mainstream media pointed out themselves that the symbolism of “comradery solidarity” with Chávez only mattered to Russia as long as it guaranteed it access to Venezuela’s markets and oil fields. At the same time, the concerns about the future of trade and business – a profoundly capitalistic narrative – coexisted with the narrative of nostalgia for socialism, as evidenced by the praise given in several reports to Chávez’s management of oil wealth, and a critique of Russia’s more capitalist approach to the management of its own.

These two divergent narratives – one signifying a sharp departure from the communist ideology, and thus from the Cold War discourse, and another one pointing to acute nostalgia for the Soviet past and thus, especially combined with the narrative of anti-Americanism, reminding the readers of the Cold War and the ideological struggle – are articulated within the coverage as one coherent narrative. One could argue that this coexistence of the nostalgia for the Soviet past with rampant consumption and pragmatism is precisely what defines Russia’s post-Cold War identity and this is also exactly what makes it so difficult for the US dominant culture (and mainstream media) to make sense of the post-Cold War Russia, as other cases in this project demonstrate. The

idea of one embracing elements of capitalism and socialism at the same time seems to be beyond the range of political possibilities as they are articulated within the US mainstream political (and media) discourse.

Lastly, like in previous cases, the mainstream US and the alternative Russian media discourses on Chávez and his legacy resembled each other. This finding is not surprising given that both *Novaya Gazeta* and *The New Times* emerged in the early 1990s accompanying the political and ideological trend that condemned and rejected socialism, citing the “failed experiment” of the USSR as a “never again” kind of cautionary tale. The Russian alternative media’s negative descriptions of Chávez’s legacy serve to counter the nostalgia for the Soviet past prominent in the Russian mainstream media accounts, reminding – hence the link of Chávez’s death to the birthday of Stalin – of the dark side of Russia’s socialist past.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this project I approach mass media as crucial sites of meaning making. Moreover – and most importantly – I view meaning making as a process that is inherently political in a sense that the choices that are made in the process of construction of media narratives are never random or accidental. They are a result of mass media being situated within the fields of political, ideological and cultural production, comprising sites of political, ideological and cultural struggle. As media create meanings for their audiences, they draw on a variety of discourses available to them – as Teun van Dijk noted, “the

construction of news is a reconstruction of available discourses”¹ – but the range of available discursive possibilities is contingent upon the historical, political, social and cultural circumstances within which these media function. In turn, the notion of struggle implies that within any given society and at any historical moment there exist competing interpretations of reality, though not all of them are equally powerful in a sense that not all interpretations are viewed as equally legitimate and acceptable by all actors. Thus, when I ask in this project to what extent do the Russian and the US media narratives about the post-Cold War events rely on or depart from the discourse of the Cold War, I am interested in discovering to what extent the powerful discourse of the past continues structuring the narratives – and therefore the meanings – of the present in spite of the fact that the material reality of the post-Cold War present is drastically different from the Cold War past. At the same time, keeping in mind the notion of discursive struggle and contestation, this study aimed to discover what other narratives and discourses comprised the discussions of the events analyzed in this study as different Russian and US media made sense of them and interpreted them for their audiences. From the perspective of Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation, this project examined how various elements of the Cold War discourse were articulated – but also re-articulated – by various media given these media’s national, political and ideological affiliations.

It is also important to note that I engaged with this project as a culturally situated scholar and individual, as someone who Abdul JanMohammed calls a “specular border

¹ Van Dijk, 35.

intellectual.”² The specular border intellectual is “caught between two cultures... [and] subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them.”³ As Karim Karim elaborates, “instead of becoming disoriented and out of place, [a specular border intellectual] uses the vantage point that she occupies to view horizons difficult for others to envision.”⁴ In addition, a specular border intellectual “must disengage personally from allegiances to any one culture, nation, group or institution... to the extent that these are defined in monologic, essentialist terms.”⁵ Indeed, as I think back to this study’s opening story – my puzzlement and confusion over the vastly different stories that the Russian and the US mainstream media told in August of 2008 – I realize that what truly struck me then was not so much the difference in the stories presented but the lack of complexity within the opposing narratives, a similar lack of complexity in presentations of the “political Other” and, consequently, the degree of vilification of the “political Other.” I would argue that it was precisely the comparative perspective – the everyday condition of me “living between the cultures” – that allowed me to question not so much “whose side the truth was on” that summer but the very mode of discursive engagement which, by virtue of being confrontational and uncompromising ran counter to the idea of the post-Cold War world and to my own experiences of living, working and learning in Russia and in the United States in the post-Cold War world. Additionally, growing up in a multi-ethnic family with history of political dissent, I have always been acutely aware of the

² Abdul R. JanMohammed, “Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual,” in *Edward Said: a Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinkler (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

³ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴ Karim H. Karim, “Making Sense of the ‘Islamic Peril.’ Journalism as Cultural Practice,” in *Journalism After September 11*, ed. Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 111.

⁵ JanMohamed, 238.

indispensable connection between culture, politics and power and of the existence of multiple cultures – and thus multiple interpretations and discourses – within any given national culture. To me, Edward Said’s statement that “no culture is understandable without some sense of ... creative provocation from the unofficial to the official”⁶ always rang true. Thus, by bringing alternative media’s narratives into this project, I tried to show that just like no domestic issue can be adequately understood without taking into consideration the dynamic between dominant and alternative voices, no international or global issue can be understood without elaborating this dynamic as well.

There is, however, one caveat that I must acknowledge. I realize and admit that my choice of specific media outlets for the analysis in this project automatically put them in the position of “representing” the “dominant” and the “alternative” in Russia and in the US, which, given the cultural, political and media diversity in both countries, comes off, quite ironically, as essentialist and reductionist. I acknowledge this limitation but also insist that this design nevertheless enriched the project. The inclusion of some of the “sources of creative provocation” – and their narratives – in the analysis allowed elaborating the links between culture, politics and power, as well as determining when, where and how the meanings of the events and issues comprising the post-Cold War world might be re-articulated.

In this project, I asked the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent (if at all) does the discourse of the Cold War inform and structure the narratives created by the Russian and US mainstream and alternative media as they cover the events and controversies examined in this project?

⁶ Said, 7.

RQ2: What other discourses of international affairs and global politics can be identified?

RQ3: How do the ways in which various discourses are articulated within the news media texts analyzed in this project expose the relations of symbolic domination and subordination that constitute the post-Cold War political and media environment, and how do these relations work to construct the identities of the actors involved in the events analyzed in this study?

RQ4: What possibilities and limitations for discursive transformation can be discerned from the analysis of overlaps and contradictions among the narratives, and how do these possibilities and limitations expand the theoretical debate on power struggles between the forces of nationalism and globalization in the post-Cold War era?

My analysis demonstrates that certain elements of the Cold War discourse continue structuring the narratives that different Russian and US media produce as they make sense of various events that occur in the post-Cold War time. The mainstream media in both countries relied particularly strongly on the narrative of "spheres of influence," especially in cases of the war in South Ossetia and the diplomatic debate on the peace resolution in Syria. The US mainstream media articulated this narrative by linking Russia's response to the war in South Ossetia to what was presented as Russia's desire to regain power in the post-Soviet space. Similarly, Russia's support of Assad was linked to Russia's desire to not lose power in the Middle East. In turn, Russian mainstream accounts articulated the narrative of "spheres of influence" by linking US support of Georgia to the American desire to expand NATO eastward (and thus expand

the sphere of influence) in case of the war in South Ossetia. In case of the Syrian debate, Russian mainstream accounts insisted that the peace resolution is nothing more than an attempt by the US and its allies to overthrow Assad and expand their influence in the Middle East.

The narrative of the "spheres of influence" was also articulated by highlighting the "sponsor-client" nature of the relationships between Russia and South Ossetia and Russia and Assad's Syria in US mainstream accounts, while the Russian mainstream accounts emphasized in a similar way the relationships between the US and Georgia and the US and the Syrian opposition. The emphasis on the sponsor-client relationship was strengthened by a recurring narrative of arms sales or arms supplies to the clients, evoking memories of the Cold War "proxy conflicts." The narrative of the "spheres of influence" was also complemented by the one of two "great powers" competing for dominance on the global arena. It is interesting how the articulation of this specific narrative required the US mainstream media to link Russia and its post-Cold War politics to its Soviet/Cold War past by presenting Russia as a "resurgent power" (not "emerging power," for example), by focusing overwhelmingly on Vladimir Putin's KGB past, spying missions, and even comparing Putin to Stalin. These articulations suggest that the mainstream US media find it difficult to make sense of Russia's post-Cold War politics without tying it to Russia's Soviet past. In this case, Russia's Soviet legacy – and the narratives associated with it – present powerful barriers for re-articulation even twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, tying Russia to its Soviet past works to construct the "enemy Other" in nationalist terms as it simultaneously helps cast

the American national identity in terms that affirm the United States' commitment to peace, democracy and justice.

In turn, Russian mainstream media accounts clearly portray the US (or in some instances "the West") as a "great power." However, the recognition of the West's "unmatched power" - a narrative contradicting the discourse of the Cold War as it speaks to the notion of the post-Cold War US hegemony - overlaps with the bitterness over "Russia's lost power" that underlines the articulation of this narrative. The bitterness points to the narrative of Russia's regret over the lost power and the desire to restore the "balance of power," suggesting that the Russian mainstream media construct the narrative of the "Cold War nostalgia." This narrative points explicitly to Russia's desperate and ongoing attempts to redefine its post-Cold War national identity, and to the seeming lack of any meaningful post-Cold War options. The case of the coverage of the death of Hugo Chávez by the Russian mainstream media strengthens this point. The analysis suggests that Russian mainstream media struggle to re-articulate the image of strong post-Cold War Russia without tying it – implicitly or explicitly – to the Soviet legacy, as the narrative of praising Chávez's socialist politics as a role model that Russia should have followed in the 1990s (instead of embracing "the Western capitalist vision") demonstrate. Thus, while the US mainstream media present a picture of reality where the only model of powerful Russia is the one of Soviet Russia against which the US identity as an "indispensable nation" fighting for democracy and world peace can be constructed, the Russian mainstream media reinforce this narrative by offering a picture of reality where the national identity of post-Cold War Russia is defined as fundamentally anti-US or anti-

West.

The discourse of the Cold War also manifested itself in the ways in which the US mainstream media juxtaposed democracy and authoritarianism in their accounts, tying democracy and those who embraced it to “good” and authoritarianism to “evil,” while the Russian mainstream media condemned American democracy as profoundly hypocritical. In case of the war in South Ossetia, the US media presented Georgia as democratic and Russia as autocratic, while Russian mainstream media presented Georgia as an authoritarian regime masquerading as a democracy and in doing so following the lead of the United States. In case of the Syrian debate, the US mainstream media highlighted that the US and its allies supported the Syrian opposition's demands for democracy while Russia was supporting autocratic Assad. The Russian mainstream accounts, in turn, insisted that the Western "democracy talk" was nothing more than an excuse for intervention. In case of Chávez's death, the US mainstream media emphasized the link between socialism and authoritarianism, juxtaposing authoritarianism to democracy and thus presenting the picture of reality where socialism and democracy can not coexist.

One of the most striking discoveries in this project was the incorporation of the discourse of the “threat of Islamic terrorism” into the discussions of the diplomatic debate on the peace resolution in Syria. On the one hand, the incorporation of this discourse suggests a departure from the discourse of the Cold War insofar as it both introduces a new “centerpiece” of global politics and presents a “common ground” (or a common enemy?) that can take Russia-US relations out of what one foreign policy analyst termed

a “Cold War autopilot.”⁷ On the other hand, however, a bigger question arises of whether the substitution of one security discourse with another really brings any meaningful change to the very nature of discussions of global politics in the post-Cold War world, especially if one accepts the argument that the forces of globalization are replacing nationalism as a guiding principle for conducting – and discussing – global politics. In fact, several scholars pointed out the conceptual similarities between the two security discourses.⁸ In his critique of Samuel Huntington’s thesis of the “clash of civilizations,” Edward Said noted how the thesis – and the overwhelming attention paid to the “Islamic civilization” in it – “is in fact a recycled version of the Cold War thesis that conflicts in today’s and tomorrow’s world will remain not economic or social in essence but ideological... In effect then, the Cold War continues, but this time on many fronts, with many more serious and basic systems of values and ideas like Islam and Confucianism struggling for ascendancy and even dominance over the West.”⁹ Thus, while it may seem like the discourse of the “threat of radical Islam” presented a departure from the Cold War discourse when it came specifically to Russia-US relations, the incorporation of this discourse in texts about the debate on the peace resolution in Syria did not advance the confrontational, “us versus them” framework for presenting and interpreting global conflicts. This finding calls for a further deeper examination of the role, meaning and roots of binary thinking as a way of interpreting reality and global politics. In some ways, binary logic underlines what Clifford Geertz termed “totalizing conceptions,” identifying

⁷ Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁸ Said; Andrew Padgett and Beatrice Allen, “Fear’s Slave: The Mass Media and Islam After September 11,” *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy*, no. 109 (November 2003): 32–40.

⁹ Said, 3.

moving away from this way of thinking as one of the greatest intellectual challenges of the post-Cold War era. Interestingly, Geertz denies mass media the ability to present reality (or realities?) in a meaningful way, as he asks “surely, we are not reduced... to thought-bites and wondering attentions of the evening news?” before formulating his call for a “new way of thinking” about politics and the world in the post-Cold War era. Yet the media environment is also quite complex and media not only play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world around us, but different media play different roles and assume different goals in this process.

The ways in which the alternative media both in Russia and in the US attempted to rearticulate the meanings of the events in the case studies demonstrated both the alternative ways of thinking about the events in the post-Cold War time and the persistence of the Cold War discourse. On the one hand, alternative media elaborated some of the aspects of the events in each case study that the mainstreams media omitted: the human tragedy aspect of the war in South Ossetia as well as the connections between the political elites of the states involved in the conflict critical for understanding of the conflict’s dynamic; the complex nature of the Syrian opposition in case of the Syrian debate; the emphasis that Chavez’s political and economic vision placed on the questions of social justice and the ways in which this vision and politics helped the disadvantaged not only in Venezuela but in other countries too, including the United States. This is not surprising as, once again, these media’s explicitly articulated goal is to challenge the mainstream narratives by, among other things, focusing on topics that are absent from the mainstream accounts. On the other hand, most of the alternative media’s narratives

focused on critique of the narratives offered by the mainstream media, either implicitly – by critiquing the policies that the mainstream media reinforced in their accounts – or explicitly, by engaging in critique of specific mainstream media texts. By doing so, the alternative media inevitably engaged with the same discourses that they critiqued, possibly perpetuating them further. On the one hand, this is not surprising as it shows precisely how ideologies work. Stuart Hall explains this dynamic by pointing out that “even journalists who write within the muckraking tradition often seem to be inscribed by an ideology to which they do not consciously commit themselves, and which, instead, ‘writes them.’”¹⁰ On the other hand, it raises – once again – the question of how could one re-articulate a particular discourse without simultaneously relying on the very same structures that contribute to perpetuation of this discourse.

Another interesting finding that spans all three case studies is that generally the narratives of the US mainstream media shared several similarities with the narratives in Russian alternative media and the narratives in the Russian mainstream media shared similarities with the US alternative media. This dynamic itself is reflective of the Cold War ideological set up where the dissent in each of the great powers aligned closer with the dominant ideology of the opponent. While the post-Cold War politics is not driven by the same type of ideological struggle, the symmetry between the narratives advanced by domestic dissent and foreign opponents is striking. This suggests that while the substance of the Cold War antagonism had disappeared in the post-Cold War period, the form, or the style of discursive engagement stayed the same. Interestingly, some international

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (June 1, 1985): 91–114.

relations scholars point out a similar trend in Russia-US relations. For example, Richard Sakwa suggests that the post-Cold War era “is one of a ‘cold peace’,” where a “cold peace” is a “mimetic cold war.”¹¹ Sakwa argues that “while a cold war accepts the logic of conflict in the international system and between certain protagonists in particular, a cold peace reproduces the behavioral patterns of a cold war but suppresses acceptance of the logic of behavior.”¹² I would argue that these “behavioral patterns” are supported by and articulated through the combinations of various narratives that are informed by the discourse of the Cold War. The narratives that support these patterns are also nationalistic at their core as the discussions revolve around questions of national interest and international competition.

The ways in which various elements of the Cold War discourse work in Russian and US mainstream and alternative media texts to create meanings of events and construct the identities of the actors involved bring to mind Karl Marx’s discussion about the power of tropes from the past to structure the politics of the present. Marx wrote:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.”¹³

¹¹ Richard Sakwa, “The Cold Peace: Russo-Western Relations as a Mimetic Cold War,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (March 2013): 203–24, doi:10.1080/09557571.2012.710584, 205.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 595.

Marx's reference to the "revolutionary crisis" as a moment when the "borrowing of names, battle slogans and costumes" occurs is particularly profound, as it points precisely to what seems to be the paradox of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War world: the mismatch between the material reality of geopolitics and the discourses constructed to make sense of geopolitics. Moreover, the notion of the "revolutionary crisis" takes us back to the immediate aftermath of the Cold War – the 1990s – when the end of the Cold War led to what Zaki Laïdi called the "universal crisis of meaning."¹⁴

"Our feeling of an exceptionally strong change in the world order after the fall of the Berlin Wall is coupled with our equally enormous inability to interpret it, to give it meaning. Though all the upheavals we experience daily can have several meanings, nothing indicates they have a meaning, if by meaning we imply the triple notion of foundation, unity and final goal: 'foundation' meaning the basic principle on which a collective project depends; 'unity' meaning that 'world images' are collected into a coherent plan of the whole; and 'end' or 'final goal', meaning projection towards an elsewhere that is deemed to be better."¹⁵

One could argue that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 gave the world a new meaning and a "triple notion of foundation, unity and final goal." Yet in cases analyzed in this project the grand narrative of the "war on terror" does not seem to be of central importance, even though it appears in the discussions of the Syrian debate. The roots of the disconnect that manifests itself in often diametrically opposite articulations of events in Russian and US mainstream and alternative media may be indeed located in the unresolved "crisis of meaning" of the post-Cold War and pre-9/11 decade. Have we truly understood and internalized the meaning of "post" in "post-Cold War"? An interesting theoretical parallel is instructive here. Eric King Watts discusses the meaning of "post" in

¹⁴ Zaki Laïdi, *A World Without Meaning: A Crisis of Meaning in International Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

rhetoical formulation of “postracial America.”¹⁶ He suggests that in moments when “post” gets added to any term as a way to signify “the liberation of previously unheard voices and unseen bodies, the ‘post-’ comes equipped with and resonates with ideations of freedom, disorder, and closure – something ‘ends’ and something else ‘breaks’ out.”¹⁷ However, simply “post-ing” something as a way of imagining it being “past-tense” does not help to break from the issues that the term being “post-ed” carries. Adding “post” to “race” in the moment of “spectacular celebration regarding the emergence of ‘postracial America’”¹⁸ (the election of President Barack Obama) did not solve the “race problem” because postmodernity failed to deconstruct “race” on the first place. Similarly, one could argue, adding “post” to “Cold War” in the moment of celebration (the collapse of the USSR) did not solve the “Cold War problem.” Watts adds another dimension to the discussion by stating that the “break” put between “post” and “race” was also a “wound.”¹⁹ The wound introduced “inconvenience” associated with “an awful and intimate angst sitting in the gut of those folks who sensed deep down in their organic psyches that “postracial America meant a ‘post-White’ America.”²⁰ This idea of inconvenience relates well to a similar inconvenience of encountering a post-Cold War “world disorder” instead of a much more desired “new world order.”²¹ It is the convenience of order that makes the grand narrative of the Cold War so appealing both in conducting foreign policy and in creating media narratives about it. In fact, several

¹⁶ Eric King Watts, “The (Nearly) Apocalyptic Politics of “Postracial” America: Or “This is Now the United States of Zombieland,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 3 (2010): 210 – 253.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Henry A. Grunwald, “The Post-Cold War Press: A New World Needs a New Journalism,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 12–16, doi:10.2307/20045619.

authors wrote about the convenience of the Cold War discourse. For example, John Mearsheimer wrote in August 1990 that “we may... wake up one day lamenting the loss of the order that the Cold War gave to the anarchy of international relations.”²² Similarly, though twenty years later, Steven Belletto remarked that “in the post-Cold War world, there have been the sense that despite the domestic scares and threats of nuclear destruction, the Cold War was oddly comforting because it was somehow manageable and known: its two clearly defined antagonists could be counted on to play by certain rules.”²³ This idea of convenience, combined with the desperate need to find meaning in times of political and intellectual crisis might give a clue as to why the Russian and the US media, including at times the alternative media, continue drawing from the toolbox they inherited from the Cold War era when they struggle to make sense of events that expose the disagreements between the old-time Cold War rivals but that take place in the environment that is drastically different from the one during the Cold War.

This project analyzed media texts. However, what makes this analysis important is the argument that ultimately the narratives comprising these texts influence in one way or another how these media’s audiences view the post-Cold War world and make sense of global politics. One of the key limitations of this study is that it took the media texts that it analyzed out of the context of the hybrid media environment within which they exist in the post-Cold War era of social media, YouTube, blogs and comment sections on the digital platforms of traditional media. While audiences always had the power of

²² John J. Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 2 (August 1990): 35-50, 35.

²³ Steven Belletto, *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 130.

interpreting the narratives produced by the media in their own unique ways, the post-Cold War media and communications environment presents actors other than institutional media with opportunities to create alternative interpretations of events and disseminate them worldwide through “horizontal communication networks.”²⁴ This condition takes the question of the Cold War discourse in the post-Cold War world onto a new level, opening up several avenues for further inquiry. First, it would be important to examine the dynamic between media texts and audience-produced texts to compare, for example, the discussions of global politics that the institutional media (both mainstream and alternative) offer to the discussions unfolding in online forums or blogging platforms or even in the comment sections of those institutional media. To what extent are the narratives produced by the institutional media similar or different from the audience-produced ones? Does the discourse of the Cold War inform the audience-produced narratives in the same way as it informs the narratives produced by institutional media? How do the similarities and differences between media and audience-generated narratives complicate the meaning-making terrain in the post-Cold War environment?

Another important aspect of the hybrid media environment is that not only the lines between the producers and consumers are blurring but the lines between various formats of media texts are blurring too. In the post-Cold War media environment, audiences easily and naturally navigate among multiple media as they search – often simultaneously – for information, news and entertainment. The notion of the multimedia environment calls for expanding textual and discourse analysis of any phenomenon

²⁴ Manuel Castells, “Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society,” *International Journal of Communication [Online]* 1, no. 1 (February 8, 2007): 238–66.

beyond strictly one format. Thus, an important direction to pursue in order to expand and deepen the analysis of the significance of the Cold War discourse in informing the discussions – and the public understanding – of global politics in the post-Cold War world would involve the analysis of popular culture texts as well as the texts produced within the so-called infotainment format.

As I finalize this project, the war in Ukraine continues to unfold and the Russia-US relations continue to deteriorate. Almost every week I see an article come out with the term “Cold War” in the headline.²⁵ I hear news of toughening of sanctions on Russia and of NATO forces conducting military exercises in Latvia, thirty five miles from the Russian border.²⁶ I also hear news of Russia allocating more and more resources from its already shrinking budget to increasing its military might, including the reassessment of the capabilities of its nuclear arsenal.²⁷ I also observe – from consuming Russian media – how the anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric is growing stronger. I keep asking myself, how did we get here? What and where have we missed? How, to paraphrase Karl Marx, did we allow the spirits of the past to haunt us to the point when discourse is increasingly turning into reality? Most importantly, what, if anything, can be done and what could be the role of media in this process? Through this project I hoped to show that

²⁵ See, for example, “The next Cold War May Have Already Begun,” *The National*, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/the-next-cold-war-may-have-already-begun>; Jonathan Beale, “Moving Ever Closer to a New Cold War,” *BBC News*, accessed June 24, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33237439>.

²⁶ Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers, “NATO Refocuses on the Kremlin, Its Original Foe,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/world/europe/nato-returns-its-attention-to-an-old-foe-russia.html>.

²⁷ Jonathan Tirone, “Vienna Forum Hears Warnings of a New U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Race,” *Bloomberg.com*, accessed June 23, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-24/u-s-risks-weapons-race-as-russia-adds-warheads-senate-stalls>.

the opportunities for discursive re-articulation can be located on the intersections of multiple – and different – discourses. I tried to use my vantage point of a “specular border intellectual” to demonstrate that multiple – and competing – interpretations of reality manifest themselves in stories that various media tell us. However, the central problem seems to be that these media “talk past each other,” drawing borders between “us” and “them,” between “good” and “evil,” “right” and “wrong.” All of this is happening in the “era of globalization” when communication channels are plenty and open, and when power – including discursive power – is becoming more and more diffused. Thus, one of the key opportunities for strategic intervention lies, perhaps trivially, in education, and most importantly, in diversification of media education. Diversification includes internationalization but is not limited to it. In other words – and my engagement with alternative media in this project aimed to stress this point – understanding of a foreign Other is never complete without the understanding of a domestic Other. The era of globalization calls for a media education that would emphasize the interplay of local and global, and the roles of history, politics and power within this interplay. It is my hope that such approach would help us deal with global crises in ways that would enable us to turn the moments of emergency into the moments of emergence.

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