RUSSIA’S “SOFT POWER” STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

On October 30, 2013 the business-oriented Forbes.com put Russian President Vladimir Putin at the top of its list of “The World’s Most Powerful People,” unseating United States President Barack Obama. Forbes said its editors made the decision based on the power of the person over a large number of people, the financial resources controlled by the person, their power in multiple spheres, and the degree to which they actively use their power.

Revisionist media commentary immediately followed the report, pointing out that Russia remains a regional power, that its economy, while improving, still ranks fifth in the world, significantly trailing those of the United States and China. The ranking also appeared to be, at least partially, a reaction to Russia’s skillful shift in diplomacy on the Syrian conflict, by which it proposed a plan to destroy the Assad regime’s chemical weapons. Others noted that Forbes is a conservative publication, and part of its editors’ motivation might have been the desire to criticize a Democratic President.

It was, nevertheless, a stunning turn-about for Russia’s President, an indication of how quickly evaluations of a leader and his or her country can shift, based on their perceived influence. That perceived influence is a component of soft power, the ability to attract or co-opt others by diplomacy and other non-coercive methods.
In this thesis I will examine Russia, and Vladimir Putin’s, use of soft power. This study will show that Putin and his government are in the process of rebuilding Russia’s soft power and public diplomacy instruments that collapsed along with the Soviet Union, and that they have had some success.

This study also will show, however, that soft power consists of more than a temporary shift in opinion on a leader’s power and influence, that it ultimately is rooted in a nation’s values and its civil society, and that Russia still must allow those roots to grow, in order to fully exercise its soft power.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world countries still go to war, cities are laid waste, and blood is shed. This is “hard power:” the use of military or economic coercion in order to force another country to do what you want. Hard power, the “carrots and sticks of economic and military might,” as Joseph S. Nye, former Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University calls it,¹ is the traditional tool for a nation to exercise its will. Russia, for example, with approximately 1,480 deployed strategic nuclear warheads,² has significant hard power.

War, however, is expensive in both lives and treasure and governments today face challenges that cannot be met with armies or economic sanctions alone. Non-state actors, for example, wield power once retained only by nations, using terrorism and asymmetrical warfare to attack enemy governments and their citizens. Political groups, corporations, terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, and even powerful individuals employ digital media to spread their views and ideologies worldwide. Nations must compete with each other for economic advantage and international influence.

In this rapidly changing environment nations have another resource to help them attain their objectives: “soft power.” As defined by the man who invented the term, Joseph S. Nye, Jr.,


it is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.”³
That attraction is based, Nye says, on a country’s values, culture and policies. The term “soft power” has become an official part of the lexicon of international relations, as well as a strategic objective of many nations, including the United States and Russia.

Russia’s main foreign policy document, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, approved by President Putin on February 12, 2013, devotes a section to soft power and its importance to the nation’s relations with other countries:

“Soft power, a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations.”⁴

President Putin has referred to soft power numerous times. In July 2012, addressing ambassadors and other representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Mr. Putin chided his diplomats for not sufficiently mastering the use of soft power: “Our diplomats are well versed in the traditional and familiar methods of international relations, if not masters in this field, but as far as using new methods goes, ‘soft power’ methods, for example, there is still much to reflect on.”⁵

Putin, quoted on the official Kremlin website [http://www.kremlin.ru/](http://www.kremlin.ru/), went on to define soft power much as Nye does: “Let me remind you that ‘soft power’ is all about promoting


one’s interests and policies through persuasion and creating a positive perception of one’s country, based not just on its material achievements but also its spiritual and intellectual heritage.”

In practice, however, Russia’s concept of soft power is significantly different from that described by Nye. In this thesis I will define those differences, trace their historical origins, and explore the implications of Russia’s approach for its international image.

President Putin and many of Russia’s top officials and politicians admit that Russia has an image problem. In February 2013 I traveled to Moscow to conduct a series of interviews with Russian government officials and opinion makers in order to hear first-hand their views on Russia’s soft power. In an interview with Konstantin Kosachev, head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Russia’s key soft power agency, he told me: “Right now the image of Russia is, in some way objectively, negative. In some way it is discredited.”

Public opinion polls bear this out. The Pew Research Foundation’s Global Attitudes Project shows that citizens in a number of countries have an unfavorable view of Russia. In the 2012 survey, for example, seventy two percent of Japanese queried said they had an unfavorable view of Russia. Forty percent of Americans held that view. Among Chinese thirty eight percent of those polled responded negatively.

Russia’s leadership is actively examining its soft power resources, building and reviving institutions to employ them, and devoting significant financial resources to that purpose. This thesis will show that several key factors are impeding Russia’s utilization of its soft power resources, complicating Moscow’s attempt to attract support for its policies around the world.

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6 Konstantin Kosachev, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 21, 2013.

Those factors include the lack of an organized systemic structure for employing Russia’s soft power resources as a result of the dismantling of public diplomacy institutions that existed in the Soviet Union; Russia’s deep ambivalence and cynicism about soft power as practiced in the West; the Russian government’s state-centric approach to soft power which emphasizes institutions over individuals; the pursuit of government policies that clash with the image Russia wants to project; Russia’s traditional reluctance to “explain itself” to the rest of the world and to blame outside forces for what President Putin calls a “one-sided” portrayal of Russia; and, crucially, its lack of a cohesive set of agreed-upon national values that could find resonance among and attract citizens of other countries - that “spiritual and intellectual heritage” to which Vladimir Putin refers.

For some Russian officials soft power equals image management – “branding” that can “sell” a nation internationally. As Alexander Smirnov, the Kremlin’s public relations and communications chief, said of the United States in a Moscow interview that I conducted with him in February: “If we are talking about democracy, it’s the most expensive brand in the world that you have created. It’s a million times more expensive than Coca-Cola.”

More than twenty years after the end of the Soviet Union, Russia has no “brand.” It continues to struggle to define its political and cultural values – values that could attract support from citizens of other countries and further Russia’s foreign policy objectives.

This study of Russia’s use of “soft power” is based on existing literature on the subject, although there is comparatively little written about the subject in books. Some academic research

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8 Alexander Smirnov, personal interview with Jill Dougherty, Moscow, February 18, 2013.
is being done on the subject and I have included citations from significant reports. The most current and significant data comes from the interviews that I conducted in Moscow and in the United States from November, 2012 to April, 2013 with key officials responsible for Russia’s, and the United States’, use of soft power. In those interviews I sought answers to the following questions:

1. How does Russia define soft power?
2. What are its goals?
3. Who is the audience?
4. Is this approach succeeding in furthering Russia’s foreign policy objectives?

The answers show that Russia’s definition of soft power, although it embodies much of the rhetoric of American and Western concepts, is more utilitarian and transactional in nature. Russian officials see it more as a tool to be wielded by the state to reach certain goals which, up to now, have been narrowly focused on increasing investment in the country and retaining educated Russians who have fled the country for opportunity abroad. In addition, in contrast to the American approach, Russia’s soft power strategy is focused not only on international audiences but on Russia’s “near abroad,” i.e. countries of the former Soviet Union as well as on Russia itself.

Those limited objectives have not succeeded to the extent that the Russian government hoped, especially in its attempt to attract foreign investment. As the U.S. State Department’s 2012 “Investment Climate Statement” notes: “Despite the Russian government's stated goals of combating corruption and improving the investment climate, independent organizations continue to rank Russia as one of the most difficult major economies in which to do business.”

Large amounts of capital have left the country in the past few years, the State Department report says: “Russia experienced a net capital outflow of $133.9 billion in 2008 and $56.9 billion in 2009. In 2010, capital outflow slowed to $33.6 billion, but has accelerated again in 2011, and is expected to reach about $85 billion for the year.”

In its foreign policy, Russia is better able to explain what it does not want rather than what it does. The lack of desire to promote its values and ideals undercuts Russian diplomacy, creating confusion among other countries about Russia’s true intentions. A primary example is Syria, where Moscow continues to resist any attempt to pressure President Bashar al-Assad to resign and end the conflict, justifying its actions almost exclusively on a blanket principle of the unassailability of national sovereignty.

Whether or not Russia succeeds in employing its soft power is important and has implications for the world. In spite of losing land mass and population after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it remains a nuclear power as well as a crucial regional and international player, with cultural and linguistic ties to its former Soviet neighbors, as well as significant societal and cultural resources that could serve as the basis of an effective soft power strategy. What Russians think, what their values are as a nation does matter. Today’s Russia is in the process of defining its soft power resources but soft power grows out of a nation’s culture, its domestic values and policies, and out of its foreign policy. It cannot be built from the top-down.
CHAPTER 2
DEFINING “SOFT POWER”

The term “soft power” was introduced by Harvard University’s international relations scholar Joseph S. Nye, Jr. in his 1990 book, Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power.

As he further refined the concept in his 2004 book, Soft Power, The Means to Success in World Politics, soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.”¹

The aim, he says, is “getting others to want the outcomes you want” by “co-opt(ing) people rather than coerc(ing) them.”² Although, conceptually, it is the antipode of “hard” power, i.e. military power, the ultimate aim is to induce others to do what you want or, as Nye puts it, “to shape the preferences of others.”³ If it is done successfully it reduces the need to employ expensive “hard power” options. As Nye put it in a recent article in Foreign Affairs magazine: “If you can add the soft power of attraction to your toolkit, you can economize on carrots and sticks.”⁴

Soft power uses a “currency,” Nye says: “an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values.”⁵ The soft power of a country, he

¹ Nye, Jr., Soft Power, x.
² Ibid., 5.
³ Ibid.
notes, “rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others),
its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when
they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)”

Soft power is a broad concept that can include everything from the way a country’s treats
the civil rights of its citizens to its mass media, its national language, its culture – highbrow or
lowbrow - its film industry, e.g. Hollywood, even its cuisine. It arises organically from the
cultural accretion of a particular people. Although a government can utilize its soft power to
induce others to support its policies or actions, governments do not create soft power; people do.

The Cold War, as John Lewis Gaddis points out in his book on that almost half-century
standoff between the Soviet Union and the West, is a prime example of the powerful role that
ideas, ideals and morality can play in international relations. “The Cold War,” Gaddis writes,
“may well be remembered, then, as the point at which military strength, a defining characteristic
of ‘power’ itself for the past five centuries, ceased to be that. By the time the Cold War ended,
the capacity to fight wars no longer guaranteed the influence of states, or even their continued
existence, within the international system.”

“Real power,” he maintains, “rested, during the final decade of the Cold War, with
leaders like John Paul II, whose mastery of intangibles – of such qualities as courage, eloquence,
imagination, determination, and faith – allowed them to expose disparities between what people believed and the systems under which the Cold War had obliged them to live.”

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6 Ibid., 11.


8 Ibid., 196.
The American Concept

Although many nations employ soft power the United States has developed the modern concept the furthest, both in its international relations and in academic studies of soft power diplomacy and therefore in this thesis I will use the American understanding and approach as the yardstick against which I will examine Russia’s soft power. The term “soft power” is little more than two decades old but the underlying principle of soft power – attraction rather than coercion – has existed for centuries. The Declaration of the Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, used what it defined as universal human values to win international support for its revolt against the King of England.

“When in the course of human events,” it read, “it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another…a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

America’s principles, the Declaration stated, were not unique to the colonists of the thirteen original states but were part of mankind’s heritage: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it went on, “it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government.”

That argument resonated with countries like France, Poland and Russia, which supported the American cause against England, and the United States, to this day, uses what it claims are
its core values to further its foreign policy objectives. Ronald Reagan’s robust rhetorical support of human rights is just one example of America’s soft power projection.

“Our creed as Americans,” Reagan said in 1986, “is that these rights—these human rights—are the property of every man, woman, and child on this planet and that a violation of human rights anywhere is the business of free people everywhere.”

President Barack Obama described the United States as a “beacon of hope around the world,” echoing the Declaration of Independence in his 2012 Human Rights Day proclamation: “Men and women everywhere long for the freedom to determine their destiny, the dignity that comes with work, the comfort that comes with faith, and the justice that exists when governments serve their people. These dreams are common to people all around the world, and the values they represent are universal.”

American culture, although reviled by some, resonates around the world, carrying the country’s soft power with it. As German editor Josef Joffe, cited by Joseph S. Nye Jr., notes: “U.S. culture, low-brow or high, radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman Empire – but with a novel twist. Rome and Soviet Russia’s cultural sway stopped exactly at their military borders. America’s soft power, though, rules over an empire on which the sun never sets.”

Soft power is not a tool or instrument that a government wields. It is a “resource,”

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according to the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy, and the mechanism that seeks to “leverage” soft power is public diplomacy.  

**Soft Power’s Mechanism: Public Diplomacy**

The term ‘public diplomacy’ first was used in 1965 by Dean Edmund Gullion of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. According to a short history of United States public diplomacy on the website of the Public Diplomacy Alumni Association (formerly the United States Information Agency Alumni Association,) Guillion used the term “public diplomacy” as a way distancing the U.S. government’s attempts to promote its polices internationally from “propaganda” and its negative connotations.

The U.S. government used propaganda as America entered the First World War. In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (CPI), employing the advertising genius George Creel to spearhead an unprecedented campaign to rally Americans to support the war effort and an equally effective campaign to demonize the enemy. Creel, however, refused to call it “propaganda,” describing it as “the world’s greatest adventure in advertising.” The stigma of “propaganda,” however, clung to the operation and when its mission was done, just after the war ended, Wilson abolished the CPI.

Public diplomacy is a “transparent means,” Nye says, by which a country communicates with the citizens of other countries and is aimed at “informing and influencing audiences

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overseas for the purpose of promoting the national interest and advancing its foreign policy goals.”

As such, it is part of relations between countries carried out by diplomats or representatives of the given country. It can include educational exchange programs; international visitor programs; language training; cultural events and exchanges; radio and television broadcasting; and Internet websites. Its purpose is to project the country’s image or reputation to the target country in order to influence public attitudes. It is a kind of diplomatic “tilling of the earth,” to influence opinions in the “receiving” country about policies or actions of the “sending” country.

The State Department’s website says the mission of American public diplomacy “is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”

As part of its outreach it lists communications with international audiences, cultural programming, academic grants, educational exchanges, international visitor programs” and – in an increasingly important post-9/11 area – “U.S. Government efforts to confront ideological support for terrorism.”

Significantly, it notes that “public diplomacy activities often present many differing views as represented by private American individuals and organizations in addition to official

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U.S. Government views.”\[^{16}\]

Amidst the rapid evolution of digital media and other forms of communications, traditional public diplomacy is giving way to what scholars and government officials refer to the “New Public Diplomacy,” in which non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations, international organizations, universities, religious organizations, multi-national companies, even influential websites operate in what the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy describes as a “fluid global environment of new issues and contexts.”

These groups most often communicate through the Internet and “new media,” such as Facebook and Twitter – the “fluid environment” par excellence - and Joseph S. Nye Jr. maintains that “private sources of soft power are likely to become increasingly important in the global information age.”\[^{17}\]

This presents a challenge to governments’ power to project its message. In a personal interview at the State Department Tara D. Sonenshine, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs said that “Public diplomacy in an Internet age means publics are talking to each other and sometimes cutting out the government. Now, smart public diplomacy means, as a government, you pull up a chair at the table and you join the conversation, or else you’re just watching it. But most countries practicing public diplomacy today are still trying to figure out where the citizen conversation fits.”\[^{18}\]

**The Russian Idea**

The Russian-language terminology of “soft power” and “public diplomacy” contains

\[^{16}\] Ibid.,

\[^{17}\] Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 17.

nuances that differ from the Western understanding of those concepts. “Soft power” is most commonly translated as “мягкая сила” (pronounced “myakhaya seela.”)

As Alexey Dolinsky notes, “soft power” also has been translated into Russian as “мягкая мощь” (“myakhaya moshch”) or “гибкая сила” (“geebkaya seela”). Another variant is “мягкая власть.” (“myakhaya vlast”).

In each case “мягкая” signifies “soft,” with approximately the same connotations as in English. “Сила,” however, and “власть” have different implications: “сила” means “strength,” “force,” and “power.” “Власть” means “power” but it also is used as a synonym for governmental power, “authority” or “rule.” Dolinsky believes “vlast” seems to be “closer to the original meaning…since it implies an ability to make others do what one wants.”

In yet another layer of Slavic linguistic complexity, “public diplomacy” can be translated with three different expressions, each with its own unique meaning, as Roman Grishenin, Deputy Executive Director of the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund explained to me in an interview at the Fund’s Moscow Headquarters: “Публичная дипломатия” (“publichnaya diplomatiya”); “общественная дипломатия” (“obshestvennaya diplomatiya”); and “народная дипломатия” (“narodnaya diplomatiya”).

“Publichnaya diplomatiya” is closest to the traditional Western concept of public diplomacy, i.e., initiatives and programs developed and carried out by a government. The term “obshestvennaya diplomatiya” puts the accent on initiatives by civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. “Narodnaya diplomatiya” was a term used in the Soviet Union and implies people-to-people contacts.

In addition, as Alexey Dolinsky points out, the Russian language also contains a second...
meaning of people’s diplomacy: diplomacy at the level of public organizations such as NGO’s. “It generated a dangerous confusion.” Dolinsky says. “Even certain experts are convinced that public diplomacy is no more than a dialogue at the level of non-government organizations.”

These shades of nuance are significant to the Russian ear, especially for Russians who grew up under the Communist system. As Maria Lipman, chair of the Carnegie Moscow Center’s Society and Regions Program explained to me in an interview in Washington, D.C., the Soviet Union was “highly verbalized,” with the Central Committee of the Communist Party’s ideological department issuing precise phrasing for that ideology. “There was the right way to think and to talk – about all kinds of issues.”

Like the United States, Russia’s soft-power history began centuries ago with its language, culture, music and religion but, unlike the United States, which believes that its values of freedom and democracy have universal applicability, Russia’s values traditionally have been directed inward, toward uniting the nation and its people.

America defines itself and its values in largely political terms: all people are created equal; every person has the right to vote and participate in the nation’s political life; the legal system should treat every American equally; a person is considered innocent until proven guilty, etc.

Russia defines itself, for the most part, in cultural terms and it often depicts its culture as unique. In an interview in Moscow with officials from The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund the Deputy Executive Director, Roman Grishenin, told me “we have our own culture, our own system of values; we have our own understanding of what the state should be and which functions it should bear and what patriotism and loving the motherland should look

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20 Alexey Dolinsky, telephone interview by author, October 11, 2012.

like. If we find words to tell the West and East about this, that will be Russia’s soft power.”

Grishenin conceded “it’s difficult to explain” but he said, “There is something that unites us.” Ivan Ksenofontov, the Fund’s PR-Director, added: “Some things we just understand with our soul.”

The concept of the “Russian soul” is closely tied to the Russian national unifying idea. The quest for that National Idea, the basic ideals that define what it means to be a Russian, began under the Czars and, at its core, is it focused on what makes the Russian people unique. As Vadim Volkov writes, the Russian Idea “gave answers to several key questions: In which way is Russia different from other nations? How should this difference be translated into its political and economic constitution? Who are Russia’s allies, and who are its enemies?” In the late 1800’s it found that Idea in “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationhood.”

The National Idea is not exclusively philosophical, however. It does have political implications: “The Russian Idea provided societal integration and justified most of the grand mobilization projects throughout Russian history,” Volkov writes. The “triad,” of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationhood,” he says, “is quite simple and boils down to one general principle: the universal is always higher than the particular.”

This is a far cry from America’s rugged individualism and its historical reverence for individual freedom. Russia’s National Idea, Volkov says, “means that spiritual concerns are higher and more meaningful than material ones; collective values and goals are superior to individual ones; and international or multinational identities take precedence over narrow ethno-

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22 Ivan Ksenofontov, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 21, 2013.

national ones.”

Russia has found it true meaning, Volkov maintains, when facing “a great challenge, a mission of grand historical importance, or a catastrophe (‘times of trouble.’)

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution ended Czarist rule but Soviet Communism, too, had an ideology. Marxism/Leninism trumpeted a new world in which the working class would rule, and the Communist Manifesto of 1848, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, proclaimed: “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!”

Armed with a triumphant message the Bolsheviks believed in spreading it as widely as possible. Almost half a century after the Russian Revolution a 1963 manual on the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory breathlessly proclaimed: “The Great October Socialist Revolution ushered in a new era not only in the history of Russia but also in world History. It was a turning point in world history from the old, capitalist world to the new, socialist world. Capitalism ceased to be a universal system ruling the world, the chain of world capitalism was broken never to be repaired.” Lenin, as Andrew Sinclair writes, “believed that propaganda was all, if the masses were to join any radical leaders.”

This ideology, like the messianic American claim to universal values of freedom and democracy, could be embraced by people everywhere. It promised a bright future – the “svetloye budushcheye” (Светлое будущее) - when Communism, finally, would be built after a long period of struggle. That struggle united the citizens of the Soviet Union in a common

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quest with shared values and beliefs. Marxism/Leninism was an elaborate philosophical construct, taught to Soviets from the cradle. Its holidays, its symbols, its rituals marked every significant event in a Soviet citizen’s life. It ideas defined the U.S.S.R.’s art, music, and culture.

This ideology resonated in other countries. As Joseph S. Nye, Jr. observes, the Soviet Union “had impressive military capabilities poised to threaten Western Europe, and in the early postwar period it also possessed important soft-power resources from the appeal of Communist ideology and its record of standing up to Nazi Germany.” In the heyday of the Cold War, writes Adam B. Ulam, “the ghost of John Foster Dulles must have watch unhappily as American influence was being rolled back, especially in the Third World. The Soviets had developed a very effective technique of nibbling at the edges of what not so long before had been undisputed spheres of interest of the West: southern Africa, Ethiopia, Arabia.

In contrast to America’s ideology and values, which shape the aspirations of American society to this day, the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 dethroned its Communist ideology. Post-Soviet Russia, under President Boris Yeltsin, rejected ideology outright as the oppressive legacy of the past but the New Russia could not agree on the values that could form a coherent new worldview.

In 1997 President Yeltsin set up a commission to define Russia’s “national idea.” After a year of work under his aide, Georgi Satarov, it disbanded, unable to find the principles that could unite Russians and provide an identity for the new nation.

Two years later Vladimir Putin, named acting president by Yeltsin who had just resigned, expressed these concerns in his conceptual article, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium:”

Nye, Jr., *Soft Power*, 49.

“How can we overcome the still deep ideological and political split in society?” he asked. “What strategic goals can consolidate Russian society? What place can Russia occupy in the international community in the 21st century? What economic, social and cultural frontiers do we want to attain in ten to fifteen years? What are our strong and weak points? And what material and spiritual resources do we have now?”

Unless Russia could find clear answers to those questions, Mr. Putin, said, “we will be unable to move forward at the pace and to the goals which are worthy of our great country.”

Mr. Putin listed what he called Russia’s “traditional values”: Patriotism; “belief in the greatness of Russia;” social solidarity and, significantly, “statism,” the belief in a strong state which, he argues, distinguishes Russia from the United States or Great Britain:

“It will not happen soon, if it ever happens at all, that Russia will become the second edition of, say, the U.S. or Britain in which liberal values have deep historic traditions. Our state and its institutes and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people. For Russians a strong state is not an anomaly which should be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change.”

With its stark and dramatic language – “The paramount word is ‘fast,’ as we have no time for a slow start” - Vladimir Putin’s Millennium Message strongly echoes the Czarist-era call to embrace the challenge of Russia’s uniqueness. He calls on Russians to combine “the universal principles of a market economy and democracy with Russian realities.”

Russia’s values, therefore, are unique. In our interview in Moscow Konstantin Kosachev, head of the Federal Agency for CIS Countries and International Humanitarian Cooperation

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(Rossotrudnichestvo), Russia’s primary public diplomacy agency, said: “We certainly don’t have to immediately acknowledge that the collection of values the United States has developed is the only one possible. That doesn’t mean that we reject them. But the specificity of the situation in a given country is different.”

Russia insists that it is a democratic nation but one with its own unique version of democracy. “What is the message?” said Elena Vartanova, professor and Dean of the Journalism Faculty at Moscow State University. “We are different, we want the rest of the world to respect our difference and we want to say that each country, if it wants, should be different, not the American democracy.”

The Kremlin’s Alexander Smirnov told me that Russia does not claim “the Russian way of life is the best way of life in the world.” What Russia is promoting, he said, “is that Russia is a country that actually unites different people and it unites on the basis of common culture, common language, and common religion and that's why we are saying it’s not driven by some kind of evil plan to conquer the whole world.”

Russia’s “special path” of development has both a positive and a negative side. As Lilia Shevtsova wrote in 2003: “The beginning of Putin’s presidency saw an increase in the number of people in Russia who believed that their country was different from other states and that Russians were different from other people.”
Some Russians viewed that with despair, she said, but an antidote was the belief that Russia “has been marked out for a special destiny – Russians are not like other people and should not try to be, because they are meant for something greater and the goal itself demands suffering, pain, and coping with difficulties. Russia’s special path has never brought a normal life, but belief in it confers a justification of hopelessness and an illusion of strength.  

Russia’s claim to “uniqueness” complicates its attempts to exploit the core of Nye’s concept of soft power: “the ability to get what you want through attraction.” Vladimir Putin’s soft power does not seek to project Russia’s values around the world as a “beacon of hope.” Russia’s “audience,” so far, is itself and its people, including Russian citizens who fled, or were stranded in the new nations that were formed in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Some Russian foreign policy analysts believe that Russia, since the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., has moved beyond ideology even as the West has taken an increasingly ideological stance. In our interview Konstantin Kosachev told me “the demise of Communism in the 1990’s made many speak about the end of the ideological standoff and even the end of ideologies as such. But these assumptions were short-lived. The former Communist countries and even the formally Communist China shifted to exclusively pragmatic positions in world politics. Western countries and societies, which seemed to have won the ideological contest of the past, have not yet renounced the proliferation of the ideology of liberal democracy.”

34 Lilia Shevtsova, Putin’s Russia, 170.

**Economic roots**

Vladimir Putin may have used the language of values in order to keep his fractured country together but, as a leader, Mr. Putin is post-ideological. Allen C. Lynch, former assistant director of the W. Averell Harriman Institute for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union at Columbia University, says “Putin is best understood as a pragmatic, modern realist who thinks in terms of raw power – economic, military and political.”

Putin, he writes, “sees the world as intensely and fundamentally competitive. In many ways, his foreign policy outlook resembles that of the American ‘power realists,’” or Republican conservatives. His worldview is completely devoid of abstract ideological categories, and he is painfully conscious of the limitations of Russian power in a post-Soviet, post-Cold War world.”

Modern Russia’s foray into the use of soft power in the 1990’s had a specific and concrete aim: attracting international investment. With an economy in shambles, soaring inflation, extremely low productivity and plummeting real incomes for Russian citizens this was an economic imperative.

President Putin, in 1999, described Russia as being marked by a “feeling of hope and fear” as it faced difficult economic and social problems. “The overall volume of direct foreign investments in Russia amounts to barely 11.5 billion dollars,” he noted, while China received as much as 43 billion dollars in foreign investments.”

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37 Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium.”
essential factor in Russia’s early attempts to use its soft power; its primary purpose was to attract foreign direct investment in order to modernize the country.

In October 2013, at a point where China had attracted more than $88 billion in FDI since January, President Putin reported to an investment forum that, in the first six months of the year, the amount of FDI in Russia had tripled over the first half of 2012 to $55 billion. Reporting on the President’s speech RIA Novosti added a caveat: “However, Putin did not mention that Russia’s GDP in the first eight months of this year grew a meager 1.5 percent year-on-year and the seasonally adjusted month-to-month growth was basically zero, according to figures provided days earlier by Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev.”

Russia’s largely negative image abroad still is taking a toll on investment in the country, as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev admitted to the newspaper Vedomosti in September.

“Investors still have an irrational fear of working in incomprehensible, and sometimes unpredictable, Russia,” Medvedev wrote. “And they also have a completely explainable distrust of public institutions. Saddest of all, this includes the legal system and law enforcement bodies.”

Both Russia and China started their public diplomacy planning at the same time, according to Tara Sonenshine, former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy.

Russia, she said, began surveying public opinion and, in a 2003 poll, observed how Russia was being perceived around the world in movies. The survey, Sonenshine said, showed they were

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portrayed as thugs, as organized criminals: “Every movie, every portrayal made them look like bad guys.”

Sonenshine told me that both China and Russia appear to have concluded that investment by U.S. companies and international corporations in their countries would be minimized by the image of crime and corruption. “Both of them were trying to use economic models to draw people there without changing political structures but believing that image matters. That’s the common thread.”

Konstantin Kosachev, head of Rossotrudnichestvo, also said that Russia’s initial goal for exploiting its soft power was economic: “For a long time the calculation was made exclusively on an economic basis,” he told me. “They thought that if we go forward with an economic project then everything will end up in the right place. But our economy did not develop as quickly as we might like because the image of Russia was inadequate.”

The Soft Power “War” against Russia

Vladimir Putin and other Russia officials publically depict soft power and public diplomacy as vital ingredients for a successful foreign policy but they put more emphasis on “power” than on “soft.” The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation approved by President Dmitry Medvedev on July 12, 2008 devoted a section to “Information support for foreign policy activities.”

In public diplomacy, it said, Russia “will seek its objective perception in the world, develop its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad” and, it stresses, take “necessary measures to repel information threats to its sovereignty and security.”

Igor Sergeyevich Ivanov, who served a Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2004 and now is

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40 Tara Sonenshine, interview.
president of the Russian International Affairs Council, said in our interview that Russia “must use the entire arsenal of foreign policy, including soft power.”

Russia, he said, understands the need for soft power “in order for Russia to successfully fight to be considered one of the poles of the multi-polar world. Because the multi-polar world is in the process of being formed and, naturally, there are various players who are going to try to play a key role. Russia wants that too, he said. “If you don’t get actively involved in those spheres it will be uncontrolled or it will be controlled by someone else.”

President Putin, too, sees soft power as part of that “arsenal” but goes further. For him, soft power, as he described it in his article “Russia and the Changing World” is part of several “levers of influence” Russia can use. In contrast to most Western concepts of soft power, in which attraction to a country’s is the key to a country’s getting what it wants, Mr. Putin sees soft power as a kind of “defensive” power, an instrument of geopolitical control exercised primarily by government and, in his view, other nations are exploiting their soft power and public diplomacy in order to interfere in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Putin’s 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, for example, while noting the importance of soft power, also decried what it claimed are illegal uses of soft power: “increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of ‘soft power’ and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad.”

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41 Igor Sergeyevich Ivanov, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 18, 2013.


43 “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,” website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 12, 2013,
In an article on the website of the Valdai International Discussion Club he insisted “There must be a clear division between freedom of speech and normal political activity, on the one hand, and illegal instruments of ‘soft power,’ on the other.”\textsuperscript{44} This is a “far…from stylistic” difference from the definitions of soft power offered by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., says Alexey Dolinsky, Junior Research Fellow at Moscow State University. “The American political scientist,” he says, “points out attractiveness as the key element of the notion, while the Russian politician is focused on the levers of influence.”\textsuperscript{45}

President Putin’s reference to “illegal instruments of ‘soft power’” appears to imply that soft power can be regulated or controlled by the state. The use of the word “illegal” is significant; to President Putin soft power is more akin to public diplomacy, a tool to be utilized by a government, not the accumulated and often amorphous international influence of a nation’s culture and civil society.

Yelena Osipova, who has studied Russia’s use of soft power and public diplomacy, says that “any discussion of (Russia’s) public diplomacy – no matter the actual terminology used – sees ‘influencing opinions’ as its ultimate objective, while it also emphasizes the need to adhere to the legal and political framework laid out by the government.” This, Osipova says, “reflects Russia’s heavily centralized and top-down political culture.”\textsuperscript{46}

In one notable article published on the Valdai Discussion Club’s website, an influential

\textsuperscript{44} Valdai Discussion Club, “Vladimir Putin on Foreign Policy: Russia and the changing world.”

\textsuperscript{45} Alexey Dolinsky, “What is Public Diplomacy, and Why Russia Needs It?”

soft power organization run by the Kremlin, Sergei Karaganov depicted a post-Soviet Russia doomed to exist in “strategic solitude” for another ten years at least, forced to act as “an independent center of power” in the world. During this period, he said, Russia must make “an inventory of the sources of its power and influence in the world.”

Russia “should fight for positions on the market of ideas and images,” he said, “since they are playing a much greater role today than ever in the past. The alternative is an inevitable loss in international competition.”

What does Russia have to sell to the world in this marketplace of ideas? “We cannot sell anything, for example, Russia’s unsightly political system. Nor can we sell Russian climate, Russian cars or Russian medicines. Alas, Russian cuisine, too,” he ruefully, and ironically, noted. “What we can sell is a proud history of military victories, weaponry, processed raw materials, foodstuffs, huge spaces and opportunities. But the main thing that should, and must, be sold is Russian culture and arts.” Why should Russia strive to improve its image? “For the purpose of bringing in more money and for stimulating people to stay back instead of abandoning the country.”

For Russia, as Igor Ivanov said, soft power also carries negative connotations from the recent past. “It’s positive that the president and the Foreign Ministry are talking about soft power as an important factor in Russia’s foreign policy,” he said in a personal interview at the Moscow office. “A few years ago that didn’t exist. Soft power in some circles in Russia was considered Western propaganda, an instrument of infiltrating the social consciousness.”

President Vladimir Putin’s concept of soft power still evinces skepticism about the United States’ motives. The notion of soft power, he says, is being used increasingly often but

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47 Sergei Karaganov, “Russia in the world of ideas and images”.
“Regrettably, these methods are being used all too frequently to develop and provoke extremist, separatist and nationalistic attitudes, to manipulate the public and to conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries.”

In an apparent effort to counteract what Mr. Putin sees as “information threats” - efforts by other countries to malevolently exploit their soft power – the Russian Parliament, in November, 2012, passed a law requiring NGO’s operating in Russia to register as “foreign agents” if they receive any foreign funding and conduct what is referred to as “political activities.”

In July RIA Novosti news agency reported “Prosecutors have searched the offices of as many as 2,000 NGOs across the country, while thirty six groups have had legal action brought against them, according to Agora, an NGO that provides legal assistance to other NGOs and is itself one of the thirty six.” The “civilized work” of non-governmental humanitarian and charity organizations “deserves every support,” Mr. Putin said, including those that “actively criticize the current authorities.” But the activities of what he called "pseudo-NGOs" and other agencies that try to “destabilize other countries with outside support” are, “unacceptable.”

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48 Valdai Discussion Club, “Vladimir Putin on Foreign Policy: Russia and the Changing World.”


51 Valdai Discussion Club, “Vladimir Putin on Foreign Policy: Russia and the changing world”.

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CHAPTER 3

UTILIZING SOFT POWER

The Structure of U.S. Public Diplomacy

Russia and the United States differ in terms of the underlying cultural values that create their countries’ soft power and they differ, as well, in how they utilize soft power, through the structure of their public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy, according to an early publication of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, "deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies."\(^1\)

Public diplomacy goes beyond traditional diplomacy in which countries, through their diplomats and other representatives, deal directly with each other seeking, instead, to influence public opinion in other countries. It fosters communication between private groups, such as non-governmental organizations, communicates with media that report on international affairs, fosters cultural programs and other forms of outreach to the citizens of other countries.

In the United States public diplomacy is carried out by the U.S. State Department. Public diplomacy outreach, according to the State Department, includes “communications with international audiences, cultural programming, academic grants, educational exchanges, international visitor programs, and U.S. Government efforts to confront ideological support for terrorism.”

On the bureaucratic level it is highly structured. An organizational taxonomy of the public diplomacy and public affairs operation is available on the State Department’s website.

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The Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs is one of six offices reporting directly to the Secretary of State and serve as the Secretary’s "corporate board" that formulates U.S. foreign policy.

The Office is lead by an Under Secretary to whom two Assistant Secretaries, for Education and Cultural Affairs, and for Public Affairs, as well as one Coordinator for International Information Programs, report. The Under Secretary also oversees the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications.

Deputies report to each Assistant Secretary and to the Coordinator. For example, the Assistant Secretary for Education and Cultural Affairs has Deputy Assistant Secretaries for Academic Programs, Professional and Cultural Exchanges and Private Sector Exchanges.

On the ground level, the State Department’s public diplomacy efforts include a complex network that engages with citizens around the world. According to the State Department’s website, for example, the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) “provides and supports both physical and virtual places, including approximately 820 American Spaces, around the world, as well as a social media community with more than 22 million followers. It provides publications, video, and U.S. expert speakers, who engage foreign audiences in person and through virtual programs. IIP also manages the infrastructure for all U.S. embassy and consulate websites, translations of public remarks by the President and Secretary, and internal websites serving field public diplomacy officers.”

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The Roots of Russia’s Public Diplomacy

Russia’s soft power strategy began almost a century ago in the early years of the Soviet Union. Although the phrase “soft power” did not yet exist, the Soviet Union had an elaborate, and well-funded public diplomacy structure, controlled by the Central Committee of the ruling Communist Party, that sought to make common cause between the peoples of the Soviet Union and “progressive” organizations and citizens around the world.

The key Soviet organization in this outreach was the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations (VOKS) (in Russian Всесоюзное общество культурной связи с заграницей.) It was created in 1925 and its first director was Olga Davidovna Kameneva the sister of Leon Trotsky and wife of the revolutionary Lev Kamenev. She served from 1926 to 1928 and her portrait hangs today in the offices of Rossotrudnichestvo, Russia’s main public diplomacy agency.  

The mission of VOKS, according to the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, was to “acquaint Soviet society with the cultural accomplishments of countries abroad and to popularize the cultures of the peoples of the Soviet Union abroad in order to promote the development and strengthening of friendship and mutual understanding between the people of the Soviet Union and other countries.”

VOKS sponsored visits to Russia by famous cultural figures like the French writer Romain Rolland and the Indian author Rabindranath Tagore. It also sent on international tour leading Soviet scientists and cultural figures, as well as music and dance troupes.

4 Konstantin Kosachev, interview.

5 Всесоюзное общество культурной связи с заграницей (ВОКС), Большая советская энциклопедия http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/bse/76356%D0%92%D1%81%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B5 (accessed October 20, 2013).
VOKS was disbanded in 1958 and replaced with another "friendship organization" called the "Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries" (SSOD) (Союз советских обществ дружбы и культурной связи с зарубежными странами). SSOD’s most famous director was Valentina Tereshkova, the first female cosmonaut. She headed the organization for more than ten years and her portrait, like that of Kameneva, hangs today in the headquarters of Rossotrudnichestvo.  

SSOD was a huge, powerful and well-funded organization with infrastructure around the world including, according to Konstantin Kosachev, more than one hundred Soviet Houses of Science and Culture with approximately one thousand employees, some Soviet citizens, others hired locally. “It was ideological work,” Kosachev told me in our Moscow interview, “and it was a very serious public support for the Soviet Union. It required a system of communications and that was conducted through the Friendship Societies.”

SSOD was, officially, a non-governmental organization, Kosachev said, funded by the government. “It was hidden, un-official government financing through many different formats but, of course, it was part of the government structure.”

As an undergraduate student in the Soviet Union in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s I became acquainted with the Friendship Societies system. American students and other visitors to the U.S.S.R. were invited to meetings and discussions with handpicked Soviet students and youth leaders. The discussions were, nominally, about education or culture but often had a political or ideological slant. A well-known venue for such meetings was the Dom Druzhbi (House of Friendship) in downtown Moscow, a mansion in Moorish style covered in faux seashells, built in 1899 by the rich merchant Arseny Morozov. The building still exists but it no

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6 Konstantin Kosachev, interview.
longer belongs to the successor of SSOD, Rossotrudnichestvo. “That building is no longer ours,” Kosachev told me, “it’s for government receptions. That happened against our will and we regret it.”

The Soviet Union employed other forms of soft power, including major construction projects in other countries. In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s it designed and funded Egypt’s Aswan Dam. “They built things like the Aswan Dam not because they were building the idea of the Soviet Union,” said former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. “That would have been artificial. They were preparing cadres that were sympathetic to the U.S.S.R., of course, because they got education, they got work, they became the technical elite.”

Ivanov said, in his opinion, “that was a type of ‘soft power’ in the Cold War period. Another, he noted, was Moscow’s Patrice Lumumba University, founded in 1960 as People’s Friendship University, and named after the assassinated Congolese independence leader. Here, promising young Africans received an education paid for by the Soviet government, with the same aim described by Igor Ivanov: to “prepare cadres” sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

This Soviet “soft power” strategy was to a large degree successful, according to almost all of the leaders of Russia’s current public diplomacy efforts with whom I spoke in Moscow. “The positive experience of Soviet internationalism at the time is probably something we can share with others,” Roman Grishenin of the Gorchakov Fund told me.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, however, spelled the end of Friendship Societies and the entire structure of government-funded public diplomacy projection. The system was based on the ideology of Communism and, in post-Soviet Russia, Communist “agitation and propaganda” was rejected. “People concluded that such a thing was from the past,” Konstantin Kosachev told me. “It was the Soviet Union, it was the Communist system and, you know, we have the
expression ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’ and pretty much the same thing happened with this work. It was said that we don’t need it and we’re not going to do it anymore. The ideology fell apart. Unfortunately, the entire machine fell apart too.”

There also was no money to fund it. In the early 1990’s Russia’s almost-bankrupt economy could not afford the massive sums of rubles needed to project the Soviet Union’s public diplomacy around the world. The fate of the Soviet Union’s Houses of Friendship is a vivid illustration.

In 1991, according to Konstantin Kosachev, Russia had more than 100 Friendship Society centers around the world. During the Soviet Union the Union of Friendship Societies was a mammoth, and powerful organization with infrastructure abroad: more than 100 “Houses of Science and Culture.”

“No one was calling it ‘soft power’ then,” Kosachev said. When the Soviet Union ended, officials of the impoverished new Russian government had to decide what to do with the organization’s infrastructure. Russian President Boris Yeltsin decided to retain only those centers that were located in property legally owned by Russia, a total of approximately thirty. Any property rented was given up and, as a result, some 70 centers closed.

“The logic disappeared,” Kosachev said. The decision to close centers was made on strictly economic terms, not diplomatic: Five of the thirty centers salvaged were located in India. “In China, for example, we had none,” he notes. “And there weren’t any for 20 years. We opened a center just two years ago. In many European countries, in Paris, we had property, in Berlin. In London it disappeared. In Rome it disappeared, in Madrid – disappeared. So of those 30 centers, in these 20 years, the logic was laughable. For example, we had a center in Nepal, in Zambia.”
“Because there was property in many countries and there were personnel working in those countries the decision was made that everything that was connected to NGO work we would direct to a public organization created at the time that was called the Russian Association of International Cooperation,” Kosachev said. The association, which still exists, was not well funded and was involved in purely social work, coordinating with the Friendship Societies that still existed.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s the Soviet system of public diplomacy already was having difficulty matching the impact of America’s burgeoning popular culture of jeans and rock music. Young Russians were eager to obtain them and the records and jeans I took with me to Leningrad were prized objects among my Russian friends.

The United States’ soft-power efforts, meanwhile, were having an effect on millions of Soviet citizens. United States Information Agency cultural exchange exhibits toured the Soviet Union for nearly three decades. The first, the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, site of the famous “kitchen debate” between American President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, was a collaboration between the U.S. government and private companies. Displaying aspects of American life, from culture to consumerism, it was visited by 2.7 million Soviets during the summer of 1959. It was followed by sixty six shows and seventeen exhibits on a wide range of subjects, from outdoor recreation to photography to medicine.7

I worked as a guide on the 1972 exhibit Research and Development USA, which traveled to Tbilisi, Moscow, Volgograd, Kazan, Donetsk, and Leningrad. The underlying concept was the tangible benefits of private enterprise. The displays included a range of products and artifacts,

many of them from the U.S. space program, and featured the Apollo 10 command module as well as the ever-popular kitchen appliances. Two million Soviet citizens visited the exhibit and had an opportunity to talk with young Russian-speaking U.S. guides about life in America.

The exhibit drew more than just average citizens; KGB provocateurs also showed up, asking provocative questions about race relations in the United States and about the Vietnam War. The U.S.S.R. succeeded in scoring political points around the world by criticizing the War and other controversial U.S. policies and actions but some of the Soviet Union’s own policies damaged its image abroad as well. As Nye notes: “The Soviet Union once had a good deal of soft power, but it lost much of it after the invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Soviet soft power declined even as its hard economic and military resources continued to grow. Because of its brutal policies, the Soviet Union’s hard power actually undercut its soft power.”

The Structure of Russia’s Public Diplomacy

Russia current public diplomacy structure differs in many respects from that of the United States’. The chief difference is that it is not exclusively part of the international relations apparatus of the Foreign Ministry. Its center lies, instead, in the Kremlin, under the direction of the President of the Russian Federation.

In contrast to the tree-and-branches structure of the State Department’s public diplomacy apparatus Russia’s system consists of discrete organizations and agencies that report to the Kremlin or carry Russia’s soft power message to the world, but which have little or no communication with each other.

Rossotrudnichestvo, RIA Novosti, RT news channel, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the Voice of Russia radio, the Valdai International Discussion Club, the Alexander Gorchakov

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8 Nye, Jr., Soft Power, 9.
Public Diplomacy Fund and *Russia Beyond the Headlines* pursue their missions relatively independently.

RT, for example, under its original name “Russia Today,” began with a mission of explaining Russia to the world. More recently, it has switched focus to the United States, vigorously criticizing U.S. foreign policy and actively reporting on U.S. government violations of American citizens civil rights. *Russia Beyond the Headlines* maintains a moderate tone, publishing articles on business, culture and society in today’s Russia.

Alexey Dolinsky, who studies Russia’s public diplomacy, says that Russia’s system, from its inception in the early 2000’s, has lacked operational coordination: “The decision making was all in the Kremlin,” he said in an interview. “The Foreign Ministry was technically supposed to be coordinating all the policy activities but it was only supporting them at best and even that was limited. There was no direct coordination between the Foreign Ministry and all other entities that are involved in public diplomacy.”

The Kremlin, Dolinsky said, sets goals and priorities in a crisis or for special events, such as the G-8 summit but on an operational level “there is no such thing as a head of public diplomacy, someone who would be calling the Kremlin on a daily basis.” Dolinsky calls lack of coordination a “huge problem.” There is no two-way communication “so the message is being distributed from the Kremlin and there is no horizontal coordination between different issuers of public diplomacy.”

This structure reflects what Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy call the “highly personalized” political system instituted by Vladimir Putin. “Its legitimacy and stability are heavily dependent on Putin’s personal popularity,” they say. “The Russian economic and

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9 Alexey Dolinsky, telephone interview by author, October 11, 2012.
political systems are private and informal.\textsuperscript{10} 

Igor Ivanov, however, believes that structure, alone, is not enough. “You can have a structure but soft power isn’t going to work,” he told me, “because for the structure to work, you need the corresponding structures of civil society. Soft power doesn’t depend so much on administrative mechanisms like the State Department etc., but basically on institutions of civil society. And if the institutions of civil society are not sufficiently developed then it’s hard to draw a nice chart and carry it out.”\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{11} Igor S. Ivanov, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 18, 2013.
CHAPTER 4
RUSSIA’S SOFT POWER INSTRUMENTS

The Western concept of soft power, as explained by Joseph S. Nye, is based on attraction; the Russian concept is based on projection, i.e., using “levers of influence,” as Alexey Dolinsky notes in his article “What is Public Diplomacy and Why Russia Needs It?”

These “levers of influence” include re-structured instruments of Soviet public diplomacy such as Rossotrudnichestvo, new instruments such as RT television, Czarist-era sources of influence and attraction such as the Russian Orthodox Church, think tanks, and Western PR firms.

Rossotrudnichestvo

Rossotrudnichestvo is Russia’s main public diplomacy agency, under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It currently is undergoing a major revamping, which includes increased funding, and its long and complex Soviet-sounding name - the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Residing Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Федеральное агентство по делам Содружества Независимых Государств, соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом, и по международному гуманитарному сотрудничеству) - is likely to change.

Its head, Konstantin Kosachev, former diplomat and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the State Duma (the lower house of the Federal Assembly), gave me a blunt assessment in his interview in Moscow: “Of course we are going to do a ‘re-branding’ because

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in Russian it’s not easy to have to pronounce it every time and in other languages it’s completely incomprehensible.” Kosachev said the agency is doing research on a new name that can symbolize what he says will be a “deep, profound reform that we are going to carry out.”

Kosachev was named to the post in March 2013, by then-President Dmitry Medvedev. In our interview Kosachev compared Rossotrudnichestvo to the U.S. Agency for International Development, (USAID) part of the U.S. State Department, created in 1961 to provide humanitarian assistance to countries around the world. Rossotrudnichestvo was created in September 2008 by presidential order. As described in the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, it “participates in elaborating proposals and implementing the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the field of assisting international development, providing international humanitarian cooperation, supporting Russian compatriots living abroad, strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, and developing a network of Russian scientific and cultural centers abroad.”

According to its official website, Rossotrudnichestvo has an additional aim: to “assert abroad the objective presentation of modern Russia, its material and spiritual potential, and the content of the internal and external political course of the country.”

It cooperates in the scientific, cultural, informational and humanitarian areas with Russian non-governmental and religious organizations, as well as those of CIS members and international NGO’s and religious organizations.

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2 Konstantin Kosachev, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 21, 2013.


The priority is the Commonwealth of Independent States, (CIS), which includes countries of the former Soviet Union. In the past couple of years it has opened new representative branches in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Its website, updated regularly, included on June 8, 2013 reports on a CIS sports festival, the opening of a new Russian center in Greece, and a festival of Russian culture in Istanbul.5

Kosachev told me that he proposed his own candidacy for head of Rossotrudnichestvo because he thought the sphere was “very interesting” and had “long-term perspective.” Dmitry Medvedev, who was President at the time and now is Prime Minister, he said, “takes a very serious approach to soft power as a humanitarian aspect of international cooperation,” and added “I have to say the current President, Vladimir Putin, according to the signals we receive here, considers it just as seriously and attentively. And if you listen to his speeches…the term ‘soft power’ is appearing more and more frequently.”

Rossotrudnichestvo is the successor to Soviet public diplomacy agencies, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations, and the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

In the past 20 years, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the public diplomacy system was reformed five times, Kosachev said: “It has been an NGO, then under the government, then under the Foreign Ministry and now the fifth form – it’s a federal agency, separate from the Foreign Ministry, but under the authority of the Foreign Ministry, under its jurisdiction.”

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Rossotrudnichestvo is under the direct authority of the Russian President, he explained, with a separate line in the Russian Federal budget. The head of the agency and his deputy are approved by order of the President.

When Rossotrudnichestvo was created almost five years ago its powers were defined to include maintaining connections to the Russian diaspora, the so-called “compatriots” (соотечественники.) None of the 30 centers was in the former Soviet Union and the government set a new political priority, Kosachev said, of strengthening Russia’s humanitarian presence in the former Soviet Union. “Not because of Soviet-style ‘agitation and propaganda,’” he insisted, “but because of our humanitarian presence, educational programs, youth exchanges, cultural events. It’s a normal part of the foreign policy of any nation.”

Rossotrudnichestvo has almost doubled the number of its international centers to fifty nine, with representative offices – some of them located in embassies and consulates - in seventy seven countries. The centers provide various forms of cultural outreach, including movie theaters and exhibit halls. Most are in rented accommodations. Centers have been opened in Washington, D.C., London and Beijing. “So there’s a political logic to it,” Kosachev noted.

The agency has re-established centers in all the countries of the CIS except for Turkmenistan, which has refused to allow it unless it is under a mutual agreement between the governments. The decision by Turkmenistan Kosachev ascribed to “very specific, national politics.”

The three Baltic nations of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have refused to sign a government agreement to open centers. The Baltic nations, Kosachev said, “are afraid that our appearance there will have an anti-government character, that we are going to work with our compatriots and turn them into a fifth column. And that is not true.”
Until now, the centers have been oriented to Russian speakers and former Russian citizens who socialize and take advantage of Russian language classes for their children, and that remains an important part of the agency’s work, Kosachev said, “But I am convinced that can’t be the only part of our work.”

“I am trying to develop a new concept that is called, very conditionally, the creative concept of a “Russian World,” Kosachev explained. “It’s very similar to what the French have been doing for many years with Francophone programs, with the focus on language, history, culture.”

“It’s not necessary to swear allegiance to a nation,” he said. “It’s not political, it remains in the humanitarian sphere. And I think that is the correct form. Our dream is to try to initiate a union, a consolidation of the ‘Russian World’ in which the center would be people who are Russian but then, radiating out from that, include those who studied in Russia, married Russians, created families, have business interests, are in some way connected professionally or personally. Then there is another layer of people who are simply interested in Russia, in its literature, the ballet, the cosmos.”

This outreach to people who are not necessarily Russian but have interest in Russia, in Russian literature, Russian science is “taking on a very serious form,” Kosachev said. “When I talk about doing a re-branding, that is just the external part but internal reform will include working within a significantly broader format than with Russian compatriots.”

Behind the desire to attract people to Russia is a deeper soft power strategy. As Kosachev put it: “In my concept this nucleus of compatriots, they should in no way be an isolated group that lives in another country but swears fealty to their historical homeland. This is a uniting element between Russia and all those who are interested in Russia.”
Kosachev conceded that “in Latvia and Estonia they mistrust us and maybe they’re right when it comes to the previous concept” but he said, “I am deeply convinced that the main instrument, let’s say, to protect the rights of our compatriots in Latvia or Estonia…is normal relations between Russia and Latvia, Estonia, or Lithuania. That approach can apply to “strengthening normal relations between Russia and the United States, Russia and China.”

Kosachev, who served as a diplomat at various international posts and in Moscow from 1984 to 1998, said Russia lags behind other nations in its use of soft power. He called it “indispensable” and admitted that Russia’s image abroad often is negative. He denied, however, that he takes it as his mission to create an “artificial” image of Russia. “My task is to return it to the point of reality, to the objective, adequate understanding of Russia,” he said. “We have an enormous number of problems but we are not as bad as it looks from abroad.”

The government’s initial approach to soft power was based on economics, he told me. “They thought that if we go forward with our economic project then everything would end up in the right place. But our economy did not develop as quickly as we might like because the image of Russia was inadequate.”

Kosachev said he is often asked what, in his opinion, is soft power. “For many, it is a measure,” he said. “You need to have more people study the Russian language or more people should come to hear the Alexander chorus or more people see some great Russian film.”

“But I don’t think that way. In my understanding, the soft power of the United States is not Hollywood films,” Kosachev said, “but people abroad who come to a theater to see a Hollywood movie about the American Dream and believe in it. That is what soft power is for the United States. It’s people.”
Kosachev drew a parallel to the conflict in Syria. Who are the people who come into the streets and demand to replace Syrian President Bashar al-Assad? “They are people who sincerely believe that they can live as people do in the U.S., he said, that Assad is preventing them from doing that – I am simplifying this, of course – that all you have to do is remove the dictator, the tyrant, and we are going to live like they do in the U.S. And those people who have seen Hollywood films, who have read a lot on the Internet, they sincerely believe that ‘this model is our model. We want to live just as happily.’ Such people are the real soft power of the United States.”

Kosachev admitted he was being “quite cynical” but added: “It’s great that the U.S. has been able to convince almost the entire world that this is the ideal. This is the way you should live and therefore you should support some kinds of external political actions of the United States of America.”

Russia, however, is in a different situation, Kosachev said: “There are a lot of people who relate to Russia with sympathy, with understanding, are prepared to develop relations with us, but frequently are shy about expressing that position because it is not mainstream. They are going to look strange, inadequate.”

Rossotrudnichestvo’s role, he said, is to help such people strengthen their position and understand that their view is not marginal, that they are not inadequate: “Ideally, in the end, there should be a certain condition of the mind, some part of civil society – in the U.S., in Latvia, in China – that will also loudly say: ‘Wait! You shouldn’t deal with Russia the way you are dealing with it right now. You should do it differently. We need Russia.”

“I see my task as make a change in the mood of civil society in other countries to do more for normalizing relations between nations. And that doesn’t exist right now.”
A society’s values, he said, are important in changing that mood. “Yes, of course. It must be the task,” he said. “Right now, I can tell you candidly, it’s just becoming our task and without it – without defining a message (although we were speaking in Russian he used the English word “message’’) we can’t be effective in this work.”

Russia has great literature and a high level of culture but, he said, “that’s not enough…we have to begin speaking in this language of values but we certainly don’t have to immediately acknowledge that the collection of values the United States has developed is the only one possible. That doesn’t mean that we reject them. But the specificity of the situation in a given country is different.”

As an example Kosachev spoke of human rights. “In Russia there are colossal risks of disintegration. And what happens in circumstances of disintegration? The violation of people’s rights. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a huge violation of many people’s rights, for example, Russian speakers in Latvia.”

“If freedom leads to progress, to a better outcome, that is a shining example and, bravo, you have done it. But we are not yet in that situation. We always have risks that as soon as we turn on the unlimited mechanism of freedom it does not necessarily lead to progress. Very frequently it leads to degradation, unfortunately.”

In contrast to the American view of soft power, which sees it as an organic outgrowth of a country’s society and values, Kosachev’s view of soft power emphasizes the role of the state. He claimed there are good reasons for that.

“How much can we, say, take the government out of the political process and not allow the risk of degradation of the situation? That is the dilemma that is constantly in front of Putin. I am convinced that he sincerely would like to see more democracy in the country than there is
now but, on the other hand, the more democracy, the more you end up with Bolotnaya Ploshchad’ (site of anti-government demonstrations in Moscow December, 2011.) The risk is that, tomorrow, ‘Bolotnaya Ploshchad’ would develop a mass movement character and theoretically lead to the overthrow of the government. And then what? Putin is not about to allow that risk and, in that sense, he’s right.”

Russia, Kosachev told me, does not have one commonly accepted “message” for the world, the way the United States promotes democracy and human rights. “I can confirm that we have started to work in that direction. Not just Rossotrudnichestvo. It’s a question that’s much broader.”

What is the attraction that the Russian way of thinking has for a foreign audience? Kosachev gave me his personal opinion: “First, we don’t force our model of development on anyone, in contrast to the United States. That is not a condition for cooperation. The U.S. says to its partners ‘we are ready to help, to consider you allies, but for that you must carry out certain conditions. You must become democratic, you must adhere to the economic criteria of the IMF, for example, you have to have this certain budget and that certain balance. There are conditions for friendship. You must be a certain way and then we will be friends.”

The alternative Russian model, Kosachev explained, says: “We are ready to be friends with you no matter who you are. We respect you. And we ask the same from you.” That, he added, is “principally a different model of relations, without preconditions.”

This laissez-faire approach illustrates the dual objectives of Russia’s current soft power strategy: improving its own image around the world while, at the same time, denigrating the model of values projected by the United States. The United States, for example, ties its foreign aid to human rights in recipient nations. The State Department, on its website, notes that “U.S.
assistance supports Egyptian efforts to protect civil liberties and human rights, introduce transparency and accountability in government, foster economic growth and democratic institutions, and develop a robust, independent civil society.”

Russia, in contrast, he says, has a “willingness to help our partners without preconditions” and he believes such an approach can be attractive to other countries, especially to ones that are, as he put it, tired of being told what to do by the United States. Rossotrudnichestvo’s mission, however, does not appear to be to overtly challenge U.S. soft power but to compete with it. Rossotrudnichestvo, he told me, is being given more power to organize international development assistance, similar to the aid that USAID provides. In May 2013 President Putin signed a decree giving Rossotrudnichestvo responsibility for leading Russia’s international development efforts both in neighboring countries of the CIS and around the world.

“Why have we, to this day, been losing in the CIS to the Americans?” he asked.

“Because, on the level of slogans, Americans always come to a country with the thesis: ‘We came to help you.’ In reality, it’s not at all like that. But that’s the slogan. Russia frequently has done the opposite. We always would tell our partners what we needed. So, if we are going to do something you have to be useful to us.”

Kosachev said that’s not the right approach and it “turned people away.” Russia must “change the psychological understanding of Russia in Ukraine, in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and other countries.” To do that Russia is increasing its international aid budget.

According to Rossotrudnichestvo the federal budget currently allocates to $500 million to the agency for international aid. “Not very much in comparison to the United States,” Kosachev

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noted, “but it’s something.” Until now the funds were at the disposal of the Ministry of Finance and were used exclusively for broad programs through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Russia, although it gave significant funds to the organizations, was not recognized by recipients of the aid as the donor. In one project that allocated $61 million for countries of the South Sahara, Kosachev said, Russia contributed $50 million, Great Britain gave $8 million and Norway donated $3 million.

“The money was given under the aegis of the World Bank,” he said. “No one knew it was basically Russian money. It’s a strange way of doing it. We, of course, also suffer when we see people in Africa are hungry and children are dying. I am being very honest, but the form is not right. In my opinion, the fact that no one will say thank you to Russia for these $50 million – that shouldn’t be.”

Rossotrudnichestvo is revising its approach, Kosachev said: “First, the aid must be for a specific purpose, that is, maximum bi-lateral, so that it is obvious that Russia is helping, and not the World Bank and not the U.N.”

Second, he explained, Russia should first help those countries that Russia needs. “You don’t need to turn your back on Africa but we have huge problems closer to home,” he said, “for example, the countries of Central Asia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Armenia. The third principle is to try to give goods and services, not cash.

As an example, Kosachev pointed to the problem with worker immigrants from Central Asia who often take menial jobs in Russia such as street cleaning. Their Russian language skills are poor and they are poorly adapted to life in Russia. All of these factors feed Russian nationalism and there have been attacks on the workers.
Rossotrudnichestvo’s solution: give the workers’ home countries money for their education before they leave for Moscow and other Russian cities. Russia currently is building “technicums,” (technical schools) in Tajikistan, providing them with textbooks and equipment. Instruction is in the Russian language and Russia sends teachers to provide the education. There is no cost for Tajikistan.

“We help citizens of Tajikistan learn a profession, get a good education, learn another language, in this case Russian. So those who want to stay in Tajikistan can. Those who want to go to earn money in Russia, they go there in a completely different condition.”

“We, first, helped Tajikistan,” Kosachev explained. “That is soft power. Second, we solved the problem with qualified workers who come here as prepared workers. Third, we lower the level of nationalism, so we begin to solve the internal problem of the relationships among different nationalities.”

In Laos Rossotrudnichestvo is providing de-mining experts to help clear mines left over from the Vietnam War. Laos is not rich enough to do de-mining itself and the Russian experts need to be paid. “So we take the funds for this program, state aid, we pay the Ministry of Emergencies so they will de-mine Laos,” Kosachev explained. “In this way Laos will be a lot friendlier country toward Russia, may give us more comfortable access to their minerals. I think these programs should be complex, thought-out constructions, in which every ruble or dollar creates several effects. It’s what the Americans are doing, the Europeans, and it’s what we have not been able to do.

Other nations have had soft power strategies for years, Konstantin Kosachev noted, pointing to the German government’s Goethe-Institut, to Great Britain’s British Council, France’s Alliance Française and China’s Confucius Institutes.
The head of Rossotrudnichestvo has been watching China’s soft power strategy carefully. “Every four days in the world another Confucius Institute opens. It’s astounding,” he said. “We have 59 centers and they have 900!”

“Why did the Chinese do it?” Kosachev asked. “I started thinking: What are they doing? They also have Chinese language classes but, as I understand it, the most important thing is not the spread of the Chinese language around the world.” The Chinese, Kosachev thinks, understood that their economic expansion was beginning to elicit more and more concern in the world, a fear of Chinese expansion.

“So the Chinese understood that if they don’t get rid of these phobias at an early stage – if they don’t show that they are like everyone else, that they have Confucius, that they have Chinese cooking, and a lot of other things,” he said, “if they don’t do it now, at an early stage, sooner or later they will hit a wall and won’t be able to move forward economically.”

In its outreach to other countries, which includes student exchanges, Rossotrudnichestvo is putting the accent on the most attractive part of Russia – its culture, especially high culture such as ballet and music. “Those popular events that attract people who may not even know that such a country as Russia exists,” Kosachev said, “but, if they come to a concert in Washington, they will find out that there is a Russian Center in Washington and they might come back the next time.”

Another focus is the Russian language and educational exchanges. Internationally twenty eight percent of students studying in other countries study in the United States; only three percent study in Russia, Kosachev said.7 “I am going to fight so that the number of

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foreign students coming to Russia is much larger than now,” he told me.

Finally, Rossotrudnichestvo is sponsoring youth exchanges. The agency currently has sufficient government funding for a program to invite young, promising leaders in business, science, culture, and politics, ages 25 to 35, to Russia for “get-acquainted” trips.

“Last year we invited 500, this year 650, and next year 1,000. I hope there will be more,” Kosachev said. “And we have two priorities, I will tell you openly: the CIS and the United States. And we are going to actively try to bring people to Russia who are interested in the country, not just tourists, but people who can get in touch with potential partners, in politics, in society, in business, culture, and then do some joint projects. This is a very serious, ambitious project.”

Some observers, however, call this a throw-back to Soviet times, when the government-sponsored “Sputnik” international exchange and tourism program collaborated with more than four hundred organizations in seventy countries bringing young foreigners to the USSR and sending young Soviets abroad. It’s a system I remember well; I stayed at a rustic Sputnik camp on the Volga River in 1971.

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, sees the influence of Soviet propaganda efforts in these new forms of outreach. In an interview in Moscow he said: “They just discovered the need to do soft power. And they’re grappling with it. They have rediscovered their own heritage of soft power projection, which is essentially Soviet, and they’re trying to revive the bits and pieces of that Soviet heritage. When I read what Rossotrudnichestvo is

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planning to do it is very Soviet. It’s just unashamedly Soviet. So they just took a book from the shelf and they started reading it again.”

Konstantin Kosachev, however, said Rossotrudnichestvo “wants to be at the center” of Russia’s soft-power strategy. “We have proposed, on the level of the government leadership, to reform this work, to be the coordinator of the activities of those involved. It’s our vision of the situation. We have said we need to be doing this. No one else is doing it. We’re offering our services to the government.”

In May President Vladimir Putin increased Rossotrudnichesto’s budget from 2 billion rubles ($62,484,000) to 9.5 billion rubles ($296,799,000.)

RT News Channel

RT is an international news channel funded by the Russian government. Started in 2005 it has 2,500 employees, including editorial, technical and support staff, and five stations: RT International, RT America (English language,) RT Arabic, RT Spanish and RT Documentary. This spring RT is launching its own video agency in Berlin to compete with Reuters, APTN.

RT’s original name was “Russia Today” and its early mission was to inform the world about events and life in Russia but that, according to its 33-year-old director, Margarita Simonyan, “was a mistake, really.”

In an interview via Skype in March, conducted in fluent English, Simonyan asked rhetorically: “What is going to make me watch a TV station? Not too many people out there are interested in Russia so much that they really want to watch things about Russia and only about

9 Dmitry Trenin, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 20, 2013.

Russia. How many people are there? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? Fifty thousand across the world? That’s not nearly enough that it’s worth spending so much money.”

RT’s self-professed aim now is to provide an “alternative view of news and current events” and Simonyan insisted that the staff decides RT’s editorial policy, not the government. “The whole shift to being more international and showing the alternative view of the world rather than doing news about Russia was completely our own decision, RT’s staff decision,” she said, “and I keep getting letters from some of the more enthusiastic bureaucrats saying ‘Why are you doing this?’”

Simonyan compares RT to the BBC, France 24, Deutsche Welle, and other state-funded news outlets. “If we look at the BBC as a station whose mission is to bring British values to the world, as they say on their website,” Simonyan said, “then in those terms we could say something of the like about RT. Only I would say our mission is to think of the alternative picture. More than the mainstream media are showing. We deliberately choose to show something different to our viewers.”

Asked whether she considers RT part of Russia’s soft power or public diplomacy Simonyan replied: “I would never say that.” Simonyan, however, is keenly aware of Russia’s image in the world. “It’s bad,” she said ruefully.

She insisted that is the case mainly in the West. “If you talk about Russia’s image in the Arab world or some countries in Asia it’s much better,” she said, “let alone the CIS, the post-Soviet space.” Russia’s image, Simonyan thinks, is a product of the Cold War and that image is rife in Western reporting about Russia.

“It’s almost like Hitler,” she said. “When you write about Hitler you know he is bad. Which is quite fair! But I don’t know how fair it is when it comes to Russia. So among the
journalists it’s easier to believe in the more fantastic theories, as long as it’s in line with this narrative that Russia should not be trusted, that Russia is evil and so on and so forth, which probably comes down from the Cold War times. I don’t know how much time it will take to overcome it.”

A key problem for Russia, she believes, is that the country has not been able to explain itself adequately to the world and “sometimes it doesn’t have the desire to explain itself.”

That lack of desire to explain is part of the Russian mentality, she said. “You know, we in Russia have this mentality: if I do something and start to explain myself it looks bad. You know the Russian world “оправдываться” (оправдывать) and this is something that Russian hate to do, as you know, so they’d rather raise their chins and say ‘Ok, if you don’t understand me, I’m not going to explain it to you.’”

Simonyan studied in the United States and, she said, in America, “it’s absolutely different. I remember how surprised I was that a person thinks it’s necessary to explain his or her image, especially if a lot of people think he or she did something wrong. Whereas in Russia it’s a common thing you always hear ‘не оправдываться,’ – ‘Don’t explain.’”

Simonyan told me that was a bad approach. “This is a habit and part of the mentality that should be overcome,” she said. “Otherwise we are always going to be failing, I mean, our foreign policy with the West.” Russia now is paying more attention to its message and she embraces that approach but she said, “We lost so much time. I mean unbelievably!”

Simonyan said she talks “daily” with the Kremlin and urges them to take a more open approach but, when asked whether those conversations are successful, she answered “It depends on who you talk with and on what subject.”
The Kremlin administration is not monolithic, she explained. “They’re not all the same. There are a lot of different people in it and a lot of currents, I’d say, like in the sea. Some of the people do (agree.) Some of the people think that more effort and money and thinking should be invested into explaining ourselves to the world. Some of the people think that it’s absolutely useless.”

RT devotes much of its international news programming to news and opinion about the United States, not Russia. The subjects often are controversial and many of its commentators are critical of the U.S. government. In September of this year, for example, RT featured a report on the 9/11 attacks on New York, alleging that it was a conspiracy by the U.S. government itself. In another report the anchor interview an American anti-military protester who refuses to pay income tax. The anchor asked how RT’s viewers can join this “growing movement.”

Simonyan, however, denied that RT’s programming is deliberately anti-American. “I can understand why it feels anti-American,” she said. “To me, CNN and BBC feel anti-Russian. They never say anything good about Russia.” Reports about the United States that appear anti-American, Simonyan believes, are not deliberate criticism of the U.S. but are the result of RT’s reporting the other side of the story.

“When you have the Occupy Wall Street movement out there for five weeks and American networks never say a word, we covered it from the very beginning because we know that our audience is watching us to see something different,” she said. “It’s not because we want to show America in a bad light, it’s just because we’re showing what’s going on. The experts we speak with say things about America that no one else is saying. It seems anti-American. Just like for Russians, what the Western media does toward Russia also looks pretty much anti-Russian.”
On June 8, 2013 among the stories on the RT website was an opinion piece by journalist Sam Sacks: “NSA overreach: When a system of checks and balances breaks down.” There was an interview about protests in Turkey with journalist Barbara Slavin headlined “Erdogan should quit while he’s ahead.” A live feed of TV programming featured a report on alleged WikiLeaks “leaker” Bradley Manning that cited “America’s fondness for secrecy over transparency.” Another TV story, “Drones: Flights and Wrongs,” reported on U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan.

RT’s editorial approach, along with its state of the art studio and on-air look, Simonyan said, is working. The network, she said, is watched in forty million households around the world. When I asked her how that is calculated she said that in Great Britain the network does ratings minute-by-minute, which it is not yet doing in the U.S. In 2012, she said, according to RT’s ratings, it was the third most-watched news network in the country, after the BBC and Sky News, ahead of Al Jazeera, euronews, Bloomberg News and Fox News.

Those ratings, she claimed, are the result of RT’s “question more” approach: “The same day the BBC and others are leading with the story of a drone being shot down in Libya we’re leading with the story of a family of thirteen who ended up being killed by NATO bombs,” she said. “It’s a completely different story. People not only want to know that a drone was shot down but they also want to know that a family of thirteen - mother and kids – died as well. And not too many networks out there showed that. I would say none of them.”

Russian observers of RT whom I interviewed in Moscow say the network, whether or not it defines itself as part of Russia’s soft power, is having an impact. “The key driver here is Russia Today,” said Elena Vartanova, Dean of the Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University, in an interview in Moscow at the university’s historic building near the
Vartanova believes RT is “an attempt to create an alternative news flow.” The roots of that debate go back to the 1970’s, with the concept of the New World Information Order that arose in debate at the United Nations. Some researchers, especially those from the socialist world, criticized what they termed cultural and informational imperialism by the United States because of the overwhelming influence of U.S. mass media.

What appears to be anti-Americanism, she said, is part of a broader attempt by Russia to define its role in the world. “The concept of anti-Americanism is also the starting point for creation of new identity,” she said, because America “is the power. It is the only power which is relevant for many other countries.”

The Carnegie Moscow Center’s Dmitri Trenin says RT’s approach differs significantly from news broadcasting in the Soviet Union. “The Soviet system of propaganda talked about Russia. They had Russian announcers, by and large, and they tried to project Soviet ideas, Soviet ideology, Soviet experience.”

“This time there’s nothing to project, they don’t care about it. What they do care about is introducing themselves in the Western media world and challenging the established truths and half-truths of the Western media, of the Western World. It’s not about Russia.”

**Voice of Russia**

Founded in 1929 Voice of Russia (Голос России) is one of the earliest examples of Russia’s and the Soviet Union’s public diplomacy outreach, although the phrase, “public diplomacy,” was invented nearly four decades later.

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11 Elena Vartanova, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 20, 2013.
Originally called Radio Comintern, and then Moscow International Radio (Radio Moscow,) Voice of Russia presents the Russian government’s point of view to the world, along with reports on life in Russia and opinions of media commentators.

During the Soviet period it fulfilled a propaganda role, to project the ideology, views and policies of the U.S.S.R.’s Communist leadership internationally.

One of the most famous chapters in its history occurred during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis when it was used by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to direct his message to the Kennedy administration. Radio Moscow released the text of a letter from Khrushchev stating that the Russian missiles would be removed, insisting: “We are not threatening. We want nothing but peace.” President John F. Kennedy replied to Khrushchev in an October 28, 1962 telegram, now declassified, ending the standoff.12

Voice of Russia has eight different platforms: Radio (short wave, medium wave and satellite,) an Internet website (http://english.ruvr.ru/), social media (Twitter and Facebook,) phone apps, digital. One of its newest ventures is English-language broadcasts on HD digital radio AM frequencies in Washington, D.C. and New York.

According to its chairman, Andrey Bystritsky, it has more than 120 million listeners around the world. Fifty million of them are in the CIS, the former Soviet Union, where Voice of Russia has 35 stations. It employs 1,150 people and has bureaus in Washington D.C., London and Berlin.

Although it is a government broadcaster, as are the Voice of America and the BBC, its staff are not government employees, the chairman told me in an interview at Voice of Russia headquarters in Moscow. VOR, technically, is not part of the Russian government but most of its

financing comes from the government, although it does have the right to accept advertising. In that interview Bystritsky said: “You could call The Voice of Russia ‘soft power’ but mainly this is a mass media broadcaster. The logic, the purpose of it, is media.”\(^{13}\)

As might be expected from a government-financed broadcaster, Voice of Russia pays more attention to the opinions of Russian government leaders than do popular commercial radio networks in Russia, Bystritsky said. “We have comparatively few listeners in the USA,” he admitted but added: “We are oriented more on being quoted. If the Washington Post quotes us, that’s good.”

In replying to my questions about Voice of Russia’s editorial policy Bystritsky said “We, naturally, try to say something about Russia, something interesting, positive, and to show the contradictory things that exist in Russia.”

“We put the accent on not so much showing a preconceived image of Russia as much as to give a chance to various political groups in Russia, including possibly opposition, to be heard outside of Russia on issues like the world financial crisis, Syria, the Arab Spring and international relations.”

Bystritsky said Voice of Russia tries to ensure “that Russia will look like an interesting, attractive country,” but he insisted, “We aren’t distorting reality. When there are so many other media outlets distorting reality is very dangerous. It undermines trust in yourself and that why we don’t distort reality. When we see something real, something positive, we try to underscore it.” As an example he cited the meteor that hit the city of Chelyabinsk in February 2013. “Our listeners increased three times in one day after the meteor,” he said.

In our extended discussion of Russia’s image abroad and Russia’s soft power Bystritsky said countries around the world compete for support from average citizens. Both he, and a

\(^{13}\) Andrey Bystritsky, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, February 20, 2013.
number of Russians with whom I spoke in Moscow, emphasized the economic benefits of soft power. “Everyone wants others to trust them more, sympathize with them, come as tourists to their country,” he said. “I think Russia wants others to trust it more, so that more businesses come, so that science and innovation and high-tech industry would be created here. Russia wants commercial connections. It wants other countries to respect it, and that its citizens abroad are protected.”

“The Russian elite want the country to be respected,” he added. “People have to take them into consideration.”

The idea of soft power was not invented in Russia,” he noted but he said Russian diplomats have been thinking of how to make Russia’s markets more attractive.

Outreach to Russia’s diaspora is important, too. Using Voice of Russia statistics, Bystritsky says there are an estimated thirty to thirty five million Russian-speakers worldwide. Some of them are successful business leaders, he says, but the Russian government does not want Russians living in other countries to become a “fifth column.”

“It’s more about attracting business, about cultural heritage, and consolidating Russian society. Russia’s message, he said, “is more modest. Of course, it’s security. It’s authority and respect, admission of the uniqueness of the country. There’s the French world, for example, and there is the Russian world. And they are different. It doesn’t mean that one is inferior to the other. I don’t see any messianic mission, as in the U.S., it’s more a defensive move.”

**Russkiy Mir**

The Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation was created in June 2007 by decree of President Vladimir Putin. Its stated purpose is “promoting the Russian language as Russia's national heritage and a significant aspect of Russian and world culture, and supporting Russian
language teaching programs abroad.”  

The Foundation, according to its website, is a joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science and is supported by both public and private funds.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation is headed by Vyacheslav Nikonov, Dean of History and Political Science at the International University in Moscow and founder of the Polity Foundation. Its Board of Trustees is a “who’s who” of prominent Russian academics, cultural figures, and government officials, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and is headed by Lyudmila Verbitskaya, Rector of St. Petersburg State University and Chairwoman of the International Association of Russian Language and Literature Teachers (MAPRYAL).

The Foundation aims “to promote understanding and peace in the world by supporting, enhancing and encouraging the appreciation of Russian language, heritage and culture.” It encourages study of the Russian language and also showcases Russian culture around the world.

The Foundation has another aim as well: to “reconnect the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges and assistance in relocation.”

In an interview in Moscow, at his office in a new building at Moscow State University, Vyacheslav Nikonov told me that the Russkiy Mir Foundation now has operations in more than one hundred countries. That includes more than ninety “Russian Centers” at universities and libraries. The Foundation, he said, is opening approximately twenty centers a year at which classes are offered in the Russian language, in literature and in culture.

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In addition, there are one hundred fifty smaller centers globally that share book collections and equipment, software, and films. The Foundation provides approximately two hundred grants a year to organizations that promote cultural and language-related events.

When asked whether he would consider the Foundation part of Russia’s soft power, Nikonov did not answer directly but said the concept of soft power is “well known” in Russia, his students at Moscow State University are taught about soft power, and the concept introduced by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. is “well-received here.” But Nikonov immediately noted that Russia’s soft-power “mechanisms” are “limited, compared to other countries.”

“Ironically, I don’t think Russia’s image is any worse than America’s,” he said, “because the Russian and American images are quite bad globally but American efforts are much more intensive. At least, in America, as far as I know, there are something like 15,000 NGOs that are involved in foreign affairs, not to mention the State Department and USAID.”

Russia, Nikonov said, has no more than ten foreign policy NGO’s. “We (Russkiy Mir) are probably the most powerful,” he added. “The rest are even less. So we’re at the very beginning of that.”

Soft power, he said, “is also the image of the country and the power to promote it but, at this point, Russia is not promoting any idea,” in contrast to the Soviet Union which promoted the vision of a communist future. Modern Russia’s ideas, he said, “is like a set of bricks, principles, which are: compliance with international law, the sovereignty of states, non-interference in the affairs other countries. But (those principles) are not implemented in any ideological scheme. It’s a set of principles to guide international affairs. It’s not an alternative to the idea of democracy.”

Russia, in contrast to the United States, is not promoting any “global scheme,” he insists, and even if it had a global scheme it “does not have the instruments to promote its vision.” The
American international television network CNN, he claims, “is more powerful in that sense as a promter.”

Russia, therefore, in his view, is better off not promoting anything: “I think it’s better to have no promotion, like the U.S promoting democracy. The idea of the US promoting democracy sounds ridiculous to many people around the world.”

Russia does have an image problem, said Nikonov, but it is an issue primarily in the West, in Northern Europe, America, Canada, and Japan. “We don’t have any image problems in Greece, Italy, Asia, Africa, and Latin America,” he told me.

In the West, he said, “they look at Russia as something that’s wrong, that proves the West is right. This is in their psyche. I understand something needs to change to change. If you present something right about Russia, it kicks off cognitive dissonance.”

As Nikonov sees it, soft power is an instrument of the state. “This is a foreign policy instrument for every country, and Russia is the last to use it,” he said. “We’re learning to use it mostly from the U.S., from the Europeans and now the Chinese. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, he said scornfully, “are advertised on CNN as the greatest countries. Russia is a democracy, not Saudi Arabia or Qatar,” he insisted. “Russia is doing pretty well. You have two parties. There is more freedom of expression in Russia.”

One of the strongest instruments of Russia’s soft power, Nikonov said, is the Russian language but there are major problems: Russian was the lingua franca of the Soviet Union but, since its collapse, the number of Russian speakers, he said, has decreased by 50 million. “No other language disappeared as much as Russian in last 20 years,” he claimed, “so promoting the Russian language in places where there is no Russian language is one of my tasks.”
Yet interest in learning the Russian language is great, Nikonov said. For example, in several post-Soviet republics, such as Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, countries from which people migrate to Russia for work, prospective hires are interested in learning Russian but the countries do not have the capacity to educate them in the language.

The Russian language was purged from many countries after the U.S.S.R. ended, Nikonov told me, but today’s economic incentives, including the fact that Russia is the sixth largest economy in the world, are clear.

The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund

Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov (1798 – 1883) was one of the most distinguished diplomats in Russian history and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund is named in his honor.

On its website the Foundation describes itself as the “first and unique in modern Russia mechanism for state-society partnership in the sphere of foreign policy.” That is immediately followed by this note on soft power: “In international life so-called ‘soft power’ has begun to play a larger role, where the priority is not the military-economic power of world national administrative entities, but the ability of a state and society to exert influence on the international space with the help of its cultural, historical and political values.”

The Moscow office of the Gorchakov Fund is located at the headquarters of the Onexim Group, one of Russia’s largest private investment funds. Mikhail Prokhorov, its former president who resigned to run for Russian President in 2012, is on the Board of Trustees. “If you open Forbes Top 20 Russia maybe you will see there all members of the Board,” says its Deputy

Executive Director, Roman Grishenin, “We are extremely thankful that they think that public diplomacy is the field in which they can donate quite large financial resources.”

In an interview at the Gorchakov Fund Grishenin defined public diplomacy to me in the following way: “If we take the classic definition, this is, perhaps, the government’s ability to make an impact on foreign policy processes through the capability of civil society institutions, such as non-governmental organizations, and the ability to form a favorable public opinion for itself.”

The Gorchakov Fund is an NGO established by Russian Presidential decree in 2011. It was created by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its approach to soft power is centered on the role of NGO’s as the primary method of projecting Russia’s soft power.

“I don’t want to say that we were established in the same way as the well-known American NGO’s like NDI (National Democratic Institute) or IRI (International Republican Institute.) I don’t want to say that we copied American experience in this field, but we took it into account in working up, let’s say, the strategy and tactics of the Gorchakov Fund for Public Diplomacy Support.”

Grishenin said Russia is concerned that in the United Nations some 3,500 NGO’s are represented, while in Russia there are only about thirty and when I asked him whether Russia has an established soft power structure he replied: “That’s a provocative question. We wish we had such a structure, but I’ll probably disappoint you if I say that in fact we don’t have it.”

“We are based on the premise that Russia has something to say,” he told me, “that Russia has great experience of being between Europe and Asia with a mixture of different cultures. Asian nations as well as European had a significant impact on the formation of Russia’s morality and culture. That is why we don’t have to be either “under-European” or “over-
Asian”. We can say that we have our own culture, our own system of values; we have our own understanding of what the state should be and which functions it should bear and what patriotism and loving the motherland should look like. If we find words to tell the West and East about this, that will be Russia’s soft power. This is my personal opinion.”

“Our target audience is young, active people from different countries,” Natalia Burlinova, Program Director for the Gorchakov Fund, told me. “These are mainly countries in the post-Soviet space. In the future I hope it will be European countries, Western Europe and probably the United States. We are now only two years old and we are just developing. Here we have great prospects. In general, these projects are aimed at giving people from different countries a chance to get to know which processes are going on in the Russian Federation, in foreign policy and even in domestic policy, and, of course, to communicate and make contact.”

Roman Grishenin pointed to a project planned for March with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Institute for the U.S.A. and Canada: a meeting of Russian ambassadors to the United States, and U.S. Ambassadors to Russia and the Soviet Union.

Although our conversation in Moscow was devoted primarily to the structure and role of the Gorchakov Fund we discussed, as well, the legacy of the Soviet Union. “We did have serious ideals in which we all certainly believed, or many of us, let’s say,” Grishenin told me. “In the 1990’s, when this values system collapsed, it became quite difficult to determine any priorities; moreover, difficult to define them. I think we will reach that. Maybe the one who will be able to define that has already been born, but that’s not me.”

The Fund’s Director of Public Relations added: “In Russia, for Russian people, sometimes there is no need for an exact wording. Some things we just understand with our soul.”
Russia Beyond the Headlines

The concept of Russia Beyond the Headlines was developed in 2006 by the staff of Rossiskaya Gazeta, the daily newspaper of the Russian government, which publishes all official government documents.

“The idea came about because of discussions of how Russia is presented in various media,” Eugene Abov, Publisher of International Supplements at Russia Beyond the Headlines explained in an interview in Moscow.16

“The idea was that Russia is under-represented in foreign media,” he said. We were talking about newspapers. The space was limited and most often was filled with sensational or negative articles because it raises readership. The negative was most common and it highlighted only one side.”

Abov said the project began on our own initiative “not on orders from on high,” although it is funded, indirectly, by the Russian government. It also gets sponsorship from various regional administrations that want to promote their investment opportunities as well as from Skolkovo, the high-tech business center near Moscow.

“We are financed from the budget of Rossiskaya Gazeta,” Abov said. “The government finances Rossiskaya Gazeta for its activities as the official publisher of Russian legislation. But another part is financed from the open market. They sell circulation. If you look at the state budget you will see Voice of Russia, you will see RT television, you will see ITAR TASS, the

16 Eugene Abov, interview by author, Moscow, Russia, Feb. 21, 2013.
All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company and Rossiskaya Gazeta. But you will not see Russia Beyond the Headlines.”

*RBTH* is a monthly supplement published in leading newspapers around the world, in the form of the paper in which it appeared, paid for by Rossiskaya Gazeta.

At RBTH headquarters in Moscow, a modern, open newsroom with young staff, most of them in their twenties, Abov told me that when the idea was first proposed it elicited a very negative reaction from editors of the foreign papers. “They almost fell over!” he said.

“Imagine! The government newspaper, Rossiskaya Gazeta, wants to publish its material inside the Washington Post! It was impossible. They thought it would be the usual propaganda.”

Slowly, he said, “we found a common language and decided that, on the condition of advertising and division of our content from the rest of the paper, we could do it. Each insert has its own sub-editor who looks at the articles in terms of the paper’s editorial standards, from the point of view of not having propaganda.”

Today, RBTH publishes a monthly supplement in newspapers around the world: The Washington Post, the U.K.’s Daily Telegraph, France’s Le Figaro, Germany’s Ze Deutche Zeitung, Italy’s La Republicca, Japan’s Mainichi Shimbun and The Wall Street Journal. It has a website translated into fifteen languages: RBTH.ru accessible on iPad with a special app. In June of this year Russia Beyond the Headlines and Foreign Policy launched a new digital project called Russia Direct. The new website includes articles, white papers and monthly memos on U.S. and Russian foreign policy from leading experts in Russia and the United States.

*RBTH*’s early experience underscored the difference in how news is presented in both countries. Material from Rossiskaya Gazeta was translated it into English without re-writing.
Abov said: “it didn’t work at all. There are absolutely different schools of journalism…and there was no context.”

In 2008 a new editorial team was brought in 2008 with a new concept: “try to tell foreign readers more than their own press is writing. Not fight with the Western media, but write more. Present to them an alternative reading.”

Abov says RBTH’s aim is to “present the country by means of quality journalism. Not through informational advertisements but through quality journalism.”

“Our partners at first didn’t believe it,” he said. “They thought we were there to present propaganda and to promote one idea, primarily the Kremlin’s view. And we agreed that we would work in such a way that our readers would not think of us as propaganda.”

Propaganda, he said, is “poor journalism . . . when you present only one viewpoint, when you ignore other ideas, when you diminish facts.” Abov said the editors of the newspapers in which his supplements appear think that advertising is “anything that is not created by their newsroom” but added: “We really don’t like it to be considered advertising. We want to write about things broadly.”

Is Russia Beyond the Headline part of Russia’s soft power? Abov told me “It’s usually said that we are involved with trying to improve the image of Russia. But we don’t think that is our job. Because you can’t just change the image just like that. We are media. We can only explain what is not clear to our readers. To change the image you need a whole lot of things. We try to be objective.”

As for changing Russia’s image, Managing Editor Lara McCoy, an American, told me, “There’s only so much you can do in these spheres when the reality is different . . . the Russian government is its own worst enemy.”
Editor in Chief of *Russia Direct* Ekaterina Zabrovskaya said in U.S. publications *RBTH* “talks about stories that are more positive because those stories aren’t the ones that are reported because they’re not sexy, they’re not big explosions, big scandals, what the Western press want.”

She, too, however, objects to the word “propaganda.” “What we do is expressed in the name: it’s ‘beyond.’ We want to tell more of the story that isn’t available in the local press in whatever the country. Not because the country is biased but because there’s not enough space, they’re cutting newspaper staff, there isn’t space for information. In some ways I kind of consider us the Moscow bureau for these international papers.”

In Serbia the editorial approach is different, she said. “Our Serbian editors, for example, say people are extremely pro-Russia so they have to say ‘You know what? Russia’s not all great. Here are some challenges.’ What we want to do is show a bit more complete picture and if that results in people feeling differently about Russia then I don’t think that’s a bad thing.”

**P.R. Agencies**

To get its message to the world the Russian government also employs the services of leading global public relations companies, most notably Ketchum, Inc., a subsidiary of Omnicom Group, Inc.

Ketchum began working with the Kremlin in 2006 when it won a competitive bid to assist the Kremlin press office with media relations and communications for the G-8 summit hosted, hosted by Russia for the first time.

The U.S. Justice Department, under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, (FARA) “requires persons acting as agents of foreign principals in a political or quasi-political capacity to make periodic public disclosure of their relationship with the foreign principal, as well as
activities, receipts and disbursements in support of those activities.**17**

Since 2006 Ketchum has registered a number of projects for Russia. In documents filed in May, 2006 it stated that “Ketchum Inc. has been engaged by Ketchum Ltd. which is based in the U.K., to provide communications support for the Russian G-8 presidency before, during and after the 2006 G-8 summit through December 31, 2006.”

Two million dollars, “which includes fees and out-of-pocket expenses has been allocated to finance Ketchum’s activities in the United States,” it said. “The amount allocated is an estimate based on projected services and may be revised upwards or downwards, based in the worldwide communications needs of the G-8 presidency.”**18**

In 2008 it registered Ketchum and The Washington Group as subcontractors for Ketchum Ltd., based in the U.K., “to provide public relations counsel, lobbying and media relations support for The Russian Federation from January 2007 through and including February 28, 2007. The purpose was to promote “energy security, The Russian Federation as a place favorable for foreign investments, and The Russian Federation’s accession to the World Trade Organization.”**19**

Ketchum works primarily with a senior aide to President Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Peskov, shaping Russia’s outreach to Western media on a variety of initiatives, depicting Russia as a country with a strong economy in which it is safe and advantageous to invest and do business.

Ketchum also runs the website thinkRussia.com which includes articles on Russia’s

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business and the economy, policies and the arts. Its purpose is to reach influential policy makers, journalists, Russia experts, business leaders and investors. Angus Roxburgh, the BBC’s Moscow correspondent during the Yeltsin years, worked for three years as a media consultant to the Kremlin, as a contractor for Brussels-based g+, a partner of Ketchum and part of the Omnicom Group. In a Skype interview he told me the Kremlin has an underlying view that he summarized as: “Why does the West hate us so much? Why do they criticize us all the time?”

Roxburgh agreed that the West still has a number of stereotypes about Russia. “It’s very hard for the West to understand that it’s not a Communist country anymore,” he said, and there is a reason for that, he would tell Kremlin officials. “I would say to them, ‘because you still keep acting like a Communist country in so many ways. You’ve got a capitalist system, you’ve got relative freedoms and so on, but you still do things that remind people of how things were in the old days.’”

Roxburgh said he suggested commissioning a series of programs on Russian television that would expose the Communist history of Russia, instead of programs that glorify Stalin. “That’s giving the completely wrong impression,” Roxburgh said he told them, “but that advice fell on deaf ears because they are actually stuck in the past.”

One official, he said, explained why Russian media should not talk about the Soviet Occupation of the Baltics. “He said the time hasn’t come for that yet: ‘There are hundreds of thousands, even millions of veterans alive, people who fought in that war, families whose parents gave their lives in that war, not for Stalin but in the honest belief that they were liberating Eastern Europe. And if we turn round and tell them that basically everything you did was in vain, how can we do that?’”


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20 Angus Roxburgh, Skype interview by author, November 9, 2012.
wrote: “The biggest problem Ketchum faced was that the Russians had little clue about how the Western media function” and in our Skype interview he told me he had to disabuse Russian officials of the idea that they could pay for positive articles in Western publications.

“Their basic difficulty is that they imagine that the Western press operates in the same way as the Russian press does,” he said. “In other words, if you pay them enough they’ll write whatever you want them to write.”

Roxburgh said he encouraged Kremlin officials to take a cue from their counterparts in the West and invite journalists to lunch, to cultivate them. One official, he said, did that for a while, hosting dinners in Moscow for journalists and arranging briefings with government ministers. The step initially won praise that the Kremlin was “opening up.”

Then the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya was murdered. Roxburgh said he believed that Kremlin officials concluded that they would be inundated with questions about the murder, making it more difficult to get across the government’s message on other subjects. Although the official never directly made the connection to the murder, the briefings stopped.

Vladimir Putin himself has become part of Russia’s public diplomacy, engaging in unique publicity stunts. In one, he ostensibly discovered ancient Greek urns while scuba diving. In another he rode a horse bare-chested. He has thrown opponents in judo matches, tranquilized a polar bear and, dressed in white, has flown a hang-glider to lead a flock of endangered Siberian cranes on their seasonal migration.

Roxburgh insisted that the stunts were not invented by Ketchum but were President Putin’s ideas. “I realized that, if Putin has an idea, nobody criticizes him,” Roxburgh said. “When Putin is doing something it’s accepted completely and people will sit and actually wait for Putin’s word. That’s why there are so many periods of utter paralysis in Russian decision-
making, including in presenting their positions, their public diplomacy. It’s because they’re all waiting for the boss himself to pronounce because nobody dares to come out and say something first, in case it’s wrong.”

**International Youth Festivals**

Russia under Vladimir Putin is reaching back into its history to revive some high points of Soviet soft power. According to an article from Kommersant newspaper featured on the Russkiy Mir website, Russia, in 2017, plans to host an International Festival of Youth and Students (Всемирный фестиваль молодежи и студентов.)

“The U.S.S.R. held this kind of events twice,” the article said, “and both had a powerful agitation effect: in 1957 the Soviet leadership for the first time opened the iron curtain in this way and in 1985 it was the first high-profile international action of perestroika.”

The report, published January 16, 2013, is interesting not only for the information it conveys but also for its revival of the Soviet word “agitation” (агитация) that usually is employed along with the word “propaganda” (пропаганда) – sometimes in shortened form “agitprop” (агитпроп) - to connote art forms with a political content.

Youth Festivals were a high-profile project of Soviet public diplomacy and, according to Frederick C. Barghoorn, conformed well to the U.S.S.R.’s propaganda strategy.

“Generally speaking,” he wrote, “Soviet successes in the area of cultural diplomacy and exchanges of persons are more likely to occur when carefully staged spectacles and regimented

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masses – as in youth and sports festivals – can be employed, than in the smaller, more intimate types of gather where communist aversion to spontaneity is likely to strike a jarring note.”

The Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in July of 1957, for example, was a mammoth show of soft power, attended by 34,000 people from one hundred thirty one countries, displaying the Soviet Union as a more open nation after Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s “Thaw.”

The festival’s slogan was "For Peace and Friendship" ("За мир и дружбу") a phrase that would resonate for decades afterwards when Soviet young people and students met their counterparts from other nations. Photographs from the time showed smiling young people singing, dancing, talking with students from African nations newly liberated from colonialism, listening to jazz for the first time. Perhaps the most famous Russian song of the 20th century was introduced at the festival: “Moscow Nights.”

“The festival rocked the Soviet style of life and affected what young people were wearing at the time,” an article on the RT.com website in 2007 explained. “Short blazers and skirts have been popular ever since. And that's when the Soviet people first heard the word 'jeans.'”

“The festival turned the gaze of the Soviet people to fashion, manners of behavior, a way of life, and increased the speed of change,” notes the Portal about Russia website.

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“Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw,’ the dissident movement, a breakthrough in literature and painting – all of that began soon after the festival.”

Almost three decades later, at another turning point in Soviet history, Russia hosted the 1985 International Festival of Youth and Students bearing the motto “For Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship.” It was another major soft power attraction, drawing 26,000 participants from one hundred fifty seven countries to Moscow. At the closing ceremonies Lenin Stadium was filled with approximately 100,000 people.

This time, Swan Lake blended with rock music. Just four months before Mikhail Gorbachev was chosen as the new general secretary of the Communist Party and leader of the Soviet Union, the man who would usher in “perestroika” that would transform life in the U.S.S.R.

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church is a potent factor in Russia’s soft power diplomacy, especially in countries of the former Soviet Union. In its “Postulates on Russia’s Foreign Policy (2012-2018)” the Russian International Affairs Council notes “The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is a special component of Russia’s ‘soft power.’ Positioning of ROC as a transnational institution is advisable.”

According to a poll conducted by the Levada Center, a Russian polling company, almost eighty percent of Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox. In the mid-1990’s only one half defined themselves that way.²⁵

Thomas de Waal notes, in an article in The National Interest: “Surveys suggest that religious belief in Russia is getting stronger, not weaker.”

The Church’s influence, however, is not limited to religious issues. In a list ranking leading “political figures,” published by Nezavisimaya Gazeta the head of the Church, Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, was rated number six. Significantly, he came in five places ahead of the Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov.

Throughout his career Kirill I has been closely tied to president Vladimir Putin. Before assuming his position as Patriarch he was Chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Relations, a powerful post with broad influence in the former Soviet space. In his article de Waal calls him a “shrewd political figure(s)” and “untouchable,” adding: “Although he wouldn’t see it that way the Moscow patriarch is probably the most effective instrument of Russian soft power in the ‘near abroad.’”

One recent example of the Patriarch’s influence is his public endorsement of prosecuting members of the Pussy Riot band, who performed a punk rock song with a political message at Moscow’s main cathedral, praying to the Virgin Mary to save Russia from Vladimir Putin. Two of the women were convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred by a Moscow court last August and are serving two-year sentences. A third member was convicted as well but her sentence was suspended.

The Patriarch has spoken out forcefully against abortion and equal rights for homosexuals, including the right to marry or adopt children. His lobbying apparently has been


President Putin, in June 2013, signed legislation outlawing spreading propaganda supporting “non-traditional” sexual relations to minors and imposing heavy fines and jail terms for those convicted of breaking the law.

The RT website reported: “The bill was slammed as ‘anti-gay’ by gay rights activists both in Russia and abroad. However, the Russian president tried to cut short the criticism coming from Western countries and, speaking at the press conference in Finland earlier this month, called on them not to interfere with Russian internal affairs. ‘Some countries . . . think that there is no need to protect children from this. We do. We are not going to interfere,’ he said. ‘But we are going to provide such protection the way that State Duma lawmakers have decided.’”

That same month the Russian president signed a law criminalizing “insulting people's religious feelings” and in July he signed separate legislation banning the adoption of children by same-sex couples.

In addition to its political role the Russian Orthodox Church plays an ideological role in Russian society. In a document written by the Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” the Bishops present a robust definition of the role of patriotism in the Church: “The patriotism of the Orthodox Christian should be active,” it says. “It is manifested when he defends his fatherland against an enemy, works for the good of the motherland, cares for the good order of people's life through, among other things, participation in the affairs of government. The Christian is called to preserve


and develop national culture and people's self-awareness.”

The Church, under the leadership of Kirill I, promotes what it sees are Russian values, as opposed to Western “universal” values, a concept that aligns closely with Vladimir Putin’s concept of national sovereignty.

In his article, “The Soft-Power Foundations Of Putin's Russia,” Victor Yasmann notes that the 10th World Congress of Russian People, an event organized by the Moscow Patriarchate, “adopted a conception of a uniquely Russian vision of democracy and human rights, an idea that became a central tenet of the Kremlin's ideology of sovereign democracy.”

“Speaking at the congress,” Yasmann says, “Kirill said there are higher values than liberty and democracy and that the church rejects the idea that "human rights prevail over the interests of society."

Vladimir Putin has urged that the Church play a greater role in formulating and promoting societal values. As Thomas Grove wrote: “The Russian Orthodox Church and other traditional religions should get every opportunity to fully serve in such important fields as the support of family and motherhood, the upbringing and education of children, youth, social development, and to strengthen the patriotic spirit of the armed forces.”

More recently the Kremlin has honed its “values” message, depicting itself as the repository and savior of traditional moral values espoused by all traditional religions. Addressing

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the 20123 Valdai Discussion Club in September, a meeting which I attended, Putin excoriated the West for its moral relativism and “political correctness…rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization.”

“The excesses of political correctness have reached the point,” he said, “where people are seriously talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote pedophilia. People in many European countries are embarrassed or afraid to talk about their religious affiliations. Holidays are abolished or even called something different; their essence is hidden away, as is their moral foundation. And people are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world. I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis.”

The speech, which was broadcast live for the first time, is a milestone in Putin’s strategy of projecting Russia’s soft power. Taking an indirect, but obvious swipe at American “exceptionalism” he noted that: “we believe that every country, every nation is not exceptional, but unique, original and benefits from equal rights, including the right to independently choose their own development path.”

Russia, and not the United States, he seems to be saying, is the leading moral force in the world and it will actively promote its values internationally: “This is our conceptual outlook, and it follows from our own historical destiny and Russia's role in global politics. Our present position has deep historical roots. Russia itself has evolved on the basis of diversity, harmony and balance, and brings such a balance to the international stage.”

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EVALUATING RUSSIA’S SOFT POWER STRATEGY

Objectively evaluating the effectiveness of a nation’s soft power is not a simple task. Soft power, in the Western understanding of the term, is not under the direct control of government; it flows, as Joseph S. Nye, Jr. says, from a nation’s “culture, political ideals, and policies.” How “attractive” it is depends, to a large degree, on how others perceive the legitimacy of those ideals and policies.

There is not a direct dollar-for-dollar connection between how much money a nation’s government spends on soft power and public diplomacy initiatives and how citizens of other countries view that country. The United States, for example, spends heavily on public diplomacy in order to project the image of America as a bulwark of democracy but the recent controversy over leaks concerning the National Security Agency’s collection of intelligence on foreigners and Americans alike has damaged the image of the U.S. government around the world.¹

Even in areas of public diplomacy where the precise amount of money a country spends can be defined it is difficult to measure its soft power effect. The U.S. Agency for International Development, for example, carefully tracks the funds it allocates to international development projects but, as Alexei Dolinskiy noted: “Evaluating outcomes is very complicated as development progress or stagnation can be attributed to numerous factors far beyond any country’s international assistance impact.”²


Russia, however, appears to be measuring its soft power success by the extent to which it has been able to undermine the soft power of the United States and its emphasis on democracy and individuals rights and, by that measure, President Putin appears to believe he is succeeding. As he stressed at this September 10th anniversary meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club: “The time when ready-made lifestyle models could be installed in foreign states like computer programs has passed.”

Russia, Putin proclaimed, is back. No longer the wounded nation of the immediate post-Soviet years, it is prepared to actively promote its views internationally. Although Russia, as this thesis shows, may still be in the process of defining its “national idea,” Putin argued it is already well on its way.

“Russia has passed through these trials and tribulations and is returning to itself, to its own history, just as it did at other points in its history. After consolidating our national identity, strengthening our roots, and remaining open and receptive to the best ideas and practices of the East and the West, we must and will move forward.”

In Russia, as I discovered during the interviews I conducted in Moscow, there is deep cynicism about the United States’ professed support of democracy and human rights. Several Russians I spoke with described the U.S. strategy as, at best, a PR campaign and, at worst, an attempt to foment “color revolutions” in Russia.

As Leslie Gelb and Dmitri K. Simes noted: “Many Russian and Chinese elites consider American foreign policy objectives fundamentally hostile to their vital interests. Neither group views American democracy promotion as reflecting any genuine commitment to freedom;
instead, both perceive it was a selective crusade to undermine governments that are hostile to the United States or too powerful for its comfort.”

Some academic researchers who have studied Russia’s soft power and public diplomacy have concluded that Russia’s strategy simply is not working. Yelena Osipova said: “Russia is still stuck with its Cold War image, especially in the American public psyche.” The image is “constantly reinforced not only in the American popular culture and media, but also by Russia’s own domestic and foreign policies. The Kremlin’s various initiatives at improving its image – although largely nascent – have not yet shown significant success or potential promise.”

The Pew Research Global Attitudes Project’s 2012 survey of international opinions of Russia bears that out. While Russia received a relatively favorable review in Greece (sixty one percent) Lebanon (forty eight percent) and China (forty eight percent) the majority of countries surveyed were more negative, with only approximately one-fifth of respondents in Italy, Japan and Pakistan responding favorably.

Russia’s leadership fared poorly in a Gallup survey published in 2011 that compared the leaders in Moscow with the leaders of the U.S. and other major nations. In 2010, it found, “a median of twenty seven percent of adults across one hundred four countries that Gallup surveyed approved of the Kremlin's leadership, while thirty one percent disapproved and thirty three

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percent didn't have an opinion.” Approval of Russia's leadership, it noted, was significantly higher in countries of the former Soviet Union and in sub-Saharan Africa.  

China, too, in spite of its more robust public diplomacy strategy, had relatively high negative ratings in many countries, with approximately two-thirds of the populations of Germany, Italy and France saying they had a negative view of China.

Even Confucius Institutes, about which the head of Rossotrudnichestvo, Konstantin Kosachev, fretted during our interview in Moscow, do not appear to be improving Beijing’s image abroad. The New York Times says an article by a Chinese professor titled “What Affects China’s National Image? A Cross-National Study of Public Opinion” was rejected by Chinese academic publications “because it said the institutes, designed to project soft power, had failed to reverse China’s ‘rather negative image’ in most of the countries where they operated.”

Polls showing problems with Russia’s international image are no surprise to some Russia government officials or to others responsible for developing and implementing Russia’s soft power strategy.

In its Postulates on Russia’s Foreign policy (2012-2018) the influential Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) headed by former Russian Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov said that Russia possesses “substantial” soft power potential but it is “still under-utilized.”

“In general, the task of creating a positive image of Russia abroad has not been

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resolved,” it said. “Russia is often associated with corruption, crime, bureaucracy, judicial tyranny, and other negative phenomena. Russia usually loses awareness-raising and image-building campaigns.” Russia, it went on, “is seen by many, including partners favorably disposed to us, as a closed country, whose leadership believes that any outside influence is potentially dangerous and destructive.”

There are objective reasons for this, the report noted: “In some critical areas, the real position of Russia in the world is peripheral. The economy is critically dependent on world prices of oil and other raw materials. The country’s scientific and technical potential is reducing, the proportion in manufacturing and trade in high technology is extremely modest, and the population is decreasing. Russia is perceived abroad as a country that is not very favorable for business.”

Russia, it said, needs to promote the image of “a different Russia – a country that is open to communication with the outside world.” Significantly, the RIAC report said it is equally important to change Russian citizens’ views of the outside world “as a source of opportunities for Russia and as resource for transformation.”

“Today,” the report said, “a different picture of the outside world – a dangerous, cruel and hostile environment against which the country must defend itself – dominates the public consciousness.”

RIAC called for a “robust strategy” of building up Russia’s soft power, which it termed “one of the most important reserves of Russia’s foreign policy.” That strategy, it said, could include leveraging the export of educational services, the country’s science and technology, the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid., 6.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Ibid.,11.}\]
Russian language and culture, tourism, the Russian Orthodox Church and “people’s diplomacy” as well as “modern means of communication.”

President Vladimir Putin also appears to believe that Russia is failing in promoting its image abroad but he ascribes it less to Russia’s deficiencies than to attacks from abroad. “Russia has been the target of biased and aggressive criticism that, at times, exceeds all limits,” he said in his article “Russia and the Changing World.”

“When we are given constructive criticism, we welcome it and are ready to learn from it. But when we are subjected, again and again, to blanket criticisms in a persistent effort to influence our citizens, their attitudes, and our domestic affairs, it becomes clear that these attacks are not rooted in moral and democratic values,” he said. When it comes to the influence of the mass media, he complained, Russia often is “outperformed in fostering “an accurate image of Russia abroad.”

The Kremlin’s Alexander Smirnov believes Russia’s modern-day attempts to create an “accurate image” are subverted by the legacy of the Soviet Union. “It’s a thing that will require not only money but also time to build on,” he told me in our interview in Moscow, “because, unfortunately, the management stereotypes that were applied during the Soviet era on such mechanisms are still there.”

Russia, Smirnov said, also is failing in its attempt to be as good a salesman of Russia as the U.S. is in “selling” its democracy to the world: “Re-branding, we did nothing, and that's the problem,” he said. “But now…Russia has a lot to say to the world and we are trying to do this.”

The State Department’s Tara Sonenshine, countered however, that public diplomacy

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should not be confused with public relations. “Public relations is often individuals and a firm trying to push a brand,” she said in our interview in Washington. “Public diplomacy is a structural apparatus around an inter-governmental approach.”

“That, to me,” she said, “is the DNA of public diplomacy: often you can get at it by what is the architecture around how it’s being built. Are you doing it where you could just hire a PR firm, or are you building it into the fabric of your foreign policy? If you build it into the fabric of your foreign policy it’s going to show up in foreign affairs architecture.”

Russia’s model, Sonenshine argued, is “impositional public diplomacy - which is basically imposed on you, we give it to you. It’s the old style of public diplomacy. We will paint you the picture and you will see it the way we see it.” Sonenshine said she is not surprised by Moscow’s approach. “It’s only a decade or two into this, so it doesn’t surprise me that they are still catching up with public diplomacy which is supposed to be a conversation, give and take, you’re not trying to teach and preach. I think they’ll get there but right now they’re in the ‘We’re going to impose our view of how you should see us’ upon you.”

Russia’s attempt to project it soft power is complicated by its bifurcated approach: it is speaking to two audiences simultaneously - Russians at home and residents of other countries abroad - each receiving the message from a different point of view. This can, and does, undermine Moscow’s attempts to present a coherent message.

Moscow State University’s Elena Vartanova told me “part of this public diplomacy is also targeting not only for the outer world but also for Russia itself.” Soft power, she said, is an important method of showing the legitimacy of Russia’s different position. “We have a different position, but it is not in opposition to the United States, it is because we see the world from the other angle” which, she said, is lacking in an “Anglo-America-centric world.”
This “other angle,” this sense of Russia’s uniqueness, however, which finds expression in many aspects of modern Russian society, from the Russian Orthodox Church to RT television’s editorial approach, accentuates differences with other countries, not similarities – a stark contrast to Nye’s concept of attraction. Lilia Shevtsova called this an “old, familiar song, cooked up by the statists of the past, (which) is now being sung by a new generation of statists, who are tying to find a new variation of the traditional melody: steps in the direction of a theocratic state, the Eurasian Union as the new form of areas of influence, and a ‘pivot’ to the Pacific as a means of geopolitical confirmation of Russia’s distancing from Europe.”

Shevtsova, a fierce Kremlin critic, said Vladimir Putin may be using the words “soft power” but “that doesn’t mean that it’s something real.” “They really think seriously about how to contain the West,” she told me in our interview in Moscow. “I don’t think they really believe – because they’re smart guys – that they can influence the West, that they can make Russia attractive, in current Russian form. This is just like typical, vintage Putin: ‘you’re talking about justice? Look at your justice when you have so many corrupted people! You’re talking about extremists that we have in Chechnya? Well, just look how many extremists you have! You have soft power but we have soft power!’”

Shevtsova believes there is no argument to support the notion of soft power or public diplomacy in Russia because “there is no society participating. And those who do participate are nominated by the state so they are not civil society.”

Russia’s former Foreign Minister Igor S. Ivanov, however, believes President Putin is serious when he and the Foreign Ministry talk about soft power as an important factor in Russia’s foreign policy. “A few years ago that didn’t exist,” he told me. “Soft power in some

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14 Lilia Shevtsova, Russia XXI: The Logic of Suicide and Rebirth (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2013), 33.
circles in Russia was considered Western propaganda, an instrument of infiltrating the social consciousness.”

Yet Ivanov shares the view that Russia lacks a strong civil society. “Non-governmental institutions, for example, don’t have to mean opposition, he said in our interview. “In the U.S. the Council on Foreign Relations or the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace are neither Democratic or Republican.”

“Unfortunately, here in Russia, we have these new, young institutions and so far a culture has not been fully developed that says criticism does not necessarily mean opposition. If I criticize that does not necessarily mean that I am criticizing or I am against the government.”

A country may have the “structure” of soft power, he said, but that is not enough. “You can have a structure but soft power isn’t going to work, he said. “For the structure to work you need the corresponding structures of civil society because soft power doesn’t depend so much on administrative mechanisms like the State Department, etc. but basically on institutions of civil society. And if the institutions of civil society are not sufficiently developed then it’s hard to draw a nice chart and put it into action.”

RT’s Margarita Simonyan said Vladimir Putin’s administration is paying more attention to soft power but, she lamented, “We lost so much time. I mean, unbelievably!” In our interview she told me she talks with the Kremlin “daily” about the need to improve Russia’s image but when I asked her if she was successful she answered: “It depends on who you talk with and what subject.”

The Kremlin is not homogeneous, she told me. “They’re not all the same. There are a lot of different people in it and a lot of currents, I’d say, like in the sea. Some of the people think that more effort and money and thinking should be invested into explaining ourselves to the
world. Some of the people think that it’s absolutely useless.”

In spite of Russia’s lack of success, for the most part, in improving its image, Moscow’s overriding message – its insistence on sovereignty above all – resonates with many developing countries that chafe at U.S. military, political and cultural dominance. Even as the Obama administration has been damaged by leaks about its massive collection of intelligence information, the upper house of the Russian Parliament is promoting the idea of stripping the U.S. of control over the World Wide Web, according to the New York Times: 15

“Ostensibly with the goal of safeguarding Russian citizens’ private lives and letters from spying, the committee revived a long-simmering Russian initiative to transfer control of Internet technical standards and domain name assignments from two nongovernmental groups that control them today to an arm of the United Nations, the International Telecommunications Union,” it reported.

“Its proposals had found some support among other governments that wanted greater access to social networking and e-mail data, but which did not ban such services outright, as China does,” the Times said, citing Brazil’s foreign minister who endorsed the Russian proposal.

Rossotrudnichestvo’s head, Konstantin Kosachev, agreed that Russia, so far, does not have one, unified concept of how to develop a “commonly accepted message” that it could present to the world but, he argued, Russia does have one idea that can attract others to its way of thinking: its insistence on the primacy of national sovereignty.

“We don’t force our model of development on anyone, in contrast to the United States. It’s not a condition for cooperation,” he said. “The U.S. says to its partners ‘we are ready to help, to consider you allies, but for that you must carry out certain conditions. You must become

democratic, you must adhere to the economic criteria of the IMF, for example, you have to have this certain budget and that certain balance. There are conditions for friendship. You must be a certain way and then we will be friends.’

The alternative Russian model, he said, tells other countries: “We are ready to be friends with you no matter who you are. We respect you. And we ask the same from you.” This different model of relations, without “preconditions,” he told me in our interview in Moscow, “can be attractive for many. Quite a number of my serious European partners, Western European, say that exhaustion with the United States is rapidly growing, strange as that may be. The U.S. is constantly proposing to others, including Europe, you must behave this way, you must! And it constantly builds up. It’s disturbing.”

Russia’s own internal political dynamics sometimes override Moscow’s attempts to project an “accurate image” of itself abroad. “The first priority is control,” the Carnegie Moscow Center’s Maria Lipman told me, “and if there is a clash, if there is a conflict between the purpose of improving Russia’s image in the West, it will never come at the cost of yielding control. And the opposite is true: if President Putin needs to keep control and it comes at a cost, which often happens at a cost of tainting Russia’s image, he would do that, he would accept the costs to Russia’s image, as he did with Pussy Riot. That took a tremendous toll on Russia’s image but why didn’t he play it down? It was important to look strong, even if it came at the cost of a tarnished image.”

Anne Applebaum, in her essay, “Putinism: The Ideology,” pointed to a factor that plays at cross purposes to soft power’s organic emergence from a country’s political and cultural life. Putin and those around him, she wrote, “deeply believe that the rulers of the state must exert careful control over the life of the nation. Events cannot be allowed to just happen, they must be
controlled and manipulated. By the same token, markets cannot be genuinely open, elections cannot be unpredictable and the modern equivalent of the Soviet dissidents – the small group of activists who opposed centralized Kremlin rule – must be carefully controlled through legal pressure, public propaganda and, if necessary, carefully targeted violence.\textsuperscript{16}

From the perspective of Vladimir Putin, however, allowing civil society – the loam of soft power - to develop without any boundaries is a dangerous proposition. Fourteen years after the Soviet Union ended Putin, in his 2005 State of the Nation speech, described his abiding fear that the same forces that tore it apart still threatened the modern Russian state.

"Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century,” Putin said. “As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself.”\textsuperscript{16}

Mr. Putin is constantly faced with a “dilemma,” says Konstantin Kosachev: “How much can we, say, take the government out of the political process and not allow the risk of degradation of the situation?”

“I am convinced that he sincerely would like to see in the country more democracy than there is now but, on the other hand, the more democracy (there is) the more you end up with Bolotnaya Ploshchad” (site of the December 2011 anti-government demonstrations.)

“What was Bolotnaya Ploshchad?” Kosachev asked me. “It was disunited program. The risk is that tomorrow Bolotnaya Ploshchad would develop a mass movement character and


theoretically lead to the overthrow of the government. And then what? Putin is not about to allow that risk and, in that sense, he’s right.”

President Vladimir Putin has moved beyond the stark warnings against the possible disintegration of the Russian state that marked his early presidency but he still fears the centrifugal forces pulling at today’s Russia. In his 2013 Valdai address he urged Russians to set aside their political differences for the sake of the country: “Russia’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity are unconditional. These are red lines no one is allowed to cross. For all the differences in our views, debates about identity and about our national future are impossible unless their participants are patriotic. Of course I mean patriotism in the purest sense of the word.”

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CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Russia’s soft power strategy must be understood in the context of the massive geographic, economic, and political changes that ensued after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Fifteen independent nations were created from that defunct empire, tearing apart one of the world’s two super-powers.

On a societal level, it was a kind of vivisection, as families found themselves, overnight, living in different countries. On a national level the collapse severed economic, military, political and social ties with former Soviet republics and soon led to the dismantling of the Soviet Union’s elaborate public diplomacy structure.

As Russia’s former Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov put it in our interview in Moscow: “Twenty years is not that long a period. We went through major changes after the fall of the Soviet Union and we still are in a transition period in which we have to solve simultaneously economic, social, and cultural issues, as well as define our own place in the world. It’s clear that Russia is not the Soviet Union. It’s not a world power. And because of that, it is necessary to understand what our priorities are.”

Russia’s soft power strategy, therefore, is motivated less by projecting Russia’s ideas and values around the world in order to attract support - the classic Western definition of soft power - than it is by an overriding desire to preserve, strengthen, and exploit what influence Russia still wields. As Leon Aron expressed it in his recent article on Vladimir Putin: “The overarching

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1 Igor Ivanov, interview with author, Moscow, Russia, February 18, 2013.
objective of the Putin regime could be summarized as the recovery of political, economic, and geostrategic assets lost in the Soviet collapse.”

Russia, which began as a new nation twenty two years ago, is playing “catch-up” to the West in using its soft power by fostering a national image that can attract support and build influence internationally. Still labeled with the image of the Soviet Union, it is like a sports team trying to re-imagine its name and mascot. It has no “theme song” – no national idea. Moscow more often plays “defense” rather than “offense.” Its public diplomacy “equipment” is a ragged set of Soviet institutions in need of refurbishing and coordination. Vladimir Putin and his administration, however, are intent on transforming and strengthening Russia’s image and international influence.

In the introduction to this thesis I set out to answer four questions:

1. How does Russia define soft power?
2. What are its goals?
3. Who is the audience?
4. Is this approach succeeding in furthering Russia’s foreign policy objectives?

In this thesis I have come to the following conclusion: Russia’s definition of soft power follows the general outlines of Nye’s classic definition but contains significant differences. The Western concept of soft power hinges on a country’s using attraction to its culture and values as a way of inducing other countries to do what it wants. Russia, as yet unable to define its own values, takes an “oppositional” approach to soft power, seeking to improve Russia’s image by undermining the narrative projected by the United States. To accomplish this goal Russia does not need to carry out a full frontal assault on Western values; it can simply “relativize” the values promoted by the West.

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The United States says it opposes the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad because of his human rights violations but Russia accuses the Syrian opposition of its own human rights violations. The U.S. promotes democracy around the world but, as President Putin wrote in a recent op-ed in the New York Times, “Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’”

Russia does claim common ground with other nations that are committed to universal democratic values, as spelled out in President Dmitry Medvedev’s 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. In that document he declares it Russia’s goal to “seek respect for human rights and freedoms in the entire world” but he immediately adds the further goal of “preventing double standards, respecting national and historic peculiarities of each State in the process of democratic transformations without imposing borrowed value systems on anyone.”

Russia, in other words, claims to subscribe to universal values but defends its right to adhere to its own version of those values, as Vladimir Putin put it in 1999: “democracy with Russian realities.” Fourteen years later he had not changed that view. Reporting in The New York Times on Putin’s first major speech after returning to the presidency in 2012 Ellen Barry writes: “Vladimir V. Putin on Wednesday called on Russians “not to lose ourselves as a nation,” urging them to look for guidance in Russia’s historic and traditional values — and not in Western political models — as it charts its post-Soviet development.”

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Internally, that insistence on Russia’s uniqueness can be a potent tool in uniting the country’s citizens and instilling pride, much as many Americans claim their country is the “greatest in the world.” In *Russia at the turn of the millennium* Vladimir Putin says:

“I am convinced that ensuring the necessary growth dynamics is not only an economic problem. It is also a political and, in a certain sense, - I am not afraid to use this word - ideological problem. To be more precise, it is an ideological, spiritual and moral problem. It seems to me that the latter is of particular importance at the current stage from the standpoint of ensuring the unity of Russian society.”

Outside of Russia’s borders, however, insisting on Russia’s uniqueness gives Moscow’s foreign policy the feeling of a country with a chip on its shoulder. As the U.S. State Department’s Tara Sonenshine describes Russia’s approach to the world: “We are not going to be irrelevant, and we are not going to be ignored and we’re not going to be ‘dissed’ and we’re not going to be told what to do.”

Russia image and its values are important factors economically. In Ernst & Young’s Attractiveness Survey, “Russia 2013,” Andrei Nikitin, General Director, Strategic Initiatives Agency (SIA) says that “Businessmen who don’t work in Russia tend to believe what the foreign press says about this country and, in the eyes of this type of investor, Russia has a negative image. This is a problem, no doubt. There is a need to work harder to create and promote a positive image of this country abroad. To achieve this, it would help if we identified our philosophy and our goals for the foreseeable future, both within the country and abroad. And

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6 Tara Sonenshine, interview.
only after that should we get down to designing a plan of action."\(^7\)

Russia is not the only country attempting to define its soft power, however. China, another state undergoing rapid societal transformation, is doing the same. In his book, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, David Shambaugh says: “There is growing recognition in China that their components of its international image are subjects worthy of academic study as well as foreign policy practice.”\(^8\)

As in Russia, there is debate over whether China’s culture and values are terminally unique or whether they can find resonance in other countries. One school maintains that China has something to teach the world others, Shambaugh says, argue that China’s unique values “should not be exported and transposed onto others. As the veteran diplomat and well-respected intellectual Wu Jianmin observed, ‘Chinese culture is so powerful – it is the core of our soft power. But we do not seek to transform others with it.’”\(^9\)

In Beijing, as in Moscow, Shambaugh says, some lament that China has yet to develop new values and is beset by an identity crisis.

Russia’s goals in utilizing its soft power resources, until now, have remained limited and utilitarian: increasing investment in the country and preventing brain drain of young, educated and ambitious Russians. As Sergei Karaganov writes: “Image improvement is needed for inviting more money to Russia and to make it stay here, since many of those displeased with the current situation benefit from the redistribution of that money in reality. In addition, it will


\(^9\) David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global, the Partial Power*, loc 4002.
ensure that more worthy and educated people come here to stay and few people leave for abroad.”¹⁰

Those are legitimate, if limited, goals for a country still rebuilding its economy to compete internationally. In order for that approach to succeed, however, Russia needs institutions that can foster investment and induce young, educated Russians not to emigrate. It needs a legal system that protects the rights of investors and business owners, as well as opportunities for entrepreneurs in new areas of business not reliant solely on the export of energy resources like oil and gas.

In the ashes of the Soviet Union, uniting the country was an important, indeed, existential necessity. Elena Vartanova says Russia still insists that it differs from other countries “because it is also a kind of internal legitimization of our identity. Because all the soft power mechanism in the global arena also is targeted to the Russian domestic society.”¹¹

If Russians themselves remain the “first ring” of the Kremlin’s soft power strategy citizens of the former Soviet Union comprise the “second ring.” Language and culture remain its most potent tools. Viktor Yanukovych, for example, the president of Ukraine, spoke Russian better than he spoke Ukrainian. The lingua franca of Central Asia, as I have seen on my recent trips to the region, remains Russian.

With the exception of the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which have robustly sought to strengthen their own languages and revive their own cultural identities, Russia retains considerable soft power and cultural influence in other parts of the post-Soviet space. As James Sherr writes in Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion, “The products of Russian cinema


¹¹ Elena Vartanova, interview.
provide a bridge into television which, along with the Russian language itself, is possibly Russia’s most potent form of soft power in Russian-speaking regions of the newly independent states.”

Strengthening bonds to the Russian diaspora, which Dmitry Medvedev’s Foreign Policy Concept refers to as “the Russian world,” is a top priority of the Russian government. It lists as its goal: “to contribute to the consolidation of the organizations of compatriots so as to ensure a more efficient protection by them of their rights in their countries of residence and to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of the Russian diaspora and its links with its historic motherland, to consistently create conditions to assist in the voluntary resettlement to the Russian Federation of those compatriots who would make such choice.”

It is in the “third ring” – the international arena – that Russia finds it more difficult to utilize its soft power. Moscow’s dilemma is trenchantly summed up by Sergei Karaganov: “But first we must decide what we should sell and whom (sic). We cannot sell anything, for example, Russia’s unsightly political system. Nor can we sell Russian climate, Russian cars or Russian medicines. Alas, Russian cuisine, too (Russian readers should not take offense at this – the American or British cuisines are even worse.) What we can sell is a proud history of military victories, weaponry, processed raw materials, foodstuffs, huge spaces and opportunities.”

What can be “sold” to the world, Karaganov argues, is Russian culture. Elena Vartanova sees a direct link between this approach and that of the Soviet Union. “The Soviet Unions’ foreign diplomacy used these notions of Russian culture, Russian soul – what I say is “balalaika,

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matryoshka, ikra (caviar), and Dostoyevsky…They are still here and in a way they are even strengthening. We are no more the global empire based on Soviet weapons but we will are basing our society and our country and our national identity on Russian literature, on Russian culture, on many traditional things, and that is an attempt also to legitimize the Russian position as a global power.”

In one recent example of Russia’s soft power, Anatoly Kucherena, lawyer for NSA leaker Edward Snowden, gave him a gift at Sheremetyevo Airport where Snowden was staying in the transit zone: Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and works by Anton Chekhov.

Evaluating “success” in an area like soft power is difficult. There is no directly relationship between a country’s culture and values and it international influence. Take, for example, President Putin’s use of his own image to forge the impression among his countrymen of a powerful leader. Putin remains Russia’s most popular politician and the image of a fit and vigorous president, no doubt, has a positive effect, especially in the wake of Boris Yeltsin’s public image as an undisciplined lover of vodka. But internationally, as Maria Lipman notes, “The potential for soft power is there but Putin himself is not soft. He is anything but soft. Putin’s way of leveraging foreign policy is by being a difficult partner. Why is that? Because I think he probably realizes that Russia is relatively weak. And because he cannot impose his own on the world or even on bi-lateral relations, the way to go about being weak is to be difficult. Not soft or friendly.”

Some experienced observers of Russia, however, argue that Russia has no soft power. Lilia Shevtsova, for example, says that “Russia has no instruments of soft power in the traditional Western sense of the word…There is not a single argument to support the notion of public diplomacy. Because there is no society participating. And those who do participate are

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14 Elena Vartanova, interview.

15 Maria Lipman, interview.
nominated by the state so they are not civil society.”

Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz says that Russian policy-makers have “misinterpreted” the concept of soft power: “They failed to appreciate the idea of partnerships with clear advantages for both sides in the near and long term,” he says. “Instead, Moscow perceives soft power as the capacity to influence, or even manipulate, public opinion in target countries.”

The Russian leadership’s priority remains control. However, that is interpreted – as an iron fist to subdue dissent or as a necessary bulwark against forces that could destroy the state, it is paramount and it stifles the as yet nascent desire of some Russians to create a civil society not under control of the state. Putin believes “For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly which be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change.”

At its heart, this emphasis on control runs contrary to most Western concepts of soft power. Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz writes that “As soft powers usually use the most transparent and democratic measures to build their external attractiveness, the only way for Russia to become a real soft power in the post-Soviet area is to introduce serious internal reforms that focus on the liberalization of its economy and the democratization of its political system. It is only through real democratic change that Russia will reach its soft power potential.”

The answers to the four questions posed at the beginning of this thesis lead to the conclusion that, two decades after the end of the Soviet Union, Russia still is a period of consolidation; that its leadership continues to be haunted by fears of societal disintegration; that

16 Lilia Shevtsova, interview.
17 Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the turn of the Millennium.”
its self-image is a work in progress; that it realizes the necessity of having a soft-power strategy but remains conflicted about allowing soft power to percolate up from the roots of civil society; that it remains highly cynical of the West, and especially the United States’, soft power strategy; that it confuses soft power with public diplomacy; that it lacks effective coordination of its public diplomacy structure; that its internal policies aimed at preserving internal stability often work at cross purposes to its international public diplomacy; and that it sees soft power diplomacy more as brand management than as an expression of the values that inform its society.

So far, Russia has failed in its attempts to define its values. Increasingly, however, Vladimir Putin sees Russia’s values as key to its success at home and abroad. At this year’s Valdai Discussion Club, in an address broadcast live, he said: “It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination. Without this we will not be able to withstand internal and external challenges, nor we will succeed in global competitions.”

Russia is moving beyond its original, more limited, soft power objective of increasing investment in the country. Expanding his earlier concept of Russia’s cultural uniqueness Putin now is positioning Russia as the bastion of true Western and, indeed, universal moral values.

“We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization,” he said at Valdai. “They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan.”

Putin’s comments were met with applause by American conservative Patrick Buchanan

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who defended Russia’s new law against propaganda on “non-traditional” sexual relations.

“Thus, if we seek to build a Good Society by traditional Catholic and Christian standards, why should not homosexual propaganda be treated the same as racist or anti-Semitic propaganda?"\textsuperscript{18}

Rejecting America’s “exceptionalism,” as he did in his New York Times op-ed, President Putin is staking Russia’s claim as a moral leader: “We believe that every country, every nation is not exceptional, but unique, original and benefits from equal rights, including the right to independently choose their own development path.”

Will this strategy succeed in reversing the overall negative image of Russia? But a wholesale reversal may not be possible or even necessary. Increasingly, Russia appears to be defining success as its ability to question, indeed undermine the United States’ claim to uphold and promote Western values and, for now – for Moscow, at least - that may be enough.

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