

The 21st Century Impasse

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The 21st Century Impasse:
Conflicting Sentiments in US-Russian Relations

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Abstract: There are opposing sentiments deeply rooted in the cultures of the American and Russian peoples, and these sentiments, fed from within, grow stronger every year, further hindering reparation of the relationship between the two states. Three primary influences of both nations are government officials, media, and the entertainment industry. The first, government officials, includes such figures as the presidents, prime minister, secretary of state (in the US), and foreign minister (in Russia); ultimately, these leaders' words have condemned the relationship with negativity, cynicism, and fatigue. The second, the press, is represented by key news sources (television, newspaper, and magazine) in both countries; what they say about the other country over the same eight-year period of time is reflective of the words of the officials. The press is also very critical and perhaps even aggressively opposed in its view of the relationship and the other country as a whole. The final source of input into the two cultures is the entertainment industry in both countries, primarily cinema and television shows, but including smaller subsets of the industry; entertainment used as a medium of propaganda occurred far more frequently on the American side of the relationship. Ultimately, the conclusion is that all three of these inputs into the societies are levelled against reparation and will work against it for the foreseeable future.

Perhaps one of the greatest rivalries of all time is that of the United States of America and Russia (formerly the Soviet Union). Though its death has frequently been anticipated and prophesied, there is little to suggest that it is any less alive today than it was in the 70s at the peak of the Cold War. The primary sources of such influences are the political sphere, the media, and the entertainment industry. All three of these preach gospels and ideologies at the consumers, the people.

The government of any nation is perhaps one of the greatest expressions of intent the nation has. It determines "official" relations, binds itself to or against another nation through international law, and feeds its populace propaganda through its heads of state.

The media frequently complements the government's agenda and also expresses the intent of the nation. Media that succeeds has a wide and varied consumption, a clientele base that they are able to influence through selective information and other tactics.

Entertainment is taken in through dozens of sources, including being hidden within the media. Movie studios and television companies publish works that agree with their views and propagate a message across the culture, and, with the help of globalism, the world.

These sources of influence represent three of many ways in which the nations express their intentions toward one another, and these sentiments help shape the relationship. This situation is what binds arguably the two most influential (and possibly dangerous) nations in the world in check to one another, and thoughts of reparation and cooperation are unlikely to come to fruition until they are addressed.

HISTORY

In order to provide an up-to-date picture of the relationship, the most recent happenings must be examined. In regard to government, the relationship between President Barack Obama in the United States and President Vladimir Putin in Russia provides a good scope of nearly eight years, beginning with hope and ending in a quite similar plight to that which Obama inherited when he was elected to the presidency in 2008.

During these eight years, many historically extraordinary occurrences took place. These events set the stage for interaction between the two countries and were open displays of just how well the repairing of their relationship was going. The first was the declaration of a reset in the first place, in 2009, at the beginning of the Obama administration (Obama). A young, chic president with optimistic tendencies came on scene and wanted to see a new future for the US and Russia, a

relationship built upon transparency and cooperation. By April of 2010, the two nations had signed a new arms reduction treaty by the name of "New START" (Shear), which was heralded as a symptom of improving relations. However, less than a year later, by March of 2011, the Syrian Civil War had begun to pick up; this was to become one of the most influential situations upon the relationship between the US and Russia.

GOVERNMENT

The first of the great influences is the government. Both the citizenry of the United States and that of Russia are heavily reliant on the opinions of heads of state in the formation of their own opinions. Individuals such as presidents, secretaries of state, and high ranking military personnel are able to greatly impact the populace's mindset with their "expert" opinion, and members of both countries' governments have employed this tactic to no small end. Within the governments of Putin and Obama, there is a wealth of opinion offered on the other.

President Barack Obama came to power in 2009 for his first term, and was reelected in 2012, bringing his span of national influence to a total of around eight years thus far. In that time, he has frequently expressed his disappointment and even

disgust with Russia's leadership. As a presidential candidate in 2007, President Obama heralded a time of US-Russian cooperation and mutual disarmament (Obama), or tried to; and when he came to power, this intention was formally expressed when secretary of state Hillary Clinton presented a button meant to be labeled "reset" to Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov (Hornat). This outlook was merely a small part of the arguably optimistic, idealistic worldview of a president characterized as "young" and "chic", and it was viewed as such by much of the world's leadership.

It's hard to say how long this optimism lasted at its fullest, considering that in July of 2009 Obama announced to the world that he viewed President Putin as having "one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new" (Harding). One year later, in June of 2010, the White House painted a very rosy picture of US-Russian relations, full of cooperation, engagement, and benevolence ("US-Russia Relations"). Indeed, for a good portion of his first term, Obama looked favorably upon Russia, even openly mocking Mitt Romney in his second presidential election campaign for implying that Russia was a major threat to the United States (Romney). It is evident that Obama either truly believed that Russia was a relatively benevolent and cooperative force in the world's affairs, or that

he was portraying his foreign policy as being more effective than it actually was.

As Obama's second term dawned, however, his view and comments on Russia were moving south quickly. By August of 2013, President Obama likened Putin's posture at official talks to that of "the bored kid sitting in the back of the classroom" ("Obama on Russia"). While this is not inherently, aggressively a verbal attack on Putin, it certainly reflects the fact that Obama now viewed him as a junior player that he had wrangled into submission. Less than a year later, in late March of 2014, Obama gave an extensive speech after a summit on nuclear security in which he repeatedly referred to Russia and its actions on the world stage as weak (Borger). This was only the beginning of truly pointed comments about Russia and Putin to follow.

In 2014, Obama implied that Russia was a bully on the international stage (Liptak), and in a number of speeches throughout the rest of that year and into those that followed, Obama took on the tone of an instructor or even disciplinarian when addressing Russia on its foreign policy in Ukraine and Syria. By the end of the year, Obama delivered a speech in which he ranked the Russian Federation as a threat to the US and the world, second only to Ebola, and just above ISIS (Obama). Obama

insisted that president-elect Trump's apparent affinity for Putin/Russia was "out of step" and preposterous (Boyer), and truly cemented his relationship with Putin in a discourse with a journalist in March of this year:

He's constantly interested in being seen as our peer and as working with us, because he's not completely stupid. He understands that Russia's overall position in the world is significantly diminished. And the fact that he invades Crimea or is trying to prop up Assad doesn't suddenly make him a player. You don't see him in any of these meetings out here helping to shape the agenda. For that matter, there's not a G20 meeting where the Russians set the agenda around any of the issues that are important (Goldberg).

Surely President Obama must have seen this as a final nail in the coffin that bears his first-term optimism toward Russia and the foreign policy with Russia that some journalists said was the make or break factor of his presidency. With this, Obama took his most firm and vehement stance on Russia as a whole and on Putin as a figure.

Vladimir Putin, President Obama's second-term Russian counterpart, has not been lax in his criticism of Obama and the United States government entity either. Putin held the position of prime minister prior to his return to the presidency in 2012, and after holding the presidency from 1999-2008. From this platform as well, he decried the US and its president. In 2007, two years prior to Obama's ascendancy to the presidency, Putin used the vast majority of his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy to condemn America's unipolar leadership and manipulation of world affairs. Repeatedly, Putin makes veiled allusions to US dominance, and closes with the statement, "And of course we would like to interact with responsible and independent partners with whom we could work together in constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all. Thank you for your attention" (Putin). With these and other comments, President Putin set the stage for Obama's administration and its relationship with Russia. In spite of this, Obama held to his lofty ideals in the early days of his presidency.

According to Russia's term limitations, a president cannot serve more than two consecutive terms (Gilbert). Thus, Putin's first two terms from 1999-2008 disqualified him from running

again in the 2008 elections. However, his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, was widely regarded as a puppet or stooge of Putin (Osborn). Medvedev as president, was responsible for the appointing of his prime minister, and he selected Putin; in the years that followed, many wondered who exactly held the most power. In a poll taken in May of 2009, 68% of Russians polled by Levada (a non-governmental Russian research/polling group) said they believed Medvedev's policies were heavily influenced by Putin ("Медведев и Путин").

It is hard to believe that a figure such as Putin would easily relinquish his power, and it is not hard to imagine that he was pulling strings behind the scenes of the Russian political sphere, especially after he selected Medvedev as his prime minister in his 2013-2018 term. Here it may be noted that previous presidencies were limited by a four-year term (Gilbert). However, during Medvedev's four-year reign, he amended that term limit to six years, not to be applied to his presidency. The next person to profit from that amendment was Vladimir Putin.

With such evidences, it can be safely concluded that Medvedev's government is merely a continuation of Putin's, and its treatment of America in foreign policy is further proof of such. In March of 2009, Medvedev said this:

I agree with President Obama that resuming the disarmament process should become our immediate priority. The wish to ensure absolute security in a unilateral way is a dangerous illusion. I am encouraged that our new partners in Washington realize this (Medvedev).

While the "new partners in Washington" may indeed have been excited, there is no doubt that American political analysts caught the echoed, if once again veiled, hostility of Putin's 2007 rant on unilateral security. Medvedev seems far less optimistic than Obama on the outcome of the "reset", even early on in their relationship as fellow heads of state. By 2011, Medvedev was clearly and vocally laying out plans to destroy the American European defense shield project, on the grounds that it was a thinly veiled scheme aimed at Russia (Osborn [2]). Medvedev evidently strongly doubted the American promises of goodwill and had every intention of holding the US at arm's length. In his first year as prime minister, Medvedev called US sanctions on Russia "stupid" and "destructive", and said that Russia's foreign minister's suggestion that US-Russian relations could be reset again was "impossible" (Cutmore).

Putin (officially) returned to the helm of Russia in 2013, and his commentary on the United States was by no means cordial.

From calling America "godless" (Wilde) to correcting Obama's assertion of American exceptionalism (Blake) to implying that America's Syria policy was borderline criminal (Putin [2]) all within his first year, Putin came out swinging. He seemed intent on amending the post-Medvedev view of the world on Russia. Russia was a world power of equal status with any other nation (especially the US), the United States was running rampant and in need of a reality check, and the international system needed to recognize both of these things and act accordingly. His accusations were levelled with only the slightest caution and diplomacy, and they certainly served to inflame a relationship already in critical shape. By late 2014, Putin had placed the entirety of blame for the creation of ISIS upon the shoulders of the United States government (Putin [3]).

With individuals in all walks of life, murmurings of Putin's potential attack upon the US were frequent and widespread. And that heat never let up. On New Year's Eve of 2015, President Putin signed a new document, "About the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation" (Soldatkin). This document, which was an update to a document written in 2009, listed both the United States and NATO as major threats to Russian national security. Previously, Russia and specifically Putin had denied seeing the US as a threat, in spite of the US

making it clear that it viewed Russia in that light. Tensions once again significantly rose, and the relationship between the two continued to spiral down. As the 2016 election approached, Putin rather cautiously weighed in on both candidates (Yuhas).

On Donald Trump, Putin said he was "colorful", a rather noncommittal take. In his following comments, however, Putin made it clear that he felt that Trump could have a good impact on the US-Russia relationship, that he welcomed Trump's views and had hope for their truth. When the conversation then turned to Hillary Clinton, Putin, ever sober and remaining relatively noncommittal, said that he had had little interaction with her. He did speak briefly of her husband, former US President Bill Clinton, with some positivity, but failed to note a more antagonistic relationship with Hillary toward the end of her time as secretary of state, during which he accused her of stirring up dissension and dissatisfaction with his administration.

Now, looking at the other side of the election, many had predicted Trump and Putin to have a great relationship (possibly a little too great in many individuals' opinions), and indeed, Putin was among the first to congratulate President-elect Donald Trump in the hours following the election, in a speech which spoke positively of "fully-fledged" relations between the two

countries soon to come ("Putin on Trump Victory"). There was no doubt that the Russian head of state was waxing overly optimistically about the election results, as he noted both that the two powers had some "burning issues to address" and that there was "a difficult path" for them to walk before things would begin to improve. Nonetheless, Putin appeared to believe in a true possibility for improvement and a higher level of trust in the US's cooperation.

Only shortly thereafter, however, a wave of cautionary sentiment issued from some of Russia's top government officials and advisors, ranging from "[We've had] very diverse experiences doing business with U.S. administrations, both Republican and Democrat"; to "The U.S. is in a bit of a stupor, a crisis. There's a great deal of uncertainty" (Bodner). These opinions, while not necessarily those of Putin's (expressly), are influential. The first, in fact, belongs to one of the most influential individuals in this saga besides Putin, Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov. Lavrov was placed in this position by Vladimir Putin during his first presidency in 2004 and has remained there since, serving under Medvedev as well, before Putin's "return to power" in 2012 (Zamyatin). With Lavrov's extensive history of supporting the Syrian Assad regime, contrary to the US-backed rebel groups, he is evidently

a man acquainted with opposing the United States. Even way back in 2009, with the "reset" button faux pas, Lavrov was critically minded when it came to the US-Russian relationship (Landler). His comments were composed, realistic, and gave no airs of over-optimism; with staunch refusal to entertain some of the requests made. Ultimately, the conclusion of officials who accompanied the American team was that the talks were "constructive".

In June of 2012, Lavrov was the first to directly point the finger at the United States for its arming of Syrian rebels ("Russia Accuses US"). An article supplied to many news sources by the Agence France Press reports:

Russia was supplying "anti-air defense systems" to Damascus in a deal that "in no way violates international laws," Lavrov told a news conference during a brief visit to Iran. "That contrasts with what the United States is doing with the opposition, which is providing arms to the Syrian opposition which are being used against the Syrian government," (Lavrov) said.

And in September of 2014, Lavrov openly mocked the "reset" attempt of the Obama administration, saying:

The main problem is that we're absolutely interested in normalizing these relations, but it wasn't us who ruined them. And now we need what the Americans will probably call a 'reset.' Something else will probably be thought up, 'reset number two' or 'reset 2.0.' (Luhn).

Lavrov's cynicism has run strong, even up to the doorstep of 2017, and is unlikely to die any time soon. With a strong hand on the throat of the two nations' ability to repair or amend their relationship, he remains in a strong seat of power.

Meanwhile, Lavrov's US counterparts Hillary Clinton (secretary of state from January 2009-February 2013) and John Kerry (secretary of state from February 2013-current) have also weighed in on the status of the relationship. Secretary Clinton called the Russian elections in 2011 highly corrupt, a statement Putin claimed was the primary cause of widespread and heavily populated protests across the country (Schwartz). This was only the beginning of a steadily worsening relationship between the two that ultimately led to the veiled hostility Putin regarded her with throughout the 2016 election season. John Kerry was no less forward with his comments on Russia. In regard to the

Ukraine crisis in 2014, he asserted that Russia was "hiding its hand behind falsehoods, intimidation, and provocations" (LoGiurato). More recently, in September, Kerry openly mocked Lavrov with the latter's own words as the UN discussed the Syrian crisis (Gauette).

MEDIA

The second great source of guidance for the masses is that of the media. In the famous words of Malcolm X:

The media's the most powerful entity on earth.

They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses (Malcolm X).

In our societies, the media blasts us on screens in public areas, from newsstands on every corner, and even through our phones for a large portion of the population. Whether televised or in print through a magazine or newspaper or over the radio, the opinion and shepherding voice of mass media carefully directs us and shapes us to better integrate with the society they would like to create.

According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, 57% of Americans continue to rely on television as their primary

source of news, whether that be cable, local, or network packaging (Mitchell). Of the news stations watched, Fox News leads the pack by a solid amount of viewers (Kissell). Of course, every media outlet, regardless of origin or intention, exists with a bias, and that bias can be a helpful look inside the way a nation's populace views another nation. That 57% of Americans is being fed a steady mixture of sentiments by Fox News and its contemporaries, which has done very little to help the relationship between the United States and Russia.

In 2009, apart from a slew of bizarre alien abduction cover-up stories on Russia, Fox News seemed to present a relatively optimistic, if vague, outlook on the Obama-Putin reset. In October of that year, Fox published an article which heralded a largely cooperative relationship, with agreements, progress and transparency; it notes that Lavrov "resisted" certain persuasion tactics and objectives levelled by Secretary Clinton, but things seem pretty positive (Lewis). But in 2010, articles take on a sense of foreboding and a suggestion of danger. An article on Secretary Clinton hints that she believes the relationship needs some serious help, and the language it is written in points the mind in a specific direction ("Clinton Clashes"). "Clinton did not criticize the long-delayed project

directly" merely implies that the desire to criticize was there; the encounter is ultimately described as a "clash".

A few months later, Fox published an article on Russia's new fighter jet ("Putin Boasts"). In fact, Fox published an article *commending* Russia's new fighter jet. Its conclusion: "Successful development of the fighter, built by Sukhoi, is crucial to showing Russia can challenge U.S. technology and modernize its military after a period of post-Soviet decay." This article paints Russia as a de facto contender, capable and mindful of challenging US military dominance in the world. It's one thing for Putin to boast in such a way; it's quite another for the American media. After 2010, it's certainly hard to separate the reporting of facts from fear-mongering. After all, what was not true to claims that Russia was advancing into Crimea and Ukraine, seizing regional control in the name of self-preservation? What was not true to claims that Russia had hardline policies contrary to US demands and pleas?

Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately, depending on the side of the conflict), much of Russia's media is government-owned, and even privately owned news companies are heavily invested in by the government, leading to heavy bias and control. Channel 1 is Russia's primary television station for news, 75% of which is owned by the Russian government (Oshkalo).

Channel 1 is strikingly nonchalant in its handling of international affairs, portraying Russia as a superpower who is forced to meddle in the affairs of lesser powers. In March of 2009, for example, an article declares that disagreement will not be a problem for either country, specifically referring to the Iran situation and the respective US and Russian responses to that situation (Sashina). Sergei Lavrov is quoted defending the distribution of "defensive" weapons and equipment to "partners" (read: Iran). Secretary Clinton is depicted as merely rehashing the issues Lavrov brought to the table.

In September, then, Channel 1 lauds the support given to President Medvedev by all other members of the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Vernitsky). This directly follows a quote from Medvedev in which he all but blames the United States and its "ill-conceived" fiscal and economic policies for the global recession the previous year. A large portion of the body of the article is dedicated to speculation that Pittsburgh was chosen as the location for the summit due to its large campaign contributions to President Obama. Other articles from that year decried Switzerland's caving to the United States' blatant violation of law by requesting bank records on potential tax evaders ("Громкий скандал") and the US's double-standard dealings with Iran outside of the latter's geographic area

(Vernitsky [2]): "Where it does not interfere with their own business, the United States have nothing against cooperation with (Iran), which they enrolled in the 'axis of evil'."

Perhaps one of the more bizarre reports done by Channel 1 in recent times was their coverage of Larry King's interview of then-Prime Minister Putin ("Американский телеканал"). Taking place in December of 2012, this piece feels like something out of *Russia Today*. Putin is painted a composed and righteous victor in a rigged boxing match. King's questions are described as "the first move- attack" and "the blow to the flank". "But Prime is ready," Channel 1 proclaims. The conclusion between the prime minister and the "purely American" Larry King is a brilliant question from Putin which King cannot answer. Putin is again framed as the champion in a piece published in June of 2015, in which Putin menacingly (or heroically) tells the United States "don't talk the language of ultimatums with us" ("Владимир Путин"). It is evident that in the "best case scenario", Channel 1 is strongly pro-government (which largely equates with anti-America); and in the "worst case scenario", it is under heavily regulating government control. Either way, it is a significant voice to the masses of Russia, and it's certainly not a fan of America.

The world today propagates news through many sources: internet, television, magazines and newspapers. One of the greatest sources in the United States is the newspaper, and of the thousands issued in America, USA Today tops the charts in popularity ("Top 10 US Daily Newspapers"). In order to get a more complete understanding of the media complex in either country, research of multiple sources is necessary. USA Today continues the trend of low-level anti-Russian sentiment, and, frankly, covers much of the same material as Fox News. Political conflict over Ukraine, Crimea, Syria, etc.; highlights of the START treaty and arms limitations talks; relatively sunny outlooks early on turning to ominous horizons: the same stories are covered again, using much of the same language. Russia is demonized in the conflicts repeatedly (Lackey, Jackson). By 2015, the news organization is outright cynical at the thought of Russia re-entering into peaceful negotiations with the United States over Syria.

Russia's top newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda is more of a tabloid, and the more factual, second most popular newspaper is Kommersant ("Top Newspapers in Russia"). Even back in 2009, when all the other news agencies at least had some optimism as the Obama administration came to power, Kommersant was already on the offensive. Its article entitled "Minds Boiling with Fear"

championed the United States as the harbinger of the end of the world, a nation couched and ready to pounce into nuclear holocaust should a plausible cover ever arise (Nizams). Whether placed on the side of China or diametrically opposed, whether the war is started in Pakistan or through the US's own economic crisis, the United States will fight to the bitter end to bring down the other superpowers with it, and desperately fight to come out ahead. Unsurprisingly, even when opposing the allied might of the Chinese and American militaries (as well as, presumably, a host of smaller countries), Russia is projected to ride the disaster out and become the new hegemon.

And in 2010, articles on the Deepwater Horizons oil spill (Nizams) and the arrests of members of an alleged Russian spy network within the US (Belianinov) were nothing short of sardonic. In regard to the oil spill, President Obama is openly mocked for his declaration that drilling platforms no longer generally cause spills due to their advanced technology; these comments came only weeks before the incident. The article implies that the decisions made and plans laid for increased drilling by the President and administration were ridiculous and that there were plenty of warning signs against such moves. In the case of the "spy", it's quite evident what Kommersant's journalists think of the reports. "Alleged spy" appears

repeatedly in quotations, as does "so-called". There is a suspicious presentation of information: "the fact that US authorities failed to collect a sufficient amount of evidence for the charges against him of espionage" appears in bold at the head of the article, and tucked innocuously in the text and quickly glossed over is the phrase, "Mr. Karetnikov (the alleged spy) admitted that he violated immigration laws while in the United States, and voluntarily agreed to deportation in exchange for the termination of court proceedings". While information is presented, it is presented in such a way that a reader without a critical eye and good analytical skills would not pick up on the fact that their attention is carefully being chaperoned through this information. There is an agenda, and it is well-crafted and well-hidden.

In 2013, Kommersant reported on disciplinary action Russia took against its own diplomats, diplomats who were collecting fraudulent health benefits and other benefits in the US (Sabitova). While the title itself and a good bit of the heading is lip service to the United States, the text itself spends more time focused on the fact that the United States violated the diplomatic immunity of the diplomats by looking into their accounts. This is certainly a veritable testimony against American transgression, and it is not to be taken lightly.

Nonetheless, again a reader must examine the agenda behind its writing. This agenda has continued up to the doorstep of 2017, as in 2016, Secretary John Kerry was vilified for shifting blame of the Ukrainian civil war to Russia and its government (Sokolovskaya).

The next major facet of news publication in both cultural spheres is magazines. While not as direct and frequent for the consumer, weekly news magazines are often considered to be highly reputable and well-regarded. The number one news magazine in the United States is Breitbart, but it has a strong focus toward business, so for the purposes of focus and relevance, Time (the second most popular news magazine) is a more worthy candidate. Time only confirms what has already been seen- the vast majority of American media has an unfavorable view of Russia.

2009 saw such articles as one pointing to Russia as the victor in a potential confrontation with whistleblower site "Wikileaks" (Shuster). In it, Russia's FSB or secret police are openly compared to the KGB of the Soviet era, and it is apparent Time does not consider them any less unscrupulous. Truly, however, when approaching an issue of Russian politics or society, it is very hard to separate the truth from an agenda, or validate that there is indeed an agenda in place. Truly, the

Russian government is willing to try more aggressive tactics in accomplishing its agenda than is considered acceptable in most of the world today; their allegations against the United States are not as easily proven. Time goes on to report in later years, as have Fox and USA Today, on Russia's policies in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria.

Notably in April of 2009, Time did a piece covering the Russian pullout of troops from Chechnya (Marson); this piece does, rather than simply presenting the facts unbiasedly, take the stance of one analyst who views the Russian pullout as a compromise, despite Russia's official statements citing a victory over terrorism in the area and a situation well under control of Chechen. The article is entitled "Russia's Chechnya Pullout: Compromise Over Victory". The text goes on to build on this premise. A 2012 article showcasing conversation between a Time journalist and a Time correspondent in Russia paints a dire picture of "Putin's Russia" and the FSB even within the introduction, before any factual information is presented (Paramaguru). March, two years later, presents a similar sentiment from Time, ripping apart Russian justifications for actions in Crimea and Ukraine ("Many Ukrainians Want..."). Finally, in September 2016, Time published an article entitled "How Russia Wants to Undermine the US Election" (Calabresi).

In lieu of an outstanding weekly news magazine to serve as counterpart to Time (there is not one), the major Russian news source to provide balance is Argumenty i Fakty, a weekly newspaper and "largest and most popular weekly publication in Russia" ("About Argumenty i Fakty"). Argumenty i Fakty is also quite cynical from the very beginning. In regard to the reset, they published an article which recounted the numerous meetings of US and Russian heads of state in the past, the numerous attempts at "resetting" the relationship, and how those ended (poorly). It criticizes "new formulas" for reparations, but goes on to say:

Now it's time to get started and to move from warm words to concrete achievements for the benefit of Russia, the United States and all those around the world who are interested in peace and prosperity. The article also wonders if Russians will be able to overcome "years of anti-American propaganda", designed to stir up dislike of the West; this is a bizarrely self-reflective moment of clarity that is very hard to determine the purpose of.

Less than two weeks later, AiF showed a slightly different face toward the US (Миюшевская). This article defines a new "nuclear doctrine" for the United States,

inflicting minimal casualties while effectively neutralizing Russia in the event of nuclear conflict. While the text itself is largely a recap of the report itself, including a chart of casualty figures pulled directly from the report, it's clear that the title ("The US Develops a 'Humane' Scenario for Russian Destruction. DETAILED PLAN") is meant to raise fear and suspicion among the Russian citizenry. In 2011, AiF released an economic report disguised as a smear campaign, mocking the United States for its less-than-predicted growth ("Америка «показала». Официальная статистика..."); and 2012 had a slew of jabs for America. One of the most popular, released in May, compared the United States to the Nazi regime, even implying that it was a greater evil (Мельников). This was in response to the inhumane intentional infection of Americans with syphilis to test penicillin. In 2014, AiF published an article on the effects of the sanctions on US-Russian scientific relations. It bemoaned America's "manic desire to control the whole world" and challenged Russia (through its better resources) to rise above its privileged competitor. And coverage of the 2016 Olympics in Rio wouldn't be complete without a recount of how the Russian

Paralympic athletes were booted, to the advantage of US and Ukrainian athletes (Писапенко).

ENTERTAINMENT

Finally, a third primary influence on the masses is the entertainment industry. Through movies and television shows, music and theater, entertainment is designed to appeal to large numbers of people, and it often indirectly shapes their views in the way it portrays groups. Since the days of "the Russian" facing off against Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky IV*, Russian characters have been punching bags for easy laughs or cheap plot devices. Unsurprisingly, the Russians continue to plague Sylvester Stallone's projects, with his *Expendables* trilogy (2010, 2012, and 2014) featuring Russian villains to one degree or another (*The Expendables*). The second film's entire plot runs around a stockpile of Russian weapons-grade plutonium (because Russians just have those lying around) (*The Expendables 2*). In the final installment, the Russians are big clients from a nuclear arms dealer (*The Expendables 3*).

And as serial offenses go, the Marvel Cinematic Universe is a serious contender as well. *Iron Man 2* (2010) introduces the audience to Whiplash, a former Soviet scientist with a vendetta (*Iron Man 2*). Of Whiplash's father (also Russian), Samuel L.

Jackson's character exposit, "He spent the next twenty years in a vodka-fueled rage." Whiplash's backstory consists of vodka, plutonium, espionage, and exile to Siberia. This movie is a double header as it also introduces us to the frequently recurring character of Natasha Romanov/Black Widow; her backstory includes Stalingrad, little display of emotion, the KGB, and double agency. A few years later, in *The Avengers* (2012), Romanov interrogates a present-day Russian general who is decorated with Soviet-era medals of honor; he is also a bumbling idiot (*The Avengers*).

Russians have been long-standing foes of Bruce Willis just as much as Stallone. In *RED* (2010), Ivan Simonov, a former KGB officer, is perhaps at best an anti-hero in the film, with his fur and vodka ever-present; he laments that he hasn't killed anyone recently as though it was a great taxation of his soul (*RED*). The *Red Dawn* remake of 2012 seemed as though it would portray North Korea as the singular "bad guy", but only minutes into the conflict, the audience learns that the Russians have control of the East Coast (*Red Dawn*). Released in 2010, *Salt* features a Soviet sleeper agent being activated and wreaking havoc through the United States security agencies (*Salt*). IN 2015's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, the teamed-up FBI and KGB agents make it clear: Russia has muscle, while the United States has

brains (*The Man from UNCLE*). Incidentally, this casting bias can also restrict Russian and otherwise ex-Soviet actors in the roles they are offered. For instance, the very talented Vladomir Mashkov boasts only one recent role in American cinema: bad guy Sidorov in *Mission: Impossible- Ghost Protocol* (2011) (*Mission: Impossible III*).

This bias is not constrained to movies either. Television shows are a very high volume consumable for today's American society, and they continue a reflection of that society's view of Russia. In the TV drama *The Americans*, Annet Mahrendu plays a KGB agent who seduces and has an affair with an FBI agent, all the while manipulating him for information (Weisburg). In *Archer*, an animated adult comedy, Nikolai Jakov is the head of the KGB and has few scruples in life; he is shown as a double agent, and even his name itself is mocking (Reed). And in *The Sopranos*, Valery is a Russian ex-Spetsnatz soldier who is a raging alcoholic and addicted to the technology he now has access to in America (which was virtually unheard of back in Russia) (Chase). Valery also has the distinction of being one of the many who, within his created universe, is referred to as "the Russian".

While Russia almost certainly leads the pack in its media propaganda campaigns against the United States, it's hard to see

it as nearly as competitive a player in the entertainment field. Even during the Soviet era, the entertainment propaganda was not strong (Vishnevetsky). This has continued to the present day. Short of the sitcom *Interns*, Russia has very little in either movie or TV show production that villainizes the United States; even that show merely shames a main character for being the American foreigner with homosexual parents (rather mild stuff comparatively) (Dusmhukomitov).

One might argue that this is merely a demonstration of a public sector apart from the government sector. However, this theory falls flat for two reasons: Russian government involvement in everything within their borders (and more than most are comfortable with without) and the US's heavy involvement in Hollywood. Russia's meddling goes without explanation, but America's meddling is unbeknownst to most of its citizenry. To quote the Guardian:

The model for this is the defense department's "open" but barely publicized relationship with Hollywood. The Pentagon, for decades, has offered film-makers advice, manpower and even hardware - including aircraft carriers and state-of-the-art helicopters. All it asks for in exchange is that the US armed forces are made to look good. So in a

previous Scott film, *Black Hawk Down*, a character based on a real-life soldier who had also been a child rapist lost that part of his backstory when he came to the screen ("Hollywood Stereotypes about Russians")

In exchange for the favors, the CIA exercises vast powers over what is produced; according to the same article, that includes edits to the true story scripts of such legendary war stories as *The Sum of All Fears*, *Charlie Wilson's War*, and *The Good Shepherd*. Individuals who pushed the envelope disappeared in very KGB-style situations, and film rights were even bought up to prevent them being produced in an unapproved way. This goes a long way toward explaining the biases above.

These biases, however, also permeate less controllable mediums, such as comedy. A medium frequently chosen for expressing controversial or politically incorrect opinions, comedy in the US and Russia is rife with insults to both sides. In a video clip from a popular comedy club in Russia, actors mock the way Russians are portrayed in American film (*Avaeva*). A ridiculous surplus of "Comrade" and poorly pronounced Russian (even quickly noticeable to the foreigner's ear) mocks the misinformed and potentially ignorant American public. On the other hand, there is a

comedy series in the process of getting launched in America, staffed with Americans, which is trying to show the life of a Russian actor in America; essentially the two job openings are overtly sexual or overtly "bad". The show is called "Never Say Nyet". Both of these challenge their host cultures in small ways as well. And beyond the comedic realm, there is theater, video games, and music.

As long as these three voice are actively speaking into their respective cultures with these messages, it will be virtually impossible for the two countries to cooperate on a large scale or have a good relationship. While viewed by the uneducated as the savior and restorer of US-Russian cooperation and friendship, Donald Trump has already been lambasted with skepticism from both sides that calls into question his ability to deliver on the dreams of his followers. Populations steeped in cynicism toward the other and familiar with recent attempts and optimism for the restoration of full relations will easily become doubtful and perhaps even opposed to restoration attempts.

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