

Whither *Obshestvennaya Diplomatiya*: Assessing U.S. Public Diplomacy in Post-Cold War Russia

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Although a substantial amount of literature analyzes American public diplomacy in the Soviet Union, the level of scholarly interest in the region appears to have fallen with the Iron Curtain. There exists no comprehensive account of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia over the last twenty years, or any significant discussion of how these efforts have been received by the Russian public. This study addresses the gap in the literature by reconstructing the efforts of the last twenty years, providing an important case study for scholars of public diplomacy and of U.S.-Russia relations. Twelve policy officials, area experts, and public diplomats who had served in Moscow were interviewed to create a primary-source account of events in the field from 1989-2012. The taxonomy of public diplomacy, originally defined by Dr. Nicholas Cull, was then used to categorize each activity by primary purpose: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchanges, and international broadcasting. These accounts were contextualized against the major events of the U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship in order to identify broad trends, successes and failures. The resulting narrative illustrates that U.S. public diplomacy in Russia suffers from a lack of top-down support from the U.S. government, from a restricted media environment that limits the success of advocacy and international broadcasting, and from the incongruity of messaging and actions that characterize the last two decades of the bilateral relationship. Other findings include that: 1) listening among public diplomacy practitioners in Russia is improving; 2) cultural diplomacy and exchange programs have been the elements of public diplomacy most immune to the kind of political fluctuations that have obstructed advocacy and broadcasting efforts; 3) an increased reliance on digital platforms is expanding U.S. public diplomacy practitioners' ability to act as facilitators in Russia, but concern remains among practitioners that this will create an overreliance on social media as the "silver bullet" to all problems.

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I. Introduction

The dynamic of U.S.-Russia bilateral relations since the end of the Cold War has never been easy to manage. But the first few months of 2013 have witnessed levels of tension and uncertainty even greater than normal for the relationship. In such a changing landscape, it is crucial for U.S. policymakers to understand what kind of engagement can and should be pursued. Public diplomacy is one of the most important tools of influence in the U.S. diplomatic arsenal. On its website, the U.S. Department of State formally defines public diplomacy's mission, which 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 the Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.

Judging by the amount of treatment that U.S. public diplomacy in Russia receives among the scholarly community, one would presume that the field has been extinct since the Cold War ended. This is, of course, an illusion: public diplomacy is alive and well in Russia, albeit out of the spotlight, ignored in favor of the post-9/11 public diplomacy priorities in the Middle East.

While some information exists on the individual elements of U.S. public diplomacy, it is scattered and unconsolidated, with no attempt made to create a cohesive picture of public diplomacy in Russia as a whole. Yet this is a subject that demands attention, for, without addressing all of the aspects of public diplomacy's role in the structure of U.S. diplomacy with Russia, there can be no hope of fixing any existing problems or articulating a future strategy.

Reconstructing and analyzing public diplomacy in post-Cold War Russia serves an important purpose to policymakers, practitioners, scholars, and the U.S. public itself. Since the American media focuses on the negativity of the U.S.-Russia relationship, it is important to testify that there have been unceasing government efforts to foster strategic goodwill between the U.S. and the Russian people. It is also important to situate public diplomacy in the context of the broader U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship. By doing so, it becomes easier to spot trends and patterns, and to make judgments about successes and failures. It also provides a crucial study for public diplomacy practitioners elsewhere who can learn from the successes and failures of the Russian case. Finally, it humanizes the public diplomacy practitioners that have played vital roles throughout the course of U.S.-Russia relations; it honors those who have devoted themselves to "telling America's story" by telling their story in turn.

Hypothesis

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. public diplomacy efforts have had a broadly positive influence in supporting U.S. strategic interests in Russia by maintaining high levels of exchange between the two nations and affecting Russian public opinion for the better.

Methodology

Public diplomacy does not lend itself well to quantitative metrics. The majority of this methodology for this research consists of investigative tactics to instead use primary sources to reconstruct the last two decades of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia, and then analyze it for successes and failures.

First, an extensive literature review was compiled to give context to the role accorded public diplomacy by the U.S. policy community, as well as to analyze the Russian political mentality in order to understand the environment in which U.S. public diplomacy operated.

Post-Cold War history was divided then into five logical categories based on the different periods of Russian political leadership and the distinct eras that each signified in the course of the U.S.-Russia relationship.

Area experts, public diplomacy practitioners, former and current high-level officials and FSO were contacted and interviewed at length about their experiences with public diplomacy in Russia. Their recollections, anecdotes, and input were categorized by time period and then by element of public diplomacy. Dr. Nicholas Cull's taxonomy of public diplomacy was used in the classification of these elements. Then the progression over time of each element was tracked, with supplemental secondary-source research filling in any gaps that appeared. The narrative that emerged was used to 1) analyze the trends and relationships in each element against the backdrop of the official bilateral relationship; 2) determine how the relationship in turn affected the usefulness of public diplomacy as a strategic tool.

II. Public Diplomacy's Role in Foreign Policy

Conceptualization of Foreign Policy

In order to understand the purpose of public diplomacy as a strategic tool, it must first be contextualized in a broad sense of who and what drives foreign policy. In the field of IR theory, liberalism is the most relevant to public diplomacy practitioners because it views group action as motivated by shared preferences, and possesses an inclusive definition of actors. Liberalist philosophy assumes the primacy of multiple rational, risk-averse actors - individuals, groups, and states - that are interdependent in their preferences and goals in the international system (Moravcsik 1997). Foreign policy analysis must take into account the interactions between a state, its institutions, and the people that populate them, for these interactions in turn are crucial in shaping policy-making. Because individuals can be actors in a liberalist world, leadership matters (Twing 1998). The preferences of such non-state actors may potentially overcome what would otherwise be considered "rational" in the state-centric world of realism. Liberalism has historically faced criticism from realist scholars who argue that it is too normative and too descriptive (Waltz, Gilpin). But even in the realist camp, some scholars recognize that individual units and actors can influence the choices that are otherwise driven by the traditional elements of power and capabilities (Rose 1998).

The Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) framework also supports the idea that leadership matters in foreign policy, generally by arguing that foreign policy is conducted by a small group of actors who have intimate knowledge of and connections to

policymaking institutions (Simao 2012). However, Simao's interpretation of FPA maintains that actors operate in relative isolation from domestic pressures. This assumption must be questioned, for if policymakers cannot be influenced by domestic pressures, then does an impetus to reach out to foreign publics to attempt to inform and influence them even exist?

Wilsonianism, or liberal internationalism, is an important subset of American liberalism. The theory, named for its most famous proponent, argues that the U.S. must commit itself to multilateralism, transparency, a positive-sum approach to institutions and practices, and the integration (rather than imposition) of U.S. ideas to maintain peace in the international system (Slaughter 2009). This in turn suggests that foreign policy must account for these commitments when constructing a national security strategy. Whether public diplomacy is interpreted as an attempt to integrate U.S. ideas into the international system or to impose them largely determines how credible Wilsonianism can be in the field. Some authors suggest that democracy promotion and interventionism are natural extensions of Wilsonianism (Smith 2009), and are an essential part of the U.S. grand strategy in the international order. They justify this idea by arguing that it is easier for the U.S. to pursue its own interests when it shares values and systems with its intended partners (Prados 2002; Eikenberry 2005). Others recognize the truth of the latter claim, but dispute the necessity of interventionism. They argue that the U.S. must differentiate between value projection and forceful, "crusading" democracy (Deibel 2007; Slaughter 2009), that there must be a preference for persuasive methods over those of coercion and force when it comes to influence. Either way, both sides certainly derive meaning from the "city on a hill" symbolic structure inherent in U.S. cultural shaping (Twing 1998). However, it is important to realize that different cultures and states may interpret value promotion differently than US policymakers do. It is also important to note that Wilsonianism was an early and prescient call for the inclusive conceptualization of diplomatic actors: by, as the first tenet of its program, committing to diplomacy in the form of "open covenants, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view."¹

Russian Political Mentality

Indeed, the Russian political mindset and priorities make Russian policymakers skeptical of the American openness, positive-sum approach and the integrational aspect of Wilsonianism. A survey of available literature indicates that two major factors broadly drive Russian policymaking: the country's Great Power status and lingering Cold War suspicion of Western motives.

Russia scholars agree that the country's leadership is ready to invest everything to maintain its strategic independence, distinctive identity, and its parity with other world powers, particularly with the United States (Trenin 8, Richmond, Aron 2013). It is entitled to this role, Russian policymakers believe, at least in part because of the country's nuclear arsenal and the salient legacy of its massive sacrifices for victory in World War 2 (Cooper/Barry). These authors characterize Russian foreign policy and

¹ Wilson, Woodrow. "President Wilson's Fourteen Points," in the World War I Document Archive. http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson's_Fourteen_Points. (accessed April 2013).

actors as proud and pragmatic, unwilling to act or intervene in a situation unless it directly benefits them (Trenin 16). If this pragmatism is indeed a reality, then every policy decision must be undertaken with a calculated approach to how it will support Russia's position in the international order. This goal of superiority is inherent, for example, in Russia's extension of influence into CIS countries and the increased use of its Security Council veto in exercising power over other states (Trenin, Aron 2013).

Many authors, both Western and Russian, agree that the Soviet "us-versus-them" mentality still permeates Russian foreign policy (Avgerinos 117, Trenin 20). It reinforces a belief among Russians that they cannot appear weak because an imperialistic U.S. is constantly waiting for every opportunity to weaken them (Baker, "Mr. Obama and Mr. Putin", Trenin, Trenin 2011, Aron 2013). Certainly, casting blame onto an external enemy has a unifying effect on the domestic public while distracting it from other issues that would be inconvenient or damaging for the government. This dynamic in turn lends itself to chauvinism and xenophobia in Russian politics (Trenin, 29) and suppresses civil society (Kahn). With so much distrust inherent in the relationship, it is unlikely that Russian policymakers – at least under Putin – will ever view the majority of U.S. public diplomacy efforts as benign.

Putin's drive towards power consolidation and centralization has also limited the potential actors in Russian policymaking. The administration uses the factors identified above – as scholar Leon Aron terms it, the "besieged fortress syndrome" – to justify its consolidation of power and its movement away from democracy through crackdowns on independent media and NGOs (Averignos). Some authors argue that the Russian intelligentsia is beginning to reject that frame, and that is why Putin feels a need to crack down even further before it disintegrates (Baev 2013). It is very important to discuss how much influence these elite circles have, and how much they buy into the official Kremlin line, in order to gauge how effective U.S. public diplomacy may be in the future. It should also be noted that high-level corruption also colors the Russian political mindset (Goldman).

The Role of Diplomacy

Cold War era journalist Walter Lippman famously defined diplomacy as the "shield of the Republic," intended to manage and disperse crises, absorb shocks, and circumvent the need for the hard power of the "sword." (Lippman 1943). But diplomacy long predates this definition, as well as IR theory and certainly the concept of liberalism. Accordingly, diplomacy was traditionally state-centric and practiced only by official representatives. Its goals included creating positive understandings between countries (Butterfield 1966; Sharp 2009), altering the external environment to achieve strategic objectives (Holsti 1976; Morgenthau 2004), and maintaining international cohesion and peace (Melissen 1999; Bull 2004). However, a trend away from insularity and towards a "new diplomacy," based on the concepts of multilateralism, direct communication, and Wilsonianism (Berridge 2011). Consequently, the modern diplomat's role is multi-faceted, including representation, supervision, negotiation, trust-building and information management (Kurbalija 1999; Finger 2002; Bull 2004; Morgenthau 2004; Nicolson 2004). Technological innovation has also made it a necessity to engage and communicate with foreign publics, as channels for feedback have expanded and made the

information management job of the diplomat more complex and significant (Kurbalija 1999; Dizard 2001; Johnson/Dale 2003; Kralev 2012).

One group of authors argues that new diplomacy has an all-inclusive definition of “diplomat,” that extends to non-state actors such as publics, NGOs, international organizations, media and the private sector (Hocking 1999; Prendergast 2000; Dizard 2001; Ross 2003; Kralev 2012, Melissen “Beyond the New Public Diplomacy”). A subset of this group believes in the idea of “citizen diplomacy,” in which an educated populace, empowered by democratization and innovation, having knowledge of the international system, can engage in outreach as well (Sharp 2001). In contrast, many scholars maintain that diplomacy can only be conducted by traditional agents of the state, who are endowed with the necessary skills and important official symbolism (Bull 2004; James 2004; Nicolson 2004; Sharp/Wiseman 2007; Sharp 2009; Berridge 2011). These authors tend to place great faith in the value and the skills of the diplomatic community and the power of its self-awareness and fraternal bonds. While the symbolic idea is certainly important, since ideally this role would lend them the credibility and weight of the government they serve, it may not hold up in situations where a government has lost its credibility, or in a situation in which a state does not have the resources to properly train its diplomats. But even these authors acknowledge the contributions of new technology in enabling diplomats to more easily maintain levels of contact and connections.

The criticisms of modern-day diplomacy fall into three categories: a lack of guiding strategy (Jett 2008; “Diplomacy” 2012), deficiency of proper training and human capital (Kurbalija 1999; “Diplomacy” 2012; Kralev 2012), and a lack of credibility. Granted, articulating a coherent foreign policy strategy is difficult if all potential state and non-state actors are taken into account, but that does not make it any less essential. The lack of capital is an extremely important problem, since diplomacy is so dependent on personal relations and engagement, and inadequate training or budgeting prevents diplomacy from reaching its maximum efficiency. Credibility issues can result from poor messaging, or from a perceived gap between what diplomacy promises in theory, and what it is actually able to deliver (Sharp/Wiseman 2007, Jett 2008). Setting realistic expectations is just as important to strategy creation as the identification of critical objectives, but both processes are complicated by the complexities of the international system and the utter unpredictability of a world populated by diplomatic actors with varying degrees of legitimacy. The traditional diplomatic community is still learning to adjust to this world. Nicolson’s article even delineates two different camps of diplomacy, military and “bourgeois,” in which the former camp’s objective is solely to outmatch one’s diplomatic opponent and retain superiority in a zero-sum game. This idea is at odds with the majority of the literature examined up to this point, but it is worth noting for its theoretical illustration of how Russian policy makers may view the motives behind U.S. diplomacy.

Some authors opine that these issues signal the decline of diplomacy’s utility (Bull 2004; Morgenthau 2004). However, others argue that the objectives of diplomacy have remained the same; it is only the methods of accomplishing them that has changed (James 2004). Any perceived decline is simply a transition phase, owed in part to changing priorities, greater links between the state and society, and the inclusion of new actors (Hocking 1999; Kurbalija 1999). These views reflect a liberalist slant, since they

assign great importance to individual diplomatic actors and their ability to influence policy, as well as the relationship between the state and its institutions.

U.S. Public Diplomacy

In an official sense, public diplomacy can be defined as a government's efforts to conduct its foreign policy through engaging with foreign publics (Cull 2012). Terry Deibel, a former National War College Professor of Foreign Policy Strategy, identified public diplomacy as one of the ten crucial instruments of foreign affairs that can be to express a country's priorities (Deibel 2007). In the diplomatic arsenal, public diplomacy resides in the realm of soft power, a now-ubiquitous theory devised by Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye. Nye's seminal work on the three circles of soft power conceptualized soft policy into three concentric realms of increasing time frames: 1) daily communications and time crisis management; 2) strategic communications of policies; 3) long-term relationship building (Nye 2004; Nye 2008). According to the theoretical approaches to diplomacy delineated above, media, politicians, NGOs, educators, and even ordinary citizens can all influence the way that U.S. policy is portrayed and what kind of influence it has correspondingly on foreign publics. Melissen notes that many other non-Western states are embracing Nye's approach to soft power and commissioning their own public diplomacy efforts (Melissen "Beyond the New Public Diplomacy"). In order to categorize the functions of public diplomacy in these three circles, public diplomacy expert Dr. Nicholas Cull created a taxonomy with five crucial components: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchanges, and international broadcasting (Cull 2008). Cull's taxonomy is widely used and cited, and will be the framework around which this paper will construct its assessment of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia.

The U.S. engaged in robust public diplomacy throughout the Cold War to counter the ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union. As a result, there is a significant body of literature discussing the successes and trials of Cold War era public diplomacy. However, this paper will only examine the work that emerged during public diplomacy's 21st century "resurgence." After the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy (along with the rest of the American foreign policy strategy) suffered an existential crisis. The US Information Agency (USIA) struggled to justify its existence to lawmakers who believed that there was no further need for a peace-time organization dedicated to spreading American values and communicating with foreign publics. Slowly, USIA was stripped of its operating capabilities, and it finally ceased to be an independent undertaking when it was consolidated into the State Department. But the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the subsequent results of the American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan showed policy makers that the US still desperately needed soft power initiatives to communicate its democracy-promoting message to the world. Public diplomacy had to quickly be resurrected from its understaffed, underappreciated existence in the morass of State Department bureaucracy. However, post-9/11 public diplomacy was fraught with shortcomings that were quickly criticized by scholars, public diplomacy practitioners, political scientists and think tanks. All of these existing problems are inherent in public diplomacy in general, and thus can be considered applicable to the state of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia, even though not a single study surveyed mentioned Russia by name.

Commenting on his service as the cultural attaché in Moscow from 1998-2001, former Foreign Service Officer and Russia scholar John Brown expresses his opinion that “public diplomacy is something you do, not something you think about,” that there should not be too many rules because person-to-person contact often comes through new and unanticipated situations in which the rules do not apply.² But of course, there is a guiding structure, as most authors agree thematically on what public diplomacy done right should look like. It should be based on cooperation, rather than a zero-sum approach to foreign policy (Nye 2008). It should build relationships to support American policies and make them much more sustainable abroad (Ross 2003). It should be a two-way dialogue, pairing listening with advocacy through technological innovation to encourage feedback from target audiences (Johnson/Dale 2003; Ross 2003; Brown/Glaisyer 2011). It should promote policies that are consistent with closely-held American values (Johnson/Dale 2003). All of these multilateral, positive-sum conceptions of public diplomacy are in line with a liberalist philosophy. Granted, it may not appear that way to Russian policymakers who have difficulty believing that the U.S. is not operating on a zero-sum mindset. For this reason, it is important to be selective in the application of public diplomacy (Rawnsley 1999) in order to protect it from the negative connotations of a propaganda label. It follows that public diplomacy must have a long-term guiding strategy so that it is an efficient constant, rather than just a reaction to specific threats and crises (Deibel). All these authors believe that strong public diplomacy will increase mutual understanding between the two states involved, while creating or strengthening an intelligentsia that share these interests (Scott-Smith 2008; Richmond). Hayden notes that “if public diplomacy can promote judgments and attitudes about the United States that can create a permissive environment for its policies (or at least discourage active opposition), then public diplomacy has worked as a strategy of influence.”³

Unfortunately, many of the problems that undermine broader U.S. diplomacy can be spotted in public diplomacy as well. The lack of a comprehensive and committed strategic framework for public diplomacy is foremost among these problems (Entman 2008; Graffy 2009; Hayden 2011; Lord 2008). Public diplomacy too often suffers from a belief that it can either be “sprinkled on” to regular diplomacy (Armstrong), or that it can passively rely on the benefit expected someday from long-term relationship building. This is not the case. Public diplomacy is not a panacea; it requires vigilant application, foresight, and integration into an overall national security strategy to ensure that the U.S. actually benefits from it. Entman’s 2008 study, “Mediated Public Diplomacy,” was an important example of how the U.S. could strategically conceptualize its public diplomacy efforts. By expanding his cascading network activation model, Entman demonstrated how the U.S. government should attempt to influence foreign publics by strategically targeting that country’s elites, media, and framing. However, achieving this kind of strategic planning is made more difficult by the fact that public diplomacy has never truly been a high priority for U.S. policymakers (Ross 2003; Johnson/Dale 2003; Deibel 2007). This manifests itself in woeful underbudgeting and insufficient career training for public

² John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

³ Craig Hayden, “Beyond the ‘Obama Effect’: Refining Instruments of Engagement Through U.S. Public Diplomacy.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55 no. 6 (2011), <http://abs.sagepub.com.proxyau.wrlc.org/content/55/6/784> (accessed February 12, 2013).

diplomacy officers in the field (Johnson/Dale 2003). The lack of attention from policymakers is a trend carried over from the final hours of USIA, when libraries, American Corners and publications were shut down and never revived (Johnson/Dale 2003; Cull 2012). Poor utilization of interagency channels from those who are paying attention makes it even harder to coordinate an effective public diplomacy strategy (Johnson/Dale 2003; Brown/Glaizer 2011; Hayden 2011)

The lack of top-down leadership is tragic on another level, since leadership credibility is vital to properly shaping attitudes and influence abroad (Goldsmith/Horiuchi 2009; Lord 2008). When President Obama first took office, his popularity made the reinvigoration of U.S. public diplomacy a real possibility. However, many authors agree that the administration relied too much on the “Obama brand” without creating a real strategy to take advantage of it, and the moment was lost (Snow 2009; Hayden 2011). Other authors complain that public diplomacy lost power and credibility when the U.S. government gave up an independent USIA (Johnson/Dale 2003); now, antagonistic governments can claim to see nefarious motives in every public diplomacy initiative.

With all of these flaws present, it is not surprising that some authors contest the utility of public diplomacy. Traditionalist literature is wont to dismiss public diplomacy because it includes so many non-state actors (Berridge 2010). Given that empowering non-state actors ensures a wider, more cost-effective reach, this does not seem like a legitimate criticism. It is more concerning that too many policy makers believe that, when it comes to public diplomacy, “seeing is believing:” a well-educated public receiving all the right messages may still not necessarily like or agree with U.S. policies (Entman 2008). The cultural shaping grounded in the Russian political mindset discussed above may well make the case of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia especially vulnerable to this criticism. Moreover, critical authors suggest that attempts at public diplomacy engagement in regions where the U.S. lacks credibility may actually do more harm than good (Deibel 2007; Goldsmith/Horiuchi 2009). If the message of U.S. public diplomacy is not considerate of the dominant views in the target society, it may be more important for public diplomacy practitioners to target elites and intelligentsia, rather than the mass public, in the hope of creating a more organic attitudinal shift (Entman 2008).

III. U.S. Public Diplomacy in Russia – A Chronological Reconstruction

End of the Cold War: 1989-1991

The radical changes wrought by the death throes of the Soviet Union meant that a wider American public diplomacy effort in Russia and Eastern Europe was suddenly possible. It was a time in which everyone at the Embassy was utterly delighted by the new opportunities presented to them; they believed that everything for which the U.S. had been striving for decades had been achieved at last.⁴ The sense of victory and excitement was amplified by the rapid increase in opportunities for advocacy and broadcasting capabilities, a continued high demand for U.S. culture, and the perceived success of exchanges in accomplishing U.S. strategic goals.

Listening

⁴ Ambassador Jack Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013.

In theory, 1989 should have been a prime opportunity for the U.S. to engage in the “listening” element of public diplomacy. The Russian (and, at this time, still Soviet) intelligentsia had long been “cooped up intellectually”⁵ and they were eagerly taking advantage of the voice newly afforded them by Gorbachev’s *glasnost*. For the first time, U.S. public diplomacy practitioners could ask the Soviets their opinions and requests and receive an honest answer.

Indeed, USIA publications at the time demonstrate that the official approach to the U.S.-Russia relationship was to be one “based on restraint and reciprocity, even though *fundamental differences with the Soviet Union will persist* (emphasis added).”⁶ The recognition of these differences should logically have prompted a query of what those differences were and how might they affect the story that might resonate most effectively with the Soviet public.

However, it is unlikely that U.S. “listening” was a real aspect of public diplomacy at this time. The two-way nature of successful public diplomacy was not fully recognized until the post-911 era. Cold War public diplomacy had been a monologue not by choice but by necessity, since the Iron Curtain and repressive government policies minimized potential feedback from Soviet publics to the U.S. government. For decades, “listening” had simply not been an option. Public diplomacy officials – caught just as off guard as the rest of the U.S. government by the changes in the Soviet bloc – were not adapting quickly enough to realize that they should incorporate it.

Advocacy

The “FY 1989 Country Plan Themes” for the Soviet Union (literature provided by USIA for internal strategic guidance) highlight what the U.S. wanted to convey about itself during this pivotal period. Peace and security, freedom and democracy, economic issues, and arts and cultural heritage were all considered to be the foundational issues for public diplomacy’s advocacy U.S. interests and positions.⁷

In general, this particular component of public diplomacy relies heavily on the working relationships between public diplomacy officers and their contacts in foreign media organizations. The maintenance of these contacts increases the likelihood that American points of view will be given space in credible domestic platforms. Such access is crucial for the promotion of U.S. positions and values.

In terms of access, Ambassador Jack Matlock, who served as the ambassador to the USSR from 1987 until 1991, considered the transition to the post-Cold War era to be particularly invigorating. Historically, American ambassadors to the USSR had only been permitted to appear on state television for a brief 4-5 minutes once a year, usually on the 4th of July;⁸ in 1989, Matlock and his wife suddenly became regulars on hour-long segments of prime-time television. There was a seemingly “unlimited” demand for their participation, as well as unlimited access to their preferred channels of engagement.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Country Plan Themes FY 1989*, ed. U.S. Information Agency, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed March 2013).

⁷ *USIA Country Plan Themes FY 1989*, in the National Archives, College Park ANNEX (accessed April 2013).

⁸ Ambassador Jack Matlock, conversation with author, March 25, 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

Cultural

The story of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War is a powerful one to which numerous authors have already paid tribute. The “forbidden fruit” of the West¹⁰ continued to exert a strong hold over the imaginations of Soviet citizens, and manifestations of U.S. culture in Russia remained popular. Matlock points to the circulation of *Amerika* magazine at the time as a compelling proof of the persisting magnetism of U.S. culture. *Amerika*, a long-running State Department publication in the Eastern Bloc about American life, had been limited by agreement with the Kremlin to publication of only 50,000 copies, with an additional 5,000 copies distributed by the Embassy in Moscow.¹¹ The valuable publications sold out instantly every year, and heavily amplified their audience size through additional circulation on the black market. Matlock has high praise for the magazine’s popularity, expressing his belief that, without the production limitations, *Amerika* could have been sold “by the millions” in the 1980s.¹²

Exchange

Exchanges between the U.S. and the USSR had been a major public diplomacy priority since the Lacey-Zarubin Agreement in 1958, and they would continue to be so during this transitional period. Even Oleg Kalugin, former head of the KGB, was willing to acknowledge the success of this strategy in retrospect when he claimed that the U.S. exchange programs functioned as a “Trojan horse,” breaking down the Soviet Union from inside itself.¹³ USIA internal documents and memorandums in 1989 indicate an intended expansion of exchange programs with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries. The strategic value of such exchanges was the promotion of “greater understanding and receptivity to U.S. and Western democratic ideals.”¹⁴ Primary programs conducted by USIA were the International Visitor Program (IVP), FLEX, the Fulbright Program, People to People, and the Peace Corps – almost all of which are alive and well in Russia today.¹⁵ Their longevity speaks to the effectiveness still attributed to them by U.S. policymakers.

Although the overall exchange picture was rosy, some practitioners recall that the massive political restructuring (and the lack of American preparedness for the unraveling of the Soviet bloc) added turbulence to the exchange procedure. Robert Schadler, former director of USIA’s Office of International Visitors, recalls that the IVP had to “shuffle” and move quickly to fix the infrastructure gaps created by the swift emergence of the Russian Federation and the other post-Soviet states.¹⁶ Still, the program carried on in its

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 148.

¹² Ambassador Jack Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013.

¹³ As cited in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 46.

¹⁴ *USIA Country Plan Themes FY 1989*, in the National Archives, College Park ANNEX (accessed April 2013).

¹⁵ For discussion of the Peace Corps’ expulsion from Russia in 2001, see page 24.

¹⁶ Robert Schadler, interview with author, March 28, 2013.

mission to provide “an uncensored view of American pluralism, its institutions and politics, and through the process, build mutual understanding.”¹⁷

For U.S. interests, this transitional phase was a vital time to showcasing an American style of life and governance through exchanges. Mid-level professionals and government officials were ideal candidates, since they would return to Russia with a real chance of having a voice that mattered in the new social and political infrastructure.

Broadcasting:

Gorbachev’s *glasnost* ended Soviet state control over the media environment and liberated it for new channels of communication. After so many years of jammed broadcasting and suppressed communication, the sudden saturation of the media was heady and intoxicating. Broadcasting statistics of the time reflect the fact that Voice of America was riding high on the wave of its Cold War successes. As of 1988, VOA services reached 26 million audience members in the USSR,¹⁸ and the Moscow bureau alone ran 15 hours of airtime daily. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, VOA Moscow aired multiple interviews with Yeltsin and other leading reformists,¹⁹ playing such a role that was perceived to still be so important that, in 1990, the U.S. Advisory Commission for Public Diplomacy recommended adding an additional Russian correspondent to the Bureau, since “so extensive [was] the story and so demanding the coverage for so many listeners.”²⁰

The Yeltsin Years: 1991-1999

At the beginning of the 1990s, “nascent” Russia tacked westward, seeking integration,²¹ meaning that at least initially, U.S. public diplomacy in Russia was partially “demand driven.”²² Exchanges flourished, no longer limited in participation by old government agreements. The Yeltsin government accorded generous media actions to U.S. diplomats and scholars, and accorded a privileged relationship to U.S. international broadcasting by the Yeltsin government. However, at the ideal moment for the expansion and promotion of public diplomacy in the post-Cold War era, a group of policymakers in Washington convinced itself that peace-time public diplomacy was no longer vital to preserving U.S. interests. The long, slow decline of the USIA began, and the budget cuts that the agency suffered along the way impacted the opportunities available to public diplomacy practitioners in Moscow.

¹⁷ “International Visitors get a glimpse of U.S. family life,” *The Gadsen Times*, October 26, 1984: Section B2-3.

¹⁸ *Briefing Paper on VOA Broadcasting to Eastern Europe and the USSR*, ed. U.S. Advisory Commission for Public Diplomacy, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

¹⁹ It is notable that the Ukrainian and Polish bureaus aired only 4 hours per day during this time. *VOA Services to the USSR and Eastern Europe At-A-Glance*, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

²⁰ *Briefing Paper on VOA Broadcasting to Eastern Europe and the USSR*, ed. U.S. Advisory Commission for Public Diplomacy, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

²¹ Dmitri Trenin. “Russia’s Foreign Policy Outlook,” in *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future*, ed. Maria Lipman and Nikolai Petrov. (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011).

²² E. Wayne Merry, interview with author, March 5, 2013.

Simultaneously, as the decade progressed, the forbidden fruit of the West soured. John Brown, who served as a cultural officer in the late 1990s, goes so far as to diagnose Russian perceptions of America with “indigestion.”²³ During the Cold War, U.S. public diplomacy efforts consistently informed Russians that America was the land of freedom, milk and honey, where everything imaginable was possible. But the extreme economic hardship of the 1990s devastated Russian national pride, thus largely (and somewhat unfairly) disabusing the Russian people of this notion and tarnishing the attraction of capitalism, and of America as the nation that stood for it. Meanwhile, the foreign policy decisions made in Washington during this time necessitated the advocacy of policies that would be inherently unpopular in Russia. The additional influx of base American pop culture into Russian markets was the cause of additional disenchantment. The honeymoon for U.S. public diplomacy in Russia was coming to a frustrating end.

Listening

Throughout the 1990s, there is little evidence to suggest that the state of “listening” in U.S. public diplomacy improved at all, and it remained a neglected aspect of the practice. After Gorbachev signed the Soviet Union out of existence on December 25, 1991, the advocacy of U.S. policies (discussed below) was strong, even jingoistic. In the post-Soviet space, the prevailing attitudes in the West contributed to a belief that it alone knew what could best be done to transform Russia into a “civilized” state.²⁴

It is also possible that the insular culture of the Foreign Service may have limited the American ability to create spontaneous dialogues with their target Russian public. John Brown recalls that many employees did not socialize outside of embassy circles, and tended to spend their free time enclosed in diplomatic circles.²⁵ Accordingly, there would have been only limited avenues for the kind of genuine engagement that would have offered a fresh take on what the average Russian wanted from its relationship with the U.S.

Advocacy

At the end of 1991, polling data suggested that nearly 80% of Russians had a positive attitude towards the U.S.²⁶ Russians were truly interested in what U.S. officials had to offer, and Russian television continued to warmly welcome Americans to its programming. Even future ambassador Michael McFaul, who at the time was a professor conducting research on electoral politics in Moscow, starred in a 1994 multi-week television series entitled “What is Democracy?”²⁷

High levels of Russian interest rendered the early 1990s the opportunity of the century for optimistic policymakers and theorists. Hordes of Americans descended on Russia during this time to try to fix it – to, “with hubris, remake [Russia] in the West’s own image.”²⁸ It is common knowledge that most of these reforms never achieved their

²³ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

²⁴ Thomas E. Graham, “In Defense of a Strategic Approach to Russia,” *The American Interest*, (2013), <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1394> (accessed April 2013).

²⁵ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

²⁶ “In Search of Détente Once Again,” *The Economist* 392 (2009).

²⁷ Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

²⁸ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

promised outcomes. But correspondingly, the widespread sense of anger, insecurity, and disappointment in Russia at the end of the decade prompted the tarring of public diplomacy advocacy efforts with the same brush of failure.

In retrospect, the early work of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Russia in the 1990s met with such criticisms for being misguided, or for failing to properly advocate the benefits of its actions and programs.²⁹ USAID can be classified as a public diplomacy actor for its advocacy of democracy and governance initiatives, since its efforts to “support free and fair elections, to teach the skills of democratic governance, and to help citizens empower themselves and become full participants in their own development”³⁰ are inherently a promotion of U.S. democratic ideals. Defenders of USAID’s work counter that in the 1990s, Russian civil society was so green that it was certainly not an ideal partner in advocating for and achieving democratic reforms.³¹

U.S. advocacy in Russia encountered further obstacles in the foreign policy choices of the Clinton administration in the region. U.S. foreign policy between 1991 and September 11, 2001 is often critiqued as adrift or unfocused after losing its ideological rival and enemy. But many of the battles that Clinton did choose to fight were perceived by Russians as inherently threatening to their national security. U.S. actions that ran counter to deeply-held Russian frames and beliefs in these cases made it very difficult to explain or justify the American stance, let alone win over Russian public opinion. Such clashes occurred over U.S. support for NATO’s eastward expansion as well as the 1999 intervention in Kosovo against the Serbs (Russia’s traditional allies). Both events only increased the “besieged fortress” mentality, since Russian eyes perceived unilateral U.S. actions that were intended to weaken or marginalize Russia. When asked his opinion on public diplomacy’s inability to stem or reverse the negative public reaction in Russia to these policies, Ambassador Matlock expressed an utter lack of surprise; it would have been impossible for American advocacy to beautify policies that in no way served Russia’s vital interests.³²

When the U.S. mismatches its actions and its messages to the Russian public, it greatly reduces the credibility of those who attempt to advocate on its behalf. This is not to argue that the U.S. position on NATO expansion and Kosovo was unjustified, but merely to point out both were striking moments in which U.S. actions clashed with its rhetoric of freedom and multilateralism. Furthermore, while America’s policy towards Russia was publicly aimed at bringing the country to a state of normalcy, it remained painfully obvious to Russians that their country was excluded from any cooperative regional security infrastructure.³³ Collectively, these aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s could never be acceptable to the Russian public, no matter how diligently public diplomacy officials attempted to explain it.

Unfortunately, the problems facing advocacy in the 1990s were amplified by bureaucratic politics. As public diplomacy plummeted on the list of U.S. priorities in

²⁹ Ibid; Eric Novotny, interview with author, March 19, 2013.

³⁰ U.S. Agency for International Development. “Mission Statement,” *National Partnership for Reinventing Government*, (2001), <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/library/status/mission/musaid.htm> (accessed April 2013).

³¹ E. Wayne Merry, interview with author, March 5, 2013.

³² Ambassador Jack Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013.

³³ “In Search of Détente Once Again,” *The Economist* 392 (2009).

Washington and USIA was dismantled, and many public diplomacy officers who served in Russia during this time were left with a bitter taste in their mouths. Bob Gosende, the Minister Counselor of Public Affairs in Moscow during the latter part of the 1990s, recalls with frustration a parallel decline in his own influence and ability to perform his job effectively. To Gosende, it was “apparent that [he] was a dead man walking;” in a telling physical manifestation of the state of affairs for public diplomacy, at every successive country team meeting that he attended, he was seated farther and farther away from the head of the table.³⁴

Cultural

Like the advocacy element, the cultural sphere of U.S. public diplomacy in Russia started off the 1990s in an optimistic mood. With an eye for new frontiers of engagement, USIA opened its first American Center in Moscow in 1993 in partnership with the Rudomino Library. The Rudomino Library was an institution well respected among Muscovites, and the partnership was thus intended to lend greater credibility to the new Embassy facility.³⁵ Cultural events were hosted here as well as at Spaso House, the stately residence of the U.S. Ambassador that had served as the traditional venue for such exhibitions during Soviet times.

However, cultural public diplomacy officers also suffered from bureaucratic woes. The series of budget cuts during the decade-long decline of USIA necessitated a decrease in the overall number of American cultural events in Russia was decreasing. The Russian intelligentsia and elite, who were reportedly perplexed by the insular nature of the U.S. diplomatic community, were even further stymied by the fact that the “world’s most powerful country” could be lag so far behind in cultural diplomacy.³⁶

The inhibition of the U.S. ability to showcase its best side to the Russian public became a strategic problem when the free media environment opened the floodgates to the baser aspects of American pop culture. “Low-class” American culture inundated the Russian market because it was cheap and because an undeniable Russian demand existed for these aspects that had been, for so long, utterly inaccessible to them. USIS Moscow did not expect this disadvantage of the free media environment, and did not have the funds to surge its exhibitions of “good” high culture to counter it. Anton Fedyashin, the Executive Director of the Initiative for Russian Culture, speculates that this period did immense damage to the U.S. image in Russia, since the average Russian today now perceives Americans as a people lacking knowledge and appreciation of culture.³⁷ By the end of the decade, this was enough to prompt denunciations from the Russian intelligentsia of the more vulgar aspects of American culture. Such vulgarity, they believed, would poison their own society, and they began to question whether or not the U.S. was truly worthy of cultural emulation.³⁸

Exchanges

³⁴ Robert Gosende, interview with author, April 5, 2013.

³⁵ Tara Sonenshine, “Remarks at Moscow American Center” (speech presented in Moscow, Russia, April 10, 2013).

³⁶ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

³⁷ Anton Fedyashin, interview with author, March 18, 2013.

³⁸ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

American exchanges with Russia were no longer driven by the strategic goal of creating a pro-Western intelligentsia behind the confines of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, exchange programs in the 1990s retained their immense popularity with Russian citizens. Exchanges were conducted in the areas of scholarship, science and technology, humanities, social sciences, think tanks, NGOs, performing arts, movies, exhibitions, literary, journalists, and of course, the exchanges of traditional diplomats.³⁹ The number of participants was no longer subject to Soviet restrictions; in fact, the Yeltsin government generally supported and encouraged the exchanges.⁴⁰ Some diplomats stationed in Moscow at time even opined that exchanges were the single most valuable aspect of U.S. public diplomacy during the 1990s.⁴¹

U.S. policymakers knew that the malleability of the new Russian social infrastructure would not be permanent, and they hastened to promote rule of law and governance exchanges, strategically attempting to influence Russian development with the American model while it was still possible. For instance, legal exchanges under the auspices of the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) increased interaction between American and Russian lawmakers, even experimentally introducing the idea of jury trials into Russia.⁴² The IVP supported this goal as well: in one particular exchange jointly coordinated by the Department of Justice and IVP, a group of Russian judicial officials traveled to the U.S. for a conference on federalism. To ensure that the participants were exposed not just to the seat of American government, but also to the reality of federalism in practice, the delegation ended up in Montana.⁴³

For such purposes, U.S. public diplomacy practitioners already knew the importance of maintaining connections with their Russian alumni. To facilitate this, goal, they often assisted in the modernization of Russian technological and communication networks. It is impossible to quantify the effects of these actions on Russian communities, but it is possible to speculate that they may have contributed to the generation of savvy bloggers and social media denizens that are a major target audience for U.S. public diplomacy today.

Unfortunately, both in the context of formal exchanges and general tourism, U.S. visa policy for Russians at this time was an irritant. Russians wanting to visit the U.S. during the 1990s frequently lined up for hours each day at the Embassy, undergoing thorough and invasive questioning, even sometimes being treated rudely by the overworked consular staff – only to find out weeks later that their visa had been denied.⁴⁴ One such instance was a perfect storm of bureaucratic inconvenience and cultural indignity: while preparing for his company's lauded U.S. tour, the director of the Bolshoi Ballet was refused a visa.⁴⁵ Such regrettable incidents, although accidental, were poor

³⁹ Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), vii.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ E. Wayne Merry, interview with author, March 5, 2013.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Robert Schadler, interview with author, March 28, 2013.

⁴⁴ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

⁴⁵ Ibid. The confusion occurred because the director's name had been confused with another name on the "do not travel" list.

correlations of U.S. messaging and actions: how free can America really be – speculated some Russians - if it is so reluctant to let us visit?⁴⁶

Broadcasting

For U.S. international broadcasting, the defining moment of the decade came early, during the failed putsch of August 1991. At this critical time, Voice of America and RFE/RL performed a messaging function that would endear the organizations in the eyes of Yeltsin and the leadership, which in turn shaped the relatively vibrant future of U.S. broadcasting in Russia for the rest of the decade. Members of the State Committee on the State of Emergency, the group that orchestrated the attempted coup, had firm control over central television and the rest of the media. With no other viable options for large-scale messaging and advocacy, Yeltsin and his supporters approached the U.S. for help. A fax from a Russian official in Yeltsin's camp to Allen Weinstein (president of the Center for Democracy in Washington) illustrates the urgency of these requests:

11:14 am. Did Mr. Bush make any comments upon the situation in this country.[sic] If he did, make it known by all means of communication, make it known to the people of this country. The Russian Government has no NO [sic] ways to address the people. All radio stations are under control. The following is BY's [Boris Yeltsin's] address to the Army. Submit it to USIA. Broadcast it over the country. May be 'Voice of America. Do it! Urgent!⁴⁷

In the end, Voice of America did indeed broadcast Yeltsin's fiery tank speech. VOA and RFE/RL both carried other political messages as well, effectively keeping a handle on Yeltsin's supporters and on broader public opinion in the country.⁴⁸ To those in the U.S. who believed in Yeltsin as a reformer, this seemed a clear sign that U.S. broadcasting had accelerated the dissolution of the Soviet Union and saved Russia's fledgling democracy; more cynically, it served as a tool for Yeltsin to preserve and consolidate his own power. Either way, the experience inspired in Yeltsin a respectful belief that he owed his position to the media, and he exhibited an unwillingness to restrict its freedom. Others shared this belief: at a subsequent session of the USSR Supreme Soviet that was made public on USSR Central TV, a Russian member of the Council of Nationalities begged that American radio stations never be jammed again because of the immense benefit they had brought to the Russian people.⁴⁹

Even in the late 1990s, the correspondence of Joseph Duffey - at the time, director of USIA - illustrates the fact that the agency was well aware of Yeltsin's continued appreciation and strove to make use of it. The 50th anniversary celebration of VOA Russia on February 17th, 1997, included sound bites from the service's most historic events, such as its first broadcast, the moon landing, memorable interviews with leading

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Make it Known." *Washington Post*, August 20, 1991.

⁴⁸ Robert Schadler, interview with author, March 28, 2013

⁴⁹ The session aired in the afternoon of August 27, 1991. As described in documents from the VOA USSR Research Unit, *Assorted Documents*, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

dissidents Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn – and of course, Yeltsin’s tank speech.⁵⁰

The strategic role that international broadcasting had played in protecting Yeltsin – the leader who best suited U.S. interests – brought benefits to VOA and RFE/RL at home as well. Tom Korologos, Chairman of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, argued that, “the defeat of the junta demonstrated convincingly that democratic initiatives are sustained by the free exchange of ideas and information that characterize USIA’s work.”⁵¹ The momentum of this success boosted the credentials of broadcasting agencies with Congress, and subsequently, it passed a \$200 million budget increase for both RFE/RL and VOA.⁵² Congressional support and the new independent leadership of the Broadcasting Board of Governors after the International Broadcasting Act of 1994 meant that international broadcasting in Russia was much safer from the debilitating budget cuts of the decade than were its other public diplomacy counterparts.⁵³

Putin’s First Term: 1999-2008

Two key trends emerged for U.S. public diplomacy when Putin arrived in the Kremlin. The first was an increased difficulty in messaging, as first advocacy and then international broadcasting came under deliberate attack from the Russian government. The second trend is an attempt to cope when the consolidation of USIA into the State Department in 1999 damaged the synergy that had formerly existed between the educational, cultural, and advocacy elements of public diplomacy in Russia. The loss of this cohesiveness – something that been taken for granted under USIA⁵⁴ - also damaged flexibility and the diplomats’ ability to react quickly and creatively to various situations.⁵⁵

Putin, much more so than Yeltsin, was inclined to exploit the U.S. as a foil in his own domestic campaigning by using the U.S. to define what Russians should and should not want Russia to be.⁵⁶ This involved severe manipulation of the environment in which public diplomacy operates in order for the Kremlin to frame the U.S. in a negative light to Russian publics.

Listening

Since 1986, the “new” U.S. Embassy had occupied Moscow’s Bolshaya Devyatinskaya Street, just off of Noviy Arbat and barely three kilometers from the Kremlin. Due to ferocious bugging by the KGB during early construction of the New Office Building, the U.S. insisted on deconstructing and reconstructing that particular part of the complex. Finally, the New Office Building was declared safe for use on May

⁵⁰ Joseph Duffey, email to Erskine Bowles, February 13, 1997.

⁵¹ U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, *Press Release August 1991*, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

⁵² “VOA, RFE/RL Victorious After Failed Soviet Coup,” *Broadcast Magazine*, in the National Archives, College Park (accessed April 2013).

⁵³ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

⁵⁴ Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

5, 2000.⁵⁷ It was at the Embassy complex that the voice of the Russian people was clearly heard on September 11th, 2001. Anne Chermak, at the time Minister Counselor of Press and Information (2001-2003), recalls that the employees of the Embassy were “overwhelmed” by the mass outpouring of public sympathy, and that the gates outside were completely covered with flowers and candles.⁵⁸ The Russian public on a large scale expressed its sympathy for American suffering.

However, it would still be some time before the paradigm of U.S. public diplomacy would shift from monologue to dialogue. Additionally, post-9/11 security concerns reduced the accessibility of the Embassy to Russian citizens, and rendered the building an unapproachable fortress instead of the “citadel of American freedom” that it had been during the Cold War.⁵⁹

Advocacy

In the early 2000s, public diplomacy officials struggled to chart new bureaucratic waters, confronting obstacles that were “commonplace to the State Department,” but previously unheard of at USIA.⁶⁰ Many of the tools that they had viewed as necessary for effective promulgation of public diplomacy had been weakened. For instance, the grant-making authority that under USIA enabled its officers to pay out awards in cash – thus empowering them to move quickly and efficiently in their engagement with Russian organizations – was abolished during consolidation. The new State Department policy insisted that all such grants be issued by check. Reportedly, this enormously complicated efforts to reach out to NGOs and smaller organizations in the Russian hinterlands, since such organizations would inevitably encounter overwhelming difficulty when trying to cash an American check.⁶¹ Gosende attributes this change to the State Department’s belief that there was no such need for efficiency and speed in grant-making⁶² – a belief that, much like the abolition of USIA, made no sense to these seasoned public diplomacy officers.⁶³

However, such tactical issues were less significant than the “Russia fatigue” that began emanating from Washington at this time. Anne Chermak identifies this facet of the policy environment as the biggest challenge that she faced at the Embassy, since it pressured the already beleaguered public diplomacy officers in Russia to fight incessantly in order to prove the value of their efforts.⁶⁴

It did not help the situation that U.S. foreign policy continued to provoke the Russian leadership and create dilemmas for information officers. In the first few years after 9/11, Bush and Putin’s cooperation on counterterrorism built up capital and goodwill between the two countries, which had a very positive, legitimizing effect on

⁵⁷ “American Embassy Moscow – Brief History,” Embassy of the United States, Moscow, Russia, http://moscow.usembassy.gov/about_the_embassy.html (accessed April 2013).

⁵⁸ Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

⁵⁹ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013; Robert Gosende, interview with author, April 5, 2013.

⁶⁰ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Robert Gosende, interview with author, April 5, 2013.

⁶³ Ibid; John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

⁶⁴ Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

public diplomacy in Russia.⁶⁵ But the capital deteriorated quickly over continued NATO controversies and the growing Russian suspicion that it was trapped in an unequal partnership.⁶⁶ The pride of the Russian political mentality rendered such a perception particularly odious.

In the midst of overarching political tensions, Chermak affirms that the Embassy tried its utmost to get high-level American officials into the Russian media so that the U.S. perspective would have a chance of being heard. However, the Russian media environment grew increasingly restricted as Putin moved to consolidate his own power through a campaign to strip the media environment of criticisms and alternative perspectives. Independent channels like Dozhd and NTV were quickly targeted or taken over by the state, leaving only a few small-audience outlier, like Ekho Moskvi, as “safety valves.”⁶⁷ The radical changes in the Russian media environment impeded access for U.S. public diplomacy officers to the most prominent channels and the largest audiences.

Cultural

Cultural diplomacy proved difficult during the early part of the 21st century for both geopolitical and bureaucratic reasons. The “Russia fatigue” discussed above meant that cultural officers struggled even more than their informational counterparts to prove their worth to U.S. policymakers. John Brown recalls a distinct lack of top-down support for cultural programs during this time, which forced cultural officers to undertake projects on their own initiative. The cultural officers gamely tried to adapt, and they continued hosting events to educate the Russian public about U.S. current affairs.⁶⁸ But Brown, who served as the debate’s moderator, maintains that these received little top-down assistance from the U.S. leadership. For another exhibit – “Propaganda and Dreams,” comparing photography from both countries in the 1930s – Brown had to seek funding from Russian businessmen, whom he described as bemused that representatives from “such a powerful country” would have beg for cash in order to sponsor cultural exhibits.⁶⁹

The post-consolidation bureaucratic challenges in the sphere of public diplomacy meant that taking initiative was not always an easy thing to do. Public diplomacy officers no longer reported to their USIA superiors in Washington, but rather to the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy. Brown asserts that the lack of distance reduced FSOs’ willingness to embrace risk and creativity.⁷⁰ This recollection certainly corresponds with general criticisms of the State Department bureaucracy for stifling creativity: generally, employees are so focused on career advancement that no one wants to step outside the box and risk derailing himself with failure.

Yet in spite of this environment, one major public diplomacy initiative was launched in Moscow during this time: the “American Corners” (under the leadership of Anne Chermak, 2001). Described by the Embassy as “smaller, more flexible versions of

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

American Centers,”⁷¹ Chermak rates the Centers as the most successful PD effort of the decade.⁷² Two were launched in Russia in 2001; today, there are over 400 American Corners in 60 different countries.⁷³ The Centers require “buy-in” from the host nation and hire both local and American staff. Chermak regards them as valuable because they give Russians a chance to learn and engage with American reference materials, serve as bases for other initiatives like the Internet Access and Training Program, and – by tracking the number of visitors – provided another way to try to gauge audience size.⁷⁴ Certainly, while quantitative metrics do not reveal anything about the effectiveness of a public diplomacy initiative, the numbers helped bolster justifications for cultural diplomacy in number-oriented bureaucratic evaluations.

Exchanges

In spite of political tensions, Chermak characterizes exchange programs during Putin’s first term as “robust – [there was] a real thirst and hunger” for such programs among the Russian public.⁷⁵ She estimates that between FLEX, Muskie, the International Visitors Program, Fulbright Scholars, Business for Russia, and the Citizens’ Democratic Corps, approximately 5,000 Russians were brought to the U.S. per year.⁷⁶ The Internet Access and Training Program, managed out of the new American Corners, improved the U.S. government’s ability to maintain contact with all former program participants.⁷⁷ The program also taught research methods and training in new online developments. Most importantly, they were open to all members of the Russian public, meaning that the network of like-minded citizens experiencing benefits and changes in their lives thanks to U.S. programs had significant potential for expansion.

The most significant crisis in the realm of exchanges occurred in 2001, when the Peace Corps was summarily and permanently ejected from the country. After FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev accused one volunteer of espionage, all 27 other volunteers and their supportive administrative services were kicked out as well.⁷⁸ The Peace Corps in Russia at this time differed greatly from its activities in other countries. Unlike in the typical Peace Corps destination, Russia volunteers were primarily engaged in technology modernization assistance and best practices. However, it was still carried the Peace Corps’ mission to aid developing countries. This image was gravely offensive to the Russians, who still smarted from the economic disaster of the 1990s. It is not a stretch to speculate that the Peace Corps’ ejection was less about espionage than about Putin’s desire to rid the country of anything that made Russia feel like less of a “self-respecting”

⁷¹ “American Centers and Corners,” Embassy of the United States, Moscow, Russia, <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/amcc.html> (accessed April 2013).

⁷² Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

⁷³ “American Centers and Corners,” Embassy of the United States, Moscow, Russia, <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/amcc.html> (accessed April 2013).

⁷⁴ Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Aisha Labi, “A Diplomat to the Corps,” *TIME Magazine*, (2003), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,404237,00.html> (accessed April 2013).

entity.⁷⁹ If this is indeed the case, then the fate of the Peace Corps can be viewed as a prescient, small-scale foreshadowing for USAID's expulsion a decade in 2012.

Broadcasting

In an abrupt reversal of its 1990s fortunes, U.S. broadcasting suffered under Putin. Chermak confirms that it was very clear from the start that Putin had no desire for a free media in Russia, and that U.S. international broadcasting was his first target.⁸⁰ Radio Liberty was still running on local frequencies.⁸¹ Chermak believed that during this time, VOA Russia began to lose effectiveness: its content became diluted and less substantive, and in her interactions with her Russian counterparts, she cannot recall one who listened to it.⁸²

Medvedev and the Reset: 2008-2012

Broadly, the bilateral relationship and U.S. public diplomacy both hit astonishing lows during the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. The pursuit of the reset could not have come at a more necessary time, since it countered the complaint that the U.S. was indifferent, and even staunchly opposed, to Russian interests.⁸³ Medvedev himself proclaimed that the two leaders and their countries were "ready to move beyond Cold War mentalities and fresh start in relations,"⁸⁴ which superficially seemed an existentialist boon to public diplomacy practitioners in Russia. However, the contested Duma elections of 2011 sharply reminded the U.S. that the reality on the ground was not so straightforward. The general laziness and overreliance on the Obama brand identified in the literature review above also infected public diplomacy practices in Russia specifically. Fortunately, the creation of the Bilateral Presidential Commission in 2009 brought some sense of unity back to the elements of culture and exchange while encouraging engagement in many other diverse areas.

Listening

Given the plethora of studies of post-9/11 U.S. public diplomacy failures in the Middle East – largely conducted in the first few years after the beginning of the Iraq War – and its circulation through the public diplomacy academic community at the time, U.S. public diplomacy practitioners in Moscow could not have been unaware of the importance of dialogue. When social media became a viable platform in Russia, it finally empowered the Russian public with a voice, and gradually, public diplomacy practitioners started tuning in. The home-grown Vkontakte, which is currently the largest

⁷⁹ Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

⁸⁰ Anne Chermak, interview with author, April 9, 2013.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Matthew Rojansky, "U.S.-Russian Cooperation Beyond 2012," (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

⁸⁴ Office of the Press Secretary, "Joint Statement by President Dmitriy Medvedev of the Russian Federation and President Barack Obama of the United States of America," The White House, (2009), http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Joint-Statement-by-President-Dmitriy-Medvedev-of-the-Russian-Federation-and-President-Barack-Obama-of-the-United-States-of-America (accessed April 2013).

social network in Russia, was founded in 2006 by Pavel Durov and attracted 3 million users in its first year of operation.⁸⁵ The availability of such social media platforms presented new paths for broader U.S. engagement with the Russian populace. By nature, such platforms necessitate dialogue, since both actors are empowered to voice their opinions and respond to messaging in kind. Thus, the onset of social media was finally beginning to lend an element of reciprocity to the relationship between the U.S. government and the Russian public.

One notable instance of new interactivity took place during the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict over the breakaway Republic of South Ossetia, when the *New York Times* Russian blog (which is translated into English) invited Russian bloggers to voice their own opinions on the situation. Specifically, the blog requested opinions on Russia's aims in Georgia, evaluations of the leadership, and speculations on America's potential role in the conflict,⁸⁶ giving the Russian intelligentsia important agency in the U.S. media during a time of crisis. However, it must be emphasized that this was a completely non-governmental initiative. While it lends credence to inclusive theories permitting non-governmental actors to be diplomats, it certainly does not illustrate an improved listening mechanism in U.S. public diplomacy.

Advocacy

Bluntly speaking, the first year of Medvedev's presidency brought catastrophe for public diplomacy. By this point, NATO expansion had long been a point of contention in the U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship, and correspondingly, an inescapable stumbling block for public diplomacy officers in advocacy roles. But the 2008 Russia-Georgia provoked a wave of negativity between the two countries. John Beyrle characterized levels of dialogue and interaction at this time (at least between governments) as "dangerously low."⁸⁷ Public statements by Bush, Cheney, Rice, Gates, and other cabinet-level officials characterized Russia as an outlaw and an aggressor whose actions were forcing it into international isolation.⁸⁸ Ambassador James Glassman, whose tenure as the new Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs had begun only a few weeks prior to the conflict, confirms that the State Department had no strategic plan in place for crisis public diplomacy, and thus the PD elements of the policy community had to "hustle to deal with it ad-hoc."⁸⁹

Considering the lack of guiding strategy and the daunting task of explaining an undeniably "anti-Russian" position to the Russians themselves, it is not surprising that U.S. public diplomacy failed to win any victories. Findings from the Public Opinion

⁸⁵ Anna Bessonova, "The Story and Plans of Vkontakte Told by Founder and CEO," *Arctic StartUp*. (2011), <http://www.arcticstartup.com/2011/07/18/the-story-and-plans-of-vkontakte-told-by-founder-and-ceo> (accessed March 30, 2013).

⁸⁶ Victoria Orlova, "The View from Russia," in *Towards a New Public Diplomacy*, ed. Philip Seib, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 85.

⁸⁷ John Beyrle, "The Strength of Dialogue in Russian-American Relations" (speech presented at a symposium at American University, April 13, 2013).

⁸⁸ Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests," *Congressional Research Service*, (2009), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34618.pdf> (accessed April 2013).

⁸⁹ Ambassador James Glassman, interview with author, April 16, 2013.

Foundation reported that after the conflict, 75% of Russians considered the U.S. to be an unfriendly country (the highest negative Russian response to this question since 2001), and the Levada Center reported that 67% of Russians had negative feelings towards America.⁹⁰

Glassman recalls the failure to expand the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) as a major shortcoming in the public diplomacy strategy in Russia at the time. The DOT, created in November 2006, was a new vehicle through which State Department employees sifted through foreign blogs, news sites, and discussion forums to proactively find and counter misinformation online while correctly explaining U.S. foreign policy.⁹¹ The program was originally limited to Arabic, Persian, and Urdu platforms, reflecting prioritization of public diplomacy in the Middle East. During the Russia-Georgia conflict, accusations of American covert operations and involvement flew fast and furious in Russian online forums. In its aftermath, Glassman identified Russia as an ideal candidate for expansion of the DOT. When approached with the suggestion, the Embassy in Moscow liked the idea but insisted on having full control over its implementation.⁹² From there, the initiative was quietly dropped and no attempt was made to resume it. Glassman suggests that the tabling of DOT Russia may have been the result of good intentions, perhaps an effort to reduce misperceptions by the Russian government that the Embassy was engaging in further American antagonism.⁹³ Regardless, misinformation (and even disinformation) continues unabated on Russian networks, threatening the U.S. image and interests. Yet to date, the only role that the Digital Outreach Team plays towards Russia is through the online discussion site for RT's Arabic language channel.⁹⁴ This reflects more of a strategic public diplomacy offensive in the Middle East than in Russia, in spite of the fact that it is no secret that the Russian government covertly operates in the Russian blogosphere to disseminate propaganda and disinformation.⁹⁵

The post-Georgia conflict negativity persisted for the rest of 2008 and into the beginning of the first Obama administration. Levada Center published findings in July 2009 reporting that only 23% of Russians had confidence in the newly-elected American president's ability to direct foreign policy, and that a full 55% were not confident about him at all, which, as *World Public Opinion* was quick to point out, ranked Russia among the most negative of the 20 nations that conducted such polls.⁹⁶ According to the same

⁹⁰ As cited in Victoria Orlova, "The View from Russia," in *Towards a New Public Diplomacy*, ed. Philip Seib, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 86.

⁹¹ "Digital Outreach Team," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, (2009). <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/116709.pdf> (accessed April 2013).

⁹² Ambassador James Glassman, interview with author, April 16, 2013.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Lina Khatib, et. al., "Public Diplomacy 2.0: An Exploratory Case Study of the Digital Outreach Team," Working Paper 6 (Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford 2011), http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/media/Exploratory_Case_Study_US_Digital_Outreach_Team.pdf (accessed April 2013).

⁹⁵ Ibid 19.

⁹⁶ "Russian Public Wary of Obama," *World Public Opinion*, (2009), <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/breurope/622.php?lb=breu&pnt=622&nid=&id=> (accessed April 2013).

poll, 49% of Russians believed that the U.S. played a negative role in global politics, and 75% agreed with the statement that the U.S. abuses its power to get Russia to do what it wants.⁹⁷ Collectively, these findings corroborate the existence of Russian sensitivity towards an inferior status in the bilateral relationship. It also illustrates that overreliance on Obama branding was an even more harrowing mistake in Russia than it was in countries where he enjoyed huge popularity.

Fortunately, the reset pulled U.S.-Russia relations back from this glacial condition, but for the next two years, Russian public opinion towards the U.S. varied substantially from month to month. Russian attitudes towards the U.S. in 2011 – the year of the disputed Duma elections – were particularly volatile, fluctuating drastically from 55% feeling “generally good” about the U.S. in January 2011, to 49% in March, back to 58% in November, before plunging to a low 42% by January 2012. The turbulence reflected the Kremlin’s aggressively anti-American media campaigns to blame Hillary Clinton and the U.S. for the unrest. It is telling that media access for U.S. public diplomacy officials in Moscow at the time all but vanished. A U.S. official, who asked to remain anonymous, disclosed that in late 2011 and early 2012, all contacts that the Embassy maintained at Russian media outlets suddenly pulled away from any engagement. Their explanation was that word had come down from above that no positive imaging of the U.S. was to be permitted in the media at that time.

The emergence of digital platforms and social media appeared to be a real antidote to the Kremlin’s manipulations of the traditional media environment. In recent years, social media was growing in popularity in Russia. The embrace of the “E-Diplomacy” paradigm at the State Department - which benefited from the personal leadership of Under Secretary Glassman – injected new life into public diplomacy practitioners in Moscow. Public diplomacy officers began carving out a presence on popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LiveJournal, and Ambassador Beyrle became the first U.S. ambassador to Russia to have a blog (<http://beyrle.livejournal.com/>). This expansion was necessary, especially when the Russian use of social networks during the protests in 2011 actually caused a dramatic surge in the Russian online presence.⁹⁸ However, to its detriment, the U.S. Embassy does not maintain an account on Vkontakte, a Russian social media site resembling Facebook. According to sources that asked to remain anonymous, Vkontakte was not responsive to overtures from the Embassy, and the Embassy gave up, consoling itself that, in the end, Facebook attracted a more “U.S. friendly” populace. Although it is true that perhaps the audience accessed through Facebook may be more open to U.S. policies and positions, the fact that to this day the U.S. has no official presence on the single largest home-grown Russian social network is utterly absurd.

Cultural

Cultural diplomacy stands to benefit immensely from the Education, Cultural, Sports, and Media Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC; to be discussed further below). The working group’s objectives include:

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Russia,” *New Media Trend Watch Europe*, <http://www.newmediatrendwatch.com/markets-by-country/10-europe/81-russia?start=1> (accessed April 2013).

Foster a new understanding and respect for the cultures of the two nations. Focus on cultural projects that promote diversity and tolerance. Specific outreach to youth and to regions of the U.S. and Russia that do not have exposure to learn about the other's culture.⁹⁹

The proposals listed on the Working Group's website embrace virtual space as a channel for cultural exchange: live webcasts of theater and musical performances, digital library cooperation with the Library of Congress, virtual exhibits, and online databases for idea sharing. More traditional cultural events, like the Seasons of America initiative in 2011, continued as well. Regarding the "Seasons" program, Beyrle recently commented that, "of course, the activities of the Bilateral Presidential Commission are increasingly important, but the main thing is extending contacts between our peoples, and we hope that 'American Seasons' will contribute to this."¹⁰⁰ Today, Beyrle has affirmed his belief in the value of the program, which targeted younger audiences and maintains contact with alumni participants.¹⁰¹

Exchanges

The launch of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC) in 2009 created even more expansive prospects for the exchange element of public diplomacy. The BPC grew out of the reset's summer promises made by both countries to strengthen and deepen commitment to each other. The U.S. Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and the Special Representative designated by the Russian Government serve as the chairs, meaning at least in theory that this is a high of engagement, a characteristic important for embedding top-down leadership in public diplomacy. The BPC held its first Working Group Meeting in September 2009. All working groups under the auspices of the Commission are intended to foster exchange and cooperation in a comprehensive survey of all potential fields. Working groups exist for science and technology, innovation, rule of law, health, and Education/Culture/Sports and Media.¹⁰² The comprehensive distribution of the working groups is reminiscent of how broadly exchanges stretched during the 1990s, but in a more coordinated fashion.

The Education/Culture/Sports and Media Working Group garnered the most recognition and attention among the practitioners interviewed for this paper. Educational initiatives have focused on using technology to create virtual exchanges, such as playwright workshops attended online by students from Moscow State University and UCLA.¹⁰³ It is also during this time that "sports diplomacy" debuted as the new

⁹⁹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "Joint Plan of the Culture Sub-Group," U.S. Department of State, (2009), <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/144522.htm> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁰⁰ "American Seasons' in Russia – unique cultural event," *The Voice of Russia*, (2011), <http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/06/27/52464098/> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁰¹ John Beyrle, "The Strength of Dialogue in Russian-American Relations" (speech presented at a symposium at American University, April 13, 2013).

¹⁰² "U.S.-Russian Bilateral Presidential Commission: Working Groups," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/c37181.htm> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁰³ John Beyrle, "The Strength of Dialogue in Russian-American Relations" (speech presented at a symposium at American University, April 13, 2013).

diplomatic term *du jour*. Beyrle specifically recalled that during his years in Moscow (2008-2012) there was “lots of good stuff going on between the youth, in sports in particular.”¹⁰⁴

Broadcasting

Most of the important, relevant trends that appeared during this time in Russia are still being played out today, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next broadcasting section. However, in short, U.S. international broadcasting continued to suffer as it had during Putin’s first term. By the end of 2011, Radio Liberty no longer had a significant Russian audience.¹⁰⁵ Although it was broadcasting 88 hours of original and 80 hours of repeat programming per week, it maintained partnerships with only four affiliates.¹⁰⁶ Jeff Trimble, the Deputy Director of the International Broadcasting Board, compares the relentless pressure of the Kremlin on IBB affiliates (from 2006 onwards) to the tactics currently in use against Russian NGOs with former American ties: threatening to fail them on license inspections or to shut them down completely on trumped up violations.¹⁰⁷ When asked about the willingness and abilities of the U.S. government to defend the independent broadcasters of the IBB, Trimble responded that the U.S. government does not hesitate to speak up in their defense.¹⁰⁸ Yet given the ease with which Putin crowded out traditional broadcasting in Russia, it does not seem that the government put up much of a fight.

The Future Under Putin: 2012-Present

So far, 2012 has largely continued most of the trends in recent years: a movement towards digital spaces, declining relevance of traditional broadcasting, increased reciprocity and listening. Yet the reset has apparently run its course, and Carnegie Endowment’s Matt Rojansky notes that this may result from the belief among U.S. policy makers that Russia simply does not matter anymore. This low-prioritizing is reflected in the lack of top-down leadership from Obama in the U.S.-Russia relationship on all issues in the potentially multi-faceted relationship with the exception of arms control. If this indeed signifies another period of Russia fatigue similar to that of the early 2000s, public diplomacy practitioners will have to fight harder once again to prove their value.

Listening

The current public diplomacy strategy in Russia is much more active about engaging with the growing Internet-savvy Russian online community. Ambassador McFaul He has been lauded for his accessibility (he invites ordinary Russians to attend all his events, and reportedly devotes hours at night to the maintenance of his social

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ “BBG: Russia Broadcasting and Services at a Glance,” BBG Strategy, (2011), <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2011/04/bbg-russia-broadcasting-at-a-glance/> (accessed April, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

media presence¹⁰⁹ with the blessing of the White House. In a 2012 interview with *Voice of America*, McFaul recalled Vice President Biden's encouragement of his strategy:

'Keep to your guns. Keep to your guns, McFaul.' He likes to call me McFaul. He said, 'Keep to your guns. You are doing exactly what our policy is [to] keep the engagement both with the government and with society out here in Russia.'¹¹⁰

However, the critics who believe that public diplomacy should be characterized by a "face-to-face, not Facebook-to-Facebook" approach¹¹¹ are perhaps wise to fear the potential for abuse of Russian online platforms of expression. Indeed, since the onset of the Arab Spring, there have been an increasing number of attempts by Roskomnadzor,¹¹² the police, and the FSB to assert control over social media. These including attacking "extremist" blogger comments, prosecuting bloggers on trumped-up criminal cases, surveillance, and even the potential risk inherent in the ownership of Russian social media platforms by larger business interests with government ties.¹¹³

Nevertheless, this is one area of public diplomacy that has seen marked improvement over the last twenty years. Public statements by American officials now reflect the U.S. government's embrace of dialogue with the Russian public. At an event commemorating the 20th Anniversary of American Centers in Moscow, Sonenshine requested that Russian attendees give feedback at the Centers on the kind of information that most interests them, the types of speakers that they would find most engaging, and suggestions on what the U.S. can do to help them network and make contacts. She concluded by entreating earnestly, "we are listening!"¹¹⁴

Advocacy

Since arriving in Moscow in January 2012, Ambassador Michael McFaul has been one of the strongest driving forces behind U.S. public diplomacy advocacy in Russia. USAID Democracy and Governance Team Leader Alex Sokolowski noted that McFaul's approach to the Russian public has been much more proactive and less traditional than that of his predecessors.¹¹⁵ His gregariousness was met with a vicious wave of negativity and harassment from the Russian government and state-owned media. Nevertheless, McFaul has brought online public diplomacy in Russia to new levels and has managed to build and maintain the symbolic online persona of the U.S. government in Russia. In 2012, McFaul switched his Twitter handle from the Russian language

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous source, interview with author.

¹¹⁰ Ambassador Michael McFaul, as quoted in James Brooke, "U.S. Envoy sees closer Moscow Ties After Putin's Election," *Voice of America*, (2012), <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-ambassador-to-russia-no-return-to-cold-war--143976716/179486.html> (accessed April, 2013).

¹¹¹ John Brown, interview with author, March 26, 2013.

¹¹² Roskomnadzor is the Russian Federal Agency for the Supervision of Communications, IT, and media.

¹¹³ Alexey Sidorenko, "Society and the State on the Internet: a Call for Change," in *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future*, ed. Maria Lipman and Nikolai Petrov (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 578.

¹¹⁴ Tara Sonenshine, "Remarks at Moscow American Center" (speech presented in Moscow, Russia, April 10, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

“@Макфол” to English @McFaul, where he continues to tweet in both languages, but primarily in Russian. At the end of April 2013, according to his Twitter profile, he had 5,105 tweets and 46,586 followers. He uses Twitter not just to post political information, but also to humanize himself by posting more personal and spontaneous messages. Arguably, this has the effect of increasing his credibility as a messenger, rather than simply a mouthpiece of American propaganda.

However, McFaul’s online presence is by no means immune to the contractions in the bilateral relationship that drastically limit the US ability to project its image in more traditional ways. Other former diplomats expressed wariness that technology and social media are too frequently seen as the “silver bullet” to win over the hearts and minds of the Russian public.¹¹⁶ Approximately 58 million Russians (less than a third of the population) utilized some form of social network in 2012, with Facebook reaching approximately 7.6 million Russians (12.34% of the online population).¹¹⁷ Since this is a relatively limited target audience, it is important that public diplomacy practitioners not become overly reliant on social media channels for advocacy.

This is particularly important since some of the most controversial issues in the bilateral relationship are important for older, more traditional generations of Russians who are not connected to social media to hear and, if not accept, then at least understand the U.S. position. The Magnitsky Act poses a particular challenge to public diplomacy practitioners in Moscow. Matlock asserts that public coercion in the realm of human rights is an unproductive, damaging approach, since Putin’s administration is even less likely to back down and give in to public shaming.¹¹⁸ Rojansky adds that many Russians assume that the Russian and American decision-making process functions the same way, and thus that Obama has a personal role in Magnitsky because something like that could never have passed in Russia without Putin’s explicit or implicit approval.¹¹⁹ Graham notes that this kind of “feel-good rhetoric and moral outrage” makes it appear that the U.S. is meddling in Russian affairs while sending mixed messages,¹²⁰ which Russians find particularly infuriating.¹²¹ Andranik Migranyan, Director of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, noted at a conference in March 2013 at the George Washington Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies that Russians are appreciative when the US is able to refrain from unilateral criticism and instead waits to hear what international organizations like the OSCE have to say instead of jumping the gun to be the first to criticize, as they did with the parliamentary elections in 2011.

A major blow to the advocacy of U.S. values occurred in the fall of 2012 when Putin abruptly expelled USAID permanently from the country. When USAID asked the Russian government to give them a year to phase out their programs, they were flatly

¹¹⁶ Robert Gosende, interview with author, April 5, 2013.

¹¹⁷ European Travel Commission, “Russia,” New Media Trend Watch Europe, <http://www.newmediatrendwatch.com/markets-by-country/10-europe/81-russia?start=1> (accessed April 2013).

¹¹⁸ Ambassador Jack Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Matt Rojansky, interview with author, March 20, 2013.

¹²⁰ Specifically, freezing officials assets on only suspicion of guilt before going through a due process of law.

¹²¹ Thomas E. Graham, “In Defense of a Strategic Approach to Russia,” *The American Interest*, (2013), <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1394> (accessed April 2013).

denied and told to leave in 3 weeks.¹²² USAID always considered itself to be an added part of the U.S. public diplomacy strategy; since the ambassador had to approve each mission plan, its strategic values had to be aligned.¹²³ With its expulsion, the U.S. lost many valuable contacts and relationships among Russian civil society. More importantly, however, in March 2013, the Kremlin executed a severe crackdown on hundreds of Russian NGOs that had formerly had connections to USAID or to other U.S. actors, reportedly resulted when Putin announced in a February 2012 speech to the FSB that the “foreign agents” law should be enforced:

Nobody has a monopoly on the right to speak on behalf of all Russian society, especially organizations managed and financed from abroad and therefore inevitably serving foreign interests. Today, laws are established governing the activities of NGOs, including their finance from abroad. These laws should certainly be executed. Any direct or indirect interference in our internal affairs, any form of pressure on Russia, on our allies and partners, is unacceptable.”¹²⁴

Because of their various missions to strengthen civil society, the targets of these crackdowns were also likely partners for U.S. exchanges and other forms of engagement. Now, the crackdown has sent a clear warning from the Kremlin to any groups that might consider working or engaging with U.S. actors – a deterrent that, in the long run, could prove enormously harmful to U.S. interests. To some, the offensive seems to be the beginning of a Kremlin push to “turn off all other parts of the [U.S.-Russia] relationship.”¹²⁵

The case of the Kostroma Center for the Support of Public Initiatives is a poignant example of the harmful effect that the crackdown has had on U.S. advocacy. In early 2013, the Center invited an American diplomat to participate in a discussion about U.S.-Russia relations; now, because of that single act alone, the organization is facing trial for its failure to register as a foreign agent. Nikolai Sorokin, an associate of the Center, commented that, “if Kostroma residents become scared that if they go to a roundtable the police will visit them, of course they won’t go,” he said. “Journalists will not be covering our events, because they don’t want to have problems with prosecutors....the damage has been done. We’re paralyzed. We were punished well before the verdict.”¹²⁶ Eric Novotny, a current senior advisor for democracy and governance at USAID, has commented that, if USAID as a public diplomacy actor is forced into the cyber sphere, it is certain that the Russian government will follow them there.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, another concerning threat to advocacy efforts (and to broadcasting as well) developed quietly alongside it. In November 2012, Duma officials introduced a proposed media law that mirrors the one “legitimizing” the Kremlin’s attack on foreign-

¹²² Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

¹²³ Eric Novotny, interview with author, March 19, 2013.

¹²⁴ Vladimir Putin, “Speech at a Meeting of the FSB,” (2013) <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/17516>

¹²⁵ Eric Novotny, interview with author, March 19, 2013.

¹²⁶ Kathy Lally, “Russia Cracks Down on U.S.-linked NGOs,” *Washington Post*, (2013), http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russia-cracks-down-on-us-linked-ngos/2013/04/27/4fdde0d8-ae90-11e2-a986-ee837b1888b_print.html (accessed April 2013).

¹²⁷ Eric Novotny, interview with author, March 19, 2013.

funded NGOs: any medium receiving 50% or more of its revenue from a foreign source would be forced to register as a “foreign agent.”¹²⁸ It is extremely likely that, were this law to pass, the Russian media would sever ties with U.S. contacts much as NGOs were forced to do last year, giving the state-sponsored –media even freer reign in its anti-American manipulations. Even with the accessibility of digital platforms, this law would greatly restrict the access of American frames and narratives to the Russian media environment.

Cultural

Today, through American Centers, American Corners, and Binational Centers, the U.S. maintains more than 800 official spaces for the projection of American culture across Russia.¹²⁹ The activities provided in these spaces recently included Humphrey Bogart movie showings, a square dancing club, preparations for study abroad in the U.S., or taking joint online classes jointly with American university students.¹³⁰ The latter programs especially are the tangible results of the progress made in the BPC working group. The Spring 2012 Joint Report of the Education, Culture, Sports, and Media Working Group asserts that the most important cultural exchanges of 2012 were the launch of the “Russian Seasons” program in the U.S., and the performance of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Moscow and St. Petersburg.¹³¹ However, an official who requested to remain anonymous confirmed that such important, high-profile programs always take place in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As the two largest bastions of culture and Western orientation in Russia, these two cities should not require as much convincing on the merits of U.S. culture; perhaps more attention is needed to win over “hearts and minds” of Russian citizens in far-flung provinces.

Indeed, Anton Fedyashin agrees that so far, recent cultural engagement by the U.S. in Russia has been handled well, but that there has simply not been enough of it. Prolific Internet use ensures that lower levels of American popular culture remain instantly accessible to Russians, necessitating the continued vigorous promotion of “higher” levels of culture in all areas by the Embassy.¹³²

Exchanges

April 2013 marked the 40th anniversary of the Fulbright Program in Russia. Tara Sonenshine commemorated the occasion with an address to a Moscow auditorium filled with Russian and American Fulbright alumni. The message behind this was clear, as

¹²⁸ Thomas Grove, “Russian Lawmakers Introduce Law on ‘Foreign Agent’ Media,” *Reuters*, (2012), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/23/us-russia-media-foreign-agent-idUSBRE8AM0QU20121123> (accessed March 2013).

¹²⁹ Tara Sonenshine, “Remarks at Moscow American Center” (speech presented in Moscow, Russia, April 10, 2013).

¹³⁰ “American Centers and Corners,” Embassy of the United States, Moscow, Russia, <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/amcc.html> (accessed April 2013).

¹³¹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. State Department, “Executive Summary,” in *U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission: Spring 2012 Joint Report*, (2012), <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/186831.htm> (accessed April 30, 2013).

¹³² Anton Fedyashin, interview with author, March 18, 2013.

nearly half of her remarks were dedicated to reminding the alumni to stay engaged and connected, directing them to the State Department website for alumni ,and congratulating their efforts to improve US-Russian relations. She noted:

Time and time again, we have seen how connections like these can open doors, enrich communities, and open our eyes to new and different human experiences. We have seen how they can reverse cultural, ethnic, and religious stereotypes and create bonds for a lifetime.¹³³

Outside of Fulbright, the BPC will continue to shape the expansion of exchange opportunities between the U.S. and Russia. For instance, “sports diplomacy” remains a hip new term, and public diplomacy officials, Sonenshine included, have made much ado about the potential of this kind of engagement for the 2014 Sochi Olympics.¹³⁴ A February 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between the State Department and the Russian Ministry of Education created a framework for increasing cooperation between universities and the numbers of students participating in exchanges.¹³⁵

In total, Rojansky estimates that Russia sends approximately 100,000 people to the U.S. per year. However, he also cautions that this is not a particularly thrilling number when compared with other significant case studies. According to the CIA World Factbook Website, Russia’s GDP is \$2.504 trillion and its population is 142.5 million. The World Factbook Website also states that Brazil, which ranks just below Russia with a \$2.48 trillion GDP, sends approximately 1.5 million people to the U.S. annually, while Germany (whose population is nearly half the size of Russia’s) sends 2.5 million. Rojansky suggests that this signifies that the level of engagement between Russia and the U.S. is actually quite low, and that the difference in penetration of exchange programs and tourism is at least a partial factor explaining why the U.S. has such a close relationship with one former enemy (Germany), and such a glacial one with another (Russia).¹³⁶ Given the fact that there is still no shortage of interest in American exchange programs, it is highly likely that this discrepancy represents a failing on behalf of the U.S., and not of the Russian population.

However, a more controversial situation relevant to exchanges forced its way into the spotlight in April 2013 when it became public that 80-90% of Russian J-1 (Exchange Visitor) visa applicants for the year had been rejected. This constituted an unprecedented level of rejection,¹³⁷ and the Russian media were quick to voice their outrage. Sonenshine’s official statement on the matter assured the public that the rejection rates only reflected past “quality assurance” that past participants had encountered in their

¹³³ Tara Sonenshine, “Remarks at the Fulbright Program 40th Anniversary Commemoration,” (speech presented in Moscow, Russia April 10, 2013).

¹³⁴ Pavel Koshkin, “How ‘Soft Power’ Can Tackle U.S.-Russia Differences,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, April 13, 2013.

¹³⁵ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. State Department, “Executive Summary,” in *U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission: Spring 2012 Joint Report*, (2012), <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/186831.htm> (accessed April 2013).

¹³⁶ Matt Rojansky, interview with author, March 20, 2013.

¹³⁷ Tara Sonenshine, “Remarks at Moscow American Center” (speech presented in Moscow, Russia, April 10, 2013).

working environments, and that the U.S. government is simply trying to protect all applicants.¹³⁸ Yet so far, no other news stories suggest that other J-1 participating countries are experiencing similar same rates of rejection. The fact that so many Russian platforms have ignored their relationships with information officers at the U.S. Embassy to publish disparaging articles can even be considered a failure in the U.S. ability to advocate its position. Regardless of whether or not the rejections are occurring purely out of desire for quality control, the trend aggravates existing tensions and provides the Russian government with a veritable field day for anti-American messaging during a time already fraught with anger over the visa restrictions in the Magnitsky Act.

Broadcasting

There is an interesting contrast between the IBB's assertion of its continued relevance through new online platforms in Russia, and the general criticism from scholars and academics that international broadcasting is losing its effectiveness. The position of the IBB is that although its programs are no longer as "sexy" as they had been in the Cold War, they still provide steady, consistent support for civil society in Russia, as well as an alternate viewpoint in the media environment.¹³⁹ According to the BBG's 2011 Strategic Review of its Russia Services, the goals of U.S. international broadcasting in Russia include supporting political pluralism creating dialogue and forums of free expression to strengthen civil society, explaining U.S. perspective, and incorporating social media into it all.¹⁴⁰ The panel of experts assembled by the BBG for the review stressed that the overarching goal of all this should be creating an intellectual space in preparation for change that they believe will inevitably come to Russia.¹⁴¹ They note an increase of 13 million new Russian Internet users from 2009 to 2011, and emphasize the progress that VOA and RFE/RL have made in the digital world.¹⁴² VOA currently has a presence in Vkontakte, RuTvit, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube¹⁴³ (today, according to the information listed on their channel on Youtube, the "Golos Ameriki" channel has 3,866 subscribers and 13,367,855 video views). The BBG's Strategy blog proclaims new affiliations for Voice of America's Russian Service with Russian search engine Rambler.ru, - which garners 1.7 million visits per day – and Russian newswire Interfax.¹⁴⁴ In its most publicized recent effort, VOA launched a new "tech-savvy" combined TV-webcast service unique (so far) to its Russia service in March 2012 called

¹³⁸ Jonathan Earle, "'Quality Issues' Led to Work-and-Travel Visa Crunch," *Moscow Times*, (2013), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/quality-issues-led-to-work-and-travel-visa-crunch/478475.html> (accessed April 2013).

¹³⁹ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ "BBG Russia Strategic Review," *BBG Strategy*, (2011), <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2011/04/bbg-russia-strategic-review/> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁴¹ "BBG Russia Strategic Review: Expert Panel Notes," *BBG Strategy*, April 8, 2011. <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2011/04/bbg-russia-strategic-review-expert-panel-notes/> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ "BBG: Russia Broadcasting and Services at a Glance." *BBG Strategy*, April 8, 2011. <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2011/04/bbg-russia-broadcasting-at-a-glance/> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁴⁴ "Rambling Through Russia," *BBG Strategy Dealbook*, (2013), <http://www.bbgstrategy.com/2013/01/bbg-dealbook-more-in-mali-voa-in-peru-and-russian-via-rambler/> (accessed April 2013).

“Podelis” (Share), in which the online show broadcasts the anchors’ responses to live commentary from social media sites displayed on screens on stage, “offer[ing] a sophisticated conversation for a sophisticated audience about America and its values, U.S. policies in the post-Soviet era, and developments in Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.”¹⁴⁵ This is part of what VOA sees as its strategic goal to “carve out a niche in social media.”¹⁴⁶ Trimble acknowledges that “we can’t just stick with an audience of opposition members,” and that for U.S. broadcasting to be strategically effective, it will need to reach out beyond this easy demographic.¹⁴⁷

Yet critics are right in asserting that the multitude of other available channels make broadcasting outdated, especially during times of austerity.¹⁴⁸ The BBG’s 2013 budget request, for example, contains a drastic \$30 million cut from the levels of the 2012 budget.¹⁴⁹ Trimble confided that this budgetary imposition means that the IBB cannot honestly perform its specified function of “providing surge capacity” in case of a crisis.¹⁵⁰

The fact that in 2011, VOA Russia only broadcast 1.25 hours of video and 2.5 hours of audio podcast per week, stands in stark contrast to the heavy presence it maintained at the end of the Cold War. The Kremlin’s suspension of RL’s medium wave license in November 2012 ended traditional RFE/RL broadcasts in Russia.

Moreover, the suspension triggered a massive controversy over RFE/RL management. In the wake of the loss of its AM license, RFE/RL hired Russian journalist Masha Gessen as a consultant to help the station transition to a more digital presence. Ultimately, when Gessen was hired as RFE/RL Russian Service director in October 2012, she chose to fire dozens of long-time RFE/RL journalists and anchors as part of this shift. In Gessen’s defense, Trimble notes that the staff members that were let go were all “radio people” who were perceived as less than ideal for the new digital strategy of RL.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the firings triggered so much outrage in the broadcasting community that Gessen quickly lost popularity. Her situation worsened in April 2013, when, at a banquet in honor of her Media for Liberty Award, Gessen blacklisted BBG Member Victor Ashe – in plain terms, her boss’s boss. This was clearly a bridge too far, and Gessen, likely under significant pressure, tendered her resignation on April 30, 2013.

The turbulence of the seven-month controversy could ultimately damage RL’s credibility in the eyes of its already minimal audience, the volatility and perceived mismanagement reducing its credibility as a messenger and causing audience members to tune away from its messages and publications.¹⁵² Indeed, blunt criticism emerged from the Russian public, when an open letter from the Russian Opposition Coordination Council condemned the firings, saying, “in this precise moment the civil society has been

¹⁴⁵ BBG, “Fiscal Year 2014 Congressional Budget Request,” <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2013/04/FINAL-FY-2014-CBJ-print.pdf> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Ambassador Jack Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013; Matt Rojansky, interview with author, March 20, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ “BBG 2013 Budget Request Seeks \$720 million, Down 4.2% from 2012,” *BBG Strategy*, (2012), (accessed April 2013).

¹⁵⁰ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

deprived of an important and reliable source of information, which Radio Liberty has been for decades, as well as of its analyses and responsible commentaries.”¹⁵³ Former RL director Mario Corti and former VOA acting associate director Ted Lipien, called the episode “a weapon of mass destruction that has vaporized Radio Liberty in Russia and damaged America’s reputation everywhere,” and they faulted the BBG for ignoring the multiple protests to Gessen’s actions. But Trimble confirms that the handling of the incident caused great consternation among the Governors as well, and that this prompted them to shake up the RFE/RL top leadership by bringing in Kevin Klose.¹⁵⁴

V. Whither Obshestvennaya Diplomatiya?

Conclusions

The narrative created as a result of this research supports the claim that public diplomacy has generally supported U.S. interests through diverse methods of engagement with the Russian public. However, a recurring problem that prevented public diplomacy from achieving this goal is that too often, public diplomacy received a lack of full support and leadership from the U.S. government in Washington. Aggressive opposition from the Russian government also inhibited access and affected the ability of public diplomacy practitioners to faithfully inform and influence the Russian public. When either of these obstacles reached extreme levels, public diplomacy became ineffective and useless, at least in the “short” and “medium” term conceptualizations of soft power.

Instances in which public diplomacy proved least effective tended to correspond with times in which the U.S. government pursued a policy that was counter to Russians interests, or a stance that was openly anti-Russian. This suggests that the fundamental problems may not lie with public diplomacy, but with the way that the U.S. chooses to posture in its relationship with Russia.

Other Key Trends and Observations

Many other key trends emerge from an examination of the narrative, and not all of them are positive. One official quipped that, “if it was still the Cold War, I don’t know if we could tolerate our own public diplomacy in Russia.”¹⁵⁵ Recognition of these trends across the post-Cold War narrative of U.S. public diplomacy should spark debate among policymakers as to how each concern can be neutralized or addressed in the future.

Findings: Observations and suggestions

- The U.S. government has seemingly decided not to engage in Russia’s tit-for-tat media strategy,¹⁵⁶ but this low profile strategy translates to an underwhelming performance in the area of advocacy (and even international broadcasting).

¹⁵³ “Russian opposition leaders say Radio Liberty is no longer a reliable source of information.” *BBG Watch*, (2013), <http://www.usgbroadcasts.com/bbgwatch/2013/04/21/u-s-russia-panel-on-magnitsky-may-cover-chechnya-includes-critics-of-radio-liberty-firings/> (accessed April 2013).

¹⁵⁴ Jeff Trimble, interview with author, April 30, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Alex Sokolowski, interview with author, April 26, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

- Advocacy and broadcasting both experienced significant contractions in traditional operating capabilities in the 2000s.
- Advocacy (or lack of it) is considered most relevant to the short-term maintenance of Russian public opinion. Successful advocacy of U.S. policies is closely tied to public diplomacy's officials' access to traditional Russian media, especially television. This is also the medium over which the Russian government wields the most control and the medium which they can most easily strip access during crisis situations.
 - The fluctuations in Russian public opinion during the disputed 2011 Duma elections suggest that digital engagement cannot – for the moment, at least – provide a sufficient replacement in crisis situations.
 - U.S. advocacy efforts have no immediate or recognizable success when they are used in situations that run counter to deeply-held Russian frames.
- Public diplomacy suffers from excessive reactivity in crisis situations. Anecdotal evidence from the low points in the last twenty years confirms no crisis management plan. No anecdotal evidence exists to support the idea that one has been created in the last 5 years.
- While U.S. public diplomacy officials recognize the particular importance of culture in engagement with Russians, most agree that even more cultural programs would be helpful.
- A strong and relatively new belief exists in the public diplomacy community in Russia regarding the power of digital platforms to work in all five aspects of public diplomacy.
 - While this is certainly true, technology cannot be a silver bullet. Even thousands of “likes” on Facebook is by no means a signal of anything more than the most superficial public engagement.
 - With cultural and exchanges, this suggests a greater conceptualization of public diplomacy as a “facilitator” of spaces and forums, rather than the main actor.
- Advocacy problems in the 1990s grew out of policies that were irreconcilable with the Russian public; today, problems stem more from lack of access due to artificially imposed constrictions by the Russian government.
 - The tolerance of the Putin administration for American framing and narratives in the media tracks with its own domestic initiatives and manipulation of xenophobia.¹⁵⁷ These frames are more permitted when the Putin administration is more in control and less threatened by potential unrest.
- The embrace of listening as an element of public diplomacy took a long time to come to the government, but practices appear to be changing for the better.
 - However, other non-governmental actors were quicker to give the Russians agency in the public diplomacy conversation.
- Interest in American exchange programs has continued relatively unabated since the Cold War, in spite of political tensions, but visa regulations remain an irritant.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

- Publicity and anecdotal excitement suggests that public diplomacy practitioners are placing a higher priority on youth-oriented exchanges, rather than mid-level professionals as was the case in the 1990s.
- Problems in mixed messaging and actions have persisted from the 1990s through today.
- International broadcasting benefited most from public relations coups by providing access when there was none.
 - A repeat of this situation is highly unlikely given the nature of digital engagement opportunities today.
 - International broadcasting must succeed in its attempt to carve out a digital niche in Russian markets, or it will soon lose all relevancy.

A Future for Cooperation?

As Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, remarks:

To regard Russia as a country equal to the United States – that is a postulate that cannot be abandoned. Russia has no choice but to play the game at a level that it knows is too high, with a small material and economic base... This is a rather difficult game of course, and quite expensive – and so far, the game is not, in general, going Russia’s way” (Trenin 13).

It may be a difficult game, but when the U.S. engages, it renders Russia its equal in a *de facto* sense. This is an ameliorative step, since too often the U.S. refuses to take Russia and its concerns seriously.¹⁵⁸ By deepening engagement with the Russian public, the U.S. will demonstrate that it values Russia as a country and as a people, which will help counter the “besieged fortress mentality” and the anti-American agenda that the Kremlin continues to promote so vigorously. On the other hand, if the U.S. chooses to discard or under-prioritize the Russian relationship, it will be indirectly bolstering the Kremlin while disappointing the audiences and sectors in civil society who have always sought deeper U.S. ties. There are already Russians who point to declining interest among Americans in Russia as an obstacle to the U.S.’s real understanding of its former Cold War adversary.¹⁵⁹

When President Obama first called for a reset in relations in 2009, the *Economist* quoted one of Obama’s advisors, who had presciently remarked that, “Mr. Obama is not a sentimental guy. He will give the Russia relationship his best shot. But if his investment does not yield returns, there is a good chance that Russia will simply drop to the end of his long list of priorities.”¹⁶⁰ Yet Obama’s speech asserted that, “the U.S. wants a strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, in today’s multilateral world, fields of cooperation for U.S. and Russia have expanded significantly. The U.S. must engage its former Cold War foe on issues of security, mainly that of nuclear weapons and threat

¹⁵⁸ Matt Rojansky, interview with author, March 20, 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “In Search of Détente Once Again,” *The Economist* 392 (2009).

¹⁶¹ Barack Obama, “U.S. Wants Strong, Peaceful Russia,” (speech presented in Moscow, Russia, July 7, 2009).

reduction and the war on terror. While Russia maintains its hold on authority in international forums like the U.N., international disputes cannot be resolved without their cooperation. Economic engagement has taken a major step forward with Russia's 2012 accession to the World Trade Organization. Russia has a massive geographical and international presence that cannot be ignored,¹⁶² and a relationship freeze that cuts off engagement will benefit no one, least of all public diplomacy practitioners, who will once again have to work very hard to justify their trade's existence to American policymakers.

The future of relations will largely depend on the type of international policies that the U.S. pursues, and right now, many Russian experts argue that our current policies make for bad relations.¹⁶³ From the narrative above, it is only too clear that policies selected in ignorance or dismissal of Russian concerns, or those that carelessly mismatch U.S. actions and messaging, can expect no successful coups out of public diplomacy. But public diplomacy can play a vital connecting role, keeping the conversation going when decision makers are forced by traditional diplomacy and tension to step away from each other. There also must be more support for public diplomacy actors when and if tensions explode and public diplomacy officials find themselves mired in the kind of hostility characteristic of the environment during and after the Russia-Georgia war – if not worse. In order to prevent this outcome, U.S. policymakers should empower public diplomacy efforts in Russia and better incorporate public diplomacy strategy into its overall approach toward a broad-based relationship in an effort to underscore its desire for the long-term stability that would benefit both countries.

¹⁶² Collins, James and Matthew Rojansky. "Why Russia Matters." *Foreign Policy*. August 18 2010: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/18/why_Russia_matters

¹⁶³ Ambassador James Matlock, interview with author, March 25, 2013.

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