

RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DURING THE ONGOING WAR IN UKRAINE: ACTORS AND INSTRUMENTS

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: P. Kwachuh, T. (2025). RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DURING THE ONGOING WAR IN UKRAINE: ACTORS AND INSTRUMENTS. *Journal of Linguistics, Literature & Communication Studies*, 1(1), 14-33. <https://doi.org/10.63456/jllcs.v1.i1.8>

ABSTRACT

The Moscow-Kiev ongoing conflict has profoundly reshaped the geopolitical landscape of international relations with the West blaming Russia and NATO standing with Ukraine. This has prompted Moscow to redesign its public diplomacy strategies geared at counteracting western critics and fostering a favorable narrative. This article maps out those unique actors and instruments responsible for Russia's public diplomacy in this context, piloted by an intricate nexus of state and non-state entities. Masterminding these actions are the Russian government, cultural and educational institutions, NGOs, Russian media, and online platforms. These organs are all tailored at disseminating information and influencing public opinion at home and abroad. Through the use and mobilization of its soft power mechanisms, Russia aims to project a status of strength and resilience while brushing aside western narratives and seeking to win friends. Understanding Moscow's public diplomacy strategies during this period is vital because of the geopolitical implications it has as the conflict unfolds. This article aims to outline the actors, instruments, and alongside the strategies employed by Moscow, thereby shedding light on the position of public diplomacy in contemporary warfare.

KEYWORDS: Actors, Instruments, Russian, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, a growing level of focus is directed towards Russian foreign and public diplomacy due to changes in domestic and international affairs influencing the transformation of the Russian Federation. In both conceptualization and applicability, public diplomacy has evolved in a post-cold era and also seen an influx of both new state and non-state actors. Meanwhile, in the past diplomacy was once solely the domain of governments. In its present state, it encompasses a wide array of different participants, all competing for attention and sway. It is transitioning toward a far more involved and dynamic style of communication and interaction. An increasing number of nations are starting to compete in a progressively crowded global marketplace of players aiming to connect with and sway international audiences. There are numerous motivations behind the desire to communicate and engage audiences, including tourism, drawing foreign investment, national reputation, and affecting international relations (Simons, 2018: 138). Yelena (2018, 1) stated that "over the past decade, as Russia recovered from its dark chaotic days of the 1990s, the Russian leadership has been making an increasing effort not only to consolidate social and political order at home, but also to enhance Russia's international status. However, as data from Gallup – surveying public opinion in close to 100 countries worldwide – suggests, the approval of Russia's

“global leadership” role still remains the lowest among the seven major international actors.” (Clifton, 2011).

The 2022 full Russian incursion into Ukraine way from other minor incursions and conflict across its borders particularly across its borders with neighbours has made matters difficult for the Russian Federation. The conflict has metamorphosed to a geopolitical shift with western states branding Russia as the aggressor state. Meanwhile, many developing states have neither sided with Russia or Ukraine hence picking up a neutral position. The sanctions on Moscow and western media narratives against Moscow, has pushed Russia to rejuvenate and unleash its soft power via its public diplomacy strategies. These public diplomacy machineries are meant to downplay the heightened anti-Moscow narratives by the west aimed at isolating Russia in global politics as the aggressor state. The Kremlin has unpacked novel public diplomacy strategies seeking to explain herself not as the aggressor state by outweighing the enemy perspectives, by utilizing a nexus of Moscow’s diplomatic maneuvers across its borders. Shakirov (2013: 1) postulated that “for the last decade, Russian soft power policy has been mostly what scholars were eager to trace and discover rather than a subject they could really study. Indeed, the term soft power” was largely absent from official Russian foreign policy discourse. Russia’s concern about intangible aspects of its international activity was framed as a need to improve its image abroad and establish stronger ties with Russian compatriots in other countries.”

Historically, public diplomacy is undergoing a transformation. This process (of engaging the public actively in diplomacy) has mostly been spearheaded by the United States so far, and there are numerous studies that document this reality (Seib 2009; Snow and Taylor 2009). According to Simons (2020: 2) “an increasing amount of attention is paid to Russian foreign policy and public diplomacy in the 21st century. Taylor et al., (2024) stated that various actors, including government entities, cultural institutions, Russian media, and online platforms, play pivotal roles in this strategic communication initiative, collectively working to disseminate information and shape public opinion both domestically and internationally. Solar (2024) held that Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 significantly tarnished Moscow’s public diplomacy. Strained relations with the Western world obliged Russia to rethink its global positioning with a heavier focus on multipolarity, aimed particularly at Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and one will add Africa and part of Eastern Europe as well. Affirmatively through the use of soft power tactics, Borshchevskaya (2021: 3) stated that “Moscow turned to soft power early into Putin’s first presidency, with a major focus on the immediate post-Soviet space”. Russia aims to propel an image of strength and resilience at the same time counteracting western perspectives and forging new alliances globally.

When the Soviet Union fell apart at the close of 1991, the newly sovereign Russian Federation significantly diminished its global presence (compared to that of the Soviet Union). At present, it is involved in the effort of re-establishing itself in the realm of public diplomacy. However, what has prompted this development at this time? A major reason for Russia to reach out to the world’s populations, which has emerged in discussions among specialists, lawmakers, and diplomats, is that the nation feels insufficiently valued on the global arena (Simons, 2018: 138). Moscow’s blend of hard and soft power can be described as a form of its “gray zone” strategies, which has a nexus of coercive or manipulative actions, consisting of false narratives and manipulative images (Luther and Prins, 2024). The intricate nexus between state and non-state actors are symbolic in grasping the portfolio of Russian public diplomacy in contemporary times. In order to grasp this paper, public diplomacy and soft power terminologies form the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.



Consequently, the goal of this paper is not premised entirely on the Kremlin's public diplomacy in this era of the 21st century but to the traditional and novel actors of Russian public diplomacy and how these instruments are effectively galvanized to achieve its goals via a wide range of strategies enforced by Russia. This will deliver insights into the revolving role of public diplomacy in modern warfare, depicting a mirror of efforts that would spearhead geopolitical alignments as the war unfolds.

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Since the birth of the concept of public diplomacy, the term has evolved from one epoch to another providing vast definitions from both scholars and public diplomacy practitioners from different historical epochs. According to the Murrow Centre, one of its previous brochures, described public diplomacy as follows: "Public diplomacy has to do with the influence of public attitudes on forming and executing foreign policies. There is a necessity to employ a method for showcasing a nation's appeal on the global stage. Public diplomacy is an approach that has been practiced for many years (Jowett and O'Donnell 2012: 287), yet it remains highly relevant today. The term is occasionally used interchangeably with propaganda or nation branding, which often creates ambiguity regarding its intent (Szondi 2008). Dimensions of international relations are extended beyond traditional diplomacy, cultivation of public opinion with governments in other countries, interaction of private groups, interests in a country with those of another one, reporting of the foreign (affairs) works, and its impact on the policy, communication among them, communication among diplomats and foreign correspondents, and inter-cultural communication processes" (Snow, N., and M. Taylor, P., 2008: 19, Bekim et al., 2013: 1). Hitherto, "the nature of the "international actors", of their "environment" as well as that of their "engagement" has undergone fundamental transformation since the term came about, and has been subject to much debate, both among academics as well as practitioners" (Yelena, 2018: 3).

In a public diplomacy arena, transnationalism, ideals, ideas, and availability of news are delicate in the entire procedural manner and often than not its mandated in aiding democratic reign, build-up economic status, and guarantee mass solace (Açma and Tekang, 2021: 168). Luther and Prins (2024) defined public diplomacy as "the art of rallying a foreign audience behind a nation's interests – used to be about attracting support through charm, values and cultural exports". Brown (2011: 2) indicated that "the term public diplomacy is an American one and the central driver of the resurgence of interest in public diplomacy has been US policy problems." He further purported that the U.S. history of public diplomacy is articulated within the framework of institutional and cultural tools, in addition to its configurational posture in the global system, and thus won't absolutely embody a concept that would be convenient for other states that steer in the same waters or encounter numerous setbacks. Moreover, Zaharna (2010) earmark that public diplomacy is a tool of communication intrinsically on how players view themselves and the role they play during the communication phase, indicating the gesture a global actor conceit and operationalizes public diplomacy which is inescapably connected to the discrete of internal and international state of affairs.

The identified characteristics of Traditional Public Diplomacy encompass: Government to Publics (G2P); official in character; seen as a "necessary evil" since technology and new media have democratized international relations; associated with foreign policy/national security results; one-way informational and two-way asymmetric (unequal partners in communication); offer us your best and brightest upcoming participants; passive public involvement; and crisis-driven and reactive (Snow 2010: 89). The New Public Diplomacy model presents several notable alterations



from the earlier noninteractive and reactive framework. Its characteristics comprise: Public to Public communication (P2P); unofficial participants involved (NGOs, practitioners, and private citizens); “everyone’s getting involved”; active and participatory public; dialogue and exchange focused, two-way symmetric; generally, more emphasis on behavioral change; grounded in relationship, systems, and network theories (Snow 2010: 91–92). The political and information context in the new model is considerably more dynamic and engages a wider array of participants. Advancements in information technology and politics have not only facilitated but also propelled these transformations as the information and political landscape has progressed. This allows foreign governments to connect with foreign audiences through political marketing within their public diplomacy initiatives.

Two main factors are critically important in public diplomacy in global politics. The first one is that states have to gain the support of public opinion via their foreign policy since it is a very important instrument in global politics emanating from societal approval. In this context, gaining the support of public opinion refers to a state’s having and exerting soft power. This is because the increasing importance of public opinion which sometimes play a critical role in the foreign policy of states. In classical diplomacy, only winning the representatives of states would be seen as adequate for their cause. Secondly, the visualization of everyday life by the information and communication technologies has brought about the phenomenon of visibility in foreign policy. In global politics, this has made it necessary for states to present their policies with an attractive visual image in an attempt to carry them out successfully. Moreover, it has brought the necessity of presenting not only the policies but also the actors themselves with an attractive image to the public and the international community. What became gradually important is not the successiveness of a state’s foreign policy, but the execution of this policy and the concepts it communicates as well as the representation of these concepts in the international press and social media. As these two main factors increased the importance of public diplomacy in global politics, especially in the 2000s, states have intensified their public diplomacy practices (Ekşi, 2019: 177, Açma and Tekang, 2021: 168).

Intrinsically, public diplomacy according to Cull (2009: 12) is ““an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public.” Cull further stated that Listening: gathering the thoughts and information from the intended audience through listening, instead of communicating with them; advocacy: a proactive role where the communicator seeks to advance a specific idea or policy that serves their interests; cultural diplomacy: bringing attention to and fostering a nation’s cultural assets and achievements. Public diplomacy as a mechanism of international relations has not remained stagnant or ceased to evolve, as it addresses new demands and challenges in an ever-changing global landscape. Snow differentiates between what she refers to as Traditional Public Diplomacy and New Public Diplomacy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NYE’S SOFT POWER

The complex paradigm of Russian public diplomacy in the heart of incursion into Ukraine have seen the birth of numerous state and non-state actors into its public diplomacy playbook. This complex paradigm of Russian public diplomacy in the face of the ongoing war in Ukraine necessitates a structured theoretical framework for analyzing this work. The concept of soft power was postulated by Nye in the late 1980s. Nye soft power refers to the aptitude of a state to exert influence on others can be achieved via charm other than fury (Nye, 2004). Soft power is the capacity of a state to sway people without using force or money by using attractiveness and

persuasion. Three fundamental pillars support this type of power: foreign policy, political ideals, and culture (Nye, 2004). By presenting a positive image, telling an engaging story, and advocating for principles that other countries share, a nation can use soft power (Nye, 2008). Nye maintained that, especially in the era of global communication and interconnection, soft power is essential in influencing global outcomes in a world when economic clout and military might be sometimes insufficient. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's military incursion into Ukraine has transformed the debates surrounding Russia's public diplomacy as a result of western driven perceptions of Moscow as the aggressor state.

In the past few years, Moscow has categorically focused on public diplomacy by unleashing a wave of soft power tools to make headway in its geopolitical and national interests while thwarting NATO's and western chronicled regarding the Kremlin's hostile military incursions into Ukraine. Soft power framed by Nye (2004), has become a key term in comprehending how states can exert effect on global views via allurement other than duress. By utilizing Nye's theory of soft power within the ambits of Moscow's public diplomacy with the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, the theory scrutinized Russia's sweats to design global thoughts and earn diplomatic solidarity. Also, the theory would give us an insight into the effectuality and setbacks as the Kremlin doubles its efforts to gain status and prestige in international politics. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the expansion of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022, Russia, under by Vladimir Putin, has continuously used a variety of public diplomacy techniques to convey its soft power.

As has been mentioned multiple times, soft power depends on a nation's image, reputation, and credibility. This foundation is essential for the ability to draw in and sway others. Alexander Vuing identifies three key clusters of characteristics of agent and action that are crucial to the concept of attraction - benignity, competence, and beauty (charisma).

- Benignity—how an agent interacts with others and, therefore, how they are viewed;
- Brilliance/Competence—how an agent behaves, creates an impact;
- Beauty/Charisma—the agent's relationship with ideals, values, and vision can evoke admiration or adherence (Nye 2011: 92).

Moscow has used a variety of public diplomacy tactics, including media outlets, cultural exchanges, diplomatic initiatives, and attempts to develop a narrative that refutes criticism from the West. These refutations consist of;

INFORMATION AND MEDIA WARFARE

The vital utilization and government guarded media outlets have been embedded into Russia's soft power playbook. Sputnik News and RT (formerly Russia Today) have been used to spread Russian opinions on international matters, especially with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. In a battle to shield ethnic Russian speaking populace and frustrate the European Union and NATO's dubious encroachment, Moscow has tapped into its media space by projecting itself as a bulwark in contrast to European and American imperialism (Petrova & De Bievre, 2019). By delineating Moscow as the casualty as opposed to being an assailant, Sputnik and RT aims to pursue public views across the globe especially in states piloting coarse critique of the Russian Federation.

CULTURAL EXCHANGES

A distinctive area in which the Russian government uses its soft power is by picking into cultural diplomacy. Moscow has made tremendous inputs into global programs such as the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) foundation, responsible in the exaltation of Russian language and culture



throughout the world (Duskin, 2018). In this light therefore, Moscow aims to build partnerships with peoples of different states that are being ostracized by the west, hence portraying itself as an advocate of traditional values and offers a counterbalancing narrative against the west.

BILATERAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

The Kremlin uses its foreign policy strength in upholding its status and prestige international as global force that advocates for an end to American hegemony and western conspiracies in line with supporting a multilateral or multipolar world order. Many states from the developing south, whose governments are tired of western interference have fallen and become allies of Russia thanks to Russia's public diplomacy. Russia aims to portray itself as a counterpoint to what it views as the unipolarity of the West through political alliances, energy agreements, and economic cooperation (Mearsheimer, 2014). Russia aims to obtain diplomatic support from nations that are similarly concerned about Western dominance by portraying the war in Ukraine as a component of a broader fight against NATO expansion.

Despite the fact that some of the traits espoused by Nye in his theoretical explanation of soft power suits the public diplomacy mechanisms of Russia today, a plethora of angles can be spotted where Russia's public diplomacy is found wanting paving the way for fraught and hard knocks. These areas include the following;

Firstly, With the usage of soft power, Nye emphasized the value of a credibility while utilizing soft power (Nye, 2008). President Putin's aggressive incursion into Ukraine especially in 2022, which was extensively scolded as a violation of international law, have critically undermine its image. Many scholars and analysts are suspicious of the Kremlin's narratives in respond to its war in Ukraine, as either a peacekeeper or defender of ethnic Russian minorities. Specifically, Russia's defence of its activities has been sharply criticized by Western and many Eastern European countries, who see them as excuses for territorial expansion rather than real security concerns (Sakwa, 2015). Consequently, Russia's capacity to shape public opinion throughout the world has been severely curtailed.

Secondly, Russian soft power explanation is wrapped in anomaly, in spite the numerous success its has recorded in constructing healthy relationships with foreign peoples of south America, Africa, Asia and some Eastern European states. The government in Moscow has made a symbiotic connection between Russian identity, nationalism, traditionalism, and resistance to western liberal capitalism. These state manned principles, yet, is become less attractive to peoples from other nations who view Moscow's moves as dubious accompanied by Putin's authoritarian rule, human rights violations, and repression of opposition leaders (Pomerantsev, 2014). Subsequently, the vigor of Moscow's foreign policy and soft power indexes are plummeting because of domestic strives at home causing in adequate allocation of resources for its public diplomacy abroad.

Thirdly, Chatham House (2020) espoused that Moscow faces a lot of setbacks in an attempt to compete on an equal playing field with many western media outlets, international non-governmental organizations, and international organizations (NGOs), which triumphant in global debates. Despite Moscow's ground breaking successes in enhancing ties with many states across the globe, it has not succeeded to configure and pursued them to change the rampant demonization of Russia in connection to the war in Ukraine. According to Nye, the capacity to draw people in by exhibiting principles that are widely accepted by the global society is the real test of soft power (Nye, 2008). However, rather than gaining new allies or cultivating real international backing, Russia's present strategy runs the risk of further polarizing world opinion. Also, Russia's public

diplomacy is inefficient because it has not successfully proven itself since it lacks legitimacy and its policies and actions do not go together. This has caused a decline in its soft power because of its military incursion into Ukraine. Panic about Russia's aggression and imperialism across its borders particularly with neighboring states fanning closer ties with U.S. and Europe have clouded Russian public diplomacy nursing rejection of Moscow's anticipated interests around its neighbors.

Fourthly, another setback for Moscow's soft power mechanism is that it pays a lot of attention to narrative management as against genuine communication. In Nye's soft power theory, communication and understanding becomes successful in public diplomacy when both parties understand themselves (Nye, 2008). With the western piloting their own narratives about Russia, its counter-narrative strategies fall squarely into information warfare, whereby it is airing out specific content at home and abroad paying no attention to alternative viewpoints. Moscow's stature in establishing a virtuous sway premised on mutual respect and understanding is derailed by its one-sided communication model. Notwithstanding these initiatives, a thorough examination shows that Russia's use of soft power throughout the crisis in Ukraine has been remarkably unsuccessful. Russia's credibility on the international scene has declined as a result of the unfavourable opinions surrounding its military operations overshadowing its cultural outreach (Andrew Roth, 2018).

In a nutshell, the Kremlin's actions in its soft power bellicose in relation to the conflict in Ukraine is accompanied by pros and cons based on these public diplomacy mechanisms. Despite recording resounding success in its foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, and the role of the media to spearhead its image and objectives, its efficiency is under attack due to credibility, one-sided media narrative, and the brutal might of the west's soft power on the global stage.

RUSSIA AND SOFT POWER

Historically, the Russian Federation solely exercised and executed the use of hard power. During the Soviet era, the phrase "***If you don't know, we will teach you; if you don't want to, we will force you***" was echoed and enshrined as a dictum in Russia. The pioneer of the term soft power Nye defined soft power as "*the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attraction of the country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced*" (Nye, 2004). For nearly two decades under Vladimir Putin, Moscow consistently focused on soft power projection in the region and cultivated an image of a neutral powerbroker and peacemaker, as well as a business partner (Borshchevskaya, 2021, Shakirov, 2013). Following Moscow's aggression against Georgia in August 2008, the Kremlin launched a massive propaganda campaign to boost its international image, especially in the West. Russian officials discussed using soft power as a foreign policy driver that year and noted that Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had done the same on multiple occasions (Borshchevskaya, 2021, Shakirov, 2013).

For a state to be successful, according to Nye (2002), hard power is necessary; but it is also important to shape long-term preferences of others and project values. Soft power projection helps attract partners and allies (Ikenberry, 2020). Fischer (2023: 1) writing about the aggressive war on Ukraine by Russia stated that, the conflict has unfolded in multiple phases, each creating a foundation for diplomatic activities with different epochs in the war. In addition, these epochs during the war have had different states seeking to play the role of mediators beginning with Türkiye. Simultaneously, Russia's wartime diplomacy seeks to isolate and diminish western influence within the international framework as it carries the war ahead with no cessation of

hostilities. Luther and Prins (2024) believe that Moscow's use of the media outlets prior to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was done via its public diplomacy tactics which they describe as "hard soft power." With this type of diplomacy, states dispatch subtle threats to create a sense of insecurity among the denizens of targeted nations. The sole goal is widening existing discords, pipe social distrust, and expand the geopolitical influence of the nation behind the strategy.

Since 2022, Russia has increasingly paid keen attention in the Global South, aligning itself with anti-colonial, anti-interventionist, and anti-western sentiments prevalent in Africa, Latin American, and Asian societies (Fischer, 2023: 3). As the epoch in the war changes, the Kremlin has also decided to finetune its soft power dynamics so as to matchup with the changes and repositioning Russia's image in the global south. Fiona Hill a renowned expert on Russia and former advisor to President Trump on Russia, wrote that Moscow's initiatives to project soft power in the post-Soviet space yielded noticeable outcomes. Fiona stated that:

"There is more to Russia's attractiveness than oil riches. Consider the persistence of the Russian language as a regional lingua franca-the language of commerce, employment and education-for many of the states of the former Soviet Union. ... Then there is a range of new Russian consumer products, a burgeoning popular culture spread through satellite TV, a growing film industry, rock music, Russian popular novels and the revival of the crowning achievements of the Russian artistic tradition. They have all made Russia a more attractive state for populations in the region than it was in the 1990s. ... Instead of the Red Army, the penetrating forces of Russian power in Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are now Russian natural gas and the giant gas monopoly, Gazprom, as well as Russian electricity and the huge energy company, UES-and Russian culture and consumer goods. In addition, private firms-such as Russia's Wimm-Bill-Dann Foods-have begun to dominate regional markets for dairy products and fruit juices" (Fiona, 2004).

A plethora of Russian scholars believe that "soft power," and "foreign policy image," occupies a very central part in Russia's policy discourse; with many Russian pundits explaining the necessity for Russia to improve on exporting and improving Moscow's soft power. This has propelled the Kremlin to look after its image at home and abroad. In recent history, Moscow has concentrated on demonstrating hard power, as evident in its violent suppression of Chechnya's quest for independence, the 2008 conflict with Georgia, the 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, and the 2015 military intervention in Syria to support the regime of Bashar al-Assad that collapsed on the 8th of December 2024, and Moscow's incursion into Ukraine in 2022. These actions underscore Russia's reliance on hard power strategies. Many western policymakers privately pinpoint that Russia lacks the ability to attract others, noting that the Kremlin has not treated its own citizens well-much less those of other nations. A common illustration of Russia's ineffectiveness in attracting people is the fact that few aspire to immigrate to Russia; instead, many desire to leave Russia for more developed democracies, contributing to a significant outflow of talent (Borshchevskaya, 2021).

Thus, in February 2013, Russia officially incorporated soft power into its foreign policy toolkit while indirectly putting the blame on the United States for what it perceived as destabilizing soft power projection—a consistent Kremlin theme. This interpretation highlighted the Kremlin's own spin on the concept of soft power:

Soft power, a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural, and other methods and technologies alternative to

traditional diplomacy, is becoming an indispensable component of modern international relations. At the same time, increasing global competition and the growing crisis potential sometimes creates a risk of destructive and unlawful use of “soft power” and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad (Borshchevskaya, 2021). This theoretical framework highlights the nexus between the three central elements: actors, instruments, and effects.

ACTORS:

This consist of various entities such as the Russian state, state led media outlets such as (RT, Sputnik), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and cultural institutions. Each of these actors play a crucial part in disseminating messages that aligns perfectly with Russia’s geopolitical narratives.

INSTRUMENTS:

When it comes to the gizmos of public diplomacy, it consists of both traditional and modern tools such as traditional media, internet community, cultural exchanges, educational programs, and humanitarian gestures. Each and everyone of these tools are fashioned to reverberate with the target publics internally and externally, thus signaling the Kremlin’s shrewd ways of passing out its message in a plethora of diverse geopolitical scenarios.

EFFECTS: The repercussions of these strategies employed by Moscow are calculated via the browbeats it has on public thought, policy ramifications on external governments, and dynamic transformation in international blocs in relation to the war with Ukraine.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article utilizes content analysis to unmasked the trajectory dimensions by which Moscow unleashes its soft power via the different public diplomacy channels using its actors. This is done through a comprehensive document review of the actors, actions, and effects of Russian public diplomacy at home and abroad. The research methods employed by in this article is qualitative in nature with data emanating from secondary sources consisting of published works, existing research, news sources, conferences, and speeches. This unique approach is to critically underline why there has been many upsprings and success of Russia’s public diplomacy in the wake of its incursion into Ukraine since 2022. Since the article makes use of content analysis employing a systematic review of articles, social media, and media reports in connection to the Kremlin’s public diplomacy, it will unpack the narratives, formed strategies, and thematic by players from Moscow. With a case study focusing on Russia’s public diplomacy in the face of the Ukrainian conflict dwelling on its soft power bravado to swing the western narratives, providing a meticulous analysis.

CONTEMPORARY ACTORS OF RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

As the war in Ukraine unfolds, the Kremlin cares so much about its status and prestige both internally and externally. Contemporary actors in public diplomacy have seen not only the focus on the state as the main actor in IR but non-state actors as well. Today’s actors of Russian public diplomacy are pivotal since it shapes Kremlin’s international prestige and influence. As global trends from war, climate change, peace, economics, and trade evolve, Moscow is manning strong diplomatic strategies geared at elevating its soft power hence portraying attractions in and out. By knitting historical ties, cultural exchanges, and modern tools of communication technologies, both

state and non-state actors are tasked with connecting foreign audiences and build lucrative image for Russia. Comprehending these actors is vital in analyzing how the Russian Federation navigates today's global politics via the enforcement of public diplomacy. These actors include:

- I. **State Actors:** These consists of the Russian State (the main driver of Russia's public diplomacy), government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which formulates and implements public diplomacy strategies), Ministry of Education and Science, Russian Federal Agency for international cooperation, Ministry of culture, and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (responsible to pilot and bring together former Soviet states).
- II. **Non-State Actors:** It is composed of the socio-cultural institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian cultural centers, Russian World" (Russky Mir, the World Youth Festival Directorate, Center for International Interaction and Cooperation, Media (Russia Today, Sputnik, and Telegram), educational programs such as (MGIMO University and scholarships), Russian Business magnets such as Wimm-Bill-Dann Foods, Gazprom, Novatek, which enhance Russia's economic influence, individuals, Russian Public figures.

Through these state and non-state actors, they project Moscow's soft power all geared at knitting Russian status and prestige in the face of the West. Affirmatively, the Kremlin's strategies in spreading its soft power are embodied in well-structured and robust institutions to practically display and assert its influence within and beyond its geographical milieu with available resources.

CONTEMPORARY INSTRUMENTS AND EFFECTS OF RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In the Russian Federation's public diplomacy play book a lot has changed as compared to how Moscow executed its public diplomacy in the past. While political and economic diplomacy are central for states as they walk the ladder of public diplomacy, Moscow has diversified other strategies away from the original traditional strategies. Today, Moscow has fastened and employed rude instruments build on shaping its image, status, and prestige on the global front. These instruments strategically are meant on strengthening cultural ties, engage foreign publics, and national interests. Moscow's main instrument in public diplomacy and how these instruments are unleashed to win friends abroad consists of cultural exchanges, Media bellicose, educational programs, Civic Engagement, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Economic Aid and Investment, organization of international forums, and health diplomacy.

RUSSIAN CULTURAL PROGRAMS

Cultural diplomacy has become a pillar for Moscow's public diplomacy paradigm. This is use in the promulgation of Russian culture, language, and arts including music and cinema which the Kremlin really on to foster goodwill and mutual understanding. In the period that follows after the Soviet Union's collapse, Moscow fashioned its soft power dialects on Russian-speaking populations of former soviet's heritage. This tactic falls squarely with Moscow's objective to foster loyalty among Russian diasporas propelling the concept of a "Russian World" or "Russkiy Mir" (Luther and Prins, 2024 and Kravchuk, 2024). Just like the American Spaces in charge of American culture and the promotion of English, Yunus Emre Foundation-Türkiye, Franco-Alliance-France, the British Council-United Kingdom, the Goethe Institute-Federal Republic of Germany. The Russian Federation utilizes the "Russkiy Mir" foundation in the promotion of Russian language

and cultural enhancement including the organization of international festivals, exhibitions, arts, and music to portray Russian heritage.

In order to match the spending power of its rivals the Kremlin plans to spend 1.7 billion rubles (approximately \$18 million) in 2025 in the promotion of Russian globally which indicates a fourfold increase from the 2024 budget. This proposed budget which was accepted by the cabinet on September 29, 2024 and went through parliamentary scrutiny indicates an ‘elephant’ project with 1.85 billion rubles (\$19.4 million) in 2026 plus an additional 2 billion rubles (\$21 million) in 2027. A huge proportion of this funds will support programs led by the “Russkiy Mir” (Russian World) foundation and RT’s Window. The aim is to finance Russian-language schools abroad, erect cultural learning centers, and dispatch teaching corps to robustly support the cultural programs (Rodeheffer, 2024; RT, 2024; and TASS, 2025). In March 2024, the black sea city of Sochi played host to the international Youth festival with over 2500 youths across globe in attendance fully funded by the Russian Federation. The close to one month event saw the display of the cultural identity of the different regions of the Russian Federation, and the event was one of its kind. In fact, to solidify the gravity of the event Russian President Vladimir, Putin, Foreign Secretary Sergei Lavrov among other top Russian dignitaries were in attendance meeting youths from across the world. This event recruited Russian Youth Ambassadors culminating to the creation of World Youth Festival Directorate which has been on a tour ahead organizing a Mega 2025 youth event in 2025.

Osmonalieva (2024) posit that Russian officials beginning with President Vladimir Putin have stressed the importance for increased financial support for projects that enhances the promotion of the Russian language and culture universally. Furthermore, Maria Zakharova (Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs) purported that Russian language is gaining prominence in China with over 80.000 students learning it per annum. To support this claim, Evgeny Primakov from the Russian Federal Agency for international cooperation announced the creation of Russian Houses in 6 Africa states – Guinea, Somalia, Sierra Leone, the Central African Republic, Chad, and Equatorial Guinea bringing the number to 16 Russian Houses globally, thereby paving the way for scholarships and educational opportunities for prospective students in Russia. The increase in funding is based on the threats and events of the Russian language in former soviet republics such as in Georgia, 2014 western backed coup in Ukraine that saw the abolition of the use of Russian as an official regional lingua franca spoken by Eastern Ukrainians. The Russian incursion into Ukraine in 2022 has made matters worse for the Russian language as the Kremlin views this suppression as “Russophobic” (Kravchuk, 2024; ru/en/news, 2024). Today, there exist a plethora of Russian language centers with different names all geared towards the teaching and promotion of Russian language through different channels.

MEDIA BELLICOSE

Changes in the political and communication environment have enabled new participants (non-state) to join the sphere of international relations and influence affairs, which encompasses corporations and nongovernmental organizations (Melissen 2011; Seib 2012; Simons; 2018). These entities can operate independently of the state, and as a result, can act either in opposition to or in alignment with official (governmental) policy. Since the media plays a central role in public diplomacy and it’s seen as the fourth arm of the state in December 2005, Moscow launched Russia Today (“Rossiya Segodnya” in Russian, eventually renamed RT) as its flagship propaganda outlet for projecting its narrative to overseas audiences and discrediting the West. “When we designed



this (RT) project back in 2005,” Vladimir Putin said in an interview years later, “we intended introducing another strong player on the world’s scene … but also try, let me stress, I mean - try to break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams.” Thus, the Kremlin cast a wide net with its soft power projection (Borschchevskaya, 2021: 4). In order to rival western media houses like CNN, BBC, DW, and other media outlets RT channels started broadcasting in western states such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany continue broadcasting Kremlin’s viewpoints as the war with Ukraine unfolds. RT has double its language of broadcasting not only in Russian but in English and Arabic which has become the pride and cornerstone of Russia’s use of the media doing the bidding of the state in its public diplomacy quest just as other media outlets do.

In addition to RT, Sputnik was created to add flesh to the work of RT as it seeks to satisfy and meet the objectives of Moscow’s public diplomacy in global politics championing soft power programs. The overall goal of the both RT and Sputnik were to build legitimacy for the Kremlin and invalidate western perspectives about Russia as the war unfolds and win friends. Another key feature of Moscow’s efforts was an emphasis on social media targeting the region’s large youth bulge. Moscow clearly invested significant resources in its Arabic propaganda, more so than in other regions. Today, Moscow sponsors and spend huge amount of money to keep RT and Sputnik so that it will be able to air the views of the Russians hence counteracting those from rival states. These state-sponsored media outlets which broadcast news and publish contents that reflects Kremlin’s standpoints on global affairs play a pivotal role in shaping the narratives in a competitive media landscape. Luther and Prins (2024) held that the Kremlin’s global news media network in the likes of RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik during the reign of President Putin are geared at influencing audiences and media beyond Russia’s borders. The success of this media outlets is thanks to political supporters of Putin and business gurus who control pro-Russian media outlets.

Furthermore, with certain social media tools band in Russia as a result of war, Russian social media warriors have entered the digital media space engaging in broadcasting the image of Russia. The utilization of social media platforms such as Telegram founded by Russian technology entrepreneur and CEO Pavel Valeryevich have become a cornerstone in Russia public diplomacy. This messaging platform has evolved with hundred thousand of users disseminate information and counteract negative perceptions via targeted campaigns all geared at promoting the image of Russia away from the promotion of businesses among others. Due to the growing number of Telegram users, Pavel was recently questioned in court in Paris over allegations of his platform’s facilitation of criminal activities. This lawsuit depicts how successful Telegram has become in the eyes of the West threatened their traditional grip on social media apps and propelling the image of Russia via this app. RT, Sputnik and other Russian social media warriors geared at promoting Russian public diplomacy all run on Telegram. Seib (2012: 112, as cited by Simons, 2020: 144) notes that “public diplomacy is related to media accessibility and influence.” The message must be seen and heard in the public information space. However, other considerations also need to be taken into account. There are three elements to public diplomacy—news management, strategic communication and relationship building (Leonard et al., 2002; Simons; 2020: 144).

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Since education is pivotal in building long-term relationships, the offering of scholarship programs for international students particularly from the developing south by the west has gone a long way to give them a firm grip on soft power via educational programs. Western democracies especially the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France etc. cannot solely lay claim to be the sole



states offering scholarship schemes. Other states such as China, Japan, South Korea, Türkiye, UAE, Qatar among others now offer scholarship schemes hence catapulting their images. The Russian Federation through the Ministry of Science and Education offers Russian scholarship program in Russia for international students including the immersion of Russian cultural programs.

This scholarship scheme offers a chance for a wide range of educational programs such as medicine, engineering, economics, computer science, natural and social sciences, humanities, law, art, agriculture among others. With most academic disciplines offered by Russian universities and some studies done in English, international students pursue undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs which are fully funded by the Russian government. International students who could not get admission and scholarships in the west are flocking into Russia today to study and the number keeps increasing each academic year. According to Statista (2024) over 351000 international students studied in higher education of learning in Russia in 2022. The number of foreign student both self-sponsorship and government scholarship programs saw a tremendous increase from 2016-2021 hence keeping Russia as the 6th most popular destination to study abroad.

The fortification of educational programs via language and culture tailored in the promotion of Russian public diplomacy during the war with Ukraine. This is marked by a plethora of initiatives in most African states in where Moscow aims in establishing a cultural foothold through the offering of scholarships and training programs that have seen an increased enrollment of African students studying in Russian universities. (ADDO, 2024). The running of the “Distant Russian in Africa” platform has given easy access to the Russian language learning across the continent. This helps in the spread of Russian educational systems and cultural influence at the same time promulgating educational exchanges (Mironova, 2023). As Moscow bolsters its presence via educational and language programs abroad, the Kremlin is effectively constructing a scenario where populations become sympathetic to its political narratives. Since language is a pivotal communication tool and conduit pipe for the promotion of values and narratives in soft power, the Kremlin is taps into this. The creation of Russian language centers in many countries especially in Africa for Moscow’s interests is a holistic strategy aimed in building a generation of individuals who are cognitively receptive and aligns with Russian ideologies, hence enhancing Russia’s geopolitical leverage against its enemies (ADDO, 2024; Ventura, 2024).

Furthermore, the Russian State Institute of International Affairs (NGIMO) most especially offers short term research programs for postgraduate students and researchers ranging from one to six months which is fully funded. In addition, the Gorbachev foundation which is one of the first non-partisan think tanks in modern Russia plays a central part in the educational scheme. It also offers research into social, economic, and political problems. These institutions are spearheading academic partnerships by building platform for collaborations with foreign universities that seeks to promote joint research, exchanges, and succinct discussions on various academic topics.

THE ROLE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (ROC)

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has become a cornerstone and pivotal actor in the novel Russian public diplomacy, especially in line with ongoing war in Ukraine. In the wake of the geopolitical brouhaha, ROCs are now playing a multidimensional role that goes beyond religious tasks, a vehicle for Russian national ideology, a source of moral justifications for military actions, and a process of summoning support for Moscow’s wider goals in its soft power exportation (Dubtsova, 2024). Ray (2024) states that “The Russian Orthodox church is quietly winning allegiance from priests and parishes from the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Egypt with offers of



humanitarian aid, vaccines, infrastructures, schools, hospitals, and spiritual patronage.” He went forth to earmarked those exports believed that the ROC’s moves are a geopolitical strategy geared to assist Moscow in expanding its influence on the continent in the face of the ongoing turmoil within the orthodox church over the war in Ukraine.

The Patriarchate of Alexandria oversees around 1 million Eastern Orthodox Christians in Africa. The ROC, having been a powerful entity within Orthodoxy, operates closely with the Russian state. J. Peter Pham, who has researched this phenomenon in Africa, revealed that a significant number of African Orthodox clergy from the Alexandria Patriarchate have systematically migrated to the Moscow Patriarchate, sometimes incentivized financially. In response to Alexandria’s support for the independence of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the ROC established the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa in 2021 and opened over 200 parishes across 25 African countries by mid-2023. This expansion represents a key element of the Kremlin’s soft power in the region, promoting conservative and anti-Western values. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow argues that Alexandria’s influence leads believers toward Western ideologies, whereas his agenda aims to help African nations resist external pressures (Braw, 2024; Politics Today, 2023). As the war in Ukraine deepens ROC has become a soft power tool in the expansion of the Kremlin’s presence beyond Russia and Africa happens to be the fertile ground in this strategy.

Some view the ROC to be expanding faith movement systematically posing as a threat to traditional African orthodoxy and has settled down well as a smart power tool for Moscow as it enforces its mercenary forces, disinformation, corruption and propping up authoritarian regimes on the continent. The recent expansion of ROC is viewed as an instrumental yardstick for Moscow to downplay western narratives in Africa about the Kremlin (Blitt, 2011; Volodymyr, 2024). Supporting the novel means in the exhibition of Moscow’s use of soft power via the ROC, Ray argued in the FPRI report that “the Russian Orthodox Church’s expansion in Africa cannot be looked at without considering its relationship to the Russian state interests. The church is financially supported by Kremlin-backed entities. Its expansion, in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine aims to challenge the existing Orthodox churches in Africa and to promote conservative, anti-Western alliance.” He added that “it appears to be more about enhancing the Russian image and expanding influence than religious conversation and he deduces that the Russian Orthodox (church) will aim to capture a small elite tied to the top echelons of governments in pursuit of opaque Russian interests rather than winning large congregations.” It certain that the activities of ROC prior to the war in Ukraine was limited across Russia but has taken new impetus due to huge finance from Kremlin to penetrate spaces not only in Africa but states around Russia.

THE ORGANIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

In an era of unprecedented global competition for influence broadly portrayed by soft power, the strategic hosting of international forums by Russia has metamorphosed to become a cornerstone in its exhibition of public diplomacy. Such forums, such as the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), Eurasian Economic Union, Russia-Africa business and economic summits, and BRICS+ among others stand as cardinal platforms in engaging both domestic and international audiences. The multidimensional and repercussion in the hosting of such gatherings by Moscow leads to the building of status and prestige hence catapulting its image on the global stage, building international alliances, and promote its political and economic interests. As a member of the international community, The Russian Federation actively takes part and play hosts to international discussions and initiatives. These bilateral and multilateral forums have culminated to diplomatic talks, conferences, and summits all geared towards the promotion of the Kremlin’s



interest and building of alliances. The Kremlin has increasing supported internation gatherings that aligns squarely with international organizations that meets its interests.

A key contribution on how these international forums add to Moscow's public diplomacy is that it positions Russia as an influential actor in the building of multipolar world and as a facilitator of dialogue and cooperation. SPIEF founded in 1997 for example, has been a milestone in the global economic calendar and has attracted leading companies from diverse economic sectors, heads of states, intellectuals, and business magnets globally (St. Petersburg International Forum, 2024). By organizing such conferences on pressing global lacunas from economic stability, sustainable development, energy, technology, and global word order, Moscow leverages an image of strength as a key negotiator of constructive dialogue rather than a destructive force in geopolitics. Furthermore, these international forums hosted by Moscow are usually pinned on global cooperation paving the way for collaboration, mutual respect, and partnership. This is geared at counteracting negative moves due to international sanctions and the ongoing war with Ukraine. Such events project an image of resilience and strength, overturning western media narratives that downplay Russia's geopolitical image. During such forums such as the Valdai Discussion House that was held on the November 21st, 2024 saw the participation of President Putin who said that:

“New powers are rising. Nations are becoming more and more aware of their interests, their value, uniqueness and identity, and are increasingly insistent on pursuing the goals of development and justice. At the same time, societies are confronted with a multitude of new challenges, from exciting technological changes to catastrophic natural disasters, from outrageous social division to massive migration waves and acute economic crisis...In this context, I wish to emphasize once more: unlike our counterparts, Russia does not view Western civilizations as an adversary, nor does it pose the question of “us or them.” I reiterate: You’re either with us or against us” is not part of our vocabulary. We have no desire to teach anyone or impose our worldview upon anyone” (Putin, 2024).

In order to speed up the process by using “carrots” not “sticks” the Center for International Interaction and Cooperation (CIIC) was created under the theme “*Uniting Efforts for a multipolar world*”. CIIC is in charge with the promotion of humanitarian, socio-political, socio-economic, scientific, cultural, and informational cooperation between Moscow and foreign countries (<https://ciic.site/>). Within a short of its foundation, CIIC has been able to organize multiple political and educational programs with friendly states that has equally brought together foreign politicians, parliamentarians, human rights activists, social scientists, bloggers, and journalists globally. CIIC seeks to nurture a global society of independent thinkers especially from developing south, who are interested in building and enhancing a multipolar world order hence setting the conduct for novel standards of global governance. CIIC has been very successful in driving forth Kremlin's goal via its public diplomacy programs and they utilizing the social media spaces especially targeting youths and organizations in the developing south as seen their programs.

THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN NGOS

According to Sukhorolskyi and Sukhorolska (2024: 272) stated that “the active participation of non-governmental actors in PD has been discussed for several decades. Modern definitions of PD often directly indicate that it is carried out not only by the states, but by private entities, groups, and individuals, as well (Gilboa, 2023; Gibson, 2023). Cull (2019) purported that one of the main trends in PD is a significant expansion of the range of actors who try to influence foreign publics to achieve their goals. This applies to cities, regions, corporations, NGOs, and the communities in



social networks. The current stalemate between Ukraine and Russia has ushered Russian non-government organizations (NGOs) playing a significant part in shaping its public diplomacy via soft power strategies. Russian NGOs operate both domestically and internationally and are engaged in multiple actions tailored at counteracting negative surrounding Russia while airing the position of Russia's interests on a global front. The war in Ukraine which is now in a new phase has prompted Russian NGOs to play a central part in shaping Moscow's public via soft power techniques. A primary function of these NGOs in public diplomacy is meant to construct narratives that support a favourable status and prestige of the Russian Federation while playing down on western perspective on the war with Kiev (Prokscha, 2022).

Khmilevskaya. (2021) earmarked that the Russkiy Mir Foundation is one of the most popular Russian NGO tasked with the promotion of the Russian language, literature, and culture worldwide with sporadic focus in Africa and Asia. The foundation has expanded to include 19 Russian centers operation in Asia, 8 in Africa and 25 offices with plans to open more including South America. This foundation jointly patronized by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science hence serving as a tool for Moscow's gambit in soft power. The Foreign Policy (2024) held that NGOs from Russia do not only leverage cultural diplomacy as a pinnacle in skyrocketing its ties with other states but spearheads cultural exchanges, educational programs, and artistic collaboration. Such cultural mechanisms allow Russia to foster a sense of goodwill and counteract negative sentiments, thus enhancing a status of soft power on a global front. Furthermore, Russian NGOs support humanitarian programs that underscore the state's commitment to humanitarian principles. The provision of medical supplies, humanitarian relief efforts, supporting displaced persons, and assisting humanitarian corridors all helps in the enhancement of Russia as a responsible state engaged in meaningful global humanitarian discourse (Prokscha, 2022).

Prominent Russian NGOs apart from the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Russian World Foundation) includes Russian Peace Foundation, Russian International Agency and cooperation, Russian Orthodox Church charitable organizations, expeditionary societies and cultural missions, and the international humanitarian organization "Russian Humanitarian Mission" among others. These NGOs all engage in a plethora of extensive public relations campaigns that portray the Kremlin's position regarding the war in Ukraine, including its use of military actions while justifying its actions as a means of protecting Russian-speaking denizens in Ukraine and the to protect its national security against NATO's expansionism using Kiev hence winning more friends.

CONCLUSION

As the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine unfolds, Moscow has sought to use both state and non-state actors in its public diplomacy, making use of soft power techniques geared at mitigating western narratives hence projecting an image of resilience and strength. As the west keep blaming Russia as the aggressor state, many states from the developing south have adopted a position of neutrality, presenting an opportunity for the Kremlin to forge alliances with them. By dispatching a series of "carrots" and not "sticks" in terms of cultural, educational, international gatherings, NGOs, the media etc. are used in counterbalancing Western perceptions and build a strong Russia. These succinct strategic alliances have culminated to the call for a multipolar global order, with Russia building ties with the Middle East, Africa, South America, Asia, and some western and eastern European states. Moscow's mechanisms to propel its soft power are rewarded due to a substantial investment in cultural programs, media outreach, educational scholarships geared at sustaining long term relationships with foreign peoples. In spite of these tools and

instruments, the ultimate setback remains the inherent skepticism towards the real intentions of the Kremlin in Ukraine and being viewed as recalcitrant state in global politics seeking a new global order. Notwithstanding, as the Russian Federation navigates these ever complexities of contemporary warfare (hard power in Ukraine) and employing public diplomacy strategies (soft power dictum). It is undoubtedly that role of both state and non-state actors in changing the narratives, constructing new alliances, and portraying a global image of Russia amidst increasing geopolitical rivalry is crucial.

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