

# Russia's demise in the Age of Information



We live in the time, where different pieces of information swarm around us, making it almost impossible to escape it.

Over the course of mass media's existence, its role in opinion and attitude shaping has increased dramatically, particularly because of how much more accessible it has become.

With an average person finding themselves listening to evening news after coming back from work, or even those, who bravely say "I do not watch TV", but feed their need for information on the internet, we are surrounded by data flow.

And it is hard to stay neutral, as we involuntarily choose sides, depending on what agenda we are most exposed to.

A study conducted by the University of Southern California, used the analogy of an 85 page long newspaper and showed that in 1986, around the time of the Soviet Union's downfall, people were receiving about 40 newspapers full of information, while in 2007 the number rose to 174.

There is nothing new about the fact that mass and social media provide valuable tools for politicians, who seek to push their own rhetoric into the crowd's minds. Those, who manage to master the art of using these tools, are arguably capable of creating their own reality.

The classic example which is known by the majority, is 1997 movie, Wag the Dog, where such use of media is being shown in all its glory, even if it is exaggerated.

The West has been the dominant power on the global arena ever since the end of the Cold War, where after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia started to integrate into the world politics as a renewed player, with a new ideology and new political appearance.

The modern post-Soviet era world dictates certain requirements for contemporary participants, among them are free trade, technology exchange, advancement towards green energy solutions and a strong emphasis on free mass media. These are a part of the modern political courtesy, post League of Nations table manners, if you will.

Practice shows that those who choose to turn their countries into resources-only based economies, and to completely or partially ignore these requirements, will forever be on a passenger seat in this car called "global politics". This is not what Russia is ready to settle for though.

While Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, managed to incorporate the country's mighty natural resources industries into global economics, giving him a strong political leverage, he chose to be very selective when it comes to anything else.

Power and straightforwardness are seen as few of the main things that Russia respects, and its politicians are proud of the fact that they refuse to participate in this so-called free media theater. But is this sense of pride justifiable?

Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, mentioned that he was amazed to see mass and social media being used as the main sources that shed light on chemical

weapons being used in Douma, Syria.

“Apart from social media accounts and the video that was shared there, there are no other pieces of evidence, which can be seen as ridiculous by some specialists” – he stated during Russia’s XXVI Assembly of Foreign and Defense Policy Council.

Mr. Lavrov’s speech was brought to the international audiences by pro-Kremlin news channel, Russia Today and failed to make any ripples on the surface of people’s opinion, which was already heavily bombarded by horrible images of the chemical attack, the whole rhetoric of people’s suffering and the West’s responsibility to protect.

Social media or not, nowadays, people like to believe in the power of freedom of speech and share the awareness. After all, it was Twitter that brought us the Arab Spring.

Another prime example of storm clouds gathering around Russia’s reputation is the latest poisoning of Russia’s former military intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal. The incident took place in the middle of UK’s very peaceful city of Salisbury and has awoken the memories of a similar poisoning from several years ago of Alexander Litvinenko, who used to be a part of Russia’s Federal Security Service.

Mr. Skripal’s poisoning happened exactly two weeks before Russia’s presidential elections, which is hardly the best international PR campaign for President Putin.

The event was quickly used by the Western media to even further demonize the people’s vision of Russia’s politicians, portraying them as very conniving and not trustworthy.

Yet, OPCW-designated laboratory, based in Spiez, Switzerland has officially confirmed, that the poison, used on Mr. Skripal, shows traces of certain elements, which can be found only among NATO’s arsenal.

The news were delivered through Russia’s highest possible diplomatic level – the Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. One would assume that this scandalous piece of information would get an intense coverage by the mass media. But the reality shows the absolute opposite.

It is not enough to simply “share the truth” with the world, this truth has to be imbedded into people’s minds through constant exposure and endless repetition,

just like certain Western media repeats time and time again that Russia is a criminal state.

If you run a quick internet search of Mr. Skripal's poisoning, the vast majority of non-Russian speaking newspapers and media channels would give you same old information about the attack itself and the following clean-up, while Russian sources would be screaming about Western conspiracy and the revelations from the Swiss lab.

If this information is indeed that vital (and it is), why don't we see it on every TV channel here in the West? Where are the Russian foreign public relations specialists, pressing BBC, CNN and the others to get a minute of their time to spread this information, even though it is against those news outlets' agendas?

Russia's politicians, who are mainly Soviet-era raised, seem to be stuck in the late 80's mindset, where people were not that exposed to the power of media and where the country had very little ability to influence anything that the average person "consumes" outside the Soviet Union.

It is not any longer enough to win only your citizens' hearts, but as an international political player, Russia has to realize the importance of the global public's beliefs and opinions.

The country's Foreign Ministry actively chooses to be passive about this information war. This war is conducted not only behind the curtains, not only on the floor of the UN's Security Council, it is also in people's minds.

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