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**Russian-American Relations and the Mass Media
Securitization of Vladimir Putin and Donald
Trump in the American Press**

Master's Thesis

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Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification thereof, or for any other university or institute of learning.

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are cited and included.

Valeriia Alikina

May 11, 2018

ABSTRACT

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by

Valeriia Alikina

This thesis is focused on two issues relevant to Security Studies and Political Science: relations between the Russian Federation and the United States of America, which are currently experiencing yet another decline, and problematics of political journalism. It reviews the process of securitization of Russia through speech acts in the mass media of its historical opponent, the United States.

First, the thesis provides a theoretical framework, securitization theory, introducing its main principles. To prove that the process of securitization indeed occurs, the method of discourse analysis is employed. The third chapter provides background information on the relations between the Soviet Union/Russia and the United States since the end of the World War II; this information is completed by the role mass media had in their affairs. The next chapter frames the issue of propaganda, elaborating on the meaning behind this concept, the “fake news” narrative, and the idealistic idea of media objectivity. In the fifth chapter, the case study, two processes of securitization are reviewed. The first one is the American mainstream media, namely *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, securitizing Putin’s Russia, with the referent object being the United States and the international liberal order. It has been found that the media uses “symbols” to refer to Russia as an aggressor which threatens the US and other actors. The second case of securitization is the media securitizing Donald Trump’s presidency; the referent object is again the United States and democracy in the country. The thesis concludes with emphasising the importance of connection between the two processes: securitizing Trumps is possible because securitization of Russia started decades ago and has never really stopped, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This indicates the importance of the mass media: during the Cold War, anti-communism had become a national ideology thanks to propaganda in the media, and the negative attitude towards Russia did not cease to exist with the collapse of communism regime. It also illustrates how deep rivalry and animosity between Russia and the US are, and how

complicated it used to be - and would be in the future - for them to cooperate and coexist peacefully as partners.

Keywords:

Securitization, Russian Federation, United States, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Propaganda, Bias, Mass Media, American Media, Cold War

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Not many would disagree with importance of the mass media for domestic and international politics. In spite of transformations of the institution of media over the past several decades, it remains the main source of information for the public, serving as an important tool of communication between the governments and the citizenries. With globalization, liberalization of many institutions it brought about, and new technological developments, it was expected that the media would become freer, making it harder for the government to engage in propaganda, or making these engagements less fruitful. Nevertheless, it is evident that propaganda in the media is still strong, and ideological bias still determines trends in the media coverage even in some liberal democracies.

Arguably, the way media in a state functions can not only show the nature of political regime in it, but also represent political views of the nation, and reflect on a state's relations with foreign actors. This work attempts to provide an evidence that this is true. It explores the process of securitization: presenting a state, person, or any other actor in the system (referent subject) as a security issue which presents a threat to a referent object. Actors resort to securitization for different reasons; some of the usual ones are to gain access to more control over the referent object, typically a state/nation, or to have justification for resorting to certain means to protect the referent object and ensure its survival.¹

In this thesis, two processes of securitization are reviewed. First of all, the long-standing securitization of the Soviet Union/the Russian Federation by the American ruling elites and

¹ John Baylis, "International And Global Security," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, 230-245. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

American mass media; the referent object presented as threatened by Russia is the United States itself, democracy in the country, and the international liberal order. The US and Russia have complicated history of rivalry, competition, and unsuccessful attempts of cooperation. The second securitization process is securitizing Donald Trump's presidency on a basis of his connections with/sympathy to Russian political elites. Trump's highly controversial candidacy and presidency has been a central topic in the American media, which had its impact on the internal affairs in the country, provoking political unrest and making the American public extremely divided. The second process, as argued in the thesis, was possible due to the first one. Importantly, the thesis does not aim to establish whether the politicians and the media are lying or telling the truth; instead, it is based on the speech act theory argument: the statements in the analysis should not be regarded as either true or false. Their role is not limited to describing the reality - these statements *do* things; they are actions, and are "performatives," not "constatives."² The thesis provides a background of relations of Russia and the US and media coverage of them. It then describes concepts (and different stances on/interpretations of them) relevant to the research, such as propaganda, and provides the context of current political and media environment in the United States. Finally, thesis employs the methodology of discourse analysis in order to identify the securitization packages, trends and popular labels in the media statements, and then, based on the previous background/framing chapters, proceeds to making conclusions and answering the research questions.

1.1 Aim of the Thesis

² Juha A. Vuori, "Speech Act Theory," in *Research Methods In Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 133.

First of all, this work reviews the process of manufacturing the news, in order to provide theoretical and conceptual context to the issue. It also frames the subject matter with a chapter dedicated to relations between the United States and Russia, and how they have been presented in the media. The thesis seeks to provide evidence for the argument about importance of the media coverage of political processes, both domestic and international. Ultimately, it utilizes the method of discourse analysis to detect prevalent speech acts in the media; these acts signalize about trends in current relations between the two powers and domestic political affairs in the United States.

Essentially, the thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation, and Donald Trump presented in the American mainstream media?
2. Why is this representation influential and has an impact on consciousness of the audiences of that media?
3. What does it indicate about the current American-Russian relations?

1.2 Literature Review

One of the major literature sources the thesis relies on is “Propaganda” by Edward Bernays.

Bernays, sometimes called “the father of propaganda,” wrote this path breaking work

scientifically explaining techniques of manipulating public opinion. This book provides a

detailed view on how power and discourse are used to shape and control mass consciousness.

“Propaganda and Political Leadership” is the chapter most relevant to the topic; it explores the way political elites use propaganda as a method of attracting voters and ensuring support.

Bernays argues that democracy, contrary to a popular belief, did not bring freedom of speech and press, but paved way to propaganda in the media, since it is a convenient and powerful way of forming the will of the people.³

In order to explain how mass media transforms information before publishing, the thesis uses parts of *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* written by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, first published in 1988. The authors also offer an account on the reasons for bias and propaganda in the media. The book suggests a “propaganda model,” a system according to which information goes through five filtering mechanisms before being published/broadcasted. One of the “filters” is the ideology of anti-communism, later transformed into “fear” by Chomsky. This ideology “helps mobilize the populace against the enemy,” and thus makes the people “behave.” Constantly talking, writing and reporting so much on wrong deeds of the USSR made opposition to communism become the first principle of Western ideology.⁴ Even in the (extremely unlikely) case of the American media completely removing this narrative from its agenda right after the end of the Cold War, it would have still taken more

³ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2005), 109.

⁴ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 29.

than couple of decades for the American public to get over this principle. The process of forgetting about the image of Russia as an aggressive enemy of the US is even more complicated due to both American politicians' and the mass media's ongoing securitization of Russia.

Herman and Chomsky also argue that advertising and overall profit-orientation of the media is an extremely important factor for the content of the news;⁵ this idea will also be elaborated on in the thesis.

This work engages in analysing discourse in the mass media. To understand the methodology of critical discourse analysis, as well as relations between political power, media and control, two chapters from *Discourse and Power* by Teun A. van Dijk will be used. Van Dijk is one of the founding fathers of critical discourse studies. *Discourse and Power* is a collection of his most important works. The chapter Discourse, Power and Access explores relations between discourse and social power, which is central to this research. The next chapter, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, introduces the notion of CDA, relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks, such as mind control, and describes process of research in CDA.⁶

The thesis utilizes some ideas expressed by Paul Virilio, a French philosopher and cultural theorist, in *Politics of the Very Worst*. He attempts to reveal the hidden side of technological progress and progress in speed, arguing that globalization did not make the world bigger, it does

⁵ Herman and Chomsky, 14.

⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2008).

not provide freedom; instead, it signalizes that the world is moving to confinement. The revolution in communication (including the media) makes the world smaller and erases borders, but it is lethal to democracy.⁷

⁷ Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)/Foreign Agents, 1999).

Chapter 2. Theory and Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Framework. Securitization Theory

This thesis considers the complex process of construction of threat in the minds of the public. None of the classical International Relations theories provide a helpful framework for understanding the process and relationships between the actors involved. Thus, there is a need to resort to critical theories within the discipline. This chapter reviews the theory of securitization. First, it refers to academic sources in order to establish what are the origins of the theory. Then, it proceeds to identifying the main principles of securitization theory, while also applying the specific case selected for the topic of this thesis to those principles. Finally, it explains why utilizing the securitization theory will be helpful for the analysis, also briefly mentioning the limitations this theory typically puts on research and addressing how relevant those restraints would be for this particular work.

Securitization theory is an approach to studying security offered by Copenhagen School of thought. It was first introduced into political science discourse in the 1990s by Ole Waever.⁸ For doing that, he and other scholars of Copenhagen School who contributed into securitization research are widely acclaimed for widening the agenda of Security Studies, taking it beyond the focus on the nation-state security and studying military security only.⁹ According to them, “the issue shows itself as a security problem through the discursive politics of security.”¹⁰ In

⁸ Colleen O'Manique and Pieter Fourie, “Security and Health in the 21st Century,” in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 243-254. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 246.

⁹ Lene Hansen and Helen Nissenbaum, “Digital Disaster, Cyber Security, and the Copenhagen School,” *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 2009): 1156, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27735139>.

¹⁰ Thierry Balzacq, “Constructivism and Securitization Studies,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 56-72. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 59.

securitization theory, the word “security” itself in an act.¹¹ Buzan and Waever summarized the process of securitization as follows:

A security issue is posited (by a securitizing actor) as a threat to the survival of some referent object (nation, state, the liberal economic order, the rain forests), which is claimed to have a right to survive. Since a question of survival necessarily involves a point of no return at which it will be too late to act, it is not defensible to leave this issue to normal politics. The securitizing actor therefore claims a right to use extraordinary means to break normal rules, for the reason of security.¹²

Classical definition of securitization theory thus involves three things: speech acts, an audience, and the objective of legitimizing some kind of extraordinary means in order to protect the referent object from the constructed security threat.¹³ Historically, the referent object is the nation or the state which is securitized as “threatened to their physical or ideational survival and therefore in urgent need of protection.”¹⁴ As Copenhagen School claims, there are three stages an issue can belong to at the given moment: it can be non-politicized - when it is not on the agenda and there is no public discussion about it; politicized - as issue on the national agenda which often becomes a part of public policy and it subject to governmental action; finally, an issue can also be securitized - that is a more “extreme” version of a politicized issue, thus, it has the same characteristics, but it is understood as a security threat.¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹² Cook (2008), in Colleen O’Manique and Pieter Fourie, “Security and Health in the 21st Century,” in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 243-254. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 246-247.

¹³ Andrew W. Neal, “Empiricism without Positivism,” in *Research Methods In Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 42.

¹⁴ Hansen and Nissenbaum, 1156.

¹⁵ Vladimir Dolinec, “The Role of Mass Media in the Securitization Process of International Terrorism,” *Politické vedy: časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá* 13, no. 2 (2010): 9, www.politickevedy.fpvvmv.umb.sk/app/cmsFile.php?disposition=a&ID=18586.

Securitization theory argues that security is a speech act.¹⁶ Securitization includes stating, although sometimes not directly, that a particular referent object is threatened in its existence. The process of securitization includes a securitizing actor, an actor which is presented as a threat, and a referent object - an actor vulnerable to that threat. In this case, the arguments are based on the assumption that there are two processes of securitization going on. First one is a long-standing process of securitizing the Russian Federation, implying that it is a threat to the United States. Although it is uncertain when exactly this process started - perhaps as long ago as the beginning of the Cold War (or earlier, since it would be logical to assume that the Cold War was actually taking place because of mutual securitization) - this process has been going on since way before Donald Trump got into politics; the US government is the securitizing actor in it. Another securitization process going simultaneously with the first one is the following: the securitizing actors include Hillary Clinton, her supporters, and the mass media favorable of her/unfavorable of Donald Trump; the threat here is none other than Donald Trump, who allegedly is an ally of the securitized Russia, and the vulnerable actor is the American liberal democratic regime or the United States as a whole.

According to securitization theory, stating that something is a threat is often followed by claiming a right to take extraordinary (often non-democratic) measures to defeat that threat.¹⁷ The issue is then transferred from the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics.¹⁸ Securitization theory also argues that there is no given, established meaning to security. Security can be shaped and transformed through a speech act and become what the

¹⁶ Baylis, 240.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

securitizing actor says it is.¹⁹ Speech act theory argues that some statements should not be regarded as either true or false, because they do not just describe the given reality; they *do* things; they are «performatives», not «constatives.»²⁰ Securitization theory is seen as one of the most fortuitous approach for research on power politics of security.²¹

2.1.1 Securitization in the Media

Since the concept of securitization was introduced, the views on it have naturally transformed. While initially the governments or elites of the state were assigned with the role of securitizing actor, some scholars started to emphasise the role of the media in the process of securitization. Medialization of the events help promoting an idea that something is a serious problem, making it a widely accepted norm.²² The media's agenda-setting capacity thus acts as a link between the securitizing actor and the target audience, transferring the securitizing effort from one to another.²³ This work considers the media not only as a tool, but also as an actor with its own goals, such as: search for the truth, i.e. supplying the audience with authentic information; surviving and maintaining functionality, thus, earning money; entertaining the audience, etc. The media is not always unbiased and does not always strive to distribute exclusively the truth. The role of the media is uncertain at this point. On one hand, it might be a tool that has served the needs of Clinton and her team; on the other hand, assuming the journalists are independent and the coverage is not forced, but is a product of journalists' personal bias or intentional securitization of Trump, media can be seen as a substantive securitizing actor. Therefore, finding out what

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Vuori, 133.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²² Dagmar Rychnovska, "Securitization and the Power of Threat Framing," *Perspectives* 22, no. 2 (2014): 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24625251>.

²³ Dolinec, 10.

precisely is the role of the media in the process of securitization is another objective of the thesis, and this question will be addressed below.

2.1.2 Elements of Realism and Constructivism in Securitization

While traditional theoretical approaches to studying international politics are of little use when performing analysis in this case, some of their points are relevant to the topic. Securitization theory combines elements of Realism and Constructivism theories of International Relations. It follows the point of the realist theory by seeing states as the main actors in the international system and focusing on power relations between them. In addition to that, Securitization theory relies on the point of survival being the main goal and the dominant interest of the state. Power is relevant here because it serves as a tool for ensuring survival - the more powerful a state it, the more difficult it is to pose a threat to it. However, just to name one of limitations of realism for this research, - it does not believe in performative nature of knowing, which is central to this analysis.

At the same time, just like constructivism, securitization theory argues that there is no “given,” objective reality, and its meaning is depended on how people see the world, and thus can be and is constructed - in this case through the speech act. In spite of the fact that constructivism and realism belong to different schools of International Relations and there are hardly anything similar in them, securitization theory manages to successfully combine precisely those assumptions of the two that are relevant to the topic, which makes it the best fit for the future analysis. It also shares similarities with post-structuralism, specifically in its high attentiveness towards language. Like post-structuralists, securitization theorists also believe in the existence of

the “lense of language” through which people experience everything.²⁴ Moreover, the importance of the power-knowledge relationship is crucial for the research. The thesis is based, among others, on the assumption that those who have the power can control the knowledge, and those who have the knowledge also obtain power.²⁵

2.1.3 Limitations of Securitization Theory

It should be mentioned that the securitization theory has been widely critiqued, and every aspect of it has been challenged.²⁶ The theory indeed has some limitations. The danger of employing securitization theory when conducting critical security analysis is that it shapes the work in a specific way. Neal argues that often when a researcher decides to use this critical theory, all he/she seeks to do is stating that the securitization is an important process, since it is “at the heart of important changes in the social and political life,” and implying its problematization of security which has increased as a problem.²⁷ The analyst thus ends up being loaded with theoretical baggage which is not relevant for his/her research goal.²⁸ However, the objectives of this thesis are not limited to draw attention to stating that the process of securitization is problematic. The one aspect of securitization theory which seems to be less relevant in the two particular securitizing processes considered here is the necessity of a securitizing actor having legitimation of the extraordinary means as the ultimate goal. It appears like securitizing Russia does not necessarily call for transferring dealing with this “aggressor” from the realm of normal politics to the realm of emergency politics; however, it depends on what is considered to be

²⁴ Lene Hansen, “Poststructuralism,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Neal, 42.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

“normal” when it comes to this unique relationship between the two powers - they have hardly ever been free of mutual suspicion and feud, and since 2014 the affairs have been experiencing a new wave of crisis, currently reaching if not the all-time-low, then the lowest point over a few decades.²⁹ Nevertheless, the securitization in this case is not calling for attacking Russia - keeping in mind that, according to securitization theory, survival would be the major goal for the United States, and that violent actions against Russia would take the US very far from “achieving” it. At the same time, impeachment of a president (which has been seen as a possibility and discussed) might be considered an extraordinary mean, especially if it takes part after and due to the mass dissatisfaction of the public, protests and civil unrest.

Another important point is that Copenhagen School tends to focus on textualism, giving most attention to speech and writing and excluding gestures, silence and images. Balzacq, representing the so-called Paris school of security studies, argues that it is unfortunate, since the excluded factors are significant and carry information that “lies beyond the purview of textualism,” which is one of the objectives of securitization research.³⁰

2.2 Methodology. Discourse Analysis

The thesis assumes that the mass media engages in the process of securitization. It is hardly debatable that the media is responsible for forming the public opinion on practically every politicized issue or event, regardless of how much freedom the media in a country enjoys. While free media is supposed to be objective and serve the needs of the public, it often is dependent on

²⁹ Jenna McLaughlin and Emily Tamkin, “Under Trump, U.S.-Russian Relations Hit New Low,” *Foreign Policy*, July 6, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/06/under-trump-u-s-russian-relations-hit-new-low/>.

³⁰ Balzacq, 66.

the government and/or corporations; therefore, it acts in favor of the owners rather than the audience.³¹

This thesis uses discourse analysis as a method of detecting and interpreting securitization in media statements. Discourse analysis is a natural choice when securitization theory is employed, since speech act is in the core of it. Not only the thesis analyses discourse of the media coverage of the case selected, the sources are chosen based on rhetoric of President Trump - his statements, interviews and social media posts. Trump consistently puts labels, such as “hoax” and “fake news,” on the same few media outlets when he is referring to allegedly false information about him promoted and distributed by them, specifically about his connections with and links to the Russian President and his entourage, and the possible meddling of Russian hackers by order of Putin in the United States Presidential election in favor of Trump. The thesis analyses the discourse used in those media outlets when reporting on President Trump in general and specifically, and most importantly, about his possible association with the Russian elites. It also considers the specific way of the same media outlets report the news about President Putin, his administration, and his country.

The detected trends in coverage of President Trump, Russian elites, and the supposed connection between them, can then be fit into a broader context of the Russia-United States relations, helping to indicate current trends in the foreign policies of both powers towards each other. The ultimate point the thesis will provide an evidence to is that denouncing Donald Trump was effective due to the long-standing process of securitization of the Russian Federation by the US political elites through the mainstream American media.

³¹ Herman and Chomsky, 1.

The thesis will use primary source documents - politicians' statements, articles, and reportages; and secondary source documents - academic articles and book chapters. While secondary sources are utilized primarily for theoretic part of the thesis and for defining the key concepts, such as "propaganda" and "hoax," the primary sources are crucial when analyzing securitization language. It is also necessary to resort to secondary sources when providing factual background of the Russia-US relations, without which the said broader context, crucial to the objectives of the thesis, would be unavailable. Since many of the events surrounding current conflict are very recent, it is rather difficult to find academic literature on 2016-2018 events; thus, the media articles would be used as confirmation for some of the facts provided. However, as the thesis itself argues, the media is not always objective in its coverage, and can be biased. This limitation is acknowledged in this work, and none of the conclusions of the thesis are based solely on the information provided by the media, unless it is supported by statistics, hard facts and evidences.

Chapter 3. Relations between the United States and the Russian Federation - Historical Background and Current Events

It is necessary to frame the current relations through providing the historical background and listing the milestones of the past several decades which contributed into current state of affairs. As the thesis argues, denouncing of Donald Trump is possible due to his connections, whether real or “imagined,” to Russian Federation and its president. Even though any foreign election meddling resulting in favor of Trump would not be welcomed, undermining legitimacy of the election results, Trump’s alleged connections with Russia are particularly condemned by the American public. This is due to, first of all, the historic rivalry and tensions, especially during the Cold War, memories of which are still alive in many minds. During the Cold War era, the already existing enmity between the two superpowers had escalated multiple times to the point of nearly bursting into direct violent conflict. However, not only the Americans have been told about the actually existing threats; anti-Communist and anti-Soviet propaganda occurred, as well influencing the way citizens of the United States perceived Russia. Possibly, another reason is the way Russia have been its President are presented to Americans

This chapter takes a closer look at the previous tensions, including the Cold War era, the 90s as the period of relief and hopes for cooperation and improvement of relations, and US relations with Russia under Putin’s leadership, arguing that the said periods have certainly impacted the current relations, and they should be taken into account when analysing today’s complicated affairs.

3.1 The Cold War

The obvious limitation of this section lies in inability to cover every historical event or period of time possibly contributing into current state of affairs between the two powers. It is important however to state that the confrontations have been occurring for centuries, and did not start out of nowhere after the World War II. However, it is obvious that even though the period of Cold War (1947-1989/1991) formally left in the past, the enmity and struggle for power are still going on.

A cold war by definition is a state of conflict in which the parties resort to multiple means of warfare which are short of (direct) violence; there is no direct military action.³² Typical means include various political and economic actions, propaganda, and proxy wars. The Cold War was characterized by both the USSR and the USA resorting to all of the said methods. For more than four decades, the world became “bipolar” due to the power and substantial capabilities of the two superpowers, which allowed them to take control of many other states, or at least make them dependent on either of the bigger powers.³³ Never short of fear and tension, the Cold War escalated, threatening to transform into a conflict of direct violence a number of times, namely during the first five years (before Stalin’s death) and Cuban missile crisis.³⁴ The period is also characterized by constant arms race, which continued even after peaceful resolution of the crisis and created artificial hostility.³⁵

³² “Cold War,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

An important point that is especially relevant to the topic is that during the Cold War, both states used propaganda in public speeches and the media, discrediting the other “side,” usually its ideology specifically, in order to manipulate the public. The information warfare was a part of a more large-scale conflict, and definitely not an insignificant part. According to Whitton, since the very beginning of the Cold War, the Soviet Union started to launch propagandistic attacks on the United States and its authorities - not only the Soviet media, but also the radio and the press of the countries under Soviet influence.³⁶ The author explains the fact that the US responded with attacks of similar nature, arguing that it had to do it to defend itself, since Soviet attacks endangered the American national interests both domestically and abroad.³⁷

When describing the way American media used to function during that period of hostility, Herman and Chomsky argued that anti-communism was one of the filtering mechanisms that shaped the way American media presented information during the Cold War.³⁸ In the media and by the officials, communist regime used to be presented as an enemy, the absolute evil. The authorities used anti-communism as a “national religion and control mechanism.”³⁹ Authors use the example of anti-communist propaganda in press coverage: while legitimacy of American involvement in the conflict was not questioned, and the involvement was presented as something natural, the media criticized Soviet war in Afghanistan and portrayed it as an act of aggression.⁴⁰ The book which described the propaganda model by the two thinkers was first published in 1988, written therefore just a few years before the fall of Communism. In spite of

³⁶ John B. Whitton, “Cold War Propaganda,” *The American Journal of International Law* 45, no. 1 (January 1951): 152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2194791>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁸ Herman and Chomsky.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Herman and Chomsky, 252.

subsequent Soviet Union's loss of influence and power, collapse of the Communist regime, dissolution of the USSR, and change of the world order from bipolar to multipolar (happening since 1960s), the model suggested by Herman and Chomsky is still relevant. Even though initially the argument suggested that the mass media engages in incriminating an ideology, after the first publication Chomsky transformed the "anti-Communism" filter into "fear," making it potentially useful for deconstructing the way mass media functions not only in the United States during the Cold War, but practically in any media environment. Essentially, what the "filtering" argument suggests is: before making it to TV broadcasts or newspapers' pages, the information inevitably goes through five "filtering mechanisms" that transform and shape it. In case of "fear," the mechanism transforms information about any regime, ideology, government or person.

Russia is the legatee state of the USSR; in many ways, it adopted political course of the Soviet Union and, as discussed below, the decisions made by its leaders since the end of 1990s prove that they demand the same respect (or, perhaps, fear) that the other states had for the Soviet Union. Therefore, there is little to no reason to expect the "fear" to go anywhere in the considered case.

3.2 Russia's 90s' Decline And The 00s' Revival

Russian transformation, starting with Gorbachev's perestroika in 1985, has some unique features that are not typical for other states. The fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union happened very soon after the "liberalization" started, with the USSR losing its spheres of influence, obvious weakening of Communism in global sense, and finally the loss of the superpower status, has had an impact on public opinions and attitudes inside Russia. For many Russian citizens, especially

those who belong to older generations, the period of distinctive authoritarian (with elements of totalitarianism) governmental control prior to Gorbachev's initiatives is associated with their country having more power, being greater, and their lives being better in many ways - despite having less freedom and poorer economic conditions of an average Soviet citizen, compared to today's Russian. This is partly because of the 1990s, a period characterized by substantial changes which brought about breakdowns in nearly all politically regulated spheres of life, affecting every Russian.

Due to chaotic nature of 90s Russia's internal affairs, political instability and nearly disastrous state of economy, the fact that the country was able to improve and rise above that chaos surprised the international community.⁴¹ Along with many other thinkers, Mankoff refers to Russia's "revival" in the beginning of the 21st century as a regional security challenge. In his chapter, written in 2010, he describes Putin's Russia as "a sometimes uncomfortable amalgam of Soviet nostalgia, nationalist insecurity and the aspiration to be accepted as a fully fledged member of a new Great Powers club."⁴² While the latter is hard to argue with - Putin's objectives quite clearly include taking back the position of a superpower which Russia's predecessor, the USSR, used to have, - Russia does not want to be "accepted" as an *equal* member of the international community, which became even more evident during Putin's third term as a president (2012-2018). Russia does not aspire to enjoy *the same* opportunities and power as any other state does; instead, it wants other powers to accept it as an independent pole of the newly multi-polar system.⁴³

⁴¹ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Revival," in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 349-358. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 349.

⁴² Mankoff, 349.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 349.

Russia is in fact “sometimes uncomfortable” for other countries for many reasons; one of the main ones is that its willingness to join the “Great Powers club” is combined with the complication of cooperation with Russia. This complexity is rooted in Russian strong sense of national interests and the fact that it is only willing to cooperate if the outcomes of that cooperation are mostly desirable for the state. Of course, one can argue that such cooperation problems are typical for nearly all bigger powers, and that is it not a unique pattern of behavior inherent in Russia. However, what is crucial for understanding the reasons why Russia acts like it does, is the sense of uniqueness and national pride rooted deeply in minds of decision-makers and of the general public of Russia.

Looking at the 90s’ period of economic and political decline in Russia retrospectively and analytically, especially comparing it to other changes of regimes in the world, one could assume that such instability periods are typical for any power going through major modifications.

Economy, ideology, political and social spheres - nearly every aspect of life in Russia had been going through reformation after the collapse of the Soviet system, and there is therefore no surprise that there were some obstacles in the process. However, many citizens did not realize what were the actual reasons for decline of the standard of living. Economic crisis, political instability, and the rise of the criminal activities (such as persuasive gangland violence) made the public feel insecure and created a widely shared feeling of nostalgia for the life under the Communist regime, contributing into decline of public support for Boris Yeltsin government, undermining its legitimacy in the eyes of Russians.⁴⁴ This was partly due to poor media coverage - the supposedly newly free media failed to both provide citizens with valid legitimate coverage

⁴⁴ Mankoff, 350.

or comfort them. On the contrary, nowadays, a one job the Russian state-controlled media is good at is precisely providing the audience with comfort and assure them in stability of the future - whenever anything potentially dangerous occurs, the media is quick to find a way to portray it as insignificant, claim that it is actually beneficial in some ways, - or, alternatively, not portray it at all, completely ignoring the event.

Nowadays, many of those who remember the chaos of the period of decline in the 90s are afraid that if someone who is not Putin (or his protégé) comes to power, the devastation, lawlessness and economic collapses of the post-Cold War Russia would come back.⁴⁵ While understanding that the economic and political state of the country could be better in rather widespread among Russians, the support for Putin is still high because having him as a leader gives Russians a sense of stability.

The Western media was generally much less harsh on 90s' Russia than on the USSR, at times showing Russia some sympathy, not hesitating to emphasise how weak it was. It also made of the Russias and its first president, creating a new set of stereotypes: Russians are portrayed as hot-tempered heavy drinkers and/or tacky oligarchs, yet the "Russian villain" image was still alive and well.⁴⁶

Partly due to a sharp contrast with seemingly weak, indecisive, and seriously ill Yelstin, Putin managed to rather swiftly and successfully re-establish control over the Duma, bureaucracy, local elites and big business, and, last but certainly not least, the media, which has helped him gain and maintain public support of the Russian citizens.⁴⁷ All of this helped Putin to gain

⁴⁵ Mankoff, 351.

⁴⁶ Meagan Day, "Bear, Bolshevik, Buffoon, Spy: The American Tradition of Fearing Russia," *Medium*, August 16, 2016, <https://timeline.com/history-fear-russia-c81656ec36a2>.

⁴⁷ Mankoff, 351.

credibility in the eyes of Russians, creating a strong basis for the subsequent terms of his presidency - including Dmitry Medvedev's term, which is often counted as a part of Putin's presidency due to the fact that two politicians have the same agenda, and Putin has clearly been behind the decisions made by Medvedev as a president.⁴⁸ Moreover, it appears like the main reason why Medvedev came to power was that Constitution of the Russian Federation did not allow one person to be running for president and elected for three consecutive terms.⁴⁹

Furthermore, at least partly, Medvedev owes his success to the fact that he has been presented as Putin's confidant, someone he approves of and supports, since it made Putin supporters endorse him. As a president (and, later on, the head of the Russian government) Medvedev shared Putin's ambitions and followed his steps both in terms of domestic changes and foreign politics - not meeting the expectations of the Western powers, who once hoped to improve relations with Russia when the new president came to power. Medvedev's four years in Kremlin will therefore be referred to as a part of Putin's presidency here as well.

The fact that Putin managed to take a position of close-to-absolute control in his country gave him opportunities to pursue "an increasingly assertive, self-confident foreign policy."⁵⁰ However, there are several reasons for Russian revival beyond Putin's goals and abilities to enable it. One of them is undoubtedly abrupt increase in world energy prices, since Russia is the second-largest oil producer.⁵¹ It allowed Russia to recover from the financial crisis.⁵² However, while Russia's oil production allowed it to rise and leave the crisis behind in the past, the strong dependence of

⁴⁸ Ilan Berman, "Inscrutable Russian Tandemocracy," *The Washington Times*, February 15, 2010, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/oct/15/inscrutable-russian-tandemocracy/>.

⁴⁹ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Chapter 4, "Article 81. The President of the Russian Federation," <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-05.htm>.

⁵⁰ Mankoff, 351.

⁵¹ Mankoff, 351.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Russian economy on energy prices became an obstacle later on, specifically helping it enter an ongoing financial crisis in 2015.⁵³

The decline and revival periods in Russia are seen substantially different in the West. For the United States and Europe, the 90s are seen as a period of stability, since collapse of the USSR left the US as the world's sole superpower - despite the newly multipolar world order, none of the powers has gained enough capabilities to compete with the United States for the leadership at that point, making the 1990s the peak of American prosperity and global influence.⁵⁴ At the same time, the US was not in a state of euphoria as one could expect it to be after the "victory" in the Cold War; its otherwise unshadowed position of power was clouded by the same old problem - nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union might have ceased to exist, but the nukes did not, remaining at disposal of an unstable government of an unstable country. The US therefore had to cooperate with Russia, joining efforts to denuclearize the former Soviet republics and consolidate the weapons inside Russia.⁵⁵ The U.S.-Russian Cooperative Threat Reduction Program was successful, although details are known only by experts on both sides.⁵⁶

It is questionable whether Russia sees the world as unipolar or multipolar; either can explain its behavior. Either it believes in multipolarity, but do not consider the way its treated by other poles fair, and thus claims its right to be a pole as important as the others are; alternatively, it believes in the remaining status of the sole superpower the United States has, understands that this world order is undesirable for it, and tries to confront and balance it with all the means available.

⁵³ Natalie Kitroeff and Joe Weisenthal, "Here's Why the Russian Ruble Is Collapsing," *Bloomberg*, December 16, 2014, <http://bloom.bg/1KoXny5>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁵⁵ Tom Blanton, Svetlana Savranskaya and Anna Melyakova, "Nunn-Lugar Revisited," *The National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 447*, November 22, 2013, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB447/>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

According to Sakwa, quickly after Putin came to power in 2000, his politics provoked the same rhetoric and patterns of thinking as during the Cold War, reviving the idea of Russia as an aggressor.⁵⁷ During his second term as a president, even more politicians and thinkers started to agree that the new Cold War was in the making.⁵⁸ Nowadays, the situation is even more distinct. Putin's first and second terms as a president is characterized by Russia's attempts to find a balance between cooperating with the West, now clearly more powerful and capable, fitting into the new world order, and being independent and autonomous. In 2012, Russia withdrew from the threat reduction program, which illustrates the decline of cooperation.⁵⁹ By the end of Putin's third presidential term, it became clear that his country gravitates towards autonomy rather than cooperation, moving to political and economic isolation and not taking any drastic actions in order to stop this process.

3.3 Relations Under President Obama. Ukrainian Crisis

Despite the early 2000s aspirations and hopes to cease confrontations, Barack Obama and the Russian leaders failed to improve relations between their countries. As Russia invaded Georgia, the disagreements with the US became stronger. The dramatically different stances on and conflict over Kosovo had only worsen the situation. Halfway through Obama's first term, the relations seemed to start improving, with the symbolic agreement for cooperation,⁶⁰ cancellation of sanctions, and the New START Treaty (The Treaty between the United States of America and

⁵⁷ Richard Sakwa, "New Cold War" or Twenty Years' Crisis? Russia and International Politics," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 84, no. 2 (March 2008): 241, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25144764>.

⁵⁸ Sakwa, 241.

⁵⁹ Tom Blanton, Svetlana Savranskaya, and Anna Melyakova, "Nunn-Lugar Revisited," *The National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 447, November 22, 2013*, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB447/>.

⁶⁰ Luke Harding and Matthew Weaver, "Barack Obama Calls for "Reset" in US-Russia Relations," *The Guardian*, July 7, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/07/barack-obama-russia-moscow-speech>.

the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms).⁶¹ However, it did not last, since the two powers started to back different sides of the Syrian war. The ongoing violent conflict is a lot like the proxy wars of the Cold War era; moreover, the Syrian confrontations are potentially posing a threat of a full-scale war between Russia and the US.⁶²

The state-controlled Russian media, both domestically broadcasting and aimed at foreign audience (such as RT), excessively engaged in propaganda, attacking not only the United States, but Obama personally. This is due to personalization of politics. It happens as a general trend globally;⁶³ however, in case of the Russian audience, it is especially true because of the importance of Putin's persona for the Russian public.

One of the events that made the most impact on the state of affairs is the Ukrainian Crisis, perhaps together with Syrian civil war shaping the current problematic Russo-American relations. In 2013, the Ukrainian government provoked mass unrests in the capital when it refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union; it led to the change of the government and constitution.⁶⁴ The new government was not favorable of Russia and did not plan to maintain extensive cooperation with it. It provoked a new wave of unrest, this time of those who lived in the Russian-speaking parts of the country.⁶⁵ The Russian government took

⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, "New START," <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/>.

⁶² Liz Sly and Anton Troianovski, "Fears of a U.S.-Russia Conflict Recede as Trump, Moscow and Macron Dial back the Rhetoric," *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/russia-seeks-to-allay-fears-of-open-conflict-with-the-us-over-syria/2018/04/12/2d2407c4-3e38-11e8-8d53-eba0ed2371cc_story.html?utm_term=.896a32b8522d.

⁶³ Ian McAllister, "The Personalization of Politics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 571-588. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 579.

⁶⁴ Amnesty International, "Amnesty International Report 2014/15. Foreword and Regional Overviews," 2015, 383, https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/AIR15_English.PDF.

⁶⁵ Sabra Ayres, "Is It Too Late for Kiev to Woo Russian-Speaking Ukraine?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 28, 2014, <http://fw.to/mXE2BN>.

advantage of the situation and, claiming it was trying to protect Russian people, interfered with sending its armed forces.⁶⁶ They suppressed pro-Ukrainian opposition in Crimea; later, an illegitimate referendum took place in the region, allegedly resulting in almost everyone voting for unification with Russia.⁶⁷ Those decisions worsened the relations with the Western powers significantly. The reaction of the most of international community was highly negative - sanctions were introduced, aimed at Russian officials and companies, but swiftly having an effect on the country in general; food embargo (including Russia's own counter-sanctions) was especially damaging.⁶⁸ Moreover, cooperation and economic negotiations with Russia were suspended due to its refusal to take deescalatory measures.⁶⁹ Four years later, most of the sanctions are still valid, with the US introducing new ones in 2017 as a punishment for both Ukraine and US election meddling. Many, including President Trump,⁷⁰ argue that the Russian-US relationship is in all-time low.

This is also evident when reviewing the way politicians on both sides speak, and media on both sides reports, about the conflict. The discourse used by officials of the US when referring to Russian actions in Ukraine is consistently negative. A typical way of describing it is calling it a violation, stating that Russia does not respect the international law, is a threat to liberal international order, and is destabilizing.⁷¹ The American media, apart from echoing the same

⁶⁶ Kathy Lally and Will Englund, "Putin Says He Reserves Right to Protect Russians in Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2014, <http://wpo.st/MjsL2>.

⁶⁷ Amnesty International, 383.

⁶⁸ NATO Review Magazine, "Sanctions after Crimea: Have They Worked?" <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Russia/sanctions-after-crimea-have-they-worked/EN/index.htm>.

⁶⁹ European Union Newsroom, "EU Sanctions against Russia over Ukrainian Crisis," http://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/eu_sanctions_en.

⁷⁰ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, August 3, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/893083735633129472>.

⁷¹ See, for example, "Statement by the President on Ukraine," *The White House*, February 28, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/28/statement-president-ukraine>; and "Barack Obama Attacks Russia Involvement in Ukraine at UN – Video," *The Guardian*, September 28, 2015,

labels, occasionally took it much further. From casually calling Putin the new Hitler, to labelling Russia as “Hollow Superpower” or “The Evil Empire” (importantly, just like they did during the Cold War) - almost every major media outlet has discussed the Russian actions in a condemning way.⁷²

3.4 Putin and Trump’s “Friendship”

It should be noted that a basis for meddling accusations is definitely a wide-spread idea of Trump and Putin being “friends,” or them at least having mutual sympathy, liking each other. There are a few reasons why this idea is rather popular, starting from Trump’s favorable Twitter posts in 2013 and ever since, such as:

- “Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Moscow - if so, will he become my new best friend?”⁷³

According to him, he ended up meeting Putin during his visit to Moscow in November 2013, and “getting along with him well;” also, Trump mentioned meeting Putin once before that occasion.⁷⁴

This however does not make them anything more than acquaintances and does not prove an existence of bond between the two men. While Vladimir Putin is known for using his power for helping his “friends” and the meddling would not be surprising if he and Trump really were the it is hard to track an actual, not imaginary/excessively exaggerated tie between them.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/sep/28/barack-obama-attacks-russia-involvement-in-ukraine-at-un-video>.

⁷² See, for example, Philip Rucker, “Hillary Clinton’s Putin-Hitler Comments Draw Rebukes as She Wades into Ukraine Conflict,” *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2014,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hillary-clintons-putin-hitler-comments-draw-rebukes-as-she-wades-into-ukraine-conflict/2014/03/05/31a748d8-a486-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c_story.html?tid=a_mcntx, and “Russia The “Evil Empire” Again,” *USA Today*, January 1, 2018,

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/01/01/russia-evil-empire-again-editorials-debates/988275001/>.

⁷³ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, June 19, 2013,

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/347191326112112640>.

⁷⁴ Andrew Kaczynski, Chris Massie, and Nathan McDermott, “80 Times Trump Talked about Putin,” *CNN*, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2017/03/politics/trump-putin-russia-timeline/>.

As for Putin's remarks on Trump, he has been much more modest when expressing his somewhat positive attitude. Back in 2015, he called Trump a "colorful" and talented politician⁷⁵ - just this was enough for the American media to assume his admiration and, since it was practically a reply to Trump's praising of Putin's leadership skills, it was also enough to make people believe that they are best friends. Two years later, the Russian President paid Trump a compliment about his "strong leadership."⁷⁶

It is evident that the Russian political elites were happy with the results of the 2016 election. Starting with the most obvious sign of it - the celebration and cheering in the Duma right after the announcement of Trump's win is quite an illustrative example.⁷⁷ However, it can be explained by the hopes the Russian parliamentarians had for better cooperation with the new president, who indeed publicly expressed much more positive attitude to Russia than Hillary Clinton did.

Overall, despite the attention, perhaps excessive, Trump and Putin's mutual statements have gotten, there is hardly any proof that there is in fact some kind of connection between the two leaders, beyond the mutual compliments and official meetings that they are supposed to have regardless of their attitudes toward each other. However, there is no proof for the opposite, and a small chance that speculations about a secret agreement between the two politicians made behind the curtains are true exists.

⁷⁵ Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin Calls Donald Trump a "Very Colourful and Talented Man," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/vladimir-putin-donald-trump-very-bright-talented-man-russia-us-presidential-race>.

⁷⁶ Nick Allen, "Vladimir Putin Praises Donald Trump's "Strong Leadership," Claims He Doesn't Read US President's Tweets," *The Telegraph*, March 10, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/10/vladimir-putin-praises-donald-trumps-strong-leadership-claims/>.

⁷⁷ Sergey Syomushkin, "Trump's Victory Welcomed by Cheering in Duma," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26604/3621092/>.

3.5 The Russian Meddling

Right before the 2016 United States presidential elections, American institutions accused the Russian Federation of interference to the elections.⁷⁸ According to them, Russian authorities tried to support Donald Trump, the candidate they were favorable of, by using the Russian state-owned and state-controlled mass media, launched social media campaigns, taking over the social media spaces, and, most infamously, hacked servers of the Democratic National Committee and the Chairman of Clinton's presidential campaign, then leaked them to public to expose Trump's opponent.⁷⁹

Theoretically speaking, it is hard to argue that Russia did not have any motives to engage in meddling. First of all, interference could be considered as an act of revenge against Hillary Clinton, who has made decisions in the past which were harmful to Russia, and during her presidential campaign was much less favorable of Russian than her main opponent. In fact, some Russians shared an idea that if Clinton succeeded and became the US president, it would be much worse for Russian than Trump's victory,⁸⁰ to the point that Clinton would start the World War III - however, it is unclear whether this belief was common among the few political elites which participate in decision-making in Russia - after all, it is not like people's opinion matters to them. As discussed above, the "friendship" between Trump and Putin is exaggerated; however, it is reasonable to believe that Trump indeed intended to improve relations with Russia and be more favorable of it, perhaps treating it with honor and respect the Russian leaders think

⁷⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Background to "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections": The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution," 2016, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

it deserves, taking into account its “special” position on the international arena - something Russia has always desired but never received from the US under its previous leaders. The next possible objective of the hackers could be threatening American democracy, destabilizing the country, and making it weaker.⁸¹ According to Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the objectives of Russian attack included: “to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. We have high confidence in these judgments.”⁸² CIA, FBI, and NSA confirmed these conclusions with confidence.⁸³

Many media outlets, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, have regularly reported on Russian interference, making it their routine and one of the central topics of coverage. In 2018, both periodicals shared a Pulitzer prize for national reporting.⁸⁴ The content of their reports is to be analyzed in the fifth chapter.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Paul Farhi, “The Washington Post Wins 2 Pulitzer Prizes for Reporting on Russian Interference and the Senate Race in Alabama,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-washington-post-wins-2-pulitzer-prizes-for-reporting-on-russian-interference-and-alabama-senate-race/2018/04/16/0915c310-4197-11e8-8569-26fda6b404c7_story.html?utm_term=.5cdc52847826.

Chapter 4. The Mass Media in the United States of America

The power of the media is hard to deny. Even though the media has gone through substantial transformations during the past few decades, it still remains a major source of information about current events, and it very significant when it comes to political processes.

This chapter seeks to do the following: first of all, it gives the overview of theoretization of propaganda, providing definitions of rather complicated and disputable concepts that are central to this work, such as hoax and objectivity. While this chapter is mainly descriptive and might appear as secondary to the research, it is in fact an important part of this work, since assuming that words hold the same meaning for everyone, that the meanings are universal, can be misleading and result in incorrect outcomes of the analysis.⁸⁵

The chapter discusses the problematics of objectivity and bias of journalists. Trump's "fake news" allegations, which are crucial when reviewing the meddling scandal, are also covered here. The chapter reviews general ways used by the media to persuade and manipulate the audience, and attempts to explore the way political propaganda through the media works. It is also discusses whether these ways could possibly be resorted to in the considered case of representation of Trump and Putin in the American mainstream media; however, the conclusive answer to this question would be possible to give only after the discourse analysis to be conducted in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

Taking into account the information and definitions on the concepts which are crucial for critical discourse analysis of the media, the final section of this chapter presents the discussion of

⁸⁵ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, "Strategies for Qualitative Data Analysis," in *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 65-86. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 78.

whether the ideological bias in the American media exists, and if so, what is the nature of that bias. It includes the information provided by non-governmental organizations, which focus on detecting the issues of freedom of expression in the world. Moreover, resorting to another objective account on the issue, it provides summaries of different works of academics who conducted their research attempting to establish presence of bias, subjectivity, and/or propaganda (or lack of those) in the United States' media.

4.1 Propaganda

The word “propaganda” will be used a lot in this work; it is thus important to establish what exactly is labelled as propaganda here, because this term can be extremely misleading. Every attempt to define it resulted in a different outcome.

In Edward Bernays' influential manual “Propaganda,” modern propaganda is defined as “a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group.”⁸⁶ The author argues that propaganda had to be adopted by businesses, politics, and any large undertaking in order to gain and retain support, interest, or money of the public.⁸⁷

According to Bernays, propaganda originates from wartime.⁸⁸ The propaganda during the war was so successful that it was only natural for the elites to apply similar techniques to the problems emerging during the peaceful times.⁸⁹ Formerly, the rulers were the leaders of the nation, i.e. the government. Due to democratization, the masses obtained the power instead; the

⁸⁶ Bernays, 52.

⁸⁷ Bernays, 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

elites had to resort to propaganda, since it is such a powerful tool for ensuring the approval of the masses.⁹⁰

Many of those who attempted to define propaganda also tried to “classify” it in order to give it a more precise and in-depth definition. Aldous Huxley, for example, claimed that propaganda can be “rational” or “irrational.”⁹¹ This distinction is made based on the cause that is espoused. While irrational propaganda is “not consonant with anybody’s self-interest, but is dictated by, and appeals to, passion,” rational propaganda promotes actions that coincide with self-interest of both those who create the propaganda, and those to whom it is addressed.⁹²

This definition appears to be of little relevance when it comes to political propaganda for the following reason. Suppose that the mainstream media of a country broadcasts the information and that would ultimately encourage people to support and vote for a political party A. While it is certainly done in accordance with self-interests of the said party, which wants to gain more support and therefore power, it contradicts with the interests of every other party participating in the election. It also contradicts with the interests of the public, assuming that there are people who would otherwise (without the influence of propaganda) support any party other than A, rationally making a decision in favor of a corresponding ideological preferences/political agenda rather than “fake” positive image of the party A or negative representation of the party B. If applied to the Russia-Trump case, following the hypothesis and assuming that those who create the anti-Russian/anti-Putin propaganda are people who do not want Trump to come to power/stay in power, and the “receivers” of propaganda are the American public, successful

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹¹ Neil Postman, “Propaganda,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42575397>.

⁹² Postman, 128.

promotion of negative image of President Trump due to his connections with Russia would benefit the creators of propaganda, but not the public - at least not the majority of the population. First of all, the voting results of the presidential elections and subsequent approval ratings show that many Americans express support of Trump and his actions as a potential or present President of the US: while roughly 50% of the voters gave their vote to him, his approval ratings have been going up and down, varying from 37 to 44%.⁹³ Propaganda against Trump certainly does not benefit people who share his ideological views and ideas, support his decisions and genuinely want to have him as their president, as it gets in his way and arguably makes his performance as a president less productive, and also undermines his authority.

In addition to that, one may argue that such propaganda does not give any advantage to those who do not admire President Trump either. Of course, propaganda can take many forms, from only presenting information which has a potential to create an exclusively negative image for someone, to muckraking - purposefully digging for “dirt” on someone with the same goal, to presenting unconfirmed information as hard facts, to simply lying. For an average citizen, it is hard to distinguish the truth from propaganda and evaluate the information correctly. The negative propaganda is aimed at every American, including those who already dislike Donald Trump, which makes them vulnerable to perceiving him worse than he deserves it and becoming radical in their judgements. What would actually be “beneficial” for every American, regardless of their political views, is the truth, not a compilation of propagandistic material carefully selected with the intention to create a crafted unjustifiably negative - or positive - image of someone/something.

⁹³ Real Clear Politics, “President Trump Job Approval,” https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/president_trump_job_approval-6179.html.

Finally, assuming that the information in the media about Trump is false if not entirely, than at least to some extent, sabotaging the President and labelling him as someone who cares more about himself, or even about another country (which is considered a foe of the United States by many) than the USA, causes destabilization of the society and the state in general, which does not benefit any of the above mentioned parties “participating” in propaganda. Nevertheless, it might be wanted by Russia (or the Russian political elites, to be precise), since it is possible for it to take advantage of destabilization of the long-standing competitive country.

Another definition of propaganda is provided by Vladimir Pozner. Since he is a journalist who engaged in propaganda during the Cold War, as Pozner himself has admitted, his understanding of this process should be relevant. According to him, propaganda is an attempt to convince - either an individual or a nation - of something; importantly, the objective of those who engage in propaganda is limited to persuading rather than telling the truth, being unbiased, enlightening, or urging the reader to think critically and evaluate the subject matter objectively.⁹⁴ As an example he uses the press coverage of President Putin; for him, both exclusively positive and exclusively negative remarks about the Russian leader count as propaganda.⁹⁵

Moreover, he argues that in English language the term “propaganda” without any exceptions carries a negative meaning in it; propaganda is thus always bad and is associated with lying and fooling the audience.⁹⁶ The reason for that propaganda holding exclusively a negative meaning in English, while in Russian it is not always the case, can be rooted in Americans prioritizing freedom of speech and considering it to be an inherent right. Since propaganda poses a threat to

⁹⁴ Vladimir Pozner, “Vladimir Pozner: Many People Engage in Propaganda These Days - Both in Russia and Abroad,” *Pozner Online Website*, <http://pozneronline.ru/2017/03/18368/>.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

that right, an always-negative attitude towards any kind of propaganda is natural, because it is strongly associated with brainwashing, lying, and fraud.

Importantly, propaganda does not always include lying - presenting false information as the truth intentionally. Pozner's definition of propaganda actually refers primarily to creating a negative or positive image of something/someone; to do that, one does not necessarily engage in lying - sometimes it is enough to present carefully selected information and completely ignore alternative points of view, since reporting on them diverges with the goal of a propagandist journalist. Moreover, it is rather easy to recognize the lies in the media and prove that the information presented by the propagandist media is wrong, in its turn creating a negative image for that media outlet, killing the trust of the audience for it and, potentially, making it less relevant and popular - therefore, less profitable, which creates a threat to the media outlet and the journalist working for it. In contrast, it is harder to blame the media for exclusively/mainly positive/negative coverage and absence of critical thinking - after all, criticism is not always an essential element of journalism. Objectivity, on the other hand, is, but there is hardly a way to prove that one is not objective - it usually does not go past accusations of subjectivity and bias; moreover, the concept of objectivity is abstract, somewhat ephemeral, and largely idealistic, and many would argue that absolute objectivity is an element of utopia, as no one is ever completely objective due to the nature of human beings. The "ideal type" of objectivity of reporting refers to "uninterpreted presentation of the physical and social world."⁹⁷ In fact, a journalist's interpretation of objectivity does not have much to do with the ideal type definition; instead, it

⁹⁷ Ralph E. Hanson, "Objectivity and Narrative in Contemporary Reporting: A Formal Analysis," *Symbolic Interaction* 20, no. 4 (1997): 387, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/si.1997.20.4.385>.

refers to presenting the factual information from an “unbiased” or neutral (non-positive and non-negative) account.⁹⁸

The question widely discussed and debated by both the journalist community and the academics is: how possible is it to remain completely “unbiased” for a reporter? Since journalists engage in storytelling, they inevitably resort to interpretation of the social world. The way they interpret the reality depends on their way of thinking, background, own knowledge, understanding of a stock of knowledge shared by the potential audience, and many more factors. Moreover, an “objective” story is said to be fair when it is presented from the two accounts, often oppositional to one another, without giving preference to either of them. For the American media, generally speaking, it typically means covering the events from both liberal and conservative accounts.⁹⁹

There is therefore a scale, a gradation of a kind, of independence and objectivity of journalists. Some reporters engage in propaganda on condition of dependency from people who either directly tell them what to write, or unspokenly, but obviously, want them to present an event in a certain way. Other journalists are independent reporters - there is usually no one to dictate them what to write, thus, no top-down censorship. However, the problem of self-censorship remains for these reporters, as does the fact that they still tell their audiences how to think and what to do, just like their less “objective” and free colleagues.

As for the American media in particular, the main changes in reporting have happened due to the change of the audience - as it became wider due to the industrial revolution. Prior to that, the US newspapers tried to satisfy the needs of a very limited group of people who could afford a rather expensive daily subscription - mainly the business elites, attempting to let them read what they

⁹⁸ Hanson, 387.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

wanted to.¹⁰⁰ Starting after 1830s, the much more diverse audiences created demand to widen the previously narrow perspectives.¹⁰¹ Selling more copies, making the advertisements in the newspapers reach a bigger audience and, therefore, earning more money, became a primary objective of the media. Resorting to the “neutral” account can therefore be explained not only by the journalists’ good will and aspiration to inform the audience with facts instead of spreading false/biased information; a desire to make a media source more profitable is also of big importance. Without a doubt, providing a neutral or objective account is the best way to reach the widest possible audience.¹⁰² Another reason why it is easier for media to be “objective” is that it is much faster to report the facts rather than engage in shaping the information in a way that would fit a certain agenda, contribute into creating an image. Moreover, there is an issue of legality. Journalists and media sources can be sued for libel, which is not only expensive and time consuming, but also entails long-term/permanent negative consequences the media’s reputation, the audience’s trust in it, and therefore - more financial losses.

Hanson suggests that the fact that a journalist is objective in his/her writing does not necessarily make this writing unbiased.¹⁰³ This is because the journalist’s understanding of objectivity might differ significantly from the reader’s understanding of objectivity. It brings us back to the problematics of the encoding/decoding model, i.e. the difference in perception of journalists and readers, occurring due to different levels of awareness and familiarity with the “codes.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Hanson, 387.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 388.

¹⁰⁴ Van Dijk, 86.

For journalists, objectivity is often not about reality; writing objectively simply means writing as closely to the official sources' statements as possible.¹⁰⁵ Reliance of the “objective” journalists purely on official sources, which often are statements of the officials, is problematic. The bias may start its influence on the final product if a journalist tries to deconstruct or interpret the official statement, which is often necessary for a number of reasons. First of all, a reporter may have to provide a background on the official source, in case it is crucial for understanding the context of the news piece. Second of all, as this chapter has argued, the selling power of the news is extremely important for journalism; as the readers often prefer to read interpretations and even opinions over dry facts, perhaps without even realizing it, it is necessary to keep the entertaining factor for a media outlet to gain/not lose the popularity. Moreover, there is a factor of literary character of the media outlet, a specific format its audience is often used to and is therefore “demanding” from its journalists.

4.2 Hoax

Generally speaking, and especially for this work which engages in discourse analysis, word choice, precisely the discourse chosen and used when referring to political scandals, is very important, since it is responsible for creating a certain impression in the public mind. President Trump himself has referred to the media coverage of the Russia-Trump alleged connections as a “hoax” multiple times on different stages of investigations:

- “The Russia-Trump collusion story is a total **hoax**, when will this taxpayer funded charade end?”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Hanson, 388.

¹⁰⁶ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, May 9, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/861713823505494016>.

- “Now that Russian collusion, after one year of intense study, has proven to be a total **hoax** on the American public, the Democrats and their lapdogs, the Fake News Mainstream Media...”¹⁰⁷
- “[...] money to Bill, the Hillary Russian "reset," praise of Russia by Hillary, or Podesta Russian Company. Trump Russia story is a **hoax**”¹⁰⁸

What exactly is a hoax, and can the media attention to this case really be considered as one?

Hoaxes are widely defined as: “something intended to deceive or defraud”, “to trick or dupe.”¹⁰⁹

It is common to put a “hoax” label on fictional stories such as urban legends; however, this definition might be confusing, since those stories are often passed from one person to another in good faith, meaning that the person who passes the information may actually believe that it is true. Media hoaxes refer to creating a fictitious story in order to mislead the audience. They should be distinguished from false information published due to honest mistakes in journalist investigations or delusions - what makes a false piece of information a hoax is that it should be published with an *intention* to trick the audience.¹¹⁰

Hoaxes can be created not only with intention to fraud the readers by tricking them into acting in a certain way, or influence their behavior and decisions. In case of political propaganda, a suitable example of a hoax would be consistently and widely publishing false information about a presidential candidate with the intention of lowering public support for him. While this is a typical thing in political journalism, sometimes the main goal of media hoaxes is actually

¹⁰⁷ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, January 6, 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/949616329463615489>.

¹⁰⁸ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, March 28, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/846536212362018816>.

¹⁰⁹ Fred Fedler, *Media Hoaxes* (Iowa City: Iowa State University Press, 1989): xii.

¹¹⁰ Fedler, xiii.

entertaining the audience rather than influencing their views and behavior. Fedler argues that this is the usual intention of media hoaxes; this makes them “a form of practical joking [...] on a grand scale.”¹¹¹ However, it appears like President Trump does not see the Russian media “hoax” as a joke or a form of entertainment. For him, it is rather a personal attack, almost organized, as if many media sources collectively decided to consistently conduct these information “attacks.” Hoaxes are often created because of the need to continue to make profit, especially in conditions of today’s increased competition, with not only multiplicity of the media outlets, but also online sources like blogs, news webpages, and social networks.

What the majority of definitions of hoax seems to agree on is the importance of *intention to mislead* and, of course, the information being false - at least for the most part. Therefore, before labelling the meddling scandal as a “hoax,” the important questions to answer are: were the reported connections between Russia and Trump (and Russian support and rooting for him) actually true, or was the media publishing the false information; and what was the intention of publishing that information.

This work holds no intention to answer the first question - after all, many people have spent more than a year in attempts to give a definite answer to that, and it still remains uncertain - some say there is no way to find that out; others are not sure; some are very confident with the results of their investigations - however, there seem to be as many definite positive answers as there are negative ones. Moreover, it is not that important for the objectives of this work. What it intends to do, among other, is answering the second question - what was the intention of the media reporting Trump? Is he right and it is attacking him personally, is it just reporting in the name of

¹¹¹ Fedler, xii.

providing the truthful information to the audience? Or is it more complicated than the U.S. president understands - or at least publicly declares?

One of the key ideas is that if a hoax is created, it is often done for financial purposes.

Regardless of whether the media coverage of the Russian meddling was a hoax (which is to be established in the next chapter) the influence of profitability factor on media coverage should be discussed.

4.3 Financial Factor

This thesis is written with no intention to argue that the only or even the primary reason for the very fact of coverage of, or the specific way of covering, something related to Trump is to create a negative image of him. The motives can be diverse; one of the ones worth mentioning is certainly the selling capacity of the newspapers. This section is devoted to explaining how the need to sell more copies might have driven the reporters to cover the subject matters in a specific way.

Without a doubt, it was (and still is) financially beneficial to write about Trump's candidacy (and now presidency), since it appeared to be the one thing that each and every American had talked about in 2016. People were hungry for information, and supply and demand of the news are creating each other. The more the media covers something, the more people are informed about it and want to know more about the subject matter. People in charge of the media outlets knew that Donald Trump's face with one of many of his highly controversial statements on the cover would probably sell more copies of the newspaper than anything else - perhaps with the exception of Trump and Putin's duo appearing on the cover together, especially as the United

States were approaching the elections, when the rumors about Russia's meddling in the elections started to become more and more widespread.

On the other hand, Trump's name can also make a business less profitable. An example of it is the new line of hotels which belongs to Trump Hotels will not bear his name.¹¹² The decision to name it "Scion" was made because the targeted group of clients is the younger generation, people of which are less likely to be favorable of the President.¹¹³ A problem faced by some advertisers is Trump's social network presence, in particular on his favorite one - Twitter. The company, despite its popularity, fails to make any profit. This is partly due to some companies' refusal to launching their campaigns on a platform so closely associated with Trump.¹¹⁴ Moreover, some of the retailers refused to continue selling Ivanka Trump's products,¹¹⁵ which is certainly connected to her father's actions and statements.

It is important to keep in mind that news is a commercial product, and newspapers are businesses usually controlled by corporations.¹¹⁶ The goal of those corporations is to generate profit for their shareholders.¹¹⁷ Obviously, newspapers need to maintain large circulation figures in order to stay profitable since they make money through sales.¹¹⁸ Some of the typical (and mostly productive) ways to increase sales include: new formats, extra sections (usually entertainment ones), and puzzle quizzes.¹¹⁹ Bignell states that due to large competition the quality of newspapers dropped,

¹¹² Shivani Vora, "A New Trump Brand Not Named for Trump? Yes, Meet Scion," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/travel/donald-trump-hotels-new-name-scion.html?_r=0.

¹¹³ Vora.

¹¹⁴ Jana Kasperkevic, "How In The World Is Twitter Still Not Making Any Money?" *Marketplace*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.marketplace.org/2017/10/25/tech/why-twitter-not-profitable-money-trolls-users>.

¹¹⁵ Kasperkevic.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Bignell, "Newspapers," in *Media Semiotics. An Introduction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002): 80.

¹¹⁷ Bignell, 80.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

and previously “good quality” newspapers have become more like popular mass-market ones. Today, they write more about sports, entertainment, and lifestyle, other than news on politics and economy, or foreign news; the objective is therefore shifted from informing to entertaining.¹²⁰ According to Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model, the media in the United States has consistently been influenced by the business and political elites of the country. The authors argued that one of the main factors determining what is printed is material profit and advertisement. In this model, the actual news are marginal and generally unimportant, and acting as a “filler”, and the main objective of a reporter is drawing the attention of the audience to advertisements.¹²¹ The authors also make a point about unacceptability of publishing controversial information which contradicts with the common notion. “In addition to discrimination against unfriendly media institutions, advertisers also choose selectively among programs on the basis of their own principles.”¹²² However, this idea is not necessarily always true, since in some cases there is no one “common notion,” one opinion which is shared by the majority of people. Just by looking at the results of the presidential elections, it is evident that the approval of Trump’s presidency is roughly half of the voters; this fact excludes the possibility of “common notion,” since there is no unity, no largely prevailing set of views and opinions among the audiences. What it means in this particular case is that, for instance, while half of the people would want to see critical coverage of the President, others would not enjoy this content and perhaps label it as “fake news.”

While it makes sense to expect someone who supports a presidential candidate to not buy a newspaper which is critical of him, it is questionable whether in the age of digital media such

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹²¹ Herman and Chomsky, 19.

¹²² Herman and Chomsky, 17.

person would not click on the link to the article of the said newspaper just to take a look at the “other side’s” discourse - after all, it would not cost him/her anything but a few minutes of time. Essentially, one of the main goals of a journalist who is working for a popular media outlet is to write and publish something as appealing and promising - or as disturbingly intimidating - as possible, in order to sell more papers, which would make more people see the advertisement. In its turn, it makes placing ads in that newspapers more attractive for businesses, making the prices for that rise. It therefore supposedly does not matter what is published as long as it makes people buy a newspaper, or, what is more likely to happen today, click the link to view the article.

Decades later, even with the face of modern journalism going through changes every single day, this argument is as relevant as at the time of Herman and Chomsky’s writing. In spite of a large portion of the audience turning from buying their daily newspaper from a newsstand to visiting its website every morning from their mobile device, the paper’s survival is still highly dependent on advertisement - the difference is that nowadays it is not only printed between the articles, but also placed on the webpages - usually as a clickable link to the object of advertising.

The numbers prove that reporting on Trump and everything Trump-related has had a positive impact on the media business. For example, in 2016, CNN (interestingly enough, one of the “fake news” media outlets, according to Trump) had a \$100 million profit *extra* to what it usually made on television and digital advertising revenues during a typical election year.¹²³

While it is not only thanks to Trump, but also due to the intense confrontation between him and Clinton, CNN definitely should be grateful to the then-candidate for at least part of the increased profit. CBS chief executive Les Moonves also stated that writing and broadcasting about Trump

¹²³ David Folkenflik, “AT&T Deal For Time Warner Casts Renewed Attention On CNN,” *NPR*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/10/25/499299869/at-t-deal-for-time-warner-casts-renewed-attention-on-cnn>.

is extremely profitable, saying that the candidate “may not be good for America, but [he is] damn good for CBS.”¹²⁴ It confirms the fact that the media coverage of 2016 elections was if not only a competition for readers, viewers, and profit, then at least this competition is definitely a significant factor.

In critical moments, people crave information; there is thus no surprise that the media outlets take advantage of it during the campaigns, elections, and times of political unrest and mass discontent with the government. Profit-orientation not only determines what topics, events, and statements are covered; it also affects the way they are covered. The same applies to covering the Russian meddling scandal. When it comes to media coverage of Russia/Russian President in general, it is also undoubtedly profitable, since Russia is traditionally seen as an aggressor or a competitor of the US by many. Here, the appeal to emotions of the audience, namely fear, patriotism, or national pride, works to create an artificial crisis/critical moment, attracting the audience for potential profit.

4.4 Political Hyperreality and the Media

There is a view that people who are exposed to modern information sources exist in *hyperreality* - a concept defined as the most developed form of simulation.¹²⁵ In semiotic analysis, it refers to people’s inability to distinguish truth or reality from simulation of them, or from fantasy. Such simulations tend to become more important and more real for the audience than the reality they intent to simulate; as a consequence, a simulation starts to destroy the original, and people start

¹²⁴ Callum Borchers, “Yes, Donald Trump Has Been Good for the Media Business,” *The Washington Post*, October 25, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/25/yes-donald-trump-has-been-good-for-the-media-business/?utm_term=.c42335df4a07.

¹²⁵ Garder J. Torikian, “Against a Perpetuating Fiction: Disentangling Art from Hyperreality,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 102, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jaesteduc.44.2.0100>.

to prefer the illusory over the authentic. An important feature of hyperreality is that it is not *entirely* “fake”/fictitious; instead, the reality and the fiction exist in a complex fusion, which blurs the lines between the original and the fake, making it hard or even impossible to separate one from another for human consciousness. It is often argued that hyperreality is a product of the new era of possibilities of the mass media, which emerged due to technological developments and the widespread ownership of technological means it brought about.¹²⁶ The expectations and excitement for supposed liberation of information failed, making it even more complicated to find the truth in the boundless expanse of sources of information at one’s disposal instead. Nowadays, there are many sources of that one comes across, both when intentionally looking for data or even accidentally - for instance, on Twitter, or social media of similar nature. While supposedly making the access to information easier, and the media freer, it also creates chaotic atmosphere, in which separating the facts and “simulations” of facts becomes practically impossible. Other than the new media technologies which increased the information production, other factors influencing the development of hyperreality include the rise of capitalism and consumerism, and the reliance upon god and/or “the center” in Western thought¹²⁷ - both points are particularly true for the United States.

The term “hyperreality” embraces many concepts, and thinkers disagree even on the most fundamental of them. This is partly due to the fluidness of the term “reality” itself - the Oxford dictionary defines it as “the quality of being real or having an actual existence,” but the dictionary definitions are often too simplistic.¹²⁸ Baudrillard argued that reality is nothing but a

¹²⁶ Garder J. Torikian, “Against a Perpetuating Fiction: Disentangling Art from Hyperreality,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 102, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jaesteduc.44.2.0100>.

¹²⁷ Nicholas Oberly, “Reality, Hyperreality,” *The University of Chicago Website*, 2003, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/realityhyperreality.htm>.

¹²⁸ Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd Edition Online, 1989.

fairy tale, stating that nowadays it is “impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real.”¹²⁹

How does the idea of the new dimension of reality contribute into studying media coverage of the political events? It might seem like since hyperreality usually addresses embellishing, painting something as more appealing than it actually is, it is not really related to the considered cases. Moreover, a rather reasonable question emerges when the concept of hyperreality is blended in with securitization theory assumptions: why would one prefer to believe that there is a real threat to him/her, if the reality is either that there is nothing threatening the referent object, or the threat is not as significant as it is portrayed? The crucial thing here is that one does not make a rational choice when it comes to the way he/she perceives the reality while existing in hyperreality. Theoretically speaking, it is possible to evaluate the information presented and decide whether to believe it or not; however, in practice one inevitably absorbs some of the statements and ideas which eventually form one’s opinion.¹³⁰ Moreover, when it comes to the idea of being threatened by the outside actor, there are factors like fear, rage, patriotism, and the instinct of self-preservation which might make one more alarmed and concerned, prone to thinking that it is better to be safe and protect themselves/their country from a potential threat regardless of the details. In “Propaganda,” Bernays argues that the appeal to emotions is in fact one of the most productive methods of forcing ideas on the audience and urging people to act a certain way.¹³¹ Paul Virilio, a French philosopher and cultural theorist, shares this belief, stating that the government has historically abused the media and other sources of information for its purposes, and there has been a change in its methods towards appealing to emotions: “we have

¹²⁹ Baudrillard in Oberly, “Reality, Hyperreality.”

¹³⁰ Torikian, 102.

¹³¹ Bernays, 116.

gone from advertisement to propaganda and from propaganda to the occupation of emotional territory.”¹³²

To understand how hyperreality applies to the media images in the United States, it is important to consider the compatibility with the values most Americans share - despite the citizens being seemingly more and more divided with progress of time. Regardless of whether or not one decides to believe in the said American “psyche,” mentality or national mindset, the political culture is hard to argue with. The belief in freedom of speech and press has been one of the national ideas for the Americans. The majority of Americans believe that having the freedom to criticise politicians is vital for maintaining functional democratic system in the country.¹³³

According to Umberto Eco, the key to understanding the American psyche is to take into account the obsession with the “real thing.”¹³⁴ This obsession requires a demand for reality that is “too real,” actually making the lines between reality and illusion more blurred. The philosopher stated that hyperreality is a peculiarly American phenomenon. Through the process of American reconstruction, something real becomes identified with purely artificial, with the original quickly fading away, making room for its copy.¹³⁵ In extreme cases of hyperreality, an original of the present tends to be replaced with the artificial of the past, since in many cases it tends to be more appealing to the audience.

¹³² Virilio, 28.

¹³³ Pew Research Center, “Large Majorities See Checks and Balances, Right to Protest as Essential for Democracy,” March 2, 2017, <http://www.people-press.org/2017/03/02/large-majorities-see-checks-and-balances-right-to-protest-as-essential-for-democracy/>.

¹³⁴ Robert J. Ball and J. D. Ellsworth, “The Emperor's New Clothes: Hyperreality and the Study of Latin,” *The Modern Language Journal* 80, no. 1 (Spring, 1996): 79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/329060>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

Wilson, writing her article on hyperreality of the United States, summarizes the idea of political hyperreality as the following: “the inability to differentiate between reality and the reality presented to [the Americans] by different candidates or parties or ideologies.”¹³⁶

In fact, Donald Trump has created quite a persona for himself - although it is an identity which exists only in hyperreality. It appears like he has to constantly reassure himself, his audience, and the American public that he exists and his existence is of great importance. Whether one sympathizes and supports Trump or not, one has to admit that his constant resorting to talking about himself, both online and offline, created a bolder and more high-profile persona than any other presidential candidate (or, perhaps, any other US president). His presidential campaign was largely based on creating and simultaneously exploiting this persona, and it had its impact on the outcome of the elections. Without a doubt, the media played a fundamental part in that creation.

Wilson also suggests the following:

We, as Americans in an age of entertainment imagery deeply invested in presenting simulations of reality pleasing to us, find ourselves not only tempted to accept these simulations as objectively real, but are *conditioned* through our cultural heritage and upbringing to invest our faith and hope in fictional narratives that thereby have deep resonance in actual, objective reality.¹³⁷

Her argument is therefore also based on the assumption about importance of either American mentality or culture - including political culture, which is very much intertwined with the mass/popular culture. The author then emphasises that the problem of division of the US citizens into two groups - Trump and Clinton supporters, Republican party supporters and Democratic party supporters, - is a product of the two-party system. In fact, one of the well-known and

¹³⁶ Kristen Wilson, “The Time Traveller’s Guide to Hyperreality,” *Medium*, October 27, 2016, <https://medium.com/the-secret-history-of-america/the-time-travelers-guide-to-hyperreality-8653bfad38a8>.

¹³⁷ Wilson.

widely discussed disadvantages of the two-party system is the almost inevitable polarization of stances on most of the issues, and therefore complexity of finding a middle-ground, making a decision that would satisfy if not everyone, than the majority of the citizens.¹³⁸

Arguably, this sharp ideological division between the 2016 candidates and voters goes hand in hand with the division of the main media outlets. The point about the twoness leads us to the discussion about bias in the American media: is there ideological bias, and if so, to what degree, and what is the nature of that bias?

4.5 Bias of the Media in the United States. Trump’s “Fake News”

The freedom of press is one of the values massively shared by the American citizens.¹³⁹ The media in the United States is believed to have a responsibility to remain objective, fair, balanced, and detached.¹⁴⁰ The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, *or of the press*; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances,”¹⁴¹ guarantees freedom press in the United States, therefore also securing the citizens’ access to information.

Importantly, for the amendment to be effective, accessible sources of information have to be numerous and diverse.

Traditionally, protection of the First Amendment, freedom of press and “objectivity” of reporting on the official events have been some of the fundamental values for the Americans. Despite the

¹³⁸ David C. King, “Congress, Polarization, and Fidelity to the Median Voter,” *Harvard University*, https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/dking/Extreme_Politics.pdf.

¹³⁹ Hanson, 385.

¹⁴⁰ Hanson, 387.

¹⁴¹ Legal Information Institute, The First Amendment, https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment.

already mentioned Americans' appreciation of the right of freedoms of speech and press,¹⁴² the media in the United States is far from being completely free. Out of all actors engaging in research on rights of the reporters, the most respected and well-known one is Reporters Without Borders, an international non-profit non-governmental organization which promotes freedom of press globally. Due to its size and financial capabilities, it is able to conduct a detailed, sophisticated and nonetheless transparent research on current press freedom records in 180 countries. It is based on quantitative data of abuse and acts of violence against journalists and a questionnaire completed by media professionals, lawyers, and sociologists in different countries.¹⁴³ In 2018 report, the United States is ranked 45 out of 180 countries, compared to 43 in 2017.¹⁴⁴ The report states that the press freedom in the country is currently under increased attack, and the first year of Trump's presidency has worsened the conditions for journalists and threatened their right to report. This is due to his consistent accusations of the mainstream media, the use of "fake news" label, and attempts to deny access to a number of media outlets to the White House.¹⁴⁵

He argued that the media is an enemy of the public:

- "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!"¹⁴⁶

When suggesting a way to detect propaganda in discourse, Bill Kovach argues that the repetition of loaded language is typically a sign of attempts to persuade and manipulate.¹⁴⁷ Even though he

¹⁴² Pew Research Center.

¹⁴³ Reporters Without Borders, "Methodology," <https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology>.

¹⁴⁴ Reporters Without Borders, "United States," 2018, <https://rsf.org/en/united-states>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, February 18, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/832708293516632065>.

¹⁴⁷ Bill Kovach, *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2011): 92-93.

refers to the use of the same words or phrases by multiple sources, and in the considered case President Trump is the source of discourse, the rule still applies, since the “fake news” allegations have been replicated by both mainstream media and “pro-Trump” media outlets, making the American public read and hear these two words on a daily basis. “Fake news” became the 2017 word of the year according to Collins dictionary.¹⁴⁸ Since 2016, the word experienced an unprecedented usage increase of 365%, all thanks to the American president.¹⁴⁹ Taking into account that the “fake news” is (or was, originally) usually used when referring to media coverage of the Russian meddling investigation, this collocation is not only popularized, but is still linked to the Russia-Trump scandal in minds of many Americans. The effect of Trump’s “fake news” narrative should not be underestimated. Not only he used all the platforms available to him for routinely calling the media’s critical reporting “fake news,” but he also has multiple media outlets broadcasting the same message. Namely, FOX News, which he often compares the “fake news media” to, in order to make a point about FOX News being the unbiased, honest, truth-reporting outlet, shaming the mainstream media for not reporting the same way:

- “Just heard Fake News CNN is doing polls again despite the fact that their election polls were a WAY OFF disaster. Much higher ratings at Fox.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Collins Dictionary, “Word of the Year 2017,” <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty>.

¹⁴⁹ Collins Dictionary.

¹⁵⁰ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, March 20, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/843803115044454402>.

- “[...] Why doesn’t @washingtonpost report the story of the women taking money to make up stories about me? One had her home mortgage paid off. Only @FoxNews so reported...doesn’t fit the Mainstream Media narrative.”¹⁵¹

The Russian government tends to accuse the Western powers and Western media outlets of being paranoid towards Russia and thus creating artificial tension between the countries. The media-controlling elites also transmit this idea through the Russian press, television, and internet sources. For instance, RT posted a translated article by Karl-Jürgen Müller, published in a German online newspaper *Weltexpress*. Müller essentially argued that Western media’s anti-Russian “propaganda” made NATO states delusional regarding Russia and its motives, and created a paranoia.¹⁵² Moreover, according to the author, anyone who dares to express a different point of view is shut up by the people with “mainstream” views, and the EU and the United States should focus on their internal problems instead of holding into their fear of Russia.¹⁵³ Since this chapter attempts to elaborate on the concept of objectivity of the media, it has to be mentioned that RT is particularly known for its bias and lack of objectivity - given that it has initially been founded as a media outlet which offers an “alternative” (in fact, almost always exclusively pro-Russian) approach to world events in the Western countries and the United States. Thus, it is not offered to obtain from questioning the motives and agenda behind this publication - especially considering the strange choice of the original German source due to its small size and audience reach. Regardless of the article’s clear objection to the “mainstream”

¹⁵¹ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, February 20, 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/965971586913374208>.

¹⁵² RT, “*Weltexpress*: Anti-Russian Propaganda of the West Keeps Resembling Paranoia,” republished article from *Weltexpress*, March 21, 2018, <https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2018-03-21/Weltexpress-antirossijskaya-propaganda-Zapada-vsyo>.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Western media approach, which at times makes journalists, people in power and “regular” citizens improperly mistrust whatever information is provided by said media sources, the author’s opinion is not entirely irrelevant.

Chomsky also argues that this obsession is “a joke,” which to him is funny because it is not a secret that the United States not only interferes in foreign elections, including Russian elections (namely under Clinton’s administration), but also overthrows governments it is unfavorable of.¹⁵⁴ He rhetorically asks why do Democrats focus so much on Trump’s alleged connections and his initial intention to improve relations with Russia, also arguing that reducing tensions with Russia would not only be beneficial, but of vital importance for the US.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, while this obsession continues, it diverts attention from much more serious and potentially destructive policies that should be talked about, criticized, and prevented or reversed. For him, Russian meddling is “hardly a justification for allowing Trump policies to slide by.”¹⁵⁶

According to Pozner, it is not Russia that is “demonized” in the Western media; it is Putin specifically.¹⁵⁷ That in fact appears to be true, and there is a number of rather obvious reasons for it. First of all, it happens due to the fact that President Putin has been in power for almost two decades, which was more than enough for a strong imaginary bond between Putin and Russia to appear in minds of the international community, which often makes the borderlines disappear, putting an equation mark between the Russian president and his country - Putin therefore has become Russia, and Russia has become Putin. Moreover, personalization of politics is typical for

¹⁵⁴ “Noam Chomsky on Democracy Now!” YouTube, April 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOz1-5do49o>.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Vladimir Pozner, “On Propaganda in the Western Media, Vladimir Putin, and New Space Bridges,” *Pozner Online Website*, <http://pozneronline.ru/2014/10/9225/>.

democratic societies. The fact that during Putin's presidency there has been little to no political opposition in Russia, he has high approval ratings, and 2018 election outcome show mass support for him (even though it is highly questionable whether the available public poll results and election results should be trusted) certainly do not help to create an impression of a democratic society with diverse stances and freedom to express their views - this makes it easier for foreign actors to generalize, portraying Russians as a whole, with a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Moreover, there is a factor of subjective importance of Putin's authority for the Russian citizens (i.e., as discussed above, the fact that a lot of Russians see him as a "savior" and believe that Russia's "revival" from the chaotic 90s happened only thanks to him) and the objective significant influence Putin has on decisions concerning both internal affairs and foreign policies.

The American media's "obsession" with Russian allegations has a potential to create mass paranoia and panicking, which would destabilize the nation. It is certainly not beneficial for the government of the country. Combined with the fact that the American public was also essentially divided in half - considering practically 50/50 vote during the presidential elections and public polls on approval of Trump and Clinton - it is fair to say that 2016 elections and events surrounding it made the American nation more unstable, especially keeping in mind the subsequent mass protests.¹⁵⁸ Regardless of whether Trump or Clinton was to come to power, they both would have to deal with discontent of the American public. The scandal about Russian meddling in the elections has without a doubt caused some damage to Donald Trump; however,

¹⁵⁸ Tim Walker and Andrew Buncombe, "Anti-Trump Protesters Fill Streets Across the US in Fifth Day of Demonstrations against the President-elect," *Independent*, November 12, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-elections/donald-trump-president-protests-los-angeles-new-york-chicago-day-five-a7414261.html>.

since the United States' government, and thus the U.S. as a whole, is considered as a securitized actor, this "threat" coming from Russia is aimed at the country and the nation, not one particular politician.

The media's emphasis on that one rather small part of Trump's objectives as a president, which evidently initially included reducing tensions with Russia, is problematic for many reasons. The new American president, arguably in attempt to show that accusations of his alliance with/sympathy for Putin and his country are false, started to frequently speak publicly about Russia in a negative light. To mention just one of many cases, he claims that policy towards Russia under his administration is much less tolerant and soft than it was before:

- "Crimea was TAKEN by Russia during the Obama Administration. Was Obama too soft on Russia?"¹⁵⁹
- "I have been much tougher on Russia than Obama, just look at the facts. Total Fake News!"¹⁶⁰

These frequent negative comments on Russia, although inconsistent and somewhat diluted by positive ones, can be seen as a threat towards the country, especially by the Russian government, which is known for its suspiciousness and tendency to see other states as (potential) enemies.

Overall, it is safe to say that these statements do not contribute into reducing the tensions between the two powers.

A question of whether the major media outlets have the liberal bias is discussed and argued upon constantly, and there have been some attempts to conduct an academic research on the issue in

¹⁵⁹ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, February 15, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/831846101179314177>.

¹⁶⁰ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, February 20, 2018, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/965943827931549696>.

order to measure the bias. As already mentioned above, lack of objectivity for an American journalist typically means reporting on something/someone either from only liberal account or only conservative account. According to Groseclose and Milyo's research, there is a strong liberal bias in news content of the majority of big media outlets in the US.¹⁶¹ *The New York Times* received a score far to the left; *The Washington Post* is also on the left of the spectrum. At the same, many journalists and thinkers state that the US mainstream media is unbiased, or at least tries to be; some also argue that there is Republican bias, although no analytical evidence is provided to that.¹⁶²

The discussion on the impact of the age of hyperreality on the role of the mass media is relevant here. Some thinkers of the past argued that the "new" mass media would provide a platform for communication - or at least would have a potential to do it. For instance, Marshall McLuhan argued that the new media technologies help the society to evolve and obtain a greater communication potential.¹⁶³ On the other hand, there were those who held a dramatically different stance on the subject matter - for example, Baudrillard saw the mass media as a non-communicative force, which uses its capabilities - or is used by those in power - to control and enforce the ruling elites' will on mass populations.¹⁶⁴

It is rather common to believe that the new media technologies and the access that most people have for numerous sources on information make the media freer, and propaganda either less likely to occur, or less likely to brainwash the audience. Indeed, it seems like an expected outcome, since current information availability (at least in democratic states) create a better basis

¹⁶¹ Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (November 2005): 1191, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098770>.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 1196-1197.

¹⁶³ Oberly.

¹⁶⁴ Oberly.

for freedom of press and expression, compared to when people have access to only a few media sources - it was easier for the government and journalists to manipulate the readers. However, it is not universally true. Virilio argues that the progress does not bring liberalization. According to him, people are constantly told that every time progress in speed is made, democracy will follow, but the opposite is often true.¹⁶⁵

This is relevant to discussion of globalization, gradual vanishing of the borders both in terms of trade and travelling, but also when it comes to creation of cyberspace, which has no borders yet impacts the relations between the countries significantly. In the age of new media, first of all, many national media outlets are available internationally; also, there are media outlets that do not belong, and are not attached to, any country in particular, with the audience reach knowing no national borders. The seeming freer nature of the 21st century global media environment is an illusion which is pleasant to believe in. Virilio argues that bringing the populations together in extreme ways would actually cause conflict rather than love,¹⁶⁶ and the modern media is perhaps an example of it.

Overall, it is clear that Trump's win in the election has affected not only political climate in the country, dividing the nation, but also the media environment. It comes with no surprise that the president's complicated relationship with the American media and excessive criticism of it has influenced the way it operates. As stated above, first of all, the complete absence of bias is unrealistic and barely can be found; also, according to multiple sources, the media in the United States is generally not short of ideological bias. It is clear that bias against foreign actors, namely Russia, exists in the American media, and has existed for decades. The securitization of Russia

¹⁶⁵ Virilio, 19.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

was possible and had happened before. When it comes to “internal” ideological bias, i.e. liberal or conservative, whether the liberal bias in the US media had existed prior to 2016-2018 events or not, those events have brought about negative changes, threatening the journalistic objectivity, already fragile in its nature. The next chapter shall analyze the discourse used when describing the Russian meddling and Trump-Putin connections in order to establish if the mainstream media engages in the securitization of both Russia *and* Trump.

Chapter 5. The Mainstream Media's Securitization of Vladimir Putin's Russia and Trump's Presidency. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

5.1 A Note on Selection of the Specific Sources for Analysis

President Trump is famous for using his Twitter account as a platform for making highly controversial statements on a daily basis. It might appear like Twitter, as a source of information to base analysis on, is not legitimate and significant enough. However, President Trump's activity on Twitter is a unique case. First of all, he is a very active user, posting from two accounts - his personal one (@realDonaldTrump) and the official account of the President of the US (@POTUS). The impact of his Twitter use is significant in many ways; he is believed to be partly responsible for a drastic increase of the number of new Twitter users, as well as active monthly Twitter users, adding 9 million active accounts worldwide, 3 million of them in the US.

¹⁶⁷ Twitter is also a platform that allows interacting with other users, replying to posts and engaging in conversations, which could be what the public wanted - communication and dialogue, as well as debates and arguments, are in demand in times of general disagreement and division of the nation which occurred due to the election and its results.

¹⁶⁷ Kasperkevic.

However, just two or three months later, the “Trump bump” ended, with Twitter losing 2 million followers; some explain it with the fact that many came to the platform to the social network to follow Trump, and his frequent posting (around 5 times a day on average) is exhausting.¹⁶⁸

Donald Trump himself expressed his believe that his active use of Twitter helped him to get to the White House: “I doubt I would be here if it weren't for social media, to be honest with you,” he stated when referring to people, both his official advisers and the general public, urging him to stop using Twitter, or at least start “tweeting” with more moderation.¹⁶⁹ He also emphasized that he uses social media because it lets him to communicate with the public directly, not via the “filter” of the media.¹⁷⁰ According to Trump, Twitter allows him to “take care” of critique he is receiving directly, not through the media outlets, many of which he tries to avoid due to their alleged bias against him - the President is convinced that he is treated unfairly by them.

He is followed by nearly 50 million people, and each one of his posts is thus seen and reacted to by a massive number of users. The audience reach of his Twitter account is larger than that of many media outlets; the reasons for that include that, first of all, unlike printed media and television stations, it is available internationally and free of charge, and the audience often does not have to get out of their way to see his statements, since they appear on users’ timeline.

President Trump covers a lot of topics in his tweets, from official announcements (the most typical thing to be posted by the government officials online, and something posting of many politicians is limited to); personal opinions on issues both connected with governance and completely unrelated to it; and even threats and offensive statements, whether to his opponents -

¹⁶⁸ Kasperkevic.

¹⁶⁹ Financial Express, “Donald Trump Touts Twitter Use as Key to White House Win,” October 23, 2017, <https://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/donald-trump-touts-twitter-use-as-key-to-white-house-win/902426/>.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

typically Clinton and Obama, or, which is much more important and potentially dangerous, foreign officials/leaders of the nations.

One of the things President Trump consistently refers to is the “mainstream” media’s coverage of his presidency, such as reports on public support and approval of his candidacy or particular actions and decisions made, evaluation of those, or covering potentially provocative matters - for example Trump’s connections with the Russian political elites. By doing this, he has popularized the term “fake news,” essentially referring to every piece of information in the media which he saw as biased, subjective, or written with a certain goal of changing people’s attitude.

Unsurprisingly, all the so-called “fake news” happen to be unfavorable of President Trump, potentially contributing into creating a negative image of him - whether personally, his actions as a president, or his administration.

In order to establish whether there are particular media sources which President Trump accuses the most, a “search” function on Twitter was used. Through that, it has been found that there are in fact such outlets, and quite a limited number of them. They include *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *CNN*:¹⁷¹

- “Somebody with aptitude and conviction should buy the FAKE NEWS and failing @nytimes and either run it correctly or let it fold with dignity!”¹⁷²
- “So many stories about me in the @washingtonpost are Fake News. They are as bad as ratings challenged @CNN. Lobbyist for Amazon and taxes?”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, June 27, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/879682547235651584>.

¹⁷² Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, January 29, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/825690087857995776>.

¹⁷³ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, July 25, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/889673743873843200>.

- “The failing @nytimes has been wrong about me from the very beginning. Said I would lose the primaries, then the general election. FAKE NEWS!”¹⁷⁴

The reasons why *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* are chosen for the analysis are simple. First of all, all of the articles of these periodicals can be found online and are thus available for analysis. *CNN*, on the contrary, is a television channel, and not all the information is provided in textual form, which makes it harder to detect mentions of Trump, Putin, and Russia. Moreover, the choice is limited to these two for the sake of consistency and compliance of the sources for the analysis.

5.2 Securitization of Vladimir Putin’s Russia and Donald Trump in American Mainstream Media

5.2.1 Securitization of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation

Securitization cannot take place in a vacuum; there should always be a certain context prior to this process, which would allow a securitizing actor to convince an audience that a securitized actor is a threat. This section argues that the securitization of Putin and his country, which happened before the 2016 interference scandal, allowed the media to successfully securitize Donald Trump’s candidacy and presidency.

In its turn, securitization of Russia itself was without a doubt possible due to Cold War propaganda, and the fact that the negative image of the USSR/Russia have never really stopped being painted by the American media. As discussed in Chapter 3, even though the US-Russia relations have had periods of easing of the confrontations, they were not enough for changing

¹⁷⁴ Donald J. Trump, Official Personal Twitter Account, January 28, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/825328817833123840>.

of the agenda-setting patterns in the media. Therefore, the American media has been quite consistent with the way it reports on President Putin and his country.

Even when acknowledging Putin's achievements and strength, the media still often portrays him as a "bad guy." There are some tendencies, popular labels to put on Putin and Russia. They originate from something that is called packages in securitization theory.¹⁷⁵ These packages give a meaning to an issue. Media packages are complex. At their core, there is a "frame" - largely overlooked pre-existing sets of ideas, values, and sentiments on a subject matter; they determine what is at issue.¹⁷⁶ The frames are typically constituted by ideas/views that are similar but vary from each other to some extent, allowing some controversy within the package. The package offers a number of symbols so that frame can be "summarized" and addressed in short by bringing up a related "deft metaphor, catch phrase, or other symbolic device."¹⁷⁷

In the considered case, a "frame" is Russia as the US' rival, antagonist, threatening and dangerous. Most common and relevant of symbols provided by the frame the are discussed below. Note that the subsequent sections include not only pre-election interference articles, but also those published after the scandal emerged, since the securitization process is still going on, and the framing for securitization needs to be maintained in the media.

5.2.1.1 Vladimir Putin as a (Powerful) Autocrat and Revisionist

Securitizing actors do not always discredit a referent subject by assigning negative qualities to it.

For example, Putin is often painted as a powerful politician who knows what he is doing; nevertheless, in this case "powerful" often goes hand-in-hand with "power-hungry," someone

¹⁷⁵ William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (July 1989): 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780405>.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

who strives for more influence and capabilities, and is looking for it abroad, trying to take someone else's power rather than reforming and strengthening his country from within. The otherwise positive remarks are often accompanied by judgemental statements; for instance, when Putin is called strong and powerful, it is followed by a statement about illegitimacy and overall wrongness of the means of his achievements.

The New York Times refers to Putin as a “hero for the world’s populists, strongmen and others occupying the fringes of global politics, both left and right.”¹⁷⁸ He is also called “the most influential man in the world” - in a title of the article, somewhat provocative and debatable, clearly intended to capture a potential reader’s attention.¹⁷⁹ Putin is “a brilliant and reckless figure” of the global movement to more authoritarian regimes, as put by David Brooks in his *The New York Times* article.¹⁸⁰ *The Washington Post* argues that “Putin [...] is the **strongman** par excellence;” that he is the world’s favorite **dictator**, and calls Russia a **revisionist** power.¹⁸¹ According to *The New York Times* editorial board, Putin’s current actions in Syria and elsewhere is nothing but an “obsessive quest to make Russia great again has fueled instability and reawakened political suspicions and animosities that faded after the fall of the Soviet Union.”¹⁸²

5.2.1.2 Vladimir Putin / The Russian Federation as an Aggressor

¹⁷⁸ Steven Lee Myers, “The Poison Putin Spreads,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/sunday-review/the-poison-putin-spreads.html>.

¹⁷⁹ David Brooks, “Vladimir Putin, the Most Influential Man in the World,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/02/opinion/vladimir-putin-most-influential.html>.

¹⁸⁰ Brooks.

¹⁸¹ Christian Caryl, “How Vladimir Putin Became the World’s Favorite Dictator,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/05/08/how-vladimir-putin-became-the-worlds-favorite-dictator/?utm_term=.0bcd30355448.

¹⁸² The New York Times, “Vladimir Putin’s Dangerous Obsessions,” March 19, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/19/opinion/vladimir-putins-dangerous-obsession.html>.

“Aggressive” seems to be one of the American media’s favorite labels when describing Putin’s foreign policy. The Ukrainian crisis is especially convenient for this rhetoric, as it is easy to create a certain image for Putin - an image of someone who is ready to use violence and military force to achieve his goals, and acts out of his anger and wickedness instead of containing them as the international order requires.

As for the concrete examples, *The Washington Post* reports Putin’s “**aggressive** use of covert action.”¹⁸³ Its article also suggests that “The West must make Mr. Putin pay for his **aggression**.”

¹⁸⁴ *The New York Times* unsurprisingly contributes to this tendency as well. The periodical routinely calls Putin “**aggressively** provocative abroad,” and an “**aggressive** reformer keen on making Russia a genuine economic power”¹⁸⁵ - again, this can be seen as a Cold War/revisionism reference.

Of course, Putin’s actions in regards to Crimea annexation and Ukrainian crisis are most often labelled as aggressive as well: “since late 2013, Russian policy toward Ukraine has become ever more **aggressive**.”¹⁸⁶ “Russian aggression” has become a common expression in articles of both periodicals: “...the loss of more territory to **Russian aggression**,” “Ukraine needs strong Western

¹⁸³ David Ignatius, “Putin Has Finally Gone Too Far,” *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/putin-has-finally-gone-too-far/2018/03/15/a3a5c3a0-2890-11e8-bc72-077aa4dab9ef_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.fd02016a2449.

¹⁸⁴ The Washington Post, “The West Must Make Mr. Putin Pay for his Aggression,” August 28, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-west-must-make-mr-putin-pay-for-his-aggression/2014/08/28/0eaa39a0-2eea-11e4-994d-202962a9150c_story.html?utm_term=.1940b6da465d.

¹⁸⁵ Ruchir Sharma, “Aggressive Abroad, Putin Is Cautious at Home,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/20/opinion/putin-russia-economy.html>.

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance, The New York Times, “The Fantasy Mr. Putin is Selling,” June 22, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/opinion/the-fantasy-mr-putin-is-selling.html>, and Stefan Wolff and Tatyana Malyarenko, “Remember the Cold War? Putin Has Brought It Back,” *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/03/19/remember-the-cold-war-putin-has-brought-it-back/?utm_term=.045d68fa5103.

support to fend off **Russia's aggression**,” “...respond to **Russian aggression** around the world,” “...decrying **Russian aggression** in Ukraine and Georgia.”¹⁸⁷

5.2.1.3 Vladimir Putin / The Russian Federation as a Threat / Danger

The press often discusses how much of a real threat is Putin's Russia: to the United States, NATO, liberal order, American democracy, etc. *The New York Times* has published articles which claim that Russia is the main threat for Pentagon.¹⁸⁸ The newspaper also accuses Trump of “bizarre fascination with Mr. Putin” when stating that he “refuses to acknowledge that Russia poses a security **threat**” to the United States.¹⁸⁹ The Russian interference situation is reported to be “highlighting a foreign **threat**,” which left American democracy “**dangerously** vulnerable.”¹⁹⁰ *The Washington Post's* journalists are as radical with their judgements of Putin's actions. Arguing that the Russian leader brought back the Cold War, they state: “Many remember Russia's Cold War strategy of invading, **destabilizing** and **intervening** in other countries' governance. Putin has apparently once again made this his policy.”¹⁹¹ The frequent direct links to the Cold War imply that Russia is not different from the “Evil Empire” the Soviet Union was; the USSR was dangerous, and so is its legatee state. The periodical writes on Russian

¹⁸⁷ The Washington Post, “Ukraine Needs Strong Western Support to Fend off Russia's Aggression,” February 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ukraine-needs-strong-western-support-to-fend-off-russias-aggression/2015/02/06/2f6af16a-ae25-11e4-abe8-e1ef60ca26de_story.html?utm_term=.1aa35a63e659, Josh Rogin, “For John Bolton, Russia is Part of a New “Axis of Evil,” *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2018/03/28/for-john-bolton-russia-is-part-of-a-new-axis-of-evil/?utm_term=.10ae3537c9f4, and

Richard Perez-Pena, “Britain Expels 23 Russian Diplomats Over Ex-Spy's Poisoning,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/14/world/europe/uk-russia-spy-punitive-measures.html>.

¹⁸⁸ The New York Times, “The Pentagon's Top Threat? Russia,” February 3, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/03/opinion/the-pentagons-top-threat-russia.html>.

¹⁸⁹ The New York Times, “Who Will Listen to Democrats' Warning on Russia?” January 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/opinion/democrats-warning-russia.html>.

¹⁹⁰ Amanda Taub and Max Fisher, “Russian Meddling Was a Drop in an Ocean of American-Made Discord,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/russia-us-election.html>.

¹⁹¹ Wolff and Malyarenko.

interference and lack of adequate response: “Waiting any longer would be an acknowledgment that we are willing to tolerate this national security **threat** and even permit it to become more **dangerous**.”¹⁹² The Editorial Board of the newspaper stated that Putin “has evolved into a **dangerous rogue** who **threatens** the stability and peace of Europe.”¹⁹³

Overall, the Russian leader is systematically portrayed in a negative way in the two considered newspapers. No actual alternative, “positive” points of view were found. There are some rather positive remarks on Putin’s leadership skills, but usually in context of him abusing these skills for wrong ends. There also are some statements that Russia is not *as much* of a threat as some think - however, it is not because Putin/Russia is not cruel, but because the country is not nearly as powerful as the Soviet Union used to be during the Cold War, and simply has no capabilities or motives (yet) to be threatening survival of the US.¹⁹⁴ Speaking of the Cold War references - recent Russian decisions and actions are often compared to those of the USSR decades ago, trying to connect them and perhaps imply that Russia is still dangerous.

5.3 Securitization of Donald Trump via his Connections with Russia

American mainstream media has liberal bias, as suggested by a number of researchers. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* in particular have been proven to be biased.¹⁹⁵ If this

¹⁹² Mike Rogers and Rick Ledgett, “Four Steps to Fight Foreign Interference in U.S. Elections,” *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/four-steps-to-fight-foreign-interference-in-us-elections/2018/02/14/fb99b7a0-11c1-11e8-8ea1-c1d91fcec3fe_story.html?utm_term=.98b97f7d97e5.

¹⁹³ The Washington Post, “The West Must Prepare for a Wounded Putin to Become Even More Aggressive,” July 30, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-west-must-prepare-for-a-wounded-putin-to-become-even-more-aggressive/2014/07/30/d80efcd8-1804-11e4-85b6-c1451e622637_story.html?utm_term=.8906551d01b2.

¹⁹⁴ Daniel V. Drezner, “The Most Dangerous Moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis?” *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/04/11/the-most-dangerous-moment-since-the-cuban-missile-crisis/?utm_term=.5549251b5c8e.

¹⁹⁵ Groseclose and Milyo, 1192.

is true, we can also expect bias against Donald Trump, a Republican, in them. Stating that Trump is connected to Russia and is favorable of President Putin is a functioning way to discredit him in the eyes of the audiences of the mainstream media. This is due to consistent securitization of Russian leader - see examples of the securitization discourse in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* provided in the previous section.

5.3.1 Putin and Trump’s “Friendship” in the American Press

The two periodicals tend to assume President Trump’s love for Mr. Putin. The two politicians are frequently called friends in the articles. As was mentioned earlier, both presidents have given the media a few reasons to assume their sympathy towards each other, for instance, mutual compliments to each other’s leadership skills; however, those reasons are arguably not enough to take any supposed connections they may have to the point of commitment, or even blind admiration Trump allegedly has for Putin. See, for example, the “bizarre fascination with Mr. Putin” which determines the American President’s decisions, according to *The New York Times*,¹⁹⁶ or the “bromance” label: “Trump’s **bromance** with Putin appears to be back on track,”¹⁹⁷ “the **bromance** seems to have started in 2013,” or a statement highlighting not one, but a few trends in liberal media coverage of the two men: “Findings by the American intelligence community that Russia **had intervened** in the election on Mr. Trump’s behalf seemed further evidence of a **bromance**, if not something more **sinister**.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ The New York Times, “Who Will Listen to Democrats’ Warning on Russia?” January 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/opinion/democrats-warning-russia.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Peter Baker and Neil MacFarquhar, “Trump and Putin Agree to Seek Syria Cease-Fire,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/02/world/europe/trump-putin-syria.html>.

¹⁹⁸ The New York Times, “Mr. Trump’s Fickle Diplomacy,” April 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/opinion/mr-trumps-fickle-diplomacy.html>.

One may argue that these “friendship” and “bromance” statements are nothing special, and the authors of the articles are just using these words to colorfully portray the on-again off-again improvements in the relations between Russia and the US; however, these labels are unique to reporting on relations between Putin and Trump specifically, and has never been noticed during Obama’s presidency, including during the times of de-escalation of tensions.

The Washington Post does not that much rely on portraying Putin and Trump as friends. Instead, many articles claim that Trump wanted to be Putin’s friend and lied about them being in good relationship, while it is likely that they have not met prior to Trump’s election. One of the articles argues that Trump wants to be Putin’s friend, but this desire is one-sided, as the Russian leader has no friends.¹⁹⁹ According to the newspaper, when Trump stated that he and Putin had good relationship, he was nearly bragging - for him it was a way of “puffing up his importance.”²⁰⁰ Another article half-jokingly reports on their meeting: “it was like a father meeting his offspring” (Putin being the father, of course).²⁰¹ *The Washington Post* also states that Trump is “full of lies,” pointing out at him first saying that him and Putin had a great relationship, yet later saying “I never met Putin, I don’t know who he is.”²⁰² Therefore, while the way of covering their relations is different to that of *The New York Times*, the periodical still uses a link between the two presidents in order to discredit Trump - just painting him as a liar and Putin’s admiror

¹⁹⁹ Christian Caryl, “Trump Wants to Be Putin’s Friend. Putin Doesn’t Have Friends,” *The Washington Post*, July 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/07/05/with-friends-like-putin-who-needs-enemies/?utm_term=.81ece250076d.

²⁰⁰ Philip Bump, “Roger Stone’s Trumpian Self-promotion is not Helping him with Robert Mueller,” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/04/02/roger-stones-trumpian-self-promotion-is-not-helping-him-with-robert-mueller/?utm_term=.3b3a68b74340.

²⁰¹ Charles M. Blow, “Putin Meets his Progeny,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/10/opinion/trump-vladimir-putin-security-meeting.html>.

²⁰² Blow.

instead of his friend, which is even worse. If Trump indeed was a friend of Putin, it would have an upside of possible improvement of relations with Russia; on the other hand, Trump's lying makes the nation question his competence to govern, and blind admiration of someone like Putin, who has a bad reputation - thanks to long-standing securitization - is certainly not welcomed.

5.3.2 Questioning Legitimacy of Trump's Presidency

Because of this "love"/"friendship," Trump is allegedly unable to make right decisions in regards to Russia, and has to/wants to play by Russia's rules. It is not rare that the articles would admit that Trump's administration is doing a right thing, like renewing sanctions and introducing new ones. Nevertheless, the considered two media outlets do not approve of his actions regardless, since these seemingly positive remarks are often done in context of Trump's fail to take measures that are harsh *enough*. It can either be seen as "softness" - he admires Russia too much to go against it - or the opposite, stubbornness, since he does not listen to his advisors and domestic actors pushing him for appropriate punishment for Russia.

For instance, President Trump made a phone call to congratulate Putin with his 2018 election win, despite the US officials' warnings to not do it. The Washington Post informs its audience about the leaked White House documents in which Trump is strongly advised to not congratulate Putin. In this article, Gerson argues that these warnings originate from desperation of an official who leaked it. According to him, someone took a risk and revealed the truth about Trump's "cozy relationship with a strategic rival," - apparently, cozy enough to ignore the warnings.²⁰³ In other articles, it is emphasised that Russian elections results are falsified, and Trump's

²⁰³ Michael Gerson, "The 'DO NOT CONGRATULATE' Leak Shows the White House is Panicking," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-do-not-congratulate-leak-shows-the-white-house-is-panicking/2018/03/22/f3970984-2df2-11e8-8688-e053ba58f1e4_story.html?utm_term=.639faa9b515b.

congratulations look like he is supporting falsification.²⁰⁴ *The Washington Post* also states that Trump has “defiantly refused to criticize Vladimir Putin in public, even as he’s authorized increasingly hawkish policies to counter Russian bellicosity.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, in an article about ten worst things Mr. Trump has done, the periodical of course mentions Russia, and not once: “[Trump] has dismissed Russian interference in the 2016 election. During his trip to Asia, Trump said he really believes that when Vladimir Putin tells him Russia did not interfere in the 2016 election, Putin believes it. This is patently absurd;”²⁰⁶ the article also condemns Trump’s attacking of FBI and the intelligence community, which is, again, connected with the investigations on Russian meddling.²⁰⁷

The New York Times reports Trump ignoring the Russian meddling and not taking any measures despite that fact that not only the 2016 interference was confirmed, but it continues in 2018. The officials who warned him about it are mostly appointed by Trump himself, and he seemingly has not reason to not believe them; however, he failed to take any measures to stop violation which “strikes at the heart of the democratic system.”²⁰⁸ It is suggested that this is because “he is giving Russia a green light to tamper with the 2018 elections.”²⁰⁹ Trump is thus portrayed as someone

²⁰⁴ Jenna Johnson and Anton Troianovski, “Trump Congratulates Putin on his Reelection, Discusses U.S.-Russian ‘Arms Race,’” *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/trump-congratulates-putin-on-his-reelection-kremlin-says/2018/03/20/379efd0-2c57-11e8-8dc9-3b51e028b845_story.html?utm_term=.31c341dad7a7.

²⁰⁵ James Hohmann, “The Daily 202: Visuals and Ego Motivate Trump to Take a Harder Line on Putin,” *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/03/30/daily-202-visuals-and-ego-motivate-trump-to-take-a-harder-line-on-putin/5abd97ba30fb042a378a2f6b/?utm_term=.435a1a223626.

²⁰⁶ Marc E. Thiessen, “The 10 Worst Things Trump Has Done in his First Year in Office,” *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-10-worst-things-trump-has-done-in-his-first-year-in-office/2017/12/29/2446d9f6-eca8-11e7-b698-91d4e35920a3_story.html?utm_term=.55cdbcea3ffa.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ The New York Times, “Why Does Trump Ignore Top Officials’ Warnings on Russia?” February 14, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/opinion/trump-officials-warning-russia.html>.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

who is, first of all, irrational, but also ignorant and carefree, prioritizing his own interests over those of the country he leads. The periodical also states that Donald Trump is a threat to democracy, since he is the first candidate to meet not one, which is already a reason to be concerned, but all four criteria of a dangerous authoritarian leader: “1. The leader shows only a weak commitment to democratic rules. 2. He or she denies the legitimacy of opponents. 3. He or she tolerates violence. 4. He or she shows some willingness to curb civil liberties or the media.”

²¹⁰ According to the newspaper, Trump is “far more inclined to accept the Russian president’s assertions than those of his own intelligence agencies.”²¹¹

Even when *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* columnists do not directly state that Donald Trump is more likely to trust and obey Putin than rely on his own administration/advisors/nation, one can agree that it is systematically implied by the way the newspapers report on the Russian interference and Trump’s way of dealing with it. President Trump is presented as Putin’s fan, admirer, or friend, who wants to be liked by him and thus is too soft on Russia.

²¹⁰ Nicolas Kristof, “Trump’s Threat to Democracy,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/10/opinion/trumps-how-democracies-die.html>.

²¹¹ Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Trump Says Putin ‘Means It’ About Not Meddling,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/11/world/asia/trump-putin-election.html?_r=1.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This work has analyzed securitization of Russia by the American media. It has argued that the media not only presents Russia as a threat; it also implies that securitization has been so consistent, frequent and long-standing, that it is now possible to securitize other actors through connecting them with the securitized Russia. The thesis has employed the methodology of discourse analysis, which is a natural choice when having securitization and speech act theory as a theoretical framework. The process of securitization, i.e. constructing an image of a referent subject as a threat or danger, through the use of language has been examined in the thesis. The way mass media manufactures news, as well as the possible reasons for it, are covered in Chapter 4 of this work.

Attention is paid to issues that are significant to political science and security studies, such as political mass media representation, propaganda, ideological bias of the media, and, most importantly, the ongoing rivalry between the two powers which is maintained not only by the decision-makers of the countries, but also by the mass media of both of them. The American mainstream media's role for the thesis is dual: first of all, as has been established, it promotes the idea of the Russian Federation as an aggressor and rival of the United States. Moreover, it provides a proof that the rivalry still exists, as it is echoing and reflecting on the opinions and attitudes of both political elites they align with and of their audiences. As argued in Chapter 3 of the thesis, the audiences are used to the media presenting foreign actors as evil - this is particularly true for the United States' ideological rival, the USSR. Chapter 5 provides evidence that Russia is still presented as an enemy of the US, the West, and the liberal international order; the Ukrainian crisis and Crimea annexation fit perfectly into this narrative, and are thus widely

discussed in a strongly negative light. The same media outlets are emphasising Trump's connections with Russia, or his admiration on it, in order to discredit him, question his competence, legitimacy of his presidency, and adequacy of his decisions.

6.1 Answering the Research Questions

1. How is Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation, and Donald Trump presented in the American mainstream media?

Vladimir Putin is presented as a strong, authoritarian leader, who serves as an example for other autocrats - many of which have a potential to threaten the international liberal order. Russia is portrayed as an aggressor; Putin - as a power-hungry revisionist. When the media covers the Ukrainian interference, Russia is painted as disrespectful towards the international community and threatens the peaceful, lawful world order; when it comes to the US election meddling, Russia threatens American democracy and the country as a whole.

Trump is, first of all, presented as Putin's friend or ally. When the newspapers question existence of their friendship, they still have no doubt about Trump's positive attitude towards Russia, and imply that it necessarily is a negative thing. On this basis, the media outlets express doubts about Trump's ability to govern, and state that his presidency overall, and decisions regarding Russia in particular, are a threat to American democracy.

Therefore, the fifth chapter of this thesis provides an evidence that Putin's Russia is securitized in the American mainstream media, and that Trump, who allegedly acts in favor of Putin rather than the United States, is also portrayed as a threat to his country and its democratic system.

2. Why is this representation influential and has an impact on consciousness of the audiences of those media outlets?

First of all, there is a crucial factor of long-standing securitization of the Soviet Union by the Western governments and mass media via speech acts. Opposing the Soviet Union, its aggression, power-hunger, and evil communist regime used to constitute ideology of the Western powers, especially of the United States, which used to be the USSR's main enemy. After collapse of the Soviet Union, the narratives became mixed, and the portrayal became - the aggressive Russia became the poor, backwards, and miserable Russia, traumatized and recovering from losing the Cold War, - yet, still a nuclear power and therefore a potential threat. The representation have never been positive per se. Since the ambitious and persistent Putin coming to power and the 00s' "revival," plus conflicts in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, the media portrayal of Russia resembles more and more of portrayal of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The media confirms the stereotypes in mass consciousness created during the Cold War era; it is much easier to imply that someone is a threat if it indeed used to be a threat in the past, and if it used to be the main thing on the national agenda for decades. When it comes to negative representation of President Trump, since the audiences of the liberal newspapers are likely to not be favorable of him at the first place, there is no surprise that they willingly believe in his tandem with Putin and ability to put this "alliance" over the country's interests.

Another reason is the Americans' belief in the freedom of press. They are used to the idea that the American media is free and unbiased. Russian mass media, for instance, is either state-owned or state-controlled and engages in propaganda via lying; the US media is not unbiased either, but the nature of this bias is more under-the-radar. It is not plainly pro-government; some media outlets have ideological bias, either conservative or liberal. Moreover, as discussed above, creating a negative image for someone is much less obvious and harder to detect than lying.

Hyperreality, people's inability to tell the real and fake apart, occupies the modern media environment and makes it easier for the media to propagate, and harder for people to avoid being manipulated.

3. What does it indicate about the current US-Russia relations?

Essentially, the American media is back to the same patterns of coverage as during the Cold War era. Even if President Trump is taking it too far when he is stating that the relations between Russia and America are in all-time-low, the tensions are escalating. Those who hoped that Trump's presidency will bring about more opportunities for cooperation must be disappointed. The Russian media is in its turn highly unfavorable of the United States, often portraying it as a power-hungry controlling state which seeks to oppress other actors on the international arena, trying to remain the only superpower. Propaganda in the media is an important tool of information warfare; information warfare is one of the methods both powers resort to in context of a bigger confrontation. Whether one wants to label the current state of affairs as the Cold War 2.0 or not, it is evident that the two powers use the same methods as they used to in the 21st century, with the exception of the new technological achievements providing them with even more ways to balance each other.

Thesis Project

Proposed Topic

Russian-American Relations and the Mass Media: Securitization of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump in the American Press

Topic Characteristics

Media is the main source of information for the citizens, it forms citizens' common opinions, helps creating an ideology; thus, common attitude towards the country, its government and people can be formed through the media. The US citizens typically support either Republican or Democratic party, and have polar opinions on many issues; the result is that information is presented differently by various media outlets/sources. This applies to attitudes towards and media coverage of international relations with foreign actors - in this case, the Russian Federation. Mass media's role is central in the elections, as it is the main way for the electorate to be informed, and the information people get from the media affects the results. The newly elected president is responsible for future relations with the foreign actors. Principle of freedom of speech, highly valued by the Americans, can be used for political ends - to change attitude towards a politician (and his country) by discrediting him. The thesis argues that by securitizing the Russian Federation and its leader, and by promoting the idea about a mutual sympathy and alleged link/connection between him and then-presidential candidate, now-President of the United States, Donald Trump, some American media outlets manage to promote a negative image of the latter. If the planned research provides evidences to the above-stated, it will prove the importance of press to the political image and politics in general. The research will also focus

on current relations between Russian Federation and the United States, since the image given by the media can indicate certain features and trends.

Research Question

How are the President of Russian Federation and his alleged connections with Donald Trump presented in the American media? What features and trends in the current American-Russian relations does it indicate?

Thesis Sentence

The possible connection between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin is put on the agenda by some American media outlets. Therefore, by presenting the Russian president in a negative light, the media sheds that light on President Trump as well, creating a negative image for him and questioning legitimacy and security of his leadership.

Statement of Relevance

The question is relevant due to recent escalation of the long-standing conflict between the United States and Russian Federation. Current tense between the powers is sometimes called “The New Cold War”, or “Cold War II.” The thesis also has a potential to contribute to establishing the role of mass media in the process of securitization.

Proposed Theory

Securitization theory

- argues that security is a speech act. Securitization is for instance claiming something, in this case Russian Federation, is a threat, in this case to American democracy or the United States as a whole. Stating that something is a threat is often followed by claiming a right to take extraordinary (often non-democratic) measures to defeat that

threat. The issue is thus transferred from the realm of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics.²¹²

- There is no given, established meaning to security; it can be shaped and transformed through a speech act and become what the securitizing actor says it is.
- Securitization theory combines elements of Realism and Constructivism theories of International Relations. It argues that reality is constructed, while at the same time seeing states as the main actors in the system and focusing on power relations, which makes a good fit for the given topic.
- Speech act theory argues that some statements should not be regarded as either true or false, because they do not just describe the given reality; they *do* things. They are “performatives,” not “constatives.”²¹³
- Is seen as one of the most fortuitous approach for research on power politics of security.²¹⁴

Proposed Methodology

Discourse analysis

-analysis of newspaper articles and online sources. Discourse analysis is a natural choice when securitization theory is employed, since speech act is in the core of it. It is assumed that Trump’s alleged connection to Putin and the latter’s interference into the election affected not only people’s perceptions of both politicians, but also the way the incident and Putin’s persona in

²¹² John Baylis, “International And Global Security,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,, 2011).

²¹³ Juha A. Vuori, “Speech Act Theory,” in *Research Methods In Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 133.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

general were presented in certain media outlets. While for some of them it was beneficial to accuse Putin and/or Trump of scamming, for others it would be counterproductive, since it would discredit Trump, the candidate they stand for. The selection of the sources is performed based on Trump's consistent labelling of specific media outlets as "fake news" when referring to media coverage of his actions, and especially of the Russian meddling scandal and the events surrounding it. Hypothetically, those outlets were mostly unfavorable of Trump *and* of Putin, indeed putting the possible link between the two presidents on the agenda and raising public concern about it.

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Theory and Methodology
3. Background - US-Russia Relations
4. Mass Media in the USA
5. Representation of Trump and Putin in the Selected American Media
6. Conclusion
7. References

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