

The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

التمثيل الجيوسياسي لروسيا في الصحافة الأمريكية والتهديد للنظام الويلسوني

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Abstract :

This study examines the geopolitical representation of Russia in American mainstream press through the lens of critical popular geopolitics, with particular focus on how Wilsonian ideals shape media narratives. Through a framing analysis of The New York Times article "The Making of Vladimir Putin," the research demonstrates how American media constructs Russia as a threat to the liberal international order. The analysis reveals that media discourse employs various framing techniques: establishing historical continuity with the Cold War, emphasizing Putin's KGB background, constructing binary oppositions between democratic West and autocratic Russia, and personalizing geopolitical threat through Putin's figure. American press consistently portrays Russia as antagonistic to Western democratic values while overlooking complex geopolitical realities and legitimate security concerns.

Keywords: Geopolitical Representation, American Press, Wilsonianism, Russia.

الملخص :

تدرس هذه الدراسة التمثيل الجيوسياسي لروسيا في الصحافة الأمريكية الرئيسية من خلال منظور الجيوسياسية الشعبية النقدية، مع تركيز خاص على كيفية تشكيل المثلث الويلسونية للسرديات الإعلامية. من خلال تحليل تأطير مقال نيويورك تايمز "صناعة فلاديمير بوتين"، يوضح البحث كيف تصور وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية روسيا كتهديد للنظام الدولي الليبرالي. يكشف التحليل أن الخطاب الإعلامي يوظف تقنيات تأطير متنوعة: تأسيس الاستمرارية التاريخية مع الحرب الباردة، والتأكيد على خلفية بوتين في جهاز الاستخبارات الروسي (كي جي بي)، وبناء تناقضات ثنائية بين الغرب الديمقراطي وروسيا الاستبدادية، وإضفاء الطابع الشخصي على التهديد الجيوسياسي من خلال شخصية بوتين. تصور الصحافة الأمريكية باستمرار روسيا كمعادية للقيم الديمقراطية الغربية مع تجاهل الحقائق الجيوسياسية المعقدة والمخاوف الأمنية المشروعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التمثيل الجيوسياسي، الصحافة الأمريكية، الويلسونية، روسيا.

1. *Introduction*

Russia has maintained a prolonged and contentious presence within American newspapers, a phenomenon that arises from the paradoxical relationship between the two nations. The American predominant press has engaged in a continuous and critical examination of the Russian state, with a pronounced focus on its leadership, notably Vladimir Putin for the last two decades. This scrutiny has rendered Russian domestic and foreign affairs recurring subjects in pages of prominent papers like the New York Times and the Washington Post. Notably, Moscow's actions have increasingly come to be viewed as a challenge to American leadership in international affairs, as they consistently contravene established governing rules and principles. Consequently, this has prompted a wave of criticism from political elites and media outlets, which geopolitically characterize Russia as a menace to the established universal order. This critique, however, is rooted in a Wilsonian perspective on global affairs. Accordingly, through an interdisciplinary study, this paper seeks to propose a comprehensive account of Russia's geopolitical representation in American mainstream media. First, it examines the constructivist role of American media in representing foreign states geopolitically. Additionally, it conceptualizes Wilsonianism while reviewing the existing literature on Russia's portrayal in American media. For analytical purposes, the present research conducts a framing analysis of a selected article published in the New York Times to underscore Wilsonian ideological manifestations in the geopolitical representation of "President Putin's Russia".

2. *Critical Popular Geopolitics:*

In an overturn from orthodox geopolitics, which controlled most of the Cold War, Gearóid Ó Tuathail presents a new paradigm for understanding geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, 1996). His critical approach challenges the traditional usage of the term, shifting toward a more dynamic framework that deconstructs the body of geopolitical thought (Dodds, 2007). Building on the premise that geopolitics is a discursive practice situated within Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, Ó Tuathail conceptualizes it as a discourse (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998). This indicates that geopolitical knowledge and discourses are social constructions offering non-neutral representations of the world (Dalby, 2010, p. 278). The political and territorial reality reflects specific ideologies and

power relations, with media serving as a key agent in disseminating these discourses. Ó Tuathail distinguishes between three branches of geopolitical discourse: practical geopolitics, formal geopolitics, and popular geopolitics. This study focuses specifically on popular geopolitics, as media is viewed as a source of geopolitical representations of world politics and an extension of governmental foreign policy (Dittmer & Sharp, 2014). Critical popular geopolitics is dedicated to examining and investigating how media institutions perceive the world order and construct geopolitical realities (Power & Crampton, 2007). On this account, American media's geopolitical discourse have historically perpetuated a Wilsonian vision of world politics, emphasizing liberal internationalism and democratic ideals as universal values.

3. American Press and Foreign Representation:

3.1 The American Experience of News Making:

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 15th century fundamentally transformed global communication. It facilitated the rapid production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines, and books, thereby establishing a worldwide network of information exchange. This network afforded nations access to knowledge regarding distant lands and cultures. Over time, the press evolved from a mere conduit for information to a significant instrument for shaping public perceptions of reality. Journalists take on a substantial part in this process by selecting, prioritizing, and framing information in accordance with their ideologies and values. Consequently, the press not only reports on current events but also interprets their significance, provides contextual understanding, and speculates on potential ramifications (Dunaway & Graber, 2022, p. 15).

In alignment with Benedict Anderson's assertion that the press has acted as a vital force in the formation of numerous nations, the United States exemplifies this phenomenon. The evolution of the press in America has been intricately linked to the nation's development from its inception. The Founding Fathers acknowledged the crucial role of the press, in establishing a free society as consecrated in the Constitution. President Thomas Jefferson famously stated that without a free press, liberty could not exist in the United States. This

foundational acknowledgment created an environment in which newsmakers and editors could explore and expand the functionality and influence of the press within the American public sphere.

From its origins as penny presses, the industry evolved into a substantial enterprise driven by capitalist interests, ultimately transforming mass communication into a monopolistic domain and becoming "hyper-commercial" (McChesney, 2004, p. 138). Consequently, an elite group of newsmakers emerged, whose opinions began to dominate public media discourse. The primary function of this press is to communicate knowledge of ongoing events to the public, as well as to provide interpretations of these occurrences, particularly regarding government policies and initiatives both domestically and internationally. Thus, the press has become deeply intertwined with the social and political life of Americans, especially during periods of significant change.

3.2 The Press in USA and the Ideological Representation of Foreign States:

Notably, the discourse of the media and American political discourse are closely intertwined (Hachten, 2005). Attentive to political changes and conflicts, the American press endeavors to uphold objectivity and truthfulness in its reporting and analysis. However, with regard to foreign policy, the landscape of the American news industry becomes increasingly complex. Research indicates that American foreign news may be significantly less favorable compared to news issued within different media systems, seemingly, public systems in Europe (Hearns-Branaman & Bergman, 2022, p. 6). This is particularly consequential given that media reporting promote shaping public understanding; as foreign affairs typically lay outside the realm of individuals' personal experience, most information regarding it is sourced from media coverage (Soroka, 2003, p. 43).

As an active participant in both American and international political discourse, the media plays a significant role in debates surrounding major foreign conflicts and bears a responsibility to inform the public. However, this role is compromised when media coverage deviates from objective reporting principles (Schudson, 2001). As an intermediary among the political officials,

the public, and the international community, American media, particularly liberal outlets, actively promotes Western democratic values, often resulting in superficial and stereotypical representations of non-Western countries (Hearn-Branaman & Bergman, 2022, p. 6). This tendency to frame nations that challenge Western ideals in a negative light stems from the media's interpretation of global affairs through a distinctly Wilsonian perspective.

While American journalists maintain their commitment to objectivity, their reporting is inherently molded by the predominantly liberal environment within their practice (Bennett, 2005, p. 180). This ideological framework manifests most notably in foreign affairs coverage, where journalists often position themselves as advocates for liberal values (Al-Zo'by, 2021). The subjective construction of reality by American media outlets aligns with the prevailing understanding of world order in political and academic circles (Dell'Orto et al., 2004), with Wilsonian liberalism serving as the guiding ideology in American approaches to international relations (Chang et al., 1992). This framework positions America as the benchmark for international standards, leading to an imbalanced portrayal of the global landscape that overlooks diverse political and cultural realities. The resulting narrative, shaped by politicians, intellectuals, and journalists interpreting events solely through this narrow lens, excludes perspectives that don't conform to Wilsonian ideals.

4. Liberal Internationalism and the Wilsonian Order:

Power acquisition and maintenance have predominantly led to the growth and spread of civilizations, often resulting in conflicts and wars between rulers and governments over geopolitical interests and security concerns. As famously stated by Machiavelli in his politically paradoxical work, *The Prince*, "the ends justify the means," suggesting that a ruler's ultimate goal is to conquer, rule, and dominate. This pragmatic approach has characterized power politics for centuries, culminating in the outbreak of two World Wars that reshaped the international political landscape. Conversely, others advocate for peace as an essential component of stability, enabling nations to flourish. During the 17th century, the Age of Reason, Immanuel Kant underscored the importance of international peace as a means to achieve national stability and prosperity in his work *Perpetual Peace*, asserting that each nation, to ensure its own security,

should appeal for other countries to form an agreement akin to a civil contract, thereby guaranteeing the rights of all parties involved (p. 254). Two centuries later, following the devastation of the Great War , then American President Woodrow Wilson, would revive this tradition under different circumstances, proposing new principles to achieve world peace that would alter America's role in global politics.

The national experience of the United States, having diverged from its European origins, exemplifies the indoctrination of American exceptionalism, which is anchored into the founding ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This belief catalyzed the revolt against British rule and established the foundational principles of the nation. Thomas Paine's 1776 assertion, "We have it in our power to begin the world all over again," encapsulates the roots of American liberal idealism that have influenced both domestic and foreign policies over the centuries. President Wilson's vision following the war served as a cornerstone for this idealism, shaping key policy decisions for the ensuing global conflicts, and continuing into the international political landscape of the 21st century.

Wilson's Fourteen Points, which aimed to establish an international order to prevent future conflicts, encompassed concepts such as self-determination, a global economic system, disarmament, and collective security. Wilson maintained that true liberty could only be realized if nations were governed by law and justice, recognizing the shared interests of all humanity (President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, 1918). This vision can be actualized through the establishment of "multilateral institutions" that address a wide array of "issues among democratic nations, from national security to economic coordination" (Smith, 2017, p. 32). Undoubtedly, the United States, as the epitome of democracy and often labeled as "the City upon a Hill," as articulated by John Winthrop, has advanced this endeavor. Wilson's concerns and the urgency for a collective international body were later manifested as Washington abandoned its isolationist stance toward global affairs. The enactment of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and subsequently the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, served as evidence of Wilson's vision for a liberal internationalist agenda (Cude, p. 107, 2023). The full extent of Wilson's internationalist vision became apparent following 1945 and continues to exert

influence in contemporary times. Subsequent American leaders have upheld the Wilsonian vision in their foreign policy, promoting democracy and world peace based on their belief in its efficacy (Tucker, 1993). Moreover, this marked American supremacy as a unilateral leader on the global stage.

The cease of the bipolar war solidified the United States' status as the preeminent global leader and underscored its commitment to liberal principles. It was then for American leadership to shape the world order (Miller, 2021). The Wilsonian tradition served both as a framework for political strategy and as an ideological instrument against foreign adversaries (McDougall, 1997, p. 146). This context facilitated the reinforcement of the Exceptionalism doctrine, which posits that America possesses the capacity to mold the world in accordance with liberal democratic ideals. American officials affixed their position as a champion for democratic values, human rights, and global peace, with the objective of promoting and disseminating these principles globally through a blend of soft and hard power strategies (Thompson, 2010). While the aspirations of American officials were not exclusively ideological, as they also sought to advance national interests, ensure national security, and counter potential adversaries or threats, this commitment often necessitated direct involvement in conflicts and interventions in foreign nations. Consequently, the United States sometimes contravened decisions made by the United Nations Security Council. Notable instances of this include President Bill Clinton's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the Iraq War of George W. Bush's administration in 2003, both of which were predicated on unilateral policies and an adherence to liberal ideals (Ellison, 2021). This approach has elicited criticism both domestically and internationally, raising questions regarding the authentic spirit of Wilsonianism, particularly as it gained traction among elite circles and media outlets.

5. American Mainstream Press's Representation of Russia:

5.1. Two Decades of Paradoxical Portrayal of Russia in US Press:

The American-Russian bilateral relationship is characterized by a complex and conflicted history. While instances of partnership have occurred, mistrust and tension have predominantly shaped interactions between the two nations (Stent, 2015, p. 255). The events of the Cold War continue to influence

their shared historical narrative and serve as a reference point for many contemporary media discourses (Kazarinova & Taisheva, 2019). Over the past two decades, as Russia has asserted itself on the global stage through actions that have raised concerns among numerous Western nations, including the United States, its representation in American mainstream media has frequently been negative and critical (Repina et al., 2018). Media coverage tends to emphasize the aggressiveness of Russia's policies and actions, portraying its eminent threat to the democratic liberal order upheld by the West (Sakwa, 2020). This portrayal often encompasses an emphasis on Russia's authoritarian tendencies, assertive foreign policy, and alleged human rights violations (Repina et al., 2018). Consequently, American journalists have perceived their mission as one of defending liberty and advocating for international justice, which entails condemning the actions of the Russian government. The representation and reporting of Russia have increasingly become negative and biased over the years, thereby allowing little room for nuanced debate.

Prior to Vladimir Putin's presidency, the United States sought to transform Russia into a capitalist liberal democracy. This approach received substantial support from mainstream media (Miller, 2021). There was widespread optimism among political elites that Boris Yeltsin, with American guidance, would successfully integrate Russia into the Western liberal sphere (McFaul, 2018, p. 11). However, the economic shock therapy endorsed by the Clinton administration proved to be disastrous for post-Cold War Russia, leading to a severe financial crisis that plunged the country into turmoil (Rumer & Sokolsky, 2019). Consequently, the American mainstream media altered its tone, focusing on the political and economic chaos in Russia as the nation endeavored to rebuild its infrastructure (Tsygankov, 2018, p. 37). Nevertheless, when President Vladimir Putin assumed power in 2000, Russia's trajectory of reconstruction underwent significant changes. The Kremlin's new leader was resolute in his efforts to revitalize the country's facilities and rebuild its foundational structures across various sectors. However, this determination engendered skepticism among American elite circles. The fact that a former KGB officer now led the United States' old adversary —the second-largest nuclear power globally —intensified their concerns (Sakwa, 2012). As a result, Russia remained under scrutiny by the West regarding its pursuit of liberal democracy and a laissez-faire economy.

The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

The American perception of Russia has evolved from viewing it as politically unstable and economically fragile to characterizing it as a nation of significant concern. President Putin's state-building strategy has encompassed increased control over domestic affairs and a reaffirmation of Russia's status as a principal global power (Stent, 2015, p. 84). Consequently, this transformation has provoked alarm within western political and media circles and the American ones in particular. American journalists have persistently criticized Putin's treatment of political opponents and the media, perceiving it as a threat to democracy and freedom of expression. Editors and commentators have also accused the head of the Duma of misappropriating national resources and perpetuating a corrupt oligarchic system (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 186). Numerous media outlets have condemned Putin's foreign maneuvers, interpreting them as a repudiation of the new US lead world order. For example, the Kremlin's opposition to the United States' mission of promoting democracy in Iraq was viewed as a direct challenge to American values and security interests (Tysgankov, 2018, p. 38). News outlets have consistently depicted Putin's foreign policy ideology as an endeavor to establish a neo-Soviet Russia, in light of his assertion that the dissolution of the Soviet Union constituted the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" (Diesen, 2022, p. 127-128). Furthermore, Western media has criticized Moscow's attempts to counter US-backed Color Revolutions within its Caucasian sphere of influence, interpreting these actions as an assault on democracy and freedom. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War further intensified the media's narrative regarding Putin's imperial aspirations in Eurasia, illustrated by cartoon depictions of "the angry bear stretching out a claw to maul Georgia" (McLaughlin, 2020, p. 181).

The year 2012 marked Vladimir Putin's reelection as well as US media's reinstatement of a narrative that characterizes Russia as a state engaged in power politics. As Russia became increasingly involved in international affairs, American elites expressed growing concern regarding its role in the Syrian Crisis, the Ukraine Crisis, and its alleged interference in the 2016 United States presidential election. Consequently, they designated Moscow as a revisionist power and a threat to the global liberal order as well as to U.S. interests. In light of Russia's security concerns, President Putin intervened militarily in the Syrian conflict to address the threat posed by ISIS. However, American politicians and the media accused him of supporting authoritarian leaders such as Bashar al-

Assad, whose political inclinations coincided with his own (McLaughlin, 2020, 134). Similarly, the Ukraine Crisis was depicted as Russia's attempt to reclaim its lost influence in Eastern Europe, following the events of annexing the Crimean and supporting separatists in Donbas. (Boyd-Barrett, 2015). Furthermore, the 2016 U.S. elections brought Russia once again under intense media scrutiny. A significant portion of the American liberal left posited that Russian intelligence officers had orchestrated an attack on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and leaked classified information to facilitate President Trump's electoral victory. Despite the absence of concrete evidence, mainstream journalists and political figures leveled accusations of cyber espionage against Russia and its president (Marmura, 2020).

5.2. The Framing of Putin's Russia in the New York Times:

The New York Times is regarded as one of the premier mainstream media outlets in the United States, recognized both for its influence and its readership. It functions as a significant pillar of American journalism, engaging with current events and the governmental agenda. However, as noted by Hachten, the paper has embraced the emerging tendency of transitioning from entirely factual news to liberally opinionated news. (90). Consequently, the newspaper's editors perceive themselves a leading force in the defense of democracy and liberal values. Amid the media's critique and denunciation of Putin's Russia, editors and reporters of the NY Times are prominently positioned at the forefront. In a comprehensive article published on March 26, 2022, journalist Roger Cohen delivers an analytical examination of Vladimir Putin's ascendancy to power and the transformation of Russia into an autocratic and aggressive state. This research utilizes Cohen's article, entitled "The Making of Vladimir Putin," to investigate the framing of Russia. The article was selected based on its extensive historical scope, as it examines a period of twenty-two years of governance.

The analysis draws upon framing theory articulated by Robert Entman to investigate the New York Times' representation of Putin's Russia. Framing is instrumental in shaping public perception and comprehension of various issues by influencing the manner in which events and facts are conveyed, particularly through the application of a central concept to the reported occurrences (Paletz,

1999, p. 60). Entman argues that framing involves selecting specific aspects of perceived reality and emphasizing them in communication to shape a particular definition of the problem, its causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or recommended treatment concerning a suggested solution regarding the subject matter (1993, p. 52). The first dimension, problem definition, encompasses the identification and presentation of social issues through specific conceptual frameworks that prioritize certain interpretative perspectives (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). Causal interpretation constitutes the second critical component, wherein media narratives ascribe responsibility and origins to identified issues. Through meticulous linguistic and contextual selections, frames establish chains of causality that imply the reasons underlying the occurrence of specific events (Tankard, 2001, p. 96). Moral evaluation, as the third function, entails the integration of normative judgments within media representations. Frames encompass ethical dimensions that classify actors, actions, and events along axes of righteousness, culpability, or justification (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). The final dimension, treatment recommendation, proposes potential solutions to the identified problem. By presenting certain courses of action as more legitimate or feasible, frames guide public opinion toward preferred policy directions or social interventions (Entman, 2004, p. 26). These four dimensions function simultaneously and interdependently, establishing a mechanism through which media discourse constructs social reality.

Both the headline "The Making of Vladimir Putin" and the subheading of the article "Tracing Putin's 22-Year Slide from Statesman to Tyrant" contextualize Russia's head of state's career as a trajectory that descends from a national leader to an authoritarian tyrant. This framing suggests a concerning deterioration on both moral and political dimensions. Accordingly, it is posited that Putin's authoritarianism and the corruption of his power were foreshadowed by his concerning actions, a phenomenon epitomized by the phrase "slide to tyrant". The lexical juxtaposition of "statesman" and "tyrant" illustrates a moral dichotomy that encapsulates the international political order. The term "statesman" connotes effective governance, whereas "tyrant" denotes the inherent illegitimacy of authority. The title does not explicitly assert that Putin embodies an inherent threat to the international liberal democratic order; nonetheless, it suggests a necessity for rigorous scrutiny of his power-oriented political strategies.

The analysis reveals that the selected article depicts Russia as a significant threat to the Wilsonian liberal international order. It employs secondary frames to interpret the contemporary state of Russia under Vladimir Putin's leadership, characterizing it as an autocratic regime that commits human rights abuses and as an aggressive power toward other nations. The media outlet personifies this threat through the figure of Vladimir Putin.

In reference to the definition of the problem presented in the current newspaper article, Russia, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, is depicted as an eminent danger to the existing global liberal principles. The journalist, in this analytical piece, emphasizes the transformation of Russia from a once-promising democratic state into an authoritarian and repressive regime, primarily attributable to Putin's political ideology and actions. This is evident in Putin's systematic dismantling of any democratic potential, resulting in a comprehensive repudiation of Western liberal democratic norms. Consequently, Russia's political landscape is marked by the suppression of dissenting voices, media censorship, and the pervasive influence of oligarchs on the nation's economic framework. Furthermore, the Russian state has consistently engaged in aggressive actions toward other foreign nations, thereby challenging the West. Specific excerpts include:

Excerpt 1:

"Putin captured us," (Cohen, 2022, para.3)

The first excerpt, a quotation from German politician Dr. Norbert Röttgen, underscores the initial deception perpetrated by Putin in his pledge of a democratic trajectory for Russia and collaboration on an international scale.

Excerpt 2:

"Mr. Putin has morphed into the angry rant of a hunched man dismissing as "scum and traitors" any Russian who resists the violence of his tightening dictatorship." (Cohen, 2022, para.4)

Excerpt 3:

"A Russian enigma took form in the Kremlin." (Cohen, 2022, para.7)

The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

Excerpt 4:

“He transformed over time into the revanchist warmonger of today,” (Cohen, 2022, para.

Excerpt 5:

“As the grievances mounted, piece by piece, year by year, the distinction blurred. In effect, he became the state, he merged with Russia,” (Cohen, 2022, para.9)

These points illustrate that the author underscores the transformation of the Russian state into a dictatorship, personified by its leader, Vladimir Putin, who increasingly embodies the state itself. Consequently, Russia’s internal authoritarianism and aggressive foreign policies present a challenge both for its citizens and for the liberal order maintained by Western nations.

In this article, the primary issue addressed is the influence of Putin's character in the transformation of Russia into a repressive autocratic regime. The president's background as a KGB agent, his ideological perspective, and his anti-Western sentiments are central to the challenges facing autocratic Russia. The following experts illustrate this point:

Excerpt 6:

“He was always obsessed with the 25 million Russians trapped outside Mother Russia by the breakup of the Soviet Union.” (Cohen, 2022, para.10)

This assertion by Condoleezza Rice underscores that Putin's grievances in regard to the disintegration of the USSR and the subsequent displacement of Russia significantly shape his political inclinations.

Excerpt 7:

Michel Eltchaninoff, “the pull of restoring Russian imperial might, and so avenging Russia’s perceived relegation to what President Barack Obama would call “a regional power,” was always Mr. Putin’s deepest urge” (Cohen, 2022, para.29)

Excerpt 8:

“Tall once more. Mr. Putin had been formed in a Soviet world that held that Russia was not a great power unless it dominated its neighbors. Rumbblings at the country’s doorstep challenged that doctrine.” (Cohen, 2022, para.36)

The statements above underscore the Russian president's imperial tendencies and aspiration to restore the country’s status as a dominion on the global stage.

Excerpt 9:

"Putin's nightmare is not NATO, but democracy," (Cohen, 2022, para.43)

The remarks of former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer underscore President Putin's repudiation of Western democratic principles as a pivotal aspect of his governance. Most notably, the editor juxtaposes this declaration with a presentation of Putin's Implementation of democracy.

Excerpt 10:

“If this was democracy, it was “sovereign democracy,” a phrase embraced by Mr. Putin’s top political strategists, stress on the first word.” (Cohen, 2022, para.15)

To elucidate Putin’s approach to politics and governance in Russia, the journalist elucidates how his administration has adopted a distinctive variant of democracy that diverges significantly from the Western conception of democracy.

Excerpt 11:

“But if irredentist resentment lurked, alongside a Soviet spy’s suspicion of the United States, Mr. Putin had other initial priorities.” (Cohen, 2022, para.11)

The aforementioned statements highlight Putin’s enduring suspicion and resentment toward the West. This sentiment elucidates his negative stance toward Western initiatives and organizations. Perceived actions by the West are viewed as encroachments and provocations, thereby reinforcing Putin’s narrative of Western hostility and legitimizing his aggressive policies.

Excerpt 12:

The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

“You must understand, he is from the K.G.B., lying is his profession, it is not a sin,” (Cohen, 2022, para.19)

The journalist in this statement quotes France’s ambassador to Moscow, Sylvie Bermann, to characterize Putin’s Soviet-era occupation as indicative of his background as a KGB agent. This serves as a foundation for elucidating his style of governance, which is marked by manipulation and deceit.

Regarding the moral evaluation of this article, the journalist adopts a decidedly critical stance toward Putin’s Russia, condemning his autocratic regime. He employs various opinions to emphasize the negative attributes associated with the President and his administration.

Excerpt 13:

“The new president would work with the oligarchs created by chaotic, free-market, crony capitalism” (Cohen, 2022, para.15)

Excerpt 14:

“Timothy Snyder, the prominent historian of fascism, put it this way: “Having toyed with an authoritarian rule-of-law state, he simply become the oligarch-in-chief and turned the state into the enforcer mechanism of his oligarchical clan.” (Cohen, 2022, para.35)

Cohen, a journalist, substantiates his assertion regarding the corrupt nature of Putin's rule by presenting compelling evidence through direct quotations. Furthermore, he contends that a majority of Putin's associates exert control over the markets and monetary circulation within the country through unethical practices.

Excerpt 15:

“Russian TV increasingly looked like Soviet TV in its undiluted propaganda.” (Cohen, 2022, para.40)

To reinforce the central argument regarding President Putin's authoritarian governance, the article delineates accusations concerning his suppression of opposing voices within political spheres and his stringent control over the media.

Excerpt 16:

“Although Mr. Putin has portrayed a West-leaning Ukraine as a threat to Russian security, it was more immediately a threat to Putin’s authoritarian system itself.” (Cohen, 2022, para.44)

Excerpt 17:

“Noting the presence of 17 million Russians there, and calling Kyiv the mother of all Russian cities — a claim that would develop into an obsession.” (Cohen, 2022, para.63)

Excerpt 18:

“Autocratic nationalism revived its appeal, challenging the democratic liberalism that the Russian leader would pronounce “obsolete” in 2019.” (Cohen, 2022, para.80)

The author of this journalistic piece critiques the claims and policies of the Russian President regarding Ukraine. In his assessment, he characterizes the invasion of Ukraine as an obsession rather than a legitimate security measure. Furthermore, journalist Cohen asserts that Putin's political ideology constitutes a direct challenge to the liberal order.

This article does not explicitly provide any treatment recommendations; however, it suggests that Western nations should implement stricter measures to deter Russia's actions.

Excerpt 19:

“You cannot deter someone like that with sanctions.” (Cohen, 2022, para.107)

In this passage, the journalist quotes to emphasize that Western policies regarding Russia’s transgressions, in the form of economic sanctions, are insufficient. In this context, the West must reconsider its approach to dealing with Putin’s Russia due to the threats it poses to the liberal order.

The article selectively emphasizes specific facets of Vladimir Putin's life and actions, primarily concentrating on his early years during Soviet rule, his career in the KGB, and his domestic and foreign policies. However, it fails to

The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

account for significant factors that influenced President Putin's actions, such as the condition of Russia upon his accession to office in 2000 and the initiatives he undertook to revitalize and stabilize the nation. Furthermore, the article neglects Moscow's security concerns pertinent to Putin's foreign actions, including the invasion of Ukraine and NATO's expansion. It also overlooks the substantial public support that President Putin enjoys, instead depicting him predominantly as an autocrat. Moreover, the narrative is constructed through detailed anecdotes, emotionally charged language, and quotations from Putin's critics, which serve to reinforce the portrayal of him as a repressive leader. This approach illustrates that the author characterizes President Putin's Russia as an increasingly anti-democratic state with an alarming degree of threat to the liberal world order.

Furthermore, the analysis of NYT's article elucidates the negative portrayal of Russia within Western, and notably American, elite circles, as exemplified in the media. It interprets the actions of "Putin's Russia" through the ideological framework of democratic legitimacy, thereby establishing this framework as the normative standard. It is indisputable that Russia's actions contravene the internationally recognized legal framework; however, this same system has been shown to be compromised on multiple prior occasions. Its foundational Wilsonian ideals have been repeatedly violated by its own founding states when these ideals conflicted with their national interests. Consequently, the outcome of Russia's realpolitik highlights the insufficient efforts of journalists to identify the nation's insecurities in both the Eurasian region and the global arena. Moreover, the journalists' orthodox rejection of any governance strategies employed by other states underscores their adherence to a limited set of liberal democratic values, a stance that has primarily alienated Russia into its own sphere of influence and reinforced Moscow's stringent control over domestic and international affairs. Furthermore, the demonization of Russia and its president does not address any issues, such as those pertaining to Ukraine, as evidenced by the protracted and ongoing conflict. This approach has merely strained relations and impeded any attempts at dialogue. Remaining steadfast in its ideological position, the West has condemned the country as a whole.

5.3. Russia as a Geopolitical Threat:

The geopolitical discourse is constructed through the characterization of Russia's president, given his status as the "enigma" at the core of the Kremlin, thereby positioning him as a source of conflict. This process is executed through various discursive practices. Media outlets, as demonstrated in the analyzed article, emphasize President Vladimir Putin's military background in the KGB. Such an aspect is largely irrelevant, as the USSR has ceased to exist and the state of bipolar politics is no longer applicable in the contemporary multipolar world; media narratives employ this strategy to underscore a trajectory of geopolitical antagonism. Consequently, this contributes to the induction of the Russian threat narrative. Furthermore, an examination of American news outlets' portrayal of Russia, along with an analysis of newspaper articles, reveals how Moscow's foreign actions, particularly towards its neighboring nations, reflect an attempt to geopolitically establish a sphere of influence. This alludes to a concerning threat of forming a geopolitical bloc reminiscent of the Cold War era. This indicates the presence of a binary opposition within the constructed discourse, wherein Russia is positioned in contrast to the West. An autocratic revisionist state stands in opposition to a democratic liberal West. Most significantly, the construction of the Russian state as a geopolitical threat is personified through the character of its president. This personification reduces the complexity of Russia's geopolitical reality to its leader's preoccupation with Soviet legacy. The current media discourse, therefore, provides a constricted vision of the global geopolitical landscape and attempts to present virtual geopolitics through a Wilsonian interpretation of power politics that conceals American interests beneath a facade of moral idealism. In reality, the media's portrayal of the Russian state as a threat acknowledges its involvement in power relations and the propagation of its own ideologies.

6. Conclusion:

The analysis of framing techniques in the New York Times article “The Making of Vladimir Putin: Tracing Putin’s 22-Year Slide from Statesman to Tyrant” elucidates the complex and often nuanced portrayal of Russia in the American mainstream media over the past two decades. Wilsonian liberal internationalism continues to exert significant influence in the discourse surrounding global affairs and conflicts, serving as the normative ideology among elite American circles. This orthodox approach to the diverse contemporary political landscape raises critical questions regarding the authenticity and objectivity of journalistic narratives about the world and other nation-states. Consequently, this study concludes that the American press, informed by Wilsonian principles in foreign policy, has frequently characterized Russia and its leadership in a negative light, emphasizing perceived threats to American values. This framing has, in turn, obscured the Russian perspective on both domestic and foreign issues, thereby reinforcing the othering of Russia within the Western political orbit. Most significantly, it contributes to a climate of mistrust and confrontation between the two nations.

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The Geopolitical Representation of Russia in the American Press and the Threat to the Wilsonian Order

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