

Virtual War, Virtual Journalism?: Russian Media Responses to 'Balkan' Entanglements in Historical Perspective, 1877-2001

The Russian-Serbian relationship is one of declining sentiment, not one of vital interest. But it did become the symbolic measure of whether Russians were being treated as genuine partners by the [U.S.] and Europe: slights were too often interpreted as being of far greater significance than was ever intended. . . . Whenever Russia has to choose between its vital interests, usually involving keeping on good terms with the U.S., and its sentimental attachments, . . . it came down on the side of interest. Russia will never be treated as an inferior partner -- and whenever that prospect emerged the Russians became difficult.

Lord David Owen

For all their talk of Slavic brotherhood, the Russians decided that their ultimate national interest lay with America, not with a Balkan dictator. Herein lies another major irony. If Russia had been what Western policy-makers had wanted it to be for a decade – it would not have behaved as the West wanted it to. A democratic Russia would have supported the Serbs more actively. Yeltsin the autocrat was able to ignore popular feeling in favor of Serbia and instruct Chernomyrdin to abandon the Milosevic regime.

Michael Ignatieff

Wise Kosovars acknowledge that a new Kosova (the Albanian spelling) will need international foster parents before it can walk on its own feet. The Russians will have to be part of this international framework. They are an essential part of the solution. They are also part of the problem.

Timothy Garton Ash

A. Political Geography and Presumed Spheres of Influence in 'The Balkans'

When, why and how are pan-Slav appeals for solidarity relegated to the political fringes among the Russian public, and how does this affect the national and international balance in Southeastern and East-Central Europe? On a larger scale, to what extent do the “virtualized” rhetoric and stipulated conventions of political journalism influence

foreign policy, and vice versa? A substantial amount of metajournalism surrounding

1

the 1990s wars and interventions in the former Yugoslavia has been dominated by a west-to-east perspective, as is demonstrated by the very notions of an “East-Central” and a “Southeastern” Europe. When an east-to-west view is introduced, it is most likely Turkey and Greece, or to a lesser extent Bulgaria and Romania, that are selected as the primary vantage points. Indeed, a rather neat trans-Atlantic grand narrative has been formulated around and about the region, arguing against the stereotype of ancient ethnic hatreds, citing latent or manifest evidences of [Occidental] Orientalism, all the while calling for a common, integrative, multicultural European home, or at the very least a strategic move away from the unpredictable shadow that Russia as an “Asiatic” outsider allegedly casts.

The interaction of Russian foreign and domestic policies, in conjunction with the difficult question of how to maintain a sprawling land mass that was all at once a nation, state, and empire, presented an enormous challenge when Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet leaders of state confronted the problem of defining national identity and deciding when and how – based on values or interests or both – to intervene in Balkan affairs. The functional history of Russian and Soviet journalism and reportage about the preconceived ‘Balkans’ is a vital and neglected part of the debates about politics, culture and identity within the internal region of Southeastern Europe. In the path of longstanding Slavophile/Westernizer debates, fundamentally quarrels over the optimal paths of modernization, the question of whether Russia is Occidental or Oriental, European or Eurasian may seem like a vague and empty intellectual parlor game. However, it certainly affects policy decisions about the relative strength or weakness of state actors, and colors geopolitical perceptions, whether in actual or symbolic terms,

about presumed spheres of influence. Citing static civilizational faultlines in the

2

Huntingtonian vein, geodeterministic clichés still abound, for instance, about the presupposed pan-Slav loyalties between the Russians and the Serbs, or Bulgarians, or Macedonians, as if the Kosovo conflict was a direct continuity from the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. Of course, in an age of information technology and societies of mass spectacles, the historical context of media structures that impact and react to public opinion differ dramatically from the milieu of the late nineteenth century. My intention is to attempt to periodize and characterize Russian media coverage of the Balkans, analyzing the functions of the press within specific historical contexts and devoting particular attention to the relative strength or weakness of the Russian/Soviet/post-Soviet state.

B. Pan-Slav Popular Journalism, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, and the Ambiguities of Russia's 'Balkan' Designs

With the state (*gosudarstvo*) and society (*obshchestvo*) commonly at odds and separated by gulfs of silence, public opinion in multiethnic and multilingual Russia and its effects upon foreign policy has seldom been easy to evaluate. References to a semi-transparent, semi-opaque, juridically ensured Western “public sphere” or “civil society” presuppose relative freedom of the press and a minimally impeded exchange of information and ideas, rarities indeed throughout Russian, Soviet, and even post-Soviet history. External censorship and internal self-censorship further complicate the issue in the historiographical literature. ¹ For example, the influences of the commercial press during the tsarist period were systematically ignored by the newfangled, Bolshevik-founded state after 1917, which confiscated and nationalized the private firms of

newspapers and publishing houses. Consequently, greater attention was for a long time

3

accorded in retrospect to the agitation and propaganda activities of the radical, “non-bourgeois” underground elements prior to the October Revolution. Adopting the strict Marxist orthodox view that journalism was mere “superstructure,” and conditioned by their experiences during World War I and the Civil War shortly thereafter, neither Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin, nor any of the so-called Old Bolsheviks believed, as did some later liberal proponents in the era of glasnost’ and perestroika, that the press could ever be entirely free, or at least bear a more refined semblance of objectivity and fair reporting.

Popular coverage of foreign affairs independent of elite diplomatic channels, starting with those in Western Europe, began most significantly after Russia’s disastrous defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and with the Great Reforms of Alexander II (1855-1881). The educational reforms, the loosening of centralized censorship, and the establishment of *zemstva* (provincial and municipal district councils) gradually raised the numbers of a literate audience, including the nearly 22 million newly emancipated serfs. No longer the preoccupation of salon-type circles of *intelligenty* in St. Petersburg and Moscow, socially mobile and largely self-taught workers and peasants during the second half of the nineteenth century strove for everyday knowledge initially outside of their cities and villages, and then beyond the borders of the country itself.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 marks the beginning of Russian journalistic discourse about ‘the Balkans,’ a long and multidimensional process whereby public opinion both reflected and opposed Russian foreign policy initiatives on a local and international scale. Despite the popularization of such intensely nationalistic and chauvinistic books like Nikolai Danilevsky’s *Russia and Europe (Rossia i Evropa)* in 1869, the “Tsar-Liberator” Alexander II was a pan-Slav sympathizer only with

tremendous reservations. Experiencing splits of opinion between the diplomats and

4

advisors at his side, like Count Aleksandr P. Gorchakov, the foreign minister who tried without avail to calm pan-Slav sentiments; General Cherniaev, the vainglorious pan-Slav and pan-Russian crusader who mendaciously claimed that the Serbian government was behind him, and then sallied unauthorized to the military front in 1876 on behalf of the Serbs; and Nikolai P. Ignat'ev, a pro-Serb Russian who favored a greater Serbo-Bulgarian state led by a Balkan League with Serbia at the helm and Russia relegated to the background. 2

Remembering the reputation of his predecessor, Nicholas I, the “gendarme of Europe” and professed adherent of “Orthodoxy, Nationality, Autocracy,” Alexander II attempted to concentrate on domestic social reforms and remained cautious about Russian imperial adventures following the crippling effects of the Crimean War. In fact, his suppression of the Polish revolt for national independence in 1863 and quashing of the Ukrainian language in two separate decrees in 1863 and 1876 demonstrated both the nature of pan-Slav double standards as well as his own doubts about such universal and messianic appeals for fraternity. Fearing assassination by rising radical and revolutionary groups on the right and left, who eventually succeeded in killing him in 1881, his reign witnessed the transformation of Slavophilism from a rather pacific romantic nationalist, yet culturally conservative reaction to the French Revolution into a more belligerent, inflammatory, and politically aggressive organizational doctrine, mixed with currents of Social Darwinism on a geopolitical plane. 3 Concerned with the marginalization of the Russian state and its European humiliations, organizations like the Moscow Slavonic Benevolent Committee and populist-oriented “yellow journalist” newspapers such as Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin’s *Novoe vremia* aggressively pushed for Russian

reassertions of its exceptionalist civilizational imperatives on the front lines. ⁴ Although

5

Alexander II was quick to recognize the weakened and troubled status of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires and Russia's own relative economic backwardness, he ultimately came to the conclusion that Russia would have little to gain concretely from intervening on behalf of the Serbian and Bulgarian romantic nationalist hawks. It is reasonable to conclude that popular pressure led him reluctantly into the Russo-Turkish conflict of 1877-1878, out of which emerged a humiliating pyrrhic victory when Bismarck the "honest broker" redrafted of the Treaty of San Stefano to suit West European interests.

In theory, decisions to enter the Southeast European battlefronts were based largely upon the calculating *Realpolitik* of the post-Westphalian and then post-Metternichian European state system, and upon domestic pressures felt by heads of state, rather than upon the rhetorical appeals of ethnopolitical bloodlines. The study of popular opinion reveals a vexatious cause-and-effect relationship. Russia's imperial adventures to conquer Ottoman and Habsburg lands and establish its own spheres of influence within these territories were *not* unique, in the same sense, as Misha Glenny and Aleksa Djilas have argued, that the delayed reactions of Yugoslav ethnocrats in the 1990s to create unitary, ethnically homogeneous states are not unique within the wider European "Great Power" context. ⁵ From 1877 to 1914, the rightist, often nativist racial and religious civilizing missions, taken in historical perspective, were hackneyed, largely internalized editorial tropes, simultaneously employed by the state as a diplomatic pretext for interventions, and by enterprising national-*liberal* editors simply in order to sell copies of their books and newspapers. In pre-revolutionary Russia, in cases where the owners of major presses fretted about not being adequately profitable, rival editors of rival papers filled with inflammatory rhetoric traded barbs with each other. Crusading Orthodox or

pan-Slav leitmotifs of real or imagined solidarity requires a more nuanced evaluation.

6

C. Russian Reporting from the ‘Balkan’ Front: Entanglements of Russian Foreign Policy and Public Opinion, 1878-1917

The classic editorial trope of Russia as ‘the Third Rome’ intervening on behalf of her ‘brother Slavs’ or ‘fellow Orthodox brethren’ masks a far more complex reality. In his seminal overview, “Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay,” Alfred J. Rieber opposes three prevailing monocausal myths about Russian expansion, (1) the geodeterministic “urge to the sea”; (2) the image of Russia as an “Asiatic oriental despotism”; and (3) the theme of Russian messianism, to the actual and reoccurring conditions of (1) relative economic backwardness; (2) permeable frontiers subject to invasion and poor administration; (3) a tenuous multicultural society; and (4) cultural marginality in reference to “Europe” and “Asia.” Rieber plausibly argues that the history of Russian aggressive and defensive measures needs to be studied on a case-by-case geographical basis, taking into account how the centralized state tailored its policies – whether successfully or unsuccessfully – to particular national, ethnic, and religious groups within a presumed sphere of influence. Referring to Russian dilemmas and its choices for involvement in the Balkans, he writes initially from within a state-centered approach:

The tension between Russia’s obligations to the European system and to the Orthodox-Slavic population of the Ottoman Empire spawned a series of crises throughout the nineteenth century: the Greek War for Independence in the 1820s, the Crimean War, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and the rapid succession of crises from 1907 to 1914. In each case, Russian policymakers were torn between two courses of action. One was to attempt to resolve the crisis within the context of European diplomacy; the other was to intervene unilaterally in the name of a higher allegiance to Slavic or Orthodox solidarity disguised by appeals to Russian national interest. . . . In the 1870s, rebellions in Bosnia and the Bulgarian provinces of the Ottoman Empire once again plunged official Russia into a crisis

over intervention. Alexander II was no pan-Slav; his leading ministers opposed the war. But the pressure of the vociferous nationalist-Panslav right – organized

7

in Slavic committees, sustained by elements of the press, and buoyed by a widespread surge of sympathy from the Russian-educated public – created an atmosphere in which the government could not easily abstain from intervention without seriously compromising its honor and prestige both at home and abroad.

It is then toward this cultural context, one which clouds the matter of an interdependent domestic and foreign policy, that Rieber persuasively shifts his focus: “On the eve of World War I, the Russian government attempted to manipulate the Slavic cause to defend its position within the European balance. But it was inexorably dragged into an emotional involvement with the Serbian cause. A Panslav sentiment colored the opinions of diplomats throughout the Balkans, stirred the passions of the political right, and aroused a broad segment of public opinion at home.” 6

How did such a situation arise, where Russia stood to gain little economically by intervening, yet felt so doubly obligated to march toward Constantinople? Bent on refuting the “urge to the sea” myth, Rieber neglects to mention the Dardanelles Straits, a major foreign policy aim since Catherine the Great. That notwithstanding, pan-Slavism had indeed grown more vociferous and popularly receptive as a reaction to perceived national humiliations within the European balance of power. Imperial logic bolstered by wounded national pride dictated that Russia could not suffer marginalization, internal or external. Like another sorcerer’s apprentice in Russian history, Mikhail Gorbachev, Tsar Alexander II had set in motion forces that stretched beyond his immediate control. One of the major implications of his Great Reforms was the loosening of strictures on a large-scale commercial press, which ‘independently’ played to the sentiments of its variously growing literate audiences. When in doubt, Russian national pride in its territorial advances and an influential Russian-language press, not the personal whims of

the tsars and not the uncoordinated actions of the state, could serve as the last court of appeals. Reportage on the “Eastern Question” following the Russo-Turkish War and leading up to World War I witnessed an expansive role for an increasingly professionalized class of journalists eager for mobility, who flocked to the front in times of war and strife, but remained aloof in maritime. Russia’s Balkan interventions, not unlike the actions of other European states before World War I, were “virtual” in the crucial sense that the Russian media had created its own epistemology and “made” the news for its audience.

In her book, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime*, Louise McReynolds samples a number of popular Russian newspapers during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and profiles editors and professional reporters who drew selectively from the legacies of the earlier intelligentsia. Newspapers such as *Golos’ (The Voice)* and *Peterburgskaia gazeta (St. Petersburg Gazette)* underscored Russia’s civilizing mission in the Balkans, while selectively disagreeing with the state’s expansion into Central Asia and later questioning the goals of the Russo-Japanese War. Bismarck’s negotiations at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 had apparently proven the urgent need for reconsidering Russia’s appropriate place in Europe, and had shattered pan-Slav preconceptions about a mutually reciprocated Russian support from and for *both* Serbia and Bulgaria. The most influential newspaper in late imperial Russia, *Russkoe slovo (The Russian Word)*, published and edited by Ivan D. Sytin, inaugurated an era of “new journalism” for an expanding audience of middle-class consumers. Not disavowing the trope of Russian exceptionalism for his rather liberal Russian audience, V. M. Doroshevich, one of the “star” populist journalists, “took for granted Russia’s status as a Great Power,” conscientiously identified with the struggles of peasants and workers, and sought to

undermine and expose the avaricious and hypocritical nature of capitalism in Western culture. However, the foreign policies of the last two Romanov tsars, Alexander III (1881-1894), and Nicholas II (1894-1917), were not beyond criticism. The roving A. V. Amfiteatrov, for instance, joined with his fellow reporter S. M. Propper of *Birzhevye vedomosti* in criticizing Russia's treatment of the Macedonian question from 1901-1903. However, their complaints still implicitly assumed Russia's historical mission in the area by way of comparisons to the presumed better living conditions of Balkan peasants and better organized nationalist movements in Serbia and Bulgaria, and combined their reporting with touches of resentment that Russia was losing or neglecting its supposed patronage status. While stationed in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War, however, both Doroshevich and another "star" foreign correspondent, V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, opposed British and Russian imperial interventions vociferously, and carefully avoided references to any sort of "yellow peril" within Chinese or Japanese territories. In fact, of the seven major Russian newspapers, *Golos'*, *Peterburgskii listok*, *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, *Birzhevye vedomosti*, *Moskovskii listok*, *Russkoe slovo*, and *Novoe vremia* then in circulation, only one, Suvorin's conservative *Novoe vremia*, was still pro-war by the end of 1904. 7

Predictably, neutral reportage proved to be impossible for these wartime correspondents, and so did attempts to stand apart from the assumed imperatives of Russian nationalism. In the embarrassing aftermath of the Russo- Japanese War and the constitutional experiments of the four Dumas from 1905-1917, "great power nationalism" 8 had largely assimilated pan-Slavism and fragmented irreconcilably into radical, liberal, and conservative strains that reflected the formation of political parties. The Great Russian "nation" – tied to the dissonant alliances of the West European concert

in Southeastern Europe and reacting to the *revanchiste* mood of its daily reading

10

populace – would ultimately prove incapable of staying out of entangling alliances and national movements among Balkan rivals in Habsburg and Ottoman territories. The coverage of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the first major conflict in which journalists had been allowed to take part and make uncensored reports back to popular Russian-language reading audiences, proved to be a formative experience. Although there was some economic incentive to intervene in Southeastern Europe, the fragile tsarist state could not take such a calculated risk while beset with the grander domestic problems of its own. The “bourgeois writers,” as Lenin would later categorize the prerevolutionary journalists, rhetorically associating liberalism, capitalism and imperialism, readily presumed that ‘the Balkans’ justifiably fell within the Russian sphere of influence, unlike the territories in the Far East. Even while rejecting Europe’s social values and political and economic clout, the tsarist state at the very least had to seek parity with its European statist competitors. Moreover, “new journalists” of the commercial and commonly sensationalist press such as Doroshkevich had adopted many of the nineteenth-century themes of West European cultural and political exceptionalism along national, ethnic, or racial lines, with the additional (and perhaps contradictory) caveat of an anticapitalist and anti-bourgeois ethos that would metamorphose into a novel form of utopian exceptionalism, “Bolshevik culture.”

D. The Vanishing Balkans: Soviet Russian Exceptionalism and the “Bolshevization” of Russian Journalism, 1917-1985

During the period from the October Revolution to the start of World War II, Soviet Russian public reportage about ‘the Balkans’ beyond the reaches of the Comintern

was practically non-existent. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, created by

11

what was perceived to be an already decadent capitalist West, no longer could strike any popular chords. Leftover pan-Slav sentiments from the tsarist period were considered outdated and irrelevant. While the percentage of foreign affairs coverage was a substantial part of the press, ranging sometimes around 20-25%, *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *Bednota* managed and interpreted the news through the lens of an actual or symbolic international class warfare, and not in national terms. In depriving their immediate popular audience of everyday value-laden knowledge from other perspectives, the Bolsheviks sought to advance their international aims through underground means, and through direct financial support for (national) communist parties and “popular front” organizations. Arguably, in spite of the infamous “percentages agreement,” Yugoslavia was of minimal importance to the USSR until the Tito-Stalin rift in 1948. As Jeffrey Brooks has shown, “Journalists [in *Pravda*] portrayed Eastern Europe as grateful and dependent, not revolutionary. They noted the demise of the Yugoslav, Bulgarian, and Romanian monarchies, but quietly.” 9

One of the great historiographical divides in Russian and Soviet history is the question of whether the utopian experiment from 1917 to 1991 was doomed to failure from its “totalitarian” outset, or whether the Soviet state had the capacity to reconfigure itself, perhaps during the New Economic Policy of the 1920’s, Khrushchev’s short-lived “thaw,” or Gorbachev’s later attempts at a “third way” liberalization. This divide is also evident in research on the history of Soviet journalism and its international reporting. What was the actual meaning of “democratic centralism” in practice? For instance, while trying to decouple the direct line from Lenin to Stalin, Stephen Cohen in his revisionist *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* argues, “Economically, intellectually, and

culturally, NEP Russia became a relatively pluralistic society.” However, Cohen seems to

12

overstate his case and base his judgment solely on the political rhetoric of the Soviet newspapers before Stalin, finding them “moderate” in comparison with the wildly exhortative and dismissive language of high Stalinism. ¹⁰ In *The Birth of the Propaganda State, 1917-1929*, Peter Kenez examines the social structures of the press, and concurs with Sheila Fitzpatrick’s “The Civil War as a Formative Experience,” arguing that the Bolsheviks’ experiences during the Civil War after the October Revolution “were the formative period of the Soviet press. The Bolsheviks repudiated the principles governing the bourgeois press, but they did not have a clear idea of the kind of newspaper that would be appropriate for the new age.” Being a “street-fighting party,” in Fitzpatrick’s phrase, the Bolsheviks apparently had no recourse other than to impose a one-party monopoly over the press in order to reach out to the literate audience of workers and peasants whom they claimed to represent. Lenin’s own strategy and tactics, namely his agitational and propaganda activities, stresses Kenez again in his essay, “Lenin and the Freedom of the Press,” taught him and his constituency the importance of collective organization, mass mobilization, and intraparty discipline. “Immediately after the November [October] Revolution the Bolsheviks enjoyed the fruits of victory. They confiscated the paper supply, machinery, and buildings of the ‘bourgeois’ papers as spoils of war.” ¹¹

But how did the Bolsheviks allow their audience to learn about foreign affairs through the mouthpieces of their monopolized press? Enhanced content analyses by Jeffrey Brooks in his “The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed Material,” disclose that the major daily newspapers established by the Bolsheviks from 1917-1924, *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Bednota*, *Rabochnaia gazeta*, and *Gudok* did “cover” the

international scene. From 1922 to 1923, as a sample, the percentage of newspaper

13

content devoted to foreign affairs in *Rabochnaia Moskva* rose from 10% to 20%, and that of *Bednota* rose from 15% to 18%, perhaps due to the war scares. While highbrow intellectuals were permitted a significant amount of leniency and the central government actually supported and funded elite cultural and artistic experimentation, the popular audience of worker and peasant newspaper readers experienced far greater censorship, and were forced to condition themselves to a strict dichotomy between private and public codes and values. Hence, in this context, even lowbrow knowledge of foreign affairs from other sources was off-limits. Political engagement for the average journalist meant, first and foremost, commitment to the policy and ideology of the Bolshevik party.

According to Brooks in “Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921-1928,”

Emphasis on foreign affairs as the subject most likely to attract the common reader reflected the editors’ unequal contact with passive and uninformed common readers. The world abroad was an important subject in the pre-Revolutionary print media, and was, revolution, and civil war stimulated further curiosity. Soviet journalists tried to portray Bolshevik leaders as Soviet Russia’s defenders against a hostile and depraved capitalist world in order to address their interest. ¹²

Stalin’s accession to power and direction of the war effort signaled a shift toward a more aggressive tone in the popular press, and old-fashioned values like honor and dishonor, loyalty and disloyalty acquired a more performative framework. From Tito and the other supposedly party-bound leaders of Eastern bloc countries, as Milovan Djilas has shown in his exquisite conversations, Stalin expected enormous personal gratitude, not “nonalignment,” and yet it is questionable whether or not he considered communist Yugoslavia as a critical part of his post-war spoils. On the domestic post-war scene, the cult of the noble, quasi-divine leader and his robust yet modest people rallying around

him became more visible and vocal. Stalin's notorious toast on June 26, 1945 to the

14

Great Russian people prompted a backward slide toward Russian national chauvinism at the expense of non-Russian groups within the empire, especially the Jewish population. Those soldiers and officers who had been to the front and who had witnessed Western living conditions were perceived as a most dangerous threat to the leader's authority. In Brooks' abbreviated random sample at the outset of the Cold War, attention to foreign affairs shifted from a harmonious and coordinated Allied triumphalism toward a rise in emphasis upon a hostile, menacing outer world beyond the borders of the USSR. "The presentation of foreign affairs in the press changed in 1947 and 1948. *Pravda's* editors cut space on friendly and neutral relations with noncommunist countries and peaceful international activity from half in 1946 and 1947 to just over a quarter in 1948, under a fifth in 1949, and less than a tenth in 1952. Reports on conflicts increased correspondingly. Coverage of the bad life abroad declined and, after 1948, was integrated into more general coverage of the cold war. The new 'peoples democracies' never became a prime subject of reportage, however. Reports on foreign communist regimes exceeded 10 percent of *Pravda's* space only in 1949 and 1950, after Mao Zedong's victory." 13

The crackdown on reporting during the *Zhdanovshchina* and final period of high Stalinism called for increased *partiinost'* in all publications. The everyday public culture of sacrifice and devotion to the national leader manifested an insularity from the outside world and a retreat into private codes and values. While dissidents would later struggle for change under the often separate banners of human rights and nationalist sympathies, especially in Eastern Europe and the non-Russian republics of the USSR, there remained no "outside" within the grand text of Soviet official reportage. The disallowance of a free

press, enforcement of a centralized policy of socialist realism in the arts, and inability to

15

travel abroad, even after the “thaw” and exposure of the Stalinist cult of personality under Khrushchev, meant that the average Russian had no outlet in order to analyze how his or her actions were seen by the rest of the world. After the Hungarian uprising in 1956, for instance, the editors of *Kommunist* warned, “The events in Hungary have demonstrated the consequences of disregarding Leninist adherence to principle in questions of the guidance of literature and art.” Calls for further liberalization were relegated to an internal space of personal and private resistance. 14

Since the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian press had been transformed from a commercial, “bourgeois” outlet which catered to a growing, middle-class literate audience who overwhelmingly supported Russian national and exceptionalist pursuits in Southeastern Europe, and into a new kind of vehicle for a new geopolitical, civilizational imperative supported by peasants, workers, and fellow travelers. The late imperial tsarist state, foundering and weakened relative to the European Powers prior to World War I, ultimately had neither the authority nor the ability to monitor what its journalists were writing and publishing. The “street-fighting” Bolsheviks, who took command of a weak state and centralized the economy and “superstructure,” applied their tactics to build a “propaganda state,” in Peter Kenez’s phrase. After World War II, one of the major casualties of this enforced centralization was the inability to send information and receive ideas in a world of greater technological sophistication. At the popular level, the extended and exaggerated version of a siege mentality, the recoupling of a civilizing mission under the guise of Soviet Great Russian nationalism, and the inability to “cover the news” and foreign affairs from multiple perspectives on an everyday basis weakened the credibility of the state itself and ultimately damaged it beyond repair. During this

period, “the Balkans” significantly seemed to vanish from the USSR/Russian map, and

16

former presumed spheres of influence were noteworthy only insofar as their multiple ethnic groups forsook their nationalities and professed their loyalties to the communist line, especially after World War II. Everyday Bolshevik-monitored, overly didactical reporting thus “virtualized” the news, passing it through formulaic ideological filters, sharing a fundamental elitist distrust of its populace. As Lenin, stressing discipline and supervision, had written in a 1905 essay, “Party Organization and Party Literature,” all literature “must become party literature.”

E. Conclusion: The Post-Glasnost’ Retrenchment of the Russian “Independent” Press: Russian and ‘Balkan’ Quests for the Map of Europe, 1985-2001

The notions of objectivity, rhetorical transparency, and multiperspectivalism are central to the post-Soviet social transitions and reactions to the “Balkan” wars of the 1990s. Lenin and his adherents had created an entirely opaque public sphere in which knowledge of the outside world from differing points of view was prohibited. One of the main differences in the function of the press before and after 1917 was that unlike the commercial press’ consumer audience, the Bolsheviks were fantastically beyond the critical reaches of their projected and presumed constituents, and as a result were not obligated to rely upon the profit motive in order to “sell copies.” The former agencies of the Comintern (dissolved in 1943) and the post-WWII *ITAR-TASS*, the two official Soviet instruments for reporting the international news, functioned as one giant, mononuclear filter. Public dissidence and criticism of the central government, while emerging occasionally during the “thaw” after Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign, were compelled to stay grounded, nationally insular, and comparatively silent until glasnost’

and perestroika. However, Gorbachev's reforms proved to be no panacea either, and by

17

the heyday of the Yeltsin administration, an improvised retrenchment had taken place.

According to the journalist Il'ia Dzirkevelov, the pre-glasnost' *ITAR-TASS* agency was frequently used as a cover for KGB provocateurs and infiltrators, who would instruct the party-referent professional journalists which international events to cover and emphasize, and which to ignore altogether.¹⁵ Even under Gorbachev, correspondents often became confused about the formulaic policies established by the Kremlin in determining what news was "fit to print." With respect to Eastern Europe, writes John Murray, "Before the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, the position of the Russian correspondent covering the 'fraternal' socialist countries had become ever more difficult, in particular for those reporting from countries which had not followed the Soviet path of reconstruction and media openness."¹⁶ Consequently, news from such countries as Bulgaria, Romania and the disintegrating Yugoslavia would not easily reach the Soviet public audience.

During glasnost', the "one-dimensional triumphalism of fraternal news" slowly gave way to a "full warts-and-all coverage of the Soviet Union."¹⁷ But it would still take quite a while for accessibility to more than one political perspective to become the norm. In August, 1990, a formal law was passed permitting private and "independent" publications, but principally for economic reasons of interdependency and subsidization, it did not signal a complete break with the state. According to Irina Petrovskaja in a 1991 article in *Ogonek*, "The returnee: The Authorial Television of Leonid Kravchenko," the head of the *TASS* national news agency remained adamantly opposed to Gorbachev's liberalization program until nearly the end of 1990.¹⁸ After the final collapse of the USSR, the subscription system in Moscow and St. Petersburg was prone to bouts of high

inflation, and in fact had to rely upon Yeltsin's shrunken Russian state for funds and

18

loans. Initially, the new Russian journalists sought to adopt a Western-style language with its conventional modes of "wire reporting," simply translating "factual" data and commenting on articles in syndication from Reuters, the Associated Press, and France Presse. Under the Yeltsin administration, *Izvestiia* became firmly based within his camp, and the task of "objectively" reporting of the news was assumed by the more liberal and less constrained *Nezavisimaia gazeta*.¹⁹

After 1996, "Russia's media empires," as a series of special investigative correspondents of Radio Free Europe have dubbed the enterprise, have consisted largely of "oligarchs" beholden to the Kremlin who are in charge of shaping and distributing information in support of one or another political candidate.²⁰ In the United States, where the focus regularly leans toward celebrity and news personalities at the expense of constructive analysis, the question of media ownership remains somewhat taboo, often sliding down the slippery slope into anti-Semitic and conspiratorial accusations. In post-Soviet Russia, by contrast, the "manufacturing" or "shaping" of public opinion is readily assumed, particularly after the state-sanctioned wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. In fact, in a strange and ironic "Western" twist, the function of the new media largely serves the purpose of "PR" varieties of imagemaking and rhetorical posturing among potential leaders on the contested terrains of the political homefront. The June 11, 1999 "march to Pristina" (*marsh-brosok na Prishtinu*) and arrival of troops under Yeltsin's orders indicated Russia's renewed attempt to place itself once again on the European map and within the strong-armed decision making apparatus of the international community.²¹

However, as Michael Ignatieff, Timothy Garton Ash, Aleksa Djilas, and Misha

Glenny have argued, the new modes of peacekeeping/nationbuilding in Southeastern

19

Europe once again are falling within the presumed Russian sphere of influence, but under a very different geopolitical umbrella. An opportunistic yet capricious Vladimir Putin, able to combine appeals for renewed national pride with a more careful consideration of the geopolitical diplomatic scene, has taken control of a weakened but potentially strong state while successfully consigning the ultranationalists and imperial irridentists to the fringe. Parallels sensibly abound between the ongoing American-led war in Afghanistan and Vladimir Putin's "splendid little war" against real or imagined Chechen "terrorists," which consolidated his meteoric rise to power as Yeltsin's handpicked successor. Putin himself, quite unpredictably vacillating between prosecution of oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky and his Media Most, which heavily influenced Yeltsin's 1996 election, and deliberate crackdowns on "independent" journalists and NGO's, has openly expressed his preference for order and admiration for Gorbachev's conservative turn and the failed Kriuchkov military coup in 1990. His speech in German to the Bundestag in late September, 2001 brashly called for Russian entry into NATO and re-integration into a European "edintsvo kultura" ("unity of culture").²¹

In the 1990s, from the standpoint of a Russian public preoccupied by the frequently intractable domestic economic problems of its own, militantly supporting the 'Balkan' ethnocratic regimes of Milosevic and/or Tudjman did not prove to be a viable option for the Russian state. Identification with the victimized "brother" Serbs remained merely symbolic and on the extreme political fringes. There is nothing to indicate an extensive average Russian historical knowledge of their presumably Serbian, Bulgarian, or Macedonian brethren, and more to indicate their disaffection with other "Central European" Slavs like the Czechs, the Poles, and (perhaps most sensitive of all) the

Ukrainians. As Peter Bonin has argued, “To start with the allegedly special relationship

20

between Russians and the Slavic population of Southeastern Europe, Russian Balkan policy was – even in Western perception – largely understood in religious and cultural categories. However in Russia it was only the radical national-patriotic opposition that made the close relationship between Russians and Serbs their priority issue. This kind of attempted political mobilization was limited to the national revivalist movement. Supposedly cultural or religious commitments towards the Serbs were and are not the basis of action for politics or government action.”²²

Within the improvised frameworks of the “new journalism” in Russia, the state and society have a more fluid and complex relationship following ten years of economic, political, social and cultural transitions.²³ Easily forgotten are the delicate and complex diplomatic involvements of the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires within the Westphalian-based European balance of power. While the late imperial period, characterized in part by its emergence of pluralistic political parties, has begun to be slowly rehabilitated, Russian foreign policy and mainstream government-sponsored international news coverage ultimately (if reluctantly) supported U.S. and European NATO intervention from within a classic *raison d’etat* framework, rather than from the standpoint of any pan-Slav or ethnonationalist expansionist adventure. Through the media lenses, historically decontextualized, culturally constructivist studies of public opinion and state and supranational initiatives, as Michael Ignatieff has shrewdly warned in his *Virtual War*, run the danger of reducing analyses of foreign policy to an oversimplified and deterministic model of coordinated action and reaction.

Notes

1. The prime example of such dual censorship is the research of B. I. Esin, which slants teleologically toward the development of a “pre-revolutionary” press. See his *Puteshestvie v proshloe: gazetnyi mir XIX veka* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1983); *Russkaia gazeta i gazetnoe delo v Rossii: zadachi i teoretiko-metodologicheskie printsipy izucheniia* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1981); and most importantly *Russkaia dorevoliutsionnaia gazeta, 1702-1917* (Moskva: MGU, 1971).
2. See David MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1996): 10-12; and also V.V. Zaitsev, “Russko-serbskie otnosheniia kontsa 70-kh – nachala 80-kh godov XIX veka v russkoi dorevoliutsionnoi publitsistike I istoriografii,” *Etudes Balkaniques* 1983 19(3): 40-57; and Svetlana Ivanovna Danchenko, “Russkaia zhurnalistika o Serbii i russko-serbskikh otnosheniakh, 1885-1903,” *Sovetskoe Slavianovedenie* 1990 (2): 33-43.
3. Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1975).
4. Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991): 79. On the career of Suvorin and his relation to the state and his editorial peers, see Effie Ambler, *Russian Journalism and Politics: The Career of Aleksei S. Suvorin, 1861-1881* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972).
5. In his article, “The Yugoslav Tragedy” (*Prospect*, October 1995), Djilas writes, “The civil war in Yugoslavia is part of the same process of border formation and ethnic homogenization which the rest of Europe has already been through. What is happening is not Balkanization, but Europeanization, and it is irreversible.” Glenny and Djilas each opposed the NATO intervention, but from very different historical angles: Glenny from the standpoint of human rights and unilateral violations, Djilas from the tradition of Serbian nationalism and dissent. For a discussion on the issues of war guilt, ethnic cleansing, and “moral equivalence,” see Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000): 137-157.
6. Alfred Rieber, “Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy,” *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 352-353.
7. McReynolds, 176-183.
8. The term “great power nationalism” is used by Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000): 115-171. For a discussion of the Russian state's insuperable

challenges in choosing Balkan sides, see Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). On the changing patterns of state censorship, see Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

9. Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001): 207.
10. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 125. For a critique of Cohen's assessments, see Matthew E. Lenoe, "Agitation, Propaganda, and the "Stalinization" of the Soviet Press, 1922-1930" (The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies, no. 1305. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1998), especially chapter 2.
11. Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State, 1917-1929*: 48. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Civil War as a Formative Experience"; and Kenez, "Lenin and the Freedom of the Press," *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Abbott Gleason et. al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. Press, 1985): 143.
12. Brooks, "The Breakdown in Production and Distribution of Printed Material," *Bolshevik Culture*, 171; and *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*; "Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review*, Spring 1989: 20.
13. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 208. For further background, see Antony. Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964); and Angus Roxburgh, *Pravda: Inside the Russian News Machine* (London: Gollancz, 1987).
14. Quoted in Harold Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962): 188. See also Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998): chapter 19, 191-201, "Public Opinion and the 'Hungarian Syndrome.'"
15. Il'ia Dzirkvelov, *Secret Agency* (Collins, London, 1987).
16. John Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain* (Hants, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1994): 111.
17. Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 119.
18. Murray, 51; and Irina Petrovskaja, "Vozvrashchanets: avtorskoe televidenie Leonida Kravchenko," *Ogonek* no. 6, 1991: 3-4.
19. Murray, 157 and 70.

20. "Russian Media Empires I-VI," *Radio Free Europe* on-line archive, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/special/rumedia6/logovaz.html>.
21. For a copy of the speech by Putin in German on September 25, 2001, see: http://www.bundestag.de/blickpkt/2001/putin_wort.html.
22. Peter Bonin, "The Last Reserves of the imagined Great Power: On the Significance of the Balkans for Russian Political and Economic Actors," *Osteuropa* 51 (2001) 4/5: 540-553; and *Russland und der Krieg im ehemaligen Jugoslawien* (1994). See also *Iugoslavskii krizis i Rossia: dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii (1990-1993)* (Moskva: "Slavianskaia letopis", 1993); N. V. Nikiforov, *Mezhdru kremlem i Respublikoi Serbskoi* (1999); and Iurii Davydov, "Problema Kosovo v rossiiskom vnutripoliticheskom kontekste" ("The Problem of Kosovo in a Russian Internal Political Context"), 247-279, *Kosovo: mezhdunarodnye aspekty krizisa (Kosovo: International Aspects of the Crisis)*, ed. Dmitri Trenin and Ekaterina Stepanovaia (Moskva: Moscow Carnegie Centre, 1999).
23. As shown in the recent monograph and profile of Russian journalists by Pascale Bonnamour, *Les Nouveau Journalistes Russes* (1999); and the sociological study and collection of essays, *Pressa v obshchestve (1959-2000): otsenki zhurnalistov i sotsiologistov; dokumenty* (Moskva: Moskovskaia shkola politicheskaia issledovani, 2000).

