Russian "Hard Power" and "Soft Power" in Influencing Central and Eastern European Countries on the Example of Poland in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract:

Purpose: An attempt was made to determine the scope and actual implications resulting from the use of the Russian "hard power" and "soft power" concerning the CEE countries in the COVID-19 era based on the Russian impact on Poland in the period 2019/2020.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The substantive components of the impact under study were obtained through a study. A synthesis method was applied, which allowed for grouping the originally separated components into three basic currents of hard influences: political, political-economic, and paramilitary. The comparison method was used to verify such a division of the Russian hard current and, if such a division is confirmed, to highlight the existing differences - especially between the first and second current. In the course of research on the methodology of the Kremlin's soft impact on the Polish decision-making process, the method of reviewing source materials of recognized reliability was used (query of scientific literature and expert studies), which were compared with quantitatively collected data obtained from media information to supplement the whole source material. The conclusions were formulated using induction and deduction methods.

Findings: The Russian Federation uses political and economic and economic measures in the first place to influence using "hard power," and if it is not possible to influence such measures, it uses paramilitary measures. In the case of soft power impact, the Russian Federation mainly uses informational means in the form of so-called "social engineering" methodology (propaganda), where the main area of activity is virtual space.

Practical Implications: This paper can be used in scientific and expert work dedicated to the Russian methodology of impact using "hard power" and "soft power."

Originality/Value: Lack of comprehensive scientific studies dedicated to the methodology of using "hard power" and "soft power" means by the Russian Federation during the COVID-19 2019/2020 epidemic.

Keywords: Hard power, soft power, Russian Federation, Russia, Kremlin, COVID-19, epidemic.

Paper type: Research in Security Studies.

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1. Introduction

The arsenal of hard influences used by Russia in its relations with Poland, therefore, includes economic, political, and economic and paramilitary activities (Makarychev, 2020). The common feature of these actions is that they deliberately demonstrate their own power to exert pressure or intimidate the opposing party to the extent that they allow for a change in the country's policy direction concerned by the affected party's intention. In contrast to soft actions, in which the acting party avoids coercion, such a negative impact is the norm in hard actions. An example is the threat of price increases for raw material on which the other party is dependent. In a forcible variant, temporary supply stoppages may occur under any excuse, such as pipeline failure. Another form of influence may be a massive information campaign with diplomatic missions that create political and social pressure against specific political decisions. The third category is the paramilitary activities, which are not related to the armed forces' actual use, but the creation of threats to their use or paramilitary formations, as was the case several years ago in Ukraine. It should be acknowledged that some researchers of these issues include military demonstrations, e.g., in the form of "peaceful military exercises" at the border with a given country, as activities from the repertoire of military actions (Götz, 2017). Regardless of the adopted name, all the mentioned forms of hard impact (Matlary, 2018; deLisle, 2020) have been used concerning Poland, which was presented in the cases indicated in the paper.

The research presented in the paper aims to describe the methodology of Moscow's hard and soft influence on the Polish decision-making process. Research methods such as analysis, synthesis, and comparison were used for scientific considerations.

2. Russian "Hard Power" and the Polish Decision-Making Process

Analyzing the economic impact, it is worth noting that the total value of products purchased in Russia in 2019 is nearly $16 billion, with oil and oil products worth more than $10 billion, iron and steel is more than $675 million, aluminum is more than $381 million. This means that almost two-thirds of the imported goods are energy and heavy production of raw materials. In 2018, the value of imported goods was almost 4 billion dollars higher. In the same year 2018, Russia imported products with a value of just over 5 billion dollars from Poland, which means that the value of the purchased goods was about four times lower than that of those purchased by Poland from Russia. Among other things, Russia acquired in 2018 various types of machines, boilers, but also nuclear reactors worth more than one billion dollars, vehicles other than trains worth more than half a billion dollars, electronic equipment worth nearly half a billion dollars, as well as plastic products, perfume, cosmetics, toiletries, also worth half a billion dollars (Tradingeconmics, 2020). To sum up, at the moment determined by the epidemiological situation, Poland is sourcing from the vast majority of raw materials necessary to maintain the energy economy and the functioning of the metallurgical industry, while Russia is importing products that could be purchased in another

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country or interrupt supplies for some time without the risk of destabilizing its own economy. Therefore, Poland is dependent on continuous supplies from Russia, and the search for an alternative could be linked to the temporary economic crisis. The commissioning of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline bypassing Poland in gas supplies to Germany means that, in theory, Russia could stop deliveries via the Yamal pipeline, thus causing a problem with access to gas in Poland (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2020). On the other hand, in the current difficult economic situation caused by sanctions, warfare on two open fronts, and the still-developing COVID-19 epidemic (Comite, 2020), all the revenues flowing into the Russian budget are of gold importance. Poland could also count on supplies from other EU member states and Norway in the event of a gas crisis and given that the long-term contract with Gazprom will expire in 2022, Moscow has absolutely no interest in severing supplies this or next year. What is more, Poland will become completely independent from Russian supplies in 2023 by establishing cooperation with Norway and Denmark in the construction of Baltic Pipe and by expanding the Świnoujście gas port. Thus, the real possibilities for Russia to influence by limiting or stopping gas supplies are already minimal on the verge of impossibility, and after 2023 these possibilities will disappear completely.

After the USSR collapsed, the newly formed Russian Federation often used the available economic instruments, which were largely related to the former post-Soviet republics' dependence on Russian energy imports (Åtland and Kabanenko, 2020; Götz, 2017). At that time, under any pretext, deliveries could be stopped, including the excuse used in the past for sudden maintenance or repair with an indefinite deadline for completion of the "corrective" measures taken. In the background, there was usually a game of influencing the political decision-making process of a given post-Soviet country, according to the doctrine of Falin-Kwiciński, which such the doctrine said that the retreating Red Army should be replaced by a network of addictive energy connections (mainly gas and oil). However, thanks to the achievements of the so-called Shale Revolution, which allowed American companies to produce vast quantities of very cheap oil and gas, the U.S. was able to push Russia out as a supplier of raw materials, depriving the Kremlin of this important leverage. Not without significance are plans to build nuclear power plants in Poland based on American rather than Russian technology. To conclude, the possibilities of influencing the Polish decision-making process using energy mechanisms have lost their importance. As a result, the possibility of effective use of this instrument of political and economic impact, so popular in recent decades, has disappeared.

In the case of the possibility of paramilitary impact, events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria have shown that Russia is ready and willing to use these means to achieve its geostrategic goals. The epidemiological situation resulting from the spread of COVID-19 (Ordóñez, Garrido-Perez, and García-Herrera, 2020; Liu *et al.,* 2020) contributes to taking actions in other geopolitical circumstances could meet with strong opposition from international opinion. As a result, while it is difficult to imagine the possibility of carrying out a regular military operation directly against

NATO and EU Member States, paramilitary operations are much more likely (Szymanski, Smuniewski, and Platek, 2020) to be the ones described below.

The first action repeated every year, and intended to create a kind of paramilitary pressure, are exercises carried out in Belarus, near the Polish border. The maneuvers are intended to present the offensive capabilities of the Russian and Belarusian armed forces. These exercises took on a new and disturbing tone after Crimea's annexation and the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine (Götz, 2016). Suddenly, the scenario with the use of unidentified military units (the so-called "green people") became dangerously real, especially since one of the Polish Voivodeships is inhabited by many people belonging to the Russian-speaking minority. Theoretically, therefore, there would be a pretext for starting paramilitary activities in the east of Poland, along the lines of Ukraine. Equally important is the ongoing publicity for the concept of the so-called 'Suwałki isthmus,' i.e., the strategically important location of the area in the north-eastern part of Poland, whose acquisition would, on the one hand, connect Belarus with Kaliningrad and, on the other, cut off the Baltic States from Poland. Expanded media speculation on this subject, combined with the year after year of increasing maneuvers at Poland's borders, effectively influenced the imagination of the Polish and NATO generals and political decision-makers.

The second type of paramilitary influence is the presentation in the media of modern armament technologies, which are the fruit of Russian research centers' work and are intended to undermine the belief in the defensive capabilities of Poland's greatest ally, the United States. Such projects include new types of hypersonic missiles capable of breaking through all currently operating anti-missile shields. This was a clear signal sent to all the post-Soviet republics with a message indicating that Russia can defend itself effectively and, what is more, it can suddenly and very effectively attack any of Washington's allies anywhere in the world, let alone in Europe itself. Given the weakening possibilities of Russia's economic influence, it is mainly this paramilitary type of influence on the Polish decision-making process that remains, which also does not have much impact on the current government in Warsaw given its increasingly close relations with Washington and the increasingly frequent information concerning the intensification of the presence of American troops and American defense infrastructure in Poland.

3. Russian "Soft Power" and the Polish Decision-Making Process

Poland has been in the geopolitical and geostrategic interest of Russia for centuries (Amelina, 2007; Götz, 2016). Therefore, the Russian state apparatus uses various methods, techniques, and tools of influence, a significant part of which are classified as so-called "soft power" (Ohnesorge, 2020). The aim of the Russian "soft power" is, on the one hand, to gain public acceptance for Russian culture as mentally close to the Poles, and on the other hand, to gain the favor of the so-called elites. It is important to identify the social groups that the Russians rank among those elites that actively

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influence the shape of the Polish state's external and internal policies. For obvious reasons, the elites understood in this way include politicians (above all active and young, but promising for the future); entrepreneurs (especially those who have or can influence key areas of the economy and thus influence the shape of political decisions); journalists and people connected with the mass and social media (by influencing public opinion, they can also influence politicians and the state policy they create) (Sri, 2018). Thus, Russian soft action runs in parallel in two ways: it affects both society and people who have a real influence on the country's shape of policies.

The methodology of social influence concerning Russian thought goes back to the genesis of so-called "social engineering", whose personal product was described as technologists or social engineers/social influence (Baumann, 2020). Under these peculiarly technical-sounding names is simply the propaganda methodology still being developed in the Soviet Union (Amelina, 2007). Under communism, this was one of the most important functions of the Republic of Councils, whose aim was to keep society in absolute obedience to the ruling party apparatus. Red propagandists were responsible for shaping the majority of society's mental attitudes so that people without external coercion felt a strong need to support and sacrifice themselves for the "red homeland", whose interest was expressed by political representatives of the USSR. The other part of society, which could not develop an authentic devotion to the communist ideology, lived with the conviction that it was constantly being observed and invigilated, which was also the result of skillfully conducted propaganda activities. Even with a huge number of officers from the bodies responsible for the USSR's internal security, it would not be possible to control every citizen every minute of their lives.

Therefore, it was enough to develop a strong conviction among the USSR citizens that the Party and Soviet special services are omnipresent, all-powerful, and see and know everything. At that time, the USSR citizens controlled themselves and, by the way, other citizens, by their behavior, became part of a permanent machine of mutual surveillance, which without such behavior could not have worked so effectively. Today, technology makes it technically possible to control most of the life activities of individual people, but this was in no way possible during the Soviet era on such a massive scale (Amelina, 2007). Therefore, the methodology of propaganda developed at that time was erected to the heights of the general social craftsmanship and mass manipulation of all citizens' collective awareness.

Therefore, it is worthwhile to look at which of the methods, techniques, and tools developed at that time are currently applied in the case of impact on Polish society. Using reverse optics, we will start with a presentation of the tools to smoothly pass through their characteristics to discuss the techniques, allowing us to discuss the methods. In this case, it seems that the use of a synthetic approach, instead of an analytical one, can be justified by the line of argument adopted in this chapter.

The first group of tools includes classic media, among which one can distinguish: press, radio, and television. Another group of tools is social media in its broadest sense (Islam *et al.,* 2020; Gonçalves, 2017), where Russians have paid special attention to social communicators, blogs, and information services with the possibility of posting various comments under the published content. These tools are used by the Russian apparatus responsible for soft measures to shape public opinion in Poland.

The tools indicated are used within the framework of three basic techniques of social impact, which originated in the golden age of the Soviet Union:

- the technique of creating a specific vision of reality consistent with the intentions of the Russian authorities,
- the technique of blurring the hitherto accepted vision of reality by spreading as many other versions as possible (classic disinformation), where these different visions may conflict with the vision presented by the Russian authorities,
- the technique of negating a specific vision of reality that is not in line with the intentions of the Russian authorities without proposing an alternative version - indicating (true or false) factual or logical errors in the "attacked" vision of reality.

The indicated basic techniques are subject to various modifications, combining or creating original varieties depending on the authors' intentions and dynamically changing geopolitical and geostrategic circumstances. Thus, at the highest level, Russian specialists apply three methods using particular versions and combinations of these techniques:

- the white method - the use of true information in creating a specific vision of reality using selected propaganda techniques,
- grey method - using partially true partially false information in creating a specific vision of reality using selected propaganda techniques,
- the black method - creating false information and disseminating it using selected propaganda techniques.

The discussed methods, techniques, and tools are applicable at the national level. In contrast, each of the techniques used within the framework of individual tools is subject to detail concerning the selected tool (e.g., specific social communicator such as Facebook, Twitter, contact, etc.), the selected target group, and the development of the content of the message prepared according to the characteristics of the given target group.

Another group necessary to discuss is the methods, techniques, and tools for influencing people classified by the Russian administrative apparatus as a social elite characterized in the beginning. As in the previous example, a synthetic approach was

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used instead of an analytical one, thus starting with tools, then techniques, and ending with a discussion on Russian influence on the elite of Polish society.

Through the tools used to gain favor and build relationships with people selected as members of the social elite, Russian specialists use a variety of institutions ranging from their own embassies and consulates to government-owned and private information agencies (press, radio, television, internet), companies, scientific institutions, and various associations and foundations. These institutions provide credibility and thus give authority to people who are to establish a relationship with people from the Polish social elite. In other words, the proverbial "entrance to salons" is performed through "salons," which are established for this purpose or ad hoc institutions controlled by the Russian administrative apparatus.

The techniques of building relationships with elite people are quite different. They are preceded by exploratory activities aimed at developing a psychological profile, which is useful for identifying the strengths and weaknesses that can be used in building relationships. For this reason, the techniques of building and consolidating relationships can be divided into:

- techniques based on meeting material needs;
- techniques based on meeting personal needs resulting from the psychological profile, such as the need for recognition, authority, building relations;
- techniques based on meeting existential needs, such as security.

To sum up, a particular technique, different versions, or combinations of them are selected according to a pre-developed psychological profile, which theoretically excludes the possibility of failure. All these activities undertaken in the framework of these techniques are, in turn, part of the methods.

The methods are grouped according to the criterion of how they build, consolidate, and develop relationships with people from the elite. Of course, the main goal is to use the created relationship to influence the shape of political decisions. However, a given relationship's goal may be a lower-order goal that fits into the presented higher-order goal. In this case, you can talk about methods such as:

- the political relationship method - established in order to gain direct influence on the shape of political decisions, where techniques to meet the needs of a career in politics may emerge;
- the business relationship method - established in order to gain influence on the environment of entrepreneurs who can indirectly influence politicians in their immediate environment;
- the social relationship method - established in order to gain influence on representatives of self-government organizations and pro-social circles that can influence wider social phenomena, and thus politicians;

- the media relationship method - established to gain influence on the environment present in the media field, so that you can influence the shaping of public opinion, thus influencing politicians.

4. Conclusions

In the era of COVID-19, Russia gained a favorable geopolitical atmosphere allowing for stronger and more offensive actions to pursue strategic interests in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. In the area of hard impact, it is forecast that para-military measures will be resorted to in the form of intensified maneuvers, border violations, and provocations aimed at maintaining a high level of international tension, which will encourage the push for solutions proposed by the Russian side in the political forum.

The impact of political and economic measures and strictly economic measures have lost their raison d'être in the absence of strong interdependencies in this area. In the case of soft impacts, increased intensity of information activities carried out mainly in virtual space, including social media, is forecast. If it is not possible to create social attitudes consistent with the intentions of Kremlin's information centers, Russian information activities will focus on antagonizing Polish society in order to weaken or prevent the paralysis of Russian geopolitical activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

The main objective is now to increase the possibility of influencing the Ukrainian decision-making process by taking control of the country's further areas. In this context, the geopolitical actions taken against Central and Eastern European countries are intended to prevent those countries from engaging in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and the future Russian-Belarusian crisis. The epidemiological situation made it possible to take decisive action to strengthen and extend the acquired bridgeheads on the territory of these two countries while knowing that the West will not interfere with Russian activities in this area during this difficult period.

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