The Politics of International Relations

The Strategic Communication of China, Russia and the USA in Latin America under the Conditions of Global Crisis

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The strategic communication is a vital component of the national, regional and global security. It is on a system level presents in the policy of the leading powers. The efficiency of strategic communication depends from the system of the consequent right messages to the right target audience in the right time, using the right channels and their communication abilities with high efficiency.

In this paper using the methods of comparative and SWOT analysis the author tries to put differences and mark out the peculiarities of strategic communication of the USA, Russia and China in Latin America under the conditions of global crisis. How these powers formulate the key objectives and strategies in the region, develop awareness of their national brands in the local audiences, ensure that those brands fulfill their promises and expectations? What are their main advantages and weaknesses in realization of strategic communication in the region?

And what is the role of communication management tools in realization of the strategic communication of three powers. At the same time the present paper aims to examine the adequacy of the strategic communication of the USA, Russia and China to the interests of socio-economic development and strengthening of the democratic institutions in Latin America under the current aggravation of global situation.

Key Words: strategic communication, the USA, Russia, China, Latin America, national security, communication management.

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1. Introduction

Most generally, strategic communication is the state’s projection of certain strategic values, interests and goals into the conscience of domestic and foreign audiences. It is done by means of adequate synchronization of multifaceted activities in all the domains of social life with professional communication support. It is clear that such synchronization takes place in all three countries analyzed: Russia, China and the USA; reflecting the dynamics of the unique national symbiosis of the old and the new, of the local and the adopted aspects of administration forms and methods of influencing public consciousness.

The USA have elevated the concept of strategic communication to a state policy at the highest level (White House, 2010). In spite of an abundance of state institutions, documents (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, 2004; Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2006; Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), 2007; U.S. Senate, 2008; Department of Defense, 2010; Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, 2010 etc.) and scientific research (Paul, Ch., 2011; Corman S. R., Trethewey, A., Goodall, H. L., ed. 2008; Holtzhausen D., Zerfass A., ed. 2015; Fisher, A. & Lucas, S., ed. 2011; Murphy, D. M., 2008; Stovichek B. E., 2007; Patterson S.J., Radtke J.M., 2009 etc.), it is still in its nascent stages of development there.

We can find the term ”strategic communication” in the political lexicon of the state leaders of China (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2010; Indo Asian News Service, 2013; Hindustan Times, 2013). In 2011 the first Chinese book on strategic communication, entitled the Essentials of Strategic Communication, was published. The book was jointly published by two presses in Beijing: Press of Chinese Academy of Governance, and the Central Compilation and Translation Press. The book was highly evaluated by General Liu Yongzh, General Zhang Xusan and Chief Political Commentator of Phonex TV Mr. Ruan Cishan. They three respectively wrote prefaces to it. The term ”strategic communication” becomes more and more popular in China on the official sites of different state structures.

Russia tends to use the term ”state informational policy”, which does not exclude, however, the need for strategic communication, as it is implicit in the term. Though the term is not used in official documents, unlike the USA and less China one can find it in business lexicon and academic literature of Russia (Vinogradova, E. A., 2015; Pashents, Evg., 2014; Polunina, O. S., 2013 etc.).

Strategic communication in the realm of foreign policy combines synchronization of affecting an allied state, and non-state actors through friendly “deeds, words and images” and through a wide range of communications within the framework of information warfare addressing foes and enemies. However, separating one from another is extremely difficult for the following reasons: It is not easy to forge alliances in the contemporary international field, due to the conflicting interests of governing elites, who are often quite controversial. Such a phenomenon was evidence when the U.S. launched a large scale media campaign against their ally France due to its outspoken disapproval at the UN in 2003 with regard to America’s decision to invade Iraq.

The modern realities and interpretations of conflict deliberately blur boundaries between war and peace, between military and civilian systems, and the blurry boundaries between information and influence or manipulation (Armistead, E., ed., Arpagian N., 2010; 2004; Brunner E. M., Cavelty M. D., 2009). The extension of
warfare into public consciousness has taken place before. However, today we can witness the evidence of a professional form of warfare being waged in the public consciousness using complex methods of communicational influence on a global level – pulling more people into the virtual world of the internet and social networking. Accordingly, it stimulates the further development and application of new kinds of informational impact and information weapons.

*The methodology of the research* is based on the comparative method and SWOT analysis. Comparisons are a cornerstone of contemporary social sciences and history, and no social inquiry is possible without them (Slatter, D., Ziblatt, D., 2013). Comparison is a fundamental tool of analysis. It sharpens our power of description and plays a crucial role in concept-formulation by bringing suggestive similarities and contrasts among cases. The forms of comparison vary widely and include those contained in statistical analysis, experimental research, and historical studies. At the same time, the label "comparative method" has a standard meaning within the political discipline and in the social sciences more broadly: it refers to the methodological issues that arise in the systematic analysis of a small number of cases, or a "small N" (Collier, D., 1993, p. 105). Small-sample comparisons sometimes have been dismissed as "merely" descriptive, anecdotal, historical, or journalistic, and therefore atheoretical. But the harshest critic of such studies would have to concede that they at least generate "facts." Facts may seem atheoretical, but they are not. In reality, we cannot even observe facts until we have a conceptual framework to help us make sense of what we perceive (Lakatos, I., 1978. Cit. by: Coppedge, M., 2002).

The historical and geopolitical context within which we place the strategic communication of three countries to compare and contrast is determined by their long term interests in Latin America which is examined in a big number of research (Santiago, S., 2016; Gallagher, K. P., 2016; McPherson, A. A., 2016). The grounds for comparative analysis are evident: all three states pretend to be the global leaders in this or that way, the interests and policies of the USA from one hand and China and Russia from the other one in a rising number of cases contradict to each other in different regions including Latin America. At the same time one can observe an absence of a comparative and system study of the strategic communication of Russia, China and the USA in Latin America. We organize the body of paper in text-by-text way (firstly we analyze SC of Russia, then China and finally the USA), that is with SWOT analysis provides a framework for better understanding of the current opportunities and perspectives of the strategic communication of each country.

We shall start from Russia, which has made a significant breakthrough to Latin America since the beginning of the 21st century.

### 2. The strategic communication of Russia in Latin America: coming back to the region

After the breakup of the Soviet Union the system of foreign policy propaganda fell into a badly coordinated, controversial, low-powered, inefficient and far from long-term Russian interests foreign policy communications of separate bodies without any strategic context. The new elite was deep in corruption, with Western backup, tried to hold on to power in the country with a declining economy, social sphere sliding into poverty, intensifying property stratification, science and education degradation, but with the richest natural resources and a powerful nuclear potential.
The situation has started to improve with the presidency of Vladimir V. Putin first, and then Dmitry A. Medvedev and now once again Vladimir Putin. There is a twist to more independent international course, although many strategic solutions of national development are delayed and the citizens’ well-being is connected to the oil prices and other resources which can’t but transmit negative images of Russia to Latin America.

In 2008 RIA Novosti opened its bureau in Cuba. It was the step towards a more complete presence of the leading Russian agency in the region. In 2010 further strengthening of the informational presence of Russia in the region took place as Spanish inserts of Rossiiskaya Gazeta appeared in the biggest Latin American periodicals – “Clarín”, “Jornal do Brasil”, “Russia Today” also started broadcasting in Spanish.

“Mutually beneficial collaboration”, “equality”, “multipolar world” – the key messages of the modern Latin American Strategy of Russia, well accepted on the level of local elites and the broad strata of the people.

We can hardly ever argue the fact that the image of Russia is better in Cuba and Venezuela than in the former Baltic republics; and the image of the USA is better in the minds of the Latvians, the Estonians and the Lithuanians than in the Cubans or Venezuelans. The nature of foreign policy is not the main reason here. The matter is in the difficult history of small peoples neighboring world powers. No world power is persistent in respectable relations with small neighbors. Probably vice versa. Old offences are healing slowly and the strategic communication of Russia and the USA should not be directed at the warming up, at the same time this situation should not be considered from the point of view of the counterpart’s craft. The concrete analysis and concrete evaluation as well as mutual exchange of opinions and specialists are necessary.

Which competitive advantages can Russia plan in its strategic communication returning to Latin America?

No matter how strange it is, but its weakness, the US problems in the region are caused by its inadequate manifestation of economic, military and informational power in the region. Russia in its turn quickly and substantially returning to the region could go by:

- The evident faults in the US foreign policy during the last two decades in the region and in the world; evident unwillingness of Latin America to remain a “backyard” of the USA.
- The evident desire to increase the price of its services for those parts of Latin American elite which is interested in the USA; the desire to organize a fast modernization for those who don’t believe in the US support.
- The absence of geographical contact and problematic past common with Latin America.
- As for cultural and interpersonal contacts, Russian culture is closer to multi-active Latin American culture than to linear - active or reactive ones.

Russia with its slowly recovering economic power and alternative resources of supply and production of arms (together with the EU, China and other countries) symbolizes an alternative for Latin Americans. At the same time, Russia can go by recollections about past Soviet power (historical heritage) but without fear of communism for the local elites. Neither those who like it, nor those who hate it will be able to find it in modern Russia.

The instability of strategic communication of modern Russia is mainly determined by the instability of its economic resource-based situation, scientific and
technical inferiority (more serious than in the USSR) and hot social problems. But if the current model of the socio-economic and political development has changed radically in positive direction it could open new strategic perspectives and logically renovate strategic communication.

3. The strategic communication of China in Latin America is on the rise

The strategic communication of China, the second power analyzed in this paper, also plays a significant part in reinforcing its positions in the Latin American region. Regarding the changes in the presence of the three countries in Latin America after the end of the cold war, the USA have been demonstrating a gradual and in some parts an invisible decrease of the economic, military and political presence in the region. In the past decade this tendency acquired an obvious and in some countries, a dramatic character. Russia, who seemed to be a ridiculous political dwarf here in the 1990s, has managed not only to return to the region but to significantly expand its influence when compared with the Soviet period. China is the only one among the three powers who has been demonstrating during the two decades a steady expansion of its economic, military, cultural and informational presence in the region.

"In the present international climate, China considers it necessary to develop strategic partnership with the Latin American countries, "President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao said during his last official visit to Peru in 2008. "China is the largest developing country and Latin America is the largest developing continent. Our closer communication … is the demand of the present and the requirement for the development of the both sides," explained the president (Novaya Politika, 2008).

These words provide a key message to Latin America within the strategic communication of China. Another China's key message is formulated in the slogan of the so-called "peaceful rise". Through this message China presents its own system to the countries of Africa and Latin America as a model for the struggle against poverty.

A characteristic feature of the Chinese strategic communication is their well-considered and long-term nature. It is aimed at neutralizing the prospective threats of being rejected by the target audiences abroad for the reasons related to the rapid economic growth of China, as well as the growth of its military potential. The Chinese leaders in this or that way in their speeches stress that in terms of world development, revitalization of a country in the era of economic globalization can be well achieved through equal and orderly international competition and mutually beneficial cooperation. It's no longer necessary or possible to take the old path of challenging either the existing international order or other countries. The rise and fall of some big powers in the world tells China: Expansionism leads to nowhere; arms race leads to nowhere; seeking world domination leads to nowhere. As Deng Xiaoping once said, if one day China tries to seek hegemony in the world, people of the world should expose, oppose and overthrow it. The international community can hold us to account. China Will never seek hegemony when it becomes more developed – this is the third key message to the countries of the world and Latin American countries can especially appreciate it. (Liu Huanxing 2011).

What competitive advantages can China count on in its strategic communication on the Latin American direction of its policy? Here, we will refrain
from repeating the positions that have proved to be advantageous for Russia. They are mostly valid for China as well. However, China has its own extra advantages as well as weak points.

- The rate of economic development of China is incomparably higher than that of the USA and Russia and its current GDP, though two times smaller than the North American one, is three times larger than the Russian one. The real prospects of its further growth in the XXI century undoubtedly exceed both the Russian and the US potential.

- The population of China is four times larger than that of the USA and nine times larger than the Russian one. At the same time, it is more ethnically homogeneous than the populations of the two powers compared to China.

- China has the image of a developing country and a country whose status used to be close to colonial possession once in the early XX century. This makes the perception of China closer to a former colony and then for a long time politically and economically dependent Latin American states.

- The Chinese diasporas in the Latin American region is growing much faster than the North American and the Russian ones and is penetrating the political, economic and military structures of the Latin American countries on different social levels.

- A high political flexibility of China: the representatives of the Chinese diasporas are in the Latin American political establishment, the latter being not afraid (as compared to the USSR) of the “red threat” embodied by this country. At the same time, China is good at building perfect relations with most communist and left socialistic organizations of the continent.

- China possesses a higher dynamism and potential of informational and cultural influence than Russia, though it will still lag behind the USA for a long time. Consequently, China is more than Russia associated with the symbol of alternative development for Latin Americans.

However the uncertainty of strategic communication of China comes from the ambiguity of the prospects of its further rapid economic development, the absence of its own raw materials supplies, an increasing (and successful) competition with the Latin American producers, a still large (though decreasing) lag in the scientific and technological field, and still unsolved social problems. Some of the advantages can transform (and partly have already transformed) into disadvantages, such as, for instance, the world largest population (the fact which on the mental level easily provokes still not panic but fear of the Chinese threat in the significant social strata of the region).

As for the theoretical development and the practical use of strategic communication, China, like Russia, is lagging behind the USA, being on the same technological, mostly propagandistic stage of development. A transition to the new “managerial” and integrative (not only from the point of view of administration) type of strategic communications in China is underway.

4. The decline of strategic communication of the USA

The United States possess a whole set of competitive advantages allowing efficient strategic communication in Latin America. Among them are:

- the geographical proximity;
- a similarity of histories (both the USA and the Latin American countries emerged in the struggle against the colonialism of the European powers and together used to oppose (not once) the aggressive policy of the European powers in the Western hemisphere);
- the economic, military and scientific superiority of the USA in the world;
- the predominance of the USA in the trade, economic, military, scientific and educational relations with most countries of the region as compared to all other powers;
- the predominance of the US mass culture in the public conscience of the Latin Americans over the cultural influence of other powers;
- the superiority of the USA in the field of global media over any other country (the fact that clearly manifests itself in Latin America);
- a superiority in the theoretical and practical development of strategic communication on the Latin-American direction of the US foreign policy.

However, because of the vested and false pretences and decisions in the past and present, all these advantages have caused permanent and quite well-grounded perceptional stereotypes of the USA as “an aggressor-power”, “an external threat” and “the main basis of the reactionary forces in the region” in the mentality of a significant and sometimes even the bulk of the Latin-American population.

The rise to power in the USA of the new administration of B. Obama caused in Latin America a wave of great expectations however this is entirely a US domestic affair. The image of the new President was totally positive for most Latin Americans. The US Administration has outlined four pillars for the regional partnership with the Western Hemisphere: protecting citizen security; expanding economic opportunity and social inclusion; securing our clean energy future; and supporting democratic, transparent, and accountable institutions of governance. These were the key messages of the President Obama to the region many times repeated by him and the top officials of his administration and widespread in Latin America. The more repeated, the more effectively disseminated, the more practical implementation was expected among the public.

But very soon Obama’s "change you can believe in" soon began to look like "more of the same." The recognition of the November 2009 elections in Honduras for a new president soon after June 28th coup in that country, provoked the negative reaction in many countries of Latin America. Also in June, reports began to surface about a secret agreement between the United States and Colombia to allow U.S. access to seven military bases in Colombia (Stephens 2010).

Systematic, repeated and often expensive attempts to provide a communication background for questionable and improper acts have already resulted in and, moreover, can result in future in strategic management expenses and a fall of trust of the USA. A gradual growth in the number of such expenses can have a cumulative effect and is a much more dangerous threat for the national security of the country than the questionable tactical successes

5. Conclusion

All the three countries actively develop their strategic communications in the region but, according to a number of expertise and public opinion polls, the “correspondence of words and actions” is perceived as best achieved by China. Among the reasons behind it is a more adequate and consistent Chinese strategy of
developing the relations with the region and its communication support, a complex heritage of the relations between the USA and Latin America, and gross mistakes of the foreign policy of G. Bush administration, including the mistakes in the field of strategic communications, as well as an undecided and inconsistent way of their correction by the present B. Obama administration.

Once again we want to repeat that strategic communication is a projection in the mass consciousness of some strategic values, interests and goals in this or that way. And these goals can more or less coincide, coexist or compete, to be at enmity, to be in war or finally exclude each other. If strategic communication of Russia, China and the USA (desirably, that of other countries as well) projects a great number of coinciding basic values into the public conscience, this possibility will be the best option for most of the Earth’s population, as well as for those countries themselves and for global safety. If we want peace, our main goal is to obtain harmonious coincidence of interests, values and goals, though it does not depend on strategic communication completely. It doesn’t mean defending immoral compromises, it means defending pluralism in the respect of the means and models of development based on dialectical unity of the main laws, as well as of national and regional peculiarities of human development.

We consider it possible to present our general recommendations for optimization of strategic communication of the three countries within the framework of the word and deed policy, the refusal of information war in favor of mutually beneficial cooperation.

• In order to decrease the tension between each other and improve the promotion of the images of the three nations in the continent, it is sensible to launch joint projects in the domains which are crucial for the increase of prosperity and liquidation of current arrearage of Latin American countries. For this is needed the increase of involvement of Latin American partners in these projects, especially in its hi-tech elements. The projects should be open for participation of other countries and unions, such as the EU, India, Japan etc..

• Global joint projects involving Latin American partners, such as search and development of alternative energy sources, life (especially its active period) prolongation, solution of alimentation and ecological problems etc. It is rather important to achieve the development of projects vital for all mankind by joint efforts. A priority interest in bi- and multilateral relations with Latin American countries to hi-tech branches wherever and as much as it is considered mutually beneficial.

• Maximal possible transparency on preparation and implementation of joint projects.

• Well-thought system of consultations and meetings of strategic communication experts in order to discuss the emerging problems on time. Just in 1996 Timothy L. Thomas, an analyst at the Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas proposed:

One of the easiest ways for the West to begin joint talks on information warfare with Russia is through the medium of a conference among academics or through an unofficial organization or club…The academy could serve as a forum for broader discussions with the West and already appears oriented this way, having several foreigners on its membership roll. By starting this discussion soon, Russia and the West can prevent a new arms race over information systems and technologies from gaining momentum and spinning out of control. With the rate of progress in the realm of information technology, time really is of the essence (Thomas T. L., 1996, p.33).

A very good idea, but all of the opportunities of it are far from being realized yet.
The efficiency of strategic communication as means of collaboration is negligible in case of strategic interests and goals mismatching drastically. In this case, strategic communication inevitably becomes a tool of information warfare. There should be no illusions cherished of the contrary.

That is why compromises are essential, as well as searching for ways to combine interests. Strategic communication can be very fruitful for the creation of a climate useful for such a search, but it can aggravate the situation as well. To a certain extent, strategic communication itself is an important (and partly autonomous) factor of rapprochement or estrangement of the parties, and it is vital to procure that it serves to the accomplishment of the first task. We can fully agree with the point of view of Dennis M. Murphy, a professor of information operations and information in warfare at the U.S. Army War College: “Basic theory – you may not change someone’s mind, but you can find areas of agreement where interests overlap” (Murphy, D. M., 2008).

Such a program of joint optimization of strategic communication in the region is completely impossible to implement in the circumstances of growing tension between Russia and China from one hand and the USA on the other. There is a need for a serious, revolutionary at its core economic, technological, social and political shifts in the three countries with the consideration of their national peculiarities. This is the common interest in order to overcome the threat of a new world war and to provide conditions for the democratic and progressive development of mankind.

The strategic communication of three countries will have to deal with ongoing theoretical and practical problems of the further alignment of “words and deeds” in the real policy. It should make strategic communication overcome its largely propagandistic level and become not only an element of communication support of foreign policy, but even more of an equal part of foreign policy management, with the appropriate set of tools of communication management, i.e. of professional people management via communications.

References


