

**SCTCMG 2021**  
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of  
Modern Globalism»**

**WORLD POWER RELATIONS IN THE MODERN CONTEXT**

Aslakhanova Seda Asuevna (a)\*, Amadaev Anzor Aslambekovich (b),  
Bakashev Emidi Dagaevich (c)  
\*Corresponding author

- (a) Chechen State University, 33, Subra Kishieva str., Grozny, Russia, Zvezdochkagoodluck@mail.ru  
(b) Complex Scientific Research Institute named after Kh.I. Ibragimov,  
21a, Staropromyslovskoe Shosse, Grozny, Russia, anzor\_84@mail.ru  
(c) Grozny State Petroleum Technical University named after M.D. Millionshchikov,  
54, Akademik Pavlov St., Grozny, Russia, Bakashev1@mail.ru

**Abstract**

This topic is relevant due to the current circumstances in the world, namely the global crisis and the confrontation between the world powers, for leadership and domination. The main players on the world political scene remain the same – Russia, America and the European countries. Now we can also add modern China to this list, as its foreign economic policy (including contracts and agreements with Russia in various areas) has proved effective in recent years. The disagreements and confrontations between them date back long before the Ukraine crisis, but these events have been another starting point of worldwide 'madness'. The sudden onset of a worldwide pandemic also contributed, complicating the situation worldwide. The current situation is such that the degree of Russian-American confrontation (Russia's main competitor) is so high that experts say we are close to the Berlin crisis of 1961 or the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. One of the biggest problems today is the lack of dialogue. A similar dialogue existed even during the Cold War. Today, the links have been severed due to political decisions. The only sustainable solution to existing international problems is in serious and honest cooperation among the leading countries to solve truly common problems. An example of this is the many agreements reached in the past. All this points to the need to rely on diplomatic work, which remains the only key to peaceful solutions to international problems.

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*Keywords:* Confrontation, digital diplomacy, negotiation, powers, peace, war



## 1. Introduction

The current world order is characterized by uncertainty and turbulence. This system is polycentric, hierarchical and unstable. The uncertainty and instability of the system is due to the uncertainty of the players in the game. It is essentially based on two trends that are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, there is the increasing interdependence of the world due to globalisation and integration processes, which open up borders between states. This interdependence manifests in all spheres (economic, socio-political, informational, scientific and technological).

On the other hand, there is an increase in competition which makes the system very tough. In this context, we see a constant dynamic of increased military expenditure and information warfare (Cherkashina, 2020).

## 2. Problem Statement

During its history, Russia has been and remains at the forefront of international policy issues. However, there are different perspectives on Russia's role in the international process, both inside and outside the country. Some believe in Russia's destiny to remain a lagging country forever, while others tend to see its history as its unique path of development (Makhmudova, 2020).

Since 2013, the Russian dimension has taken a high priority in public diplomacy in the West, particularly in the United States of America. This was facilitated by many factors, such as the intensification of the Russian Federation's foreign policy, the withdrawal of a number of American non-profit organizations (NPOs) from Russia, the weakening of American media activities in Russian-speaking countries and the entire post-Soviet space, etc. (Tsvetkova, 2017).

While information projects, and indeed propaganda, have always been an integral part of Western foreign policy towards Russia, since the 1990s, they have been implemented with soft power tools – cultural exchanges, educational programmes, training of opposition leaders, etc. (Tsvetkova, 2019).

After the Ukrainian crisis, the trust that existed before has disappeared. All bilateral ties have been terminated (although there were over 50 bilateral programmes between Russia and the EU). One of the most important aspects of the crisis is Russia's non-integration into the European security system, with the result that both sides are discussing the same problems today as they did 30 years ago (EEAS, 2019).

## 3. Research Questions

It is clear that the end of the Cold War has made the world more unstable and unpredictable. There is a new configuration of forces, a new geometry of alliances, but no centre of attraction can exist without interpenetration with other centres. The collapse of the bipolar world transformed previous notions of security. A conflict of interests, values and identities has replaced the bipolar confrontation. Meanwhile, the world continues to slide towards new confrontations. The number of armed conflicts and outbreaks of sectarian confrontation is on the rise.

Today's international security system is shattered in large part because of the crisis that has developed in relations between Russia and the West. It appears that this crisis is not confined to the

confrontation between Russia, the USA and the EU; it is more complex and multifaceted (Cherkashina, 2020).

From a historical perspective, the post-World War II partnership between the USA and the EU was challenged by the arrival of the Trump administration in the White House. Trump has become the first USA president to dislike Europe. And the 2019 Munich Security Conference was precisely a demonstration that relations between the traditional partners are at a breaking point. The American president indulged in generally dismissive rhetoric against the Europeans. This could well be interpreted as a willingness to go to the trouble of breaking existing institutions. (NATO, 2018)

It also seems appropriate to talk about the crisis in relations between Russia and Europe. Throughout its existence, Russian-European relations always featured stages of both mutual attraction and mutual repulsion. The EU sees Russia as a major challenge and perceives it as a threat, and there is no longer any talk of a strategic partnership.

As a result of the Ukrainian crisis, the organizations that exist in Europe have returned to their original function – to ensure the integrity and security of their participants. As a result, the OSCE is almost the only platform in Europe for Russia. It is clear that participation in only one organization does not make Russia a full-fledged partner in the European security system (EEAS, 2019)

Geopolitical rivalries in the post-Soviet space predate the crises in Syria and Ukraine. But it is the internal Ukrainian conflict that has played a major role in the deterioration of relations between Russia, the USA and the EU, and in the confidence crisis that has resulted. Moreover, there is a return of militarized rhetoric, and the Cold War mechanisms of mutual restraint are once again in demand. The Cold War developed certain rules of the game to mitigate the risks of uncontrolled confrontation. They increased the predictability and controllability of relationships. In this way, the unique architecture of these relationships has remained stable.

There has never been such a relationship between Russia, the US and the EU as now, when the political regulators collapsed and resulted in a game without rules. And the intensified confrontation precisely between the two powers has led to the emergence of rhetoric about a new Cold War. However, the current state of Western-Russian confrontation has a number of distinctive features. Firstly, Russia and the West today exist in an environment of mutual deterrence. Secondly, the confrontation takes place in the context of economic wars (it is about reciprocal imposition of sanctions). Thirdly, instead of the ideological confrontation of the Cold War era, we are now witnessing a confrontation of values: the West with its postmodernism confronts Russia with its traditional values. All this makes the current crisis in relations between Russia and the West much different from the Cold War and more acute and profound. Contrary to some expert predictions, the crisis within the West has not led to a reassessment of relations with Russia. On the contrary, there is a tightening of the sanctions' regime (Whitehouse, 2017).

Russian intensification in the international arena has forced USA to abandon the concept of soft power, as it has proved ineffective. In this changed environment, digital diplomacy has been a great help in influencing Russian society more effectively through direct or public dialogue via social media and other web-based resources.

As defined by American University School of Communication professor Doshi (2018), digital diplomacy is the area of direct government interaction with foreign audiences through social media.

The USA government has extensively funded international media discrediting Russian policies, created a variety of digital projects offering the Russian public an alternative view of events in Russia and the world, and increased propaganda of Western values and attitudes. However, digital diplomacy has changed significantly since the 2016 presidential election. Russia was almost immediately accused of interfering in the USA election. It has allegedly used foreign policy tools such as cyberterrorism, hacking and political destabilization through subversion of the internet segment (internet trolling) and the creation of numerous internet bots (Cherkashina, 2020).

Current methods of USA digital diplomacy According to a 2019 sociological survey by the All-Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), 84 % of Russians use Internet resources to communicate on social networks and search for new information (VTsIOM, 2019). This fact once again proves the enormous impact of the internet on society, and thus the effectiveness of digital diplomacy tools. Now we consider the main strands of digital diplomacy that the West, particularly the USA, is currently pursuing to influence the Russian public.

The first method of digital diplomacy is so-called Twitter diplomacy, which has become the foundation of the USA public diplomacy under Donald Trump. Trump is a strong advocate of using social media to promote both domestic and foreign policy interests of the United States (Cherkashina, 2020).

The Trump phenomenon has been unofficially dubbed 'Trumpism', meaning that personalized contributions to public diplomacy by a politician are more important than profile programmes, and that the emotionalism of communication can easily replace real facts (Twiplomacy, 2018).

Social media allows the possibility to perceive a politician's statements directly rather than in the form of processed media material, so they attract an audience. This factor plays a huge role in the recipient's choice of dissemination source. The active use of social media and other Internet resources to influence audiences and maintain a country's image is a tool of classic digital diplomacy or soft power of the state. So during the Trump presidency, these methods continued to exist and evolve (Cherkashina, 2020).

The second method of digital diplomacy in operation is the phenomenon of 'sharp power'. Internet trolling, fake news, cyber-attacks on government databases and generally information attacks that discredit the image of a foreign state form the basis of the policy. The introduction of fake media into the news agenda of many foreign countries is already dubbed the cause of media degradation and a lever of manipulation by certain political forces. Since this technology has speed advantages over espionage to achieve such subversion, it is cheaper, quicker, safer and more reliable than espionage. The true purpose is to shape the social consciousness and behaviour of people around the world (Kuznetsov, 2019).

It is information operations in Russia that are generously funded by the American leadership. 'Sharp power' as a form of force does not aim to improve the image of the USA or promote American values. It aims to destabilize the domestic political situation in the chosen target country. All this indicates an interest of the USA in developing new forms of influence on foreign audiences (Arkhipova & Klimin, 2020).

A third relevant method of digital diplomacy is the phenomenon of actively used political advertising and the creation of alternative Russian-language media. In 2019, there was a huge scandal caused by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's targeting ads on Facebook, asking Russian-speaking users

to help US intelligence agencies with any useful information. The same advertisement appeared in 2020. Attempts to establish their network of loyal activists and opinion leaders, as well as efforts to exert informational influence on the Russian world, began under B. Obama. Now, for example, the administration's budget for 2021 envisages allocation of \$760 million to counter Russia's information influence. The USA actively continues to use digital projects on the Internet, YouTube channels and Internet television, as well as other resources to create alternative information influence. The basis of such USA information programmes is to discredit the Russian interpretation of events in the world (Arkhipova & Klimin, 2020).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the problems of Russia's relations with the West, and to identify current USA digital diplomacy techniques towards Russia, as they have persisted since the departure of the previous Trump administration; and to analyse their application and the potential for threatening domestic political stability in the Russian Federation.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to analyse existing government documents, USA academic and journalistic literature, and to conduct a content analysis of social media and other web resources involved in USA online diplomacy.

#### **6. Findings**

Traditional threats to the national security of states are now being replaced by new challenges of a cross-border and transnational nature. These include the undermining of traditional security structures, the phenomenon of hybrid warfare, etc. We are entering a new era of great power rivalry, the liberal international order has come into crisis, and the international system itself stands under serious fire: the world order is disintegrating into parts (Twiplomacy, 2018).

There are serious rifts between the USA and the EU, which have led to an erosion of trust between them and are causing significant difficulties in shaping a common foreign policy course. And the relationship between the USA, the EU and Russia acquires the features of a new Cold War accompanied by information wars. The way of structuring the relations between the major global powers in a polycentric world will largely determine the nature of the world order we are witnessing today.

The main trend in the modern world is the dispersal of economic power and the emergence of new power centres (e.g. China) and the decline of the leading role of the historical West. In this situation, the USA is attempting to maintain global leadership and is working on schemes to overthrow existing regimes (Makhmudova, 2020).

## 7. Conclusion

Digital diplomacy is an extremely important phenomenon in contemporary global politics, whose growing role underlines the need for further research into the forms, methods and actors involved in internet diplomacy within its growing influence on foreign states. Based on this research, we can conclude that USA digital diplomacy towards Russia is implemented through the following three methods:

- personal presence of USA officials and politicians on social media to draw Russian audiences' attention to the agenda and to organize public or direct communication with internet activists;
- sharp power tools to reinforce protest moods and destabilize the country;
- introduction of political advertising and creation of alternative Russian-language online media to form an alternative view of the state's domestic and foreign policies.

All these methods focus on discrediting the image of the Russian government and trying to cause protest moods in the country. The confrontation continues.

In contrast to the dead-end Russian-American relations, the key direction for the development of Russian-European relations may be the harmonization of integration processes. The formation of a Large Eurasian Space can serve as a key for a new start in Russian-European relations, building constructive, stable and predictable cooperation with the EU countries on the principles of equality and mutual respect for interests, improving both the legal framework and the institutional mechanisms of cooperation to ensure mutual benefit and optimal building of partnerships.

Thus, there is a need to rely on diplomatic work, which remains the only key to the peaceful solutions of international problems. The major players in the international arena support Russian opinion. They include China, the SCO, BRICS countries and CSTO, CIS friendly countries. The Russian Federation intends to maintain an intensive and mutually beneficial dialogue on the main issues of development and practical interaction in the foreign policy and military-political spheres with its Western partners.

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