

Russia Today: A new kind of Media? A Projection of Russian Foreign Policy

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Is Russia Today a sign of things to come in the world media order?

A global, digital media cuts both ways or as they say 'what's good for the goose is also good for the gander'. The arrival of [The Real News Network](#), [Democracy Now!](#) and [grtv](#) for example demonstrates what can be done, even on a shoestring budget. But to get onto the global media circuit still requires big bucks in spite of all the talk about 'convergence' and 'citizen journalism'.

Ironically, it's been left to the Russians to offer to Western audiences a genuine if contradictory alternative to our state/corporate media's take on events. But that's as it should be, it is after all the Russian state's view, views that just happen to coincide in some respects with progressives here in the West, even if for different reasons.

On the 29 June I watched an in-depth [interview](#) with Mark Serwotka general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) whose members took part in a strike against proposed government pension/job cuts but it wasn't on British TV, it was on Russia Today.

It's not often that we get to view stories on broadcast TV that present progressive viewpoints on events. To see such stories almost every day took some getting used to for someone raised on a diet of the Western media, notwithstanding all the propaganda about it being 'free' and 'objective'. And I'm not alone as according to the following (out-of-date) figures:

In January 2008, the total number of views for RT videos on YouTube was over 3 million, and RT was sixth in YouTube's Most Viewed Partners rating, behind CBS, BBC World, Al Jazeera English, France 24 and Press TV. — [Wikipedia](#)

Russia Today

Russia Today (RT) is the Russian state-sponsored digital TV news channel (it also has a Spanish channel). Financed by the Russian state Duma (parliament) to the tune of some \$60 million a year and targeting a very specific sector of Western society, to a leftie RT reveals itself as somewhat schizophrenic (and maybe not just to lefties).

Thus on the one hand it can interview well-known left-wingers like Noam Chomsky, William Blum, F. William Engdahl, or Michel Chossudovsky and on the other, some rightwinger from the fringe UK Independence Party going on about immigration or the welcome demise of the EU. Or, it will be on fighting 'international terrorism' and Russia's latest obsession, 'the war

on drugs', focusing understandably so on the narco-state of Afghanistan from whence most of the heroin in Russia is coming.

The 'schizophrenia' that I mentioned earlier may only be apparent to a leftie but it makes sense when you view RT's programming as a projection of the Russian state's foreign policy concerns, especially its own security.

Where it is weakest is of course its reporting on Russia itself but I suspect that it's a little more outspoken than any Russian domestic channel on 'sensitive' issues. Broadly, it takes a pro-capitalist economic and political position, but again RT has pro-socialist viewpoints represented in panel discussions, something unheard of on the BBC for example.

And increasingly, there seems to be an interesting trend in its domestic coverage that looks back to the achievements of the Soviet Union as well as the crimes of Stalin. I think this is a positive move as it means that a deeper and more complex analysis of the legacy of the Soviet Union is emerging. After all, you can't just dismiss seventy-five years of the USSR as if it didn't exist and that it didn't make positive contributions.

Of course RT functions primarily as a PR channel for what Russia has to offer (some of which is actually interesting given how little we actually know about Russia and its peoples after decades of Cold War propaganda) as well as projecting Russian foreign policy.

RT denies this but it would be ludicrous to assume that the Russian parliament would spend \$60 million a year and not have the programming reflect the interests of the Russian state. It's why there is such a strong emphasis on the expansion of NATO and recalling the memories of the 'Great Patriotic War'.

After being bankrupted and broken up by the Empire, the last thing the former Soviet Union needs is another war. And after all Russia, whatever else it is, it is not an imperialist state.

This is why RT features so many anti-war activists, writers and journalists in its programming and explains RT's apparent programming schizophrenia.

Having borne the brunt of WWII and losing 27 million people, it's no surprise that RT takes an anti-war stand. And with the Cold War still alive and well and living in Washington DC and London, Russia's relationship with its old nemesis presents the same set of contradictions as those revealed on RT. This is especially true given the central role that NATO plays in the Empire's game plan.

Back when the USSR folded and along with it the [Warsaw Pact](#), it was agreed that NATO would follow suit. But in the chaos that resulted from the implosion of the Soviet Union, getting rid of NATO as agreed, conveniently got lost in the shuffle.

So, far from a peaceful world following the end of the Cold War, with no counter-balance to NATO, things have gone from bad to worse and in the process revealed the not unsurprising fact that NATO from its inception (the Warsaw Pact was created as a counter-balance to NATO) was and remains an instrument of Imperial power.

But Russia, once one of the world's two superpowers, re-enters the fray at a distinct disadvantage, economically and militarily, a position borne out by its vacillation over the illegal NATO invasion of Libya: which side to back? Well the winning one of course. Had it a

principled position, it would have vetoed the UNSEC vote. Instead, it took what I can only view as an opportunist position, though what it hoped to gain from it, is anybody's guess (one [source](#) suggests that favours were promised to Russia in return for abstaining. If so, a serious miscalculation).

"No longer is NATO pushing eastward, threatening a now compliant Russia, concerned with maintaining its hegemony in its near abroad, but posing no threat to Western Europe." — 'Russia, Egypt, Libya: A kind-of-silver lining', by Eric Walberg

Well maybe, but with Russia ringed on all sides by USNATO bases, things don't look all that different than they were back in the days of the Cold War, so it's still a bit of a mystery to me as to why both China and Russia abstained. But they've clearly both learned a lesson as they do not intend that the same fate befall Syria at least not via the UN Security Council.

Presstv

I confess I'm not really up to speed with Presstv as it's not as easily available to me as RT but methinks it comes out of the same bag as al Jazeera/RT, targeting Western audiences but with the Iranian state's position on events. Which is fine by me. Let the viewer be the judge.[2]

Conclusion

It's apparent that as never before a global class war is being directed and merchandised by the Western media. The media is now an indispensable weapon in the Empire's fearsome arsenal. Global in scope, it determines not only the nature of the 'news' but what it considers to be 'news' in the first place. All alternative views disappear under tsunami of Western suppositions and inventions.

But even as I try and finish off this essay, I'm pondering the 'news' story that surfaced yesterday (1/7/11) alleging that Col Gaddafi said

"[that] Libya would target European "homes, offices, families" unless Nato stopped its campaign." — '[Libya: Muammar Gaddafi threatens Europe](#)', BBC 1 July 2011

This struck me as odd and not a little convenient, so I dug a little deeper and came up with the original Reuters story:

"TRIPOLI, July 1 (Reuters) - Muammar Gaddafi delivered an address by telephone to thousands of supporters who gathered in Tripoli's Green Square on Friday, vowing to stay on and warning the NATO-led alliance to stop its air war or face "catastrophe."

"We advise you to retreat before you face a catastrophe," Gaddafi told the crowd of supporters who waved green flags and posters of the Libyan leader, whose soldiers are fighting a war against NATO-backed rebels seeking his overthrow." — '[Defiant Gaddafi warns NATO of "catastrophe"](#)', Reuters, 1 July 2011

Then this story appeared on Information Clearing House titled '[Qaddafi Did NOT Threaten](#)

[Attacks on Europe](#)'. As we have seen many times before, it's all down as to how it's translated:

"Gaddafi is challenging Sarkozy, Cameron and Obama to switch on their TV and watch the crowd. He is saying that they will find out that they are delusional because they entered a war which they will never win, he also says if you continue targeting our houses we can do the same because Europe is not far away but he said lets not do this." (ibid)

Predictably, the bent story now embraces the planet, justifying the rationale for 'taking out mad dog Gaddafi'. A perfect example of how the state/corporate media stranglehold on reality functions. Even RT has fallen for the propaganda [repeating verbatim](#) the allegations made in the BBC piece. By the time (if ever) the misrepresentation is addressed, it will be too late. A replay of Saddam's none existent WMD.

Note

1. See for example: '[Russia Today Starts To Worry American Media](#)', Disinfo.com
2. '[Presenter Nick Ferrari quits Iran Press TV over bias after election](#)', July 1, 2009, Times Online. The piece opens as follows:

"It is called Press TV, is funded by the Iranian regime, and opponents say that from its nondescript offices off Hanger Lane in northwest London the 24-hour news station is beaming pro-Tehran propaganda into homes across Britain."

Of course the fact that the Empire funds dozens of both radio and video propaganda channels into countries around the planet doesn't figure in the Times' take on Presstv. This is especially true of the BBC's World Service that until recently had been funded by the British Foreign Office and which orchestrates a massive and ongoing propaganda campaign against the Tehran government.

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