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Meet the New Villain, Same as the Old Villain

The New Cold War in American TV, Film and Video Games

Declan E. Cronin '19

The Cold War ended in 1991. But, the American imagination of Russians continues to be informed by the Cold War framework. Hollywood movies, in particular, played a crucial role in shaping the public perception of the Soviet Union as an existential threat to the western way of life. Take for instance the film *Rocky IV* from 1985, which was ostensibly a narrative about the victory of America over the Soviet Union, represented through US boxer Rocky Balboa's win against a Soviet boxer Ivan Drago. *Rocky IV* was not an exception. Throughout the Cold War, Russians frequently appeared as villains in many Hollywood movies, who were in the end always defeated by the good American heroes.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent rebuilding of the US-Russian relations, one would imagine a gradual disappearance of Russians as primary villains from Hollywood movies.¹ Especially, in light of new threats posed by Islamic Terrorism after 2001. Yet both Hollywood and television productions continue to present Russians as bad guys in their narratives. Russians as antagonists are as prevalent in Hollywood movies as they were during the height of the Cold War.² The continued ideological construction of Russians as villains has since found its way into new media platforms like video games. Russians appear as the second and third-most common adversaries (before or after Latin American and Middle Eastern terrorists) in fifty-seven bestselling games from 2001-2013.³ At the same time, the representations of Russians, as foes in film, television, and video games have undergone significant changes since the 1991.

Historiography: Cold War, Yeltsin Era, Putin's Russia

Understanding those changes require a nuanced exploration of different but interrelated historical developments. The Cold War divided the world into the ideological opposites between the good West and the evil Soviet Union. For decades, the *New York Times*, writing about Soviet actions across the globe,

¹ "End of the Soviet Union; Text of Bush's Address to Nation on Gorbachev's Resignation," *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 26, 1991.

² Spring 2017 Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Survey, Q17a-g. 74% of Americans saw ISIS as a "major threat," while only 47% responded that Russia's power and influence was a "major threat."

³ Brandon Valeriano and Philip Habel, "Who Are the Enemies? The Visual Framing of Enemies in Digital Games," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (2016).

published articles with dramatic headlines like: “Czechoslovakia Invaded by Russians”; “Russians Open Fire on Crowds in Prague”; “President Demands Explanation for Horrifying Act of Violence”.⁴ The “orthodox” school of Cold War historiography placed the West on a moral high ground against the Soviet Union for the entirety of the Cold War. It explained away the cases of Western military interventions as examples of the latter defending democracy and freedom.⁵ After 1991, the Cold War historiography shifted its focus to understanding the implications of the fall of Soviet Union.⁶

Initially, the Western media embraced the Yeltsin era. But, by the first decade of the new century, historians and journalists began re-evaluating Yeltsin’s rule. They focused on the problems Russia faced under Yeltsin’s presidency. Influential works like *Godfather of the Kremlin* (2000), *Oligarchs* (2001), and *Piratinization of Russia* (2003) shed light on the widespread corruption of the Yeltsin-era. Uncontrolled corruption and organized crime as central aspects of the post-Soviet Russian society continue to shape the narrative arcs of various literary works on Russia. Ben Mezrich’s many best-selling works, some of which have also been developed into popular movies like *The Social Network* and *21*, have further aided in disseminating such narratives through the mainstream media.

When Vladimir Putin assumed power after Yeltsin, Western scholars yet again sought to understand the new ruler and the trajectory of Russia under him. In 2007, Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, Moscow bureau chiefs for the *Washington Post*, published one of the first major works on Putin’s Russia titled, *Kremlin Rising*. Baker and Glasser argued that under Putin’s presidency (2000-2004), Russia moved towards authoritarianism with an uncertain future. Apart from Putin’s meticulously curated biography titled, *First Person*, it is hard to find a scholarly and literacy work that views Russian through a different lens. All influential works on Putin, such as, *The Strongman* (2011), *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (2012), *The Man Without a Face* (2012), *The New Tsar* (2015) draw similar conclusion of him as an authoritarian ruler and Russian society further sliding into deeper organized crime under his rule. While scholars disagree over Putin’s ultimate goals (self-enrichment, a return to Soviet glory, or to undermine the West), they all seem to agree that his political ambitions and decisions pose real risk in de-stabilizing the existing international order.

Notably, in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea, scholars and politicians alike began describing the Western-Russian relation as “New Cold War.” Many argue that the thawing of the conflict after 1991 between the West and Russia is hardening again. But, some disagree with the choice of the phrase “New

⁴ NYT, August 21, 1968; NYT, September 2, 1983.

⁵ Edward Crapol, “Some Reflections on the Historiography of the Cold War,” *The History Teacher* 20, no. 2 (February 1987): 253-254.

⁶ Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-4.

Cold War,” to describe the emerging conflicts between Russia and the West.⁷ They particularly argue that it inaccurately conflates two distinct historical periods and ideologies into one. The Cold War was a geopolitical and ideological battle between the communist Eastern bloc and the capitalist Western bloc from 1947 till 1991. Currently, neither the West nor Russia is involved in a world domination based on such ideological differences. Robert Legvold argues that unlike the Cold War, the ‘New Cold War’ does not “pit one ‘ism’ against another”. Rather it is largely based on Russia’s perceived alienation from the contemporary West.⁸ Despite these conceptual and historical differences, scholars continue to use the term “New Cold War” to describe the ongoing tension between Russian and the West.⁹

The Cold War: A World of Moral Clarity

Cold War ideology reached the American households through popular television shows like *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends*. While films also played an important role in propagating the good vs evil narrative, their time format of 90 to 120 minutes made them less effective compared to the television shows. The latter unrestricted by the time format of a film, reached American living rooms for years, allowing viewers regular as well as prolonged opportunity to develop opinions on characters. Media philosopher Lars Lundsten calls this power of television programming “generated state of affairs.” For example, frequent “images of mutilated corpses in Chechnya may serve as ground for condemnation of the Enemy or as ground for identification of a remote and suffering nation.”¹⁰ In other words, what viewers experience regularly on screen can have a profound impact on how they view the world. In a long-running television show, these effects are further amplified.

The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends, which aired for five seasons from 1959 to 1964, featured two Russian-accented villains named: Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale. Both, Natives of Pottsylvania, a fictitious Eastern-bloc country, Boris and Natasha were the nemesis of Rocky and Bullwinkle. Badenov’s name is a play on the name of late sixteenth century Russian czar called Boris Godunov. Over the course of more than one hundred fifty episodes, viewers saw the two Russian villains constantly trying to kill the lovable flying squirrel and moose and carry out attempts at world domination. It is worth nothing that the

⁷ Aurel Braun, “Tougher Sanctions Now: Putin’s Delusional Quest for Empire,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 2 (July/August 2014).

⁸ Robert Legvold, “Managing the New Cold War: What Moscow and Washington Can Learn from the Last One,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 4 (July/August 2014): 75.

⁹ Jeffrey Gedmin, “Beyond Crimea: What Vladimir Putin Really Wants,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 2 (July/August 2014).

¹⁰ Lars Lundsten, “Modal Ontology of Television: How to Create Social Objects,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 58, no. 2 (April 1999): 239.

Russian villains were presented as cartoonish figures. In the immediate aftermath of the McCarthyism, the media took a cautious approach in presenting a less militant version of Cold War. The cartoonish caricatures of “diminutive Boris and the vampy Natasha” as the face of the looming Soviet threat” convinced the viewing audience “that there’s really no need to panic.”¹¹ Yet it was imperative to remind American viewers who the enemy was.

Cold War-era popular entertainment presented Western audiences with a Manichean view of the world in which Russians represented the evil side. The Hollywood movies played an equally important role in further propagating such worldview. Between 1963 and 1987, *Bond* franchise films featured Russian characters as main villains.¹² One of the Russian characters, who appeared in six of those seven movies is General Anatol Gogol. As the fictional head of the KGB, Gogol embodied was often presented as a stone-cold, conniving and ruthless character. Rosa Klebb and General Orlov.

The second installment of the *Bond* franchise also explored the idea of the difference, in Western perception, between good violence and bad violence. In *From Russia With Love*, James Bond is pitted against Rosa Klebb, the former head of SMERSH (a formal Russian agency used by Ian Fleming in his novels) who defected to SPECTRE (the fictional, villainous organization largely used as a placeholder for SMERSH in the film series). Klebb, a short-haired, cold woman whose rolled R’s are supposed to imply a Russian accent, is equally determined to both obtain the Lektor (a decoding device) and kill James Bond. Her signature weapon is a lethally-poisoned knife embedded in the toe of her shoe, a Bondesque gadget that reveals itself at the end of the movie when Bond narrowly escapes laceration at its blade. When Q, MI-6’s own inventor, designs a deadly contraption for James Bond, audiences are expected to, and do, marvel at the good guys’ ingenuity. Yet, when the villain has their own special weapon, the audience is supposed to see its use as illegitimate or cheating in the pursuit of killing Bond. Consider the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, where the Soviets secretly installed missile bases in Cuba, near the U.S. mainland. This was interpreted as aggressive and incendiary by many in America, but the United States had missiles equally close in Turkey.¹³ Rosa Klebb, playing the role of aggressive Russian, is devious in her concealment of her poison-tipped shoe knife, but James Bond, as the heroic West, is admired for his clever attaché case that conceals knives, a rifle, tear gas, and ammunition.

The political end of Western Cold War rhetoric originated from a place of

¹¹ David Klion, “Russia, Hollywood’s Mirror,” *Coda Story*, September 2018.

<https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/rewriting-history/russia-hollywood-mirror>.

¹² *From Russia With Love* (1963), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *Moonraker* (1979), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *Octopussy* (1983), *License to Kill* (1985), *The Living Daylights* (1987).

¹³ Mark L. Haas, “Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2001): 263-265.

moral superiority, deeply rooted in the idea that the West sought to restore peace in opposition to a belligerent Soviet Union. U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who thoroughly enjoyed Tom Clancy's book *The Hunt for Red October*, recognized the importance of culture during the Cold War. He was also fond of establishing the U.S.'s ethical advantage over the USSR. In what has popularly come to be known as his "Evil Empire" speech, U.S. President Ronald Reagan clearly outlined the moral superiority of the United States as grounded in "the greatness of America in you, her people, and in your families, churches, neighborhoods, communities—the institutions that foster and nourish values like concern for others and respect for the rule of law under God."¹⁴ The last, and most unapologetically evil Russian villain in the *Bond* franchise is General Orlov, who appears in the 1983 film *Octopussy*. Although the movie was released three months after Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech, so filming took place before Reagan delivered it, Orlov captures the view of the USSR and Russia that Reagan perpetuated in his address. At the film's beginning, Orlov attempts to rally the other members of the military commissariat to support his proposed full-fledged invasion of the West. Representing the Russians as aggressors against peace and stability, Orlov challenges the détente that had been in place since the early 1970s. General Gogol, thankfully, is there to hold Orlov's belligerence in check. Gogol, however, represents what was but no longer is in Russia—Orlov, it appears, represents what is and what may come. Released in 1983, *Octopussy* was produced around the time of the 1980 Summer Olympics boycott, a time when many in America thought that the Soviet Union was taking drastically violent and detrimental measures to preserve and advance communism around the globe. Reminiscent of General Orlov's push for a large-scale invasion, the major reason for the 1980 boycott was the Soviet's December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. A *Daily News* headline in January of 1980 emphasized that the "Soviets must leave Afghanistan in a Month" to avoid a 50-60 country boycott; the *New York Times* described, "The War of the Games," stating that "for the games to proceed as if nothing has happened would confirm the Soviet Union in its contempt for world opinion—the more so as the violence in Afghanistan grimly mounts. A boycott is one of the few ways to reach past *Pravda* with a clear message to the Soviet people."¹⁵ There, the West's perceived moral superiority is confirmed: the U.S. was leading a global charge to show the oppressed Soviet people the truth. Orlov's blind aggression reflects data from a Roper poll on "Russia's primary objectives in world affairs." In one year, from 1979 to 1980, the percentage of Americans that felt "Russia seeks global domination and will risk a major war to achieve that domination if it can't be

¹⁴ Ronald Reagan, speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983.

¹⁵ *Daily News* (New York, NY), January 21, 1980; "The War of the Games," *NYT*, March 28, 1980.

achieved by other means” jumped from 18% to 39%.¹⁶

By 1985, American attitudes continued to grow increasingly in favor of the view that the USSR was a total aggressor, willing to achieve dominance by any necessary means.¹⁷ The fourth installment of the *Rocky* franchise offers the clearest black and white portrayal of the Cold War, and U.S.-Russian relations, as a fight between good and evil. Ivan Drago, a Russian boxer portrayed by Swedish actor Dolph Lundgren, represents all American fears and misgivings about the USSR. Before fighting Rocky Balboa in *Rocky IV*, Drago was an Olympic gold medalist (perhaps at the boycotted 1980 Games) and an undefeated (100-0-0 with 100 KO) amateur boxer in the USSR. Born in Moscow, Drago was groomed to be a top fighter in the world, training with the best machines and technology (compared to Rocky, who trained by running up and down the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s steps). Director Sylvester Stallone is careful to expose, though, that Drago achieved much of his superhuman ability and stature illegitimately via years of anabolic steroid use. Essentially a Soviet science experiment, Drago embodies a fear and perception that many Americans held: from 1981 to 1990, ABC/Washington Post polls on perceived military strength showed that more Americans thought the USSR was superior to the U.S. in terms of strength.¹⁸

Rocky IV’s good-vs-evil motif was built around the idea that the virtuous United States, was fighting the behemoth “Evil Empire,” and it was not at all subtle. As a *New York Times* review points out, Sylvester Stallone makes it clear that Rocky’s bout with Drago is a Cold War battle of “international diplomacy.”¹⁹ Before fighting Rocky, Drago duels Apollo Creed. Creed, dressed in his stars and stripes shorts, is pulverized by his vastly superior opponent. In the end, Drago lands a punch to the head that kills Creed; the emotionless Drago’s response to Creed’s lifeless body on the canvas: “If he dies, he dies.” When Rocky, the hard working, all-American fighter, takes on Drago, the film becomes a pure fight between good and evil, between the U.S. and USSR. The ring in which they fight is just another in a long line of Cold War proxy battlefields. Not only is Rocky defending his fallen friend and countryman, he is fighting for the U.S.’s reputation against the goliath Russian who insists that “the defeat of this little so-called champion will be an example of how pathetically weak [American] society has become.” Drago, the Russian, proves to be the ultimate aggressor, willing to achieve victory by any means necessary and at any cost.

Post-USSR Russia: A World Without Laws

¹⁶ Tom W. Smith, “The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (Summer, 1983): 281.

¹⁷ Roper Poll in Alvin Richman, “Poll Trends: Changing America Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 141-142.

¹⁸ ABC/WP Polls in Richman, “Poll Trends,” 143.

¹⁹ Janet Maslin, “Screen: ‘Rocky IV,’ vs. the USSR,” *NYT*, November 27, 1985.

When the Berlin Wall nominally fell on November 9, 1989, four years after *Rocky IV*'s release, it triggered the creation of a vast void. By Christmas Day, 1991, the Soviet flag was removed from the Kremlin, never to fly again, as the white, blue, and red flag of the Russian Federation took its place. What changed for Russia was far more than a flag: a massive union of states, along with its government, institutions, and infrastructure, had stood one day, and was gone the next. Rose Brady, the Moscow bureau chief for *Business Week* at the time of the USSR's collapse, described how the uncertainty of transition "provided fertile ground for organized crime," as the Russia mafia grew increasingly powerful in the early-1990s.²⁰ At the end of January 1996, the head of President Boris Yeltsin's human rights commission, Sergei Kovalev, resigned in disgust. In an open letter published domestically and abroad, Kovalev rebuked Yeltsin and Russia's current state. Kovalev expressly noted that "criminals continue to roam freely," referring to the mafia's accumulating control over the economy and society.²¹

The USSR's collapse left in its wake a damaged, seemingly lawless Russia left to fend for itself. When the command economy ceased to exist, all connections were lost. The large majority of the population was subject to the command economy, and when it vanished they did not know from whom to buy or to whom to sell. According to Marshall Goodman's book *The Piratization of Russia*, the mafia gained prominence during this time because their system of connections was not reliant upon or accountable to the government run, Soviet command economy.²² Because Russian law-enforcement had virtually no control over Russia in the 1990s, the mafia employed extra-legal means of accomplishing their goals.²³ As Paul Klebnikov explains, murder became their preferred form of doing business: "Businessmen, instead of deciding their differences in the market or in court, are hiring professional killers and deciding their differences with guns."²⁴ This rise and violence of the Russia mafia did not go unnoticed in the West. As early as 1992, American and British press began to cover the growing role of organized crime in newly-capitalist Russia. Reestablishing the moral high ground over Russia, articles with titles such as "Russia's New Culture Begins to Emerge from Soviet Rubble," "In Ex-Soviet Lands, Gangs Fill Vacuum," and "Capitalism gone wild, anarchy and crime fire forces of opposition" characterized Russia as a chaotic, lawless hotbed of

²⁰ Rose Brady, *Kapitalizm: Russia's Struggle to Free Its Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 149.

²¹ Sergei Kovalev, "The Case Against Yeltsin," *Washington Post*, January 29, 1996.

²² Marshall I. Goldman, *The Piratization of Russia: Russian Reform Goes Awry* (London: Routledge, 2003), 170-171.

²³ Anders Asland, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), 167.

²⁴ Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2000), 32.

criminal activity.²⁵

Slowly, with the re-evaluation of Yeltsin's Russia, the prototype of Russian antagonists shifted from an ideological, evil enemy to a morally corrupt foe, based on the country's rise in organized crime. Nowhere is this picture of Russian organized crime clearer than in the 2007 film *Eastern Promises*. Set in London, the film explores, as Doris Toumarkine of *Film Journal International* puts it, "a particularly venal branch of the Russian mob...a gang specializing in human trafficking, drugs, and killing on a dime (or ruble)."²⁶ The Russian mafia members are vory v zakone (thieves in law), an elite echelon of professional Russian criminals born out of Soviet Gulag prison-camps. The vory have always held "hallowed place in Russia's criminal lore," but recently have gained Western attention. This is in part due to their notoriety after their post-Soviet diaspora to Western cities, where they continue to engage in crime today, but in a larger sense they have "come to symbolize opposition to the country's often arbitrary political and legal practices."²⁷ In *Eastern Promises*, dialogue between two Vory reveals their contempt for the west, as one expresses frustration over the fact that "the Americans...f*****g NATO" interfere with their smuggling supply lines from Russia to the West. In a surprising plot twist, the protagonist, a newly promoted vor named Nikolai Luzhin, reveals himself to be an undercover FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) agent who has infiltrated the London arm of the mob. With this, *Eastern Promises* establishes that the Russian state is not the enemy; rather, the state is attempting to curtail the rampant Russian organized crime, the true adversary, both at home and abroad.

Even in 2014, with the blockbuster hit *The Equalizer* starring Denzel Washington, Western film continued to fall back on the Russian mobster trope that was born two decades prior in the 1990s. While still Russians, this model of Russian movie villains are enemies because of their moral corruption more so than their inherently Russian (or communist) identity, which characterized their Cold War counterparts. Like *Eastern Promises*, *The Equalizer* features ultra-violent Russian mafia members. The two main antagonists, Vladimir Pushkin and Nicolai Itchenko, are both reflections of the Western perception of Russia as the land of gangster capitalism that was born in the 1990s. As the 1990s progressed, however, Americans began to take note that the Russian mafia had extended its reach into their cities.²⁸ Both *Eastern Promises* and *The Equalizer* take place in major Western

²⁵ John Rockwell, "Russia's New Culture Begins to Emerge from Soviet Rubble," *NYT*, November 11, 1992; "In Ex-Soviet Lands, Gangs Fill Vacuum," *NYT*, October 25, 1992; Michael Brinyon, "Capitalism gone wild, anarchy and crime fire forces of opposition," *Times* (London, England), October 5, 1993.

²⁶ Doris Toumarkine, "Eastern Promises," *Film Journal International*, September 10, 2007.

²⁷ Michael Schwartz, "Vory v Zakone has hallowed place in Russian criminal lore," July 29, 2008.

²⁸ Alison Mitchell, "Russian Emigres Importing Thugs to Commit Crimes in U.S.," *NYT*, April 11, 1992; Alan Lupo, "A New Breed of Comrades in Arms," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 10, 1995.

metropolises, London and Boston, respectively. Pushkin and Itchenko are not ideological enemies or purely evil (although they have few to no redeeming qualities), instead the Russians that audiences encounter in *The Equalizer* are mobsters involved in a prostitution ring and other illicit smuggling operations. Their end goal, however, is not reprehensible. Unlike *Bond* villains or the ruthless Ivan Drago, these Russian characters are not after world domination. They are not confrontational, or trying to disrupt most people's day-to-day goings-on. At the end of the day, Pushkin and Itchenko engage in their criminal activity to make money, and while there is nothing inherently wrong with the pursuit of wealth, it is how the Russians are willing to make their money where they are at severe fault.

A *New York Times* review of *The Equalizer* written by A. O. Scott calls into question where to draw the line on Russian bad guys. "I can't help feeling a little bit sorry for some of the bad guys," Scott confesses, "not Puskin and [Itchenko]...but what about the lower-ranking muscle, the bald dudes with tattoos who have to open the doors of the black S.U.V.s and throw first punches at a man they have no way of knowing is really an elite super-assassin? Were they warned about this in the job interview? Do they have health insurance? They're really just working stiffs, too, and the way they're treated seems a little unfair."²⁹ With his tongue-in-cheek commentary on how some Russian villains are worse than others, Scott plays the role of judge, arbitrating from his place of ethical high ground. It appears, then, that while portrayals of Russian antagonists changed from the Cold War to post-Soviet-era, the Western assertion of moral superiority reigned on.

New Cold War: Same as the Old One?

The New Cold War, a term recently coined by scholars to describe current affairs, must be framed differently than the original Cold War. Nonetheless, its use has benefits, especially when referring to the various secondary battlefields that are active today. In recent years, a new kind of Russian adversary has been developed in the West due to more palpable fears regarding Russia. While the Russian mob is real and certainly active around the globe, Westerners are beginning to see a different side of Russia as the largest threat. In fact, what has changed since Russia's heyday as the home of organized crime and mafia violence is that Americans view Russia as a more genuine enemy. From 1999 to 2018, the percentage of Americans that saw Russia as an enemy rose from 5% to 29%.³⁰ Today, while ISIS is perceived as the greatest danger to national security, nearly half of Americans see Russia as a threat to the United States.³¹ This is because Americans have observed Russia's actions on the world stage in places like Georgia

²⁹ A. O. Scott, "The Equalizer: Heroically Handy With a Corkscrew," *NYT*, September 25, 2014.

³⁰ Gallup Poll, "Please say whether you consider Russia an ally of the United States, friendly, but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States," April 1999-July 2018.

³¹ Spring 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Q17c.

and Ukraine as well as on American soil, with the 2016 presidential election. The Putin-led Russia emerging in the world over the last decade has shown that it is not afraid to flex its military muscles and exert brute force to achieve its objectives. The new Cold War in which many argue the U.S. and Russia are engaged is rooted, in no small part, in the rise of tensions over Russian military actions in ex-Union Republics. In August of 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that Russian invasion of Georgia was “unacceptable in the 21st century” and “jeopardize[d]” its relationship with the West.³² Six years later, NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow stated that “[NATO] must begin to view Russia no longer as a partner, but more as an adversary.”³³

In addition to thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of civilian casualties, Russia has extended its reach and will via a different kind of warfare. In the mid-2000s, Russia began utilizing cyberwarfare internationally. Before invading Georgia with military units on the ground, Russia launched cyberattacks on Georgian servers and both the Georgian President, Mikheil Saakashvili, and National Bank of Georgia’s personal websites.³⁴ Similar attacks were carried out in Estonia in 2007. According to Brian Mazanec, an Acting Director with the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s International Affairs and Trade team, based on Russia’s repeated denial of service (D.D.O.S.) cyberattacks on civilians, “Russia’s early cyberwarfare activity...indicate that it is largely unconstrained by restrictive cyber norms and is preparing to use cyberweapons in a wide range of conflicts and against a variety of targets.”³⁵ In 2011, largely in response to Russian use to cyberwarfare, the Pentagon constituted cyberattacks against the United States as potential acts-of-war.³⁶

Russian cyberwarfare has not been limited to Eastern Europe, though, and in 2016 the United States experienced the effect of Russia’s newfound method of nonmilitary attacks. In January of 2017, the United States Intelligence Community found that Russia had interfered in the previous year’s presidential election. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence stated that Vladimir Putin had ordered the use of “cyber tools and media campaigns to influence US public opinion.”³⁷ The campaign launched against the United States was unfortunately just another attack in a string of non-linear offensives that the Kremlin has launched in recent years. Recently, journalists have begun to group

³² “Moscow threatens Georgia regime, says Bush,” *Financial Times* (London), August 12, 2008.

³³ Martin Matishak, “NATO Diplomat: Russia now more an ‘adversary’ than an ally,” *The Hill* (Washington, D.C.), May 1, 2014.

³⁴ John Markoff, “Before the Gunfire, Cyberattacks,” *NYT*, August 12, 2008.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Brian M. Mazanec, “Why International Order in Cyberspace Is Not Inevitable,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 87.

³⁶ Siobhan Gorman and Julian E. Barnes, “Cyber Combat: Act of War, Pentagon Sets Stage for U.S. to Respond to Computer Sabotage with Military Force,” *Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), May 31, 2011.

³⁷ United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Intelligence Community Assessment 2017-01D,” January 6, 2017.

this new hybrid, nonmilitary warfare under the umbrella of what many are calling the Gerasimov Doctrine. Named for General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russia Armed Forces and first Deputy Defense Minister, the phrase originated after a 2000-word article, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight,” published by Gerasimov in 2013. In 2017, Molly McKew summed up the doctrine in an article for *Newsweek*, establishing it as “a vision of total warfare that places politics and war within the same spectrum of activities...guerrilla, and waged on all fronts with a range of actors and tools—for example, hackers, media, businessmen, leaks, and, yes, fake news.”³⁸ While the Gerasimov Doctrine covers a wide range of methods, it is generally acknowledged that Russia is a demonstrable technological threat to those the Kremlin perceives as adversaries.

Even the Marvel comic universe has picked up on Western fear of Russia’s capacity for and willingness to engage in technological warfare. In *Iron Man 2*, a 2010 blockbuster hit that made over \$623 million at the box office, audiences encountered a vengeful Russian engineer, Ivan Vanko. Played by Mickey Rourke, Vanko is oftentimes cold and machine-like. Vanko is an interesting Russian adversary, because he essentially does the same things as all the American characters, designing a suit and drones that are superior to protagonist Tony Stark’s. Nonetheless, Vanko represents a cyber and technological threat to security in the movie. As a representation of the new breed of Russian antagonists, Vanko is not an ideologically motivated villain; rather he is even humanized by his vengeful motivation for violence. Vanko’s subtle humanization through a universal influence—revenge—is the result of the deliberate intentions of both actor Mickey Rourke and director Jon Favreau, who wished to avoid the character becoming a one-dimensional villain.³⁹ While Vanko’s thirst for revenge stems from Stark’s role in his father’s deportation, which led to his death at the hands of the Soviet Union, Russia may have its own grounds for revenge against the United States.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is fond of emphasizing the victimization of Russia at the hands of the United States during the 1990s. James Goldgeier, a professor of international relations at American University’s School of International Service, elucidated Putin’s contempt for the United States’ role in Russia’s restructuring after the fall of the Soviet Union: “[Putin] sees the 1990s as one long period of humiliation.”⁴⁰ To Putin, the U.S. was too deeply involved in Russia and dictated events far too often in the 1990s, and it has been a goal of his to re-establish Russia as a major, respected global power. In a speech made after the annexation of Crimea, Putin demanded that the world “accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other

³⁸ Molly K. McKew, “The Gerasimov Doctrine: It’s Russia’s new chaos theory of political warfare. And it’s probably being used on you,” *Newsweek* (New York, NY), September/October 2017.

³⁹ Lisa Schwarzbaum, “Iron Man 2,” *Entertainment Weekly* (New York, NY), June 16, 2012.

⁴⁰ Michael Crowley, “Putin’s Revenge: Humiliated by the 1990s, Russia’s strongman is determined to win Cold War 2.0. He may be succeeding,” *Politico* (Arlington County, VA), December 16, 2016.

countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.”⁴¹ In many ways, Vanko perfectly embodies this notion: he displays not only technological proficiency, but also brute force without restraint, justified by serving his own interests and carrying out his personal revenge.

Just as Russian film antagonists’ nature changed from the Cold War-era to the 21st century, Russian enemies’ portrayal on television has similarly transformed. Since the show’s premier in 2013, *The Americans* has been telling Cold War spy stories from a Russian perspective, offering a nuanced and unique insight on foreign agents carrying out espionage on American soil.⁴² *The Americans* follows the story of two Soviet KGB spies, Elizabeth and Philip Jennings, living in the Washington D.C. area with their family during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Filmed in the 21st century, but set during the Cold War, the show is offering a new, current day take, on Russia through a historical lens. Elizabeth and Philip’s characters are extremely complex and call a lot of prior notions into question. Through the medium of television, creator Joe Weisberg develops Elizabeth and Philip more methodically than he would have been able to in cinematic format. As Russian spies living in the United States, the two KGB agents lead very normal American lives. Their deep-cover makes them appear, even to their FBI counterintelligence agent neighbor, American. On the surface, there is no difference between Elizabeth and Philip, two Soviet agents, and any other American citizens. In that way, the show humanizes the West’s Cold War—and arguably present day—adversary by asking a question: really how different are our enemies from us?

In the moment Elizabeth and Philip garner sympathy from their American audience, however, the show reminds viewers that they are Russian agents and, more importantly, the enemy. The two do unspeakably brutal and violent things with little remorse. Elizabeth and Philip are, though, multifaceted characters. Elizabeth is very much the hardline Soviet operative who is completely bought in on the idea that the USSR is good and America is pure evil. Philip, on the other hand, enjoys his life in America and admits that it is far better than anything Russia can offer. *The Americans* is fond of reminding, or reassuring, their American audience that the U.S. is superior both morally and materially to the USSR, despite their intricate humanization of two Soviet spies.

The Americans very intricately blurs the lines between friend and foe, calling the previously accepted bi-polar morality of the Cold War into question. Elizabeth and Philip, in *The Americans*, are shown to be a cog in the Soviet machine. They are Russian spies, but they are people. Even though Elizabeth is a staunch communist with numerous ideological misgivings about America, she is

⁴¹ Masha Lipman, “How Putin Plays with the Law,” *The New Yorker* (New York, NY), March 19, 2014.

⁴² I refer to Elizabeth and Philip Jennings as “antagonists” because, despite being the main characters of *The Americans*, they are KGB agents carrying out covert actions against the United States in a U.S. television show.

nonetheless capable of living in Virginia and raising an American family. Whereas during the Cold War *The Americans* would have focused on the KGB and Soviet element of Elizabeth and Philip's story, in the 21st century the show focuses on them as people. Similarly, in *The Equalizer*, despite their awful ways of making money, audiences must acknowledge that the Russian characters' goals are not that unlike their own. What has changed most about American representations of Russian characters is their end goals. During the Cold War, Russians were often portrayed as more dramatic, ideological enemies. In the context of a global conflict between the capitalist West and communist USSR, Russian antagonists' end goals were evil and reprehensible. Now, in a post-Cold War-era, what the Russian characters want is not the issue; the problem has become how they go about getting what they want.

Today, America and Russia, and each country's leadership, are both judged by many to be morally compromised. The U.S. is still the triumphant, more popular global power, but the difference between Russian and U.S. favorability, worldwide, is not as black and white as it once was. The United States' global image is weakening, and weakening quickly. In 2017, drawing on data from 33 polled countries, the U.S.'s favorability stood at 50%, a 14% drop from the same polls conducted in 2014-16.⁴³ While the U.S.'s edge on global favorability is shrinking, it is still good enough for a narrow first-place lead over second-place China (at 48%) and a swiftly dwindling margin over third-place Russia (35%) in 2017 statistics. As the lines blur between the once-righteous-superpower United States and once-deplorable Russia, American media has understandably adjusted its portrayal of Russians.

In addition to portraying modern-day Russian characters as morally corrupt, video game developers and designers have added another nuanced approach to Russia in the 21st century. One of the bestselling and most popular video games of the 21st century, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, pits the user against current-day Russian ultranationalist enemies in its campaign game mode. In the 2007 game's campaign story, a major plotline is the rise of the Russian ultranationalist movement. At the game's outset, a civil war breaks out between a failing Russian Federation government and the ultranationalists, who seek to restore Russia to Soviet-era glory. The ultranationalists are led by Imran Zakhaev, the game's main antagonist. Nationalism is on the rise in Russia today, and *Modern Warfare* essentially expounds the movement in the form of a violent militant group led by a nuclear arms-crazed revolutionary. While the game's story is fictional, it touches nonetheless on the rising Russian nationalism that the West has undoubtedly recognized in the 21st century.

According to the 13th Prime Minister of Ukraine, Arseniy Yatsenyuk,

⁴³ Spring 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Q12a, c, e.

recent actions by Russia have reinforced his fear that “Vladimir Putin is trying to restore the Soviet Union.”⁴⁴ Consistent with recent data compiled by Pål Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud, two forms of nationalism are on the rise in Russia—ethno-nationalism and imperial nationalism. Imperial nationalism, in Russia, is tied to the growing perception that Russia is no longer a part of Europe.⁴⁵ Russians, now more than ever, view themselves as their “own civilization.” The escalation of ethno-nationalism, however, complicates matters for the Kremlin. Ethno-nationalism is gaining traction due to factors such as illegal immigration from the South Caucasus, and may trace its roots back to Soviet times, when “Russia became a state dominated by ethnic Russians.”⁴⁶ The 2014 annexation of Crimea, it appears, helped the Kremlin corral the ethnonationalists, focusing nationalism primarily on the state and its strength: “the annexation of Crimea allowed Putin to ride two horses: since the population of the peninsula is primarily ethnic Russians it was possible to present this act both as an ingathering of Russian lands in a strong Russian state and as a defence [*sic*] of ethnic Russians abroad.”⁴⁷ The tides of nationalism are, nonetheless, forcing contradictions and tensions to the surface in Russia. A new dimension to American perception may be that Russia is dealing with a lot of internal problems, and, while they still might pose an opaque threat to us, their government certainly has a lot on its hands with internal affairs.

Modern Warfare is important because it takes place in the present and deals with Russia, the country. Players encounter Russian army enemies more than individual Russian characters in this commentary on 21st century Russia. In *Modern Warfare 2* and *Modern Warfare 3*, the ultranationalists seize control of the Russian Federation and launch terrorist attacks across the globe, including a mass shooting in a Moscow airport. Vladimir Makarov, the ex-KGB operative who carries out the shooting does so with the aid of an undercover CIA agent. Aware of the CIA operative’s identity, Makarov kills him and leaves his body in the airport as evidence that the event was U.S.-sponsored. At the end of *Modern Warfare 2*, Ultranationalist-led Russia declares war on and invades the United States. *Modern Warfare 3* opens up in New York City, where the Russian forces have almost completely taken control of the U.S.’s largest city. As video games play a major role in attitude formation, millions of people fighting against modern-day Russian enemies on their Xboxes or PlayStations will have an impact on how they view

⁴⁴ Sam Frizell, “Ukraine PM: Putin Wants to Rebuild Soviet Union,” *TIME*, April 19, 2014.

⁴⁵ NEORUSS survey data, 2013–2014. Russians were asked “Do you consider Russia to be part of European civilization or something else?”

⁴⁶ Mikkel Berg, Aadne Aasland and Olga Tkach, “Compatriots or Competitors? A Glance at Rossiyskaya Gazeta’s Immigration Debate 2004–2009,” *Social Sciences Bulletin* 2, no. 11 (2010): 7; Richard Arnold, “Surveys show Russian nationalism is on the rise. This explains a lot about the country’s foreign and domestic policies,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 30, 2016.

⁴⁷ *The New Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. Pål Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 6.

Russia in real life.⁴⁸ Again, culture and politics share a two-way street.

The Villain Speaks

The fact that Western media has persisted in their use of Russian adversaries has not been lost on the Kremlin. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin's reactions to the Western trope have varied in recent years. As for various forms of global demonization of Russia that Putin perceives, he has made fun of it, embraced it, and at times angrily rejected it.

Putin has admittedly become more comfortable with gently joking at his own regime and country's expense in efforts to degrade his international rivals. Take, for example, the Russian primetime television show, *Once Upon a Time in Russia*. In state-sanctioned political humor, the only permissible program of its nature, Putin is portrayed as a slightly devious character. The show "pokes fun at contemporary Russian life, but in a way that justifies rather than attacks the country's widespread corruption."⁴⁹ In essence, Putin is acknowledging that outside media will criticize various parts of his regime and state, and an effective way of combatting this is to channel it into self-deprecation and own a little part of it. So, while the West criticizes his country's corruption and prevalence of organized crime by making the sex-trafficking mafia thugs in *Eastern Promises* or *The Equalizer* Russian, Putin acknowledges the same issue by dousing it in comedy.

While American media seems fixated on providing commentary on Russia in movies and television shows, perhaps no one is more fixated on providing commentary on Russia in movies and television shows than Russia itself. Putin and the Kremlin are no strangers to using state-produced films and shows to their benefit. Oftentimes used to draw the nation's attention away from negative realities, as Moscow reporter for the *Washington Post* Amie Ferris-Rotman asserts, Russian television shows are hugely popular and used by the Kremlin to push a pro-Putin regime agenda.⁵⁰ Additionally, the Kremlin uses comedy shows to propagate criticism of foreign countries and their leaders. In addition to the bumbling Donald Trump impersonator on *Comedy Club*, other state-run programs use satire to bolster the Putin regime and disparage the West. In 2017, the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence released a 157-page report on Russian state-sponsored comedy shows. NATO StratCom COE's report used a case study, the show *KVN*, a national comedy competition as an example of "a ready-to-act tool of strategic political communication" through its "special

⁴⁸ Brandon Valeriano and Philip Habel, "Who Are the Enemies? The Visual Framing of Enemies in Digital Games," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (2016).

⁴⁹ Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Primetime Politics: How the Kremlin Shapes Russian Television," *Foreign Affairs*, October 12, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2018.

⁵⁰ Ferris-Rotman.

relationship with the Kremlin.”⁵¹

The humor on *KVN* is intricately crafted to both allow some concessions on Russia’s part while further legitimizing Putin’s Russia and degrading America and the West. *KVN* tackles many of the issues that the West raises against it, while putting its own spin on them. Once such case involves the West’s criticism of Russia for homophobic legislation. In a 2015 episode of *KVN*, a large rainbow U.S. flag came up on the screen and Russian comedians quipped that “the best country in the world is where it will be possible to marry a plant.”⁵² In this segment, the Kremlin-backed *KVN* essentially took on the West’s criticism, acknowledged it, but then turned it on them, making their acceptance and open-mindedness seem like the absurd thing. Additionally, *KVN* is fond of comparing Putin to other world leaders, especially American presidents. In 2015, photos of U.S. President Barack Obama and Putin were shown side by side: President Obama riding a bike, polo tucked into his khaki shorts, next to Putin, shirtless on a bear. *KVN* does not shy away, however, from poking fun at Russia’s own government—yet, it is always for the larger mission of legitimizing some area of the Putin regime. In one episode, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov appeared and read his reaction to post-Crimea annexation sanctions. While the words he spoke were serious, the way he did so was “overtly sexual, demonstrating that the sanctions against Russia were totally inconsequential, that Russia was standing above them.”⁵³

In addition to poking fun at Western criticism and villainization of Russia, another way in which Russia has adopted Western portrayals of Russians, especially in film and television, is through an embrace of the *femme fatale* character. The *femme fatale*, a woman whose seduction ensnares her lover-victims, has been a constant staple of Western renderings of Russian women since the Cold War. In *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, the female Pottsylvaniaian’s name, Natasha Fatale, is a not-so-subtle nod to this notion. The *Bond* films, however, are where *femme fatales* get their most screen time. For decades, Western audiences met various females who, by lowering 007’s guard through seduction, manage to make attempts on James Bond’s life. For example, in *From Russia With Love*, Tatiana Romanova lures Bond from their first meeting, telling him “you’re even nicer than your photograph,” to which Bond replies, “you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen.” From their first exchange to her naked waltz across Bond’s hotel room, Romanova sets up Bond to be entrapped by her commanding officer, Rosa Klebb. Even 21st century television shows as complex as *The Americans* have not separated from the *femme fatale* characterization of Russian women. Less than two minutes into *The Americans*’ first episode, audiences witness Elizabeth Jennings’ seduction of an FBI bureaucrat for

⁵¹ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, “StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework,” 2017, 97.

⁵² NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 113.

⁵³ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 110.

information.

Russia enthusiastically embraced the idea of a Russian *femme fatale* in 2010, when thousands of fans gave Angelina Jolie the reception of a lifetime at the Moscow premier of *Salt*.⁵⁴ *Salt*, which was released in English and Russian and interestingly features both a character named Orlov and a shoe-knife, follows the story of a CIA agent who is accused of being a Russian spy. The truth is, however, that *Salt* is a Russian spy, a part of a Cold War-era sleeper cell. Interestingly, the *Salt* character that thousands of Russian fans rallied around was selected to kill the President of the United States. Named the “sexiest woman alive” in 2004 by *Esquire*, Jolie’s portrayal of *Salt* embodies the idea of a *femme fatale* character. In the same year as *Salt*’s release, though, the Russian public and the Kremlin celebrated a *femme fatale* who existed outside of Hollywood, in the form what *The Week* called the “real-life” *Salt*.⁵⁵

In June of 2010, eleven Russian sleeper agents, members of the Illegals program, were arrested, accused of “gathering information on American policy and politics.”⁵⁶ Essentially the inspiration for Philip and Elizabeth Jennings from *The Americans*, the Illegals operated in the United States without diplomatic cover, assuming everyday identities and embedding themselves nondescriptly in various communities. One member of the program, Anna Chapman, gained prominence as many in the U.S. saw her fit the *femme fatale* mold perfectly. In an interview with CNN, independent producer John Palacio described how Chapman “understood the power of her sexuality.”⁵⁷ On July 9, Chapman and the other Illegals were exchanged for prisoners held by Russia, and sent back to their homeland. Upon her arrival to Russia, Chapman was immediately celebrated and rose to fame virtually overnight. Chapman was personally invited to the Moscow premier of *Salt* by Angelina Jolie. Additionally, Russia has embraced her *femme fatale* persona, as she has launched an acting and modeling career in recent years: “unlike her more obscure colleagues, Ms. Chapman, 28, has welcomed the spotlight. She has become a darling of the tabloids, appearing in racy photo spreads, one of which recently involved her posing with a pistol.”⁵⁸ Vladimir Putin, who welcomed the Illegals back home by singing patriotic songs, is certainly aware of how Russia can spin and weaponize Chapman’s *femme fatale* side on the global stage.

Aside from turning Western depictions of Russia into comedic bits to lessen their blow or embracing them head on, Putin’s regime has, at times, angrily rejected the West’s criticism. When Russian politician and former KGB operative

⁵⁴ Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Angelina Jolie spurs Russian patriotism at ‘Salt’ Moscow show,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2010.

⁵⁵ “‘Salt’: Anna Chapman, the movie?” *The Week* (New York, NY), July 23, 2010.

⁵⁶ Ellen Barry, “Illegals’ Spy Ring Famed in Lore of Russian Spying,” *NYT*, June 29, 2010.

⁵⁷ Robert Bridge, “Western Media Goes Gaga Over Russian ‘Femme Fatale,’” *RT* (Washington, D.C.), July 1, 2010.

⁵⁸ Michael Schwartz, “Russian Spy? Maybe So. TV Darling, Absolutely,” *NYT*, December 30, 2010.

Nikolai Patrushev remarked that “US policy became reminiscent of the Cold War” in 2014, he did not refer to the West’s portrayal of Russian antagonists in movies and television shows.⁵⁹ Instead, he referred to the U.S.’s reaction to Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and other military incursions into Ukraine—something that was certainly reflected in Western characterizations of Russia. As a member of Putin’s inner circle, Patrushev’s interpretation of the current U.S.-Russian relationship likely lends insight into the mainstream opinion of those at the top. Putin, adept at painting Russia as the innocent victim of Western hypocrisy, has often negatively reacted to how the West continues to see Russia as an adversary. In terms of Russian action in Crimea, Putin wielded this rhetoric: “they like us only when we are poor and standing there with a beggar’s bowl...As soon as we start talking about our interests and they start feeling some element of geopolitical competition, well, they don’t like that.”⁶⁰

Putin’s outrage often stems largely from a feeling of exclusion from the West, his contempt for NATO, and his perception of spreading Russophobia. While Western perpetuation of Russian adversaries may seem benign to some, to Putin is a sign of increasing global ostracization of Russia. In a June 2017 interview with Oliver Stone, Putin’s emotions ran high when he asserted: “There is no more Soviet Union, no Eastern Bloc. In my view, NATO needs an external enemy to justify its existence, so there is a constant search for one, and provocations to create adversaries where there are none.” For Putin, Russia has become the external enemy whose preservation as antagonist is vital to Western stability.⁶¹

What Now?

In 2019, battles are unquestionably being waged between Russia and the West. While the us vs. them motif may still score a win at the box office, though, our culture is lagging behind the geopolitical reality of today. The Cold War days of black and white polar opposition seem far behind us, as lines between friends and enemies begin to blur. Granted, Russian undertakings of recent memory, from actions in Ukraine and Syria to granting Edward Snowden asylum, have been in direct opposition to Western aims and interests. In light of new, larger threats and shifting global dynamics, however, the Russian villain cliché seems to have lost its Cold War gusto.⁶² The New Cold War has indubitably brought about a new Russian antagonist prototype in Western media, but the villain remains, nonetheless, Russian. The familiarity of a decade-old enemy—and one that

⁵⁹ Walter Laqueur, “Détente Plus? How Should the West Deal with Russia?” *World Affairs* 178, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 76.

⁶⁰ Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa, “Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War: What lay behind Russia’s interference in the 2016 election—and what lies ahead?” *The New Yorker* (New York, NY), March 6, 2017.

⁶¹ *The Putin Interviews*, directed by Oliver Stone, written by Oliver Stone, Showtime, June 12-15, 2017.

⁶² Steven Kurutz, “Russians: Still the Go-To Bad Guys,” *NYT*, January 17, 2014.

conveniently continues to justify its evolving, but steadfast, role as villain—may have done just enough to keep the Russian antagonist in Western cinema, television, and the newer video game market.

New Cold War battlefields exist today on household televisions, in movie theaters, and on mobile phones—they inescapably surround us, oftentimes without our conscious awareness of their presence. While much of our culture clings to the past, we are slowly beginning to come to terms with the complex nature of a world in which we are not sure where our greatest enemies reside. In the coming years, it will be interesting to witness where the entertainment industry settles. Will the Russian villain hold strong, or will another take its place? In recent years, countless journalists have called attention to the film industry's persistent enemy. When will their realization inspire a reevaluation from those within the realm of entertainment? Perhaps soon. Today, given the world's current course, change looms. Culture is vital, and its place cannot be overlooked. Our portrayal of adversaries is of the utmost significance because it is a method through which to channel a deeper set of beliefs, of not only why our adversaries are the bad guys, but, perhaps more importantly, of why we should be the good guys.

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