

Tracing Images in American and Russian Oratory

An Analysis of Russian and American Rhetoric within
the Context of the Syrian Conflict

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Abstract

This essay is an analysis of American and Russian oratory within the context of the conflict in Syria. The purpose of the analysis is to delineate Russian and American understandings of an eventual military intervention in Syria, as well as depicting which images of the self and the enemy that are mediated through both countries' rhetoric. This search for images is based on the idea that powerful countries deliberately or subconsciously mediate certain pictures of themselves and their adversaries using certain terms and phrases. Further theoretical foundations for this research will be ideas concerning the construction of enemy images, mirror images and binary oppositions.

Following the analytical discussion in the essay, we can in the end see how Russian and American oratory contain traces of both enemy images and mirror images as well as binary oppositions. The pictures are in many ways similar to each other, even if they also differ from one another in significant ways. Some of their similarities, such as mirroring characteristics, will be briefly debated in the last section of this writing.

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1. Introduction

This essay will be divided into three parts. This opening section shall be treating the theoretical foundations laid out for the purpose of this text, as well as it will be saying some words about the method used during the research. Possible limitations and demarcations of the material and analysis will also be discussed. Following this section comes the essay's analytical part, namely an analysis of the primary material utilized. The concluding chapter will contain a discussion including a reasoning of the relationship between the analytical result and this essay's theoretical basis, and will be finished by a paragraph stating some complete thoughts about the results .

1.1 The Aim and Purpose of this Essay

This composition is an analysis of the United States' and Russia's rhetoric within the context of the ongoing conflict in Syria. The aim of this analysis is to examine the oratory of these countries in order to depict three things. First of all, the purpose is to delineate any opinion each country may have of the eventuality of intervening with force in the situation in Syria. Both countries views of such an intervention are related to and of importance to the following two questions of this analysis and they are therefore investigated. Secondly, I wish to examine which understanding of itself either country is subconsciously or deliberately mediating through its rhetoric when making official statements or remarks about the Syrian conflict. Similarly, and finally, I am also going to review what perception each country is encouraging of its opponent in this issue. The first question is akin to the succeeding ones in the way that the image of the self and other are also connected to the understanding of an intervention. Since both countries have different opinions on the intervention-issue, these opinions also reflect the images they want to present of each other, as we shall see.

As we can see, all three points are related to each other and serves the higher purpose of investigating how images are created in the American and Russian oratory. Hence, to summarize, the specific purpose of this essay is to examine the American and Russian comprehension of an intervention, together with the highlighting of self- as well as enemy images emerging in superpower rhetoric within the frame of the ongoing conflict in Syria.

1.2 Creating Enemy Images and Binary Oppositions

When analyzing American and Russian rhetoric within the frame of the Syrian conflict the aim is to be able to depict what kind of image both countries wish to mediate of themselves and their opponent. The analysis will be based on an idea of countries seeking to picture themselves and other agents in specific ways in order to achieve political goals in the international arena. By promoting a certain perception of their character and connecting themselves to powerful epithets, countries may create an opportunity of influencing other states' understandings of and attitudes towards them. Consequently, this kind of image-building may in the long run have an impact on countries' roles and on what kind of influence they have in the international community. It can create opportunities for promoting all of the good qualities connected to the self, or for smearing your opponent in a delicate way. The idea is that all states in some way or another create such images, deliberately or subconsciously, and that it is possible to find pieces or traces of these desirable pictures in for example rhetoric or actions.

It is my firm belief that different created images of Russia and America will emerge when

examining the rhetoric of the superpowers closer. Hopefully it will be possible to discover in what way the countries are putting their images together and a clear comprehension of how they wish to depict themselves and each other will come into existence.

My theory is connected to the ever so present idea of enemy images that appear in studies of conflicts and conflict behavior.¹ Enemy images represent in the case of conflict different beliefs and assumptions about (usually more or less hostile) individuals or groups.² These profiles can be and are often grounded in misconceptions and distorted images about other personages and their intentions towards ourselves. There is usually no need for enemy images to be completely rational or even related to the objective truth. They are plainly imaginations of our enemies with the purpose of distancing and disconnecting ourselves from the characteristics and conduct of our opponents. The images are a way for us to contrast ourselves with our adversaries in order to create feelings of a clash between an ingroup and an outgroup. Enemy images hence play an important role in the maintenance and reinforcement of hostile attitudes and violent behavior, in part since they are affecting the way we look upon our enemies behavior.³ A frequent effect of images of this kind is that enemy conduct is misinterpreted and connected to incorrect underlying causes. For example, ambiguous acts could be seen as threatening, while friendly acts are pictured as devious and manipulative.⁴ Often violent and hostile behavior from the opposing side becomes normalized, whilst peaceful acts aiming at reconciliation may be pictured as exceptions.⁵ It is also common to attribute one's own belligerent and hostile actions to external circumstances, while attributing the same kind of behavior from the opponent to internal characteristics.⁶ In short, enemy images are utilized by states partially to justify antagonistic actions and attitudes towards other actors.

This essay will also rely on theories concerning the creation of binary oppositions and mirror images, connected to Philip Smith's thesis of cultural codewords.⁷ By using binary oppositions, countries are putting together images of the self as well as the adversary through the application of specific designations.⁸ Typically the terms connected to the self are positive in character, while the designations negative counterparts are attached to the opponent.⁹ One typical example would be states frequently depicting their own behavior as rational, while opposing countries consequently are described as irrational and illogical. Governments seek to picture themselves as the positive contrast of the ones they are fighting, as to separate themselves from the

1 For a brief, yet thorough explanation of the relation between enemy images and the development of conflicts see for example *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* by Dean G. Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim. The book provides an easily understood explication of how enemy images and other psychological processes may affect conflict escalation and settlement.

2 Oppenheimer, Louis; *The Development of Enemy Images: A Theoretical Contribution; Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*; Vol 12(3); Sep. 2006; pp 269-292; Publisher: Lawrence Erlbaum (Journal Article); Database: PsycARTICLES; p 271

3 Oppenheimer; 2006: 270

4 Oppenheimer; 2006: 272

5 Sande, Gerald N, Goethals, George R, Ferrari, Lisa and Worth, Leila T; *Value-Guided Attributions: Maintaining the Moral Self-Image and the Diabolical Enemy-Image; Journal of Social Issues*; Summer 1989; Vol 42 Issue 2; pp 91-118

6 Oppenheimer; 2006: 275

7 Smith, Philip; *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War and Suez*; Chicago; University of Chicago Press; 2005

Smith, Philip; *Codes and Conflict: Toward a Theory of War as Ritual; Theory and Society*; Vol. 20 No. 1; Feb. 1991; pp 103-138; Published by Springer

8 See for example the underlying code of binary oppositions used by Smith when theorizing the cultural discourse present during the Falklands War (Smith; 1991: 117)

9 Smith; 1991: 115

behavior of their opponents and create dichotomies of positive and negative oppositions. For example, legal and rational epithets are often linked to the own side to prove the legitimacy of the actions of the government.¹⁰ Following the idea of binary oppositions, contrasting behavior would be seen as illegal and irrational, thus challenging the legitimacy of the opposing government. The use of binary oppositions reflect in what way states want to contrast themselves from their enemies and the use of each such opposition serves a certain purpose.

Smith furthers the theory of the use of binary oppositions, composing the oppositions into a code of words used by states during crises. This code of oppositions reflects what image the state wishes to mediate of itself as well as what picture it wants to promote of its enemy. Important though, is that these images have to be “couched in terms of the shared codes of civil society” in order to be effective.¹¹ Hence the meaning and significance of the words or terms used has to be carefully measured since different definitions and ways of interpreting play great role in what effect these codes and images will have . Furthermore, dominant actors or people with control over means of communication may affect definitions and interpretations, something which has to be kept in mind.¹² Indeed, Smith states that “actors are not able to perform any action they wish with the expectation that their rhetorics of legitimation will always be accepted or believed”.¹³ Other actors may well interpret the oratory in ways separate from what was meant by the sender.

According to Smith's thinking, it is also important that the behavior of the state matches the codewords set up if it wishes to maintain this peculiar picture of the self.¹⁴ Conduct and actions seen by onlookers as not matching the codewords will risk erupting this self-image and may be used as a base for questioning the authority and legitimacy of the state and its conduct.

Persuant to Smith, the use of codes is precisely one of the ways in which “constituencies and players make sense of wars and the situations that might lead up to them”.¹⁵ The author means that narratives and storytelling are some of the most effective ways of generating wide support and legitimating warlike actions (the kind of storytelling most efficacious in this case would be the one that Smith names “apocalyptic narrative”).¹⁶ Consequently, efforts to de-legitimate one's enemy's actions and justifications would involve attempts to erase the apocalyptic element of these narratives by for example rediscirbing or redefining objects, actors or motivations.¹⁷

The theories of how enemy images are created and binary oppositions composed will be kept in mind when examining the language of Russia and the US. I will be looking for traces of existing enemy images that these countries may have of each other. The rhetoric will be investigated in order to find what terms and words are used when both countries work on mediating hidden messages about themselves and the other. The idea is to highlight these concealed images and messages that lie beneath the oratory as to make clear what kind of image each country wishes to promote. Furthermore, the language will be analyzed while looking for any clear pattern of binary oppositions that may appear. Possibly, both sides will reveal completely contrary pairs of binary oppositions.

10 Smith; 1991: 116

11 Smith; 2005: 12-13

12 Smith; 2005: 12

13 Smith; 2005: 47

14 Smith; 1991: 118-119

15 Smith; 2005: 7

16 Smith; 2005: 26-27

17 Smith; 2005: 27

1.3 Method

As already stated, this essay will be a rhetorical examination of certain statements from Russia and America. While analysing these remarks I will look through a filter made of the theories about enemy images and binary oppositions explained in the previous section. I will carefully examine the documents chosen in order to detect all traces of images and such oppositions.

The method used for this essay will be based on Philip Smith's analysis of how different countries justify their actions and standpoints during situations of war.¹⁸ Smith uses a method founded on inter alia investigations of narrative and different stories depicted mainly in the media. The writer then searches for evidence of culture and narrative as a "provider of motivations and classifications" and as a "resource that enables interests to be translated into actions".¹⁹ In short, Smith uses the media and culture as a base for finding vindications and motivations for actions of war, and as a way of investigating how cultural mandates for war are composed.

My own analysis will be methodically analogous to Smith's, with some smaller justifications. For instance, the primary material utilized is significantly limited in scope compared to Smith's resources. While Smith is investigating the media at large, this essay is based on reviews of statements and remarks deriving from presidents and some other exalted politicians. This implicates that this analysis perhaps will be based on examinations of political narratives rather than broader cultural ones. I have also limited the scope of the analysis compared to Smith in that it is accomplished within the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict, thereby at large forfeiting the comparative element Smith is using in his analysis, as his investigations are based on four different countries and three different conflicts.²⁰ My comparative segment will only consist of the contrasting of Russian and American images.

The main lesson from Smith that I will be carrying in mind during my work is his theories of how cultural discourse can be systematized into mirror images and binary oppositions.²¹ It is mainly this segment of his method that I will be using during my own examinations of rhetorics. Moreover, this analysis will be mainly oriented towards the searching for self- and enemy images sooner than the discovery of cultural justifications for warlike actions. It is also therefore I will be helped by theories of enemy images during my research (in point of fact, Smith as well recognizes the importance of enemy images while justifying hostile actions, as he points out that "it is the image of the enemy and the narrative inflation of the precipitating crisis that lead to war").²²

1.4 Demarcations and Limitations of the Material

This essay will, as said, be based on an analysis of the oratory of the United States and Russia within the body of the conflict in Syria. In order to make such an analysis manageable, I have made certain necessary delimitations of the primary material used.

The analysis of the rhetoric has first of all been limited to the oratory of Russia and the US. I have chosen to examine further these countries as they are both superpowers on the international arena, and thus likely have an image and important core interests that they are eager to protect. There is accordingly a strong probability that both superpowers have clear opinions of what kind of

18 For a more thorough explanation of Smith's choice of method, see Smith; 2005: 35-56

19 Smith; 2005: 47

20 Smith; 2005

21 See for example Smith; 2005: 15-16. Here Smith systematizes three kinds of civil discourse into pairs of binary oppositions.

22 Smith; 2005: 208

image they want to maintain of themselves in order to achieve their national political goals.

Moreover, these countries' stories are clearly connected and they have a long history of cold and hot enmity. It is therefore not far-fetched to believe that they already would have created certain images of each other as enemies. Since America and Russia also often are depicted as completely contrasting powers with reverse interests, there is a strong case that the pictures they want to emit of each other and themselves would be fairly opposite. Hence tracing binary oppositions in the rhetoric would not be an impossible mission.

Additionally, both Russia and the United States are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. This implies that they have a close to unique opportunity to express their opinions in the case and enforce their national claims, which opens up for the eventuality of finding such utterances clearly expressed in national statements. I have also chosen to investigate the oratory of solely these two members of the Council, this to limit the scope of the analysis as well as to increase the chance of finding two completely opposite images.

Furthermore, the analysis has been limited in scope to statements concerning the current conflict in Syria. Syria has been chosen as a framework for this examination as to further highlight the disparate interests and views of Russia and the US. The powers have completely different opinions on what should be done to avoid further menaces in Syria, and if possible even more contrasting views on the possibility of intervening military in the conflict. I have also limited the extent of the essay in this way in order to make the volume and scope of the rhetoric analyzed more manageable. Simply looking at the oratory of the superpowers without any limitations like this would be a workload requiring more time and resources than available for this essay.

Additional limitations to the time span of the material has been made. The time span has been limited to statements from the year of 2013. This is partly because of the reasons stated above, but also because of the fact that this is a currently ongoing conflict where conduct and viewpoints of the countries involved may change rapidly. It is also a conflict that has escalated during the later half of the year of 2013, and where relations between the superpowers have tensed. Therefore the material in use has been limited in this way in order to get the clearest view of the present tensions between Russia and America in this issue.

The type of material further investigated are statements from the presidents of both countries, certain press briefings concerning the conflict in Syria, one article published by Russian President Putin in the New York Times and several questionings by journalists including the presidents. The material is limited in first hand to statements and remarks by the presidents, as they are the representatives of their countries and hence responsible for the image of the powers political attitudes and opinions (however, certain remarks and press briefings are made by other political agents). Remarks made at this political level certainly have to be carefully measured, thereby making any traces of images or codewords found less coincidental. The press briefings and questionings have been chosen as a contrast to these thought out statements. Here the politicians interviewed may not always be prepared on what questions are to be asked, providing an interesting perception on how both countries subconsciously view themselves and each other. Deliberate pronouncings together with unprepared statements will hopefully compose a rather just portrait of both countries' views.

During the research for material, several documents concerning the Syrian conflict from the perspectives of Russia and America have been reviewed.²³ However, the documents mentioned

²³ Other documents reviewed has been for example some eight pronouncings related to the Syrian conflict released on

above have been selected for further examination, as they provide clear evidence of Russia's and America's disparate views on an eventual intervention and on the different images they wish to mediate. It should be mentioned that remaining documents investigated do not describe an image contrary to the one depicted in the selected documents, but plainly are short of enough fruitful remarks for a more careful examination to take place.

1.5 Analytical Limitations

I am aware of the fact that the choice of material and method limitates this analysis in certain ways. One of the bigger disadvantages when chosing the conflict in Syria as the essay's framework is that a large amount of the discussions and negotiations concerning the clash take place behind closed doors and are not made official. Hence an analysis of this sort is limited in scope to those documents each country has made public, which may conclude in a biased analysis which does not accurately reflect the truth. There may be underlying reasons why each country has made certain documents official, something that can affect the result of this analysis. Therefore this essay does not claim to provide a universal view of the connections between Russia and the US, it is simply an examination of the rhetoric of both countries found in certain selected documents. Different images of the self and the other and additional binary oppositions may have been found if the analysis had been based also on these informal papers. It is also important to clarify that this analysis only depicts these images within the context of the Syrian conflict. Russia and America may well have different understandings of each other within other contexts. I am also aware of the fact that these statements do not reflect the view of the common American or Russian civilian, but are measured political remarks with a certain goal. The Russian or American people presumably have different views of themselves and others than are discovered in the essay.

There is also a risk of incorrect analysis when pondering the fact that the examination is based solely on English versions of each document. As I am not a native Russian speaker, there has been no opportunity to analyse documents in Russian. This is a drawback to the analysis as some of the hidden content and meaning of the rhetoric of the documents examined may have gone lost when they were translated into English. I have also missed out on the opportunity to examine documents published only in Russian, as for example speeches or statements directed to the Russian people. This may result in an incomplete conclusion when investigating Russian standpoints, as I may have missed out on important material.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that the analysis may be affected by my own prejudices and by possible preconceived understandings I have of both cuntries. These may have had an influence on my interpretations of the material. As mentioned before, countries work hard on what picture they wish to bring about of themselves and others, and it is not impossible that these pictures might already have affected me in some way. It is also possible that I may have over-interpreted certain pronouncements in the search of binary oppositions and enemy images.

the official website of the Russian government (<http://government.ru/en/search/?phrase=syria§ion=all>), as well as all official statements released by the President of Russia on his website (<http://eng.kremlin.ru/>), related to the Syrian conflict and released during the year of 2013. Some pronouncings made by the Russian foreign ministry have also been read. As for American remarks, they all derive from the official website of the Whitehouse. Here, almost all statements concerning the conflict in Syria from 2013 have been overlooked, using keywords such as "syria", "syria intervention" and "syria statement", among others.

1.6 Further Remarks about the Material

I have during my research found certain differences about both the material interpreted during this analysis and about the images found in each document. To start up, it has been easier to find statements, pronouncements and further remarks concerning the conflict in Syria coming from the American side than from the Russian part. Russia provides very few official documents on this subject, at least in English, while it is possible to find a large amount of pronouncements from the American President and American politicians. I do not know what the underlying causes of these differences are. Possible explanations, among others, may be that Russia has chosen to publish only a few remarks in English, or that America simply find it more important and rewarding to make public statements about these issues. Certain is that this has affected the analysis in that I have had the possibility to review and investigate a larger number of American documents than Russian ones. This implicates that I have had an overall broader base for making assumptions about US standpoints and views compared to suppositions made about Russian images. Yet, it should be stated that for the purpose of this essay, I have further investigated an almost equal number of Russian and American statements.

Furthermore, there has been a large difference in the amount of “evidence” of the different images of Russia and America that I have found in the documents examined more thoroughly. Generally speaking American documents have provided more traces of these pictures than have Russian ones. There is also a difference in how much effort and energy the countries have put into creating its own image versus a profile of the other. While America seems to have worked a lot on mediating a preferable picture of itself and only in part mentioned Russian characteristics, Russia appears to have put equal amounts of time into creating profiles of both sides, possibly a little more effort into the American image. To clarify, America seem to find it more important to mediate an image of itself than creating an enemy image, whilst Russia find both tasks equally important or inessential (though, this contradicts the belief that Philip Smith holds that “depictions of evil seem to have greater implications for war politics than images of our own “good” leaders”. According to this way of thinking, countries should likely be putting more effort into depicting their enemies as diabolic or evil and far less effort into promoting themselves as genuinely good, as this would be more rewarding).²⁴ It also appears as if the US has a clear and solid understanding of what image it wants to present of itself, regardless of what context, while the Russian self image is in part more linked to the context in Syria. Hence there is a difference in how these superpowers use enemy images and the promotion of self-images in the Syrian conflict. Though, these differences may be explained by the fact that all documents examined in this essay are different in character, and thus serve different purposes. For example, the main goal during those questionings by journalists that have been analysed may not have been to mediate particular images of each country, something which may in part explain these differences.

24 Smith; 2005: 21

2. Analysis

2.1 The View on a Possible Intervention in Syria

Within the last two years, relations between Russia and the United States have been strained due to different opinions on how to handle the current situation in Syria. One of the bigger issues discussed is how the international community should respond to the chemical weapons attacks taking place in Damascus in late August this year. Since particularly the United States has a very resolute view on the use of weapons of this kind, these events have opened up for a discussion on the possibility of intervening in the Syrian conflict. American President Barack Obama has stated the attacks as "an assault on human dignity" and describes inaction as risking to make "a mockery of the global prohibition on the use of chemical weapons".²⁵ The American President has thus made a decision to involve in the conflict and take military action against Syria, a decision that did not receive a warm welcoming on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

Russia and the US clearly has contrasting opinions on what should be done in the case of chemical weapons being used in Syria. When discussing the eventuality of taking action and stepping in in the violent and chaotic Syrian conflict, both superpowers try to picture the intervention and its outcomes in a certain way. I am here going to analyze the content of these differing pictures, as they are in part related to the way both countries are portraying themselves and each other. Behind these perceptions of an intervention lie hidden messages of how Russia and the United States visualize their opponents, messages which I am going to expose.

As already mentioned, the US sees the attacks in Damascus as an assault on human dignity. For the US, intervention in Syria is about defending the value of human dignity and sending a sharp message to the ones responsible for carrying out the attacks.²⁶ It is also about defending the international law and order, and to remove all doubt whether weapons of this type are to be allowed. Inaction and passivity are seen as dangerous and irresponsible, whilst a military strike is seen as holding a gruesome dictator and his regime liable for the crimes they have committed. When discussing the fact that a military intervention would in this case be performed without the authorisation of the UN Security Council, American President Barack Obama describes the Council as "paralyzed" and "unwilling" to hold anyone accountable for the attacks.²⁷ In fact, the President believes that the absence of such an approval "will show that the United Nations is incapable of enforcing the most basic of international laws".²⁸ The US thus means that it is in the interest of the UN to take action unless they are to be seen as an organisation that lacks real credibility and who looks the other way when individuals are committing horrendous crimes against the international law. Inaction on the whole can thus be said to be seen from the US viewpoint as refusing to hold criminals liable for their crimes and as a failure to enforce international law.

25 The White House Office of the Press Secretary; *Statement by the President on Syria*; Whitehouse.gov; August 31 2013; www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria; retrieved 3 January 2014

26 The White House Office of the Press Secretary; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*; Whitehouse.gov; September 10 2013; www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria; retrieved 3 January 2014

The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

27 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

28 The White House Office of the Press Secretary; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*; Whitehouse.gov; September 24 2013; www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly; retrieved 3 January 2014

As a contrast to the paralyzed and reluctant Council, an intervention is from the American part described as an energetic, noble option to the dangers of inaction.²⁹ Actions of this kind are seen as part of the war on terrorism and as enforcing those international agreements concerning the use of chemical weapons.³⁰ America also clarifies that an intervention would be accomplished with the aim of maintaining international peace and order, and as a way of protecting Syria's civilian population from further attacks of this kind.³¹ The country here eradicates the common opinion that it would be intervening purely out of national interest and tries to erase the perception of its behavior as egoistic. It is instead attempting to promote itself as taking responsibility and stepping in to clear up the mess in Syria and protect its citizens from additional abuses when no other country is willing to do so. Indeed, President Obama declares that "the danger for the world is not an America that is too eager to immerse itself in the affairs of other countries", but an America that "may disengage, creating a vacuum of leadership that no other country is ready to fill".³² The Americans look upon the intervention as a means of preventing mass atrocities and protecting basic human rights, and accordingly upon themselves as the protector of these core values.

Interesting to note is also that America, when discussing an intervention, choose to describe it using terms frequent in the international doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. Obama says American military action will be "designed to be limited in duration and scope", that it would be a "targeted strike to achieve a clear objective", and repeatedly clarifies that the intervention would be designed to destroy Syrian stocks of chemical weapons without interfering in the ongoing civil war.³³ One of the core principles presented in the doctrine when it comes to military intervention is that "the scale, duration and intensity of the planned military intervention should be the minimum necessary to secure the defined human protection objective".³⁴ Using terms of this moral doctrine could possibly be seen as a skillful maneuver from America's side in an attempt to increase the legitimacy of its military operation.

While the States expresses great confidence in talking about going forward and carry out an intervention without the official approval of the United Nations Security Council, the Russian Federation depicts such a conduct as highly dangerous and careless. In an article published in The New York Times, President Vladimir Putin declare that involving in the conflict will "result in more innocent victims and escalation, spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders".³⁵ Further destabilization of the Middle East and North African region is described as a probable result of an intervention, as well as increased violence on the whole.³⁶ Putin in his article also point to the fact that there is a strong opposition against an intervention from a large number of countries and many political and religious leaders, furthermore mentioning that a planned strike could undermine multilateral efforts to solve other urgent problems in the area. From the point of view of Russia, any country carrying out a military strike lacking Security Council approval is seen as very careless,

29 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

30 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

31 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney*; Whitehouse.gov; 11 September 2013; www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2013/09/11/press-briefing#transcript; retrieved 4 december 2013

32 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

33 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

34 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; *The Responsibility to Protect*; Canada; International Development Research Centre; 2001; p XII

35 Putin, Vladimir; *The Syrian Alternative*; Eng.kremlin.ru; September 12 2013; www.eng.kremlin.ru/news/5974; retrieved December 4 2013

36 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

selfish and negligent when considering other countries opinions and efforts to bring peace in the Middle East. It is also seen as a behavior that is challenging the international law and present order.³⁷ Putin even go as far as saying that an intervention "could throw the entire system of international law and order out of system".³⁸ On the whole, Russia describes interventionism in the case of Syria as highly risky behavior and as promoting and spreading violence, and anyone encouraging such behavior as venturous. To further build a picture of actors promoting intervention as reckless, Putin refer to previous American military strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq, which he describes as "ineffective and pointless".³⁹

In his article, Putin continues in describing an intervention without approval from the Security Council as outermost incautious business by comparing the United Nations to its unsuccessful precursor the League of Nations. The President here states that the UN could suffer the same fate as the League of Nations if "influential countries bypass the United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorisation". Hence the behavior of the US is not only pictured as reckless, but also as jeopardizing the future of the UN. Putin also presses the point that one of the foundational principles of the UN is that "decisions affecting war and peace should happen only by consensus", promoting an image of the US as selfish and counteracting the work of the UN. Important to note is also how Russia states that military action without Security Council permission would constitute an act of aggression, thus becoming illegal under international law (and making anyone carrying out that intervention a criminal).⁴⁰

Noteworthy is that both Russia and the United States make a connection between an intervention and the global phenomenon of terrorism. While the States indicates that inaction "could lead to escalating use of chemical weapons, or their proliferation to terrorist groups who would do our people harm", Russia imagines the chemical attacks as a provocation by the opposition in Syria (which is described as having connections to well-known terrorist groups) to drag other countries into the Syrian conflict.⁴¹ Russia here especially mentions the United States, and suggests that intervening in Syria only would be to respond to terrorists' claims of support from "powerful members of the international community".⁴² The Federation also very clearly states that a military strike would "increase violence and unleash a new wave of terrorism".⁴³ Both countries accordingly accuses the behavior of the opposing side to promote the proliferation of terrorists. As a large number of us probably would concur with the idea of terrorists as some type of evil force, trying to picture your adversary as pro-terrorist becomes a powerful tool when constructing enemy images and enforcing the dichotomy of good and evil.

The pictures that Russia and the United States want to build of each other appear clearly when we take a closer look on who is to blame for the chemical weapons attacks in Damascus. Both sides have very clear and solid understandings when discussing this issue, and neither think of the

37 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

38 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

39 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

40 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

41 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*
Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*; Eng.kremlin.ru; August 31 2013;
www.eng.kremlin.ru/news/5912; retrieved January 3 2013

42 President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*

43 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

opposite position as even possible. The countries both refer to "common sense"⁴⁴ when defending their view, making clear that any other idea would simply be stupid (the American President even refers to the Russian standpoint as an "insult to human reason" and as an insult to the legitimacy of the UN.⁴⁵ Another American politician expresses that Russia's stance "defies logic and probability").⁴⁶ Russia and the US are also accusing one another for not providing enough or trustworthy evidence to support their stance. For example, the Russian President declares, when confronted with the American pronouncing that the Syrian government would be responsible for the attacks, that "claims that proof exists, but that it is classified and cannot be shown to anyone are beneath criticism" and that such a conduct "is simply a lack of respect for their partners and participants in international activities".⁴⁷ Hence we can see how both countries want to show how the other side is unreliable and have illogical opinions.

As we can distinguish above, both Russia and America manage to mediate arguably clear messages about how they visualize any adherent of the opposite viewpoint. What they both have in common is that they want to build an image of the opposing side as illogical and irresponsible, and their conduct as a danger to international order and peace. Both sides see themselves as protectors of international core values and their behavior as completely reasonable. Intriguing is also their ravingly disparate opinions on the fact that the United Nations Security Council has not yet pronounced its approval for any foreign military operation within Syria's border.

2.2 Portraying the Self and the Other

We have already seen how the US and Russia sometimes straight out pronounce their opinion of any opponent when it comes to intervening in Syria. However, these statements about the intervention and the conflict are also full of other messages, not always as obvious and as easy to discover. Taking a closer look upon the rhetoric used, we can track down traces of enemy images and self-promoting terms and bit by bit manage to put together what images each country wants to encourage of themselves and how they want others to imagine their enemy. These images do not necessarily have to be linked to the Syrian conflict, but can be part of broader, context loose images that the states are continuously working on. In this section of the essay, I will distinguish four different images that appear within the context of the Syrian conflict, two American ones and two Russian ones.

2.2.1 American leadership and a hint of exceptionalism

There are probably few surprised should the Americans promote themselves as a hegemonic superpower, imagining themselves as taking the lead in many hotly discussed world issues. Americans often picture themselves as leading the world forward, something of which there are clear evidence in their rhetoric. Obama in his remarks, for example, often talks about America's given role in the world, as well as the burdens of leadership that the country has to bear.⁴⁸ As we

44 The term "common sense" frequently appears whenever both countries are talking about their opponents' standpoints or actions.

45 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

46 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney*; 12 September 2013; www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2013/09/12/press-briefing#transcript

47 President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*

48 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

have already seen, the President expresses that the world should be concerned if the US one day would choose to disengage in the affairs of other countries, as this would create "a vacuum of leadership that no other nation is ready to fill".⁴⁹ This particular belief that no other state would yet be able to walk in the footsteps of America is part of the larger conviction that Americans have of themselves as truly different and exceptional.

American politicians often speak of their position as world leaders as full of burdens, that their role is not always easy and may be both unpopular and uncomfortable.⁵⁰ Still America proudly takes on what it sees as its responsibilities in crises like the Syrian one, in part because they believe that they are "called upon to lead in circumstances like this".⁵¹ Here we discover once again traces of the American self-image as them being both selected and exceptional. We can also see how America connects responsibility with world leadership, as they make clear that they do not only bear their role in times of peace and order, but continues to lead the world when they are challenged and criticized. The picture created here is the one of the responsible world hegemon who leads the world through good times as well as hardships.

The concept of American leadership includes inter alia enforcing international agreements and standing up for core values such as human rights and human dignity as a means of guarding international security.⁵² American President Obama describes these assignments as "burdens of leadership" but also states that "the world is a better place because we have borne them", and that America is an "anchor of global security".⁵³ This conception that its actions foster the interests of the vast majority of the world's states is a common one and one of the characteristic ways in which the US justifies its conduct. For example, Obama states the decision to take military action against Syria as being in the security interest of the rest of the world "to meaningfully enforce a prohibition whose origins are older than the United Nations itself" (by prohibition implying the Chemical Weapons Convention).⁵⁴ The claim that this Convention has been approved by 98 percent of humanity is a frequently recurrent argument when legitimating an American military operation in Syria.⁵⁵ Hence America advances the understanding of their actions as being beneficent for all and counters the perception of them acting purely out of national interest. This puts together an image of America as unselfish and as minding about the international community, an image supported by statements as the one that America has "shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure" to stand up for "the interests of all".⁵⁶

Connected to this understanding of leadership is how America wishes to state themselves as a good example and a rolemodel for the remaining countries. President Obama expresses this in an official statement, where he declares that "our power is rooted not just in our military might, but in our example as a government of the people, by the people and for the people".⁵⁷ The Americans frequently press the sensitive point of democratic values and picture themselves as being a

49 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

50 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

51 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

52 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

53 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

54 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

55 This argument appears in several places in all American documents further examined, except for the press briefing hold by Jay Carney on 11 September 2013.

56 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

57 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

role model for the rest of the world's democracies. Obama himself often talk about his country as the "world's oldest constitutional country" and that this is what constitutes the power of his country, as well as mentioning how the US is a country that "stands up for democratic values and human rights in our country and the rest of the world".⁵⁸ He also speaks about America as the country "of freedom of expression", something which makes his country "truly exceptional".⁵⁹ When justifying disputed actions abroad, the US talks about defending values such as democracy and fighting for ideals and principles rather than promoting particular political interests.⁶⁰ This connection to human rights and democracy is also used by the US as a means of contrasting itself to its foes. Russia for example, is clearly described as a nation not standing up for these values (the fact that Russia from an American point of view does not stand up for democratic values and human rights is also something that "demonstrates why America is exceptional").⁶¹ If we look upon this assertion out of the theoretical perspective used as a basis for this essay, we find both the constructing of an enemy image and the creation of binary oppositions as a means of differing yourself from your opponent (in this case, America pictures itself as a democracy and as defending human rights, whereas Russia is imagined as the contrary).

We can also see additional examples of America promoting itself as a country protecting human rights when we further investigate its manners of talking about its activities in Syria. The country preferably talks about its conduct as being "humanitarian" and supportive aid to the Syrian civilians.⁶² It is also a known fact that America is backing up the political opposition in Syria.⁶³ When delineating this assistance, America rather refers to the opposition as the "Syrian people" and repeatedly describes the opposition forces as "moderate".⁶⁴ Picturing the opposition as sober and moderate could possibly be seen as a means of distancing the US from any type of excessive violence and as contrasting the resistant forces with the government, thereby attempting to deligitimate the government's rule. In this way, America builds an image of itself as helping the exposed Syrian people in a responsible way and as non-supportive of the governments actions. This may also be one of the reasons why the US so eagerly attributes the contested use of chemical weapons in Syria to the ruling forces.

Along with concepts of leadership and role models, another foundational feature of the American self-image is the one of exceptionalism.⁶⁵ Caroline Kennedy states in an article concerning US foreign policy that the tendency to see the US as exceptional is deeply imbedded in the American culture.⁶⁶ Kennedy furthers her reasoning by expressing that "the thought and practice of US foreign policy has been marked by a tendency to see itself as a beacon of light in an otherwise problematic world".⁶⁷ Indeed, this concept of exceptionalism is frequently occurring in the rhetoric of American politicians, often as a means of justifying the country's actions. The US is

58 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*
The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

59 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

60 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

61 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

62 The term "humanitarian" emerge almost always whenever America is talking about its conduct in Syria.

63 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

64 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

65 As well as the term humanitarian, the word exceptionalism appears continuously when the Americans are talking about themselves or try to justify their actions.

66 Kennedy, Caroline; *The Manichean Temptation: Moralising the Rhetoric and the Invocation of Evil in US Foreign Policy*; *International Politics*; September 2013; 50(5); pp 623-638; p 626

67 Kennedy; 2013: 626

described straight up as "a unique nation" and the Americans state that "the responsibilities that we bear when there are crises around the world are unique".⁶⁸ This understanding of themselves as different and exceptional is also in part used as a way of legitimating American world leadership.

So far we can depict a general image of the US as responsible leaders, being truly exceptional in their character and as standing up for important values such as democracy and human rights. When examining the rhetoric of the US in the documents used for the purpose of this essay, we can also trace other pieces of the American self-image, perhaps more specifically linked to the situation in Syria. In the case of chemical weapons utilized in Syria, the US has made clear that the employment of such weapons would be the "red line for intervention in Syria".⁶⁹ This statement as well as the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention make up the foundations for an American intervention in Syria, an intervention that as we have seen is partly about "sending a message". Intervening would also be a way for the Americans to show that they "follow through on the things they say, the accords that they sign, and the values that define them".⁷⁰ America clearly wants to be looked upon as a country that sticks to its pronouncements and to its values and principles. The American president also states that an American military strike would "send a message to Assad that no other nation can deliver", once again demonstrating the phenomenon of American exceptionalism.⁷¹

However, American president Obama declares that he has come to the decision to intervene "after careful deliberation".⁷² Thus, even if they want to be seen as a power that follow through on the things they say, the Americans are also careful not to make an impression of their decisions as rash or unconsidered. By stating that "the United States has a hard-earned humility when it comes to our ability to determine events inside of other countries", Obama refers to previous interventions as a way of displaying American experience and knowledge in these issues.⁷³

In the event of diplomatic solutions now being discussed about how to solve the chemical weapons issue in Syria, the US is keen on taking credit for these negotiations taking place. The overall opinion is that the threat of an American intervention helped bring forward these discussions, and that a diplomatic solution probably wouldn't be in sight if it weren't for this threat.⁷⁴ Hence the US wants any progress or diplomatic settlements to be attributed to American efforts and accomplishments, perhaps to visualize how important their contribution is to stabilizing the world order. The US also stresses that even if it is prepared to take military action against Syria, its preference has always been a diplomatic solution to the problem.⁷⁵ America is seen as a country that does not back when it comes to protecting certain values through intervening, but also as a state that possesses common sense and prefers a peaceful resolution when this is possible.

Finally, one can note that it is very remarkable that, when Whitehouse Press Secretary Jay Carney is asked directly whether the US is above international law (on the fact that America is considering intervening without Security Council authorisation), the Press Secretary clearly avoids

68 The White House; *Press Briefing by Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

69 *The US Prepares for an Intervention in Syria*; Stratfor Geopolitical Diary; August 2013; p 17

70 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

71 The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

72 The White House; *Statement by the President on Syria*

73 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

74 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

The White House; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*

The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

75 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

answering the question.⁷⁶

To summarize, the American self-image is one of a benevolent hegemon who acts in the interest of all and whose actions protect values of democracy and human rights. In this sense the Americans look upon themselves as exceptional and unique, as leaders and role-models. The US also wishes to foster an image of itself as easy to cooperate with, and as a country who makes efforts towards diplomatic solutions rather than solving Syrian problems with military force.

2.2.2 Russia as the reluctant adversary

While it is a fairly convenient mission to construct an image of the American self from investigating US oratory, it is harder to understand how the Americans want others to depict their opponent in this question, Russia. Caroline Kennedy talks about how the US pictures its adversaries as she suggests that “there is a permanent temptation for the US to moralize its relations with others, often rationalizing its own actions by demonizing its opponents”.⁷⁷ This indicates that any traces of an American image of Russia would be negative ones and that Russian actions would probably be seen as irrational as to increase the credibility of American conduct.

In general, one could say that the portrait of Russia discovered in US rhetoric is the one of a stubborn state unwilling to cooperate, often contrasted as America's outright counterpart. The United States uses this contrast as a means of demonstrating its own exceptionalism and justifying its own actions. There are also indications of the tendency to demonize enemies, as for example when America states that Russia does not stand for democratic values and human rights, or when it is pointed out that the freedom of expression is not encouraged in the Federation.⁷⁸ Both of these pronouncements are made to compare Russia with America and enforces a binary opposition of democracy and non-democracy.

The most remarkable feature of the Russian image is that Russia frequently is pictured as uncooperative and unwilling to solve the crisis in Syria. For example, it is stated that America has had nothing but “two years of complete lack of cooperation with Russia on the United Nations Security Council when it came to dealing with Syria”.⁷⁹ Any willingness do deal with the question is depicted as a result of the threat of an American military intervention as well as diplomatic efforts from the American part. Before this threat of military action, there was “not a lot of optimism about resolving this diplomatically with Russia's help, given the role that Russia had played in the past”.⁸⁰ The US depicts Russian behavior as kind of predictable, as for example when Jay Carney says that he was not “surprised by President Putins words”, referring to the Russian Presidents article in New York Times.⁸¹

On the same matter, it is also said that “Russia has played the role of blocking international efforts thus far to hold Assad accountable”⁸², which enhances the picture of Russia as unwilling to cooperate, and also highlights an unwillingness to keep offenders of international law accountable for their crimes. The US further states that letting Assad continue his rule will lead to an “increasingly violent space for extremists to operate”, which would suggest that Russian conduct would to some

76 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

77 Kennedy; 2013: 624

78 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

79 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

80 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

81 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

82 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

extent be pro-terrorist.⁸³ This kind of support and Russian disinclination to intervene in Syria is also said to encourage the proliferation and usage of weapons of mass destruction, most likely an undesirable image that Russia would like to counteract.

Another characteristic attribute of the American imagination of Russia is that the US try to depict its enemy's behavior as illogical and irrational. American understandings and actions are referred to as “common sense”, contrary to Russia's (for example, the Russian belief that the opposition is responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria is, as we have already seen, described as “an insult to human reason”). Russia is seen as “isolated and alone in blaming the opposition of the chemical weapons attack”, as to intensify the understanding of the Russian stance as irrational.⁸⁴

America also tries to undermine Russian credibility by connecting it to the Syrian Regime. The Federation is seen as “Assad's patron and protector”, thus implying that Russia should have some influence on the leader's attitudes and appearance.⁸⁵ As the commander's behavior sometimes is seen as highly violent and dubious, it would probably harm Russia's image to be seen as supportive of such a personage. It is also a common American assumption that President Putin has invested his prestige and credibility when suggesting a diplomatic solution in the place of an American intervention to resolve the issue of chemical weapons in Syria.⁸⁶

To sum up, American oratory does not provide a picture of the Russian Federation at all as clear and complete as the image it mediates of the United States. Instead there are a few points it presses when discussing Russian attitudes and actions. In those cases, the intention seems to be to contrast Russian behavior with American conduct, as a means of mobilizing greater support for the American viewpoint. Russia is depicted as the American counterpart concerning democracy and human rights, as well as reluctant to work for a solution to the disagreements concerning Syria. The Federation is believed to be an illogical and irrational enemy, supportive of the horrible regime of Assad in Syria.

2.2.3 A defender of international law and order

If it was somewhat difficult to outline how the Americans want the international community to picture Russia, it has been even harder to contour what profile the Russians would like to mediate of themselves. However, it seems like the pieces of the Russian self-image almost directly correspond to the image that the US is trying to promote of the Federation. For example, while the US wants the world to believe that Russia has been unwilling to cooperate, the Russians describe themselves as collaborating and taking initiatives to find a peaceful solution to the problems in Syria. In the same way they are also convinced that their stance is the one representing common sense, while the American viewpoint should be seen as illogical.⁸⁷ Russia also tries to work against the understanding of its country as not supporting democracy or human rights. Similarly to America, the state describes its operations in Syria using terms such as humanitarian, support and civilian. The Government is talking about how they are helping Syria through “humanitarian cooperation”,

83 The White House; *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly*

84 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

85 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)*

86 The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/12/2013)* (Only in this text, the argument that Russia has put its credibility at stake when suggesting this diplomatic solution appears at least four times.)

87 As for the Americans, the argument of common sense appears whenever Russian politicians are talking about the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

“humanitarian aid” and “support for the civilian population”, thus making an impression of them caring about the violations of human rights in Syria.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the Russian Federation counters the American claim that they would promote the dispersion of chemical weapons as weapons of mass destruction by stating that “we are categorically opposed to them, we condemn them and accordingly, if their use can be proven, we will participate in developing countermeasures”.⁸⁹

Another thing that the Federation wishes to clarify is that it is not supporting the Syrian regime by combatting a military attack against the country, but is simply protecting international law and order. President Putin could in his article in the New York Times not pronounce this fact any clearer, as he states that: “We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law”.⁹⁰ This is also how the president explains the use of its veto power in the United Nations Security Council. Putin declares that “we need to use the UN Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today's complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos”.⁹¹ In this way Russia manage to profile themselves as responsible representatives of international law and order rather than as proponents of Assad's regime, and this connection to law and order is one that the Russians cling to.

Russia also wishes to favour themselves as the peaceful alternative to the intervening Americans, for example by stating that the state has “advocated peaceful dialogue enabling Syrians to develop a compromise plan for their own future”.⁹² In this statement the Russians also indicate how they are prepared to let the Syrians decide about the outcome of their own future, possibly to demonstrate how they are protecting democratic values and contrasting themselves further to an American military operation. President Putin also declares that “we must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement”, further enforcing the image of Russia as peaceful and civilized.⁹³

In conclusion, we can see that the most powerful feature the Russians wish to mediate of themselves is that they are defenders of international law and order, rather than the Syrian regime. They also try to promote a picture of their country as very willing to cooperate, as well as they are trying to counter the perception of their Federation as against human rights values. Russia also work on mediating a picture of their standpoint as the peaceful alternative to an American military operation.

2.2.4 Breaking international law the American way

The Russian enemy image of the United States is in many respects the same one as the profile discussed in the paragraph concerning the view on interventionism in this essay, as those remarks are almost directly directed towards America. It is a picture of a reckless country, refusing to think twice about striking against Syria, and that is presented as not caring about further menaces and suffering that their actions would spread. Its actions are described as challenging the international law and order and the legitimacy of the United Nations. Moreover, the United States

88 President of Russia; *Vladimir Putin's News Conference Following the G20 Summit*; Eng.kremlin.ru; September 6 2013; www.eng.kremlin.ru/news/5950; retrieved December 4 2013

89 President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*

90 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

91 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

92 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

93 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

conduct is delineated as pro-terrorist and its intervention as an act of aggression and offense against the law.

Nevertheless, there are some additional pieces to add to the Russian comprehension of America. One of these pieces concerns the democratic image of America, and how the country may not be as good a role model as they wish to be in this aspect. Putin states in his article in the *New York Times* how “millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan “you're either with us or against us””.⁹⁴ This stance is enforced when President Putin speaks of a pronouncement by the South African President, stating that “it seems like a more powerful country can use force at any time at its own discretion” (possibly referring to US as a country that takes military action without caring about other countries' interests).⁹⁵ Additionally, the Russian President mentions that “it would suffice to look at European and US sociological surveys” to understand that “the overwhelming majority of their populations are on our side”.⁹⁶ Putin here emphasizes that most Americans are against an intervention abroad, and that the American government by defying the will of its people are disrespecting the power of democracy. The democratic capacity of its country is one of the United States' strongest arguments for legitimizing its power and actions and is hence a vulnerable and effective point to press if you want to undermine the country's credibility. We can also see how Russia tries to counter the American belief of the US as an exceptional country. Putin states that he disagrees with a case Obama made on American exceptionalism, pronouncing that “it is extremely dangerous to encourage themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation”.⁹⁷

Other remarkable pronouncements made by the Russian President have been made, such as the one where Putin states that he would “first and foremost address Barack Obama not as my colleague, not as the President of the United States and the head of state, but as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate”.⁹⁸ In the same sentence, the Federation's president further says that “the United States initiated armed conflicts in various parts of the world”.⁹⁹ Putin probably mentions the Nobel Peace Prize and previous military actions taken by the US to defy the American decision to intervene and remind president Obama about the responsibilities that a Peace Prize brings with it. If you want to preserve the image of yourself as peaceful, probably starting a new war through a weakly supported military intervention would not be the best decision.

Further noteworthy is how Russian politicians want to depict the Americans as liars. Putin states straight out how American politicians are “lying shamelessly” about the situation in Syria, how they know they are lying, and that it is sad.¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously, the President describes how the Russians are communicating with the Americans, assuming that they are “decent people”, but that the Americans are telling lies and that this feels “unpleasant”.¹⁰¹ By saying this, the US is imagined as lying and undecent, and the Russians as the counterpart as they are distancing themselves from this behavior.

Finally, the Russians are also in principle trying to promote the perception that Americans

94 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

95 President of Russia; *Vladimir Putin's News Conference Following the G20 Summit*

96 President of Russia; *Vladimir Putin's News Conference Following the G20 Summit*

97 Putin; *The Syrian Alternative*

98 President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*

99 President of Russia; *Answers to Journalists' Questions*

100 President of Russia; *Meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights*; Eng.kremlin.ru; September 4, 2013; www.eng.kremlin.ru/news/5933; retrieved December 4, 2013

101 President of Russia; *Meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights*

think they stand above international law. Obama has stated that he is seeking authorisation from the American Congress to realize an intervention¹⁰², something that has been heavily criticized by the Russians. Putin calls this a “distortion of international law” as “no congress of any country can authorise something like this”.¹⁰³ Instead, the Federation views such an approval from the American Congress as an authorisation and legitimation of aggression, and states that this behavior is “fundamentally unacceptable”.¹⁰⁴ Hence, once again, we can see how the Russians would like to depict the US as a danger to the international law and world order. Consequently, they also proliferate and understanding of America as criminals, as the act of aggression indeed is a crime under international law.

So, to end this analysis, we can see that the Russians are attempting to erase the understanding of America as an important democratic power, at once calling them liars who believe they are above the international law. They find American behavior reckless, and the united States is viewed as probably acting more out of national interest than for the protecting of certain ideals and values.

102 The White House; *Statemen by the President on Syria*

103 President of Russia; *Meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights*

104 President of Russia; *Meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights*

3. Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

Seeing that the purpose of this essay has been to delineate images that derive from the different perceptions the United States and Russia have of themselves and each other through a perspective based on theories of enemy images and binary oppositions, it appears appropriate to conclude this analysis with a brief discussion established on the analytical findings reasoned in the previous section as well as the essay's theoretical foundation. I will in this conclusive chapter build my articulation around two main issues. To begin with, I shall discuss the images depicted in the analytical section of this writing in relation to assumptions of and characteristics typical to enemy images on the whole. This will be done in order to distinguish to what extent Russian and American understandings correlate with the general perception of how enemy images are constructed. Later on, I will lead a discussion based on the principle of binary oppositions and mirror images. The aim here is to see if we have discovered any completely binary oppositions or images while investigating the rhetoric, as to strengthen Philip Smith's theories, and to see what characteristic codewords will emerge for each country.

3.1 American and Russian Images in Relation to Typical Features of Enemy Images

Although most enemy images differ from one another in some way depending on, for example, what the purpose of the constructing of the image is, pictures of this kind usually have some characteristics in common. Spillmann and Spillman mentions that typical features and symptoms of enemy images may be distrust, de-individualization of the adversary, placing guilt on the enemy, zero-sum thinking and inability to empathize with the other side.¹⁰⁵ It is also common to see the enemy as self-centered, inhumane or morally unfit, as well as depicting the opponent as different to the self when it comes to basic values and ideals.¹⁰⁶ Looking through the separate images that have emerged during the course of this analysis, we can easily see how they contain several of the classic characteristics of enemy images.

3.1.1 Distrust

Distrusting your enemy or someone that you are in any kind of conflict with would presumably be seen as natural, and it is therefore not surprising that we can distinguish elements of distrust when America and Russia are talking about one another. The perhaps clearest example of distrust in this narrative can be found just by looking upon the issue of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict and who have used them. Both countries state straight out how they for various reasons do not trust the opponent's stance and claim of evidence.¹⁰⁷ The adversary is very clearly portrayed as not being trustworthy.

It is also easy to discover a more general feeling of distrust between the two countries, perhaps due to previous decades of Cold War and dubious behavior from both sides. For instance, the US does not seem completely convinced about the real underlying causes for Russia's sudden will to work out a peaceful solution to the matter of chemical weapons in Syria. The statement that

105 Spillmann, Kurt R. and Spillmann, Kati; *On Enemy Images and Conflict Escalation*; *Social Science Journal*; Feb. 1991; Vol. 43 Issue 126; p 56-58

106 Pruitt, Dean G. and Kim, Sung Hee; *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement*; 3rd edition; New York; McGraw-Hill; 2004; pp 105-106

107 See the section in this essay concerning both countries views on a possible intervention in Syria.

America did not have “a lot of optimism about resolving this diplomatically with Russia's help” furthers an understanding that the countries are not completely trusting one another.¹⁰⁸ Russia also seem to have suspicions about American conduct, not believing US motivations for intervening in the Syrian conflict and perhaps thinking that such an operation would be performed out of national interest rather than for the maintaining of some universally good ideals and principles. This corresponds to the perception that actions of the enemy often are attributed to self-serving motives (whereas the same actions taken by one's own country rather are ascribed to altruistic motives), a common feature of enemy images.¹⁰⁹

3.1.2 Moral unfitness

Another particular attribute of enemy images is the way in which we picture hostile actors as “morally unfit”, or as being “less moral” than ourselves.¹¹⁰ The moral ingredient of this kind of image becomes easy to distinguish in superpower oratory, as the moral argument constitutes a big piece of the large jigsaw-puzzle of reasoning that is laid when both states are trying to justify their particular stance in relation to Syria. The United States describes it as morally indefensible to stand by and watch as civilians are dispatched by the use of chemical weapons, and the Russians likewise talk about intervention as ethically untenable as it would adventure international law and order. Both countries in this way depicts actors not supporting their particular stance as immoral.

These arguments of ethics are also related to the ways in which we may depict our enemies as self-centered and inhumane.¹¹¹ Although there are few specific examples where the countries image each other as egoistic (one example may be how Russia states that an American military operation in Syria may undermine multilateral efforts in the Middle East), we have seen how the Americans carefully seek to portray themselves as acting in the interest of all (thus as the opposite of being self-centered). Following an idea of binary oppositions, opposing conduct should be seen as self-centered and as a way of not caring about others. The same goes in this case for the inhumane characteristic. There are no specific examples where the Americans depict Russia as inhumane (although the US tries to point out Russia as not caring for human rights), but the US is picturing the use of chemical weapons and its effects as inhumane, and the unwillingness to confront this problem as the like. Hence unwillingness to act could also be seen as inhumane behavior. Though, Russia declares that action in the case of Syria will spread further menaces and suffering, which could presumably also be labelled as behaviour leading to inhumane outcomings.

3.1.3 Placing guilt on the enemy

Describing the opposite side as morally unfit is in this case also akin to how we in conflicts are tempted to place guilt on our enemy. Both America and Russia loosely describe what would happen should the other side get things their way. Russia, as we have already seen, does this by saying that American conduct will threaten the international law and order, while America on the other side states that Russian behaviour for example may encourage the proliferation of chemical weapons to terrorists. Should any of this occur, the countries have in this way safeguarded themselves from any

108 The White House; *Press Briefin by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

109 Sande, Goethals, Ferrari and Worth; 1989: 91

110 Pruitt and Kim; 2004: 106

111 See for example how Oppenheimer describes how negative characteristics previously defining the self becomes dissolved in the development of enemy images, as “one becomes more “human” and the enemy less so”. (Oppenheimer, 2006: 270)

blame as they have already stated that the actions of the adversary would eventually result in these happenings. So to say, they have in advance placed the guilt on the enemy. We can also see how the opposite is happening, namely how both powers eagerly take credit for successful actions related to this issue. For example, both Russia and America promotes the perception that it was their own efforts that lead to the diplomatic discussions concerning Assad's stockpiles of chemical weapons.¹¹²

3.1.4 Inability to empathize with the adversary

Perhaps one of the easier features of enemy images to discover in Russian-American relations is the inability from both sides to sympathize with the enemy. Either side clearly has difficulties empathizing with each other's stances, as we can tell when we look upon how they call one another "illogical" or "irrational". Both countries seem to lack an understanding of the opponents view of how the problems in Syria should be handled. They also seem to insist on the fact that solely their own stance is the right one, and appear to be unwilling to change their opinions.

3.1.5 Additional observations concerning enemy images

As we can see above, the relations between Russia and America contain several of the characteristic features of enemy images. Although the rhetoric of the documents examined show no evidence of a directly hostile relationship between the powers, it cannot be overlooked that the images created in the oratory in many ways resemble classical enemy images. We can also discover other phenomena that appear in relation to the creation of enemy images, for example how enemy images seem to be accompanied by an ameliorated picture of the self. To illustrate, there is in American oratory examples of the "false uniqueness effect", namely the tendency to "see oneself as more likely than others to engage in positive behavior".¹¹³ Americans frequently picture themselves as unique and exceptional, and have, as previously noticed, an inclination to image themselves as "a beacon of light in an otherwise problematic world".¹¹⁴

Noteworthy is also how the different images that the US and Russia are creating of each other may actually be a source of conflict escalation.¹¹⁵ Nations are as we have seen immensely concerned about the way they appear in the eyes of others, and threats to to this image may produce both anger and fear.¹¹⁶ Hence actions or pronouncements from the opposing side that threatens Russia's or America's self- image may actually worsen the relations between the countries.

3.2 Traces of Binary Oppositions and Mirror Images

The creation of enemy images also fosters the appearance of binary oppositions, as "the formation of enemy images is characterized by dualistic thinking".¹¹⁷ So to say, picturing the adversary as the contrary of one self happens naturally when enemy images are generated and you attempt to distance yourself from your opponent. Thus binary oppositions and mirror images would be a natural consequence of the making of enemy images.

112 The White House; *remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*
The White House; *Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney (9/11/2013)*

113 Sande, Goethals, Ferrari and Worth; 1989: 102

114 Kennedy; 2013: 626

115 Pruitt and Kim; 2004: 104

116 Pruitt and Kim; 2004: 104

117 Wahlström, Riitta; *Enemy Images and Peace Education*; Malmö; Institutionen för Pedagogik och Specialmetodik; 1989; p 5

During this research, no entirely opposite mirror images of Russia and America have appeared. To clarify, the understandings that America and Russia want to mediate of themselves and their adversary are not completely contrary to each other. However, we can find some dichotomies which are typical to both American and Russian delineations and that are part of their different images.

For this last reasoning section of this essay, I wish to make clear what definition of mirror image and binary opposition I will use when discussing the analytical findings. By mirror image or mirror characteristic, I mean that when country X connects itself to one characteristic and describes its enemy as the opposite of that characteristic (for example good versus evil), this image is met by a completely reverse understanding from the adversary. By binary opposition, I simply mean that country X is linking itself to a specific feature and then depicts its opponent as the contrary of that feature.

3.2.1 Rational versus irrational characteristics

The contradiction of rational versus irrational behavior is perhaps the one appearing most clearly in both American and Russian oratory. Both countries depict their own behavior as rational and sensible whereas the opponent is described as irrational, resulting in mirroring characteristics. Same goes for the dichotomy of logic contra absurdity. The US and Russia both picture their own opinions and actions as completely logical, while the same kind of conduct deriving from the opposite side is seen as illogical. Here we have two examples of how the Russian understanding of itself and the enemy is directly mirrored by the American understanding of the self and its foe. The understanding of the self being logical is additionally strengthened when the powers refer to common sense as to further justify their stances. These contradictions of rationality and irrationality or logic versus absurdity appear for example when the states are talking about their views of an intervention, or when the issue of the utilization of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict is discussed.

3.2.2 Democratic versus non-democratic

Although the contrariness of democracy and non-democracy does not appear as frequently as the contradictions of rational and irrational or logical and illogical, it is still a pair of oppositions that are easy to detect. We can easily see how both countries wish to promote themselves as caring for democratic values such as for example human rights, and at the same time are working on spoiling the democratic image of the other. The word democracy is in today's society very positively loaded, making it an important piece of a preferable self-image. For instance, both countries work hard on describing their conduct in Syria in humanitarian terms, and America repeatedly refer to its country as an old constitutional democracy.

3.2.3 Complementing mirroring characteristics

Other mirror characteristics appearing in Russian and American oratory are for example ones with terrorist elements, attributes related to cooperation, and claims of responsibility versus recklessness. Both powers accuse the opponent's actions of risking proliferation of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, at once arguing that one's own actions are counteracting these negative consequences. Similarly, Russia and America eagerly promote their own efforts at cooperation and participation when it comes to solving Syrian difficulties, while they are depicting their adversary as stubborn

and hard to cooperate with. Finally, the claim of being responsible is adopted by both superpowers, as opposing behavior or views are labelled as being inconsiderate.

3.2.4 Codewords

When examining the oratory of these powerful countries, we may detect that certain words or phrases occur more often than others when the states are talking about themselves and each other. There are, so to say, a few qualities or attributes that America and Russia highlight more than others. For America, such codewords would be for example “leader”, “exceptional” or “constitutional democracy”. These terms occur frequently in American rhetoric and are foundational building blocks of the US self-image, as well as they may be part of the justifications the country makes for its actions. Similarly, American codewords when talking about Russian conduct may be “uncooperative” or maybe “pro-terrorist” (the latter probably aiming at Russian unwillingness to deal with the chemical weapons problem and Russian support to the Syrian regime). Russian codewords are not as easy to detect as American ones, probably because of, as we have already shown, the fact that Russia does not seem to put much effort into creating images or oppositions of this sort. Though, the Federation continuously presses the point of “law and order” and “common sense”. For the American part, we can see how Russia aim at descriptions such as “reckless”, “unreliable” or the fact that Americans are believed to stand above the law.

Of course American and Russian perceptions are very complex and cannot be reduced to a set of words or terms. However, codewords like these may help create an understanding of what kind of pictures these countries are attempting to compose.

3.3 Concluding Thoughts

In the course of this essay, we have taken a closer look upon American and Russian oratory in statements and remarks concerning the current situation in Syria in order to depict three different understandings. First and foremost, we have examined what each country think of the American idea to intervene in Syria so as to get hold of chemical weapons used in the conflict and prevent their further distribution. Here we discovered that Russia and America have quite different meanings considering such a military action. While Russia imagines that an intervention would only exacerbate the conflict and lead to further menaces and suffering, the US believes that an intervention is necessary in order to send a message about the use of weapons of mass destruction like these, and to prevent further proliferation of the weapons to for example terrorist organisations. The Russian Federation believes that a military operation, especially without authorisation from the United Nations Security Council, would adventure the current world order and challenge the international law. It would also undermine the real power of the United Nations and promote an understanding that powerful countries may take action on their own behalf without further consequences. In short, American conduct is pictured as reckless, as negligent of other countries often multilateral efforts to bring peace to the Middle East, and as a danger to international law and order. America, on the other hand, firmly believes that it will be more dangerous to stand beside the conflict without trying to ameliorate the situation for the people in Syria. For them, this is an issue of human dignity and humanity, and they believe that failure to act from the side of the UN is what will undermine its credibility as a peace-bringing organisation.

The second question examined during this analysis have been what kind of image or understanding each country wishes to mediate of itself. From the American side, we have here seen

that the country preferably pictures itself as a world leader with good intentions as it is defending important values and principles. Specific to the context in Syria, the US promotes its efforts to bring forward an diplomatic solution as well as its willingness to cooperate to stop the violence in the country. The superpower also presses the point of how it takes on the burdens of world leadership without complaining, and how it in its actions and beliefs is exceptional and unique. Russia likewise mediates an positive picture of itself, as a defender of international law and as a stable and peaceful alternative to unconsidered American conduct. The Federation as well as America stresses that it has been cooperative considering the Syrian issue. They too attempt to promote how they encourage human rights and other humanitarian values.

Thirdly, we have in the same way investigated which picture America and Russia have been trying to proliferate of each other. Here the US pictures Russia as reluctant to cooperate and as blocking international efforts to solve the Syrian crisis. The Federation is imaged as not promoting the values of democracy and human rights within its country, at the same time as its behavior mostly is pictured as being irrational and against common sense. Russia in the same way states that American conduct counters common sense, as its reasons for taking action lack a logical stance. Russia also try to eradicate the common understanding of America being an important democratic power.

To sum up, we have in the analytical part of this essay captured two opposite understandings of the effects of an intervention as well as four different images that America and Russia hold of themselves and each other. Furthermore, we have in the debating part of this writing tried to examine the relationship between these pictures and the classic buildstones of enemy images, as well as what kind of mirror images and binary oppositions we have been able to trace in the pictures. Here we have found that even if the relations between America and Russia within the context of the Syrian issue are not obviously hostile, their images of each other do indeed contain several of the typical elements of classical enemy images. Moreover, we have discovered that Russian and American understandings are not evident mirrors of each other, even if there are some reflecting elements of the perceptions. Finally, we have also very briefly talked about certain codewords appearing in this kind of superpower oratory.

So, in conclusion, we can tell that the teoretical foundation of this essay has indeed been helpful when we have examined the different pictures delineated in Russian an American rhetoric. Moreover, we can tell that the idea leading up to this anaysis, namely the idea that countries mediate certain understandings of themselves and other actors through their rhetoric and actions, has proven to be true.

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