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**CONTENTS:**

[INTRODUCTION 3](#_Toc104451010)

[CHAPTER 1. SOFT POWER: RESOURCES, INSTRUMENTS AND STRATEGY 6](#_Toc104451011)

[1.1.Concept of soft power 6](#_Toc104451012)

[1.2. Place of soft power in the foreign policy of countries 9](#_Toc104451013)

[1.3. Role of state institutions in implementing soft power policy 16](#_Toc104451014)

[1.4. Priority directions of implementation 20](#_Toc104451015)

[CHAPTER 2. INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA 24](#_Toc104451016)

[2.1. Evolution of Russian foreign policy goals 24](#_Toc104451017)

[2.2. Russian capabilities and digital diplomacy resources 26](#_Toc104451018)

[2.3. Russian challenges 33](#_Toc104451019)

[CHAPTER 3. INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA. 35](#_Toc104451020)

[3.1. Evolution of American foreign policy goals 35](#_Toc104451021)

[3.2. American capabilities and digital diplomacy resources 38](#_Toc104451022)

[3.3. American challenges 49](#_Toc104451023)

[CHAPTER 4. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN AND US SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA 51](#_Toc104451024)

[CONCLUSION 56](#_Toc104451025)

[LIST OF REFERENCES: 58](#_Toc104451026)

# INTRODUCTION

Currently, international politics is once again turning to soft power - a concept that opposes the already established principles of conducting foreign policy of states. The country is trying to achieve its own economic, political, and geopolitical goals with the help of a policy of soft power in the international arena in relation to other states.

The term ‘soft power’ originated in the USA. American experts on international relations, Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, formulated the principles and basis for the application of this policy. Experts believe that at present, the state cannot conduct its own policy and maintain relations with other states by traditional methods related to the use of force. In the 90s, Joseph Nye reasoned that after the end of the cold war, information channels began to play an important role in society and it was possible to interact more effectively with society through them. With the help of soft power or soft interaction, it is possible to make the national interests, values, and culture of a country more attractive to others. Since the beginning of the 1990s, countries have been looking for new ways of political relations. Nye argues that soft power is used by states in order to achieve the desired results without the use of coercion and force[[1]](#footnote-1). This means that relations between countries take place on a voluntary level. One state influences the society of another state with the help of culture, ideology, economy, politics, and lifestyle.

Thus, the neoliberals Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane in their works describe soft power as a tool for realizing the state's own goals by promoting their values to the society of another country, which are ‘imposed’ as correct. Being under the influence of soft power, the leaders of countries do not always notice that they are not guided by their own interests but serve as guides for the policy of another country. Joseph Nye's followers believe that hard power has not disappeared and is applicable only to solving local problems in the state.

It can be noted that at present, the policy of soft power is successfully coping with its tasks. The United States most often uses this policy, for instance, by spreading cultural values, and promoting the ideal American life that young people around the world want to live.

In the new era, economic success, ideological persuasiveness, and cultural attractiveness of a country have become important factors in international relations. The concept of soft power, introduced into scientific circulation by Harvard scientist Joseph Nye, was a response to the changes that took place in the international system at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. It has become an expression of new trends in IR, the main of which is the competition of values and models of social, state and socio-economic development. Due to the popularity of the concept, governments began to actively implement communication strategies in foreign policy: to gain the trust of their partners, to shape the image of their country in the media, and to establish close ties with foreign audiences[[2]](#footnote-2). Soft power is definitely needed for a long-term, mutually beneficial international partnership that can ensure the stable domestic development of the country.

The object of the study is the foreign policies of Russia and the United States in the Central Asian region. The subject of the study is the instruments of soft power in the foreign policies of countries. The purpose of this work is to determine the main features of American and Russian soft power and their individual directions, as well as to conduct a comparative analysis of the use of their tools in Central Asia. Such Central Asian countries as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were chosen as the object of the study based on the definition of the term ‘Central Asia’ in the British-American encyclopedia Britannica. The analysis of the influence of Russian soft power on the region took into account the historical and cultural heritage of Russia in the five former Soviet republics of post-Soviet Central Asia.

The objectives of the study are:

1) to determine the role of soft power tools and institutions in US and Russian foreign policies;

2) to identify priority areas for the implementation of this tool in the Central Asian region;

3) to compare the use of soft power tools in the studied countries;

4) to evaluate the effectiveness of the American and Russian soft power models in the Central Asian region.

To solve the stated tasks, the following scientific methods are used in the work:

1. Institutionalism that is a direction that analyzes institutions, namely states, parties, rules, and principles of behavior of actors in various situations.

2. Social constructivism, the main postulate of which is the thesis that politics in the international arena is formed at the expense of such social values as culture, identification, and collectivism. This is the civilizational specificity of soft power.

3. A comparative analysis.

The following official foreign policy documents of the Russian Federation are used as the main sources of the study: the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2016, the Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of international development assistance, as well as documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Rossotrudnichestvo. The United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025 is also considered to be a significant document used for the research of the concept. The analysis of the conceptualization of soft power is carried out on the basis of official statements, speeches, and comments by top officials of the Russian and US governments, representatives of executive authorities responsible for the implementation of foreign policy, and heads of NGOs. Social media (interactive websites of departments and news agencies, global social networks) are analyzed as sources, which have recently been actively used by the authorities to explain their foreign policy position and influence on foreign public opinion. Objective data for a quantitative analysis from the USC Center of Public Diplomacy is studied to measure soft power. The index compares the relative strength of countries’ soft power resources, assesses the quality of a country’s political institutions, the extent of their cultural appeal, the strength of their diplomatic network, the global reputation of their higher education system, and measures a country’s digital engagement with the world.

# CHAPTER 1. SOFT POWER: RESOURCES, INSTRUMENTS AND STRATEGY

## 1.1.Concept of soft power

In the modern system of international relations, it is necessary to draw a clear line between the concepts of hard and soft power. The first is aimed at direct pressure on the object to achieve short-term goals, while the second is used to achieve long-term goals through indirect and often hidden influence. The term ‘soft power’ was first used by the American international relations scholar Joseph Nye in his article ‘Soft Power’, published in 1990. His definition included the ability to achieve what a state wanted voluntarily with the help of allies. In 2004, Nye finalized the concept and published the book, ‘Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics’. To describe the concept, the scientist relied on his experience in the Pentagon, the UN and the State Department. In fact, the concept was focused on the foreign policy interests of the United States and was based on American scientific, cultural, and economic potential. Nye turned to an urgent topic in the field of international relations, namely, the gradual involvement of the object in the zone of influence of the state through attraction, not coercion[[3]](#footnote-3). According to the author, soft power resources can include anything that attracts and inspires people. He identifies its three main components as cultural, political, and economic influence. The first sphere is focused on the values, traditions, and culture of the country. This includes literature, music, the spread of pop culture, the film industry, national cuisine, and sports. Trademarks and brands distributed outside the country are also carriers of the cultural aspect of soft power. The second area includes the nature of relations between countries, their participation in international institutions and, in general, the image and reputation of a country. In order to achieve a positive image of the state, Nye notes that the state should use its development model and be useful to the world community. As an example, he cites the participation of the United States in the creation of the WTO and the IMF. In order to increase the capital of soft power, a democratic state should also take an active part in resolving local, regional, and international conflicts.

The third area includes a successful economic model, attractiveness in the investment plan, and the participation of the state in assistance and development programs. The United States actively finances international institutions and provides assistance to recipient countries to establish democracy, thereby achieving its geopolitical interests and finding allies. As an example, Joseph Nye cites the Marshall Plan, launched in 1948 on Washington's initiative, which became the most important tool for maintaining the post-war political and economic hegemony of the United States in Western Europe.

In his works, Joseph Nye emphasizes that the instruments of soft power should be adjusted depending on the development of the country and its regime. Nye argues that the economic influence of soft power is better suited for developing countries, since they may be less interested in the cultural aspect. American values are not suitable for all states, the author notes. Nevertheless, values such as democracy, freedom of speech, and equality of people before the law promoted by Washington are universal values for the whole world. According to Joseph Nye, one wrong decision made by the state can undermine the image. He cites as an example the fall of the USSR's international reputation after the suppression of the anti-communist rebellion in Hungary, and then its rise in the field of space exploration. Due to certain decisions by the government, the image of the country can both be increased and decreased, and along with this, the capital of soft power is also changed.

Undoubtedly, it is worth noting that TNCs, global NGOs, and charismatic leaders can also use soft power to achieve their goals, which may run counter to government goals. A modern example of this is the growing attractiveness of terrorism. Nye admitted back in 2009 that, in particular, Bin Laden's ideas seemed very attractive to many people in a certain region of the world: ‘His ability to handle soft power is beyond doubt. He used it to bring down the twin towers of the World Trade Center. He did not hold a gun to the heads of any of the suicide pilots; he did not promise money. They decided to do it only because he captivated them with his charisma and outlook on the world’.

In his 2004 paper, Joseph Nye describes the United States as a leader in soft power because of the attractiveness of culture, a large number of emigrants, foreign students, and scientists. In his opinion, in the XXI century, the USA is the largest exporter in the cultural (film industry, music) and educational aspects of soft power[[4]](#footnote-4). Joseph Nye certainly made a huge contribution to the formation of the concept of soft power. If one takes into account domestic research on this topic, then the work of O. Leonova should be highlighted. In her article ‘Soft Power: a Resource of the State's Foreign Policy’[[5]](#footnote-5), she divides the resources of soft power into internal and external factors. The author refers to the external factors of the country's position in the world, the conduct of foreign policy, information resources, and the model of state development. O. Leonova, describing the soft power of Russia, takes into account the historical and civilized background, which Nye did not mention in his writings. Internal factors include mentality, culture, quality of life, and values.

The greatest attention is paid not to the very essence of the concept but to the tools for its implementation. Thus, E. Shirokova argues that information warfare, image-making, status, and reputation play a major role in creating the attractiveness of the state. Although, for instance, A. Mironov considers information and communication technologies to be the most important catalysts of soft power. He also concludes that the more unique and distinctive the culture, the easier it is to develop an attractive national model of soft power for others. Leonova includes PR, tourism, migration policy, language, and global marketing in the list of effective tools. E. Panova divides the tools into short-term and long-term mechanisms[[6]](#footnote-6). Short-term projects include all types of media and cultural projects. Long-term mechanisms include extended educational programs, since it is higher education that forms the minds of foreign citizens about the country, culture, and values.

There is another point of view that supports the destructive aspect of soft power. Many Russian researchers, for instance, E. Borisova, condemn the concept, noting that its essence is only manipulation, propaganda and PR. Moreover, Dmitry Medvedev argues that soft impact is not limited exclusively to constructive impact. He states: ‘One of the conditions for attracting the other is its disintegration as a strategic subject, the destruction of its subjectivity as such. Deprived of its own values and ideals, the object of soft influence adjoins the attractor, which is offered to it by the source of soft influence’. Thus, Dmitry Medvedev concludes that, first of all, a person's consciousness and perception of the world are being destroyed.

Soft power can also be passive and active. Passive soft power includes certain characteristics already inherent in the state; that is, the country is a priori attractive to others. Active soft power means the application of efforts on the part of the state to achieve goals. Soft power resources are also divided into natural (conducting a foreign and domestic policy of the state that is approved by the world community) and artificial (active control of the state in purposefully carrying out activities to inform foreign audiences)[[7]](#footnote-7). Moreover, soft power can be directed at the influence of the political elite of the state (high level) and the population of the country (at a low level).

The world scientific community as a whole assesses the use of soft power positively, as it helps to improve mutual understanding, and promotes cultural, scientific, and educational enrichment. But on the other hand, soft power can be destructive; namely, the deliberate destabilization of public administration as well as the manipulation of mass consciousness. Public diplomacy is considered to be the main instrument of soft power. It includes educational, sports, scientific, cultural, and media projects related to the interaction of countries. This is a whole set of measures aimed at studying, informing, and forming positive foreign public opinion about a certain state. Authorities, NGOs, and the media can be the actors of this tool. Public diplomacy channels include the Internet, cultural, scientific, and educational centers, etc.

## 1.**2. Place of soft power in the foreign policy of countries**

Leaders in the international arena have long been using the policy of soft power to promote their national interests and achieve results. The end of the Cold War between the superpowers formed certain instruments of influence on other countries. Some experts argue that it was the competent promotion of the Western model that gave the United States an advantage at the end of the 20th Century[[8]](#footnote-8). The United States of America not only opposed Soviet ideology but at the same time improved its image as an economic and military leader. It was this country that shaped the agenda in the world, gathered allies around itself, and even managed to competently realize its interests in the post-Soviet space. The soft power of the United States is focused on the gradual involvement of other states in the zone of influence. The traditional subjects are the world powers.

Since the early 1990s, the soft power of the United States has been passive; that is, the state was attractive to others by itself and did not make any additional efforts in this area. After the collapse of the USSR, other countries themselves turned their attention to the United States. Young people were attracted to democracy, American values, a high level of income, an abundance of goods, and new career opportunities. The country has become an example of an ideal state. Based on the above facts, it is possible to understand why the United States did not consider it necessary to activate the policy of soft power. The country still preferred to pursue a policy of hard power.

The situation changed only in the early 2000s after terrorist attacks as well as military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. At first, the United States still adhered to the idea that hard power was an ideal tool against terrorism. In 2001 , the US Secretary of Defense, D. Rumsfeld told a journalist that he had never heard of the policy of soft power, and, in his opinion, it meant only requests and persuasions. As for terrorism, American Vice President D. Chey noted that in no case should soft power be used against terrorists, but only by the method of total destruction. It can be noted that this concept was perceived by the administration quite narrowly.

Starting from the second presidential term of J. Bush, the country's authorities began to publicly consider soft power as the basis of US foreign policy. During the presidency of Barack Obama, the concept has become more relevant. To a greater extent, the United States is replacing military methods of resolving international conflicts with diplomatic means[[9]](#footnote-9). For instance, in 2013, the president refused to participate in a military operation regarding the invasion of Syria.

It is important to note that soft power still existed in the 1990s, despite the absence of the term itself in political rhetoric. In the 2000s, it was decided to develop this component of the country's foreign policy and to activate foreign policy departments affected by soft power.

During the administration of George W. Bush, the power policy of ‘promoting democracy’ in Afghanistan and Iran suffered a crushing failure. Military defeats were one of the reasons for the victory in the presidential election of Barack Obama, who advocated non-forceful methods of conducting the country's foreign policy[[10]](#footnote-10). The Republicans' power course was replaced by the concept of smart power. This concept is an information and communication strategy. The impact of globalization, the emergence of frequent terrorist attacks, computer hacking, and the advent of the information age marked the beginning of smart power.

Speaking to Congress in 2008, Joseph Nye noted that the introduction of smart power was necessary to change the course of foreign policy. According to the scientist, the American military force knows no equal in the world, but in the international arena there is no longer a need for forceful solutions to conflicts. Other diplomatic tools are needed to fight terrorism, climate change and disease. Nye stressed the need for partners and institutions in the economic, informational, educational, and healthcare fields in order to promote the influence of the United States on other states.

In the late 2000s, the decision-making process regarding foreign policy was not structured. Such soft power tools as television and radio broadcasting, public diplomacy, educational programs did not have a strategy and budget. The United States spent 500 times more money on the maintenance of the army than on educational programs and scientific exchanges.

After the speech of J. Nye, the Congress decided to change the foreign policy strategy. In his election campaign, Barack Obama noted America's determination to assume a role in maintaining peace and combating terrorist attacks. Later, due to UN assistance, more than a hundred security treaties were signed. The United States began to pay great attention to public diplomacy, stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons and health issues.

In Obama's foreign policy course, soft power has taken a new turn. During the 2008 election campaign, Barack Obama spoke for the Democratic Party and proposed diplomatic methods of conducting politics, while Republican candidate John McCain wanted to continue the power policy and increase the country's military potential. It is not surprising that American citizens, tired of protracted conflicts, voted for Obama. Thus, the president withdrew a significant number of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. At the beginning of Obama's presidency, he was called the personification of ‘America with a human face’ and was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The priority of foreign policy was such areas as reconciliation between America and the Islamic side, improving relations with Russia, as well as preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the rise of China as a leading world power. The American leader cleverly used the concept of soft power in his doctrine and increased America's authority as a distributor of ‘public goods for all’. Obama also recognized Russia's role in the post-Soviet space and postponed the issue of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO. Nevertheless, experts believe that despite the fact that the US president tried to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he overlooked the formation of the ‘Islamic State’.

The promotion of American values has only intensified conflicts abroad[[11]](#footnote-11). The ‘Arab Spring’, during which the country supported opposition forces, destabilized the Middle East, which led to an increase in the influence of ISIS. The task of establishing relations with the Russian Federation failed miserably after the Ukrainian crisis. Tough sanctions were imposed, as well as a policy of economic and military containment of China's growth[[12]](#footnote-12). As a result, non-Western institutions, such as the SCO and BRICS, began to take a leading global role in the international arena. Sanctions and criticism of Moscow's leadership have not changed Russia's attitude to the issues of Ukraine and Syria, as the United States wanted. Washington failed to establish economic relations with China. On the contrary, the two key powers, Russia and China, have moved closer. A new geopolitical space was formed called ‘Greater Eurasia’, in which the United States had no place.

Nevertheless, some areas of Barack Obama's foreign policy have been successful. This concerns the restoration of relations with Cuba, rapprochement with India and the deal on Iran's nuclear program. But still, experts believe that the main defeat of the 44th president was the election of Donald Trump. His victory meant for America the end of the world order that Obama had so diligently built.

It should be noted that the concept of soft power, which actively began operating under the Obama administration in 2009, was used for the global transformation of the international arena. The strategy was adapted to the needs and interests of the country in order to influence other countries through American values. At the present stage, the concept is more modernized, backed up by the power of NATO and improved by innovative technologies. With the arrival of US President Donald Trump, the strategy faces difficulties due to his impulsive approach to foreign policy.

In Russia, the concept of soft power is also used, but its approaches differ from the American ones. The conduct of the policy of soft power is often criticized by domestic and international experts. In 2013, J. Nye published an article in which he condemns Russia for misunderstanding the concept and completely distorting its meaning. Nye emphasizes that in the soft power of the Russian Federation, civil society is underestimated and the role of the state is overly exaggerated. In Russia, the concept has been studied from different points of view. The term ‘soft power’, introduced by Joseph Nye, has aroused lively interest in Russian political circles. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the vagueness of the concept caused confusion among Russian researchers. So, O. Leonova writes that ‘today there is no clarity in the scientific literature about what soft power is,’ and O. Krasina points out that ‘in the form in which the concept of soft power is presented in the works of J. Nye, it covers almost all actions in the subject of international relations that are non-violent in nature’.

Soft power is enshrined in the regulatory documents of the Russian Federation. However, before the concept was mentioned there, the term ‘soft power’ was usually used in public speeches by Russian politicians. The term was first used by Dmitry Medvedev in 2009 during the annual session of Rossotrudnichestvo in the context of cultural interaction[[13]](#footnote-13). Further, the term was used by V. Putin in 2012 in his article ‘Russia and the Changing World’, where the president mentioned soft power not only as an important phenomenon, but also a combination with the dark side. He wrote: ‘There is also such a thing as soft power - a set of tools and methods for achieving foreign policy goals without the use of weapons, but at the expense of information and other levers of influence. Unfortunately, these methods are often used to foster and provoke extremism, separatism, nationalism, manipulation of public consciousness, and direct interference in the internal politics of sovereign states. It is necessary to clearly distinguish between freedom of speech and normal political activity and where illegal soft power tools are used’. E. Osipova in her article about soft power, shows the difference in concepts and adaptation of this phenomenon in Russia. The author cites V. Putin's speech in 2012 as an example and concludes that for the Russian leader, American soft power is considered immoral, involving in the concept hidden financing of non-governmental organizations abroad and a violation of the sovereignty of other countries[[14]](#footnote-14). The Russian implementation of the policy is based on respect for sovereign states. In subsequent years, the term was repeatedly mentioned by Medvedev, Rogozin, and Lavrov in their speeches.

Attention to the concept of soft power in Russia has intensified after events such as the Ukrainian crisis, the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, as well as the deterioration of relations with Western countries. All this showed that the policy of Russian soft power failed and that Russia had no countermeasures against the American one. 2014 was a turning point for the use of soft power in Russia's foreign policy. After the successful holding of the Winter Olympic Games, Russian politicians made it clear that soft power is fading into the background, and hard power is coming to the fore. Such a transition was connected with the events in Ukraine and Crimea[[15]](#footnote-15). Nevertheless, in 2014, Sergey Lavrov said that compatriots were under threat, which means it was a threat to the entire Russian world. He called on Rossotrudnichestvo to help defend the rights of the Russian language, history, culture and, in general, their legitimate rights in the Ukrainian state. The Minister emphasized the media as an important tool of soft power because, in his opinion, Russian politics is discredited by the media in the eyes of other people and the image of the country is deliberately distorted.

In the concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation in 2016, this phenomenon is already considered as a tool for solving foreign policy tasks and is also based on the capabilities of citizens, information and communication, humanitarian and other diplomatic methods. Soft power is most often used to influence the Commonwealth of Independent States. The implementation tool in this example is Rossotrudnichestvo. The activities of the authority are aimed at the policy of international cooperation, support of the Russian language abroad, and partnership between educational institutions.

It can be concluded that in the XXI century, soft power is quite capable of standing on a par with military and economic potential. The origins of non-violent concepts come from Ancient Greece and Ancient China. In the 90s, Josiah Nye introduced the updated term ‘soft power’, which quickly found its popularity among foreign scientists. Nevertheless, despite the formulation of the concept itself, a clear list of the tools for its implementation was not given, which caused dissonance of opinions. The gradual study of the mechanisms of the implementation of soft power in the foreign policies of countries allowed scientists to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the concept itself.

It has become possible to measure soft power in different countries.The USC Center on Public Diplomacy launched a project called ‘The Soft Power 30 by Portland’[[16]](#footnote-16). Experts are sure that in the conditions of global instability and imbalance, leaders and diplomats need to adapt and apply different soft power resources. Those countries that use soft power tools more skillfully have every right to influence global events. Up to this point, it was not difficult to measure hard power in international relations, taking into account economic and military indicators. The creator of the term ‘soft power’, Joseph Nye, introduced three main sources of the concept: political values, foreign policy and culture. The creators of the Soft Power 30 project have made an index of more than 75 indicators, taking into account seven categories of international surveys in an attempt to measure this phenomenon.

The methodology of this project is quite simple: the index combines such categories as government, education, culture, global interaction, entrepreneurship, digital technologies, and surveys about the country's image. In 2019, the United States ranked 5th in use of soft power but was first in such indicators as education, digital diplomacy, and culture. For comparison, Russia ranks 30th. Compared to 2018, the US has shifted one position lower due to the controversial policies of Donald Trump. First of all, the former US president questioned his long-standing allies on security issues and tore up a number of trade agreements. This policy has significantly lowered the rating of the United States in the eyes of the world community. The country's foreign policy seems unpredictable.

According to a study by Brand Finance, an independent brand assessment consulting company, in 2021, the United States ranked sixth in the global soft power index, and Russia ranked thirteenth[[17]](#footnote-17). Brand Finance uses ISO international standards to measure the soft power of countries and their ability to manage their image and brand. The company defines soft power as ‘the ability of a nation to influence the preferences and behavior of various actors in the international arena (states, corporations, communities, the public, etc.) through attraction or persuasion, not coercion’. If one looks at countries through the prism of power, then there are many terms that can be applied to their description. The concept of ‘soft power’ introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, was used as a basis for the research. The creators of the index argued that this concept is an alternative to the current hard power used in the foreign policy of countries. With the help of soft power, it is easier to gain the support and trust of other states. In the 21st century, hard power has receded into the background, and technological advancement, economic growth, and education have come to the fore in international relations. The Global Soft Power Index 2021 was built on criteria such as the reputation of the state, its influence in the international arena, the seven pillars of soft power, and the country's response to the pandemic. The seven pillars include such categories as ‘Business and Trade’ (brands, economy, investments), ‘Governance’ (security, human rights, political elite, crime rating), ‘International Relations’ (diplomatic relations, international organizations, and conflict resolution), ‘Culture and Heritage’ (literature, art, sports), ‘Media and Communications’ (marketing, social networks), ‘Education and Science’ and ‘People and Values’ (character, trust, values).

Last year, the United States became the fastest-falling country in the soft power ranking. This result is not surprising, since the country was shocked by the election campaign, the Black Lives Matter campaign, and the pandemic. The reluctance of former US President Donald Trump to recognize the scale of the coronavirus has lowered the country’s soft power rating. The USA quickly began to lose its role model status. Nevertheless, in such indicators as education and science, the country ranked higher, which indicates the persistence of its reputation. The Black Lives Matter protests and counter-protests have also drawn international condemnation for the disproportionate use of force against African Americans. Even now, the Biden administration is trying to restore the country's reputation.

As for Russia in the global soft power ranking, a sharp drop in such criteria as reputation and international relations can be noted. Due to the current political situation, it is highly likely that Russia will continue to lose points in these indicators. The positive aspects include the growth of education and science in the country due to the development of its own vaccine.

The global index also includes a survey of respondents. From the report, it can be concluded that the United States leads in the sphere of influence on other states, the media, and international relations. The country also occupies a high position in the categories of ‘Business and Trade’, ‘Education and Science’. Russia is not included in any of these indications at all.

Experts also assessed the potential for future growth for the countries. They put Russia on the fifth line in terms of having the potential for the development of the state. Russia occupies such a high position because of its participation in the BRICS, as the country moves away from the West and directs its attention towards eastern countries that are competitors to Western countries. The growth potential of technology development, cultural and state influence, as well as economic indicators are clearly visible here.

At the moment, most countries are aware that the imposition of American interests has a negative impact on the external and internal affairs of states. For more than a quarter of a century, America has been using the tools of soft power to influence Ukraine, which is one of the reasons for the rupture of relations between Russia and Ukraine. The position of the Russian Federation in the context of foreign policy is quite obvious - the United States should stop interfering in the affairs of foreign states. The annexation of Crimea in this case can be viewed from the point of view of Russia's ability to back up its position with actions. Despite the fact that many states condemned the return of Crimea, Russia remained a strong and independent player in the international arena. The alliance with Russia is clearly attractive to other countries.

Nevertheless, Moscow has enough strength to fight back against the United States in the case of the use of soft and hard power. Although the concept of soft power does not imply forceful intervention, it is applied in a different way in Russia. The country's military potential allows diplomats to use soft power and protect national interests[[18]](#footnote-18). Although Russia and the post-Soviet space are in American focus, Russia has decided to reduce the influence of the United States in the country. In this scenario, the Russian Federation should create organizations and hire talented specialists to build a Russian policy of soft power as opposed to the American one. It is quite easy to do this in the post-Soviet space, as long as the Russian language is widespread and trade, economic, cultural, and historical ties are preserved. The priority should be not soft, but smart power, which combines soft efforts with military-political and economic areas.

## 1.3. Role of state institutions in implementing soft power policy

To identify the differences between American and Russian soft power, it is necessary to compare the institutional and legal parameters of policy implementation. Soft power is mentioned in such official documents as the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, etc. However, in the White House documents, such a concept is practically not used.

At this stage, the main foreign policy department in the USA is the State Department, whose main mission is ‘to ensure freedom for the benefit of the American people and the international community through the creation and development of a more democratic and secure world’. Thus, it can be noted that soft power is the cornerstone of protecting the values of democracy and freedom.

In 1961, the US Agency was created, which is responsible for non-military assistance to other states. This institute closely cooperates with the State Department but is not fully subordinate and operates independently. The Agency promotes economic prosperity, protects human rights, strengthens democratic values, improves public health and the environment, helps in post-conflict recovery and provides humanitarian assistance to other countries. The agency presents a list of activities and an estimated budget to the US government every year.

In the USA, formal institutions dealing with soft power policy are the Bureau of Education and Culture of the US Department of State (Fulbright Program, English language programs, scholarships for citizens of CIS countries, raising the prestige of American higher education, etc.). The informal institutions of soft power include Hollywood, music, and the media.

As for institutions in Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the main body responsible for the implementation of policy. Among other state organizations, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian World, the Pushkin Institutes, and the Russian Association for International Cooperation can be distinguished.

Rossotrudnichestvo should be considered one of the most important institutions for the implementation of soft power. Dmitry Medvedev's decree established the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) in 2008. It cannot be said that this institute appeared out of nowhere since its predecessors are considered to be the All-Union Society for Cultural Communication with Abroad, the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies and the Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation under the government, which existed in the XX century[[19]](#footnote-19). Until 1958, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries promoted scientific and cultural exchanges among 47 countries in the world, held youth festivals and collaborated with more than 7,000 organizations. After 1958, the society was renamed the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, and then, after the collapse of the USSR, it was called the Russian Association for International Cooperation.

In 2013, the concept of soft power was enshrined in the fundamental foreign policy document - the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Article 20 of the concept is entirely devoted to the definition of soft power as an integral part of the international system. It is said that the implementation includes classical diplomacy, humanitarian, cultural, educational, informational, and communication methods of influence, and the destructive side of soft power is mentioned. This includes political pressure, destabilization, intervention in the affairs of the state and manipulation of public opinion and mood[[20]](#footnote-20). The concept also includes a call to distinguish humanitarian, charitable, and positive non-governmental organizations from pseudo-NGOs that destabilize the country. Then the description of soft power tools in the Concept of the Russian Federation in 2013 was mentioned. It includes mechanisms of public diplomacy and cultural, scientific, sports, and educational programs that will contribute to building a positive image of Russia[[21]](#footnote-21).

In the same year, the Activity Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation was published, which described the need for the development of soft power. The plan clearly outlines the course of cooperation with Rossotrudnichestvo to increase the number of Russian centers of science and culture abroad, the number of courses, and educational and methodological centers for the study of the Russian language. Study trips to the Russian Federation for talented young people were also planned.

The main document adopted today on the issue of the Russian concept of soft power is considered to be the Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of international development assistance in 2014. In this document, Russia recognizes its historical responsibility for the formation of a modern system of international relations. Therefore, the country is ready to use soft power implementation mechanisms to stabilize partner states, eliminate local conflicts, and help strengthen international positions. The mechanisms include two elements - state programs and the Commission of the Russian Federation on International Development Assistance.

To implement this concept in 2014, an Action Plan was adopted to intensify activities in the fields of international development assistance and humanitarian cooperation on the basis of Russian centers of science and culture abroad for 2014-2016. The main institutions of implementation were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Culture. The plan included 35 events dedicated to the development of the language abroad, Russian culture, science, technology, and education. Cultural festivals were held mainly with the CIS countries, SCO and BRICS members. As for Central Asia, the emphasis of the soft power of the Russian Federation was directed at such events as round tables, exhibitions, presentations in the military-technical sphere, historical films about the war, staff training, discussion of educational and cultural programs. It is noteworthy that 1/3 of the plan consisted of a discussion of military-technical cooperation.

Soon, for the post-Soviet space, it was decided to expand its activities and create a new federal authority that would be authorized to develop Russian relations abroad, including with the CIS countries[[22]](#footnote-22). At the present stage, Rossotrudnichestvo is actively functioning in the Central Asian region, promoting the dissemination of the Russian language, culture, values, domestic science and education, as well as contributing to the implementation of international projects. There are 14 representative offices of Rossotrudnichestvo in the CIS[[23]](#footnote-23). According to the agency's performance report in 2020, it can be concluded that Rossotrudnichestvo paid more attention to the CIS countries. The work was carried out within the framework of the state programs of the Russian Federation: ‘Foreign Policy activity’, ‘Development of Education’, ‘Interstate Program of Innovative Cooperation of the CIS Member States’. Due to the unfavorable epidemiological situation in 2020 and the restrictions associated with it, most of the projects were implemented online, and some of the planned activities had to be canceled.

As a tool for the implementation of soft power in Russia, it is also possible to single out Russian expert platforms, such as the World Public Forum ‘Dialogue of Civilizations’, the Valdai International Discussion Club, and the A.M. Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund. The conferences are held under the auspices of the EU and the UN, and every year an international prize is awarded for a contribution to strengthening cooperation between countries and peoples. For example, the former President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was awarded. The Forum is actively promoted on social networks and has its own website in English. All materials from the forum and speakers' speeches are publicly available. Currently, the most popular expert platform in Russia is the Valdai Discussion Club, which began its work in 2004 with the support of MGIMO, HSE, the Russian Council for International Affairs, and the Council for Foreign Defense Policy[[24]](#footnote-24). Over the past few years, more than 1,000 experts around the world have participated in its work. The Club also holds regional conferences such as Asian, Middle Eastern, Russian-Chinese, and Euro-Atlantic in the format of dialogue. After the Ukrainian crisis, the club somewhat changed the concept of holding meetings - from telling the world about Russia to discussing the global agenda and assessing economic and political situations.

As for the Central Asian region, experts such as Umid Abidkhadzhayev (Director of the Institute of Forecasting and Macroeconomic Research under the Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan), Iskander Akylbayev (Executive Director of the Kazakhstan Council on International Relations) and Timofey Bordachev (Program Director of the Valdai Club) are working together on the Asia program and Eurasia. The program includes the study of the geopolitical space of Central Asia, where Russia is the center, as well as the promotion of scientific partnerships[[25]](#footnote-25). Special attention is paid to Russia's bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries.

The club does not always receive positive assessments from the world expert community, Russian speakers are often called the ‘mouthpieces of the Kremlin’. Thus, in the report on Russian soft power in the UK, prepared by the Henry Jackson Society in 2015, it is indicated that during the annual conference of the club, journalists ask questions prepared in advance and agreed with the organizers to top officials, especially questions to Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Since the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is mainly focused on the CIS countries and neighboring countries, the country can follow its principles[[26]](#footnote-26). Russia focuses on the support of conservative leaders, supporting their leadership in the states. In turn, the soft power of the United States has a purely pragmatic orientation.

Thus, it can be concluded that in the relations between Russia and the United States, there is a rivalry of ideological principles on the world stage. Russia's political ideology has found states that support it, for example, CIS countries and neighboring countries, China and India. Almost any negotiations take place with the participation of Russia as a world mediator trying to settle the situation peacefully. But still, Russian soft power can adopt some features from the United States. For example, the involvement of informal actors, the dissemination of creative products on the international market, and an increase in the radius of influence on other countries can bring the implementation of this policy to a new level. The study of soft power allows us to understand situations of countries in the world and consider their foreign policy strategies from a different angle. It is necessary to take into account not only the military and economic power of the state but also the mechanisms and instruments of influence on other countries, without applying the policy of hard power. It is necessary to show an interest in studying this instrument of influence when planning Russia's foreign policy, since the country has just begun to study the instruments of conducting this policy.

## 1.4. Priority directions of implementation

The priorities of the soft power policies of the United States and Russia include the dissemination of language, culture, and education, as well as the promotion of international development. The other areas are much more extensive and require study in a separate work.

Since the beginning of the 2010s, the US agency has been implementing a policy of soft power in the following main areas:

1. Culture and language promotion through organizations such as the American Councils for International Education and the United States Agency for International Development, as well as organizations not sponsored by the government, for example, the Council on International Educational Exchange. It is important to note that the United States is not a mono-ethnic country, so the values of democracy, freedom, equality, and human rights are taken as the basis of culture. Experts believe that such a policy of soft power in the field of culture does not meet criticism from religious groups in other countries.

2. Cooperation in scientific-technical and innovative areas, which are implemented in academic exchanges and programs, as well as the involvement of personnel from abroad.

3. The development of business relations through such programs as ‘Economic Support Fund’ and ‘Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia’.

4. Development of public diplomacy in order to positively influence the country's attitude towards the United States through the creation of a civil society supporting American ideas.

5. Assistance to international development ‘Migration and assistance to refugees’, ‘Fight against drug trafficking’ and ‘Global health and children's medicine’.

It can be concluded that soft power policy of the United States is more focused on international development.

Since 2013, one of the most common areas of US soft power policy has been educational programs[[27]](#footnote-27). For instance, the Fulbright program allows international students to study in the United States. The educational direction is more strongly represented in the countries of the former USSR, as well as Vietnam. The USA realized quite early that through education it was possible to effectively influence other states. During the Cold War, the USSR also conducted educational programs and student exchanges, but after 1991, Russia abandoned this practice for a long time, giving way to China. Due to the high quality of education in these countries, the governments of both states can build a successful soft power policy.

The support and development of democracy is also a priority for the implementation of this policy, in particular in the post-Soviet space. In this case, it is worth mentioning Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, where a number of political transformations have taken place over the past few years. Kyrgyzstan is a recipient country that has received financial support in the fields of health and education. In addition, there are 15 American resource centers located in the country (Embassy, Peace Corps, Education-USA educational centers, and International University). It can be concluded that the policy of soft power is actively functioning since a large number of people are committed to the American ideas of freedom, equality, and lifestyle. Through soft propaganda, America forms a positive public opinion about itself.

The key areas of implementation of Russian projects in the field of international humanitarian cooperation remained the popularization of Russian culture and achievements of Russian science, the promotion of Russian education abroad, strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, support of compatriots and assistance to international development. Education is also a priority for the policy of soft power because it affects a person's worldview. Of course, these tools are used in different ways. Firstly, it is worth considering the cultural aspect, since Russia has a rich Eurasian heritage and the United States promotes Western traditions. Secondly, it is worth evaluating the implementation of soft power by such parameters as the comparison of national interests and the interests of the region under study and ways to promote it.

In 2007, Vladimir Putin's decree established the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which was supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science[[28]](#footnote-28). Russian history studies, organization support for teachers of the Russian language, dissemination of reliable information about the country, support for NGOs, support for Russian diasporas abroad, interaction between foreign and Russian-speaking media, and promotion of Russian culture are among its tasks. The foundation's ideology is based on the fact that this global project is able to unite all people in the world who are interested in Russia. Such Russian centers are located in 45 countries in the world. The Foundation has an online website available in English, German, Italian, French, and Chinese. The Foundation also oversees educational courses in the Russian language abroad, passing the unified state exam in the post-Soviet space, language courses, Russian history and labor legislation for those who want to immigrate to the Russian Federation.

One of the most relevant think tanks in Russia since 2011 is the Russian Council for International Affairs. Membership includes Russian non-profit organizations. The aim of it is stated to be the strengthening of peace, friendship, and harmony between peoples, the prevention of international conflicts, and crisis management.

To date, the work of the Russian Council for International Affairs has not been highly appreciated by the international expert community. In the Global Ranking of Think Tanks (Global Go To Think Tank Index Report), it did not make it into the global list of the 150 best think tanks. For comparison, there are 143 think tanks registered in Russia in 2020, while there are more than 2,200 in the United States[[29]](#footnote-29). According to the report, the top think tank is the American Brookings Institution, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Moscow Center is in the 19th position, and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) is in the 38th place. In the category of ‘the best analytical centers of educational policy’ in 2020, the USA takes the leading positions from 1st to 9th place, and the Center for Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Educational Management in Russia takes 11th place.

One of the priorities of Russian soft power is considered to be the involvement of civil society in the formation of a favorable image of the country. This may include the development and deepening of ties with compatriots and citizens of other countries, the holding of international cultural (cross-years of literature and language) and sports (Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014, the 2018 FIFA World Cup) events[[30]](#footnote-30). Science and education are also the directions of soft power because through these tools, the greatest influence is exerted on the consciousness of the younger generation. Information technologies and Internet resources have significant potential, especially in countries with post-Soviet influence.

To draw the conclusion, it should be noted that both Russia and the United States have a good amount of potential for soft power tools to work in the whole world and in Central Asia in particular. Russia is more focused on preserving the already existing soft power potential in the Central Asian countries and expanding its potential worldwide through culture, education, and science. The United States, in turn, will focus on maintaining the influence of American soft power in the world and trying to overcome Russian dominance in Central Asia through education, the media, and international support programs.

# CHAPTER 2. INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA

## 2.1. Evolution of Russian foreign policy goals

The importance of the Central Asian region for Russia can be seen from the collapse of the USSR and the indication of the country's foreign policy goals in all concepts of Russian foreign policy. A.V. Kozyrev attributed the CIS to the first circle in his concept of three concentric circles of Moscow's interests, ahead of the West and East. In the 1993 concept, Russia's main goal with the CIS countries was to strengthen multilateral cooperation in all areas, although it was assumed that cooperation with countries such as Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine would occur faster than with other states.

The 2000 Concept stated that Russia would interact with all Central Asian countries, but bilateral cooperation is possible only if each state is open to cooperation. Essentially, the economic sphere of relations was intended.

Since 2007, the vector of cooperation has shifted towards security, since the Russian Federation was interested in having stable and secure borders with the Central Asian countries. A course was also outlined to eliminate favoritism in the region. Nevertheless, the concept noted that Kazakhstan has been and remains a key strategic partner for Russia. Uzbekistan was classified as an ‘important strategic ally’. A short paragraph was devoted to the key areas of cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan[[31]](#footnote-31). At the moment, this priority of countries for the Russian Federation has not changed. In the concepts of 2008, 2013, and 2016, the Central Asian countries received the same attention in the context of the CIS.

Russia's relations with Central Asian countries have always remained a priority. The country does not intend to give up its dominant place in this region, so it is extremely important for the Russian Federation to join Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the CIS, as well as in the SCO (except Tajikistan) and the Eurasian Economic Community (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). Given that the United States is actively trying to take its place in the Central Asian region, Russia needs to offer more profitable cooperation options for the countries.

The issue of security in the Central Asian region has always deserved close attention from the Russian leadership. In the Tajik Civil War of 1992-1996, Russia provided assistance and support to the country in resolving the conflict, and this marked the beginning of the creation of a ‘Collective Security Treaty’ between Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 1999, when extending the contract, Uzbekistan refused to sign it, deciding that it could ensure its security without Russian support, relying on its own forces and on the support of the United States.

After the change in Russia's foreign policy in the mid-1990s, Russia began to make attempts to strengthen its role as an Eurasian power. Now the priority was not bilateral, but multilateral agreements with countries that later led to the creation of the SCO. Multilateral cooperation among the Central Asian countries began with the creation of the Customs Union in 1995 among Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Later, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan joined it. Although the countries were afraid of Russia's economic dependence and influence, they nevertheless willingly concluded agreements. In the 2000s, Uzbekistan refused to join the EAEU because it chose a policy of balancing between the United States, China, and Russia.

When Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia's foreign policy course as a Eurasian country was finally determined, and Central Asia continued to be a priority region for Russia. The participation of Central Asian countries in international integration processes has allowed them to become an important subject in international relations. In addition, the issues of security, drug trafficking, and terrorist threats have increased markedly in the region, and Russia has to take these facts into account when building its policy due to its geographical proximity.

For more than 20 years, Russia has been competing with the United States for dominance in the Central Asian region. After the terrorist attacks of 2001, the whole world began to cooperate against international terrorism. Under the pretext of resolving the conflict in Afghanistan, the US government has deployed military bases on the territory of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Russia, in contrast to American influence, has created a Collective Rapid Deployment Force consisting of military contingents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. The American presence in the Central Asian region worried the Russian government. The US accusations of undermining the foundations of the country during the ‘color revolutions’, the SCO declaration demanding the withdrawal of American troops from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan only worsened relations between the two countries.

The concepts of 2000 and 2008 are no different in the issue of Central Asia. Only priority areas have changed: security has outstripped economic cooperation.

In 2011, the Prime Ministers of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Ukraine signed an agreement on the establishment of a free trade zone between their countries. In 2013, a roadmap for Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EAEU was approved, and negotiations with Tajikistan are also underway. Nevertheless, the Central Asian countries are cautious about new integration projects because they are afraid of falling under Russian dependence and sometimes look for other alternative formats of participation in organizations.

Thus, it can be concluded that the analysis of the concepts of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation demonstrates that Central Asia has always been a priority region for Russia. Greater emphasis was placed on the CIS, and all the tasks implemented for the Commonwealth were automatically applied to all Central Asian countries[[32]](#footnote-32). Since 1991, relations between Russia and Kazakhstan have been developing on an upward trend. The key document concluded between the countries is considered to be the Treaty of Eternal Friendship and Alliance[[33]](#footnote-33). There are two stages in relations with Kyrgyzstan: a strategic course of relations until 2000 and an asymmetric course of interaction provoked by contradictions. Milestone events are considered to be the Agreement on Eternal Friendship and Alliance and the transition from a donor basis to a market one. Relations between Russia and Tajikistan include both upward and downward trends. Until 2005, Russia provided material assistance to Dushanbe until the end of the civil war, then there was a cooling of relations. Since 2019, the heads of state have been meeting on a regular basis and actively interacting with each other on issues of housing, labor migration, and cultural and humanitarian cooperation. A similar situation can be traced in Russia's relations with Turkmenistan. Until 1995, the countries maintained mutual antipathy and conducted limited cooperation. From 1996 to 2005, the interaction between the countries practically came to naught in such areas as economic, military, cultural, and political cooperation due to the constantly neutral foreign policy position of Turkmenistan. From 2006 to the present, relations have warmed up and cooperation in the energy sector has begun to intensify. Of all the five Central Asian countries studied, the development of relations between Russia and Uzbekistan is the most unstable, as relations have warmed and cooled due to the interaction of the unofficial authorities of Uzbekistan and the Taliban, the country's turn to the West, economic crises, and misunderstandings. Currently, the countries mainly cooperate in the cultural, humanitarian, educational, and economic spheres.

## 2.2. Russian capabilities and digital diplomacy resources

The priority tools of Russian soft power include state projects in the fields of education, science, culture, medicine, and media. The key areas of implementation of Russian projects in the field of international humanitarian cooperation remained the popularization of Russian culture and achievements of Russian science, the promotion of Russian education abroad, strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world, support of compatriots and assistance to international development. In the Central Asian region, support was provided for holding congress and exhibition events in the field of science and technology, and roadmaps (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) were developed until 2022. Methodological events were held for teachers of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan[[34]](#footnote-34). Among the Central Asian countries, the largest interaction in 2020 was with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The Declaration on Eternal Friendship and Cooperation, adopted in 1998 by Boris Yeltsin and N. Nazarbayev, can be considered the origin of the use of Russian soft power in Kazakhstan since one of the points of the document prescribed the creation of Russian-Kazakh and Kazakh-Russian universities. The parties also pledged to preserve the spiritual closeness of the peoples and interact in the cultural, scientific, and educational spheres.

In Kazakhstan, the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Nursultan, one of the divisions of Rossotrudnichestvo, is considered the main institution for implementing the policy of Russian soft power. The Russian government allocates 3% of the total budget of the organization to finance the programs carried out in Kazakhstan. The primary task is to promote Russian culture, science, and education in Kazakhstan. Education as a tool of implementation is brought to the fore, as students form their worldview in the learning process[[35]](#footnote-35). Russian universities are attractive to Kazakhs for their geographical accessibility, similar mentalities, quality of education, and accessibility of the language. The Russian diploma gives advantages for working in Kazakhstan. Since 2003, Rossotrudnichestvo has been offering grants for free education for residents of Kazakhstan. At the moment, the quota for grant applications is more than 300 places per year. Statistics show that every fifth foreign student coming to Russia comes from Kazakhstan. One can also get a Russian education within the country. There are six branches of Russian universities in the country: a branch of Moscow State University (Astana), the Academy of Labor and Social Relations (Almaty), the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics, and Informatics (Ust-Kamenogorsk), Chelyabinsk State University (Kostanay), the Almaty branch of the St. Petersburg Humanitarian University of Trade Unions (Almaty), and the Moscow Aviation Institute (Baikonur). Since 2007, the Kazakhstan Association of Graduates of Russian (Soviet) Higher Educational Institutions has been functioning. It was created in order to strengthen ties between academic circles[[36]](#footnote-36).

The key task of soft power is also considered to be the dissemination and strengthening of the Russian language in Kazakhstan. Rossotrudnichestvo annually conducts scientific, cultural, and educational events dedicated to the Russian language and literature. Literary evenings, seminars for teachers, familiarization with Russian creativity and cinematography are held. The agency also offers advanced training programs for teachers and language courses for residents of Kazakhstan. The training and educational programs of the Russkiy Mir Foundation (located in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Almaty, and Aktobe) are aimed at forming a favorable opinion about the Russian Federation.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have a high level of knowledge of the Russian language among the residents of the countries. Nevertheless, the number of those wishing to study Russian is falling in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and in Turkmenistan there is a negative trend of declining interest and generally any presence of Russian educational programs on the territory of the state. Rossotrudnichestvo actively cooperates with many organizations in Kazakhstan (Slavic, Cossack, and Orthodox communities) to support compatriots abroad and respect their rights.

The centuries-old relations between Kyrgyzstan and Russia, the joint history, the importance of the Russian language, and a large number of Russian graduates provide a good basis for the tools of soft power implementation. Russia provides humanitarian assistance to Kyrgyzstan, conducts joint cultural events, provides grants and loans, and actively attracts Kyrgyzstan to Eurasian projects and structures[[37]](#footnote-37). Thus, it is worth noting that the Russian Federation has assumed financial gratuitous expenses for the accelerated entry of Kyrgyzstan into the Customs Union. The Russian Embassy organizes school trips to Russia and provides quotas for free university tuition. There are 7 branches of Russian universities in the republic, where training is conducted in Russian. A private Russian language school operates in Bishkek.

Russia's soft power in Tajikistan can be traced only by the education tool. The Russian-Tajik Slavic University, the Russian-Tajik Modern Humanitarian University, a branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University in Dushanbe, and a branch of the Russian National Research University MISIS operate in the republic. About 5,000 Tajik students are studying at universities in Russia today. Such tools as cultural, humanitarian, and language projects are not being implemented.

The improvement of such information platforms as the press center of the Russian Foreign Ministry, electronic portals of Russian representative offices and Russian social networks is also given an important place in soft power policy.

Since 2005, with the creation of the international information channel Russia Today, one can notice the growth of Russia in the information space. The channel was created in order to cover the Russian position on international issues and inform the foreign audience about life in the country. CNN and the BBC served as prototypes for the channel. The structure of Russia Today includes four information channels broadcasting around the clock in English, Arabic, and Spanish (RT International, RT Arabic, RT Spanish, RT America). Foreign journalists make up the fourth part of the staff. Of course, it is quite difficult for the newly created channel to overcome the Western monopoly in information space, but it is already overtaking such channels as Deutsche Welle and France 24 in popularity.

In 2013 and 2014, two MIA projects, ‘Russia Today’ and ‘Sputnik’, were created. MIA information portals ‘Russia Today’ is represented in 30 countries of the world, and the agency ‘Sputnik’ was mainly created to maintain websites, mobile applications, and pages on social networks in various cities of the world. News feeds are conducted in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese and publish analytical reports, interviews, and online voting results. Compared to Chinese and English-language sources of information, Russian media occupy a dominant position. There are at least 50 Russian TV channels in the packages of digital satellite television in the Kyrgyz Republic, such as ‘Pervyi’, ‘Rossia’, ‘NTV,’ and ‘MIR’.

In recent years, Russia has used a record number of expert platforms in Kyrgyzstan. Conferences and round tables have been held between the RIAC, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Foundation, and Kyrgyz experts. According to the publication of documents concerning Eurasian integration projects, Kyrgyzstan took the highest place in 2015.

Russia's assessments in the global information space vary. For example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, claims that Russia Today is a successful project that can compete with the BBC and CNN and give an independent assessment of what is happening in the world from the West. Nevertheless, foreign experts criticize the channel for bias and the use of the channel as a weapon in the information war related to the Ukrainian crisis.

It is also worth noting the use of digital diplomacy resources by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Since 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched an updated version of its official website, where information has been added in English, French, German, and Spanish. The Ministry's information materials were posted on the website: official documents, statements, comments, information about the results of negotiations, press reviews, and summaries. Site traffic is growing from year to year. In the same year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to actively conduct social networks. So, for instance, 2 Twitter accounts were created - @MID\_RF and @MFA\_Russia[[38]](#footnote-38). Both accounts are actively maintained and, at the moment, there are 1,250,338 followers and 536,121 followers (as of 01/04/2022).

It is noteworthy that the practice of maintaining accounts on social networks by officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not taken root in Russia[[39]](#footnote-39). The only exception is Maria Zakharova, who has been actively leading social networks since 2015. At the moment, her page has 91,804 readers. She actively comments on the activities of the Foreign Ministry, in particular the visits and speeches of Minister Sergey Lavrov, providing them with photos. However, the tone of her posts sometimes turns out to be quite informal and even undiplomatic. Maria Zakharova writes Facebook posts only in Russian, addressing the citizens of the country. In general, M. Zakharova's page cannot be considered the official page of the press secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the author often posts information of a purely personal nature, enters into dialogues with readers on non-working moments. It is important to note that in foreign practice, the diplomacy of top officials is quite widespread. Many foreign ministers have their own Facebook and Twitter accounts. For comparison, the account of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has more than 1,357,054 followers on Twitter and more than 2 million people have subscribed to the official account of the State Department (as of 01/04/2022).

One of the most significant Internet portals is the ‘Russian World’, where news from the cultural, scientific, and educational environment is published. The annual audience is more than 1 million people, and Kazakhstan ranks second among the most active readers of the platform. Since 2015, the Russian World TV and radio company has started publishing podcasts, literary and historical programs, as well as exclusive interviews to familiarize foreign audiences with Russia.

Currently, the most popular expert platform in Russia is the Valdai Discussion Club, which began its work in 2004 with the support of MGIMO, HSE, the Russian Council for International Affairs, and the Council for Foreign Defense Policy. Over the past few years, more than 1,000 experts around the world have participated in its work. The Club also holds regional conferences such as Asian, Middle Eastern, Russian-Chinese, and Euro-Atlantic in the format of dialogue. After the Ukrainian crisis, the club somewhat changed the concept of holding meetings - from telling the world about Russia to discussing the global agenda and assessing economic and political situations. The website is maintained in English and Russian and has several accounts on social networks. For example, the club is currently continuing its work in such accounts as Telegram, VKontakte, and Twitter. Facebook and Instagram accounts\* are temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a fairly small number of users (from 3 to 5 thousand people) are subscribed to the Russian-language social networks of the forum. On Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (English accounts), the audience consists of 7 thousand people. The largest number of subscribers was observed on the YouTube channel of the Valdai Discussion Club, where most of the viewers were from different countries. At the moment, the video holding has removed the forum channel from the online platform.

Since 2010, a financially independent expert platform has been created called the A.M. Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund. The Foundation was created to help Russian non-governmental organizations in cooperation with international organizations and promote cultural, educational, and scientific programs abroad. On the basis of the headquarters in Moscow, discussion diplomatic seminars are held, where young specialists from different countries are invited. For instance, there is a School of Young Experts on Central Asia (Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan). The Foundation also sponsors academic mobility programs where Russian housing experts can make presentations at foreign universities. The foundation's website contains brief analytical notes in Russian and English, as well as links to social media accounts. Only 4000 people have subscribed to the Russian-language entries of the VKontakte and YouTube Foundation, and 1000 on Telegram, which indicates that only a small number of Russian users are interested in the activities of the Gorchakov Foundation.

To draw the conclusion, it is crucial to emphasize that since 2008, the term ‘soft power’ has been included in the speeches of such Russian politicians as S. Lavrov, D. Medvedev, and V. Putin. The government of the Russian Federation is convinced that the country needs to improve its image abroad and broadcast its attitude to world events. Since 2013, the concept has acquired a legal character and entered into the concept of the country's foreign policy. The official definition of soft power was as follows: ‘comprehensive tools for solving foreign policy tasks based on the capabilities of civil society, information and communication, humanitarian, and other methods and technologies alternative to classical diplomacy’. The concept also mentioned such negative aspects of soft power as the use of its tools to interfere in the internal affairs of states and destabilize society through manipulation. In the political speeches of S. Lavrov and V. Putin, it is repeatedly stressed that it is necessary to distinguish between the real work of NGOs and pseudo-companies that receive financial support from outside in order to influence the consciousness of Russians.

In subsequent years, soft power was mentioned in such documents as the Plan of Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and the Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of International Development Assistance. The documents outlined such goals as developing the potential of Russian soft power and building up scientific, informational, cultural, and educational presence in the world. Based on the Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of international development assistance, in October 2014, the Government of the Russian Federation adopted an Action Plan to intensify activities in the field of international development assistance and humanitarian cooperation on the basis of Russian centers of science and culture abroad. The plan included measures to strengthen military, cultural, and linguistic cooperation.

Since 2008, Rossotrudnichestvo has been the main institution for the implementation of soft power policy. At the moment, the agency is represented in 80 countries around the world.

The main areas of work are the promotion of the Russian language, education, science and culture; assistance to compatriots; monitoring and improving the perception of Russia by other countries; and the country's participation in international projects. Non-state instruments of soft power are such NGOs as the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the World Without Nazism movement, the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, and the Foundation for Cooperation with the Russian-language Press[[40]](#footnote-40).

Russia has consolidated its place in the media space and created the Russia Today TV channel. Since 2011, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has activated digital diplomacy. There is a positive dynamic in social networks, which undoubtedly affected the expansion of the Russian presence in the global information space.

According to the Russian foreign policy concept of 2016, the Central Asian region is one of the priority external tasks. The Russian Federation actively ensures the security of this region and helps solve economic problems. As for education, it should be noted that Russia is interested in preserving Russian culture and language. Historically, taking into account the proximity of Russia and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, it can be concluded that the population of the region has always perceived Russia as a friend and a link with the rest of the world, trying to join European civilization. The population of large cities in some CIS countries still speaks Russian fluently. This allows the Russian media to broadcast the Russian perception of the political situation in the world in Central Asia. Thus, during the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, the Russian media successfully used soft power to gently propagandize their vision of the conflict. In 2014, the Kazakh sociologist G. Ileulova conducted a survey, which shows that more than 62% of the population of Kazakhstan approve of Russia's actions in this conflict, and more than 68% do not support Ukraine's position.

It is also worth paying attention to the large flow of migrant workers from the region to Russia, which allows the segment of Russian education to occupy one of the leading positions in the market. The Russian foundation ‘Russkiy mir’ creates centers in Central Asia and promotes Russian culture. Universities cooperate on exchange programs and open their branches on the territory of other countries (for example, Kyrgyz-Slavic University is named after the first President of Russia, B.N. Yeltsin). For several reasons - a common historical past, the widespread use of the Russian language, opportunities for emigration in the fields of work and education, as well as geographical proximity Russia remains attractive to the Central Asian countries. All this allows Russia to successfully use the mechanisms of soft power.

## 2.3. Russian challenges

The government of Kazakhstan is dissatisfied with the active use of Russian soft power on the territory of the country, the negative consequence of which is the outflow of the population. Russia is ready to provide benefits such as simplified migration for highly qualified specialists, obtaining citizenship and the opportunity to get a diploma in Russian education for free. In 2019, the federal project ‘Export of Education’ was introduced, which involves improving the conditions for obtaining education for foreign citizens and increasing their number[[41]](#footnote-41). The number of Kazakh students who want to get a Russian education is rising. Most of them do not return to their homeland, but start working in Russia. The Kazakh government is taking measures to improve the quality of life in the country and introducing benefits to reduce the outflow of the population.

The weak side of Russian soft power in Kyrgyzstan is that it rests only on cultural and historical heritage and does not form an attractive image of the future. Soft power is mainly focused on the older generation, young people are not the target audience. At the moment, Russia cannot offer Kyrgyzstan new information, educational and scientific projects, and cannot form a positive image of the country in the eyes of young people. The prestige of Russian education in Kyrgyzstan is inferior to that of American, Chinese, and Turkish education. Russian education is considered classical and traditional, which does not attract young people. American education in Kyrgyzstan, on the contrary, is famous for its popularity, since the American University of Central Asia teaches according to the latest methods, and holds conferences and round tables, which are actively covered by the press.

In Tajikistan, only a small percentage of the population knows Russian. In schools in large cities, the study of the Russian language is devoted to 2 hours a week. There is a shortage of specialists. At the moment, Russia is not taking measures to improve the situation.

The number of Russian compatriots is decreasing, and the desire to study Russian language and culture is disappearing among the Central Asian population. In Turkmenistan, the government has directly refused to include the study of the Russian language in the school curriculum. The Russian World Foundation has no representative offices in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Pushkin Institute launched the project ‘Ambassadors of the Russian Language in the World’, where experts came to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to introduce schoolchildren and students to the culture, language, and literature of Russia. Unfortunately, this project has its own limit. For example, the project is mainly focused on using an Internet platform, and in most Central Asian schools there are limited digital capabilities.

In general, it can be noted that the lack of interest in the Russian language and culture, the outflow of migrants, and a small part of educational and scientific programs reduce the influence of Russia's soft power in Central Asia. There are significant gaps in the implementation of Russian soft power in the Central Asian region. Despite the fact that there are Russian universities in large cities, educational activities are not developed in the regions. After graduation, there are no graduate clubs for CA residents from Russian universities, where specialists could meet as agents of influence. The press also does not sufficiently cover the activities of educational institutions, and there are not enough specialists in the educational institutions themselves who teach according to the latest methods. It is also worth noting that Russia's soft power is functioning quite well in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the Russian government needs to strengthen its work in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Russia should think about its own concept of soft power, which will be attractive to Central Asia. It is necessary to work towards strengthening and modernizing Russian universities in Central Asia. In addition, it is important to continue to contact graduates of Russian universities in order to deepen ties with the youth of Central Asian countries and consolidate the positive experience of soft power.

# CHAPTER 3. INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA.

## 3.1. Evolution of American foreign policy goals

Until 2001, US policy in Central Asia was limited only to helping to achieve and maintain sovereignty and to destroying Russia's monopoly. The region was considered a low priority area. The strategic policy of the United States has nevertheless borne fruit. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states has been established. The nuclear infrastructure in Kazakhstan has been dismantled since the Soviet Union. Also, no state has become a hegemon in Central Asia. The United States has eliminated Russia's monopoly on oil and gas supplies from this region. Nevertheless, the issues of respect for human rights and the creation of a democratic society remain open. The US plan to create regional economic integration and security cooperation has also failed. The slow development of the Central Asian countries is associated with the continuity of power in the United States. In some countries, leaders who had been in power since the Soviet Union (for example, Nursultan Nazarbayev) and elderly presidents were in no hurry to appoint successors. This can also include corruption and the lack of the rule of law. The ruling elites share the economic benefits between themselves and their seeds. Economic crimes are often prosecuted selectively, which effectively allows the ruling elites to sideline political or economic competitors.

The strategy of US foreign policy in Central Asia is primarily focused on the removal of this region from the influence of Russia and China. By seeking to expand its own influence, the United States will be able to gain benefits for its state, namely access to hydrocarbons and the formation of infrastructure on the border with major competing powers. Special attention to this region was clearly noticeable during the presidency of Barack Obama, who used three programs to realize the country's national interests (the Northern Distribution Network, the New Silk Road, and the Central Asia Counternarcotic Initiative). All three programs were inextricably linked to Afghanistan. Through the NDN, Washington expanded its presence in the region and involved Tajikistan in the process of ‘Afghan settlement’ by signing contracts on transportation, water supplies, and the training of Afghan servicemen. The new Silk Road proposed by Hillary Clinton in 2011 also implied the inclusion of the Central Asian region in the global economy. At the same time, Afghanistan was perceived by the American government as the heart of a new economic region. All this could ensure the stability of the pro-American government in the country, as well as raise the economy and bring it to a new level. The hidden purpose of these programs was the export of raw materials from Central Asian countries, bypassing China and Russia, as well as the export of mineral resources to India. In addition, in order to undermine Russian influence, the United States intended to liberalize trade with Afghanistan, which meant a continuous flow of drugs into the region to strengthen its criminalization. The Central Asian Anti-Drug Initiative was created by the United States to push the fight against drugs closer to the Russian border. All the projects presented can be attributed to soft power tools, but the Obama administration also used military actions and sanctions. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, there was a crisis of American soft power, which primarily meant active participation in international organizations. During Trump's presidential term, the United States withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), from the Paris Climate Agreements, from UNESCO, the UN Middle East Agency for Palestine Refugees, from the Iran nuclear deal, the INF Treaty, and the Open Skies Treaty. In the same destructive vein, Trump announced the readiness of the United States, ultimatum furnished with another unreasonable demands to Russia, to withdraw from START–3 in early 2021. Then Trump severed relations with the World Health Organization. Nye sharply criticized Trump for reducing the practical significance of soft power to nothing.

Since 1994, after the signing of the Charter of Democratic Partnership between the United States and Kazakhstan, Western countries have been able to freely carry out the activities of organizations, foundations, and the media on the territory of the republic. Part of the financial assistance to Kazakhstan went to the disarmament of the country and the creation of a ‘nuclear-free republic’. Over the past decade, the United States has invested more than $20 billion in Kazakhstan in education, the media, non-commercial funds, and national security. USAID annually sends up to $20 million to support and strengthen democratization and to finance joint projects for military cooperation[[42]](#footnote-42). For comparison, American financial assistance to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is twice as much as assistance to Kazakhstan[[43]](#footnote-43). It should also be noted that international organizations mainly interact with small Kazakhstan non-governmental organizations. So, for instance, it is possible to allocate the National Endowment for Democracy of the USA closely cooperates with such Kazakhstani associations as the online publication ‘Zona.kz’, The Adil Soz Foundation, specializing in the protection of freedom of speech on the Internet, as well as the National Association of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Kazakhstan.

Objectively, at the moment, Tajikistan cannot occupy a central role in the region for the United States, since the country has little political weight, a weak economy, and geographical isolation. Nevertheless, the United States sees in Tajikistan the potential to destabilize the situation on the border with China and Russia. Coups and the loosening of the socio-political situation can make the country an unsafe source for the spread of extremism and drugs.

In the early 2000s, the government of Tajikistan was very concerned about the active involvement of NGOs in the country's politics[[44]](#footnote-44). After the ‘color revolutions’, the country changed a number of rules. Foreign organizations do not have the right to function on the territory of the country if their leaders do not reside in Tajikistan on a permanent basis, if the organizations are not accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and are not subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. In 2007, the country's authorities ordered 146 foreign organizations to be re-registered, of which 117 were able to continue working on the territory of the state, and the rest stopped their work due to active pro-Western political views and suspicion of participating in rallies and revolutions. For instance, Freedom House organizations were refused re-registration several times, which significantly worsened relations between the current government of Tajikistan and the political leadership of the United States. Freedom House was important for the United States since it was this organization that recorded human rights violations and submitted reports on the need for foreign intervention under the pretext of humanitarian protection.

The Central Asian region began to interest the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this region, public diplomacy is focused on explaining the country's foreign policy and improving its image, promoting national interests and influencing the public[[45]](#footnote-45). To achieve these goals, public diplomacy programs are associated with cultural and student exchanges, grants, and internships. The growing attention of the United States is focused on the containment of Russia's influence and China's interest in the region. Other factors include the geopolitical location of the region, instability and underdevelopment of democratic institutions, hydrocarbon resources, economic problems, and threats of various kinds.

American approaches to the Central Asian region have changed depending on global circumstances, and therefore their evolution can be divided into several stages:

1. 1991 - 2001. This approach begins with the collapse of the USSR and ends with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Three goals of the approach can be distinguished: assistance to states in strengthening sovereignty, denuclearization and overcoming the Russian monopoly on the transit of oil and gas. The CA region was not given priority.

2. 2001 - 2016. The nature of interaction with the Central Asian countries has changed towards international security. The focus of cooperation has shifted from economic and political changes to respect for human rights and the military plan in connection with the operation in Afghanistan. Until the mid-2000s, the United States successfully coped with the role of a stabilizer, but subsequently its relations with other countries deteriorated due to the obsessive dissemination of its own democratic norms[[46]](#footnote-46). The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the Ukrainian crisis, and the activation of terrorist groups forced the United States to reconsider its priorities in Central Asia.

3. 2016 - present. At the moment, Central Asia is also of interest to the United States. The priorities include the development of democracy, strengthening security, and the development of the energy sector.

After the collapse of the USSR, the USA took advantage of the opportunity and began to actively fill the information space with their own products. One such example is the creation of ‘American Corners’ - US resource centers in the region that disseminate information about US foreign policy, life, traditions, culture, education, and work[[47]](#footnote-47).

In the annual reports on public diplomacy and information broadcasting until 2015, the high activity of non-governmental organizations was explained by the need to combat Russian propaganda and information aggression. Since 2016, such formulations have not been found in the reports, which only state that the growing influence of China and Russia is perceived by the United States as a challenge to national interests.

At this stage of the development of international relations, US foreign policy is implemented through public diplomacy, which includes various mechanisms of influence on Central Asian society. It is based on the concept of soft power, since it is public diplomacy that is responsible for spreading American values abroad.

## 3.2. American capabilities and digital diplomacy resources

As for the US soft power policy in the field of education in this region, it is possible to make a choice about its selectivity. Most of the work in the educational sphere is concentrated in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In an effort to strengthen its position in the educational market, the United States is opening universities (Kazakh-American University in Kazakhstan and American University in Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan). The main goal of the institutions is to educate young leaders who actively support democracy and human rights. All this is funded by various organizations, such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Despite its geographical remoteness, the United States has the material resources to promote its national interests in the Central Asian region. This can include the promotion of American values and interaction with opposition forces in the country.

One can distinguish two main vectors of the influence of American soft power on the Central Asian region: the information field and education. There is an extensive journalistic network of American media in the region, and the largest broadcasting channel is Radio Liberty. Since the authorities have partially banned the broadcast of the wave on regular channels, the work of Radio Liberty is conducted on the Internet. Basically, the work of the presenters is focused on acute political topics and topical issues. The radio is also partially sponsored by European media, forming a Western network that has a huge impact on changing the social climate in the region[[48]](#footnote-48). The United States, through foundations, also sponsors a number of independent print and electronic publications that write on propaganda and opposition topics. This may include the Kazakh port of Zona.kz and Tajik news agency Asia-Plus. Due to the monopoly and state control over television channels, the United States is paying more and more attention to new media and broadcasting programs on the Internet. Also, considerable attention is paid to the service system itself. The USA supplies equipment, trains personnel, and gives the opportunity to undergo internships abroad to ensure a continuous broadcasting system. The governing bodies of universities such as the American University of Central Asia (Bishkek), the Kazakh-American University, and the Kazakh-American Free University include foreign citizens. The process of studying at universities is close to the Western model, and foreign lecturers are invited to classes.

The financial support of the training is organized by USAID, and student exchanges are carried out at the expense of the Bureau of the State Department of Education and Culture. Advisory centers are being created (there are 13 of them on the territory of Central Asia); there are American stands and corners dedicated to education abroad at universities[[49]](#footnote-49). The Soros Foundation organizes volunteer, language, and youth centers, as well as visiting congresses. NDI works with young people and oversees the receipt of scholarships to study in the USA. Of course, the greatest demand here is for students of the Central Asian region who dream of studying abroad. American students, to a lesser extent, choose this region for study and are mainly engaged in data collection and analysis of the current political, energy, and crisis situations.

In addition to the educational sphere, the American government is also interested in scientific potential. Even NATO, within the framework of the Science for Peace and Security project, is looking for researchers in the fields of environmental protection, cybersecurity, and mining. And finally, the American education system includes advanced training programs for personnel of banks, courts, law enforcement agencies, and public authorities. Basically, their main activities consist of conducting internships and seminars. One of the training centers is the Regional Customs Operations Training Center of the International Customs Organization, which was opened with the assistance of USAID in Astana in 2009. It is through educational projects that political processing takes place, a specific attitude towards one's own power is laid. In the future, American soft power might be focused on the reconstruction of the states of the region in the political and public sphere. The media broadcast a positive image of the USA. Even in the humanitarian field, health-care programs have hidden goals, for example, birth control in poor countries.

In 2019, USAID, together with the US Council for International Research and Scientific Exchanges, opened their own media studio in Bishkek to help local broadcasting channels create high-quality content. This is far from the first American information project created to reduce Russian influence in the region and promote Western opinion. A media studio opened in Bishkek will translate American (and not only) TV series, films, and shows into Kyrgyz. Undoubtedly, media influence is also a soft power tool for broadcasting democratic values and attracting an audience to American ideals. IREX stated that it was no coincidence that they chose Kyrgyzstan, because this country will be the link for broadcasting films in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz Republic has the most liberal legislation regarding foreign non-profit organizations. Such a large-scale media project can distract the audience from the unstable political situation, high level of corruption and interethnic conflicts, which will play into the hands of the Kyrgyz government. This project is closely related to the 2018 USAID-funded project on the development of independent media in Central Asia. The description of the program says that the American authorities are concerned about the growing number of Russian programs in Central Asia and therefore allocate funds to improve the professionalism of local media and information literacy, which will help the population identify manipulations in the information environment. This program is a fairly effective means of combating Russian influence in the media sphere. At last year's conference, the General of the Central Command of the US Armed Forces, Joseph Votel, said that "Russia retains significant influence in Central Asia. This creates problems for us, as Russia's efforts may limit opportunities for interaction and provide Moscow with additional levers of influence."[[50]](#footnote-50) Here we can conclude that in the context of soft power, projects related to familiarizing the population with American TV programs, improving information literacy, and developing media independence are exactly the tools for solving the problems that the general spoke about.

Moscow has not reacted in any way to these projects and the obvious strengthening of American influence in the media sphere, guided by the fact that Russian influence is permanently entrenched in Central Asia due to cultural and historical ties. However, it is worth noting that in the last decade, Russian influence has been gradually weakening, especially on the younger generation. The programs for compatriots promoted by Rossotrudnichestvo are mainly aimed at the older generation. The embassies of the Russian Federation are not active in digital diplomacy. Even in the field of education, one can notice a tendency that, after completing their studies, Central Asian students do not plan to return to their homeland and become conduits of Russian influence, but strive to stay in Russia and continue their lives here[[51]](#footnote-51). The result is a steady decline in Russia's influence in the region. The Russian approach clearly loses out against the American one since the United States most actively uses soft power tools and focuses on the younger generation who will be able to influence their country in the future. Leading positions of power in Kyrgyzstan are occupied by people who have been trained in the West. They are gradually adjusting their foreign policy course and taking a consumer position in relations with Russia. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have created their own domestic broadcasting channels, limiting the access of Russian media to these states.

With such negative dynamics, after a while, Russia will completely lose its influence in the region. To avoid such a situation, it is necessary to pay attention to the younger generation - to promising young politicians who studied in Russia and to the leaders of NGOs. It is worth strengthening ties with the unofficial independent press, filling embassies with young personnel, arranging professional training and, in general, creating an entirely new system of young, motivated specialists. It is also necessary to revise programs aimed at compatriots and increase the number of branches of Russian universities in Central Asia. The closest attention should be paid to non-profit organizations. Russia should be ready to provide them with support and cooperation since they are the main instrument for shaping public sentiment. And the last thing is to carefully develop communication channels, launch joint projects, and give more opportunities to young journalists. Undoubtedly, these measures will require costs, but in the long term, they will clearly bear fruit.

As for the dissemination of the image of the United States, information about the country's humanitarian policy is actively disseminated by American organizations in Kazakhstan. Currently, the main funding is aimed at gaining access to the information channels of the republic and broadcasting its own American broadcasting facilities, as well as expanding the pro-Western base, which is indirectly able to influence the political course of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the media sector is quite limited and most of it is owned by the state, which complicates the work of American soft power tools in the country. Traditional media are controlled by the state, but with the advent of digital diplomacy, it has become easier for the United States to influence Kazakhstan. It was Washington that began actively financing this sector, promoting Internet freedom and the rejection of state censorship. In 2011, American diplomats criticized the Kazakh government after blocking websites in connection with terrorist threats, forcing the government to loosen its grip on digital diplomacy. At the moment, both embassies of the USA and Kazakhstan are obliged to maintain social networks, actively promoting cultural, educational, and social events of the countries[[52]](#footnote-52). The popularization of such American Internet resources as Google, Facebook, and websites for the promotion of American educational programs is also clearly noticeable. Nonetheless, American digital diplomacy is significantly inferior to Russian. In the post-Soviet space, the Russian social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki are more often used[[53]](#footnote-53). This may be explained by the novelty and underdevelopment of the local segment of the Internet. It should also be taken into account that a large audience of Facebook is entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and businessmen, which is not the dominant target audience of Kazakhstan.

The US government has created an Internet resource ‘Union of Youth Movements’, which aims to find young activists who are ready to resist corruption, bureaucracy, and the stagnant political regime of Kazakhstan. The site publishes small street actions in order to attract public attention to the political situation in the country. Social platforms are used to create events for IT specialists who come to Kazakhstan from the USA and are actively looking for talented specialists in order to offer them internships in the USA and participate in competitions that involve a ‘brain drain’ abroad.

It can be concluded that, firstly, the priorities of US soft power in Central Asia have shifted to support and financing of ‘new media’ in order to avoid state control by Kazakhstan. Secondly, Washington is actively allocating funds to expand the pro-Western social base in Kazakhstan by issuing grants, educational programs, and training courses (primarily these programs are aimed at young people). According to USAID, most of the Kazakh graduates educated in the United States return to their homeland and hold government posts.

American soft power in Tajikistan is mainly aimed at financing non-governmental organizations and the media through USAID. Cooperation takes place through such organizations as the Aga Khan Foundation (humanitarian aid), the Soros Foundation (press support), Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International (human rights monitoring), acting under the coordinating role of the US Embassy. In 2000, the Institute of Central Asia was opened, giving the younger generation the opportunity to study at the university and receive grants to American and European institutions. The American government is also concerned about infrastructure (but only in its own interests). For example, a bridge was built connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan for the development of trade.

USAID has been operating in Central Asia since the countries' independence. Basically, the mission is related to strengthening the sovereignty and independence of the region, maintaining stable relations between the countries and the United States, and also promoting respect for the fundamental rights of citizens. One of the priorities of the mission is the development and maintenance of trade and economic ties and the promotion of foreign investment. Other areas of cooperation include the fight against extremism and human trafficking, as well as the development of the energy sector and the maintenance of clean water resources.

The USAID official website contains a strategy for the development of regional cooperation with five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The strategy covers the years 2020-2025. Nevertheless, Afghanistan can also be included here since one of the goals is related to the development and strengthening of regional ties of the five countries with Afghanistan. Based on the official strategy, USAID is also aimed at the strategic priorities of the United States, namely, to expand women's rights in the economic sphere, thereby reducing gender inequality, as well as to increase the social involvement of young people. At the moment, it is possible to summarize the interim results of the strategy for 2020 and 2021.

Regarding the first goal of strengthening cooperation within the region and Afghanistan, we can highlight the following features:

1. Trade barriers have been reduced (simplification of border and customs agencies, the expansion of cross-border linkages between firms).

2. Improvement of regional modernization of energy (increase in private investment in clean energy, the creation of a separate regional energy market).

3. Global restructuring of the cooperation of water resources.

The second global goal is related to increasing the resilience of the Central Asian region to external and internal vulnerability. The countries began to cooperate more in the field of combating human trafficking, strengthened migration security, openly exchanged information and evidence, and improved the regional network against violent extremism. It is worth noting that the strategy is quite flexible and prone to change. For example, USAID recently included issues related to both the COVID-19 pandemic itself and its consequences on its agenda. The pandemic has already affected the reduction of financial flows to the Central Asian region, and the tightening of economic conditions has negatively affected the disadvantaged segments of the population.

The situation in the region worries the United States. More than 70 million people live in five countries. Despite the similar values, common history and connection with the Soviet Union, each country develops differently. Some countries have the necessary natural resources, but they have not been able to raise their own economies to a new level.

Also, during the analysis, the following conclusions and problems in this region can be identified. The Central Asian countries do not occupy priority places in the global economy, Kazakhstan is in the 25th place, and Turkmenistan is not included in the trade list at all. As a result, the region is not economically integrated because as it accounts for less than five percent of the total trade volume. This fact prevents the increase of foreign investments.

The mission also conducted a strategic study in which it found out that most migrants are exposed to direct or indirect exposure to violent extremism, both in real life and online. The United States is also concerned about the lack of influential regional institutions in this region, which they cannot fix. Nevertheless, USAID supports cooperation with other programs, such as the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation Organization (CAREC).

Earlier in the paper, the priority goal of USAID related to natural resources was mentioned. During the Soviet era, the countries of the region had a single water supply system and a hydropower system. The Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan supplied hydropower to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in the summer, and these countries, in turn, supplied electricity to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The situation changed after the collapse of the USSR, and the countries abandoned unified systems. Gradually, countries raised prices and exported energy to other regions of the world. The economies of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan suffered greatly, as their natural resources were not enough for electricity, and the budget was not designed for large imports. Currently, the USAID mission is aimed at creating effective management of water and energy resources since there is still no legal framework for management of transboundary water flows. All this is necessary to prevent natural disasters and environmental problems in the future.

The region's economic prospects have deteriorated significantly over the past two years due to the global pandemic. The problems include falling oil prices, the inability to move migrants, and a reduction in trade. The number of residents of this region with a standard of living below average and on the verge of poverty increased by 27%. According to migration services, there are between 2.7 and 4.2 million migrants from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in Russia. The inability of Central Asian countries to create good conditions for their jobs significantly reduces the domestic economy.

At the beginning of the crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that 2.7 to 4.2 million labor migrants from Central Asia were in Russia alone. Since the rate of job creation within the country does not keep pace with the rate of population growth, migrants use linguistic and cultural ties to find work outside their home country, mainly in Russia and Kazakhstan. Their remittances have helped to reduce the level of poverty. The goal of the USAID mission is to help countries overcome this leak, and thus reduce Russia's influence in this region.

Another goal of the USIAD mission is to help Central Asian countries integrate young people into the economy and development of their states. According to demographic data, more than 50% of young people under 25 live in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, the society of the Central Asian countries is quite conservative in the field of gender equality. Women are mainly engaged in the household and raising children, and their opportunities in the economic sphere are limited. They are paid less than their male counterparts. The labor market is characterized by a segregated approach.

Over the past decade, certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the policy of open space. The authorities are eliminating long-standing contradictions between the countries. For example, since 2016, the President of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyev, has been introducing a new policy vector called ‘good neighbor’[[54]](#footnote-54). The vector is aimed at building friendly relations and settling long-standing disputes (for example, removing barriers to cross-border flows and withdrawing objections to the construction of a dam on the border with Tajikistan). With the help of the United States, the President of Uzbekistan plans to build an educational center and invite Afghan students there. The strategic interest of the United States is to establish relations between the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan. It is already possible to note some successes in this area. Thanks to bilateral agreements, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have power transmission lines to Afghanistan and Pakistan (CASA - 100 project).

In addition to USAID, it is worth noting the activities of the National Endowment for Democracy, which allocates resources to support the media[[55]](#footnote-55). Up to half a million dollars a year is allocated annually for the operation of pro-Western and non-state broadcasting channels, for example, Youth of the XXI Century and the Human Rights Center. Despite the fact that the Tajik government is actively looking for methods to combat the suppression of opposition sentiments among foreign organizations, American programs related to the Internet, education, media, and civil society institutions can still indirectly influence the mood of the population. Since 1996, USAID has promoted the development of Internet resources in Tajikistan by sending equipment and training employees. Without such financial and technical assistance, it would be impossible to create an Internet space in the country. Nowadays, electronic media are given a priority place. Access to the network in the republic was first established in 1995 by the Agency for the Development of Central Asia. American broadcasting information services also conduct their work on the Internet. The number of new users of Google and Facebook is growing (Tajikistan is one of the leading states in Central Asia in terms of Internet connection dynamics). More than 80% of the country's population is connected to the mobile Internet. Undoubtedly, the government of Tajikistan is concerned about the uncontrolled expansion of the Internet and Western platforms. For example, in 2011, the Tajik leadership attempted to control the access of the population to the World Wide Web by connecting to the unified state operator Tajiktelecom. But at the moment, this assumption has been postponed due to the inability to implement it from a technical and financial point of view. In 2012, the authorities restricted access to Facebook in connection with negative statements addressed to the authorities.

Experts from the United States even took part in the development of Tajik legislation on the media at the end of the XXI century. With their help, the National Association of Independent Media was established to monitor the protection of the rights of freedom of speech of journalists. Since 1995, USAID has been financing Tajik information holdings (for example, Asia-Plus), and several US non-governmental organizations are currently negotiating the creation of radio stations on the territory of Tajikistan. Since 2010, the US Embassy has been cooperating with non-state newspaper publications so that they are published freely and journalists have freedom of speech. This private cooperative was created to counter the state monopoly in the media. Moreover, it should be noted that education is not a priority tool for using American soft power in Tajikistan. Every year, only about 170 students leave for the United States to get an education. On the territory of Tajikistan, the United States finances such programs as Fulbright, TEA, and UGRAD.

Thus, it can be concluded that Tajik non-governmental organizations are funded by the United States to a lesser extent than in the Central Asian region, mainly because the emphasis is on the local information field, which can be used to inflame public sentiment against the state.

The opportunity to strengthen its influence in Turkmenistan has been realized by the United States to a lesser extent. The prospects of the region for the American government include the promotion of its infrastructure projects to the detriment of Chinese, Iranian, and Russian ones. Since 1991, the implementation of soft power tools has cost the United States $400 million.

At the current stage of relations, it is impossible to talk about warm and friendly ties. Turkmenistan is interested in economic cooperation, the purchase of high-quality products, and American support for Trans-Caspian gas pipeline projects[[56]](#footnote-56). The United States is trying to weaken Turkmenistan's ties with Iran, China, and Russia and to establish supplies of goods and resources in Afghanistan.

The main instrument of soft policy is the sphere of education. Training courses, internships abroad, and cultural and student exchanges are implemented under USAID funding. Every year, USAID allocates more than $6 million for the development of education. USAID's activities in Turkmenistan can be divided into three areas:

1. Promoting the economic development of the country. This includes the financing of economic and financial disciplines of bank employees on the basis of universities, a smooth transition to international financial reporting standards and conducting business programs for young professionals. USAID also created the Regional Energy Security Program in 2010, aimed at developing the local energy market and training specialists in this field. The program is valid not only for the post-Soviet space and Afghanistan.

2. Assistance in the field of education and health. The programs of this direction include trainings of citizens in risk groups, training of medical staff. The program ‘Youth Centers’ was developed in several cities in Turkmenistan to conduct English classes, computer courses, and so on. The target audience of the program is young people aged 15-25.

3. Development of democratic processes and institutions. The programs are designed to improve the efficiency of the authorities, housing and communal services consultations and information support are carried out.

The US Embassy in Turkmenistan also introduces residents to humanitarian activities. Information about educational programs, cultural, and student times is transmitted through the website and the embassy building itself. According to the American Embassy, more than a thousand residents of Turkmenistan visit the counseling center every month.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the government of Tajikistan is concerned about the active growth and influence of NGOs on public consciousness. Therefore, the law ‘Public Associations’ is in force in the country, which reduced the number of non-governmental foreign organizations from 400 to 99. In 2009, the head of Turkmenistan banned the American NGO Counterpart Consortium from conducting its activities on Turkmen territory, accusing it of anti-state activities. In the same year, the authorities refused to release Turkmen students to study at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, where they studied under the previously very popular ‘American Councils’ program in the country. From 2004 to 2011, President S. Niyazov issued a decree that foreign diplomas would not be quoted on the territory of Turkmenistan.

Despite the active activity of American non-governmental organizations in the country, this is not enough. Half of the organization is located in large cities, although most of the population is concentrated in rural areas. NGO leaders are subcontractors of USAID, which is why corruption is developing in the country. Soft power can be developed only through education, since other tools for its implementation are not available. There is no free journalism in the country, so the mechanism of mass media is simply not available to the United States. Turkmenistan also lags behind other Central Asian countries in terms of Internet usage. Citizens are noted for their low Internet speed and high subscription fees. Many American Internet platforms, such as YouTube and Google, have been blocked in the country since 2009. The country's only Internet provider, Turkmentelecom, is controlled by the state.

Since the 2010s, American-Uzbek relations have warmed up. The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the countries was unfrozen. The main interest of Americans in Uzbekistan is its transportation infrastructure in Afghanistan, as well as the realization of energy and communication potential. USAID also operates in Uzbekistan, mainly in the field of education. USAID programs provide for cooperation with ministries, government and other organizations, commercial enterprises, and communities in the following areas: improving legislation, creating new jobs, increasing household incomes, improving professional knowledge, and resource management. Since the 90s, USAID has also been helping the government in the medical field in rural areas, water purification and vaccination. However, USAID funding to Uzbekistan is much less than to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. USAID funds programs to reduce the spread of infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis) among high-risk populations. It is also worth noting the role of the NDI in Uzbekistan, as it cooperates with international organizations, NGOs, research centers such as the Institute for the Study of Civil Society, as well as with political parties[[57]](#footnote-57).

For the United States, Kyrgyzstan is not of great importance and American soft power functions there only to maintain its dominance in the world and in contrast to the influence of Russia. Soft power is based on cultural values, educational programs, and the careful work of NGOs. Unlike Russian soft power, the target audience of American soft power is the younger generation. On the territory of Kyrgyzstan, there are American funds that finance talented and ambitious Kyrgyz people, who in the future will be able to become the basis of an opposition to an established government. In order to develop democracy in Kyrgyzstan, organizations such as the Eurasia Foundation, the Peace Corps, and the International Republican Institute of the USA are functioning. Previously, the US National Democratic Institute provided support to opposition parties in Kyrgyzstan.

The field of education plays an equally important role. In 1997, the American University of Central Asia opened in the capital, completely replicating the American model of education. The university became the first university in Central Asia to offer partner study programs at American universities.

## 3.3. American challenges

Nevertheless, geographical remoteness and American ideology have repeatedly become a stumbling block between the relations of the Central Asian countries and the United States.

Unlike the United States, Russia has much more advantages to promote its soft power. It has the most influence on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the cultural influence on Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is quite organic. After the civil war of the 1990s, there was de-russification in Tajikistan and the need for culture and knowledge of the language waned. As for the US influence in Tajikistan, it should be noted that due to the criticism of the Tajik authorities, the number of joint projects is significantly reduced. The greatest influence of soft power through the tool of education is seen in Kyrgyzstan, and the least in Kazakhstan. On the territory of Central Asia, the USA has many foundations and two universities, with the help of which it promotes democratic values. In the education market, the struggle is not only between the two superpowers, but also between China, Turkey and Iran, which also use soft power tools in the context of education, which only exacerbates competition.

American soft power in Kyrgyzstan has its weaknesses. What is meant here is the lack of geographical and cultural prerequisites for creating a good ideological base that would satisfy the United States. The influence of India, Turkey and China is growing in the Central Asian region, which have a high chance of displacing American soft power in all indicators. The USA and Russia are in conflict in ways of ensuring peace and democratic development of the Central Asian countries. The USA imposes its own vision of democracy and implements its experience without taking into account local mentality and customs, working with the younger generations and the opposition. Russia builds its foreign policy in the region based on common interests. In this vision for the region, the positions of China and Russia coincide, which is undoubtedly not an advantage for the United States. These factors may complicate the successful conduct of the policy of American soft power in Central Asia.

In Central Asia, there is an American radio broadcast, ‘Voice of America’, which covers the events taking place in the region as well as broadcasts the American position. ‘Voice of America’ is funded by the US Congress and is part of the US agency. The press is independent, and any interference by the government is prohibited. In some Central Asian countries, ‘Voice of America’ is faced with the government's unwillingness to broadcast world events from an American point of view, since the main message of the broadcasting channel is to give people the opportunity to learn something about the world, even if they are deprived of such an opportunity.

After the Second World War, it was decided to broadcast in Central Asia in Uzbek because Uzbekistan was the country with the largest population and Radio Liberty was already operating in the region in Turkmen, Kazakh, Tajik, and Kyrgyz languages. As mentioned earlier, there are no independent media outlets in Uzbekistan, and all broadcasting is subject to strict censorship by the government. Non-governmental organizations and foreign broadcasters tried to somehow ease the restrictions in Uzbekistan, but their efforts were in vain. ‘Voice of America’ is constantly being criticized and accused by the government of imposing its point of view on international problems.

At the moment, daily and weekly broadcasts are broadcast only on one radio frequency, 103 FM, where ‘Voice of America’ answers questions from young Uzbeks about admission to US universities and job searches, as well as highlights the problems of corruption and human rights violations in Uzbekistan. For several decades, ‘Voice of America’ has been fighting for survival in Central Asia, trying to bring news to a population deprived of the opportunity to hear a different non-governmental point of view.

# CHAPTER 4. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN AND US SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA

In the eyes of the Russian government, since the 2000s, American soft power has been propagandistic in nature, which has contributed to fomenting ‘color revolutions’ in the region. American foundations and programs operating in Central Asia received particular criticism. In turn, ‘since the beginning of the 21st century, they have been closely following the development of the Russian information space, namely the creation of Russia Today. The competition of soft forces in the region is growing, and the outcome of the rivalry has not yet been determined’.

It is worth noting that after the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, the Kremlin began to pursue a hybrid policy of soft and hard power in the Central Asian region. Through such a federal channel as Eurasia, Russia broadcasts its vision of the current world situation to Kazakhstan. Within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, Kazakhstan is perceived as a renter of the Russian point of view. The EAEU can currently be considered an additional institution of soft power, since events dedicated to the problems and prospects of the union are held monthly at Kazakh and Russian universities in order to improve the perception of young people about the organization. In addition, conferences, summer schools, and special courses on Eurasian integration, diplomacy, and relations between Russia and Central Asian countries are held in higher educational institutions. In Kazakhstan, Russia has a huge influence on the population through the Russian media space, namely television, radio broadcasting, and social networking.

The problem with Russian soft power lies in the initial incorrect use of the concept. The creator of the term ‘soft power;, Joseph Nye, has repeatedly criticized Russia for the fact that the success of the model was due to the emphasis on civil society, and not on state efforts. After the Ukrainian crisis, Ney stressed that the information conveyed by the Russian media borders on propaganda, which is a counterproductive tool of soft power. Despite the rich historical and cultural heritage, Russia's reputation in the eyes of other countries is falling, and with it the attractiveness of the country is falling.

The Russian soft power in Central Asia is mainly based on the already existing foundation: the spread of language, cultural, and historical heritage. Nevertheless, Russia does not have a clear strategy of its own to achieve geopolitical goals and improve its image abroad, since when soft power fails, Russia most often uses hard power. One can notice a significant difference between the American soft power described by Joseph Nye and the Russian concept created in opposition to the United States. Nye argued that soft power should be based on culture, international norms, the involvement of the country, and not the imposition of one's political opinion. Nevertheless, every crisis occurring in Russia affects Kazakhstan in one way or another. Unlike American soft power, the Russian one leads in education but lags far behind in the digital aspect.

At the moment, the results of Russian soft power in Central Asia are unclear since it was originally created to deter the United States. The Russian language has lost its importance in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and is likely to lose the status of lingua franca in Kazakhstan. The new government of Kazakhstan is trying to keep its distance from Russia in the information space and broadcast its own point of view to the population.

Despite the privileged position of the Russian language in Central Asia, there are negative trends in reducing its use. In Kazakhstan, the emphasis is on learning English and Chinese, and the Kazakh government is proud to note the growth of the use of the Kazakh language in international projects. By decree of the former President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, Russian is studied from the second grade in the school curriculum, while English is studied from the first. Tajikistan has adopted a number of laws aimed at reducing the use of the Russian language. The attractiveness of Russian education in Central Asia is clearly inferior not only to the United States, but also to China and Turkey. Russian education is considered classical and traditional, which does not attract young people. American education in Kyrgyzstan, on the contrary, is famous for its popularity since the American University of Central Asia teaches according to the latest methods, holds conferences and round tables, which are actively covered by the press.

The number of American resource centers engaged in the promotion of education, language, science and culture exceeds the Russian ones in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Soft power should be targeted at broad segments of the population rather than focusing on one generation. For the successful implementation of soft power, Russia should concentrate its influence on the younger generation, form a stable and attractive system of Eurasianism, raise educational programs to a qualitative level, involve analytical centers, and expand the activities of non-governmental organizations[[58]](#footnote-58).

Since 2019, the United States has been actively using the media as an instrument of influence in the Central Asian region. The task of the independent media is to create information independence in the region and reduce the broadcasting of Russian opinion on important political issues. USAID has developed the concept of the Central Asian Design Hub studio, which will translate American films, cartoons, and TV series into Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Tajik languages. The studio itself is located in Kyrgyzstan, as it is the only country in Central Asia with liberal legislation regarding foreign non-commercial organizations. In addition, the country is known for its unstable political situation, so the authorities willingly allowed Americans to distract residents with entertainment content. The main goal of the program is to combat Russian actions in the media. Russia is considered the main obstacle for the United States in the Central Asian region since the Russian Federation prevents the free receipt of raw materials and transit corridors. Unfortunately, Moscow has not reacted in any way to the strengthening of the American presence in the media sphere. It can be assumed that Russia mistakenly assumes that the Soviet cultural and historical background is enough to ensure the country's unshakable influence on Central Asia. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about the youth who have read about the USSR only in textbooks, do not know the Russian language and are not familiar with culture[[59]](#footnote-59).

Russia's soft power is clearly losing its position in the sphere of influence in the Central Asian region. Russian education is declining. Russian education is not leading in terms of indicators, Rossotrudnichestvo programs are mainly focused on the older generation[[60]](#footnote-60). The Russian Foreign Ministry and other soft power institutions are not active enough in the field of digital diplomacy, let alone Russian embassies in other countries. The result of such inaction is a steady decline in the influence of the Russian Federation in the region, since Russian soft power is clearly losing to the American one, which actively involves the younger generation. Kyrgyz officials mostly graduate from Western universities, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have completely restricted access to Russian media and created internal media markets to protect the population from broadcasting Russian opinion. With such negative dynamics, the Central Asian region may soon be lost to Russia.

As for resource centers, a comparative analysis can be carried out. There are 22 American centers in Kazakhstan (Embassy in Astana, 11 American corners, 5 centers of education in the USA, Kazakh-American University of Almaty) and 36 Russian centers (Embassy in Astana, Consulate General, RCSC, 3 Russian centers, representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo, etc.). This is the only Central Asian country where there are more Russian resource centers. Comparative data is presented in the table below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **States** | **US resource centers** | **Russian resource centers** |
| Kyrgyzstan | 15 resource centers: Embassy in Bishkek, 5 American corners (Karakol, Kant, Talas, Jalal-Abad, Batken), 4 EducationUSA centers (Bishkek, Karakol, Naryn, Osh), offices of American Councils and IREX in Bishkek, Peace Corps, American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, and International University of Central Asia in Tokmok | 7 resource centers: Embassy in Bishkek, Consulate General in Osh, Rossotrudnichestvo representative office, 3 ‘Russian Centers’ (Bishkek, Kant, Osh), Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University in Bishkek |
| Tajikistan | 9 resource centers: Embassy in Dushanbe, 5 American corners (Dushanbe, Khujand, Khorog, Kulyab, Kurgan-Tube), 2 EducationUSA centers (Dushanbe, Khujand), the center of American Councils and IREX in Dushanbe | 7 resource centers: Embassy in Dushanbe, Consulate General in Khujand, representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo, 3 ‘Russian centers’, Tajik-Russian Slavic University in Dushanbe |
| Turkmenistan | 5 resource centers: Embassy, American Center in Ashgabat, 3 American corners, which include EducationUSA, IREX and American Councils (Turkmenabat, Dashoguz, Mary) | 3 resource centers: Embassy, representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo, a branch of Gubkin Russian State Technical University |
| Uzbekistan | 1 resource center: EducationUSA, the information and resource center at the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent | 2 resource centers: Embassy, Russian Center of Science and Culture in Tashkent |

It is worth noting that the United States actively uses digital resources. Every American embassy in Central Asia has a profile on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. This allows public diplomacy to be carried out at a completely different level. Russia's successes in the field of digital diplomacy are much more modest. Such a ratio of resource centers can be an indicator of countries' interest in strengthening their positions in the region. The US resource centers are superior to the Russian ones since they are concentrated not only in the capital cities but also in the regions of the countries. American soft power is also focused on network structures, relying on the younger generation, graduates of educational programs.

Kazakhstan is loyal to the Russian and American presence in the country, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan seek to protect their information space from both sides. The Internet is controlled by the state, access to analytical sites is closed.

At the moment, proposals are being discussed to improve the competitiveness of Russian soft power, namely, the expansion of humanitarian and educational cooperation through regional organizations, support for Russian language programs, and the inclusion of NGOs as soft power actors. The Russian side should think over their image of the country and a number of associations. The value-ideological component of Russian diplomacy is blurred. Russia's soft influence has a residual character and is gradually weakening.

Nevertheless, Russian soft power can regain its leadership position. To do this, it is necessary to attract as many promising young politicians, scientists, and teachers to the Central Asian countries as possible. NGOs should be involved and not be afraid to enter into a dialogue with independent media. It is also advisable to use the resources of digital diplomacy to inform the population of other countries about the events taking place in embassies. It is also possible to revise Rossotrudnichestvo programs and create more information, cultural, and educational projects between the Russian and Central Asian sides. The system of granting grants for free education in Russia should be expanded. USAID spends most of its funds on the educational sphere. Most of the foreign graduates of the Fulbright program noted that they began to understand the United States and American culture better and shared their experience gained abroad with their compatriots. The Russian government should place special emphasis on education, since it is not only the transfer of knowledge but also the formation of a certain worldview that reflects the social, economic, and political way of life. Of course, such work to improve soft power tools is costly and takes a lot of time to implement. But soft power is also focused on long-term influence and interaction between countries, which will undoubtedly bear fruit.

# CONCLUSION

The world is changing, and with it the approaches to understanding power in international relations are changing. Previously, the concept of ‘power’ meant the economic and military might of the state, but now the concept of ‘soft power’ is becoming more and more popular. The author of the term ‘soft power’, Joseph Nye, considers this direction of foreign policy as a force based on the attractiveness of the culture, values, and national characteristics of a country. Many leading countries in the world consider soft power an extremely important direction to study.

The export of cultural products and the reputation of a country's education play a significant role in increasing the prestige of countries. Currently, the role of hard power is not decreasing, but it has become much easier to use soft power in a country's foreign policy if the state has sufficient military power.

The priority areas of soft power policy include the English language, science and innovation, culture, art, sports, education, international development, and the media.

Russian scientists and politicians pay special attention to the destructive nature of Joseph Nye's concept. Bright examples are the article V.Putin's ‘Russia and the Changing World’ and the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation in 2013.

The term ‘soft power’ was first mentioned by Sergey Lavrov and Dmitry Medvedev in 2008-2009. In 2013, the concept of soft power gained legal status: it was included in the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. The government of the Russian Federation has chosen an institutional approach to the use of soft power tools in foreign policy. A number of institutions have been created, the purpose of which is to coordinate the use of soft power tools. The main institution of Russian soft power has become Rossotrudnichestvo - the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation. The agency is engaged in the interaction of a network of Russian centers of science and culture, attracting foreign students to Russian universities, strengthening the common humanitarian space of the CIS, and developing Eurasian integration. Russian World, the Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots, which are engaged in the dissemination and popularization of the Russian language and culture, support of compatriots living abroad, assistance in the dissemination of objective information about modern Russia, support of the export of Russian educational services, have been created. Nevertheless, in the Central Asian region, Russia is inferior in terms of digital diplomacy, Russian education is losing leadership positions, and interest in the Russian language and culture is weakening. The success of Russian soft power in the future will depend on the implementation of an attractive socio-economic model within the country. After all, only the successful development of the country will make it attractive in the eyes of the international community.

The soft power of the United States occupies a leading place in the ratings of its measurement. Unlike Russia, the country has huge intangible resources: the image and cultural power of TNCs, NGOs, mass culture, and foreign policy ideology (popularized by public diplomacy). One of the main institutions of the American government implementing foreign cultural policy is considered to be the Bureau of Education and Culture. Unofficial institutions of the USA are: Hollywood cinema, American television, radio, social networks, show business, pop culture. The development of the Internet and Internet technologies was the reason for the emergence of digital diplomacy. In the field of information and communication technologies, the USA is the undisputed leader in the world, but in the Central Asian region, the USA is still fighting the Russian monopoly. American education is more appreciated in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The United States also seeks to gain a foothold in the educational market of Central Asian countries through the creation of a number of universities (Kazakh-American University in Almaty and American University in Central Asia, located in Bishkek). In addition to American universities, there are numerous USAID funds in the region that distribute American grants, as well as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Thanks to the expanded educational tool, the United States can broadcast its vision of the world, as well as democratic values.

The comparison of Russian and American foreign policies with the use of soft power mechanisms as a counterweight and opposites within the framework of morality was subjected to the greatest analysis. The differences were based on dissimilar ideological principles in important regions of the world.

Nevertheless, aspects of the American policy of soft power can serve as an example for Russian diplomacy. Russia should implement the concept of its own soft power, the methods of which do not contradict the harmonious foreign policy of the state.

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