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THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE ‘ANTI-HEGEMON’ MEDIA NETWORKS BROADCASTING IN SPANISH

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ABSTRACT:

THIS PAPER EXPLORES HOW REVISIONIST AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS USE GLOBAL BROADCASTING NEWS CHANNELS TO COUNTER THE SO-CALLED WESTERN HEGEMONY NARRATIVE. IT FOCUSES ON HOW AND WHY THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD WAS TARGETED BY INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS FOUNDED BY AUTOCRATIC AND REVISIONIST GOVERNMENTS AND HOW THE WAR WAGED BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST UKRAINE IS PRESENTED IN THREE SO-CALLED ‘ANTI-HEGEMONY’ MEDIA NETWORKS: CHINA GLOBAL TELEVISION NETWORK EN ESPAÑOL (CGTN), TELESUR AND HISPAN TV. BY USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS SUCH AS CONTENT ANALYSIS AND CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF NEWS COVERING THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE PRESENTED BY TELESUR, HISPAN TV AND CGTN IN SPANISH SINCE 24 FEBRUARY 2022, THIS PAPER ARGUES THAT ALL THREE MEDIA CHANNELS PROMOTE IN DIFFERENT SHADES A KREMLIN-BASED NARRATIVE. THE ARTICLE FURTHER DEBATES THE PROFOUND FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THIS TACIT MEDIA ALLIANCE AND SUPPORTS THE CONCLUSION THAT THE CURRENT WAR WAGED BY RUSSIA IN UKRAINE IS USED IN DIFFERENT WAYS BY REVISIONIST AND ASSERTIVE GOVERNMENTS TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN REVISIONIST AGENDAS BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND ABROAD.

KEY WORDS: ANTI-HEGEMON MEDIA OUTLETS, PROPAGANDA, SPANISH SPEAKING POPULATION, WAR WAGED BY RUSSIA IN UKRAINE, REVISIONISM.

INTRODUCTION

The media have always been important for governments all around the world, not just for their role in delivering news to a broader audience, but also because of their latent political significance and subsequent instrumentalization for political gain. In his book about public diplomacy, Nicholas Cull highlights the importance of international broadcasting in global politics, as it represents a tool to engage with foreign audience “by presenting (or claiming to present) an objective picture of the world” [1]. The media are also instrumental in order to “maintain active consent and to allow the ruling elites to wield uncontested power” [2].

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The way news is delivered to citizens has changed tremendously in the last decades because of technological developments. Many TV channels have considerably expanded their reach at regional and global level. However, the editorial content and the way they present the news differs from channel to channel.

If, after the Cold War Anglophone channels like the CNN and the BBC may have dominated the global information arena[3], in more recent years broadcasting has been gradually used as a soft power tool also by autocratic governments seeking to oppose the so-called Western hegemonic narrative and deliver to the general public their own narrative of a multipolar world.

The counter-hegemony concept used in relation to these new state-founded international broadcasting media channels is not without criticism or added value questioning in the dedicated literature. When studying international broadcasting, scholars found mixed evidence for counter-hegemony and multiple dimensions such as deviation from ideological norms, coverage of the under-covered, non-elite sourcing [4], etc. Although the concept has its limitations, it is frequently used as an umbrella term that gathers the general description of editorial policies of all these media channels founded by autocratic governments around the world. In general, the term anti-hegemonic news channel refers to media outlets that challenge or provide alternative perspectives to dominant narratives, particularly those influenced by major global powers.

This paper aims to contribute to the still underdeveloped field of research on the implications of the weaponization of anti-hegemonic international broadcasters by revisionist governments around the world. This paper explores how and why the Spanish-speaking world was targeted by international broadcasters founded by autocratic and revisionist governments and how the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine is presented in three so-called ‘anti-hegemonic’ media networks: China Global Television Network en Español (CGTN), TeleSur and Hispan TV.

The first hypothesis is that revisionist and autocratic governments have a greater interest in broadcasting their propagandistic views of international events in Spanish than in other languages.

The second hypothesis is that when presenting the war in Ukraine, CGTN, TeleSur and Hispan TV follow a common narrative, rooted in the Russian official positions.

The last hypothesis is that the way the war in Ukraine is presented by the so-called ‘anti-hegemonic’ media networks serves autocratic presidents such as the Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to support their revisionist and anti-Western agendas and propaganda narratives.

In exploring these hypotheses, the paper briefly analyses the timing of when the government-sponsored media outlets of revisionist powers started broadcasting in Spanish, how these Spanish-broadcasting outlets work, how they presented the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and the implications of the narratives promoted by the presidents/ruling elites of these countries.

TARGETING THE SPANISH SPEAKING WORLD AS A TOOL FOR ADVANCING THE REVISIONIST AGENDA

The emergence of the so-called ‘anti-hegemonic’ media networks sponsored by autocratic governments has implications for the field of international relations and foreign policy. While the establishment of these TV stations is undoubtedly linked with the field of

communication sciences, their purpose exceeds this realm and develops in connection with IR concepts such as imperialism and revisionism.

The concept of revisionism—and its opposite, support of the status quo—is a topical concept in the field of International Relations and Future Studies. According to Cooley, Nexon and Ward, “the degree to which rising powers adopt status-quo or revisionist orientations helps explain whether or not international systems experience generalized, great-powers wars” [5] The exploration of revisionism as a concept is a vast exercise and engaging in such an exercise exceeds the scope of this paper. In this article, I adhere to the general understanding of revisionism as “referring to some sort of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the world”, where an absolute revisionist seeks change at any cost [6].

According to Dubik and Vincent, Russia, China and Iran are the major revisionist powers [7], the main challengers to US dominance throughout the world. The literature shows how these countries are joined by other autocratic countries or dictatorships like Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Sudan, Zimbabwe etc.[8] in their endeavour to change the status quo.

Since the early 2000s, Iran, China and Russia together with other like-minded countries, e.g. Venezuela and Cuba, started focusing, in their effort to oppose Western supremacy and Western narratives, on the establishment of media outlets in order to promote the interests and views of their governments at a regional and global level. For these non-Spanish speaking countries like Russia, China or Iran, broadcasting in Spanish was one of the first choices, after English, long before German or French [9].

Although the choice of prioritising the Spanish language may not seem rational at first because of the geographical distances and the absence of strong cultural or historical ties between the three above-mentioned revisionist powers, on the one side, and the Spanish-speaking countries, on the other, prioritising broadcasting in Spanish was a strategic choice to expand their influence globally and subsequently to try to weaken U.S. influence.

As of 2023, Spanish is the second most spoken language by number of native speakers and about 488 million people speak Spanish around the world [10]. Moreover, the Spanish-speaking populations are located in strategic positions that support anti-U.S. revisionist agenda: in the geographic proximity of the U.S., inside the U.S. and inside the EU – the United States’ foremost strategic partner in promoting peace and democratic values around the world.

The Spanish-speaking peoples are mostly located in Latin America, which geographically is in the ‘backyard’ of the U.S., and where the influence of the U.S. goes back to the fifth U.S. President, James Monroe [11]. Although still developing, with a GDP per capita of 8,300\$ for Latin America & Caribbean, according to World Bank data from 2021[12], this region has an increased global economic significance. One of the possible explanations is resource-based such as the fact that Venezuela has the largest oil reserve in the world [13]. Both Russia and Iran have increased their involvement in the Venezuelan oil-producing sector and have boosted their energy cooperation in the context of U.S. and EU sanctions. For a long period, Russian oil company Rosneft had been one of the biggest economic aids of Venezuela’s authoritarian leader, Nicolas Maduro, accounting for up to two-thirds of the country’s oil trade[14]. In June 2022, Iran and Venezuela signed a 20-year cooperation plan that includes cooperation in the oil sector, repairs of Venezuelan refineries, and petrochemicals [15].

In addition, an important reason for broadcasting in Spanish is the growing number of Spanish speakers in the U.S. and globally. According to 2020 U.S. census data, there are 62.1 million Hispanics living in the United States. This group represents 18.9 percent of the total

U.S. population, the nation's second largest ethnic group after non-Hispanic whites [16] and a plurality of the population in key states such as California, Texas and Florida.

This region of the world is also important militarily and intelligence-gathering wise for the potential establishment of military bases, deployment of troops, military presence in U.S. proximity (as already happened before, in Cuba, during the Cold War), hybrid activity and espionage operations. General Glen D. VanHerck, commander of U.S. NORTHCOM and NORAD, testified in 2022 before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that the largest foreign contingent of Russian military intelligence (GRU) officers is currently stationed in Mexico [17]. Russia has constructed GLONASS (the Soviet/Russian global navigation satellite system, similar to the American GPS and Chinese Beidou) signal boosting and tracking bases in Brazil, Nicaragua and based on the existing reports about negotiations between Russia and Cuba, whose outcome are not yet public, most probably one base will be located in Cuba as well [18].

Another relevant aspect is arms sales. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), four Latin American countries have received weapons transfers from Russia since 2014: Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela [19]. According to the testimony of Professor Kimberley Marten in the U.S. House of Representatives, in 2019, Cuba received a \$50 million loan from Russia for Russian weapons purchases [20].

An additional important factor that sheds light on the need to prioritise broadcasting in Spanish is multilateral cooperation at UN level. Russia's partners in Latin America, e.g. Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua have either opposed or at least abstained on important UN resolutions condemning Russia [21].

The above-mentioned arguments may explain the choice of designing TV news channels sponsored by the said revisionist powers to broadcast in Spanish and provide coverage of international news events from a perspective that is aligned with their respective geopolitical interests.

CGTN - CHINA GLOBAL TELEVISION NETWORK EN ESPANOL

China Global Television Network en Español was launched in 2004 as an alternative media discourse platform with the purpose of making Beijing's official voice understood in Spanish speaking countries and improving the country's image overseas. This top-down, soft power initiative derives from China's outward looking paradigm proposed in October 2000 at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, a policy shift in the cultural and economic fields in support of foreign Chinese investment [22]. As part of its activity in Latin America, CGTN launched in 2016 a cultural news bulletin called 'Prisma' in co-production with TeleSur designed as a cultural exchange between China and Latin America, although at a closer look it becomes clearer that this is not a non-political program, but one that has hidden ideological and propaganda content [23].

HISPAN TV

Hispan TV is Iran's first Spanish-language news channel, which at its launch in 2011 was available both in the Americas and in Europe. Meanwhile, Hispan TV was banned by the Spanish government [24]. Hispan TV, a 'counter-hegemonic channel', financed entirely by the Iranian government and based in Teheran is a new example of Iran's effort to counter mainstream Western narratives of world events while building a bridge between Iran and the peoples of Latin America [25]. At the inauguration ceremony of the channel, in Teheran, representatives of Latin American countries and allies of Iran in the region, such as Cuba and Venezuela, were present [26]. In 2013, due to the broadcasting of anti-Semitic and anti-

Zionistic propaganda and for many other human rights implications, Spain revoked the licence of Hispan TV [27]. Nonetheless, in Latin America, Hispan TV seems to thrive, having an active partnership with the Venezuelan channel TeleSur, as the relations between the two countries are growing stronger [28]. According an article published by Radio Farda that is citing the expert on Latin America and Iran at the Center for a Secure Free Society, Joseph Humire, HispanTV's broadcasting targets indigenous communities as well, which in countries like Peru and Ecuador represent about 10 percent of the population [29].

RUSSIA TODAY (RT) EN ESPANOL

RussiaToday is a Russian state-controlled media network founded in 2005 as a tool for influencing international audiences, including by spreading disinformation. The network's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan openly admitted that the scope of RT was waging an information war against the West and likened RT to the activities of the Russian Ministry of Defence [30].

RT's broadcasts in Spanish started in December 2009. Spanish was the third language choice of the network after English and Arabic, coming many years before promoting the German and French versions [31]. The Spanish version of RT has concluded partnerships with more than 70 local or national TV stations that fill their spaces with content created by RT, including in Venezuela and Cuba [32]. This channel is popular on Facebook (over 18 million followers), Twitter (over 3 million), and YouTube (over 5 million subscribers). The web analysis presented by the Centre for Democratic Integrity shows that half of the traffic of RT in Spanish comes from Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia and more than 11% from Spain [33].

According to the publication of the Centre for Democratic Integrity, Spanish RT targets mostly a left-wing audience, the so-called "Bolivarians". The New York Times cited a U.S. State Department Report showing how RT en Español is helping N. Maduro by creating content that is shared on Twitter by trolls spreading disinformation against the representatives of 12 countries that first met in 2017 in Lima to establish a peaceful resolution to the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, called 'The Lima Group' [34].

TELESUR

TeleSur is a multi-state sponsored Latin American terrestrial and satellite television network [35]. TeleSur, based in Caracas, launched in July 2005 at the request of the then president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez, and was the first government-founded news channel based in Latin America with a broader regional agenda [36]. TeleSur is sponsored not only by the Venezuelan government (which contributed with an initial investment of 51% of the budget [37]), but also by Uruguay and Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Boliva [38]. Until 2016, Argentina also contributed financially to the channel, however this contribution ceased with the election of a new right wing, pro-corporate government [39].

As Hispan TV and the aforementioned channels, TeleSur also rather misleadingly described itself as an independent news channel offering balanced coverage of Latin America and international news with a focus on Latin America's diversity [40]. Nonetheless, its ideological purpose was highlighted by Andres Izarra, (at that time TeleSur's president and Venezuela's minister of communications), who said the following at the start of the channel's transmission: "We launch TeleSur with a clear goal to break this communication regime and present a vision, a voice which until now has been silenced. TeleSur is an initiative against cultural imperialism" [41].

TeleSur, Hispan TV, RT and CGTN in Spanish are all state-funded or state-controlled news outlets. This means that their operations and editorial policies are influenced, to varying degrees, by their respective governments.

All these outlets have been criticized by various media watchdog groups for their editorial policies, including allegations of biased reporting, selective coverage of news events, intertwining truth with lies and suppression of dissenting voices [42]. This stands out especially in their disguising of ideological messages through standard content. The news programmes appear informative at the first, while the disinformation campaigns and ideological bias are progressively unfolded.

Despite this criticism, these outlets have gained a significant in different parts of the world, particularly among audiences sceptical of mainstream Western media outlets and seeking alternative perspectives on global events.

DEPICTION OF THE WAR OF AGGRESSION WAGED BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST UKRAINE IN THE ‘ANTI-HEGEMONIC’ SPANISH SPEAKING MEDIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Russia and other autocratic countries e.g. Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, and China make use of the so-called ‘anti-hegemonic’ Spanish international broadcasting channels to target Spanish speakers and influence them through propaganda and inaccurate depictions of the international or national events in order to gain support for their revisionist and anti-Western agenda. One of the most recent examples of propaganda and incomplete portrayal of an important international event is the way the Russian invasion of Ukraine is presented by TeleSur, Hispan TV, RT and CGTN in Spanish.

I examine in this subchapter how the war waged by Russia against Ukraine is depicted in the Spanish ‘anti-hegemonic’ media and I subsequently analyse the implications of these depictions.

SHORT METHODOLOGICAL OUTLOOK

The research method is based on content analysis and chronological analysis of news covering the Russian invasion of Ukraine presented by TeleSur, Hispan TV and CGTN in Spanish. The content analysis method was used to analyse a minimum of 10 news articles for each individual channel, using as starting point the date of 24 February 2022, the day of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. In addition, for the accuracy of the research, news items presented live were followed for a period of 5 months starting from January 2023 until May 2023.

The main research questions are: *How is Russia’s action in Ukraine described by the above-mentioned news channels? Are there any differences in the narratives of the four channels or do all of them follow a single narrative?*

The results obtained after applying the research method validate the hypothesis that these media constructs are part of a disinformation strategy and the results are used to draw conclusions on the implications.

This research has two main limitations. The first naturally derives from time constraints that prevent the analysis of a very large pool of news. The second lies in the fact that the research takes place in Brussels and the above-mentioned channels have different types of bans in the EU and this makes access to their websites more difficult than usual, sometimes even impossible. Hispan TV is banned in Spain since 2012[43], after losing the UK broadcasting license, the Chinese cable channel CGTN no longer has permission to broadcast in Germany [44], on 2 March 2022 the Council of the EU suspended the

broadcasting activities of RT English, RT UK, RT Germany, RT France, and RT Spanish in the EU, or directed at the EU, until the aggression to Ukraine ends[45]. Unfortunately, this makes RT en Español impossible to cover in this research. Moreover, important collaborations between TeleSur and RT en Español such as the program *En la mira* are not accessible in the EU. Nevertheless, for the other channels, sufficient material was gathered from following the news programmes and live shows on the official websites where possible, or on online platforms e.g. YouTube, Facebook or Twitter.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched an aggressive invasion of Ukraine with the alleged aim, according to Vladimir Putin, of ‘denazifying’ Ukraine and protecting the Russian ethnic minority living in that country[46]. Although what happened in effect was a conventional military invasion, Russian media outlets and Vladimir Putin himself never used the word ‘invasion’ or ‘war’ but described the event as a “special military operation”.

After analysing the media coverage of this first day of the invasion, and the period thereafter, by the media broadcasters mentioned above, the first conclusion is that none of them described what happened in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 as the start of an unjustified war, instead embracing the same Kremlin narrative. The wording preferred by CGTN [47], TeleSur [48] and Hispan TV [49] is “operación militar especial” [special military operation]. Other wordings that show up intensely in the research results are “crisis en Ucrania” [Ukrainian crisis] or “tensiones entre Russia y Ucrania” [tensions between Russia and Ukraine]. The research results show also the usage of the word ‘conflicto’ [conflict] but less frequently and mostly when certain opinions of the EU or NATO are considered. No mention of the word ‘guerra’ [war] was found except in situations when other actors are cited, like NATO officials or the Turkish President –“El mandatario turco dijo que espera <<que lleguen los días en que la guerra entre Rusia y Ucrania termine, primero con un alto el fuego permanente y luego con la paz>>” [“The Turkish leader said he hopes <<for the days when the war between Russia and Ukraine ends, first with a permanent ceasefire and then with peace”] [50].

The second observation of the analysis is that all the above-mentioned media broadcasting channels started to host shows, interviews or discussions with experts explaining Russia’s decision while trying not to portray Russia as the aggressor. Televisions began to use the event of February 24 in their ‘anti-hegemonic’ effort to challenge the current world order and against the U.S. and NATO. Of the three televisions, less evident in its propaganda and disinformation strategies related to the war in Ukraine is CGTN in Spanish, which naturally tends to align its content with the official Chinese government positions [51]. In the case of Ukraine, CGTN's coverage includes also China’s perspective, which typically emphasizes non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and supports diplomatic resolutions to conflicts. This is why the reporting sometimes highlights efforts for peaceful negotiations, de-escalation, and the role of international institutions in resolving the conflict.

TeleSur and Hispan TV both strongly criticize the Western powers' role in the conflict, particularly focusing on U.S. foreign policy and NATO's expansion and geopolitical rivalries.

I have identified several communication tactics employed in order to scrub Russia’s image and not portray it as the aggressor.

The first tactic is by presenting false information, half-truths or intertwining valid information with false one. For instance, both TeleSur and Hispan TV presented the failure of the ceasefire agreement between Russia and Ukraine that was meant to allow humanitarian

corridors for Ukrainian civilians to flee the war zone, however, they presented it as being Ukraine's fault [52].

An extremely important and dramatic moment of the war, the Bucha massacre, is presented by TeleSur and Hispan TV, echoing the Kremlin's positions, as if it was carried out by the Ukrainian army against its own people to unfairly blame Russia, going as far as accusing the West for trying to hide it: "Rusia recalca que las fotos de civiles muertos a tiros en Bucha son un <<ataque de falsificaciones>> que usa Kiev para culpar de esos crímenes a las fuerzas rusas" [53] ["Russia stresses that photos of civilians shot dead in Bucha are a <<fake attack>> used by Kyiv to blame Russian forces for these crimes; "Rusia acusa a Estados Unidos de ocultar <<deliberadamente>> los crímenes cometidos por Ucrania en la ciudad de Bucha, cerca de Kiev, capital ucraniana"[54] ["Russia accuses the United States of <<deliberately>> hiding the crimes committed by Ukraine in the city of Bucha, near Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital], "Rusia alerta de nuevo montaje al estilo de Bucha en Járkov" [55]. ["Russia warns of new Bucha-style setup in Kharkiv"]; "El presidente de Rusia, Vladímir Putin, desmintió este martes que su país tuviera responsabilidad en los hechos denunciados en la ciudad ucraniana de Bucha, a 70 km de Kiev, en un encuentro con su par bielorruso, Alexander Lukashenko, quien atribuyó a Reino Unido lo que llamó una <<operación psicológica>> en esa urbe" [56] ["Russian President Vladimir Putin denied this Tuesday that his country was responsible for the events denounced in the Ukrainian city of Bucha, 70 km from Kiev, in a meeting with his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, who attributed the crime to the United Kingdom that he called a <<psychological operation>> in that city"]; "El jefe del Centro Nacional de Gestión de la Defensa de Rusia, coronel general Mijaíl Mizíntsev, declaró este miércoles que el asesinato de civiles ocurrido en la ciudad ucraniana de Bucha <<debe ser investigado a fondo con la participación de las organizaciones internacionales de derechos humanos>>" [57] ["The head of Russia's National Center for Defense Management, Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev, declared on Wednesday that the killing of civilians in the Ukrainian city of Bucha <<must be thoroughly investigated with the participation of international human rights organizations>>"]; "Rusia culpa a Occidente de apoyar montaje de Bucha en Ucrania" [58] ["Russia blames the West for supporting Bucha's setup in Ukraine"].

TeleSur and Hispan TV do not present the Western or Ukrainian perspective on the facts at all. The only perspective they present, besides the Russian one, is China's position on the subject [59].

CGTN in Spanish presents in the news two narratives related to Bucha: the Russian narrative that denies the Russian involvement in the massacre and blames Ukraine and the West [60] and the Chinese narrative which does not name and shame: "China pide que se investiguen los sucesos de Bucha ante el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU" [61] ["China calls for UN Security Council investigation into Bucha incidents"].

The second tactic is by promoting fake news or fake titles. TeleSur has falsely presented in the title of an article that UN is holding negotiations between Russia and Ukraine [62], creating again, in a subtle way, the false image that Russia and Ukraine are on equal positions in this crisis when in effect Russia is the state that disregarded international law and violated the territorial integrity of another state.

Another fake news embraced this time by all three media outlets in Spanish is the false claim of the Russian officials that in Ukraine secret U.S.-funded bio labs were established with the purpose of developing biological weapons [63] even after the international community debunked the claim showing that there is no evidence in this regard [64].

The third stratagem used by all three media outlets is organising special reports or debates about the international implications of the so-called ‘Ukrainian’ crisis or presenting propaganda documentaries about the history of Ukraine, drawing on biased forced historical parallels between the war in Ukraine and the war in Yugoslavia and using the latter to reinforce the argument of the West’s involvement to advance its geopolitical agenda.

TeleSur has many opinion articles explaining Russia’s actions by blaming U.S. foreign policy and NATO’s expansion [65] or by using deceitful historical narratives like: “Crimea y Rusia guardan una relación histórica y cultural de siglos, hecho que se vio reflejado en el resultado del referendo de 2014” [66] [“Crimea and Russia have a historical and cultural relationship of centuries, a fact that was reflected in the result of the 2014 referendum”]. “En dos momentos de la reciente historia política ucraniana se ha puesto en marcha la estrategia de golpe blando teorizada por Gene Sharp, con el apoyo de los servicios de inteligencia occidentales, para derrocar gobiernos pro rusos e instalar gobiernos proclives al ingreso de Ucrania en la OTAN, lo que ampliaría las bases militares hasta uno de los corazones de la frontera rusa” [67] [“At two moments in recent Ukrainian political history, the soft coup strategy theorized by Gene Sharp has been put into operation, with the support of Western intelligence services, to overthrow pro-Russian governments and install governments prone to Ukraine's NATO membership, which would extend the military bases to one of the heart of the Russian border”].

The same historical explanation regarding the Russian annexation of Crimea was provided by Hispan TV [68].

On the other hand, CGTN promotes a different approach with articles that highlight that only by being on the right side of history can the crisis in Ukraine end, but without actually explaining what is that right side: “Situarse en el lado correcto de la historia es la única manera de resolver la crisis de Ucrania.[...] La historia y la realidad están inextricablemente unidas. Este conflicto está plagado de contradicciones acumuladas creadas durante la Guerra Fría del siglo anterior, y refleja los profundos y complejos cambios que no se habían visto en un siglo” [69] [“Being on the right side of history is the only way to solve the Ukraine crisis...History and reality are inextricably linked. This conflict is riddled with accumulated contradictions created during the Cold War of the previous century, and reflects profound and complex changes not seen in a century”].

Moreover, TeleSur provides the Spanish speaking audience with its own interpretation of the chronology of the events in Ukraine accusing the Western media of disinformation [70].

CGTN en Español has dedicated an entire chapter on its website to the crisis in Ukraine in the ‘Especiales’ [Special] category where one can find videos with news and interviews about this subject presented in a biased manner [71]. Like TeleSur, CGTN also portrays the interpreted version of the timeline in Ukraine starting 24 February 2024 in a special dedicated report [72]. Compared to TeleSur, the timeline by CGTN appears less malign but still intentionally leaves out relevant information. One of the details that are intentionally left aside regards Russia’s responsibility in the failure of the ceasefire agreement that was meant to allow humanitarian corridors for Ukrainian civilians [73].

The fourth method used to support the Kremlin narratives when presenting the news is by only presenting the Russian position, with no statements from Ukrainian officials. This can be easily observed especially on Hispan TV and TeleSur simply by looking at the titles of the live news and articles. Most titles revolve around Russia. (“Rusia asegura haber derribado el sistema de defensa antiaérea estadounidense Patriot desplegado en Kiev, la capital de Ucrania, con un misil hipersónico Kinzhal” [“Russia claims to have shot down the American

Patriot air defense system deployed in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, with a Kinzhal hypersonic missile.”] [74], “La Defensa de Rusia ha confirmado haber derribado uno de los últimos misiles de largo alcance <<Storm Shadow>> donado por el Reino Unido a Ucrania” [“The Russian Defense has confirmed that it has shot down one of the last long-range missiles <<Storm Shadow>> donated by the United Kingdom to Ukraine”] [75], “El Gobierno de Rusia avisa que el nuevo suministro de misiles y drones de guerra del Reino Unido a Ucrania causará aún más destrucción” [“The Russian Government warns that the new supply of missiles and war drones from the United Kingdom to Ukraine will cause even more destruction”] [76].

On the other hand, CGTN appears to be more balanced in presenting both sides. From 30 titles and articles analysed, almost half are about the Ukrainian perspective on some issues. (“El presidente ucraniano visita Reino Unido y Francia para pedir más apoyo” [“Ukrainian president visits UK and France to ask for more support”], “Kiev afirma recibir más de 300 tanques por parte de países occidentales”, [“Kyiv claims to receive more than 300 tanks from Western countries”], “Ucrania pide aviones de guerra y misiles de largo alcance” [“Ukraine calls for warplanes and long-range missiles”]). Nevertheless, even in these articles, Ukraine's perspective is depicted many times in an altered way as to make it appear weaker or to make it appear that the West is getting increasingly involved in the conflict.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research reflect that TeleSur, CGTN and Hispan TV follow the narrative promoted by the Kremlin on the war in Ukraine, albeit with different intensities and nuances.

The implications go beyond merely shaping the perceptions of viewers by manipulating and misinforming Spanish speakers around the world. By presenting themselves as alternative sources of information and perspectives, these channels aim to attract support and legitimacy from regions or populations that feel marginalized or disillusioned by the current global order.

This has significant foreign policy weight as the editorial direction of these media institutions reflect the foreign policy directions of the governments that control and financially support them: Venezuela, Cuba, China, Iran, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia. This illustrates a collective effort in terms of propaganda aimed at challenging the world order based on values.

This tacit media alliance serves the autocratic leaders of these countries, often described as being isolated by the international community, to justify to their own impoverished population that their anti-hegemony and anti-US stance is a just cause and that they are not alone in this fight.

Venezuela, Iran and Cuba are currently under Western sanctions, and they seek to circumvent the isolation and promote alternative models of governance.

Sidestepping sanctions seems to work rather well especially for Venezuela, whose government survived the sanctions imposed by the West with the help of Russia, China and Iran plus the complex schemes for exporting oil to non-Western countries. It is considered by Pavel Tarasenko, deputy head of the Kommersant newspaper's foreign policy department, “the unexpected beneficiary of events in Eastern Europe” [77]. While accusing the West of involvement in Ukraine and supporting financially TeleSur and its anti-West editorial policy, Venezuela is unexpectedly improving its situation because the energy crisis spawned by the Russian invasion in Ukraine has made the U.S. flexible on the sanctions, granting Chevron license to pump oil in Venezuela [78].

By collaborating on propaganda efforts, Russia, Iran, China, and Venezuela aim to strengthen their own influence in global affairs, notably in regions where they perceive Western dominance or intervention and correspondingly influence U.S. Spanish-speaking citizens.

The appearance of neutrality mimicked by the editorial policy of the state financed CGTN in Spanish network, which reflects the Chinese position on the Ukrainian conflict, is highly relevant. China, one of five permanent U.N. Security Council members, is the only major government that still has friendly relations with the Kremlin and is the biggest buyer of Russian oil and gas after the United States and the EU implemented sanctions [79]. As revisionist states, China and Russia are partners in opposing the U.S. This is why China's position is in actuality a so called 'Pro-Russian neutrality' meant to confirm a bigger role in global diplomacy and to increase China's presence in Eastern Europe. The restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran with the brokerage of China is already a step in this direction [80].

FUTURE RESEARCH

For a more comprehensive view of the matter, at least two new research directions would seem necessary.

Firstly, research should be carried out on the Russian misinformation campaigns via RT en Español and carried out globally through the anti-hegemonic international Spanish broadcasting channels in the run-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This analysis could show how the ground level for the invasion was 'prepared' from an informational point of view.

Secondly, we would recommend a comprehensive study of the data depicting dissemination on social media of the misinformation about Ukraine that first appears on TeleSur, Hispan TV, CGTN and RT in Spanish. This study would further point to whether the soft power employed by the aforementioned revisionist countries yielded successful outcomes over multiple mass-communication media.

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