

Milestone 4

The Evolution of Anti-American Sentiment in Russia

Kjersti Sjøberg

PS 625: Analyzing Anti-Americanism

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MILESTONE 1: TOPIC SELECTION, OUTLINE, AND ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of anti-American sentiment in Russia, exploring its roots, foreign policy triggers, and the role of government manipulation. It analyzes how Russia has capitalized on using the media to control narratives to paint the US as an aggressor and deflect criticism for domestic issues. This strategy strengthens national identity¹ and bolsters the government by promoting narratives of external threats to justify its authoritarian rule. While a long history of tension and disagreements over foreign policy contributes to negative views of the United States, this paper argues that the current Russian government actively cultivates and exploits anti-Americanism for political gain.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
 1. Briefly introduce the concept of anti-American sentiment and its prevalence in Russia.
 2. Address the invasion of Ukraine as a current example.
 3. End with my thesis statement: While a long history of tension and disagreements over foreign policy contributes to negative views of the United States, this paper argues that the current Russian government actively cultivates and exploits anti-Americanism for political gain.
- II. Russia's Roots of Anti-Americanism
 1. Soviet Era
 - i. Discuss the class between capitalism and communism.
 - ii. Discuss the arms race and identify major factors for fueling tensions.
 - iii. Discuss the "Honeymoon" phase of US/Russia relations being over.²
- III. Foreign Policy Triggers
 1. NATO Expansion
 - i. Explain Russia's security concerns with NATO's eastward expansion.³

¹ Lev Gudkov, "Structure and Functions of Russian Anti-Americanism: Mobilization Phase, 2012-2015," *Russian Social Science Review* 59, no. 4, 2018, 332.

² Alexei K. Pushkov, "Letter from Eurasia: Russia and America: the honeymoon's over." *Foreign Policy*, no. 93, Winter 1993, Gale Business: Insights, 1993, 76.

³ NATO, "Enlargement and Article 10," Accessed, March 8, 2024.

- ii. Analyze how the US's role in NATO's expansion was framed by Russian media.⁴
 - 2. US Interventions and Conflicts
 - i. Discuss specific examples (Iraq war, Yugoslavia intervention)
 - ii. Analyze how these events are portrayed in Russian media to create a narrative of US aggression
 - 3. Invasion of Ukraine
 - i. Briefly give a background on the conflict and its historical context
 - ii. Analyze how the invasion is being used to further anti-American sentiment (uniting Russians under a common threat)
 - iii. Revisit the expansion of NATO and how it is being portrayed in Russia today
- IV. The Role of Government Manipulation
 - 1. Media Control and Propaganda
 - i. Explain how the Russian government controls media narratives through state-owned outlets.
 - ii. Analyze techniques used to shape perspectives and promote anti-American sentiment.
 - 2. Deflecting Criticism from Domestic Issues
 - i. Explain how anti-Americanism can distract from internal problems.
 - ii. Analyze how the government uses external threats to justify authoritarian rule.
- V. Policy Implications and Potential Solutions
 - 1. Political Arguments
 - i. Find key arguments Russia uses against US foreign policy objectives and analyze the validity and impact.
 - 2. Overcoming Anti-American Sentiment
 - i. Discuss potential approaches to address anti-Americanism (i.e., international organizations, media).
 - 3. Challenges and Considerations
 - i. Acknowledge the difficulty in overcoming anti-American sentiment. Use the info from Katzenstein and Keohane's epilogue to address changes in sentiment depending on the president/policies.⁵
- VI. Conclusion

⁴ "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," National Security Archive, December 12, 2017.

⁵ Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*. Cornell Studies in Political Economy. Ithaca [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press. 2007, 237.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of anti-American sentiment in Russia is deeply rooted in the history and geopolitics of the 20th and 21st centuries. From the ideological clash between capitalism and communism during the Cold War to the ongoing geopolitical rivalry, negative perceptions of the US have been a persistent feature in Russian society. This sentiment has been exacerbated by foreign policy disagreements, such as NATO's eastward expansion and various US military interventions, which are portrayed by Russian media as aggressive and threatening. In recent years, the invasion of Ukraine has served as a contemporary example of how anti-American narratives are utilized to unify the Russian populace against a common enemy. This paper argues that while historical tensions and foreign policy disagreements contribute to negative views of the US, the current Russian government actively cultivates and exploits anti-Americanism for political gain, using state-controlled media to manipulate public perception and strengthen its authoritarian rule.

MILESTONE 2: LITERATURE REVIEW, SUPPORTING TABLES/CHARTS, AND INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that Russian anti-Americanism is not a nascent topic, there is a rich body of literature that explores varying aspects from a variety of sources. This paper will draw on several of these sources to examine the historical roots, foreign policy triggers, and the role of government manipulation in cultivating anti-American sentiment. As a baseline for understanding anti-Americanism, this paper highlighted works by Revel, Katzenstein, and Keohane's published works. Each offers valuable theoretical frameworks for understanding the various forms of anti-Americanism and the factors that contribute to it. To further understand Russian anti-Americanism's Soviet-era roots, works by Vladimir Shlapentokh, Sokolov et al., and Denis Volkov are explored. These authors highlight how ideological clashes during the Cold War fueled negative perceptions of the US. Shlapentokh and Sokolov et al.'s peer-reviewed articles approach this from similar perspectives. Shlapentokh's historical analysis argues that anti-Americanism is deeply ingrained in the Russian psyche and has been controlled by the ruling elites.⁶ Sokolov et al. echoes this sentiment, however, they add that Russian leaders used this methodology to deflect blame from domestic issues. Additionally, Sokolov et al. highlight how state-influenced propaganda is used as a tool to fuel anti-American sentiment.⁷ This notion

⁶ Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Puzzle of Russian Anti-Americanism: From 'Below' or from 'Above,'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63.5, 2011, 875–889.

⁷ Boris Sokolov, Ronald F Inglehart, Eduard Ponarin, Irina Vartanova, William Zimmerman, Disillusionment and Anti-Americanism in Russia: From Pro-American to Anti-American Attitudes, 1993–2009, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 62, Issue 3, September 2018, 534.

is again reiterated in Volkov’s article where he writes that Russian anti-Americanism can be “explained by the propaganda on Russian television: when anti-American rhetoric came into full force, the number of those expressing antipathy toward the US in opinion polls surged; when the rhetoric became less intense, so did negative feelings about America.”⁸ Importantly, each of these authors focuses on information and research released by the Levada Center, a leading independent, non-governmental organization in Russia that conducts polling and sociological research.

FOREIGN POLICY TRIGGERS

Examining foreign policy triggers, this paper will analyze how NATO expansion was (and still is) perceived by Russia and how it is used to fuel anti-American sentiment. For this, official statements from NATO itself will be used to understand how the alliance justifies its eastward expansion and its relationship with Russia. Additionally, resources from the US National Security Archive are also explored to understand the drivers in US foreign policies.⁹ Furthermore, analyses by independent think tanks like the Brookings Institution and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace both provide insights into how scholars and experts perceive the issue and its impact on US-Russia relations. By highlighting international, national, and scholarly sources, this paper aims to assess foreign policy from a multitude of perspectives.

RUSSIAN MANIPULATION THROUGH PROPAGANDA

Finally, this paper examines the role of government manipulation by exploring how state-controlled media is a weapon against the US. To understand the mobilization of anti-Americanism, the work of scholars such as Gudkov¹⁰ has been referenced to understand how the Russian government has mobilized anti-Americanism amongst its people in the last decade. Katzka,¹¹ Llanos-Antczak, and Śliwa¹² also provide specific examples of propaganda techniques that not only have been used throughout history but are still used today. This is further supported

⁸ Denis Volkov, “The Evolution of Anti-Americanism in Russia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 6, 2015.

⁹ “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” National Security Archive, December 12, 2017.

¹⁰ Gudkov 332.

¹¹ John Katzka, “Russian Propaganda Efforts: Historical Continuities Accompany Technological Changes,” *American Diplomacy*, February 2024.

¹² Anna Llanos-Antczak, and Zdzisław Śliwa. “Manipulation and Propaganda in the Russian Media: The Case of the Vriemia News Programme (2017-2019).” *Contemporary Economics* 15.4 (2021): 511–523.

by Kananovich's recent research, which sheds light on the increasing influence of online memes in shaping public opinion.¹³

MILESTONE 3: POLICY PAPER

The roots of anti-Americanism sentiment in Russia run deep, stemming from the fundamental ideological clash between capitalism and communism during the Cold War. This period, spanning from the late 1940s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, witnessed a fundamental disagreement between the capitalist ideals of the US and the communist ideology of the Soviet Union. This was a tumultuous period in US-Russian relations, not only due to an ideological clash but also because of an ongoing arms race and proxy wars. The arms race, a defining feature of the Cold War, became a relentless competition in military buildup. Both the US and the Soviet Union stockpiled nuclear weapons and conventional weaponry, creating a constant threat of escalation and mutual destruction. This pursuit of military superiority not only strained economies, but also fostered a deep sense of insecurity on both sides. Nevertheless, the Cold War did not completely sever ties between the US and Russia. There were periods of cooperation, particularly on arms control measures like the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT).¹⁴ In 1991, President George H. W. Bush spoke about “putting differences aside” and renewing US-Russian relations “for a more peaceful future for all mankind.”¹⁵ These periods of détente, however, were cyclical. Improved relations were often followed by renewed tensions, ultimately setting the stage for the current strained relationship.¹⁶

FOREIGN POLICY TRIGGERS

In the early 1990s, most Russians viewed the US favorably.¹⁷ The 1993 US bombing of Iraq, however, marked a turning point. While some Russians supported the action, many others

¹³ V. Kananovich, V. “Online memes on anti-American propaganda and the overlooked “silent majority” in support of authoritarian populism in Putin’s Russia,” *New Media & Society*, 2023.

¹⁴ Eugene Rumer and Richard Sokolsky, “Thirty Years of U.S. Policy Toward Russia: Can the Vicious Circle Be Broken?” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019, 5.

¹⁵ Rumer and Sokolsky, 5.

¹⁶ Alexei K. Pushkov, “Letter from Eurasia: Russia and America: The Honeymoon’s over,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 93, 1993.

¹⁷ Boris Sokolov, Ronald F Inglehart, Eduard Ponarin, Irina Vartanova, William Zimmerman, Disillusionment and Anti-Americanism in Russia: From Pro-American to Anti-American Attitudes, 1993–2009, *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 62, Issue 3, September 2018, 534.

saw it as a sign of US dominance and disregard for Russia's opinion.¹⁸ Throughout the 1990s, a series of events further strained relations, including the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) and NATO's eastward expansion. The ABM Treaty was a Cold War agreement between the US and the Soviet Union that limited the development of defenses against long-range nuclear missiles. It aimed to prevent an arms race where each side felt pressured to build more offensive missiles to overwhelm the other's defenses. The treaty's collapse in 2002, however, contributed to growing anti-American sentiment as many Russians saw the withdrawal as a sign of distrust.¹⁹



Figure 1: Russian attitudes toward the US since 1990. Blue is positive; red is negative.²⁰

Additionally, NATO's eastward expansion, incorporating former Soviet bloc countries,

¹⁸ Volkov 2015.

¹⁹ James M. Acton, "The U.S. Exit from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Has Fueled a New Arms Race," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021.

²⁰ Levada Center, "International Relationships," 2015.

was perceived as an encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence and a potential threat to its borders. Although the US government publicly reassured the Soviet Union that NATO would not expand eastward, there were internal discussions about allowing Eastern European countries to join. This created a mixed message. While Gorbachev, Russia's President at the time, was led to believe NATO would not grow, the US was leaving the door open for expansion.²¹

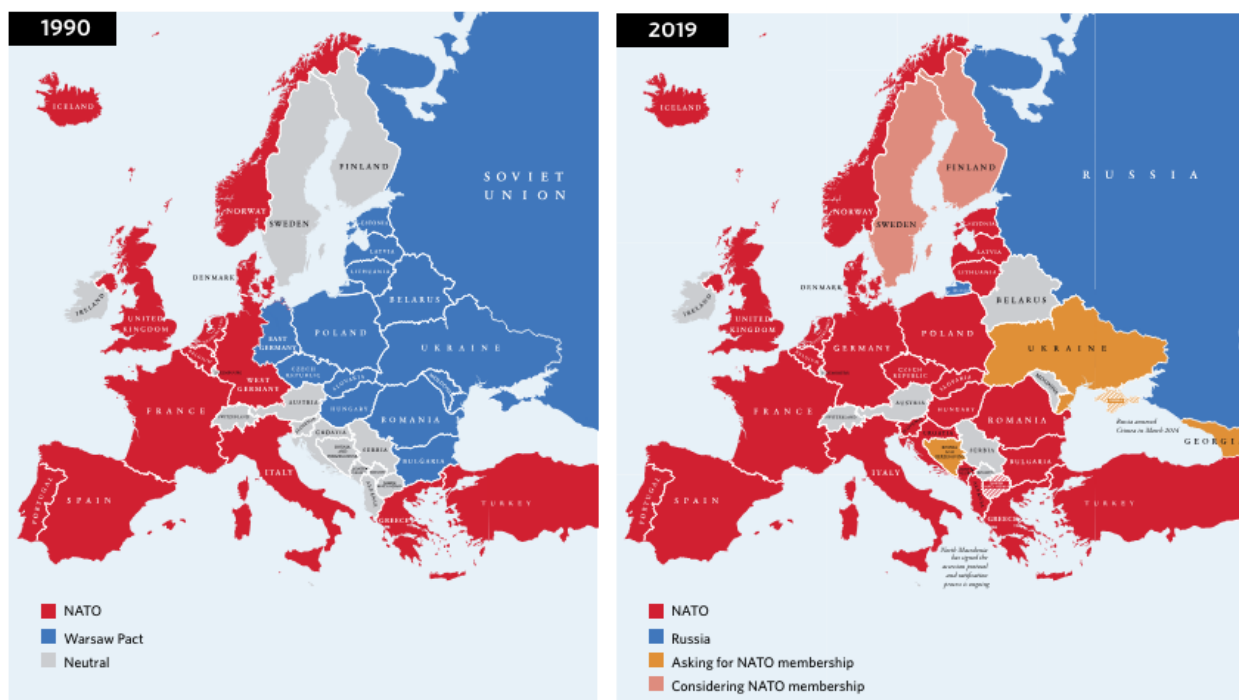


Figure 2: “NATO Enlargement as Seen from Moscow between 1990 and 2019.”²²

²¹ “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” National Security Archive, 2017.

²² Rumer and Sokolsky 2019, 14.



Figure 3: The Expansion of NATO as of 2024.²³

These actions contributed to anti-American sentiment because it was considered to be misleading and ultimately broke trust with Russia. NATO's eastward expansion is still a major point of contention between Russia and the West, as Russia still views it as a threat to its security and a broken Cold War promise. This perception of encirclement by the West is a factor behind the recent tensions between Russia and Ukraine, and likely played a role in Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION AND ITS IMPACT

The shift in Russian public opinion during the 1990s had a lasting impact. It laid the groundwork for the current strained relations between the US and Russia. Distrust became a defining characteristic, shaping foreign policy decisions on both sides and making cooperation

²³ "What is NATO, which countries are members and how much do they spend on defence?" BBC, 2024.

on global issues more difficult.

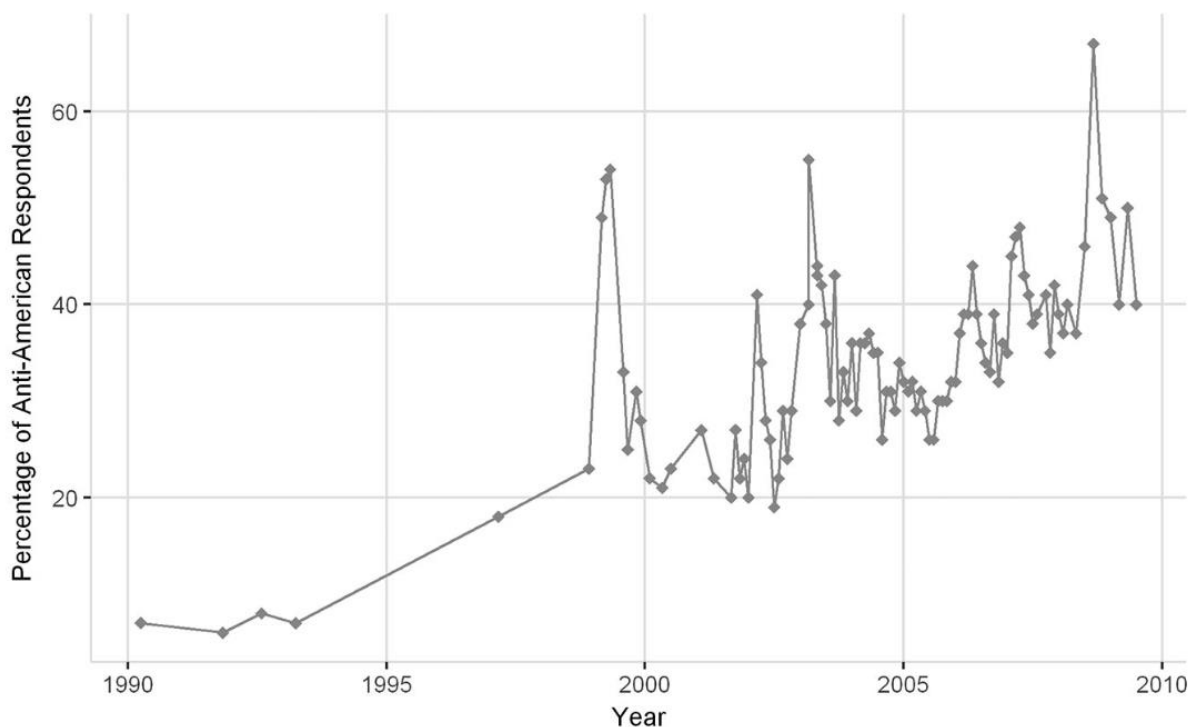


Figure 4: Dynamics of the general feeling about the United States in Russia, 1991–2009²⁴

According to the Levada Center, a leading independent, non-governmental organization in Russia, over “half of the Russian public believed that the United States plays a negative role in the world and about 70 percent believed that the [US] conducted an aggressive policy toward Russia.”²⁵ Propaganda has been a cornerstone in Russian tactics in manipulating public opinion. This has political significance.

This extreme change in public opinion in a relatively short period has obvious political significance. Public opinion, even if shaped by propaganda, can exercise an independent impact on government policies, including foreign relations... Since the United States and Russia possess the world’s largest arsenal of nuclear weapons, confrontation between them creates a massive threat to global security.²⁶

To manipulate public opinion, the Russian government wields control over its media, portraying

²⁴ Sokolov et al., 538

²⁵ Sokolov et al., 535.

²⁶ Sokolov et al., 535.

the US as a constant threat. This justifies the government's actions, deflects from domestic issues, and fuels nationalism through selective historical references. Studies show this propaganda is effective, shaping public opinion and making cooperation on global issues difficult.²⁷ This distrust ultimately creates a political barrier to improved US-Russia relations and increases the risk of international conflict.

IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The current level of anti-American sentiment in Russia stems from both historical tensions and contemporary disagreements, colored by the Russian government's manipulation of public opinion through propaganda. Overcoming this distrust does not come without significant challenges from both the US as well as from Russia. Russia's criticisms of US foreign policy play a major role in fueling anti-American sentiment. Russia views NATO's eastward expansion as a direct threat to its security and a betrayal of past assurances. US military interventions abroad have been perceived as American unilateralism and a disregard for international law with the intent to further US global dominance at Russia's expense. Additionally, Russia perceives US support for democratic movements and human rights promotion within its sphere of influence as attempts to weaken its government and diminish its global standing.

While some of these concerns may have merit, the Russian government often amplifies them through propaganda, manipulating public opinion and demonizing the US. The question remains, how can the US navigate these challenges and develop a policy approach that fosters improved relations? While there is no easy answer, several policy recommendations may offer a path forward. Finding common ground on global issues like nuclear non-proliferation and climate change through international organizations demonstrates a willingness to work together beyond competition. This cooperation, fostered through dialogue within the UN or similar international bodies, can build trust. Open communication is also crucial. The US must clearly and consistently communicate its foreign policy objectives while openly addressing Russian concerns. Nevertheless, challenges will still exist even with these measures. Deep-seated distrust will take time and sustained effort to overcome. While leadership changes can create opportunities, they are not predictable. Therefore, countering Russia's propaganda efforts becomes a crucial long-term solution. Promoting media literacy among citizens is essential to combat disinformation not only within Russia but globally.

MILESTONE 4: THEORIES/SOURCES AND CONCLUSION

THEORIES/SOURCES

To understand why many Russians hold negative views of the US, we can explore three key theories: the Realist Theory, Social Identity Theory, and the Propaganda Theory. The Realist

²⁷ Theodore P. Gerber and Jane Zavisca, "Does Russian Propaganda Work?" *The Washington Quarterly* 39.2, 2016, 85.

Theory emphasizes competition and national security interests between states.²⁸ When considering this theory and US-Russia relations, Russia arguably perceives US foreign policy actions, like NATO expansion eastward, as a direct threat to its security and sphere of influence. This, in turn, fosters a sense of encirclement or encroachment that fuels anti-American sentiment. Social Identity Theory focuses on how group identity shapes intergroup relations. While this theory can be applied in other situations,²⁹ historical experiences along with contemporary events influence how Russians view themselves concerning the US. The Russian government may utilize this theory by promoting a negative national identity vis-à-vis the US to consolidate power and deflect from domestic issues. Lastly, the Propaganda Theory highlights how government-controlled media portrays the US negatively and influences public opinion. In the age of globalization, information control plays a crucial role. This tactic has been seen not only throughout history but how it is being used today.³⁰

CONCLUSION

The roots of anti-American sentiment in Russia stem from a complex interplay of historical grievances and contemporary issues. The ideological clashes of the Cold War laid the groundwork for distrust, which was further fueled by current events. However, the current level of anti-Americanism in Russia is not merely a reflection of past tensions. It is actively cultivated and exploited by the Russian government for political gain. The Russian government wields state-controlled media as a weapon. This virulent technique shapes public opinion, making cooperation on global challenges more difficult. Overcoming both this technique and mindset will be no easy feat. It will require a sustained effort from both sides, a willingness to engage in honest dialogue, and a commitment to finding common ground despite the deep-seated distrust.

²⁸ Rosato, Sebastian and John Schuessler. "A Realist Foreign Policy for the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 4 (Dec 2011, 2011/12//): 803-819.

²⁹ J. M Berger, *Extremism*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018.

³⁰ Syahrir Mujib et al., "Social Media Dominance: Ukraine's Key Strategy in the Information War Against the Russian Invasion," *International Journal of Humanities Education and Social Sciences* 2.5, 2023.

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https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm#:~:text=Since%201949%2C%20NATO's%20membership%20has,and%20Herzegovina%2C%20Georgia%20and%20Ukraine.

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