



Experts, Inc.: The Role of Political Expertise in the U.S.- Russian Relations

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Who are the experts?

- Knowledge & special skills + authority & recognition among peers
- Historical evolution: philosophers → intellectuals → experts
- In politics, experts:
 - produce ideas, credible expertise, and policy recommendations (not public)
 - participate in debates about policy solutions and ideas (public)
- In political discourse, experts:
 - are one of the key participants, alongside policymakers, the public, and the media [Habermas]
 - act as mediators and interpreters between other participants [Bauman]
 - are responsible for shaping, analyzing, and enriching discursive practices



Think Tanks (institutional level of political expertise)

- Most experts function professionally within the framework of think tanks [Abelson, Rich & Weaver, Stone, Denham, McGann, Medvetz]
 - The think tank model originally emerged in the Anglo-Saxon system, but was successfully implanted around the world
 - 6,500 think tanks worldwide; 1871 in the U.S., 215 in Russia [McGann, 2018]
- Types on think tanks*:
 - “universities without students” (US: Hoover Institute, Brookings Institution; Russia: The Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO))
 - contract research organizations (US: RAND Corporation, CSIS; Russia: Economic Expert Group (EEG))
 - advocacy think tanks (US: Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute; Russia: Polity Foundation)
 - *other types*: party think tanks, bureaucratic think tanks, etc.



Do experts matter?

Experts and think tanks influence political discourse and shape political processes through:

- Producing reports, analysis, policy recommendations, etc.
- Political consulting, advice, briefings, etc.
- Participating in policy discussions
 - e.g. traditional and social media commentary, blogging, newsletters, etc.
- The “revolving door” phenomenon

→ Note: “For [experts] to exercise influence in policymaking, there must be a willingness on the part of policymakers to be influenced.” [Abelson, 2005]



U.S.-Russian relations

US-Russia relationship is stuck in a “vicious cycle” due to:

- Russian leaders:
 - see Russia as a great power and believe they are entitled in their sphere of influence;
 - don't accept U.S. post-Cold War primacy and reject democracy promotion as a cover for regime change.
 - Russian foreign policy is driven by domestic concerns: physical security & domestic stability.
- U.S. leaders:
 - believe in the U.S.-led world order based on the post-Cold War consensus
 - insist that NATO is the only legitimate security organization for Europe and Eurasia & needs to be expanded
 - U.S. foreign policy is torn between engaging with Russia and containing it.
- Both countries are set in their beliefs and approaches and find it hard to change course



Experts discourse on foreign policy: overview

- *Foreign Affairs, U.S, and Rossiya v globalnoy politike (Russia in Global Affairs), Russia*
- Method: qualitative content analysis
- Timeline: November 8, 2016 – November 8, 2020
- Current count (up to November 1, 2019):
 - *Foreign Affairs*: **94 articles**
 - *Russia in Global Affairs*: **649 articles**



Framework

Discourse analysis markers:

- participants: U.S., Russian, other
- issues discussed:
 - structural: foreign policy course, security, NATO
 - contingent: Ukraine, sanctions, China
- Frames (to describe the relationship)



Preliminary results

- **Foreign Affairs** (published by the Council on Foreign Relations):
 - CFR is an independent, nonpartisan think tank.
 - 17 articles (**18 percent**) are authored by Russian experts and journalists
- **Russia in Global Affairs** (a project of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy):
 - CFDP is a security-oriented think tank with close ties to the Russian government and the intelligence community.
 - 157 articles (**24 percent**) are authored by foreign experts
 - 141 articles (**20 percent**) by **Fyodor Lukyanov**, editor-in-chief of RIA;
 - 34 articles (**5 percent**) by **Sergei Karaganov**, head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy.



Issues

Foreign Affairs:

structural issues:

- Security (including arms control, WMD, proliferation, etc.): **14%**
- U.S. foreign policy toward Russia: **11%**
- NATO: **3%**

contingent:

- Rise of China (vis-à-vis Russia): **7%**
- sanctions: **4%**
- Ukraine: **4%**

Russia in Global Affairs:

structural issues:

- Security (including arms control, WMD, proliferation, etc.): **15%**
- NATO: **14%**
- Russian foreign policy toward U.S.: **9%**

contingent:

- Rise of China (vis-à-vis Russia): **29%**
- Ukraine: **11%**
- sanctions: **2%**



Content analysis: framing trends

Foreign Affairs

competing approaches ("binary thinking on Russia"):

1) Realist thinking:

- Russia is a **strategic competitor**, not an existential threat → U.S. needs a strategy of "**restrained competition**"
- US. strategy has been misguided: "persistent illusion" of a democratic Russia
 - sanctions "elicit more defiance than submission" from Russia → strengthened the frame of "us-versus-them"
 - tell Ukraine NATO membership is off the table, negotiate the sanctions regime

2) Idealist thinking:

- Putin reversed democratization in Russia; he is an "authoritarian modernizer," but an "ideological blank slate." He is an "aggressive revisionist" with a "zero-sum vision of a world"
- The West has been "myopic" about Putin
- U.S. conflict with Russia is that of "Putinism vs. democracy" → U.S. needs to "**restrain Moscow's actions abroad** while waiting for Russia to change from within."
 - Increase support for Ukraine & ratchet up sanctions
 - Possible cooperation on arms control and combatting terrorism

Russia in Global Affairs:

consistent view of the U.S.-Russian relations

- U.S. have tried to impose a unipolar model in IR, ignoring the changing world order; "these attempts have failed"
 - the rules-based liberal world order ("aka U.S. hegemony") was a liberal utopia; it has failed, as was acknowledge in the U.S. National Security Strategy (2017)
 - a **new era of great-power competition**
- U.S. has switched to "confrontation with Russia and China" as countries that refused to be "junior partners" in the U.S.-led world order
- Russia offers a de-ideologized approach: a strategic dialogue on specific risks and threats and a search for a common agenda
 - suggested framework: **multilateral strategic stability** that aims to overcome "strategic parasitism" of nations and elites who over the last 75 years "got used to the absence of big wars"



Thomas Graham. "Let Russia Be Russia: The Case for a More Pragmatic Approach to Moscow," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2019

- "A more balanced **strategy of restrained competition** would not only reduce the risk of nuclear war but also provide the framework for the cooperation needed to tackle global challenges. Smarter relations with Russia can help guarantee European security and strategic stability, bring a modicum of order to the Middle East, and manage the rise of China. As U.S. policymakers demand that Russia moderate its behavior, they must be prepared to scale back their near-term goals, especially in settling the crisis in Ukraine, to forge a more productive relationship with Moscow.
- Above all, U.S. policymakers will need to see Russia plainly, **without sentiment or ideology**. A new Russia strategy must dispense with the magical thinking of previous administrations and instead seek incremental gains that advance long-term U.S. interests. Rather than trying to persuade Moscow to understand its own interests differently, Washington must demonstrate that those interests can be more safely pursued through both considered competition and cooperation with the United States."

Michael McFaul. "Russia as It Is: A Grand Strategy for Confronting Putin." *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2018

- "Four years after Russia annexed Crimea, the United States has still not articulated a **bipartisan grand strategy** for dealing with Russia. Such a strategy is necessary because Washington's conflict with the Kremlin doesn't revolve around mere policy disagreements: rather, it is a **contest between Putinism and democracy**. No tweaking of U.S. policy on Syria or NATO will influence Putin's thinking. He has been in power for too long—and he is not likely to leave in the foreseeable future. U.S. policymakers must dispense with the fantasy that Putin's regime will collapse and democracy will emerge in Russia in the near term. The United States and its allies must continue to support human rights and democracy and embrace people inside Russia fighting for those values. But real political change will likely begin only after Putin steps down. "

Sergei Karaganov, Dmitry Suslov. "Containment in a new era." *Russia in Global Affairs*, September 12, 2019

- Leading powers, primarily the United States, often indulge in actions that could lead to a confrontation with another nuclear power, based on conviction that a confrontation will not take place. Henry Kissinger called it "strategic frivolity," which is in essence the result of "strategic parasitism." Another factor directly undermining strategic stability is the transition of the United States to confrontation with Russia and China as the countries that did not want in the capacity of junior partners to integrate into the U.S.-oriented world order.
- The next factor of the current confrontation that explains its acuity and often hysteria, is the political and psychological state of the Western elites. They don't understand how to overcome internal rifts, stop the erosion of the international positions, and need the image of an enemy whom they create through, among other things, overtly orchestrated information campaigns.
- The liberal utopia of the new nature of the relationship between great powers in the framework of the "rules-based, liberal world order" (which is in reality seen the U.S. hegemony) has collapsed. This fact has been officially acknowledged by Americans themselves, who announced the return of the great power competition in the U.S. National Security Strategy.

