



Popular political cartoon of "Uncle Sam" promulgated on many Russian social media sites. (Image used with permission by Vitaly Podvitski, <http://www.podvitski.ru/index.php>)

# How the Russian Media Portrays the U.S. Military

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**T**his article focuses on how today's Russian media portrays the U.S. military. The thesis is relatively straightforward. Over the past decade, the Kremlin-sponsored Russian media have inundated the Russian information space with an anti-American message, particularly anything associated with the U.S. military. They have created a narrative built around the assertion that the United States has been using

all of its resources (military, economic, diplomatic, information, etc.) to prevent Russia from regaining its superpower status. Since Russian military personnel are subject to this same anti-American information diet, the Kremlin's anti-U.S. propaganda campaign has transformed the U.S. military into the primary enemy for the Russian soldier. This article will review some Russian sources of anti-American propaganda and

consider a handful of implications that may stem from this negative portrayal.

During the last Russian presidential election (March 2018), members of the Russian military overwhelmingly supported President Vladimir Putin. Indeed, the official news agency Interfax reported that nearly three thousand Russian military personnel in Syria voted unanimously for Putin.<sup>1</sup> Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation Gen. Sergei Shoigu further claimed that, overall, military “personnel showed high civic activity and demonstrated unconditional support for the incumbent Russian president, Supreme Commander-in-Chief Vladimir Putin, with 89.7 percent of the servicemen and members of their families voting for him.”<sup>2</sup> While it is unclear how Shoigu procured this information, there is no question that Putin is genuinely popular among those in uniform.

The military’s admiration for Putin appears to be well-founded. Over the past decade, the Kremlin leadership has worked diligently both in modernizing the armed forces and in restoring the status and reputation of military personnel (see sidebar).<sup>3</sup> As defenders of the Russian state, soldiers have been returned to their revered pedestal. The Kremlin has been largely able to transform the discredited image of the Russian soldier, which had developed after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), into that of proud and professional “polite green man.”<sup>4</sup>

Alongside the general improvements for military personnel in living conditions, pay, training facilities, and equipment, the Kremlin leadership has worked overtime to create a narrative that places primary importance upon the readiness of the country’s armed forces. A critical part of this narrative is the notion that Russia is increasingly surrounded by enemies who are not only working to prevent the country from restoring its superpower status but also have aggressive designs against it.<sup>5</sup> This fear of foreign aggression not only elevates the stature of the Russian military but also tends to dampen domestic concerns regarding the Kremlin’s unique form of “sovereign democracy.”<sup>6</sup> There remains a key linkage



Some of the over thirteen thousand personnel marching in the military parade 9 May 2018 that marked the seventy-third anniversary of Victory in the 1941–45 Great Patriotic War at the Red Square in Moscow. (Photo courtesy of the Office of the President of Russia)

## The Life of a Russian Soldier

Overall living conditions for military personnel have improved since the latest round of reforms, which began in 2008. Officer and contractor pay is largely competitive with other government agencies. Living conditions for one-year draftees (e.g., barracks, food, uniforms, etc.) have become better. The waiting list for adequate housing for military officers has finally shrunk to manageable levels. Discipline within the ranks has improved, and there are far fewer reported cases of hazing. The military continues to develop a noncommissioned officers’ corps to provide training expertise, discipline, and continuity within the contract and draftee ranks.

While a one year conscription period is still a requirement for Russian men (ages eighteen to twenty-seven), the Kremlin has enacted legislation that provides incentives for some young Russian men to fulfill their military obligation while enrolled in college. Select college students will gain credit for military service by working on projects related to the country’s defense industry. Legislation has also been introduced whereby future government service and the right to travel abroad are contingent upon completing some form of military service. This legislation and the improved living conditions for conscripts have helped to both reduce draft evasion and increase the appeal of military service.

There have been similar improvements in the realm of military equipment and training facilities. Significant funding has been allocated toward modernizing everything from the soldier’s basic kit to advanced weapon systems. Russia continues to develop modern combined arms training facilities where military personnel can test the latest tactics and equipment in a realistic training environment. The confusion after the 2008 reform of the military’s education system (where nearly 75 percent of the military schools were closed or consolidated) has subsided, and the reorganization has resulted in greater efficiency and less redundancy. Overall command and control is now exercised by a massive new national military control center in Moscow. On paper at least (and on the virtual screens of the new control center in Moscow), there is much greater unity of effort among the various Russian security forces (e.g., Ministry of Internal Affairs, Federal Security Service, Emergency Ministry, etc.). For a more detailed examination of changes to the Russian military under Putin, see *Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military*, available at <https://com-munity.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/200392>. —Author





Vladimir Putin meets with heads of Russian print media and news agencies in the editorial office of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper in Moscow prior to the 13 January 2018 Russian Press Day. (Photo courtesy of the Office of the President of Russia)

between maintaining domestic political legitimacy and the Kremlin's aggrieved foreign policy narrative. In this narrative, the United States and its military in particular are featured as the paramount adversaries.

Evidence of this negative American portrayal was drawn from both traditional media and from various individual Russian social media sites. It is important to note that since mid-2014, Russian active duty personnel have been forbidden from maintaining a social media presence. Since then, the Russian Ministry of Defence has enacted policies that greatly restrict information flow on social media sites among individual service members. As such, this article relies on the views of Russian journalists who cover military affairs, experts and pundits, retirees, and those not subject to Kremlin media restrictions. It also does not examine non-Russian media sources that requote interesting communications in which Russians express opinions of the American military outside of the negative narrative.<sup>7</sup>

## Brief Historical Background

Over the past several years, the Kremlin leadership has rewritten the narrative surrounding the collapse of the USSR and what transpired in Russia during the chaotic 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Instead of seeing the collapse and

difficult transition to a new state as the result of a failed political and economic system, the Kremlin emphasizes the nefarious role that the United States played in weakening Russia. In its modern rendition, the United States conspired to bring down the USSR and then continued to humiliate and exploit a weakened Russia during the painful decade of the 1990s. From the Kremlin's perspective, the United States had adopted a unilateral approach toward global security, believing that it could act with impunity wherever it wanted. This sense of humiliation and resentment toward the United States formed the nucleus of the Kremlin's chronicle of recent history.<sup>9</sup> Whether expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), sponsoring "color revolutions," or continuing plans to enhance European defense (e.g., ballistic missile defense systems), Kremlin propaganda has been built around numerous historical examples that illustrate the need to defend Russia from this same American threat.<sup>10</sup>

One key event occurred just prior to Putin's rise in the Kremlin. Against a background of Russian economic collapse and political paralysis, the United States and other NATO countries began offensive military operations (without a United Nations resolution) against Serbia in March 1999. The argument that Western forces were trying to halt Serbian aggression against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo carried little weight in Moscow. Russians

Russian information sphere to transmit an anti-American/anti-Western message. Today, nearly all of the major Russian television, radio, and newspaper outlets are under indirect Kremlin control.<sup>13</sup> The most important sector is television, where upward of 90 percent of Russians still receive some portion of their news.<sup>14</sup> But it also includes the major press outlets: ITAR-TASS and RIA Novosti, which are the rough equivalents to Associated Press and Reuters.

The Kremlin has also developed a robust presence on the internet and within major Russian social media sites. The result is a multivector approach, harnessing everything from morning talk shows to evening newscasts, from pop stars to venerable academics, from blogs to Twitter accounts, from blockbuster movies to special documentaries—all continually hammering home, in the widest variety of formats—the Kremlin-approved message. For those who have electricity and are plugged in to the Kremlin's media, there is the potential for total media saturation. Nor is this crude propaganda. The Kremlin has invested considerable resources into transforming their portion of the Russian

information space into a slick, entertaining, often informative landscape that appeals to both young and old.<sup>15</sup>

Besides using their daily news programs to pound this message home, over the past decade, the Kremlin-sponsored media have developed an untold number of talk shows where "experts" discuss and explain what is *really* happening in the news.<sup>16</sup> These programs are an interesting mix of propaganda, analysis, entertainment, and discussion, and they are designed more to incite emotions and provoke indignation than to inform. Watching these programs, one might believe that Russians enjoy complete freedom of speech; watch for a longer period and one will discover that the Kremlin's message is merely strengthened under the guise of open debate. Not surprisingly, the United

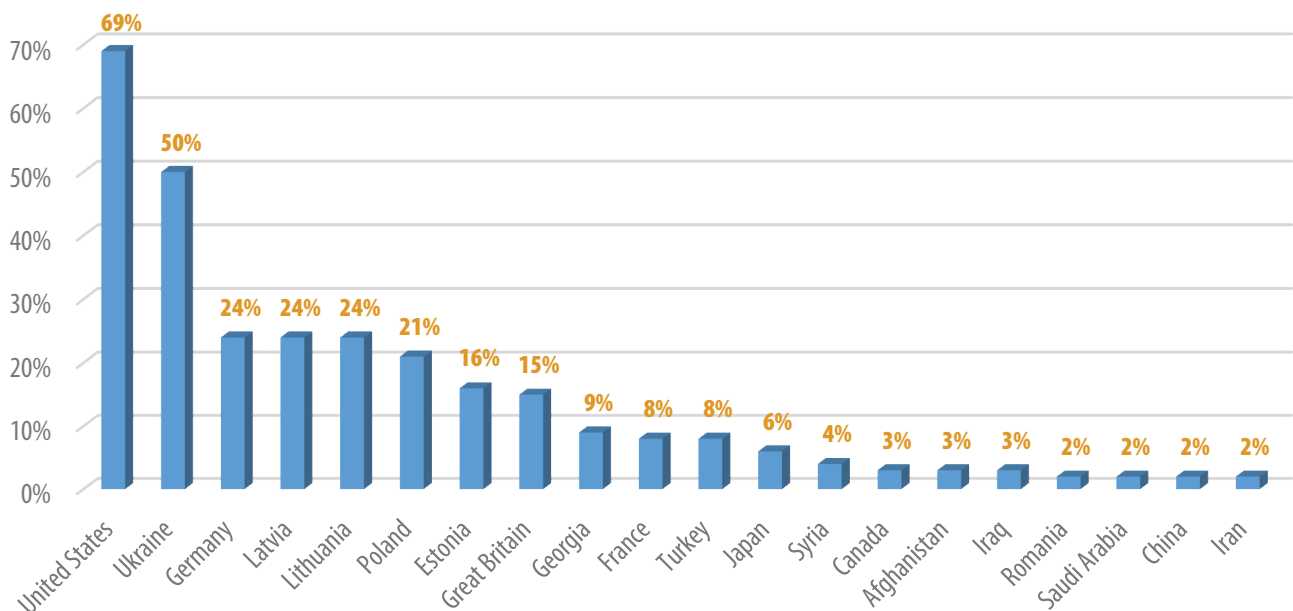


Dmitry Kiselyov, head of the Kremlin's Rossiya Segodnya news agency and a chief Russian propagandist, projects an image of a nuclear mushroom cloud and boasts of Russia's ability to turn the United States into "radioactive dust." (Screenshot of Russia 1 news broadcast via Mirovich, Maxim. "Как люди превращаются в пропагандистов" [How people are transformed into propagandists], 6 February 2019, <https://maxim-nm.livejournal.com/479126.html>)

bemoaned this unilateral use of air power against their Serb-Orthodox brothers. For the Russian leadership, this was a cold slap in the face, perhaps best personified by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov's decision to turn his Washington-bound plane around in midair when notified that NATO had started bombing Serb targets.<sup>11</sup> This conflict would prove to be a watershed in Russia's later foreign and military policy, proving to the Kremlin leadership that Russian concerns would only be heeded if backed by strong and combat-ready military forces.<sup>12</sup>

## Control over the Media

One of Putin's first priorities was regaining control over the major media outlets in Russia, and, over the past decade, he has exploited the strategic heights of the



(Figure by Euromaidan Press. Results of Levada poll question, "What five countries could you call the most unfriendly/hostile toward Russia?" <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/06/15/us-and-ukraine-are-the-top-2-enemies-for-russians/>)

**Figure 1. Opinion Poll about Russia's Top Enemies, May 2017**

States and its purported "wicked designs" against Russia is a favorite topic of discussion. They have also developed similar programs that address and expound upon general military topics, with the United States and NATO usually depicted as the primary threats.<sup>17</sup> Figure 1 reflects the effectiveness of this messaging.

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To reiterate, the Kremlin does not just employ the media to get its message across. It has created an all-encompassing, many-layered strategy that includes using the Russian Orthodox Church, the Academy of Sciences, nongovernmental organizations, the school system, Russian businesses, think-tanks, international conferences, modern movies, popular songs, and militarized youth groups,

all designed to transmit and reinforce the Kremlin's anti-Western rhetoric.<sup>18</sup>

## The Russian Military and Social Media

As of mid-2019, the internet in Russia is still largely free of government control, but there are worrying signs.<sup>19</sup> Recent statistics claim the upward of 75 percent of the Russian population are to some degree connected to digital communication.<sup>20</sup> While there have been attempts over the past several years to limit what Russians can post on the web and access on various internet platforms, they are still able to access most sites. Internet anonymity is a different story.<sup>21</sup> Over the past few years, there have been a number of high-profile cases where individual Russian internet users have posted information that the government deemed as harming the country's national security.<sup>22</sup> The prosecution of these cases has made most Russians wary of posting anything that may be used against them.

This openness toward internet usage and social media does not apply to Russian military personnel. Up until Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine in early 2014, Russian military personnel were avid users of various social media sites (e.g., VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, etc.). This usage came to an abrupt halt after



foreign researchers were able to demonstrate that Russian soldiers were indeed involved in the fighting in south-east Ukraine, especially after the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in mid-July 2014. Thanks to photos and other data posted by Russian military personnel, it was clear that Russian forces were actively involved in the fighting and were partially responsible for the tragedy behind the destruction of the aircraft.<sup>23</sup>

## Gauging the Pulse of the Russian Military

While information gleaned from social media sites used by Russian military personnel has largely dried up, there are still a number of other sources that can be exploited to gauge what military personnel are thinking. Besides the sites sponsored by the Russian Ministry of Defence (e.g., Zvezda TV and *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper), there are a number of military-themed programs on major Russian media, as well as websites, blogs, and publications that reflect current Russian military thinking.<sup>24</sup> A considerable portion of the information contained in this paper is derived from these sources.

One source in particular, the Komsomolskaya Pravda Radio program, *Voennoye Review* (Military Review), provides a good example of current Russian military attitudes.<sup>25</sup> This hour-long program airs nationwide, Monday through Friday, and is hosted by two retired Russian army colonels, Viktor Baranets and Mikhail Tymoshenko.<sup>26</sup> It usually consists of a short introduction on a military-related topic with the remainder of the program devoted to answering questions from the call-in audience. Occasionally, they will host senior military personnel who will also answer questions from the call-in audience. As this program is recorded live, it often captures the raw sentiments of both the hosts and the audience.

Unlike most official Russian sources, Baranets and Tymoshenko have no problem expressing their open disdain and scorn toward the United States and its military. Not only do they constantly repeat the Kremlin's assertion that Washington is intent upon preventing Russia from recovering its superpower status, but, in nearly every episode, they also find grounds to disparage how the United States conducts military operations.<sup>27</sup> While this particular radio program might not be all that influential within the Russian information space, it may accurately reflect popular sentiments (to include those in the Russian armed forces) toward the U.S. military.

There is likely a generation factor among Russian military personnel and how they view the American military. The older generation who were influenced by Soviet propaganda may be more inclined to embrace the current Kremlin rhetoric. Even though some of these more senior military personnel may see through the current Kremlin propaganda, to speak out could have negative career consequences. While younger military members have been exposed to the same anti-American, patriotic onslaught of past decade, they may be more



An example of a meme circulated on Russian social media sites that compares U.S. and Russian soldiers stationed in combat zones. Lower caption: "One of these (U.S. soldier) needs to be fed, dressed, armed, paid, etc. ..., while for the other (Russian soldier), it's enough to give an order to 'move out' and he fulfills it at any cost." (Image courtesy of Elena Zayulina, в Северном Причерноморье [In the Northern Pontic], Нокки и я [Knock and me], 11 November 2016, <http://mariantas.ru/v-severnom-prichernomorie/>)

proficient in relying upon other, less tendentious media sources. Indeed, recent survey data suggests that Russian youth, while claiming to be "patriotic," are increasingly unwilling to make a genuine sacrifice for their country.<sup>28</sup> However, once a young Russian enters the military, the information diet may change his or her perspective.

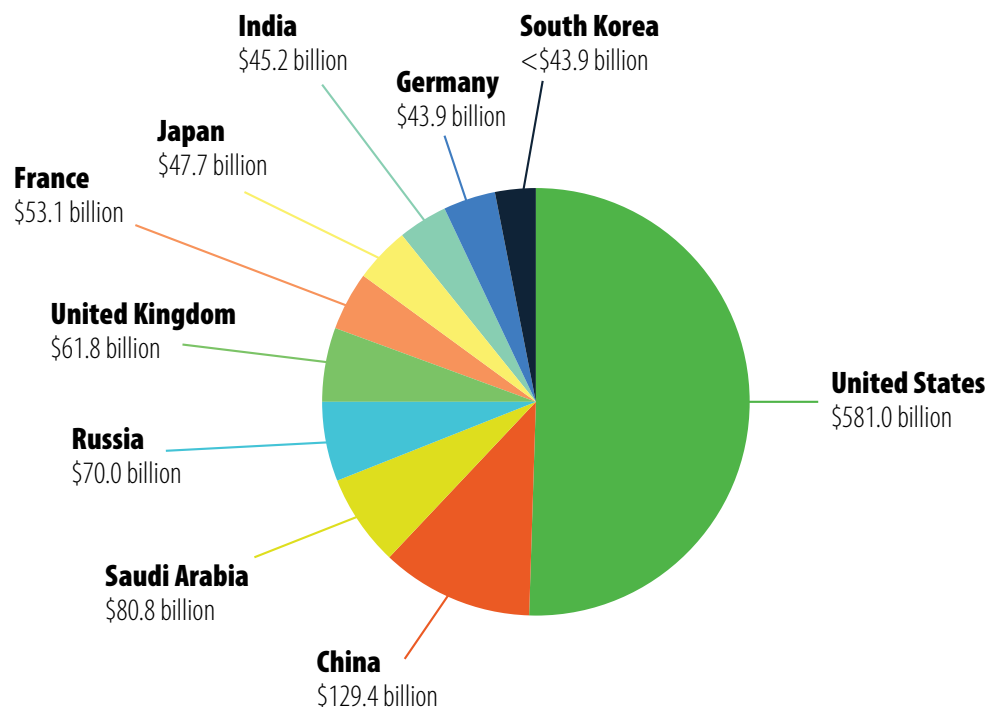
## The American Military as Portrayed in Russian Media

For the past few years, the United States has been portrayed in the Russian media as the primary source

of much of the world's instability. According to Kremlin-sponsored pundits, the United States deliberately sows unrest (often under the guise of liberal democracy promotion) to maintain its global hegemony.<sup>29</sup> After its presumed victory at the end of the Cold War, the United States assumed the role of the "indispensable nation," disregarding the global security structures built after World War II. According to Russian commentators, because the United States controls the global money supply, Washington has been able to convert its economic advantage into sheer military power.<sup>30</sup>

The Kremlin leadership often points out the wide discrepancy between how much the United States spends on the military compared to the rest of the world.<sup>31</sup> They see a direct nexus between dominant U.S. military power and the status of the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency.<sup>32</sup>

Against their aggrieved historical backdrop, the American military has been portrayed in a negative light within the Russian media. According to commentators like Baranets, Russian military leaders are aware that the United States spends considerably more on its military. They use this discrepancy to lobby for additional funding, while at the same time asserting that defense expenditures are not the only barometer of combat readiness (see figure 2). A key theme within much of the Russian information space is the belief that given their long history of repelling foreign invaders, Russia has experience, wisdom, and truth on their side. These Russian leaders would agree with Napoleon who suggested, "In war, moral power is to physical as three parts out of four."<sup>33</sup> A recent study by Global Firepower has suggested that despite Russia's much smaller defense budget, it is nearly as powerful (militarily) as the United States.<sup>34</sup>



Modified version of original figure by Der Statistiker via Wikimedia Commons. (Data source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 23 July 2015)

**Figure 2. Military Expenditures by Country in 2014**

While the Russian soldier may be impressed with images and videos of drone strikes and some of the other high-tech U.S. arsenal, he or she is likely less overwhelmed with American military strategy. The Russian media have portrayed U.S. operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere largely as failures, where the United States has only exacerbated problems in these countries.<sup>35</sup> Every botched American operation, every errant missile strike, every case of torture or criminality perpetrated by U.S. military members, and every scandal or leak that reflects poorly on U.S. Armed Forces receives the widest possible exposure within the Russian media.<sup>36</sup> The Kremlin's narrative highlights both the seemingly lack of a comprehensive military strategy and what they consider as the hypocrisy of promoting American democracy via military power.<sup>37</sup>

The American military is often portrayed as being over concerned with safety and political correctness, while being soft and dependent upon a huge logistical tail.<sup>38</sup> The American soldier is depicted as unwilling to fight if he or she is not supplied with all the comforts of home.<sup>39</sup> At the official level, Russia remains a very

traditional, conservative country, and the population of which regards gender equality, gay rights, and women in combat positions as both weak and decadent.<sup>40</sup> The Russians have coined a derogatory slang term for American soldiers, “ПИНДОСЫ” [pindosy], using it to mock and belittle Americans in uniform.<sup>41</sup>

The superiority of Russian weapon systems is also a popular topic within the Russian media.<sup>42</sup> The media are constantly claiming that Russian modern, conventional weapon systems “have no analogy in the West.”<sup>43</sup> The same braggadocio exists in the nuclear realm. Over the past few years, the Russian media have repeatedly reminded their audience of the country’s ability to transform the United States into a parking lot or as the head of Rossiya Segodnya news agency Dmitry Kiselyov put it, “radioactive dust.”<sup>44</sup>

## Implications for the Russian Soldier

Perhaps the first and most important implication is the belief among Russian soldiers that their country is already at war.<sup>45</sup> Some in the West want to draw a clear distinction between war and peace. The current Kremlin leadership does not see this divide.<sup>46</sup> The message it has portrayed over the past several years is that Russia has been engaged in a defensive “war” against the West/United

States, which remains intent upon preventing Russia from regaining its superpower status. Using economic, information, diplomatic, and other means, the Russian soldiers believe that their country has already been “attacked” by the West/United States.<sup>47</sup> Having repeatedly been taught that Russia is engaged in a defensive struggle



Among the most prominent current practitioners of the propaganda devices discussed in the adjoining article is RT (formerly named Russia Today), a sophisticated Russian-government-funded international television network that has been developed to convey globally Russian propaganda infused in news bulletins, documentaries, and other conventional Western-style television programming to audiences outside of Russia. As such, it provides both television programming and internet content in multiple languages, including German, French, Arabic, Spanish, and English. Though posing as a legitimate news outlet, RT’s official Russian-government sponsorship is poorly concealed, as its twenty-four-hour per day programming is both relentless in its anti-American and anti-Western orientation as well as in its overt advocacy of Russian-government policy objectives. RT’s editor in chief has reportedly asserted that RT programming is synchronized to support the Russian army and Russian Ministry of Defence in its effort to wage information war against the West. (Screenshot from RT website, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/459407-nato-russia-libya-peace/>)



against U.S./Western aggression, they honestly believe that theirs is a just struggle and that truth and righteousness are on the Russian side.

The prevalent mood in Soviet society after World War II could be summed up as “do everything possible to avoid another war.”<sup>48</sup> That generation had experienced the full horror of modern conflict, and even after the USSR attained superpower status, Soviet society understood that war should be avoided at all costs. In contrast, this sentiment may no longer be prevalent, particularly among the younger generation, who have been taught that war is a viable option.<sup>49</sup> Believing that their country is now under threat from the United States, these young Russians are increasingly prepared to take up arms to fight against the “enemy.”

Over the past decade, young Russians have been exposed to a persistent media message that claims their country has been under attack from the West, and the United States in particular.<sup>50</sup> A portion of these young Russians now wear military uniforms and are prepared to challenge U.S. claims of hegemony (the Pentagon map dividing the world up into American military districts drives Russians crazy).<sup>51</sup> They regard the American military as the primary threat and are increasingly ready to defend their country’s interests.

It is not so much that the Russian soldier regards the United States as an enemy, as the growing belief that in a conflict between Russia and the United States/NATO, Russia would prevail.<sup>52</sup> Up to the highest levels, Russian military personnel may have fallen victim to believing their own propaganda as to the superiority of their military power. Recent poll results suggest that, in a conflict between Russia and the United States/NATO, Russian military personnel believe they would prove victorious. This bellicosity is ever present in the Russian media, where they assert that Russia is increasingly ready for a fight. This growing confidence in their military strength could lead to greater risk taking and, ultimately, could have catastrophic consequences for both countries.<sup>53</sup>

## Implications for the U.S. Military

The U.S. military has already begun to recalibrate and adjust to an increased threat from the Russian military and the Kremlin’s associated information operations. This increased focus on measures to thwart

possible Russian aggression needs to be balanced by both an awareness of escalatory dangers and a willingness to cooperate where security interests align. U.S. military personnel should understand that their Russian counterparts’ global narrative is far different from their own. Where Americans might refer to “democracy promotion” or “concern for human rights,” a Russian would see naked aggression or geopolitical maneuvering. U.S. military personnel should understand that their Russian counterparts question U.S. claims of global dominance and will not be intimidated by threats of “shock and awe.”

Should top-level relations between Russia and the United States improve, it is conceivable that the U.S. military will not be portrayed as an adversary. Given the Kremlin’s indirect control over the major Russian media, they could be directed to adopt a more balanced and objective approach toward today’s “enemy.” This agility in changing the prominent Kremlin narrative was on display after Turkish forces downed a Russian aircraft that had briefly violated Turkish airspace in November 2015. Prior to this incident, Turkey and Russia had enjoyed decent relations. The Russian media quickly transformed the image of the Turkish leadership into a cabal of backstabbing cowards. Russia broke off many relations with Turkey (to include tourism) and levied economic sanctions. However, less than a year later, after the Turkish leadership apologized for the incident, the Russian media rhetoric toward Turkey quickly regained its balance.<sup>54</sup> Such a media transformation might occur if Moscow and Washington were to improve relations.

Nevertheless, despite economic challenges, there are currently no signs that the Kremlin leadership has modified its strategic objectives of weakening the United States and NATO. Employing the same rigor and many of the same tools it has used in influencing the mind of its own citizens, the Kremlin remains determined to debilitate the American/Western belief in democracy and the rule of law. The success of the Kremlin’s endeavor will depend not only on developing a realistic strategy to defend against Russian information operations but to a large degree on how well the citizens of the United States and other Western countries can live up to the democratic values they profess. This is doubly true for those who are called upon to defend these values. ■

## Notes

1. "100% российских военных в Сирии проголосовали за Путина" [100% of Russian soldiers in Syria voted for Putin], Interfax, 19 March 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://www.interfax.ru/elections2018/604226>.
2. "Шойгу заявил, что почти 90% военных и членов их семей проголосовали за Путина" [Shoygu announced that almost 90% of the military and their families voted for Putin], TASS, 20 March 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/5047699>.
3. Ray Finch, "Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military," *South Central Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 48–73.
4. "Polite green man" is the moniker developed by the Russian media to describe Russian military personnel during and after the annexation of Crimea.
5. The Russian Ministry of Defence published the results of an undated poll on its website, where over 75 percent of the military personnel surveyed believed that their country was under threat from other countries. See Russian Ministry of Defence, "Опросы: Министерство Обороны Российской Федерации" [Poll: Ministry of Defence Russian Federation], Наука [Science], accessed 5 May 2019, [http://ens.mil.ru/science/socio-logical\\_center/actual.htm](http://ens.mil.ru/science/socio-logical_center/actual.htm); for a more general survey of the entire Russian population regarding threat awareness, see "Если завтра война: опрос показал, какой военной угрозы боятся россияне" [If tomorrow is war: Poll shows which countries Russians fear military threat], *Apostrophe* (website), 28 June 2017, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://apostrophe.ua/news/world/ex-ussr/2017-06-28/esli-zavtra-voyna-opros-pokazal-kakoy-voen-noy-ugrozy-boyatsya-rossiyane-/100079>.
6. It is impractical to discuss genuine democratic procedures and high-level government corruption when the American "enemy" is at the gate. The term "sovereign democracy" was coined by Kremlin presidential aide Vladislav Surkov in 2006. Generally speaking, it refers to the notion that Russia has a unique form of democracy that is largely managed by the Kremlin elite. To this day, the Kremlin leadership remains wary of the revolutionary concept that the power of the state is derived from the consent of the governed.
7. Thomas Gibbens-Neff, "How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria," *New York Times* (website), 24 May 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/middleeast/american-commandos-russian-mercenaries-syria.html>. Some have suggested that the 7 February 2018 U.S. air attack on Russian mercenaries near the Syrian town of Deir al-Zour once again impressed upon the Russians the formidable military dominance of the United States. While U.S. air assets were able to pummel these targets with impunity, the mission would have likely been much more difficult had regular Russian forces been involved.
8. Antiwestern sentiment within Russia stretches back centuries, but for a good portion of the current generation of political and military leaders, their formative experience was spent in the declining years of the Soviet Union. Much of today's propaganda is built on the anti-American sentiments of the Cold War.
9. Our hypothetical Russian soldier would have been born about this time, and his family likely experienced the economic distress, criminality, and confusion that stemmed from the Soviet Union's collapse and transition to a new state.
10. "Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015 – Full-Text Translation," Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, accessed 2 May 2019, <http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>. While the Kremlin has not yet formally proclaimed the United States as an "enemy," it has certainly exploited Russian media to create this impression. In its latest national security strategy (2015), the Kremlin identifies NATO as a threat to Russian security. In the current Kremlin calculus, NATO is merely a front organization for continued American aggression.
11. Richard C. Paddock, "Primakov Does U-Turn Over Atlantic, Heads Home," *Los Angeles Times* (website), 24 March 1999, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/mar/24/news/mn-20482>. While many Americans have forgotten about what occurred in Kosovo in 1999, the topic has remained at the forefront in Russian military thinking. The attempt by Russian forces to seize the airport in Pristina has been enshrined as an early example of the necessity of using armed forces to protect the country's interests.
12. For a thorough examination of the current Kremlin leadership's grievances against America, see Michael Kirk et al., "Part Two," 1 November 2017, in *Putin's Revenge*, podcast, Public Broadcasting Service, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-revenge/>.
13. There have been numerous, in-depth studies that describe the Kremlin's control over the Russian media. For a brief sampling, see Katherine Ognyanova, "Careful What You Say: Media Control in Putin's Russia – Implications for Online Content," *International Journal of E-Politics* 1, no. 2 (2010): 1–15; Peter Pomerantsev, "Russia: A Postmodern Dictatorship?," *Transitions Lecture Series* (London: Legatum Institute, October 2013), accessed 2 May 2019, [https://li.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/pomerantsev1\\_russia\\_imr\\_web\\_final.pdf](https://li.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/pomerantsev1_russia_imr_web_final.pdf); "The Russian Media Landscape," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 123 (21 February 2013), [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/160446/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_123.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/160446/Russian_Analytical_Digest_123.pdf).
14. *Media Consumption in Russia: Key Trends* (Moscow: Deloitte CIS Research Centre, January 2016), accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ru/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/media-consumption-in-russia-2015-en.pdf>.
15. Presidential Decree No. 203, "About the Strategy for the Development of the Information in the Russian Federation for 2017–2030," 9 May 2017, accessed 2 May 2019, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41919>. In May 2017, the Kremlin published its information strategy, titled *The Strategy for the Development of Information Society in the Russian Federation for 2017–2030*. It is filled with all sorts of enthusiastic rhetoric on the need to transform Russia into a "knowledge-based" country. There is no mention of the state-use of propaganda.
16. The list of these programs is long and continues to expand/transform. Some of the most popular include Воскресный вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым [Sunday evening with Vladimir Soloviev], <http://vsoloviev.ru/sunday/>; *Pravo Znai* [Right to know], <http://www.tvc.ru/channel/brand/id/1756/show/episodes>; *Moment Istiny* [Moment of truth], <https://moment-istini.com/>; and право голоса [Pravo Golosa; Right to speak], <http://www.tvc.ru/channel/brand/id/36/show/episodes>.
17. Again, the list is long and ever-changing, and besides the Zvezda television station dedicated to covering military topics, there are programs like *Armeiskiy Magazine* [Army Magazine], *Voennoye Taina* [Military Secret], *Genstab* [General Staff], *Voennoye Review* [Military Review], and *Voennaya Programma A. Slatkova* [A. Slatkov's Military Program].
18. Much has been recently written about Russia's use of "soft-power" tools. For one study, see Antoaneta Dimitrova et al., "The Elements of Russian Soft-Power: Channels, Tools, and Actors Promoting Russian Influence in Eastern Partnership Countries" (working paper, EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment [EU-STRAT], Berlin, July 2017), accessed 2 May 2019, <http://eu-strat.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WP4.pdf>.
19. The Kremlin has been moving toward greater control over the internet; see, for instance, Dmitriy Shestoporov and Natalya Korchenkova,

"Суверенный рунет набирает скорость" [Sovereign Russian internet is gathering speed], *Kommersant Online*, 18 January 2019, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3855920>.

20. Eliza Mills and Lizzie O'Leary, "4 Things to Know about Russian Internet Usage," *Marketplace*, 13 April 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.marketplace.org/2018/04/13/tech/4-things-know-about-russian-internet-usage>.

21. Ksenia Idrisova, "Explainer: What is Russia's New VPN Law All About?" *BBC News*, 1 November 2017, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-41829726>.

22. Robert Coalsan and Dmitry Volchek, "Russian Youth Pays Price for Speaking out over Ukraine," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 12 June 2015, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-youth-anti-war-ukraine-persecution/27069023.html>.

23. Much has been written about this topic; see, for instance, Halya Coynash, "Russia Cracks Down on Soldiers' Social Media Pages that Expose Russian War Crimes in Ukraine," *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 26 February 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1518543609>.

24. For a brief sampling of Russian websites that deal with military topics, see *Zvezda TV* (<http://www.tvzvezda.ru/>); newspapers—*Krasnaya Zvezda* (<http://www.redstar.ru/>), *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye* (<http://nvo.ng.ru/>), and *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier* (<http://vpk-news.ru/>); and military—*Interfax News* (<http://www.militarynews.ru/>).

25. *Voennoye Review* [Military Review] with Col. (retired) Viktor Baranetz, *KP Radio*, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/radio-boronetz/>.

26. Viktor Baranetz and Mikhail Tymoshenko both served in the Soviet and then Russian military. Baranetz served as a military journalist and the author was unable to find Tymoshenko's military specialty. For some period, Baranetz served as a "trusted envoy" for Putin.

27. This topic surfaces in nearly every episode. For a complete archive of the program, see *KP Radio*, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/radio-boronetz/>. For a typical example where Baranetz disparages the U.S. military, listen to the first ten minutes of this episode, "In the United States, They Were Terribly Upset That 'Tomahawks' Got into Russia" [in Russian], *KP Radio*, 28 April 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/26825.7/3862383/>.

28. "Патриотизм уже не в моде? Молодёжь не хочет 'умирать за Усманова и Абрамовича'" [Is patriotism out of fashion? Young people do not want 'to die for Usmanov and Abramovich'], *Noviye Izvestiya*, 9 January 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://newizv.ru/article/general/09-01-2018/patriotizm-uzhe-ne-mode-molodezh-ne-hochet-umirat-zasmanova-i-abramovicha>.

29. In the current prevalent Kremlin realpolitik propaganda, "democracy" is a mere façade for U.S. big business and elite interests. Thus, according to the Kremlin's calculus, the various "color" revolutions of the past decade had little or nothing with advancing the cause of democracy in places like Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Egypt but rather spreading chaos so the United States can maintain its global dominance. For an example of how the Kremlin transmits this message to its people, see Igor Panarin, "Как противостоять Информационной войне против России" [How to stop the information war against Russia], YouTube video, posted by "Polit Russia," 12 October 2016, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhN7karyrtg&index=2&list=PLA884F3D85B86B355>.

30. One popular Russian pundit, Nikolai Starikov, has created a complete modern global history, where the United States plays the role of primary villain. According to Starikov, the United States planned the collapse of the USSR and since then has maintained a controlling presence within the Kremlin, primarily through its economic (dollar) influence. A few years ago, the rants and writings of Starikov were popular only on the fringe in Russia. Today, he has become a very popular unofficial spokesperson for the Kremlin. Besides his frequent appearances on television and radio,

Starikov maintains a robust internet presence. See, for instance, his blog at <http://nstarikov.ru/>. For Starikov's explanation as to how the dollar became the global reserve currency, see his book, *Ruble Nationalization: The Way to Russia's Freedom* (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Piter Press, 2007). For the specific Starikov quote regarding how the United States has used its control over the dollar to increase its military might, see Nikolai Starikov, "Стариков: Как доллар США стал главной мировой валютой" [Starikov: How the U.S. dollar became the global reserve currency], YouTube video, posted by *Narodniy Sobor*, 1 November 2011, 8:10–9:20, accessed 6 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQgWPjW8-us>.

31. See, for instance, "Шойгу сравнил военные бюджеты России и стран НАТО" [Shoigu compares Russia's military budget with that of NATO], *Lenta.ru*, 22 December 2017, accessed 2 May 2019, [https://lenta.ru/news/2017/12/22/def\\_budget/](https://lenta.ru/news/2017/12/22/def_budget/).

32. For a more detailed look at how the Kremlin views the United States' use of its economic power, see Ray Finch, "The Kremlin's Economic Checkmate Maneuver," *Problems of Post Communism* 62, no. 3 (7 May 2015), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10758216.2015.1022392>.

33. Napoleon Bonaparte, "10 Napoleon Bonaparte Quotes in Context," Shannon Selin: Imagining the Bounds of History, 24 October 2018, accessed 6 May 2019, <https://shannonselin.com/2014/08/10-napoleon-bonaparte-quotes-context/>. See also Vladimir Putin, "Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию" [The president's message to the Federal Assembly] (speech, Central Exhibition Hall "Manege," Moscow, 1 March 2018), accessed 30 April 2019, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>. On 1 March 2018, during his address to the Federal Assembly, Putin spent the second half of his speech reviewing new Russian weapons that would guarantee the country's defense and sovereignty. After completing his video-assisted description of these weapon systems, he went on to talk about a Russian pilot who had recently been killed in Syria. Rather than being captured alive, Maj. Roman Filipov blew himself up, along with several of his would-be captors. Putin remarked that while Russian weapons were important, "No country could produce an officer like Major Filipov," and that these men are the ultimate guarantors of Russian freedom.

34. According to Global Firepower, in 2018, the United States and Russia held the top two positions with regard to military firepower, with the difference measured in mere fractions. See "2019 Military Strength Ranking," Global Firepower, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

35. Not surprisingly, this is a favorite topic on the Kremlin mouthpiece RT, which now broadcasts in thirty-one different countries. For an example, see Alexander Bovdunov, "Американцы ищут повод для нанесения удара: как США могут использовать иракский опыт в Сирии" [Americans seek a pretext to strike: How the United States is using its Iraqi experience in Syria], RT, 20 March 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://russian.rt.com/world/article/494011-irak-vtorzhenie-itogi-sirii>.

36. A quick Google search, under the heading "Американские военные преступления" [American military crimes] comes up with nearly nine million hits and over six hundred thousand videos. For a typical example, watch the video from the Russian program "Military Secret," which catalogs American military crimes committed in Iraq. See Igor Khokhlov, "Преступления американских военных в Ираке" [Crimes committed by the American military in Iraq], YouTube video, posted by "ElectronicEnglishRu," 22 January 2011, accessed 2 May 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8xkKyl82\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8xkKyl82_Q).

37. This is a favorite theme of Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, and is shared widely among the Russian media. For an example, see "Московский 'майдан' — мечта Вашингтона: зачем США нужна «цветная революция» в России" [A Moscow 'maidan'—Washington's dream: Why the U.S. needs a color revolution in Russia], *Rambler*,



1 July 2017, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://news.rambler.ru/politics/37291195-moskovskiy-maydan-mechta-vashingtona-zachem-ssha-nuzhna-tsvetnaya-revolutsiya-v-rossii/>.

38. For a typical example of this sentiment, see Anatoly Matviichuk, "Миф об армии США" [The myth of the U.S. Army], *Soldati Rossiye* [Soldiers of Russia], no. 1-3 (2011), accessed 2 May 2019, <http://www.soldatru.ru/read.php?id=1307>.

39. America's general dysfunction (crime, school-shootings, obesity rates, education decline, racial tensions, etc.) is a common refrain on Russian talk shows. As a military reflects the country it purports to defend, many Russian military analysts suggest that these same dysfunctions plague the U.S. Armed Forces. See, for instance, Anton Mardasov and Alexander Sitnikov, "Америка и Россия: чей солдат лучше" [America and Russia: Whose soldier is better], *Svobodnaya Pressa* (website), 2 July 2015, accessed 30 April 2019, <http://svpressa.ru/war21/article/126479/#mc-container>; for a more detailed account, see Matviichuk, "Миф об армии США."

40. Baranetz and Tymoshenko had a field day when certain U.S. sources claimed that there were at least fifteen thousand transgender troops serving in the U.S. military. See KP Radio, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/radio-boronetz/>; for additional background, see John Riley, "Russian State Media Mocks U.S. Military's 'Tranny Troops,'" *Metro Weekly*, 2 January 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.metroweekly.com/2018/01/russian-state-media-mocks-u-s-military-allowing-transgender-enlistees/>.

41. The exact etymology of the term "pindosy" is not clear, but it is widely used in Russian slang as a derogative term for Americans, especially U.S. military personnel. For a more thorough examination as to the root and usage of this term, see Wikipedia, s.v. "Pindos" [in Russian], last updated 8 November 2018, 16:29, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%81>.

42. Over the past few years, articles asserting the superiority of Russian weapon systems have appeared every month or so. It is a favorite topic among Russian military journalists. For example, see "США признали беззащитность перед оружием России" [The U.S. recognizes its lack of defense against Russian weapons], *Pravda.ru*, 27 March 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.pravda.ru/news/world/27-03-2018/1377911-USA-0/>.

43. "Путин рассказал о новейших видах российского вооружения" [Putin spoke about the latest types of Russian weapons], *RIA Novosti*, 1 March 2018, accessed 6 May 2019, <https://ria.ru/20180301/1515566394.html>.

44. Considered as one of the top Kremlin propagandists on Russian TV, Dmitry Kiselev made the threat about how Russia could transform the United States into "radioactive dust" on his weekly news program on 17 March 2014. For a video clip of his remarks, see "Russia Can Turn the United States into a Radioactive Desert, Vesti Weeks, Dmitry Kiselev, March 16, 2014" [in Russian], YouTube video, posted by "Евгений Фоос," 16 March 2014, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1V3Mh3jCH0>.

45. This is a very popular topic in Russia today, both within traditional and social media. Someone even created a website cataloging the current preparations for the "Third World War." For a typical example of this type of reporting, see "The Third World War Is Inevitable, but Will Avoid Direct Confrontation," interview by Konstantine Sivkov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (website), [https://www.kp.ru/best/msk/no\\_peace\\_no\\_war/page389596.html](https://www.kp.ru/best/msk/no_peace_no_war/page389596.html).

46. Perhaps the most influential article on this topic was written by Russia's current chief of the general staff back in 2013. See Valery Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii," *Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kurier* (website), 26 February 2013, accessed 2 May 2019, <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

47. There are a number of Russian sites dedicated to covering the "Third World War," where the consensus is that the fighting has already started. See, for instance, Русское Агентство Новостей [Russian News Agency], which touts itself as the "Information Agency of the Russian Public Movement 'Revival of the Golden age,'" and which has a special rubric titled "Новости: Третья мировая война" [News of the Third World War], [новости.ru-an.info/третья-мировая-война/](http://новости.ru-an.info/третья-мировая-война/); see also "Третья Мировая Война: военно-политический обзор" [Third World War: Military-political review], <http://3mv.ru/publ/1>. The topic remains popular throughout both traditional and digital media. For a recent newspaper article on the topic, see Mikhail Rostovsky, "Третья мировая война просто так" [The Third World War is just like this], *Moskovskij Komsomolets* (website), 12 April 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2018/04/12/tretya-mirovaya-voyna-prosto-tak.html>.

48. After enduring the horrors of World War II, the prominent sentiment in Soviet society could be summed up as "Лишь бы не было войны" (anything is preferable to war).

49. See the long interview dealing with the rise of militarism in Russia today with one of Russia's best pollsters (and sociologist) Lev Gudkov, "ХОТЯТ ЛИ РУССКИЕ ВОЙНЫ?" [Do Russians want wars to happen?], *Levada Center*, 30 May 2016, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/2016/05/30/hotyat-li-russkie-voyny-2/>. For full audio and transcription of the interview (in Russian), see Sergey Medvedev, "Do Russians Want War?" [in Russian], *Radio Liberty*, 4 May 2016, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27716179.html>.

50. This is a favorite topic on Russian newscasts, newspapers, and talk shows, as well as on Russian social media sites. For a recent example, see the article from Anton Fokin, "США готовят для России войну-наказание" [The U.S. is preparing a punishing war against Russia], *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (website), 9 January 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26776/3810846/>; or watch this video from the popular talk show program *60 Minutes* on Russia's primary TV station, ORT: "США готовятся к войне с Россией" [The U.S. is preparing for war with Russia], YouTube video, posted by "Politics Russia – Ukraine," 22 January 2018, accessed 30 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz6aDctQww0>.

51. This is one of Baranetz's favorite whipping points on his radio program. For an example, listen to "What to Expect from Ukraine after the Delivery of 'Javelins' from the USA?" [in Russian], KP Radio, 10 May 2018, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/26827.4/3866474/>.

52. See the 2015 poll results from the independent polling center, "Threats from the West," *Levada Center* press release, 10 June 2015, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2015/06/10/threats-from-the-west/>. "Армии России и США сопоставимы по мощи, считают военные эксперты" [Military experts regard the armies of Russia and the U.S. to be equally powerful], *RIA Novosti*, 31 August 2017, accessed 30 April 2019, [https://ria.ru/defense\\_safety/20170831/1501466227.html](https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170831/1501466227.html).

53. The current Kremlin narrative stresses Russia's "defensive" policies. In their rendition, the country is defending against U.S. aggression. For a recent example of this, see Gevorg Mirzayan, "Если русские действительно спартанцы, а США — Афины: кто победит" [If the Russians are really Spartans, and the United States is Athens: Who will win], *RIA Novosti*, 19 December 2017, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://ria.ru/analytics/20171219/1511200732.html>.

54. Alec Luhn and Ian Black, "Erdoğan Has Apologised for Downing of Russian Jet, Kremlin Says," *The Guardian* (website), 27 June 2016, accessed 2 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/27/kremlin-says-erdogan-apologises-russian-jet-turkish>.