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RUSSIA AND THE US IN THE MIRRORS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

The article offers a comparative analysis of Russian and American scholarship on each other states and society. The author overviews the study of US history in Russia, the study of Russian history in the US, the study of the history of Russian-American relations, and the discourse of each country on the contemporary political reality in the other. Both Russian and the US research agendas demonstrated some degree of dependence of the other country's policies, they were engaged in a limited dialogue, but most heavily they were influenced by domestic politics. The author claims also that the image of Russia in the United States and the image of America in Russia play important roles in the home debates making it difficult to separate foreign policy from domestic disputes. Such a vantage point calls for the use of the social constructivist approach to the study of the US – Russian relations with its heavier focus on identity construction and nation-building.

KEYWORDS:

US-Russian relations, US history, Russian history, study of the other, enemy studies, area studies, constructivism in IR

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The study of Russia and the USSR in the US and the study of the United States of America in the Soviet Union and Russia were some of the first examples of 'area studies' in the contemporary world.¹ Given the additional impetus provided by the Cold War, 'enemy studies' embraced a wide range of not only social sciences but also the humanities, and such studies were not necessarily applicable in political or even military planning. The institutional and discursive legacy of these area studies survived the Cold War, although scholars engaged in studies of the other country have had a difficult time. The reasons for this are different in Russia and the United States.

The overlapping of Russian and American historical and related political science can be divided into the study of US history in Russia, the study of Russian history in the US, the study of the history of Russian-American relations, and analysis in one country of the contemporary political reality in the other. For obvious reasons, the latter analysis is most in demand among political elites, who spend the most time on it. It should be noted, however, that political analysis often relies on knowledge of the other country's history (recall George Kennan's classic text 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', which explained contemporary Soviet politics by describing the problems that Russia had faced throughout its history). This is why the role of advisers to American presidents on relations with the Soviet Union was performed not only by political scientists but also by reputable historians such as Richard Pipes.

This article is an overview of the state of each of these three fields in terms of their mutual influence and dialogue. It offers an explanatory framework for knowledge about the Other in Russian and American societies.

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF THE OTHER

Let us begin with the interrelations between these two scholarly communities' historians' knowledge of the research on their own history conducted in the other country. There has been a clear and growing role of American scholarship in Russian-American academic relations in recent decades.

The history education researcher James Leuven once (in the early 2000s) made a statement which seems paradoxical at first glance: 'It would be better for the USA if American history textbooks were written

¹ On the links between the emergence of area studies and the outbreak of the Cold War, see: David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Guido Franzinetti, 'The Strange Death of Area Studies and the Normative Turn', *Quaderni Storici*, 50.150 (3) (2015), 835–47.

by experts from another country'.² Apparently, this American scholar assumed that the outside view was not distorted by inner political conflicts and passions, therefore history written abroad can be more objective. When countries have been in a state of rivalry for a long time, however, or when one country has been a key benchmark for the other in internal political disputes, historians are under pressure by this agenda and find it difficult to remain impartial. This is not to say that historians become involved in political disputes on one side of a political conflict (although this is also not uncommon), but even objective works by historians are often interpreted in a political sense when emotions are high. Whether Leuven was right or not, it is almost impossible to use textbooks written by foreigners to study one's own history. I know of only one such instance: in the very early 1990s, when *Histoire de l'Union soviétique* (History of the Soviet State, 1992),³ written by the French historian Nicolas Vert, was officially recommended as a school textbook in Russia. Moreover, the opinions of Russian scholars about the problems of American history are virtually unknown in the United States, even though Russia is still one of the largest hubs of historians who specialise in American history outside of the English-speaking world.⁴ It must be said that some of the relative freedom of expression that scholars in the other country enjoy makes it rather difficult for their own citizens to be aware of these freedoms. For example, a leading Russian expert on American history, Vladimir V. Sogrin, Head of the Centre for North American Studies at the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, described the advantages of the view from abroad as follows:

Experts from other countries who study US history from the outside have certain advantages in taking an unbiased scholarly stance. There is an issue with so-called *political correctness* in American historiography.⁵

It is unlikely that a politically incorrect version of American history written in Russia would be in demand in the US nowadays.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, several volumes of *Russian-American Dialogues* inspired by *perestroika* and interest in Russia were published in the United States. These collections pursued the idea of introducing American readers to works on key issues of US history written in Russian by Russian authors. The issues were devoted to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the American War of Independence, the history of Russian-American cultural relations, and the history of American political parties.

² Džeims V. Lēven, 'Prepodavat' podlinnuju istoriju', *Amerikanskij ežegodnik*, 2005 (2007), 167–79.

³ Nikolja Vert, *Istorija Sovetskogo gosudarstva. 1900–1991* (Moskva: Progress-Akademija, 1992).

⁴ See: *Historians across Borders*, ed. by Nicolas Barreyre and others, 1st edn (University of California Press, 2014).

⁵ Vladimir V. Sogrin, *Istoričeskij opyt SŠA* (Moskva: Nauka, 2010), p. 17.

Each article was translated by a Soviet scholar (the editors selected articles published in the USSR) and was accompanied by a commentary by an American historian. The first issue was published back in 1989; the last, the fourth one, was published in 2000.⁶ The selection of articles for translation is a disputable issue as they were not always the best examples of Soviet and Russian historiography. Still, the very fact that these collections of articles were published shows interest in the works of Russian scholars among the American academic community.

Apparently, the American academic community tends to believe that decades of ideological dictate in Soviet historical scholarship and scarce research funding in post-Soviet Russia make it impossible for interesting studies of American history to emerge in this country.

It is noteworthy that Sogrin, whose articles were selected for the above-mentioned project, was very critical of the state of Russian-American historical dialogue that was revealed in the aforementioned volumes. In his subsequent article, published in English, he lamented the fact that American authors believed that 'Russian historians can't say anything that Americans do not already know'. He also mentioned: 'The mentor tone, an indicator of messianic consciousness and sense of national superiority [...] typical of American scholars in their analysis of Russian society today'.⁷ One may disagree with these bitter statements but they are not true of all American historians. Still, the underestimation of the accumulated work of Russian historical scholarship would be a mistake.

It could be expected that – given the lifting of ideological constraints and access to the press, monographs and archives of the other country – the quality of research would improve and the dialogue on American history could continue. In practice, however, such public dialogue between the two historiographies has been non-existent in the last two decades.

At the same time, dozens of books by American scholars on both US and Russian history have been published in Russia in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, a number of books were translated and published with the financial support of the US Embassy. Subsequently, such initiatives were supported by various scientific foundations. It is noteworthy that the US Embassy has provided Russian translations of classic American consensus history books. In the last decade, Russian publishers have been vigorously publishing translations of

⁶ *Soviet-American Dialogue on the New Deal*, ed. by Otis Livingston Graham Jr. (University of Missouri, 1989); *Russian-American Dialogue on the American Revolution*, ed. by Gordon S. Wood (University of Missouri, 1995); *Russian-American Dialogue on Cultural Relations, 1776–1914*, ed. by Norman E. Saul and Richard D. McKinzie (University of Missouri Press, 1996); *Russian-American Dialogue on the History of U.S. Political Parties*, ed. by Joel H. Silbey (University of Missouri Press, 2000).

⁷ Vladimir V. Sogrin, 'Contemporary Dialogue of Russian and American Historiographies', in *Russian/Soviet Studies in the United States, Amerikanistika in Russia. Mutual Representations in Academic Projects*, ed. by Ivan Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva (Lanham: Lexington, 2016), pp. 231–42 (pp. 234–35).

radical authors who are critical of American society in a variety of ways. However, there are also academic translation projects of American experts on Russia. Noteworthy are the three-volume compilations of articles on Russian history by American authors published in Samara in the early 2000s;⁸ the book series 'Sovremennaya zapadnaya rusistika' (Contemporary Western Russian Studies, 2001) published by the Academic Studies Press;⁹ and numerous translations of monographs by American authors published by Russian publishers (especially by the publishing house *Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye*).¹⁰

Thus, an asymmetry can be observed: works on US history and on Russian history written by American authors reach Russia and are translated and studied. Works on US history written in Russia do not reach the United States and are not within the academic interest of American scholars. Actually, there has been no bilateral discussion between Russian and American historians on US history since the publication of *Russian-American Dialogues* was discontinued.

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The dialogue between Russian and American scholars (in both languages) continues to develop when it comes to the study of Russia as well as works on the history of Russian-American relations and the history of Russian America.

The most notable changes have occurred in the community of historians specialising in the Cold War period. This is the area of the closest cooperation between researchers from the two countries. Since the publication of a book on the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis by a Soviet scholar of an older generation, Aleksandr A. Fursenko, in co-authorship with the American Timothy Naftali,¹¹ it has been clear that works based on the study of documents from both sides and taking into account the logic of

⁸ *Amerikanskaja rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Period Kievskoj i Moskovskoj Rusi. Antologija*, ed. by Džordž P. Madžeska (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2001); *Amerikanskaja rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Imperatorskij period. Antologija*, ed. by Majkl Dèvid-Foks (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2000); *Amerikanskaja rusistika: vechi istoriografii poslednich let. Sovetskij period*, ed. by Majkl Dèvid-Foks (Samara: Izdatel'stvo Samarskogo universiteta, 2001).

⁹ *Izdatel'stvo Bibliorossika / Academic Studies Press*, series: *Sovremennaja zapadnaja rusistika*, 2021 <<https://www.bibliorossicapress.com/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F>> [accessed 15 January 2022].

¹⁰ See, for example: Džejms Billington, *Ikona i topor. Opyt istolkovanija istorii russkoj kul'tury* (Moskva: Rudomino, 2011); Èrik Lor, *Rossijskoe graždanstvo: Ot Imperii k Sovetskomu Sojuzu* (Moskva: NLO, 2017); Majkl Dèvid-Foks, *Pereseckaja granicy: Modernost', ideologija i kul'tura v Rossii i Sovetskom Sojuze* (Moskva: NLO, 2020), etc.

¹¹ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997). There are two translations and several editions of this book in Russian: Aleksandr A. Fursenko and Timoti Naftali, *Adskaja igra: sekretnaja istorija karibskogo krizisa 1958–1964* (Moskva: Geja, 2001); Aleksandr A. Fursenko and Timoti Naftali, *Bezumnyj risk: Sekretnaja istorija kubinskogo raketnogo krizisa 1962 goda* (Moskva: ROSSPÈN, 2006).

both American and Soviet elites are more interesting than those based on the archives of only one side.

The volume edited by Kieron Skinner and prefaced by people who were at one point close to the decision-making centre (George Schultz and Pavel Palazhchenko¹²) is an example of a compilation of articles on the history of the Cold War. It includes articles by politicians and political scientists from both countries and is organised in the form of a debate: each article is accompanied by a commentary by the 'other side'.

Prominent scholars proposed their own interpretations of the Cold War at the beginning of the new century, sometimes revisiting the conclusions of their earlier studies.¹³ Still, most noteworthy are new works in which the focus of the study of the Cold War shifts from strategic rivalry to cultural interactions and to the impact of the Cold War on the domestic politics of these two countries. This methodological shift occurred simultaneously in both American and Russian historical scholarship.¹⁴

While the history of the Cold War attracts comparable attention in both countries, the preceding period of cooperation between these two countries during the Second World War is of markedly greater interest to Russian historians than to their American counterparts. This may be explained by the quasi-ideological role that the history of the Great Patriotic War plays in contemporary Russia. At the same time, reference to the period of Soviet–American cooperation is a reminder of an alternative to the state of confrontation in which Russian–American relations find themselves today. The history of the establishment and operation of the coalition of the Allies – personified in the interactions between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill – as well as the history of the Lend-Lease policy are of greatest interest to historians.¹⁵

Finally, the history of Russia–US relations from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century has attracted the attention only of not

¹² *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*, ed. by Kieron K. Skinner (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

¹³ See, for example: John L. Gaddis, *The Cold War: a New History* (Penguin Books, 2005); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). In Russia, such a generalising work was published by Vladimir Batjuk: Vladimir I. Batjuk, *Cholodnaja vojna meždu SSA i SSSR (1945–1991 gg.): Očerki istorii* (Moskva: Ves' mir, 2018).

¹⁴ Jennifer M. Hudson, *Iron Curtain Twitchers: Russo-American Cold War Relations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Cadra Peterson McDaniel, *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); Toby C. Rider, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016). See also: Eduard I. Ivanjan, *Kogda govoriat muzy. Istorija rossijsko-amerikanskich kul'turnych svjazej* (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 2007); Eduard Ja. Batalov, Viktorija Ju. Žuravleva, and Ksenija V. Chozinskaja, "Ryčoščij medved'" na "dikom Vostoke": *Obrazy sovremennoj Rossii v rabotach amerikanskich avtorov. 1992–2007* (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2009). Quite a number of young scholars have defended dissertations on this subject. See, for example: Anastasija S. Kurljandceva, 'Chudožestvennye svjazi SSA i SSSR v 1950–1970-e gody: chudožniki, politiki, vystavki' (unpublished thesis for the defence of a candidate of sciences degree, HSE University, 2021).

¹⁵ See Robert F. Ivanov, *Stalin i sojuzniki. 1941–1945 gody* (Moskva: Veče, 2005); Vladimir O. Pečatnov, *Stalin, Ruzvel't, Truměn: SSSR i SSA v 1940-ch gg.* (Moskva: Terra, 2006); Michael N. Suprun, *Lend-liz i severnyje konvoi, 1941–1945* (Izdatel'stvo Andreevskij flag, 1997); Irina V. Bystrova, *Poceluj čerez okean: «Bol'shaja trojka» v svete ličnyh kontaktov (1941–1945 gg.)* (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2011); Irina V. Bystrova, *Lend-liz dlja SSSR. Ekonomika, tehnika, ljudi* (Moskva: Kučkovo pole, 2019), etc.

historians who have a positivist approach to collecting new data in archives and describing new details of these bilateral relations, but also their colleagues who apply constructivist approaches to historical research.¹⁶ In addition, the history of Russian America is another field of research in which both American and Russian scholars have long worked together.¹⁷

It can be argued that the history of Russian-American relations has already become a field of joint research. The *Journal of Russian American Studies*, which has a joint Russian-American editorial team,¹⁸ has been published since 2017.

CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Let me open this section with a non-academic digression. Almost a quarter of a century ago, in the autumn of 1997, while working at the Kennan Institute in Washington, I read articles about Russia regularly in American newspapers over several months. It was a new experience for me. I soon discovered that, although I could usually agree with the conclusions of the articles, I could not accept the line of arguments of their authors as they seemed detached from Russian reality. The conclusions about the need to democratise Russia and further integrate it into the world community and about the importance of fighting corruption (which was a hot topic in the American media that year) resonated with my views.¹⁹ However, the way American authors reached these normative conclusions showed, it seemed to me, little familiarity with the subject.

A few years later, as a member of the PONARS international academic network, I started regularly reading works about Russia written by American academics. I discovered that participants of the debates possessed advanced expert knowledge, and I heard a lot of interesting things about

¹⁶ See, in particular: Viktorija I. Žuravleva, *Ponimanie Rossii v SŠA: obrazy i mify, 1881–1014* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo RGGU, 2012); Ivan I. Kurilla, *Zaokeanskije partnery: Amerika i Rossija v 1830–1850-e gody* (Volgograd: Izdatel'stvo VolGU, 2005); David C. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' since 1881* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Both Russian and American researchers study interesting individual topics: Dmitrii M. Nečiporuk, *Vo imja nigilizma: Amerikanskoe obščestvo družej russkoj svobody i russkaja revoljucionnaja emigracija (1890–1930 gg.)* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nestor-Istorija, 2018); Lee A. Farrow, *Alexis in America. A Russian Grand Duke's Tour, 1871–1872* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); Matthew L. Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940* (Lexington, 2012); Norman E. Saul, *The Life and Times of Charles R. Crane, 1858–1939: American Businessman, Philanthropist, and a Founder of Russian Studies in America* (Lexington, 2012); and others.

¹⁷ See, for example: *Istorija Russkoj Ameriki (1732–1867)*, ed. by Nikolaj N. Bolchovitinov, 3 vols (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1997–1999); Kenneth N. Owens and Alexander Yu. Petrov, *Empire Maker: Aleksandr Baranov and Russian Colonial Expansion into Alaska and Northern California* (University of Washington Press, 2015); Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867* (Oxford University Press, 2011) (its Russian translation: *Il'ja Vin'koveckij, Russkaja Amerika. Zaokeanskaja kolonija kontinental'noj imperii. 1804–1867* (Moskva: NLO, 2015); and others.

¹⁸ See the journal's website: *Journal of Russian American Studies*, 2021 <<https://journals.ku.edu/jras>> [accessed 10 February 2022].

¹⁹ See, for example: Peter Reddaway, 'The West's Spoilt Russian Son', *New Statesman*, 22 August 1997, 26–27, later developed by the author into the book: Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

my country for the first time. Academic methods and concepts developed by Western scholars and applied to Russia offered new insights into Russian society and the country's political system, thus achieving a heuristic richness. At the same time, I was under an impression that some of these publications were prepared for the domestic American agenda and had little to do with what was happening in Russia: the hierarchy of issues of interest to American colleagues differed from that of Russian participants in this academic network.

Years later, during Donald Trump's presidency, one could see that the production of balanced scholarly knowledge about Russia was once again put on the back burner: amidst the scandal about 'Russian interference in the election', mainstream American media published articles by journalists and politicians who had a poor understanding of the country they were writing about. The quality of scholarly expert knowledge about Russian society far exceeded the quality of popular journalism at the time, although one could observe misconceptions also among reputable American academics.²⁰

On the other hand, in Russia, perceptions of the USA have always been heavily mythologised. Despite the activity of a large cohort of academics specialising in American studies in the country since Soviet times, political and everyday discourse about America has been entrenched not in works by American scholars but in non-academic literature. Apart from the problem of the low status of academic scholarship in society in general, the Russian view of the United States, like the American view of Russia, can be seen as influenced by the domestic political agenda.

The study of this impact has become a popular scholarly activity in recent years as a sociological view of knowledge production has become widespread, and the study of the Other can be seen as a response to political and social demands.²¹ Thus, for example, there are reasons to believe that American historians' different approaches to Stalinism reflected their views of the ongoing Cold War.²²

²⁰ Thomas Graham, 'Europe's problem is with Russia, not Putin', *Financial Times*, 31 May 2015; Ivan Kurilla, 'To Thomas Graham: We Should Understand Russian History Differently', PONARS Eurasia – *The Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia*, 5 June 2015 <<https://www.ponarseurasia.org/to-thomas-graham-we-should-understand-russian-history-differently/>> [accessed 30 January 2022].

²¹ David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Sergei Zhuk, *Soviet Americana: The Cultural History of Russian and Ukrainian Americanists* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018); Sergei Zhuk, *Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and American Studies in the USSR: People's Diplomacy in the Cold War* (Lanham, MD and Boulder, CO: Lexington Press, 2017); *Russian/Soviet Studies in the United States, Amerikanistika in Russia: Mutual Representations in Academic Projects*, ed. by Ivan Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015).

²² See: Mark Edele, *Debates on Stalinism* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

WHAT AFFECTS MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS

Knowledge about the United States of America in Russia and about the USSR and Russia in the USA is shaped by several factors.

The first factor is the cumulative body of knowledge and stereotypes amassed by previous generations of Americans and Russians: scholars, journalists, politicians, and emigrants who took part in shaping perceptions of Russia in America. This body of knowledge – with all its discoveries and misconceptions, prejudices and insights – constitutes the fundamentals and building blocks that shape the contemporary image of the other country.

Second, each country's domestic agenda has an impact on how these two countries perceive each other. For more than a century, Russia and the US have been each other's constituent Other: they use the other to define and redefine themselves. The other country may fulfil the role of an ideal and of a role model for one's own country, although more often the other country and its people are ascribed those traits which certain political forces would like to eradicate at home. Thus, these traits are projected onto the other and are labelled as alien characteristics which are trying to penetrate one's own society.

Third, mutual perceptions are, of course, influenced by both countries' activities in the international arena and their bilateral relations. However, I would not overestimate the importance of this factor, which is often presented as fundamental in works that apply the methodology of 'political realism': experience shows that the choice of images from the repertoire constantly communicated by the other country is primarily governed by the first two factors. Moreover, when a country starts to communicate something new that does not fit into what is already known about it and is not in demand in the internal disputes of the partner, the other society can ignore this novelty for a long time.

Let's take a closer look at these factors.

THE RUSSIAN VIEW OF THE US

Three different and historically entrenched views of America can be distinguished in Russia. The first view is that of revolutionaries or radical reformers, starting with Alexander Radishchev. In Russia, Catherine the Great's words about Radishchev are well known: 'He is a rebel worse than Pugachev'. The empress's statement has a less frequently quoted ending: 'he

praises Franklin as an instigator and sees himself as such'.²³ Radishchev was a rebel because he saw a future of Russia similar to that of America. Of course, the Decembrists who translated the American Constitution, the late-nineteenth-century revolutionaries, and the dissidents who criticised the Soviet regime all belonged to this tradition. For the most part, America was an image of a better world, a utopia, not a real country. Few of its enthusiasts of the time had been there. Therefore, the US was ascribed the characteristics of the ideal that the revolutionaries wanted to instil in Russia; the anarchists saw America as a country with no central government, with local self-government being a decision-maker on all issues. On the contrary, the supporters of centralisation among the Bolsheviks argued that the US was a unitary state without a trace of federalism.²⁴

The second approach is typical of the conservative part of society, namely proponents of a strong, centralised Russian state, who have a tendency to perceive fellow citizens' fascination with the US as a threat, especially when they perceive their own political position at home as fragile. The fact that America served as an ideal for revolutionaries automatically made it a threat for the conservatives even in the nineteenth century, when the United States was in no way able to interfere in Russian affairs and was weak both economically and politically. This was true both of Catherine II, who perceived Franklin, who had fascinated Radishchev, as a threat, and of a Russian diplomat in New York, Alexey Yevstafiev, who described the US in 1852 as a 'bright ignis fatuus, enticing millions to perdition, [...] a wilful bigot sparing none opposing to her, [...] and sowing where she can the Dragon-teeth of Revolution'.²⁵ The perception of America as a threat is reinforced every time the position of the Russian government is shaken. This may explain the suspicious attitude of conservative governments even to academic study of the United States.

Every time the Russian leadership, be it Nicholas I or Dmitry Medvedev, tried to carry out reforms and talk about modernisation, America immediately acquired its third identity: a land of technological marvels from which to borrow technology, economic forms, and even elements

²³ *Pamjatnye zapiski A.V. Chrapovickago, stats-sekretarja imperatricy Ekateriny vtoroj* (Moskva: V/O 'Sojuzteatr', 1990), p. 227. See also: David M. Griffiths, *No Collusion! Catherine the Great and American Independence*, ed. by George E. Munro (Slavica, 2020).

²⁴ The anarchist leader Mikhail Bakunin wrote in 1867: 'We must reject the [French] policy of the State and resolutely embrace the North American policy of freedom'. For Bakunin's views on the US as a country of 'victorious federalism', see Andrej Teslja, 'O ponjatii "federalizm" v social'no-političeskich teorijach M.A. Bakunina', *Sociologičeskoe obozrenie*, 14.3 (2015), 136–52. On the contrary, Stalin argued in 1917 that the US had long turned 'into a unitary (merged) state with unified constitutional norms'. Iosif V. Stalin, 'Protiv federalizma. "Pravda", 28 marta 1917 goda', in *Stalin I.V. Čočinenija* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo političeskoj literatury, 1946), III, pp. 23–31 (p. 24). Clearly, the 'real' US did not coincide with either view, which was only a projection of one's own political projects.

²⁵ *The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth* (Manuscript), New York, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Aleksyei Grigoryevich Yevstafiev Papers, 1814–1852. See in detail: Ivan Kurilla, 'Debates about Russia, America, and New World Order: Four Books from the 1850s', *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Serija 4, Istorija. Regionovedenie. Meždunarodnye otnošenija*, 26.5 (2021), 225–31.

of governance. Nicholas I recruited American engineers to build the Moscow–St Petersburg railway. The Bolsheviks invited huge numbers of American specialists to implement industrialisation in the 1930s. Stalin's intelligence officers in the 1940s were all out for US nuclear secrets. Nikita Khrushchev brought home American ideas – from self-service shops to corn cultivation. Even Konstantin Chernenko (the then-head of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) flew to America in 1974 to study modern organisational solutions and their possible application in the USSR. When Mikhail Gorbachev uttered the word 'acceleration', he launched a rapprochement with the US. Finally, when Dmitry Medvedev evoked the notion of 'modernisation', he went to Silicon Valley.

THE AMERICAN VIEW OF RUSSIA

David Foglesong and Victoria Zhuravleva proved that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had developed its own traditions of perceiving Russia. Namely, conservatives saw Russia as a stagnant, conservative country with an authoritarian government living in harmony with a population that expects a paternalistic approach. The American Society of the Friends of Russian Freedom (established at that time) had a different opinion: they saw Russians as a good, democratically minded people oppressed by a repugnant, authoritarian government. Finally, at the same time, a number of American politicians, journalists and translators who were engaged in translating books by Russian writers invited P. A. Tchaikovsky and A. Rubinstein to America, thus creating a 'non-political' image of Russia as a country of high culture. These people are commonly referred to as Russophiles.²⁶

The prominent Russian historian Vladimir O. Pechatnov singles out two approaches to Russia that emerged in the United States in the twentieth century: the so-called Riga and Yalta traditions. The former developed in the 1930s in Riga, which operated as a 'surveillance hub' that monitored the USSR until 1933, when the US finally recognised Soviet Russia. The Yalta tradition was created by the Roosevelt administration in the first half of the 1940s. The former tradition sees Russia as an aggressive power

²⁶ Viktorija I. Žuravleva, and Dëvid S. Foglesong, 'Konstruirovanie obraza Rossii v amerikanskoj političeskoj karikature XX veka', in *Mify i realii amerikanskoj istorii v periodike XVIII–XX vekov*, ed. by Vadim A. Koleneko and others, 3 vols (Moskva: IVI RAN, 2008), I, pp. 189–262.

inherently hostile to the West, while the latter perceives it as a problematic country capable of change under internal and external pressure.²⁷

I believe that the description of the other country in comparison with the 'norm' (represented by one's own society), as was characteristic of the Riga tradition, focuses on the gap between the other country and one's own reference state, and on something that is missing in the society being described. It is from this position that Russia is seen as unwavering in its archetypal values over the centuries (this view was represented by Richard Pipes, who passed away a few years ago). The limited freedoms and the lack of democracy are what has remained unchanged in Russia.

This very notion of a 'norm' triggers enthusiasm that overwhelms American society every time Russia changes, be it the reform of the economy and technical rearmament along American lines, or the revolutionary demolition of the old system. Each time, at the initial stage of these revolutionary changes (in 1905, 1917 and 1991), American observers readily accept the descriptions of events coming from Russian democrats and liberals, who, according to Americans, are trying to turn Russia into a new 'United States', that is, 'to get closer to the norm'.

ASYMMETRY IN STUDYING EACH OTHER

In the United States, the study of the USSR (Russia) has intensified and received more funding and resources at times of deterioration in bilateral relations. Funding has been discontinued during periods of détente/reset. This rule has applied both to universities in the United States that receive public grants and to international think-tanks for Soviet studies sponsored by the United States, such as the Institute for the Study of the USSR, which operated in Munich from 1950 to 1972 and whose funding was terminated with the onset of détente. One of the consequences of the fact that the study of Russia in the US intensifies during periods of poor relations is the anticipatory approach to the publication of books and articles describing Russia as a hostile power.

In the USSR and Russia, US studies have received resources when relations improve and encounter difficulties during periods of poor relations. The USA Institute (now the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences) was established in the USSR in anticipation of détente. Newly opened centres of US studies proliferated

²⁷ Vladimir O. Pečatnov, 'O nekotorych konstantach vzaimnogo vosprijatija Rossii/SSSR i SŠA', *Amerikanskij ežegodnik* (2020), 13–20.

in Russia when the confrontation ended in the 1990s, and their number began to decline after 2007.²⁸

The opposite logic that governs the institutionalisation of Russian studies in the US and American studies in Russia can be explained, in my view, by the different roles played by the Other in each country. When the American state sees Russia solely as an external threat, it funds 'enemy studies', but the Russian attitude to the United States is more complex. The Russian state not only (or maybe not so much) sees America as an external military threat but is also afraid that the American example is appealing to Russian citizens; this is precisely what Joseph Nye calls 'soft power'. The liberal-democratic model of governance is attractive to a significant number of Russians and, as such, is a threat to the ruling elites. Thus, studying the US in Russia may be perceived as one way of implanting a hostile model in the country and is therefore restricted at times of confrontation. On the contrary, US studies are encouraged when reforms in Russia are introduced as such research becomes a source of ideas for improving the efficiency of the Russian economy and state governance.

CURRENT PROBLEMS IN RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS SEEN BY EXPERTS

Russia's foreign policy expansion after the beginning of President Putin's third term predetermined a deterioration in Russia–US relations. The annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine created all the conditions necessary to perceive Russia as an aggressor. The real earthquake to hit American media came as late as 2016 and involved allegations of the Kremlin's interference in the US election in favour of Donald Trump. The response to the apparent violations of international law from outside of American domestic politics was relatively mild. When Trump's opponents realised they could link him to Russia, however, the Democrats immediately used this hypothetical link as a tool to put pressure on him. On the eve of the 2020 election, a debate about Russia and the proper attitude to it unfolded in the public space of American politics, in which several positions arose. The main arguments were outlined in a series of open letters published on the website of the influential *Politico*. Let us examine

²⁸ See: Ivan I. Kurilla and Victoria I. Zhuravleva, 'Teaching U.S. History in Russia: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects', *The Journal of American History*, 96.4 (2010), 1138–44.

them in more detail as examples of a combination of lasting stereotypes and the current agenda of American Russian studies.

The first letter was published on 5 August 2020 under the title 'It's Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy'.²⁹ The letter was written by six 'heavy-weights' of US foreign policy: Rose Gottemoeller, the then-US Undersecretary of State and Deputy Secretary General of NATO; Thomas Graham, a former assistant to President George W. Bush and Director for Russia and Eurasia at the US National Security Council; Fiona Hill, an assistant to President Donald Trump for Russian and European affairs until very recently; Jon Huntsman, US Ambassador to Russia in 2017–19; Robert Legvold, Professor at Columbia University; and Thomas Pickering, US Ambassador to Russia from 1993 to 1996, former Undersecretary of State and former US Representative to the UN.

The letter was also signed by 103 experts, including a former Secretary of State, a former Secretary of Defence, senators, two other former ambassadors to Russia, and a host of other experts and professors.

In the letter, the current state of Russia–US relations was described as a 'dangerous dead end' that leaves 'the existential threats of nuclear war and climate change unattended'. Having enumerated Russia's wrongdoings that are traditionally listed by American experts (seizing territory from Georgia and Ukraine, challenging America's role as world leader, challenging the world order constructed by the US, and interfering in American domestic politics to deepen the divide and undermine its democratic reputation), the authors stated that despite the need to confront all these issues the US must 'engage Russia through negotiations out of the public glare, focused on each side's capabilities to do great damage to the other side's critical infrastructure'.

Experts believe that, strategy-wise, the US should return to the policy it pursued during the Cold War: 'a balanced commitment to deterrence and détente'. Concrete proposals include stepping up work on extending the New START Treaty and maintaining confidence-building measures in Europe (such as the Open Skies Treaty). The authors pay special attention to Russia's possible role as an ally in the event of increased tensions in US–China relations: 'Our current policies reinforce Russia's readiness to align with the least constructive aspects of China's U.S. policy. Moving the needle in the opposite direction will not be easy but should be our objective'.

The authors also drew attention to the fact that the sanctions adopted by Congress were no longer working, while the accumulation of

²⁹ Rose Gottemoeller and others, 'It's Time to Rethink Our Russia Policy', *Politico*, 5 August 2020 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/05/open-letter-russia-policy-391434>> [accessed 14 February 2022].

sanctions made it difficult for diplomats to work, hence the ‘need to restore flexibility to our sanctions regime’.

In the concluding part of the letter, the authors expressed their belief that ‘Russia, under Vladimir Putin, operates within a strategic framework deeply rooted in nationalist traditions that resonate with elites and the public alike. An eventual successor [to Putin], even one more democratically inclined, will likely operate within this same framework’. Therefore, US policy cannot be devised with the aim of changing this framework: ‘We must deal with Russia as it is, not as we wish it to be’.

Less than a week later, *Politico* published a response to the first open letter which undermined its main points. The second open letter, titled ‘No, Now Is Not the Time for Another Russia Reset’, was written by David Kramer, a US Assistant Secretary of State from 2008 to 2009 and former President of Freedom House.³⁰ His letter was signed by 33 US politicians and diplomats, including former US ambassadors to Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The message is apparent from the title: Now is not the time for a new reset. Instead, ‘the actions and behaviour of Vladimir Putin’s regime pose a threat to American interests and values, requiring strong pushback’. The author insisted that any policy addressing Russia should clearly state that ‘the main responsibility lies with the Putin regime’ when it comes to the dire state of current Russia–US relations. Similarly to the authors of the first letter, Kramer enumerated the main crimes committed by the Russian regime. Additionally, he listed ‘shooting down a civilian airliner resulting in the deaths of 298 passengers and crew’ and killings of ‘Russian critics in Western countries with highly dangerous radioactive and chemical agents’. Until Putin admits his guilt, ‘further dialogue won’t go very far’.

The author of the letter rejected any ‘trade-offs’ with Russia when it comes to NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, Russia’s control over Crimea, or ‘ignoring the ugly human rights situation inside Russia’. Such an approach contradicts ‘America’s values, interests and principles’. Kramer also disagreed with the first letter’s opinion that Putin’s strategic framework is rooted in the Russian nationalist tradition, recalling that the majority of Russians, according to polls, do not perceive the US as an enemy.

According to Kramer, American policy towards Russia must rely on cooperation with allies, ‘especially NATO and the European Union’. US policy should focus on containing the Russian threat, differentiating between the Russian regime and the Russian people, maintaining and enhancing

³⁰ David J. Kramer, ‘No, Now Is Not the Time for Another Russia Reset’, *Politico*, 11 August 2020 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/11/russia-reset-response-open-letter-393176>> [accessed 07 February 2022].

sanctions, and bolstering ‘Russia’s neighbours through military, diplomatic and economic support’. ‘America should signal our readiness to work with a Russian government only when it is clear that Moscow doesn’t view the United States as the enemy’. Until that point, ‘we must avoid pointless, endless dialogue that never resolves problems’.

A few days later, *Politico* published two more letters urging the US elite to take a tough stance on Russia.³¹ Finally, the authors of the first letter responded to their critics.³² The authors of the third and fourth letters published on *Politico*’s website were politicians and experts from Eastern Europe and Ukraine, i.e., their views cannot be attributed to the American expert debate. Still, having contributed to it with their letters, they participated in the debate, using the opportunity to express their stance and their concerns. Remarkably, the point of view of the Russians – both pro-governmental and opposition-minded – was missing from the debate. Judging by the fact that no open letter from Russia appeared on *Politico* or any other online platform, it is not a matter of refusal to publish but of a lack of desire on the part of Russians to engage in a debate about US policy towards their country. As a result, Russia only serves as an object of the application of American policy as early as at the stage of discussion of possible options, while Eastern European and Ukrainian perspectives are integrated into this discussion.

It is noteworthy that the American experts who have an alternative, third view of Russia–US relations did not take part in this debate. This is *Nation* weekly magazine’s circle of contributors. To understand their approach, one may refer to an article published by this magazine in July 2020. David Foglesong, a professor at Rutgers University, wrote: ‘The demonization of Russia is driven by the desire to deflect attention from misconduct by the United States, to affirm American moral superiority in contrast to Russian depravity, and to smear domestic political opponents by associating them with Russia’.³³ *Nature*’s renowned authors, including the prominent scholar Professor Stephen Cohen, who passed away in the autumn of 2020, have called for abandoning the Cold War approach and moving to planning a future without confrontation between the two states.

³¹ Sławomir Dębski, James Sherr, and Jakub Janda, ‘Take It From Eastern Europe: Now Is Not the Time to Go Soft on Russia’, *Politico*, 31 August 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/31/open-letter-not-time-to-go-soft-on-russia-405266>> [accessed 25 December 2021]; Ariana Gic, Hanna Hopko, and Roman Sohn, ‘Appeasing Vladimir Putin’s Russia Will Only Embolden It’, *Politico*, 25 September 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/25/open-letter-russia-ukraine-421519>> [accessed 22 January 2022].

³² Rose Gottemoeller and others, ‘Why We Still Need to Rethink Russia Policy: a Rebuttal’, *Politico*, 25 September 2020, <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/09/25/russia-open-letters-rebuttal-421546>> [accessed 2 February 2022].

³³ David S. Foglesong, ‘With Fear and Favor: The Russophobia of “The New York Times”’, *The Nation*, 17 July 2020, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/world/new-york-times-russia/>> [accessed 15 February 2022].

To the best of my knowledge, such an open letter was being prepared but was never published.

Looking at this discussion from the perspective of the long history of Russia–US relations, continuity can be observed in American authors' views of Russia. The options available in the discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, described by Viktorija I. Zhuravleva, are clearly visible. These include the conservative pessimistic myth 'of Russia doomed to perpetual backwardness [...], of the authoritarian nature of its political system [...], of the primordial "Russianness" and negative consequences of the "Russian way" for US foreign policy interests and the entire civilised world'. Again, like in the early twentieth century, this conservative pessimistic myth prevails over the liberal universalist myth 'of the ability of the Russian people to make a Western-style revolution and create a "United States of Russia", of a democratic society at heart and its xenophobic, retrograde government', of Russia 'which has no other destiny but to gradually follow the path laid down by the countries of the West led by the US'.³⁴ The lasting prevalence of these – the two most widespread – views of Russia in the United States is indicative of the structural stability of perceptions of the world over that period of time.

There is no such open debate about the United States in Russia. Growing authoritarianism and restrictions on freedoms make certain opinions unacceptable in the case of those experts who wish to remain among foreign policy decision-makers in organisations such as the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, the Valdai Club, and the Russian International Affairs Council.

Nevertheless, these experts can easily be divided into supporters of the 'reformist' tradition, who see rapprochement with the US as an opportunity for Russia, and 'conservatists', who view America as a subversive force in Russian society. This logic underpins, in particular, the policy of labelling independent non-profit organisations and media outlets as 'foreign agents'. Thus, all activities outside state control are labelled as 'foreign', with the United States of America being regarded as the main foreign actor by default. There is a reason why a spike in anti-Americanism in state propaganda coincided with the mass civil protest in the winter of 2011/12. It was at that point that the classification of the United States as a subversive anti-Russian force, coupled with the labelling of the entire Russian opposition as friends of America, helped the state to successfully marginalise the protest movement. As a side effect, this manoeuvre had a dramatic impact on Russia's relations with the US and made it difficult for experts to speak

³⁴ Žuravleva, *Ponimanie Rossii*, pp. 1014–15.

in favour of Russia–US cooperation.³⁵ The state applied a practice known from previous centuries and censored those experts who believed that the American democratic experience is applicable in Russia.

Despite the state's increasing control over political discourse, however, there are clearly differences in opinion within the Russian expert community when it comes to Russian foreign policy addressing the US.

A number of Russian scholars are inclined to blame the United States alone. For example, V. I. Batyuk, the head of the Centre for Regional Aspects of US Military Policy at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, writes in the final chapter of his monograph on the history of the Cold War that, 'In the minds of the American elite, victory over communism in the Cold War was first transformed into victory over the USSR (although "communism" and "the Soviet Union" are not the same thing) and victory over the USSR into victory over Russia (although "the USSR" and "Russia" are also completely different notions)'.³⁶ Batyuk comments on the current state of American expert knowledge about Russia:

The American political-academic mainstream is divided between those who believe that Russia is too weak and therefore it makes no sense to deal with it, and those who believe that Russia, on the contrary, is strong and therefore it should be fended off. Either way, whether the Russian Federation is strong or weak, no business-as-usual Russian-American dialogue is possible.³⁷

Another prominent expert in American history, Tatiana A. Shakleina, Head of the Department of Applied International Analysis at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), part of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shares Batyuk's views: 'Does the USA *really* think about the future of mankind, does it *really* fear a major regional or global conflict or war? [...] Interest in mutual understanding on the part of the American ruling elite has been lacking'.³⁸

There are, however, other points of view within the expert community. For example, in an article published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* shortly after the above-mentioned exchange of open letters by US experts on Russia, Andrei V. Kortunov, Director General and member of the Presidium of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), calls on the US to resume dialogue with Russia:

³⁵ Keith A. Darden, 'Russian Revanche: External Threats & Regime Reactions', *Daedalus*, 146.2 (2017), 128–141.

³⁶ Batjuk, *Cholodnaja vojna*, p. 322.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Tat'jana A. Šakleina, *Rossija i SŠA v mirovoj politike*, 2nd edn (Moskva: Aspekt-Press, 2017), p. 285.

The above does not at all mean that Europe or the United States should adopt a policy of 'appeasement' towards Moscow and uncritically accept any artistry of the Kremlin as a natural phenomenon beyond human influence. This only means that power politics cannot and should not remain a universal substitute for diplomacy. The ostentatious withdrawal from dialogue, the defiant blocking of the lines of communication and treating Russia as a pariah state only multiply problems for all of us in the East and in the West.³⁹

Similarly to the American case, a debate in Russia on relations with the US is taking place between proponents of a hard-line approach, who blame America for the poor relations (and therefore expect the US to take the first step towards normalisation), and those experts who believe it is important to restore dialogue but see no potential for a radical change. The voices of those who could call for a more far-reaching change for the better can hardly be heard today.

CONCLUSIONS

Russia and the United States have accumulated a large body of literature about each other. In the US, there are think-tanks for the study of Russia that were established during the Cold War and more recently. This enables in-depth analysis of political issues and the historical reality of the other country. Since the collapse of Marxist–Leninist ideology, all participants in the historical study of Russia and the United States have used roughly the same repertoire of research methodologies. However, this fact has not made the study of each other conflict-free.

During this period, these two countries have also accumulated huge experience of the discursive use of the Other as an antithesis or model for the sake of domestic disputes. This makes Russia in the US, and the US in Russia, a permanent 'actor' in domestic politics, making it difficult in turn to separate foreign policy proper from the resolution of domestic disputes.

This is particularly true of politically laden debates about identity and contemporary politics. Historians who study Russia–US relations have long worked together despite international tensions. However, the opinions of Russian historians specialising in the topic of the US are of little interest to their American counterparts.

³⁹ Andrei Kortunov, 'Los rusos no se rinden', *El País*, 2 October 2020, <<https://elpais.com/opinion/2020-10-01/los-rusos-no-se-rinden.html>> [accessed 2 October 2020]. The quotation is given according to the Russian translation: Andrej V. Kortunov, 'Russkie ne sdajutsja!', *Rossijskij sovet po meždunarodnym delam*, 4 October 2020, <<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russkie-ne-sdayutsya/>> [accessed 4 October 2020].

The institutional logic of the development of centres of area studies aimed at studying each other differs in the two countries: American think-tanks develop during years of strained relations between Russia and the US, while Russian think-tanks gain more discretion during periods of détente, which is explained by the different nature of the threats perceived by the political elites of these two countries. To conclude, the freedom of mutual studies largely depends on the extent of political control in either country. Although this control is not absolute, it distorts perceptions and can lead to mistakes in foreign policy decisions.

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