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THE STORY OF PUTIN

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The Story of Putin

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I. PUTINIST AUTHORITARIANISM AND ANTI-AMERICANISM: AN INTRODUCTION

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A. PURPOSE

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Is Vladimir Putin nuts? Has he drunk too much Russian vodka? Does he truly hate America? Do the people he presides over truly hate America? This thesis analyzes modern anti-Americanism in Russia during the era of Vladimir Putin. The objective is to evaluate Vladimir Putin's anti-Americanism and the domestic political implications of Putinist anti-Americanism within Russia.

The central questions that this thesis strives to answer are: (1) What are the roots of Vladimir Putin's anti-Americanism as well as the anti-American tendencies of segments of the Russian populace from the 1990s to present day? (2) What is the relationship between the progression of Putin's anti-Americanism and the anti-American sympathies of the Russian public? and, (3) What are the potential domestic political benefits garnered by Putin's hybrid authoritarian regime as a result of his anti-American rhetoric and policy positions?

This thesis will show that Vladimir Putin has maintained an anti-American attitude rooted in his youth and early adulthood in the Soviet Union. Vladimir Putin developed an anti-American cognitive pre-disposition. As president, Putin's anti-American outward volume fluctuated, but his intrinsic anti-American attitude remained. Vladimir Putin has been, is, and will be inherently anti-American. The hybrid democratic-authoritarian nature of Putin's state necessitates his usage of authoritarian mechanisms to manipulate democratic practices. A unified opposition movement of the public and disaffected elites could pose a serious challenge to regime. This thesis will also show that Anti-Americanism is employed by Putin to inhibit such a union, keeping one or both segments loyal, or at least ambivalent. Anti-

Americanism allows Putin to demonstrate democratic political conformity while simultaneously providing authoritarian political distraction. He represents the sentiments of the people who “elected” him by enunciating their beliefs, like anti-Americanism, even though that sentiment has been manipulated by him. Anti-Americanism also distracts the two pillar segments of society from forming common by helping to hide the underlying problems associated with Putin’s regime.

This thesis shall also demonstrate that the level of the Russian public’s hostility toward America tends to increase or decrease in conjunction with an increasing or decreasing level of anti-American vehemence displayed by Putin’s Kremlin. Putin can sway his nation’s moods as he deems prudent. A perpetual relationship developed between Vladimir Putin’s anti-Americanism and the Russian populace’s anti-Americanism, to include the public and elite sectors. Putin’s anti-Americanism, by means of his authoritarian mechanisms, sufficiently arouses the public’s anti-Americanism, thereby allowing Putin and the political elites to feed off of that public temperament. A positive feedback relationship between Putin and his polity has developed, and the state machine powers that loop, all for the political benefit of Putin.

B. IMPORTANCE

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A roller-coaster metaphor could easily be used to describe ongoing Russian-American relations on the global scene. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, relations between the surviving superpower, the United States, and the dominant Soviet successor state, the Russian Federation, have fluctuated wildly between open friendship, cold-war like intransigence, and anything in between. Anti-American rhetoric and policy actions have emanated from the Kremlin for decades, but hostile words and quarrelsome policies cannot force the United States into a standoffish position toward Russia. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia's continued vital importance on the geostrategic scene need only be demonstrated by its actions. Such actions include Putin's baptism of fire in the Chechen Caucasus crisis upon ascending to the presidency in 1999, a revitalized Russian economic might hinged on mineral resources, an invasion of Georgia in 2008, their bilateral relations with several of the most potentially destabilizing regimes like those in Syria and Iran, and their permanent leverage within the United Nations Security Council. America must interact with Russia one way or another in this ever-shrinking world. Understanding the nature and impetuses of Russian/Putinist anti-Americanism could go a long way in aiding American policy-makers' perception of just why Putin and Russia do what they do.

As the USSR dissolved, Boris Yeltsin took the reins of the Russian Federation, the largest country on the globe, and the most powerful of the post-Soviet successor states. Many in the West harbored dreams that Russia would transform into a democracy on the Western model and adopt foreign policies compatible with the current Western democratic

states. When Putin came to the forefront in 1999, many hoped he, too, would continue down a path toward liberalization; it was not to be. Putin has steered the Russian political system's development closer toward an authoritarian model, but not a total one; Russia has become what many in the broader literature refer to as a "hybrid," or "electoral authoritarian," or "competitive authoritarian" regime.¹ Since the spread of Western democracy stagnated beyond former Soviet Eastern Europe in the 1990s, hybrid regimes that combine aspects of authoritarianism and institutional democracy have become ever-more commonplace as a result of what some call a "democratic rollback."²

Putin must operate in a hybrid authoritarian political system in which actors within the state maintain degrees of political leverage over their government and leader. An understanding of such a system, therefore, shall be necessary to gauge any domestic political implications and potential benefits of Putin's anti-Americanism. By better understanding Putin's political situation within his state and the potential political benefits accrued by Putin for anti-American rhetoric and policy, Western entities might be better able to interact with Putin rather than discounting his actions as only the whims of a Russian strong-man.

¹ Nikolai Petrov, Masha Lipman, and Henry Hale, "Overmanaged Democracy in Russia: Governance Implications of Hybrid Regimes," *Carnegie Papers*, no 106 (February 2010): 1; Grigorii Golosov, "The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (June 2011): 623; Timothy Colton and Henry Hale, "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 503.

² Larry Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State," in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, 3rd ed., eds Patrick O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 235.

C. HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY

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One major issue investigated in this thesis is the connection between Vladimir Putin's anti-Americanism and the anti-Americanism of the Russian population. That population includes the general public and Putinist elites. The thesis shall also attempt to gauge the domestic political benefits garnered by Putin's anti-Americanism within the authoritarian system that he has created.

Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane define anti-Americanism as a "psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general...an attitude."¹ Ivan Krastev comes to a similar definition: "anti-Americanism is a systemic opposition to America as a whole. It is a critique of the United States that transcends mere disagreement over specific policy questions or government decisions."² Anti-Americanism, therefore, cannot be reduced to an isolated incident of criticism or opposition to a single U.S. policy or action. An extended pattern of animosity in rhetoric and actions must be observable.

Regarding Vladimir Putin, it is hypothesized that the roots of his anti-Americanism long pre-date his rise to power. His anti-Americanism fits the Katzenstein/Keohane narrative of a psychological animosity toward America independent of reactions to the circumstances of any one instance in time. Putin did not suddenly become anti-American due to the Iraq War, a falling-out with George W. Bush, or long-term trends in American foreign policy deemed antagonistic to Russia; he has always been anti-American at heart, and the aforementioned issues simply exacerbated a cognitive condition that already existed. He possesses a "cognitive predisposition," as Robert Jervis would say. Putin's negative

perceptions of America became engrained in his psyche during the Cold War, only to remain long past the collapse of the Soviet state.³

A second hypothesis is that Vladimir Putin, though not responsible for seeding an anti-American psyche within his populace, has utilized the means inherently available within his authoritarian system to effectively fan the flames. Such means include media manipulation, exploitation of public fears of instability, and overtly discrediting anything American/Western. Many people in Russia are or have been inherently hostile toward the United States for decades. It is further hypothesized, nevertheless, that any widespread anti-Americanism within the Russian populace, as portrayed in decades of polling data, is directly related to increases in the Putinist regime's anti-American vehemence. Putinist anti-Americanism when projected from the hierarchy of authoritarian power, therefore, positively influences public anti-Americanism. In light of the aforementioned definitions of anti-Americanism, gauging the level of Putin/Kremlin anti-Americanism over time will not be based on any one single-incident example of anti-Americanism, but rather longer-term trends in regime rhetoric and policy actions. A series of anti-American speeches or confrontational policy actions turns what appeared at the time to be an isolated example of anti-Americanism into a noticeable trend.

It is further hypothesized that Putin's and his nation's anti-Americanism has become self-perpetuating. Putin's anti-Americanism can be seen as in-line with the antiAmerican popular consensus which his machine has manipulated. This thereby garners significant domestic political benefit for Putin within his hybrid-authoritarian system. Putin's anti-Americanism drives public anti-Americanism which further feeds Putin's anti-Americanism; a feedback loop has developed. The thesis, thereby, also hypothesizes that though easy to discount as the whims of a paranoid man, Vladimir Putin's rhetoric and policy stances

toward the United States remains pragmatic in light of the domestic political situation that he created for himself. Regardless of the number of “resets” in Russian-American relations, Putinist Russia will continue to breathe a degree of surliness toward the United States and West.

- ¹ Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, *Anti-Americanism in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 12.
- ² Ivan Krastev, “The Anti-American Century,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no 2 (April 2004): 7.
- ³ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 239.

D. BACKGROUND

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Anti-Americanism in Russia, whether emanating from the Kremlin or other segments of the populace, has influenced Russian-American relations during the ongoing era of Vladimir Putin. Anti-Americanism, however, was not new to Russia with Putin's ascension to power on December 31, 1999. It has existed around the globe and among the world populace as well as within Russian politicians, elites, and the public for some time. Global anti-Americanism in the 1990s, according to Fouad Ajami, was much more rampant than many casually observed, and that post 9/11 sympathies for the United States were barely skin-deep and completely temporary. Historical hatred of America, thereby, cannot be supplanted but only temporarily hidden.¹ A lingering product of Soviet times, Russian anti-Americanism in the 1990s under then President Yeltsin, therefore, simply laid dormant, waiting to resurface, which it did during the Balkan crises of the later 1990s, followed by resurgent global anti-Americanism after the 2003 Iraq invasion.²

Much of the recent global anti-Americanism has been attributed to recent U.S. actions and policy, like those within the Global War on Terror, Iraq, and economic globalization. Russian anti-Americanism can also be attributed to the Soviet past and the history of the anti-Imperialist/Western class struggle. Such an "old" form of anti-Americanism still underlies the "new" form anchored in hatred of current U.S. policies, global influence, and lifestyle.³

According to the Levada Center, one of the pre-eminent organizations that has been gauging Russian public opinion since the late 1980s, vast majorities of people polled from 2003 through 2011 consider the United States to be an aggressor state seeking influence or outright control of

other countries. During that same timeframe, large pluralities or even small majorities consistently rate relations between the United States and Russia positively with less than a majority, and often as low as 25%, believing the United States is inherently unfriendly or hostile toward the Russian Federation.⁴ Within such polling data, however, when observed over the course of several years, marked fluctuations underlying the overall summarizing numbers can be seen. Russian public opinion toward the United States, therefore, often oscillates as much as relations between the two states varies from “allies” to “friends” to “partners” to “colleagues” to “enemies” and back again.

¹ Fouad Ajami, “The Falseness of Anti-Americanism,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 138 (September — October 2003): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183656>.

² Ole R. Holsti, *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: How Publics Abroad View the United States after 9/11* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 46.

³ Eric Shiraev and Vladislav Zubok, *Anti-Americanism in Russia from Stalin to Putin* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 2.

⁴ “Russian Public Opinion 2010 — 2011” (Moscow: Levada Analytical Center, 2012), 276, 292, 293.

1. Putin's Evolving Anti-Americanism

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Vladimir Putin himself has been the subject of much scholarly interpretation. Examples of Putin-era anti-Americanism are abounding, as are analyses about the underlying facets thereof. The roots of Putin's personal antipathy toward the United States, according to some in the literature, merely represents a present day continuation of hostilities from the Cold War. Anti-Americanism was drilled into him as a former Soviet KGB agent, and such an underlying mentality did not change with the USSR's collapse. Sarah Mendelson and Theodore Gerber attribute much of Putin's positions and paranoia to Soviet-era thinking about Russia, the United States, and government.¹ Others assign equal importance to current events in tracing modern Putinist anti-Americanism. Fyodor Lukyanov believes that Putin retains a grudge toward the United States for President George W. Bush's alleged slighting of the Russian President during their first terms on issues from Iraq to NATO enlargement to unsuccessful repeal of the Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions. This pattern of slighting, therefore, is equally important to explaining the ongoing animosity.²

Perhaps "it's the foreign policy, stupid!" Anti-Americanism around the world is as much fueled by U.S. foreign policy actions as by any intrinsic or psychological cause, according to some scholars, eloquently summarized by Juan Cole.³ Putin's anti-Americanism, therefore, could represent a common product of modern relations between two unequally powerful nations operating within the confines of the contemporary global environment.