

# Not Everyone Hates Russia

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Russian political scientists like to speak of the centuries-old clash between Russian and Western civilizations. One of their theories is that the West has been united in an ongoing attempt to break Russia's back and enslave it.

As satisfying as that might sound to the Russian ear, the truth is that Western states were much more preoccupied with other issues throughout those centuries — namely, fighting with one another. The history books are filled with pages and pages chronicling the numerous wars between Britain and France, France and Germany, Germany and Poland, Spain against Portugal and Britain, Denmark against Norway, and Sweden against Finland. Incidentally, the United States went to war twice against both Britain and Germany, but not once against Russia. Visit any European capital and you'll see monuments commemorating military victories over that country's closest neighbors — but not over Russia.

The most common evidence cited of anti-Russian sentiment in the West is the military campaigns against Russia waged by Napoleon Bonaparte and Hitler, both of whom started their wars against their "European brothers," not against Russia.

Europeans have spent centuries squabbling among themselves over superpower, territorial, economic, political and dynastic interests. They have been locked in cultural and civilization-related hostilities that have endured to this day. Ask the Belgian Flemish whom they dislike, and it turns out that it isn't the Russians but the Belgian Walloons. The terrorists of Northern Ireland are too focused on London to even think about Moscow. The Danes are not very fond of Norwegians, Finns dislike Swedes, Austrians frown upon the Germans, and there is a lot of animosity between Bulgarians and Serbs. Such hostilities can even be found within a single ethnic group: Sicilians are irritated by Romans, Bavarians make fun of the Prussians, and Parisians look down at the people of Provence.

There is no doubt that weaker European nations — particularly those that border Russia — are concerned about their more powerful neighbor, but there is nothing unique about that attitude toward Russia as a powerful state. European states have the same fear that an increasingly powerful Germany could one day become aggressive again. Recall that in the late 1980s Britain and France — strong global economic and political powers in their own right — were not thrilled about the reunification of Germany, and even today watch Germany's economic rise not only with jealousy, but with unease as well. Although the United States does not have a history of military aggression in Europe, Washington's military and economic pre-eminence annoys all of Europe, if not most of the world. In much the same way, the world is also concerned about a rising China and India.

There is also another theory that the East and West conspired to turn Russia into an economic colony. By this reasoning, the United States would have turned Japan into a colony once U.S. forces occupied the country at the end of World War II. Shortly thereafter, European nations gave up their colonies. It is absurd to imagine that any country could now enslave sovereign Russia when even small and weak states were able to cast off their colonial shackles long ago.

In this regard, it is worth recalling the words of philosopher Vladimir Solovyov who more than 100 years ago suggested that Russians should take a sober look at their traditional irrational insecurities. He wrote: "The Russian people ... are obsessed with the misconceptions that border on megalomania and delusions of hostility toward them. ... Russia thinks that its neighbors are insulting it, are not bowing enough to its greatness and are plotting against it. ... If Russia's mania persists, no money, no drugs will help it."

As it turns out, though, the attitude the international community holds toward Russia is actually better than Russians would ever imagine. A survey of people in 47 countries conducted by the authoritative Pew Research Center revealed that the collective image of Russia is "quite positive" — and is, in fact, better than the perception of the United States and China. Most surprising of all, the number of Ukrainians with a favorable opinion of Russia (81 percent) was almost as high as the 89 percent of Russians who hold a positive view of their own country.

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