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Why Russia Is No. 1 in Anti-Americanism

By Michael Bohm

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Correction appended:

Kremlin propagandists have good reason to be happy with the results of a recently released annual Win/Gallup International poll in which more than 67,000 residents in 65 countries were asked, "Who is the greatest threat to world peace?" Given Russia's results, it is clear that the Kremlin's anti-U.S. propaganda campaign is paying off handsomely.

The survey indicated that 24 percent of respondents worldwide consider the U.S. the largest threat in the world, which is not a surprise and has been consistent with results over the past decade, but a much larger 54 percent of Russians felt the same way. This means that Russia exceeded the global average by more than two times.

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Surprisingly, the Russians handily outdid the Iranians, of whom only 16 percent see the U.S. as the top threat — even though "Death to America!" remains a popular political slogan, rivaled only by "Death to Israel!"

Even more surprising, twice as many Russians than Iraqis and Afghans see the U.S. as a threat, despite the fact that the U.S. led the invasions of both of these countries in the past decade. Thus, while one could argue that the U.S. threat to Iraq and Afghanistan is real, the U.S. threat to Russia remains largely Kremlin-manufactured.

To be sure, anti-Americanism has always been high in post-Soviet Russia, given the lingering legacy of the Cold War. But it has never been this high.

Kremlin propagandists can rejoice as they reap the dividends from their anti-U.S. campaign that has relied heavily on state-controlled television. In recent years, Russian viewers have been bombarded with agitprop news reports and primitive pseudo-documentaries with titles like "Who Rules the World?" and "Who Wants to Carve Up Russia?"

Here are some of the more ridiculous viewpoints promoted by these broadcasts:

• The U.S. financially supports Russian's homegrown fascist and ultranationalist groups to help them gain control of the Kremlin. This will then give the U.S. a pretext to send troops into Russia, overthrow the fascists in the name of global peace, and install a pro-U.S. puppet government.

• The U.S. is using military transport planes to send tons of heroin into Russia from Afghanistan to increase the number of Russian drug users and increase the spread of HIV through infected intravenous needles.

• The U.S. actively supports terrorist groups from the North Caucasus with the ultimate goal of breaking up Russia into several parts.

• U.S. pharmaceutical companies, working on the CIA's behalf, have sent deadly vaccines and other medicines to cripple and kill Russians. Hundreds of Russians have already fallen victim to this plot.

• The U.S. is propagandizing and spreading homosexuality in Russia to destroy the country's traditional, Orthodox foundation, to turn a large percentage of the country's heterosexuals into homosexuals, and to increase the level of HIV infection among Russians.

• The U.S. is undermining Russian's strategic nuclear deterrence by deploying its Europe-based missile defense system.

• The U.S. is funding opposition groups and leaders to implement an "Orange"-style revolution in Russia. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny was recruited by the CIA in 2010 when he participated in Yale University's World Fellows Program. He agreed to work as a secret U.S. agent and to head the opposition movement to carry out a U.S. government plot to unseat Putin and install a pro-U.S. government.

• U.S. bankers, financiers, industrialists, politicians and media moguls dominate the elite Bilderberg Club, a favorite target of Russia's conspiracy theorists. According to a recent program on REN-TV, the club "rules the world by appointing U.S. presidents, determining the price of oil and controlling the amount of dollars that are released in the global economy." One of the Bilderberg Club's chief goals is to turn oil-rich Russia into the West's subservient vassal.

• The U.S. is responsible for most of Russia's misfortunes, including: the Chernobyl accident in 1986; the Soviet collapse in 1991; the Kursk submarine tragedy in 2000; Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003; Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 and the current protests in Kiev; the Krymsk flood in 2012; the crash of a SuperJet demonstration flight in Indonesia in 2012; and the meteorite "sent by NASA" that fell near Chelyabinsk last year.

Under normal circumstances, these conspiracy theories would evoke laughter from outsiders. But when it results in Russia leading the world in terms of anti-Americanism, it shows how dangerously effective the Kremlin has become at manipulating public opinion.

And this is not the only example. A December 2012 poll by the Kremlin-friendly Public Opinion Foundation found that 56 percent of Russians supported a ban on all U.S. child adoptions. The poll followed a massive Kremlin propaganda campaign that told Russians that the overwhelming majority of U.S. parents interested in adopting Russian children are pedophiles, sadists and child abusers.

To be sure, anti-Americanism is a worldwide phenomenon. France and Germany, for example, have their share of anti-Americanism. But in these countries, crude anti-U.S. conspiracy theories are limited to fringe elements on Internet forums. In Russia, however, they have become largely mainstream thanks to state-controlled television.

On the flip side, only 2 percent of Americans in the Gallup poll think Russia is a threat to global peace, which is consistent with the global average.

Russian analysts are split over whether this 2 percent rating is good or bad. Some think that the figure confirms Russia's positive role as a peacemaker, such as when the Kremlin brokered peace plans in Syria and Iran last year.

But others say Russia's low result, which is on the same "fear level" as Australia, is disheartening, if not degrading. They support the Soviet-era notion that "If you are feared, you are respected," and recall nostalgically how the U.S. and other countries feared the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

A "better year" for Russia was 2008, after the Kremlin sent troops into South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the Russia-Georgia war. That year, a more respectable 6 percent of those polled considered Russia a global threat.

This explains why so many conservative Russians were delighted to hear U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney call Russia the United States' "No. 1 foe" during his 2011 campaign. (Unfortunately for them, Romney quickly realized his mistake and clarified his remarks within days, saying Iran was a much larger threat than Russia.)

The WIN/Gallup International poll asked another question: "If there were no barriers to living in any country of the world, which country would you like to live in?" While the U.S. was the most-desired destination among all respondents polled, Russian respondents placed the U.S. in the fourth spot tied with Canada – between Germany in the third spot and Britain in the fifth.

Once again, Russia went against the global grain. But at least you can give it credit for being consistent in its anti-Americanism.

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Editor's note: An earlier version of this comment incorrectly stated that in the 2013 Win/Gallup International poll, Russian respondents picked the U.S. as the most-desirable country to live in if there were no barriers to living in any country of the world. In fact, Russian respondents picked Switzerland, not the U.S., as the top choice among those who would like to move.

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