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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

American's Opinion of Putin and Russia at 20-Year Low, Poll Says

By The Moscow Times

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WASHINGTON — With the eyes of the world trained on the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Americans' opinions of Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin have reached their lowest point in 20 years, according to a survey released by the U.S. pollster Gallup.

Both Putin and Russia registered their highest "unfavorable" ratings — 63 percent and 60 percent, respectively — since Gallup began surveying Americans about Russia in 1994, according to the poll, released Thursday.

The results follow a Gallup poll in September showing that for the first time in 15 years more Americans view Russia as an unfriendly or enemy nation than as an ally or friend of the U.S.

Washington and Moscow have sparred over a range of bilateral and global issues during the past two years, including the brutal civil war in Syria, gay rights and freedom of speech, U.S. support for anti-government protesters in Ukraine and Russia's decision to grant asylum

to U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden.

"While American sentiments have been mostly favorable over the past 20 years, it is obvious that Americans will react strongly at moments when Russia clashes with the U.S.," Gallup managing editor Art Swift wrote.

Thirty-four percent of the respondents in the Gallup poll, conducted Feb. 6 to Feb. 9, said they have a favorable opinion of Russia, while 19 percent said they have a favorable opinion of Putin, who rose to power in 1999. Those numbers are down from 2002 highs of 66 percent and 41 percent, respectively.

"Over the past year, Russia has pursued a much more aggressive stance on the world stage than at any time in the new millennium. In his first term in office, Putin was viewed more favorably than unfavorably by the American public, but Americans now see him in a clearly unfavorable light," Swift wrote.

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