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Anti-Maidan Movement Strikes Out Against the West

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For the thousands of Russians gathered near Red Square on Saturday, Maidan — the square in Kiev synonymous with pro-European protests last year — is nothing to celebrate.

"Maidan is a festival of death ... Maidan is the smile of the American ambassador who, sitting in his penthouse, is happy to see how brother is killing brother ... Maidan is the concentration of everything anti-Russian ... Maidan is the embryo of Goebbels," the organizers of Russia's new Anti-Maidan movement shouted from the stage.

Demonstrators vowed that last year's protests in Kiev — centered in the Maidan square, which ultimately forced Ukaine's pro-Russian president to flee on Feb. 21 — would never be repeated in Russia.

"Maidan" is the Ukrainian word for "square" and in common usage refers to Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square).

The protesters in Moscow were an assortment of ultranationalist bikers, pensioners, war

veterans, members of student organizations and activists from other pro-Kremlin groups. Many of them waved Russian flags, others bore banners that said "Die, America!" or "U$A, Stop the War!"

Police said that 35,000 people attended, though those numbers were impossible to verify independently.

In the year since Ukraine's transformation, anti-Western sentiment in Russia has spiked, largely over what many perceive as the West's hand in fomenting the protests in Kiev in order to gain a foothold of control near Russia.

"The United States is the world's biggest terrorist. ... We believe we can rise up again if they leave us alone, but they are always trying to teach us how to live," said 65-year-old Nina Kishkova, a retired teacher who was at the protest with her friend. Another Maidan "will never win in Russia. I will bring the ammunition myself."

According to a poll conducted this month by the independent Levada Center, 81 percent of Russians feel negatively about the United States — the highest figure since the early 1990s — and 71 percent feel negatively about the European Union.

The number of Russians who dubbed relations between Russia and the U.S. as that of "enemies" leapt from 4 percent in January 2014 to 42 percent. The poll has a margin of error of about 3 percentage points.

"There has been no empire in history that did the kind of things to its colonies that America does to the world today," said Alexander Zaldostanov, the leader of the pro-Kremlin Night Wolves biker gang widely known by his nickname, the Surgeon.

The anti-Western sentiment, sparked by the West's wholehearted backing of the protests in Kiev, has only deepened as the United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions on Russia for annexing the Ukrainian region of Crimea and for supporting the separatists fighting in east Ukraine.

"There's nothing new about anti-Western sentiments in Russian society, the thing was to bring them to the fore," said Maria Lipman, an independent analyst. "People have said for a long time that the West is there to do harm to Russia. ... Now this sounds like a self-fulfilling prophecy because now the West is always discussing how to punish Russia so that it will hurt more."

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