

# Trump holds more positive views toward Vladimir Putin than both his predecessor and his own foreign policy team

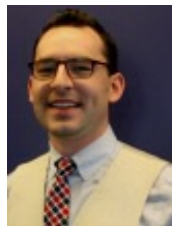
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*Content analysis of public statements by [Stephen Benedict Dyson](#) and [Matthew J. Parent](#) shows that President Trump has described a more positive approach to Russia than that of President Obama, and President Putin has responded in kind. Data shows that foreign policy officials of the Trump administration hold significantly more hostile views toward Russia than the president, providing further insight into the nature of the Putin-Trump relationship.*



On December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016, Russian President Vladimir V. Putin [welcomed](#) Donald Trump's recent election victory, saying it showed that "there are people who sympathize with our views of traditional values...it's a good basis for developing relations between our two powerful countries." Seven days later, after President Obama had imposed new sanctions on Russia for [interfering in the election](#) and Putin had shrugged them off, Trump [tweeted](#) about the Russian President: "I always knew he was very smart!"



Content analysis of public statements shows that President Trump has described a more positive approach to Russia than that of President Obama, and that President Putin has responded in kind. Perhaps even more startling are Trump's differences with his own advisors: foreign policy officials of the Trump administration hold significantly more hostile views toward Russia than the president.

Our findings grow out of [new research](#) on Vladimir Putin, in which we used [content analysis software](#) to analyze over one million words spoken by the Russian president across his entire time in office. These techniques, known as [Operational Code Analysis](#), isolate the imagery of power and control deployed by leaders as they talk about the political world. Statements the leader makes about their perceptions of other actors and their own approach are categorized as hostile (punishments, threats, or words of opposition) or cooperative (appeals, promises, rewards.) By aggregating a large number of these statements, we can produce a map of the relationship between political actors. In short, public speech reveals the world as it exists in the minds of the speaker.

Here, we extend [our analysis](#) to include new sets of public comments from both sides of the U.S. – Russia relationship, collecting all available comments by Putin, Trump, and Trump foreign policy advisors. May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017 was the last day on which we collected material.

Here's what we found:

Scores can run from -1 (most hostile) to +1 (most cooperative).

<b>Putin speaking about the U.S.</b>		
	Hostile / cooperative view of United States and its president	Hostile / cooperative approach of Russia and self
During the 3 months prior to 2016 election	.18	.56
Post-election day	.30	.53
<b>Difference</b>	<b>+12 (more cooperative)</b>	<b>-3 (essentially no change)</b>

<b>Obama and Trump speaking about Russia</b>		
	Hostile / cooperative view of Russia and Putin	Hostile / cooperative approach of United States and self
Obama during transition period	.02	.10
Trump post-election day	.41	.50
<b>Difference</b>	<b>+.39 (more cooperative)</b>	<b>+.40 (more cooperative)</b>

These are profound shifts in three of four possible categories. Putin sees Trump as more cooperative toward him than was Obama. Trump's view of Putin is more positive than Obama's. And Trump presents his own actions as more friendly toward Putin than Obama's. The sole point of continuity is Putin's presentation of his own behavior – his self-narrative is that he has remained constant regardless of the U.S. stance toward him.

There is nothing necessarily problematic about this pattern. New administrations – Obama's included – often seek to [reset relations](#) with major world powers. But the context matters: Obama's views on Russia during the transition reflect the fact that the intelligence community provided him with a [report](#) on Russian interference in the election, and he was announcing sanctions in response. These data, showing Trump talking in warm terms about Russia, confirm the new president's very different views on the matter.

What about the views of other members of the Trump administration? We analyzed statements about Russia by leading foreign policy officials: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley.

<b>Trump and his advisors speaking about Russia</b>		
	<b>Hostile / cooperative view of Russia and Putin</b>	<b>Hostile / cooperative approach of United States and self</b>
<b>Trump</b>	.41	.50
<b>Advisors</b>	.14	.46
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-.27 (more hostile)</b>	<b>-.4 (essentially the same)</b>

The analysis shows that Trump administration officials hold significantly more hostile perceptions of Russia than the president. During the period covering his election win and the early months of his presidency, then, Trump has expressed a more friendly view of Russia than both his predecessor and the leading foreign policy officials of his own administration.

“To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle,” wrote George Orwell, the master scrutinizer of political language. The struggle to understand the nature of the Putin-Trump relationship is currently consuming Washington, DC, and is focused on the subterranean world of back channels and spy games. Yet the public comments of the two men are in front of our nose, and the story they tell is one of mutual admiration between the presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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