

# From Reset to Regret: *Views of Russia Fall to Levels Not Seen Since Cold War*

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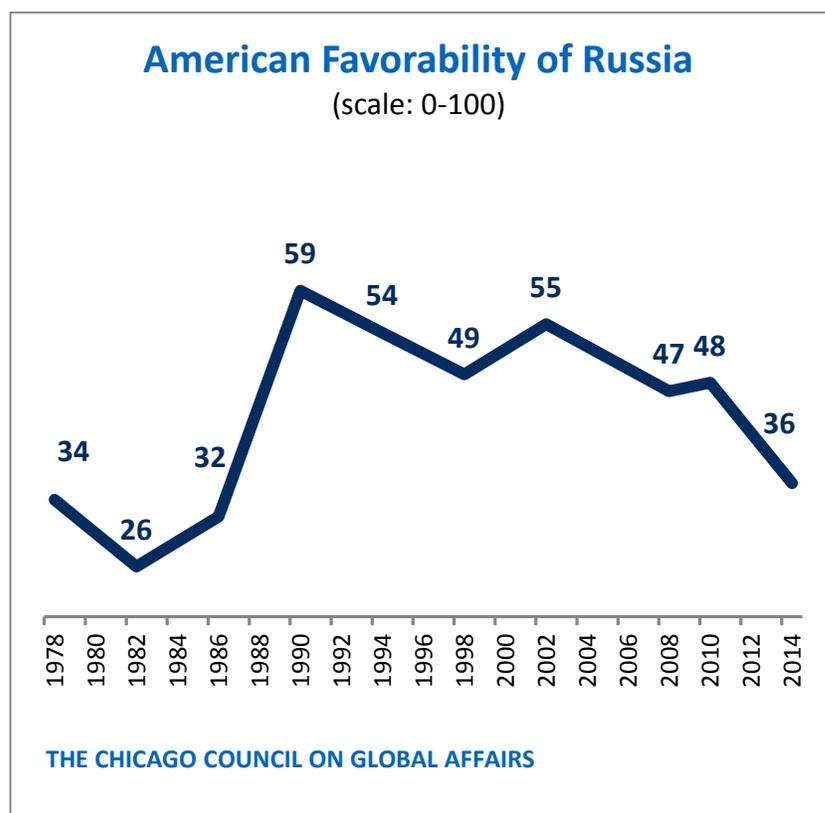
*New Chicago Council Survey results show that, even before the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17—which some commentators are linking to pro-Russian separatists—American views of Russia have become less positive now than at any time since the Cold War. Yet few consider Russia’s territorial ambitions a critical threat to the United States. This helps to explain why only 30 percent of Americans support a US military intervention in Ukraine if Russia invades the rest of the country.*

## American views of Russia at lowest point since Cold War

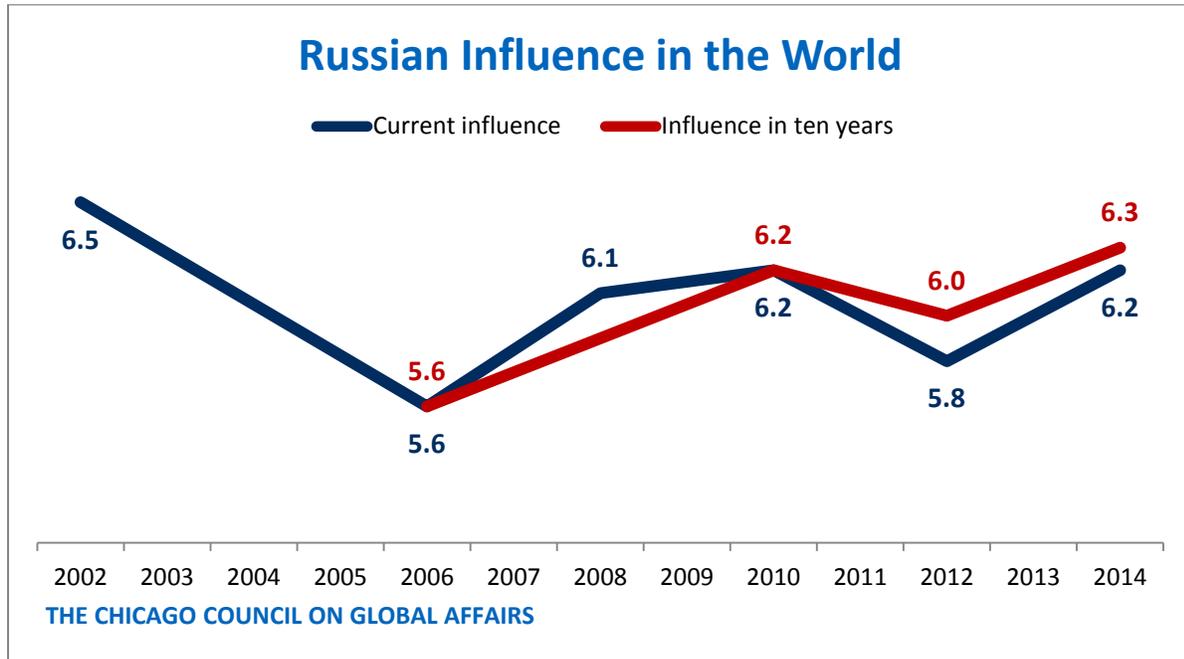
Likely as a result of the Ukraine crisis, Americans’ feelings toward Russia have fallen to their lowest levels since the Cold War. On a scale of 0 to 100, with lower ratings representing less-favorable views, Americans rated Russia a 36 on average. This is just above the ratings Americans gave to the Soviet Union during the Chicago Council’s Cold War-era surveys of 1978-1986 and is the lowest rating ever given to Russia since the dissolution of the USSR.

## Views of Russian influence unchanged

Reflecting Russia’s new belligerence in the region, Americans rate Russian influence in the world an average of 6.2 out of 10, an increase



from the average rating of 5.8 that Americans gave Moscow in 2012. By comparison, Americans rated the United States an average of 8.6 and China a 7.4. A rating of 6.2 places Russia just below Japan (6.5) in terms of global influence. Overall, perception of Russian influence over the past decade has remained fairly stable, as seen in the figure below. Nor do many expect Russia to be significantly more influential in the future. When asked to rate its influence ten years from now, Americans gave Russia an average of 6.3 out of 10.



### Russia's ambitions not seen as critical threat

Four in ten Americans (38%) say they see Russia's territorial ambitions as a critical threat to the vital interests of the United States, while half (50%) say they are an important but not critical threat. This places the threat of Moscow's ambitions well behind other threats asked about in the 2014 Chicago Council Survey (it ranked 15 out of 20 items in terms of being a critical threat).

There are generational differences in these threat perceptions as well as in views of Russia. Almost half of those over the age of 60 saying Russian territorial ambitions are a critical threat (46%). Older Americans also have less favorable views of Russia overall. But even younger Americans, who would have no memory of the Cold War, have an unfavorable view of Russia.

### Broad support for US government spying on Russia

While not a high level threat, Americans still want to keep a close eye on Russia. Nearly eight in ten Americans (77%) support the US government secretly spying on the Russian government. This is a higher level of support than in 1994 when 63 percent of Americans supported such espionage.

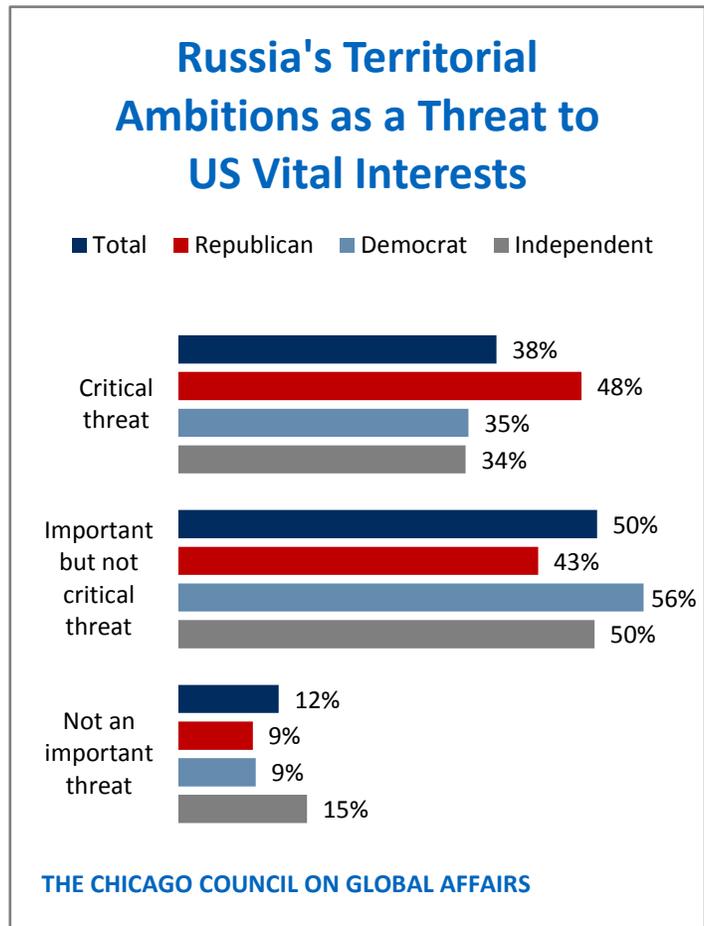
## Americans oppose sending US troops to Ukraine

In part because Americans do not see Russian ambitions as a threat to US vital interests, a majority of the public opposes using US troops to defend Ukraine in the event of Russian invasion (68%). Overall three in ten (30%) favor sending troops. Even those who perceive a critical threat tend to oppose using US troops for this purpose (51%, with 48% in favor).

Though low, this overall level of support is actually higher than in the past. In 1994, only one in five Americans (20%) supported using US troops to defend Ukraine from Russian invasion (59% opposed, 22% not sure).

Negative views of Russia and opposition to using U.S troops in Ukraine cross partisan lines, though Republicans (36%) are somewhat more likely to support sending US troops to defend Ukraine than Democrats (27%) or Independents (29%). In addition, Republicans (48%) are more likely than Democrats (35%) or Independents (34%) to consider Russia's territorial ambitions a critical threat.

Despite the fact that most Americans who consider themselves a part of the Tea Party movement identify as Republicans, Tea Party supporters are actually *less* likely to support sending US troops to defend Ukraine in the event of Russian invasion (21%, vs. 32% of non-Tea Party members)<sup>1</sup>. This is consistent with the generally non-interventionist views of prominent Tea Party leaders.



Instead of military action, Americans would favor the United States increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Russia. According to an April 2014 Pew Research Center/USA Today poll, 53 percent of Americans support sanctioning Putin's government in response to the Ukraine crisis, while 36 percent oppose such a move (one in ten are unsure)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Among those who consider themselves a part of or identify with the Tea Party movement (12% overall), 49 percent identify as Republicans, 18 percent as Democrats, and 31 percent as Independents.

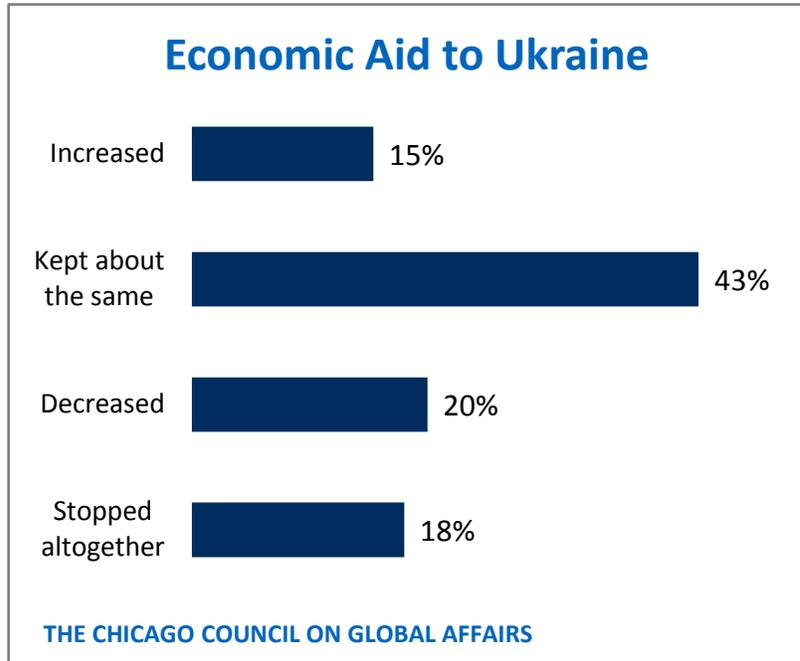
<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, April, 2014, "[Bipartisan Support for Increased U.S. Sanctions against Russia.](#)"

## Bipartisan support for economic aid to Ukraine

Despite their opposition to sending US troops to Ukraine in the event of Russian invasion, a plurality of Americans (43%) say that economic aid to Ukraine should be kept about the same, while an additional 15 percent support increasing that aid. That's good news for Ukraine. The beleaguered country was recently approved for a \$17 billion loan from the IMF, owes \$9 billion in foreign-currency payments this year, and has seen the value of the *hryvnia* plummet against international currencies.

Americans may see this economic aid as a counterbalance to Russian ambitions. Those who see Russia's territorial ambitions as a threat to the United States are more likely to support increasing or maintaining economic aid to Ukraine.

Support for economic aid to Ukraine is also correlated with support for sending troops to the Eastern European nation in the case of Russian invasion. Majorities of those who favor military action (73%), as well as those who oppose sending troops (59%), support increasing or maintaining economic aid to Ukraine.



However, according to an April 2014 Pew Research Center/USA Today poll, this support does not extend to sending arms and military supplies to the Ukrainian government. While three in ten (30%) support providing military aid to Ukraine, six in ten (62%) oppose doing so.

## About the 2014 Chicago Council Survey

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2014 Chicago Council Survey and previous Chicago Council Surveys of the American public on foreign policy. The survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide research panel between May 6 to May 29, 2014 among a national sample of 2,108 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error for the overall sample is  $\pm 2.1$  percentage points.

The 2014 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation.

Results of the 2014 Chicago Council Survey will be released on September 15, 2014. For more information regarding the survey, please contact Dina Smeltz, senior fellow, Public Opinion and Global Affairs ([dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-6860) or Craig Kafura, senior program officer, Studies ([ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-7560).