Contrary to popular Russian views, US think tanks are not usually focused on Russian Federation policies or Russian-American relations. Those, connected to the political decision making process, focus on economic issues, global security threats and the Middle and Far East. They rarely release information dedicated to Russian politics; preferring to release small articles and give expert interviews, instead of large reports. Nowadays, US experts are, in some degree, reinterpretating the history of Russian-American relations. They are trying to work out new approaches to their formation process and role in world politics.

Perhaps this was one of the reasons that the development of the Ukrainian crisis, and in particular Russia’s actions were, to a certain extent, a surprise for the United States. In fact, in the summer of 2014, the American elite did not have a coherent strategy for US foreign policy, on countering Russia in the international arena.

November and December 2014 saw a marked surge of publications devoted to the Russian Federation by the US expert analyst community. There is every reason to believe that, during that autumn, the US think tanks studied methods for US foreign policy, on countering Russia in the international arena.

The author of this article sets out to analyse publications by leading US analytical centres, in order to identify new approaches by US experts on Russia and predict the main vectors of American foreign policy.

Since an analysis of all the available information is impractical for one article, the author has focused on publications by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC. CSIS is a non-profit organisation, directly involved in the process of US foreign decision making policy.

Russia and the CIS has been of relatively little importance to the US analysts in recent years, so the increasing interest in Russian topics at the turn of 2014–2015 was obvious. Firstly, the CSIS report «2015. Global Forecast: Crisis and Opportunities» [1] Part 2, dedicated to Russia, maybe summarised as follows:

1. The «annexation» of the Crimea was an unpleasant surprise for the entire trans-Atlantic community. The act was openly compared with the 1938 Austrian annexation by Nazi Germany.

2. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union and the United States actively developed relations with Russia and contributed to its integration into the world community and its economic growth. This policy led to a dependence by European countries on Russia, especially in the energy sector. Russia uses this reliance for the propagation of political influence in Central and Eastern European countries, instead of building an equal partnership.

3. The creation of Novorossiya, as well as the presence of Russian troops in Moldova, Georgia and Armenia are the parts of a large-scale strategy for the return post-Soviet states to the orbit of Russian influence. It uses a new tactic identified as «hybrid warfare», which combines secret military operations, support for separatism, informational influence, cyber-attacks, energy and trade pressure [1].

4. European countries are in a difficult situation: they have to choose between protecting democratic
values and principles of international law, violated (according to US analysts) in Ukraine and their own economic interests.

5. Russia, through a network of NGOs, political parties and groups support Eastern European nationalism and xenophobia. These parties, with the approval of the Russian Federation, advocated reducing the role of the European Union in political decision-making.

6. Despite the end of the Cold War between Russia and the West, ideological confrontation persists. The West represents true values of political liberalism and effective democratic government. Russia represents «corruption and managed democracy» \[1\].

Especially noteworthy is the belief that Russia has a long-term political agenda against the West, aimed at the restoration of Russian spheres of influence in Europe. This approach can be considered quite controversial, as the most cursory acquaintance with Russia's foreign policy between 1991 and 2013, shows this was uneven and multi-faceted.

There were periods of constructive engagement with the West (for example, in the fight against global threats), sometimes even the creation of institutions like the NATO-Russia Council. There were periods of disappointment in European partners and the United States, the search for new allies (for example, the creation of the BRICS). The Russian foreign policy concept papers and the practical implementation of the same do not provide any evidence of such an anti-west strategy. According to the author, all one can point to is a Russian policy of reacting to world events, as they occur.

Even stranger, for a Russian researcher, are the statements about Russian economic expansion in Eastern Europe and the Russian support of the nationalist parties. One of the principal discussion points between Russia and the East European states are the status and rights of ethnic Russian speakers in these countries and the activities of radical groups.

Records of these discussions are freely available from a wide range of public sources including records at the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Department of Information and Press in relation to Estonian language policies \[2\].

As outlined in the report, the ideological differences between Russia and the Western world, can largely be considered iconic. When both sides express repeatedly the allegation that «the logic of the cold war is a thing of the past» and assurances of «commitment to democratic and liberal values», the Russian Federation and the United States are once again looking for ideological differences.

However, the two countries will surely be speaking of their own democratic system, with the respective advantages (more often – human rights protection) and deficiencies in the opponent (e.g. corruption). This is alright in a discussion by lay people, but within the framework of serious negotiations, it looks out of place.

An example of Russia's influence over Europe is exemplified in the CSIS report. According to the think tanks researchers, Hungary is dependent upon Russia for 80% of its energy supplies, as a direct result of machinations by the Putin administration. The Russian influence seems so tremendous, that Prime Minister Viktor Orban committed Hungary to an «illiberal new state based on national foundations» \[1\].

It is interesting to look at the questionable sources on which the report is based (in this case, without giving direct links). For example, «a group of pro-American leaders from Central and Eastern Europe, such as former Polish President Lech Walesa» opinions are represented in the document «Russian influence on Europe». According to it, the strategy of the Russian Federation in Europe includes «energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe» \[1\].

Of greatest interest are the CSIS predictions on trends and developments in Russia and the former Soviet Union. It is likely that their recommendations were given to decision-makers in the United States. Among the most significant of these trends are:

1. European countries will vary in their support for anti-Russian sanctions, since the latter can hurt their economy. The US should support anti-Russian policy in these countries, taking advantage of the economic and political pressure.

2. Ruling elites in post-Soviet states have very strong fears of an “orange revolution” in their own country and of Russia's imperial ambitions. These phobias should be used to support anti-Russian sentiment in post-Soviet states.

3. The democratization of the political regime in Ukraine should have a strong impact on the public mood in Russia. Inspired by the success of the Ukrainian people, the liberal political forces should take advantage of the mood on the ground.

4. Effective sanctions should be used against Russian companies and individuals, as the Russian state is closely linked to criminality, corruption and informal relationships.

5. Russia has an opportunity to respond to the West's sanctions, including economic measures. The report urges Europe to look for alternative ways of energy supply, as well as «Russian investments in the United States and Europe also should
be carefully scrutinized, and Western commercial contacts with suspect individuals and companies further constrained» [1].

6. European allies in NATO are not prepared to confront Russian «hybrid warfare» tactics. They must move from loud statements to a tangible military presence on the eastern borders of the alliance, to expand their military cooperation and interaction in confronting the new threats [1].

Statements from this document are being received by U.S. academics and U.S. foreign policy decision makers. Its part, concerning Russian policy is repeated in a later report «Global Forecast 2015» along with an analysis on the worsening Middle East and Asian situation, the economic crisis and the rise in radicalism, all are presented as a threat to U.S. security.

It should be noted that the vast majority of US’s Russian-analysts mention «Russian energy weapons». This is true in analyst’s reports [3] and amongst expert speakers [4]. The notion that energy is sometimes used for political purposes is generally understandable and, perhaps, fair to all Nations, as it is a prominent export trade. However, of particular interest is the fact that from mid-2014 the number of papers devoted to the energy security of the United States has increased significantly.

The main idea behind the documents is the need to review the entire structure of American energy sector. This is exemplified in the «Remaking American Power» [5] analysis. This document, based on a wide range of statistical data contains a detailed analysis of the structure of the internal US energy market. Special attention is paid to the problems of dependence on external energy supplies. The report’s authors believe that the main goal of US energy policy should be to overcome this dependence and become self-reliant.

Among the reasons for the need for U.S. self-sufficiency is the unstable world energy markets. The idea to shield the U.S. from market conditions and prices, has become a common topic amongst US analysts [6]. Firstly this is related to the irregular oil and natural gas prices, as well the United States determined attempts to extract shale oil. However, a role in such a persistent quest for energy independence could be because of their fears of the ‘energy weapon’.

An analysis of US experts’ briefings thus far in 2015 uncovered a new direction. Rather than paying more attention to Russian foreign policy, they looked at Russia’s domestic and economic issues. Experts from the CSIS produced a document «Russia, Ukraine and U.S. Foreign Policy Options: A Briefing Memo» [7] which concentrated on Russia’s economic situation. According to them, Russia’s problems are more economically structural, rather than with fallout from sanctions and the international situation. In particular, the Russian political system is restricting economic development.

Discontent among the elite and Russian society at large will come about, because of falling oil prices and a marked decline in living standards, which may lead to the ousting of President Putin’s administration. The most favourable moment for Putin’s departure would be in the 2016 Duma elections and the 2018 presidential elections. However, the authors recognise that if the administration copes with the crisis, its economic and political opportunities will increase significantly and the President will retain his popularity.

Note that the authors of the «Russia, Ukraine and U.S. Foreign Policy Options: A Briefing Memo» article also prepared the «Global Forecast 2015: Crisis and Opportunity» document. You may note the contradictions between the ‘economically and politically influential Russia’ (which dictates its will to European countries) and «economically problematic Russia».

Interestingly, the article also recognizes the importance of Russia in international U.S. projects, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Central Asia and the Iranian nuclear program. This is referred to CSIS analysis. For example the report «The Islamic State War: No Clear US Strategy» [8].

At the same time, the authors believe that the US is trying not to link the confrontation in Ukraine with cooperation on other important issues and their willingness to cooperate with the Russian Federation is one of the reasons for the lack of arms supplies to Ukraine. At the same time, Russia threatened to stop cooperation on a wide range of issues [7]. As for the prospects of Russian-American relations, the authors come to the conclusion that there will be a gradual distancing between the nation states.

The main objective of CSIS US foreign policy experts is the «breakdown of Russian revisionist ambitions» while maintaining the capability to resume cooperation in the future. The key point of this strategy is the preservation of Ukraine as a unified, economically and politically successful, democratic state. For this purpose it allocated funds estimated by the author of at least $ 15 billion [7].

In 2014 Russia intensified its activities in the international political arena as a whole, and in particular in Europe. The Russian elite also saw a major revision of national security priorities in certain circles [9]. Practical efficiency and the long-term implications of this new policy can be assessed in different ways, but it certainly came as a surprise to many experts and politicians in the United States.

The analysis of the causes and long-term goals of Russian politics have involved considerable intellectual resources.
However, there are obvious shortcomings and failures amongst US experts that reduce the quality of intelligence and its practical significance, including that presented to the U.S. decision makers:

1. The United States’ Russian-analysts believed Russia was immersed in its’ internal problems in the 1990’s and 2000’s and would not play a role in world politics. However, they are likely to now reevaluate their position, following the underestimation of Russia’s capabilities.

In recent years Russia has taken a number of successful steps, including its’ foreign policy. But talk about the long-term strategy of European penetration, the Russian NGOs network, the penetration of East Europe, the buying up entire sectors of the European economy and Russian «hybrid warfare» are an obvious exaggeration. It is impossible to say with certainty whether it is the result of errors, or an image of an enemy cultivation.

2. American experts put Russia into a different category from other countries. The U.S., European countries, China and many others express the ideal of «national interest», «area of interest», «security» and «economic interests» etc.

However, whilst explaining Russia’s goals and motivation, U.S. analysts talk about the aimless expansion of imperial ambition or the restoration of the Soviet Union. It is extremely rare for an attempt to be made to analyse Russian interests and take action to guarantee, or just to understand them. US expert community seems to be not totally free from propaganda myths. And the truth is, that Ukraine, absolutely regardless of it's, or Russian political regime, will always remain a zone of vital Russian interests.

3. U.S. experts attach too much importance to «democratic and liberal values.» This is especially apparent in two ways.

Firstly, the European countries are urged to choose between democratic values and their own economic interests in Russia (which are fully acknowledged). The United States supports the right choice. However, if these countries do not want to freeze relations with Russia they are seen to be in cooperation with Russia, to be the part of its «imperial plans». No consideration is given to the specific interests of these countries.

Secondly, there is a strange level of expectation that a «democratic choice» will ensure social cohesion in Ukrainian society and that a democratic Ukraine will become a reference point for the Russian public. In fact, the U.S. intends subsidising the Ukrainian democracy, which is understandable. But if you remember, increased prices for the population and a number of other unpopular measures are a precondition for loans. It is impossible to predict the public response.

The results of the CSIS analysis may have practical implications for Russian foreign policy. Those, involved in Russian foreign policy decision making, should consider the following factors:

1. The American elite is interested primarily in maintaining its influence in Europe. On one hand, Russia’s policy prevents this and on the other - the «Russian threat» is cultivated to justify US intervention in the affairs of other countries.

2. At least part of the American elite representatives believes, that European economic and political woes are encouraged by Moscow.

3. The United States recognises the importance of Russia and its role in solving global problems – full confrontation is not profitable. The possibility of a return to dialogue always remains, even if there is a marked deterioration of the international situation.

In general, the US expert community should pay more attention to an analysis of Russian interests. Russia’s most important interests are concentrated near the Russian border and are very far from US vital needs. A weighted delineation of mutual interests will significantly reduce international tensions and help create a framework for joint solutions to global problems.

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THE HISTORY AND THE MODERN TRENDS OF RUSSIA-US RELATIONS AS SEEN BY THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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The article examines new approaches to the history of Russia-US relations and their modern trends, developed by the experts of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.). The author gives a brief analysis of the main issues of the Center's expert reports, underlines the peculiarities of the Russian foreign policy perception, and shows some errors of American experts. CSIS reports reflect some transformations taking place among U.S. expert community.

Keywords: Russian-American relations, modern history, US foreign policy, US think tanks.

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