



The Enemy's Mirror: Understanding Russian Strategic Discourse on the United Kingdom

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Executive Summary

Russian strategic discourse presents the United Kingdom not merely as a geopolitical rival but as a persistent civilisational antagonist. This framing is not reactive or episodic; it is embedded in the Kremlin's broader information strategy and has remained consistently salient since at least the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It reflects an enduring narrative infrastructure in which the UK is positioned as a hostile power and a legitimate target.

This brief analyses over 2,500 Russian-language outputs from February 2022 to May 2025, including state media, pro-government Telegram channels, and other high-reach platforms. It identifies how Russian actors refer to the UK across four identity terms: "Anglosaxons," "UK," "(Great) Britain," and "England." Each term carries a distinct thematic and strategic function. These terms enable the projection of ten recurring narratives, including portrayals of Britain as:

- a source of cultural and moral decline
- a former empire unable to adapt to global change
- an instigator of proxy war in Ukraine
- a manipulator of information and international norms
- a legitimate target for material escalation

These narratives are not limited to fringe commentary. They are widely disseminated across both elite and popular channels and appear in formats that range from formal political commentary to emotionally charged satire and dehumanising rhetoric.

While the narratives are often contradictory, portraying Britain as both weak and dangerously aggressive, they serve a consistent strategic function. They contribute to cognitive warfare efforts intended to undermine the UK's international legitimacy, condition domestic Russian audiences to view Britain as a long-standing and hostile actor, and create permissive conditions for hybrid or kinetic actions.¹

Polling data supports the entrenchment of these views. As of early 2025, the UK is perceived as the single most hostile country toward Russia.² Ukraine, by contrast, is increasingly framed as a victim or proxy, with hostility redirected toward its Western supporters, particularly Britain.

This discursive landscape matters. The Kremlin has previously used similar rhetorical patterns, focused on grievance, threat perception, and moral justification, in the years preceding armed

¹ Bugayova, Nataliya, and Kateryna Stepanenko. A Primer on Russian Cognitive Warfare. Institute for the Study of War, June 30, 2025. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/primer-russian-cognitive-warfare>. ² IKAR, Sociological Research "Mirror of Russia" – Three Years of Full-Scale War, February 24, 2025, <https://ikarthinktank.org/en/explorations/129>.

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action in Georgia (2008), eastern Ukraine (2014), and all Ukraine (2022). Such narratives lower the threshold for escalation, shape elite and public expectations, and can support decision-making around pre-emptive or retaliatory measures.

This brief sets out the structure and content of these narratives, explains their strategic utility, and concludes with five policy recommendations:

- **Support Ukraine Relentlessly:** Weakening Russia in Ukraine directly enhances UK security. Continued military, economic, and humanitarian support is a strategic necessity—not charity.
- **Go on the Offensive with Truth:** Use disruptive, truthful messaging to fracture Russian information control, especially among disaffected or ideologically aligned audiences. Tailor content. Avoid overt Western branding.
- **Treat Public Awareness as Defence:** Launch a national security-led education and deterrence initiative to inoculate the public against Russian cognitive operations. Embed awareness in schools, Prevent training, and civil society. Expose narratives. Publicise consequences. Build digital hygiene.
- **Centralise Disinformation Response:** Create a cross-HMG Counter-Cognitive Operations Unit under Home Office State Threats leadership. Coordinate signals tracking, narrative analysis, and threat response across GCHQ, MOD, and domestic partners.
- **Fund Sociological Research:** Commission targeted research on Russia's hostile sociopolitical activity in the UK: recruitment methods, diaspora dynamics, public perceptions, and narrative uptake. Understand how Kremlin influence exploits trust, grievance, and social fault lines.

The portrayal of Britain in Russian discourse is not an abstract concern. It is a persistent vector of hostility with operational implications.

Why This Matters

Russia's hostile narrative construction of the United Kingdom should not be viewed as a secondary effect of the war in Ukraine or as routine propaganda. It functions as a strategic instrument within the Kremlin's broader toolkit for hybrid and cognitive operations. In this context, narrative is not incidental. It is an operational capability intended to destabilise adversaries, degrade legitimacy, and shape the information environment in advance of more overt forms of conflict.

According to NATO and EU definitions, this falls within the scope of cognitive warfare, albeit with Russians as the target audience: the use of information, symbolic framing, and emotional targeting to undermine societal cohesion, generate confusion, and impair decision-making. The UK is routinely portrayed not only as morally compromised and socially unstable, but as actively aggressive and strategically illegitimate.²

This matters because narrative escalation has preceded military and hybrid actions in other theatres. Prior to the 2008 war in Georgia, and again before the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022

² NATO Innovation Hub. *Cognitive Warfare* (2020), <https://www.innovationhub-act.org/cognitive-warfare>; European External Action Service, "EEAS Special Report: Russia's Ongoing Disinformation Campaign Against the EU" (2023), <https://euvsdisinfo.eu>.

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full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government invested heavily in building narratives of grievance, moral justification, and identity-based threat. These patterns created the cognitive conditions necessary for elite endorsement and public acceptance of conflict.

A similar architecture is now visible in discourse relating to the United Kingdom. Messages about destroying or punishing Britain or how Anglosaxons are destroying civilisation are not restricted to fringe spaces but part of mainstream state-aligned and popular media, including Telegram channels that are pro-war but not necessarily pro-regime. These statements follow a familiar pattern of ridicule, dehumanisation, and threat construction that has previously accompanied escalatory action.

Research has shown that the effectiveness of cognitive warfare lies in its ability to misalign perception and policy.³ It encourages underreaction, normalises threats, and enables gradual narrative shifts to pass unnoticed. At present, the UK lacks a sufficiently integrated system for monitoring and responding to these narrative dynamics, particularly those emerging from within the Russian information ecosystem.

This is not a speculative concern. The UK National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) both identify Russia as the UK's most immediate and persistent threat. The NSS highlights the risks of sub-threshold aggression, including cyber-attacks and sabotage, while the SDR specifically warns of Russia's intent to disrupt the international order and reassert influence through coercive means. Therefore, it is important that the British public understand their role in supporting Ukraine is not auxiliary. Britain is also being actively targeted, informationally and symbolically, as a key obstacle to Russia's geopolitical ambitions.

Russia's domestic narratives are creating the conditions for escalation or hybrid activity justified by a fabricated version of Britain as morally bankrupt, historically hostile, and strategically provocative. These rhetorical patterns are not intended to persuade in the conventional sense. Their primary objectives are to:

- Undermine the UK's international legitimacy
- Provide narrative justification for possible future action against UK interests
- Shape domestic Russian attitudes to support or tolerate such action
- Send signals to audiences that Britain is an acceptable and symbolic target

This threat environment requires a strategic response. It cannot be addressed solely through rebuttal or media literacy. The narratives surrounding the UK are designed to support broader state objectives. They must be treated accordingly, not as isolated propaganda, but as part of a coherent and enduring threat architecture.

RUSSIAN NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF BRITAIN

³ Boichak, Olga. "War of Meanings: How Social Media Shapes Conflict in Ukraine," *Media, War & Conflict* (2022); Franke, Ulrike, and Jana Puglierin. *Geopolitical Futures of Cognitive Warfare* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023); Pamment, James, and Frank Esser, "The Role of Communication in Hybrid Warfare: NATO Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 3122–3145.

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Identity Labels and Thematic Emphasis

Across the 2,570 curated items of Russian-language content (from Telegram, RuTube, television, and news media, dated February 2022 to May 2025)⁴ references to Britain are not uniform. Instead, Russian state and affiliated actors deploy four distinct identity terms, each carrying a specific rhetorical function:

Term	Number of Mentions Analysed
Anglosaxon	799
Great Britain	669
England	557
United Kingdom	345

Each term correlates with different thematic emphases and, across the 2,570 media items (Feb 2022–May 2025), Russian state and pro-war media do not use these terms interchangeably. Each term signals different strategic messaging, depending on context and intended emotional tone.

1. Англосаксы (Anglosaxons): Britain as Civilisational Antagonist

This term refers not only to Britain but to a broader Anglo-American elite seen as orchestrating global conflict and moral decay. Often used in ideological and conspiratorial discourse, it underpins themes of civilisational warfare, proxy war, and cultural subversion. Common in elite rhetoric, it frames Britain as spiritually corrosive and blames the UK for exporting liberalism, identity politics, and Western ‘degeneracy’.

2. Соединённое Королевство (United Kingdom): The Formal Threat Actor

This term appears in institutional contexts (e.g., arms deliveries, sanctions, UN votes). It carries a more neutral, legalistic tone and is used to portray Britain as a deliberate violator of international norms. It is often invoked in stories about British policy, military support to Ukraine, or tribunal proposals, as it lends accusations a veneer of official credibility.

3. Британия / Великобритания (Britain / Great Britain): Decline, Hypocrisy, and Imperial Hangover

These terms are commonly used across media formats and lend themselves to ironic or mocking treatment. Speakers use ‘Great Britain’ to highlight the perceived dissonance between imperial legacy and current decline, but also in mocking commentary on poverty, political dysfunction, or royal scandals. These terms help frame the UK as a hypocritical and morally degraded actor.

⁴ The data was gathered using the War of Words software, selecting the 850 (where 850 references were available) most relevant examples for each of the four terms and then removing any repeats, of which there were many as Russian television content is also promoted by Telegram and RuTube. The resulting number were then thematically coded, using both inductive and deductive reasoning with cross-checking across two research assistants.

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4. Англия (England): The Historical and Emotional Enemy

‘England’ carries the most historical and emotional weight. Used to evoke traditional hostilities, especially from the Crimean War, World War II, and Cold War, it portrays Britain as a duplicitous and elitist foe. Common in Telegram and popular content, it personifies England with traits like arrogance and treachery. Its usage activates national memory and animosity. As in many countries, England is sometimes used to refer to all of Britain and/or the UK.

As shown in the pie charts below, different themes are more prominent depending on which term is analysed:



These distinctions suggest that Russian narrative construction is deliberate, with lexical variation used to align messaging with audience type and strategic intent.

Despite the lexical variation, a coherent pattern emerges in Russia’s messaging about Britain:

- Moral and Civilisational Decline: Britain is portrayed as an empire in terminal decay—politically dysfunctional, socially unstable, and clinging to lost status. “Great Britain” and “England” are used to highlight this decline, especially in the context of domestic crises.
- Aggressive Provocateur: The UK is framed as a key instigator of war by proxy. This is most common in references to “United Kingdom,” reinforcing a narrative of state-level hostility through arms deliveries, intelligence activity, and diplomatic manoeuvring.

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- Ideological and Cultural Enemy: Under the “Anglosaxons” framing, Britain is transformed into a civilisational adversary, a corrupting force in an existential clash between Western liberalism and Russian conservatism.
- Manipulator of Global Events: The UK is depicted as orchestrating colour revolutions, cyberattacks, and covert operations. This narrative—common under both “United Kingdom” and “Anglosaxons”—casts Britain as a behind-the-scenes puppet master.
- Flexible Emotional Range:
 - “England” → emotional, mocking, historically charged
 - “Great Britain” → ironic, moral comparison
 - “United Kingdom” → formal, policy-oriented
 - “Anglosaxons” → ideological, existential

Thematic Analysis

1. Civilisational Conflict

Core Narrative. Civilisational Conflict serves as the ideological foundation of the Kremlin’s hostile rhetoric. It frames the UK not simply as a state actor but as the embodiment of a decaying Western civilisation rooted in liberalism, secularism, and moral relativism. By contrast, Russia is positioned as the defender of traditional values and sovereign order.

Example One⁵

Так оно и есть: именно англо-саксы в союзе с иудеями сегодня управляют мировыми процессами глобализации. И для англосаксов Россия - большое препятствие для установления Нового мирового порядка. Они и не скрывают, что в схватке двух цивилизаций в Малороссии и Новороссии они должны победить на поле боя. А что это значит? А это значит, что тысячелетняя самобытная Русская Православная Цивилизация, с точки зрения англосаксов, должна перестать существовать [...] у русского народа вместе с другими коренными народами России экзистенциальная

That’s exactly how it is: it’s the Anglo-Saxons, in alliance with the Jews, who are currently controlling the global processes of globalization. And for the Anglo-Saxons, Russia is a major obstacle to establishing a New World Order. They don’t even try to hide the fact that in the clash of two civilizations—on the soil of Malorossiia and Novorossiia—they must win on the battlefield. And what does that mean? It means that the thousand-year-old, original Russian Orthodox Civilization must, in the Anglo-Saxon view, cease to exist [...] the Russian people, along with other indigenous peoples of Russia, are in an existential struggle with the Anglo-Saxons.

⁵ «Движение Сорок Сороков (ZOV)». Telegram post. 24 September 2023, 00:00:53.

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This theme is most closely associated with the term Anglosaxons, which signals not the UK per se, but a broader civilisational bloc. In this narrative, Britain is portrayed as a spiritually hollow force that seeks to erase national identity, promote cultural degradation, and corrupt Eurasian values. The war in Ukraine is cast not as a geopolitical conflict but as a spiritual battle between an ill-defined illiberal or Orthodox order and Western nihilism.

Prominent Russian ideologues, including Aleksandr Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov, shape this worldview. Dugin's *Foundations of Geopolitics* identifies Britain as a metaphysical threat to Eurasia—a declining maritime empire incompatible with Russia's historical destiny.⁶ Prokhanov sees Britain as deploying culture, NGOs, and information in a form of spiritual warfare, while Yegor Kholmogorov, a leading nationalist commentator, similarly characterises the UK as a civilisation-destroying force, not through violence, but through the erosion of meaning.⁷ Example Two⁸

Аватары англосаксов могут менять названия и 'лица', но цивилизационно суть соперничества с Россией неизменна веками.

The Anglo-Saxons' avatars can change names and faces, but the civilizational essence of their rivalry with Russia has remained unchanged for centuries..

In this worldview, Britain replaces faith with irony, sovereignty with compliance, and history with guilt. Its very existence is framed as a violation of the global moral order. Example Three⁹

Поэтому Великобритания и сегодня является главным гаденышем в Европе. Вот именно Великобритания. Мы говорим Англосаксы, говорим про Америку. Выгодополучателем, возможно, станет Америка. А вот триггером всех этих конфликтов будет именно Великобритания.

That's why the UK remains the main little bastard in Europe today. Britain, specifically. We say "Anglo-Saxons," we talk about America—sure, the U.S. might benefit. But the real trigger for all these conflicts is the United Kingdom.

This theme appears most consistently in long-form ideological commentary and political talk shows, particularly when justifying Russian actions in Ukraine as part of a broader moral or spiritual struggle against Western modernity.

2. Historical Enmity

Core Narrative. This theme recasts current UK-Russia tensions as the latest episode in a centuries-old conflict. Rather than portraying British hostility as reactive or policy-driven, Russian rhetoric presents it as structural and enduring. The UK is framed as an historical adversary, committed to undermining Russia since at least the 19th century.

Historical reference points include:

- The Crimean War

⁶ Dugin, Aleksandr. *Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia*. Moscow: Arktogeja, 1997.

⁷ Shnirelman, Victor. "Russian Neoconservatism and Apocalyptic Imperialism." In *Contemporary Russian Conservatism*, 347–378. Leiden: Brill, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004408005_015.

⁸ Шейнин. Telegram post. 26 September 2024.

⁹ Казаков, Александр Юрьевич. *Время покажет*. Television broadcast. 21 July 2023, 01:11:21

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- The “Great Game” in Central Asia
- British involvement in anti-Bolshevik interventions
- Cold War espionage and diplomatic isolation

Even the Second World War, a period of Allied cooperation, is often reframed as a calculated British effort to manipulate outcomes at Russia’s expense. Speakers describe Britain as the original source of “Russophobia,” attributing cultural, political, and literary hostility to longstanding imperial strategy.

In the contemporary context, this framing is extended to UK-led sanctions, legal proceedings against Russian individuals, and support for international tribunals. It also encompasses accusations of British involvement in so-called “colour revolutions” across the post-Soviet space. Example Four¹⁰

Взаимоотношения нас с англосаксами имеют 500 лет исторических, и каждый раз они пытались нас, Россию, поймать на одном. Что то ли нам будет это неинтересно, то ли мы както, значит,отреагируем эмоционально. Ну вспомните, русско-японская война. Мы что, ее проиграли, что ли? Нет, конечно.

We’ve had 500 years of history with the Anglo saxons, and every single time they’ve tried to trip us up on the same thing. Either they think we won’t care, or they’re banking on us reacting emotionally. Take the Russo-Japanese War, for example. What—are we supposed to believe we actually lost that? Of course not.

Example Five¹¹

Ну, мы теперь хоть знаем, сколько англосаксы дают времени вообще на существование Украины. А если продолжать историю про англосаксов, про американцев, про попытки переписать историю, про бомбардировки Дрездена в 1945 году, все-таки русофобия заменила у европейцев национальную память

Well, at least now we know how long the Anglo saxons think Ukraine should be allowed to exist. And if we keep following the thread—about the Anglo saxons, the Americans, the endless attempts to rewrite history, the bombing of Dresden in 1945—it’s obvious: Russophobia has replaced national memory in Europe.

This narrative is frequently deployed in scripted political broadcasts and news commentary, particularly when seeking to justify present-day actions by placing them in an arc of historical betrayal and encirclement. It supports a siege mentality that reinforces both elite cohesion and public mobilisation.

3. Military Interference

Core Narrative. The narrative of military interference positions the United Kingdom not as a passive observer or political opponent but as a principal driver of international conflict. In Russian media

¹⁰ Первый канал. *Время покажет*. Television broadcast. 4 May 2023, 00:10:06. Speaker: Ivan Pavlovich Kononov.

¹¹ Николай Стариков. Telegram post. 19 January 2024.

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discourse, Britain is depicted as a global military actor that instigates, sustains, and escalates wars far from its own territory, often via proxies or covert methods.

This theme is central to the portrayal of Britain as reckless and morally indifferent, fuelling instability for strategic gain. In this framing, the UK does not merely support Ukraine but actively uses it as an instrument to wage a proxy war against Russia. Britain is portrayed as providing not only weapons, but operational direction, intelligence, and strategic intent.

Russian state media and affiliated Telegram channels frequently claim that British military personnel and intelligence services, particularly MI6, are involved in planning and executing Ukrainian strikes. These include drone attacks, sabotage missions, and missile strikes, notably in Crimea, Sevastopol, and other sensitive regions. The UK is described as directing these actions through special operations forces, covert advisors, and embedded agents.

This depiction reinforces a narrative of Britain as a state addicted to war. Speakers often cast the UK as highly provocative, willing to cross escalation thresholds and unconstrained by international norms. The UK is portrayed as thriving on perpetual conflict, and as relying on militarism to maintain geopolitical relevance.

Example Six¹²

Ну, надо сказать, что нас должно меньше волновать вмешательство Великобритании в дела Тайваня, чем вмешательство Великобритании в дела Украины, России и явно не, мягко говоря, не дружественную позицию, которую страна занимает все последние годы.

Well, it has to be said: we should be less concerned about Britain's interference in Taiwan than about its interference in Ukraine, in Russia—and the clearly unfriendly position the country has taken in recent years, to put it mildly

This theme is further supported by Duginist and Eurasianist geopolitical visions of Britain as the archetypal “sea power”, a civilisation that imposes instability through indirect control and maritime coercion. Within this ideological framework, the UK's military involvement is not a matter of alliance commitments, but an inherent threat that repeats itself again and again.

Example Seven¹³

¹² Вячеслав Алексеевич Никонов. *Время покажет*. TV Первый канал. 31 March 2022, 00:47:11

¹³ [Speaker_10]. *Полный контакт с Владимиром Соловьевым*. Soloviev Live, Telegram. 18 August 2022.

Ведь нечто подобное в английской истории уже было 108 лет назад... Лорд Китченер, который указательным пальцем правой руки многозначительно призывает своих сограждан вступать в ряды регулярной армии... Эта военная пропаганда вдохновила английского писателя Джорджа Оруэлла на создание образа большого брата

You know, something like this has happened before in British history—108 years ago. Lord Kitchener, pointing his finger solemnly with that right hand of his, summoning his fellow citizens to enlist in the regular army... That war propaganda, by the way, inspired the English writer,

Example Eight¹⁴

Я о чём? Всех этих организуют, обучают, руководят в бою и за их подготовленными войскам прежде всего англичане.

What am I saying? That all these terrorists are being organised, trained, armed, led in battle, and backed by regular troops prepared by the Anglosaxons, first and foremost the English

This narrative peaks following British arms deliveries, major Ukrainian battlefield successes, or strikes on Russian territory. Media actors use it to depict the UK as a morally culpable aggressor and to justify the framing of pre-emptive or retaliatory measures as defensive.

4. Disinformation and Propaganda

Core Narrative. This theme portrays Britain as the global centre of narrative warfare, where media, intelligence, civil society, and foreign policy converge to manipulate international opinion and destabilise adversaries. The UK is cast not as a proponent of press freedom or democratic dialogue, but as a state that weaponises truth and perception through coordinated information campaigns.

Russian media characterise Britain as orchestrating staged events, spreading falsehoods, and using psychological operations to shape international understanding of events, particularly around Ukraine. The BBC is frequently accused of operating as an extension of the British state. Other media, including *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, are framed as laundering intelligence-led narratives under the guise of investigative journalism.

This theme often includes accusations that UK-based NGOs, particularly those working in human rights, media development, or civil society support, serve as covert vehicles for British intelligence operations (MI6 or GCHQ). Such organisations are described as Trojan horses, used to infiltrate target states, train opposition activists, and foster regime change under the pretence of democratic promotion.

In this framing, the UK is not an open society, but an empire of perception that engineers consent through narrative control. Russian commentary frequently claims that well-documented atrocities,

such as the Bucha massacre or chemical attacks in Syria, were staged or manipulated by British operatives. These accusations serve two purposes: to deflect responsibility for war crimes, and to

¹⁴ #МОНТЯН! “Untitled Broadcast.” RuTube. 10 March 2025, 01:27:58. Quotation at 01:10:54 by [Speaker_02].

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reinforce the notion that the UK fabricates moral legitimacy while engaging in covert aggression.

Example Nine¹⁵

Расчеловечивание – как оружие
Сегодня не вызывает
широкомасштабная
кампания в западных СМИ о
Россия хочет напасть на
пытаются дискредитировать,
навесить ярлыки «варваров»
самом деле, это древний
метод англосаксов по в
Демонизируя своих противни
таким образом оправдывают
В прямом эфире @Soloviev
том, как англосаксы демони
на которые собирались напа

These days, no one is surprised by the large-scale propaganda campaign in the Western media claiming that Russia supposedly wants to attack the entire world. They are trying to discredit us, to dehumanise us—slapping on labels like “barbarians” and “savages.” In reality, this is an old and favourite Anglo-Saxon method of warfare. By demonising their enemies, the Anglosaxons justify their aggression. I spoke live on @SolovievLive about how the AngloSaxons have historically demonised the countries they plan to attack.

This theme is deployed in response to foreign reporting on Russian war crimes or domestic repression. It often accompanies allegations of cyberattacks, false-flag operations, or intelligence provocations. It is designed to delegitimise British information outputs while preparing domestic audiences to reject Western narratives by default.

5. Decay and Collapse

Core Narrative. The “Decay and Collapse” theme depicts the United Kingdom as a dysfunctional and declining power; it is economically unstable, culturally fragmented, and socially disordered. In Russian state and pro-war media, this narrative extends beyond criticism of political leadership to portray deep and irreversible civilisational decline.

¹⁵ Николай Стариков. Telegram. 5 June 2024, 00:08:37.

Не думаю, что бедность – причина низкой рождаемости в Великобритании. Обычно наблюдается обратная зависимость между бедностью и рождаемостью. Чем беднее семья, тем больше детей она имеет. Мне кажется, в Великобритании наблюдается сильнейшая деградация ценностей. Каждая клеточка британского общества поражена.

I don't think poverty is the reason for the low birth rate in the UK. Normally, it's the opposite—there's usually an inverse relationship between poverty and birth rate. In fact, the poorer a family is, the more children it tends to have. I think what we're seeing in the UK is a deep collapse of values. Every cell of British society is infected.

Britain is frequently described as suffering from pervasive social dysfunction: knife crime, homelessness, racial tensions, labour strikes, and political paralysis. Royal scandals and government crises are used to symbolise broader systemic failure. The country is portrayed as one in which public services falter, elites engage in performative ceremony, and ordinary people are left in worsening conditions. This portrayal is deployed to delegitimise Britain's moral authority and undermine its credibility as a global actor. By depicting British institutions as incapable or farcical, the narrative seeks to discredit UK positions on international law, democratic values, and human rights.

The theme extends beyond material collapse into what is described as spiritual and cultural disintegration. British society is mocked as feminised, atheistic, obsessed with identity politics, and disconnected from tradition. Even ordinary events, such as poor weather or transport delays, are framed as further evidence of decline. The monarchy is a frequent focus, portrayed as senile, corrupted, or absurd. Parliament is likened to a theatrical farce. If there is no evidence of such discontent, they simply make it up.

Example Eleven¹⁸

Но и не прошло и полгода, как в Великобритании, некогда Великой Британии, снова собираются сменить премьер-министра. Официально объявлена призывающая провести внеочередные всеобщие выборы в стране, уже собрано 2 миллиона подписей. Менее чем за неделю. Для понимания, партия лейбористов, премьер Кир Стармер находится в власти всего 4 месяца, но уже настроены все Соединенное Королевство.

But it hasn't even been half a year, and in Britain—formerly Great Britain—they're already getting ready to replace the Prime Minister again. An official petition calling for snap general elections has gathered nearly 2 million signatures. In less than a day. Just to put that in context: the Labour Party and Prime Minister Keir Starmer have only been in power for four months, and they've already managed to turn the entire United Kingdom against them.

¹⁶ “Время покажет.” Первый канал, 12 March 2024, 00:33:27. Speaker: Илья Владимирович Кива.

¹⁸ “Мардан TV.” Mardan Live, RuTube channel, 7 September 2024, 00:39:38.

This narrative serves multiple strategic functions. It invites *schadenfreude* among domestic Russian audiences, reinforces a sense of moral superiority, and provides psychological reassurance in the face of economic or military pressure ('it is bad here, but it is bad everywhere'). By suggesting that the UK is as broken, or more so, than Russia, it reduces the credibility of British criticism and the UK's ability to challenge Russia (despite the UK's allegedly clear intent to undermine Russia by all manner of dastardly deeds).

Example Twelve¹⁷

<p>Великобритания не совсем готова к полномасштабной войне в Европе. Армия пытается снова набраться сил, как она утратила навыки ведения кампаний. Численность армии Великобритании самая малая за последние 300 лет.</p>	<p>Britain's nowhere near ready to fight a fullscale war on its own. The army's scrambling to rebuild what strength it once had—it's lost the know-how to run an actual military campaign. Right now, the British army is the smallest it's been in 300 years.</p>
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This theme peaks during moments of visible domestic challenge in the UK—such as strikes, cost-of-living crises, political instability, or royal controversy. It is used to erode the UK's soft power and to suggest that Britain lacks the capacity or legitimacy to act internationally.

6. Proxy War Framing

Core Narrative. This is one of the most consistently deployed and strategically potent themes in Russian hostile discourse on the UK. It frames Britain not as an ally of Ukraine but as the principal driver of the war—a state that uses Ukraine as a proxy to damage Russia at minimal cost to itself. According to this narrative, the UK sustains the conflict deliberately, motivated by historical resentment and geopolitical self-interest. Ukrainian lives are depicted as expendable cannon fodder for British aims. The narrative denies Ukrainian agency and sovereignty, portraying the country as a battlefield chosen by Britain rather than a state defending itself. Example Thirteen²⁰

<p>При этом сама Украина используется англосаксами как инструмент нашей страной. Цель – подорвать и удержать своё мнимое превосходство, сохранить однополярный мир.</p>	<p>Ukraine itself is being used by the Anglosaxons as a tool in their fight against our country. The goal is to suppress Russia, maintain their illusion of superiority, and preserve a unipolar world.</p>
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This framing intensifies around major British military aid announcements or when long-range weapons (such as Storm Shadow missiles) are supplied. Britain's contribution is not presented as assistance but as escalation. Russian media assert that UK forces and intelligence officials direct

¹⁷ "Сегодня утром." Каскад ТВК, RuTube channel, 13 September 2024, 00:39:45. Speaker: SPEAKER_08 ²⁰
²⁰ "Выпуск программы 'Время' в 21:00." Первый канал, television broadcast, Tuesday, 5 October 2022, 01:09:29.

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Ukrainian targeting, sabotage, and drone operations—particularly in Crimea and cross-border strikes. This theme also integrates colonial and racial tropes, with Ukrainian soldiers described as Russian peoples, manipulated into sacrificing themselves for Anglo-Saxon gain. The UK's motivations are cast not as principled, but imperial aimed at preserving influence and punishing Russia for past confrontations.

Example Fourteen¹⁸

Именно поэтому и выбрана такая стратегия – воевать с Москвой, но воевать руками украинцам.

That's exactly why this strategy was chosen: to wage war on Moscow, but to do it with Ukrainian hands.

Importantly, this narrative supports Russian domestic mobilisation by reframing aggression as defence. It also seeks to justify pre-emptive or retaliatory strikes on British-linked targets, either in Ukraine or through hybrid action. This narrative is prominent around announcements of Western aid, major UK defence commitments, or high-profile battlefield events. It is intended to sow doubt about Ukrainian autonomy, depict Britain as the true belligerent, and provide rhetorical justification for escalatory responses.

7. Imperialism

Core Narrative. Russian state and affiliated media frequently frame the United Kingdom as a neoimperial actor seeking to preserve global influence through indirect coercion. This narrative reframes the UK's international development work, foreign policy, and public diplomacy as contemporary manifestations of colonial control, with the UK using financial instruments, military assistance, media, and elite engagement to manipulate less powerful states.

The UK is not portrayed as a former empire in retreat but as a country that has adapted its imperial model to modern conditions. According to this narrative, institutions such as the BBC, international NGOs, and green finance initiatives are deployed not to promote stability or rights but to secure access, extract value, and influence local governance.

This narrative is strategically leveraged in messaging around the Global South and many of the themes are also apparent in Russian messaging to the Global South itself.¹⁹ Russia presents itself as an anti-colonial actor, resisting Western domination and advocating multipolar sovereignty. By contrast, Britain is depicted as continuing to dominate post-colonial spaces through economic pressure, cultural narratives, and political interference. Russia itself of course, is free of imperial sin.²⁰

Example Fifteen²¹

¹⁸ Skabeyeva, Olga Vladimirovna. “60 минут.” *Россия-1*, posted on Telegram, 23 March 2023.

¹⁹ Komin, Mikhail. “Deconstructing Russia’s Anti-Colonial Posturing in the Global South.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 27 November 2024. <https://ecfr.eu/article/deconstructing-russias-anti-colonial-posturing-in-the-global-south/>.

²⁰ “Did Russia never engage in colonialism? Never. The colonisation of territories, yes, but not the colonisation of the population. Because if we note how the United Kingdom acted, how Spain did it, then that was colonisation of territories with the subjugation or destruction of the population, in fact.” “60 минут.” *Россия-1*, television broadcast, 21 November 2022, 00:03:52.

²¹ “Большая игра.” *Первый канал (Channel One Russia)*. Television broadcast, Monday, 18 April 2023, 00:59:44.

А в отношении англосаксов говорили об Индии, а в Индии вопрос и назвали цифру. Сколько потребуем от Великобритании триллионов долларов, за то который они принесли Индии разграбляя их, будучи колониальцами индусов свои счета с англичанами всех. Как и у моей страны так

And regarding the AngloSaxons—you mentioned India earlier—they raised the issue and named a figure. They said: we will demand 30 trillion dollars from the United Kingdom for the damage it caused to India through its looting during the colonial period. So the Indians have their own scores to settle with the AngloSaxons—just like everyone else. Including my country [Israel]

Importantly, the imperialism theme is not contradicted by narratives of British decline (Theme 5). Instead, it complements them. Russia’s messaging suggests that Britain’s imperial behaviour stems not from strength but from loss: a former hegemon now overreaching in order to retain relevance. Military interventions, development aid, and influence campaigns are portrayed as symptoms of insecurity rather than strategy.

Even conciliatory Western rhetoric, such as messages distinguishing between Putin and the Russian population or promoting liberal democratic values inside Russia are characterised as imperial in tone. The Russian media portrayals invert soft power into a form of epistemic or moral colonisation, claiming that the West assumes the right to define Russian identity and legitimacy.

This theme is frequently deployed in material concerning Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America. It supports Russia’s broader narrative of multipolarity and is often tied to critiques of Western-led financial institutions, sanctions regimes, or development programmes.

8. Arrogance and Hypocrisy

Core Narrative. One of the most effective and widely deployed Russian narratives against the UK centres on moral hypocrisy. This theme casts Britain not only as politically or strategically adversarial, but as a country that routinely violates the principles it promotes. It is used to delegitimise British criticism of Russia, particularly regarding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, by highlighting perceived inconsistencies or past misconduct.

The core message is that Britain’s rhetoric about democratic values and global responsibility masks a record of duplicity, selective morality, and unresolved historical guilt. Actions in Northern Ireland, Iraq, and colonial contexts are routinely cited to discredit the UK’s current foreign policy positions. In this framing, British advocacy is not seen as principled, but opportunistic, motivated by interests rather than ideals.

The narrative also resonates visually and emotionally. Imagery showing MPs surrounded by urban poverty, or the juxtaposition of progressive values with colonial history, reinforces the message. It

allows Russia to present itself as a victim of Western double standards, while simultaneously appealing to countries with their own histories of Western interference. Example Sixteen²²

²² “Большая игра.” *Channel One Russia*. Television broadcast, 29 December 2023, 00:00:29.

не Соединенному Королевству государства члены, в том числе членов Совета, по вопросу международного права. Соединенное Королевство и другие западные страны забыли о нем для международного основанного на правилах. Это поддерживает конфликты, которые были остановлены в апреле 2022 года, премьер-министр, не позволил заключить договор, по которому переговоры между Россией и Украиной, который бы позволил остановить конфликт. И еще тогда можно было спасти огромное число человек.

It is not for the United Kingdom to lecture other states, including permanent members of the Security Council, on upholding international law. The United Kingdom and its Western partners have forgotten about it in favour of a so-called “rules-based international order.” You fuel and prolong conflicts that could have been stopped back in April 2022. It was your Prime Minister who did not allow an agreement to be signed—an agreement that was being negotiated between Russia and Ukraine and could have ended this conflict. Even then, countless lives, Ukrainian lives, could have been saved.

By undermining Britain’s claim to moral leadership, this theme reduces the effectiveness of UK diplomatic or strategic messaging to Russian audiences and the millions of Russian speakers who watch Russian media from outside the Russian Federation.

This theme is prominent during major international summits, rights-based messaging campaigns, or moments when the UK publicly condemns Russian actions. It is often paired with visual propaganda or satire and is designed to undermine alignment with UK positions.

9. Covert Operations

Core narrative. Russian state and pro-war media consistently portray Britain as an unaccountable, subversive actor operating through covert means. This narrative casts the UK as engaging in indirect warfare, manipulating conflicts via intelligence agencies, cyber tools, and third-party proxies, rather than through overt military power.

Alleged British involvement is routinely claimed in a variety of incidents: sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline, drone attacks on Russian military assets, staging Bucha, and instigation of unrest in Moldova and Georgia. This theme reflects a longstanding stereotype in Russian (and Soviet) strategic culture that depicts Britain as relying on subterfuge rather than force. The UK, especially MI6, is described as orchestrating a broad spectrum of covert activities, from false-flag operations and disinformation campaigns to regime change efforts and proxy warfare. These accusations are not framed as exceptional; rather, they are presented as Britain’s standard *modus operandi* in its foreign policy toolkit.



This portrayal serves several strategic purposes:

- It delegitimises UK foreign policy by portraying it as duplicitous or underhanded.
- It provides rhetorical justification for Russian retaliatory or pre-emptive actions, particularly in cyber and grey-zone domains.
- It externalises internal dissent in neighbouring countries by attributing it to British interference.

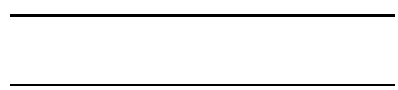
Ultimately, this theme positions Britain as a persistent and destabilising presence on Russia's borders—an actor whose influence is exercised not through transparency or alliances, but through covert manipulation.

Example Seventeen ²³

Кстати, я допускаю определенную роль, которую может играть Соединенное Королевство здесь. Правильно было отмечено, что одна из задач дестабилизация южной границы России и на Кавказе, но и цель еще более глобальная, да, дестабилизация вот нашего нового торгового коридора, который мы сейчас выстраиваем, Север-Юг. Да, которая идет как раз через кавказские страны, потом Иран, потом Пакистан и Индия. Это традиционная сфера влияния Британии, где они сейчас теряют свои позиции, потому что много проблем в отношениях. Конечно, я думаю, что они очень не хотели бы того, чтобы вот этот самый новый коридор произошел, и страны БРИКС дальше укрепляли свое экономическое сотрудничество

By the way, I acknowledge that the United Kingdom may be playing a certain role here. It was rightly noted that one of their objectives is to destabilize Russia's southern border and the Caucasus. But the goal is even broader: to disrupt our new trade corridor that we're currently building—North-South. It runs through the Caucasus, then Iran, then Pakistan and India. This is a traditional sphere of British influence, where they're now losing ground due to many issues in their relationships. Of course, I believe they are very keen to prevent this corridor from becoming a reality and to stop BRICS countries from deepening their economic cooperation

This theme spikes after Ukrainian successes, especially when the latter involves attacks (e.g.,



²³ “60 минут.” *Russia-1*. Television broadcast, 11 December 2023, 01:26:31.

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military, sabotage or cyber operations) on Russia and during attempts to frame domestic unrest in third countries as the result of Western interference.

10. “Let’s Destroy Britain” – Open Hostility

Core narrative. At the most extreme end of Russian strategic rhetoric, Britain is not only criticised or mocked, but openly threatened with destruction. Calls for nuclear strikes on London, the erasure of the UK from the map, and direct punitive measures are now a recurring feature in both state-aligned and pro-war media.

These threats are often stylised with sarcasm, meme culture, or surrealist humour, but repetition normalises the idea of violent escalation. They tend to surge in response to UK arms deliveries, sanctions, or perceived diplomatic provocations.

While some threats are framed hypothetically or theatrically, they play a role in acculturating audiences to the concept of Britain as a legitimate target. Far from being confined to fringe platforms, such statements appear on state television, in Telegram influencer channels, and in public discourse by elected officials.

This narrative serves several purposes:

- It prepares domestic audiences to accept or support escalatory actions against the UK.
- It acts as a signalling mechanism to Western governments.
- It recasts Britain not just as an adversary, but as a morally and strategically expendable entity.

Destruction of Britain is no longer presented as unthinkable within this ecosystem, instead it is framed as inevitable, justified, or even righteous.

Example Eighteen²⁴

Ну, никто не думал о том, могут больно ударить по Соединенному Королевству. Опять же, да, уровень современных политиков, уровень умения проанализировать ситуацию, осмыслить, ну что-то так

No one’s seriously thought about the fact that someone could actually hit the UK where it hurts. But again—just look at the kind of politicians we’re dealing with today. Their ability to analyse, reflect, act? That’s the level we’re at.

²⁴ RuTube Video. “Сегодня.” RuTube, April 15, 2023, 00:07:52. the context here is that for some reason Britain is to blame for Maia Sandu.

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 Example Nineteen²⁸

Ракета Судного дня RS-28 «Сармат» может нести 15 боеголовок и уничтожить территорию размером с Великобританию одним ударом.	The RS-28 'Sarmat' doomsday missile can carry 15 warheads and destroy an area the size of the UK in a single strike.
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Example Twenty²⁹

Депутат Андрей Гурулев призвал российских ученых разработать биологическое оружие для уничтожения англосаксов. Такое заявление он сделал.	Duma Deputy Andrei Gurulyov called on Russian scientists to develop biological weapons to wipe out the AngloSaxons. He made this statement.
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This is the most extreme rhetorical form, often clustering around symbolic dates—such as anniversaries of sanctions, major Ukrainian battlefield events, or British policy announcements.

Summary of Usage Patterns and Terminology

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Commonly Activated By</i>
Civilisational Conflict	Ideological mobilisation, often with religious/moral framing
Historical Enmity	Formalised media, invoking exaggerated or fictional pasts
Military Interference	British arms deliveries or Ukrainian battlefield successes
Disinformation/Propaganda	To discredit Western reporting on Russian actions
Decay and Collapse	UK political crises, royal scandals, or domestic unrest
Proxy War Framing	Announcements of Western aid or war anniversaries

Imperialism	Messaging related to foreign affairs, Russian allies in Global South
Arrogance/Hypocrisy	Third-country narratives, often paired with Gaza/Syria/Iraq
Covert Operations	Ukrainian successes, cyber events or sabotage incidents
Open Threats	Russian setbacks, British deterrence, or symbolic political dates

²⁸ 60 Минут (TV Program): “60 минут.” Russia-1, broadcast March 14, 2023, 12:56

²⁹ Telegram Post (Bloknot Rossiya) Bloknot Rossiya. Telegram post, September 3, 2024. Telegram

There are rare and brief glimpses of positivity. Across all the examples analysed, seventeen did not fit into the themes above. Most of them were neutral, some used Britain or England to bash other countries, e.g. England is better at football, and a few were positive about the British people, claiming they were not the problem, only their rulers. This is a rhetorical hangover from Soviet rhetoric that mostly folded into negative themes above relating to British imperialism. One odd entry was about a pie that Boris Johnson ate during a holiday in July 2022. The presenter appeared to approve of the pie.

Russia’s “Britain” Is Not Real—But It Is Strategic and Dangerous

The version of Britain depicted in Russian state and para-state discourse is not grounded in reality. It is a constructed adversary: collapsing, hypocritical, colonialist, covert, and morally degenerate. Yet the purpose of this portrayal is not accuracy but utility. It forms part of Russia’s cognitive warfare infrastructure, designed to legitimise hostility, condition domestic audiences, and justify escalation.

This symbolic “Britain” plays several roles across Russian media ecosystems:

- As a decadent and feminised West, especially in references to “England”;
- As the civilisational architect of global anti-Russian conspiracy via the term “Anglosaxons”;
- As the manipulative instigator of war in Ukraine, under terms like “UK” or “Great Britain”.

This phenomenon aligns with what Monroe Price termed the “infrastructure of consent for violence.”²⁵ Through repetition and meme-like imagery, Britain is transformed into a legitimate and even desirable target, particularly in response to sanctions, aid to Ukraine, or diplomatic criticism.

²⁵ Price, Monroe E. *Media and Sovereignty: The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenge to State Power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

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The most concerning dimension is the escalation dynamic. Narratives portraying Britain as morally degenerate or covertly aggressive often give way to explicit calls for violence, including nuclear threats. These are often wrapped in irony or sarcasm, masking their real impact as instruments of emotional desensitisation.

Framing techniques such as mirror memory, reassigning historical guilt to others, help invert narratives of aggression. Britain's imperial legacy is invoked to portray Russia's current actions as defensive or restorative.²⁶ The ideological tone is reinforced by cultural framing. Britain is often shown as emblematic of liberal decay: "trans ideology," street crime, and royal scandals are used to undermine its moral standing and delegitimise criticism of Russia. Mentions of the UK are saturated with emotional cues (ridicule, sarcasm, threat) which cumulatively shape public perceptions of Britain as both contemptible and dangerous.

This rhetorical Britain performs multiple functions:

- Externally, it enables asymmetric or retaliatory action, especially in the grey zone.

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- Domestically, it diverts blame for Russian failures and reinforces the image of encirclement.

- Emotionally, it unites audiences across ideological lines through shared hostility.

The interplay of sarcasm, menace, and narrative distortion constitutes a form of weaponised affect. This emotional manipulation creates conditions where violent action feels not only justified, but necessary.²⁷

Britain is not simply being criticised it is being constructed as an existential enemy. Strategic communications, sanctions policy, and threat perception assessments should account for the instrumental function of this messaging.

6. Public views of Britain

Most British citizens remain unaware of the depth and persistence of Russian hostility toward the United Kingdom. Within Russian strategic culture and popular culture alike, Britain is increasingly portrayed not merely as a geopolitical rival but as the ideological architect of Ukraine's resistance and a centuries-old antagonist committed to weakening, if not destroying, Russia. This strategic framing is reinforced through academic discourse. Russian universities and foreign policy institutes frequently amplify civilisational tropes about Britain. For example, MGIMO professor Boris Fyodorovich Martynov has contributed to the narrative with his book *Англосаксы. Кто они?* ("The Anglosaxons: Who Are They?"), which presents Britain and the Anglosphere as culturally alien and historically antagonistic to Russian civilisation.

In public discussions, including those hosted by state-aligned outlets, Martynov and others have framed the UK as a civilisational actor fundamentally opposed to Eurasian values. These narratives provide intellectual cover for rhetorical escalation, embedding conspiracy and antagonism within seemingly serious geopolitical analysis. This animus is not episodic or performative. It is foundational to how many leading Russians interpret the UK's global role and actions.

Polling data illustrates this clearly. A long-term Levada Center time series (2006–2025) shows that the UK has consistently ranked among the top five countries seen as unfriendly or hostile to Russia

²⁶ McGlynn, Jade. *Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia*. Bloomsbury, 2023.

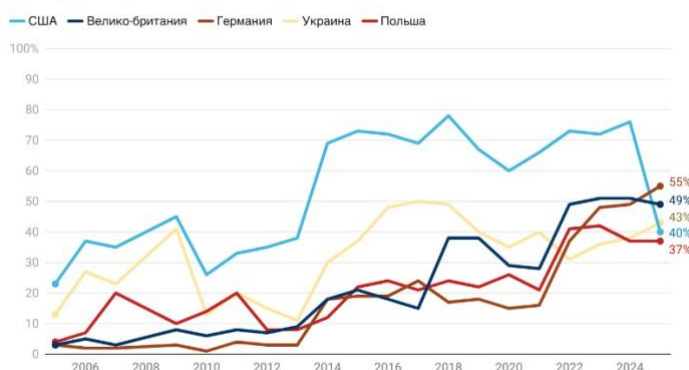
²⁷ Boichak, O., Hoskins, A. My war: participation in warfare. *Digi War* 3, 1–8 (2022).
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00060-7>

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since 2014.²⁸ After the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Skripal poisoning in 2018, perceptions of Britain as a hostile state increased. By 2023, 51% of Russian respondents identified the UK (dark blue in the image below) as one of the most unfriendly countries, up from under 20% before 2014 and placing it just behind the United States (72%) as Russia's primary enemy. In 2025, the USA (light blue in the image below) predictably dropped in the ratings while Germany (orange) overtook the UK.

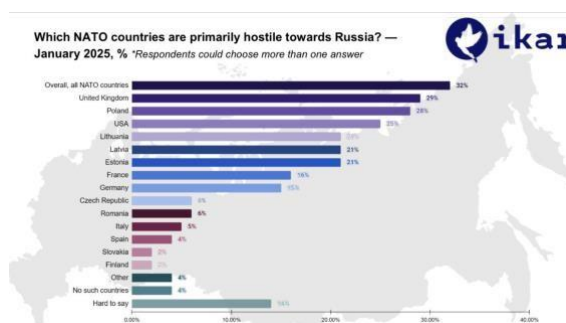
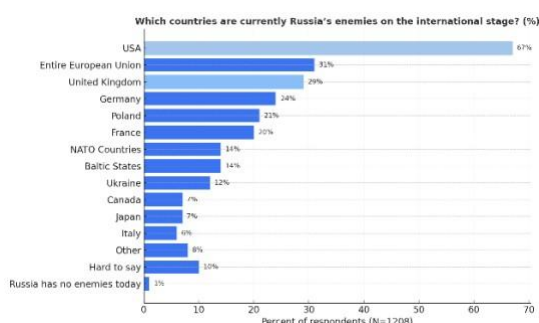
Какие пять стран Вы назвали бы наиболее недружественно, враждебно настроенными по отношению к России?

в % опрошенных, ТОП-5



НАСТОЯЩИЙ МАТЕРИАЛ (ИНФОРМАЦИЯ) ПРОИЗВЕДЕН И РАСПРОСТРАНЕН ИНОСТРАННЫМ АГЕНТОМ АНО «ЛЕВАДА-ЦЕНТР» ЛИБО КАСАЕТСЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ИНОСТРАННОГО АГЕНТА АНО «ЛЕВАДА-ЦЕНТР». 18+
Создано с помощью Datawrapper

The Institute for Contemporary Analysis of Russia (IKAR) provides further corroboration. In late 2022 polling, the UK ranked behind both the U.S. and Poland among NATO countries seen as hostile to Russia. However, by January 2025, this had shifted: 29% of respondents identified the UK as *the* most hostile NATO country toward Russia, second only to the aggregated “all NATO countries” category (32%).²⁹ This represents not just consistency but escalation in how Britain is positioned in the Russian popular imagination, as a principal antagonist in a civilisational confrontation.



²⁸ Levada Center. “Представления о дружественных и недружественных странах, взаимоотношениях с Западом, отношении к некоторым странам и направлениях зарубежных поездок” [Perceptions of Friendly and Hostile Countries, Relations with the West, Attitudes Toward Certain Countries, and Travel Destinations Abroad]. *Levada Center*, June 5, 2025. <https://www.levada.ru/2025/06/05/predstavleniya-o-druzhestvennyh-inedruzhestvennyh-stranah-vzaimootnosheniyah-s-zapadom-otnoshenie-k-nekotorym-stranam-i-napravleniyazagranichnyh-poezdok/>.

²⁹ IKAR, Sociological Research “Mirror of Russia” – Three Years of Full-Scale War, February 24, 2025, <https://ikarthinktank.org/en/explorations/129>.

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At the same time, Ukraine itself is seen as less unfriendly than in previous years. In Levada’s 2023 polling, only 26% of Russians identified Ukraine as among the top five hostile states—down from higher percentages in 2014–2022 (see Levada table above, Ukraine is yellow). This is likely a consequence of Russian propaganda portraying Ukraine as a “brother nation” hijacked by Western puppeteers, where Britain and the U.S. are framed as the true puppet-masters. The implication is clear: Britain is not seen merely as involved in Ukraine, it is seen as directing the war against Russia. The below is a good example of how Russians project blame for their own war crimes onto others:

[...]во что Украину превратили эти англосаксы. Они будут этим англосаксам мстить, безжалостно мстить. За погибших родных, за разрушенные города, поля и так далее будут украинские батальоны. И вот все это будет стоять у дверей Европы, и Европа будет без танков, без всего остального. Еще ПВО пускай привезут, чтобы у них ПВО поменьше. Но ПВО они не отдадут.³⁰

Look at what the Anglosaxons have turned Ukraine into. The Ukrainians will take revenge on them—ruthless, unforgiving revenge. For the dead, for their shattered cities and scorched fields—it’ll be Ukrainian battalions delivering that payback. And all of it will be right on Europe’s doorstep, while Europe stands there without tanks, without anything. Let them send over their air defences too—so they’re even more defenceless themselves. But no, they won’t give those up, will they?

These perceptions are not without consequence. As Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has shown, consistent rhetorical rage can escalate into violence. Britain should expect ongoing cyberattacks, targeted disinformation campaigns, and small-scale kinetic actions (e.g. sabotage, arson, or proxy acts) to intensify. The UK’s Strategic Defence Review rightly identifies the need for a “whole-of-society” approach and for “widening participation in national resilience.” But for this strategy to work, the British public must be aware of the intensity and persistence of Russian hostility. Awareness does not mean alarmism, it means clarity, especially since such hostility is likely to persevere beyond Putin.³¹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UK POLICYMAKERS

The United Kingdom is not merely a diplomatic irritant or convenient scapegoat for the Russian state, it is viewed as a core strategic adversary. This hostility is structural, not circumstantial, and it manifests across military, cyber, cognitive, and symbolic domains. Moscow’s messaging does not just delegitimise the UK—it justifies action against it. The UK must move from fragmented, reactive measures to a unified, enduring strategy of deterrence, degradation, and defence.

1. Support Ukraine Relentlessly Because It Makes Us Safer

The most effective way to weaken Russia’s ability to harm the UK is to ensure it fails in Ukraine. A militarily and economically degraded Russia is less dangerous, regardless of its intent.

Recommendation: Maintain and expand UK support for Ukraine across military, economic, and humanitarian lines.

³⁰ Телеканал 360 и Онуфриенко. RuTube. January 27, 2023. 1:00:27. <https://rutube.ru/>.

³¹ See the most recent here: Zygur, Mikhail. “The Next Generation: Russia’s Future Rulers.” *Russia Tomorrow*, Atlantic Council, July 14, 2025. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/the-nextgeneration-russias-future-rulers/>.

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- Understand this will not make Russia like us—it may even increase hostile messaging—but it will constrain what Russia can do;
- Helping Ukraine is not benevolence; it is national defence.

The Kremlin sees us as the architect of Ukraine’s resistance. We should wear that with pride.

2. Engage in Asymmetric Reciprocity

We should not try to out-lie the Kremlin because that is a tall order. But we can and should use truthful messaging to destabilise its control over information inside Russia and among its global sympathisers.

Recommendation: Design a sustained offensive information campaign built on disruptive truths.

- Reveal elite corruption, inequality, and moral decay inside Russia—but tailor the message to audience sensibilities;
- For left-leaning audiences in Russia and beyond: focus on racism, repression, and extreme wealth gaps;
- For right-leaning or illiberal audiences: in Russia and beyond highlight uncontrolled migration, family collapse, drug use, and military desertion. Efforts should also be made to develop contacts among the ethno-nationalist base of the Russian ‘Z’ community, who are likely to have an influential role in any post-Putin political situation;
- Use third-party or native Russian-speaking messengers where possible and avoid overt Western branding.

This is not about changing minds (we will fail in any such endeavour). It is about disorienting the regime’s ability to monopolise meaning.

3. Close the Information Gap: Public Awareness as a National Security Priority

At a time of fiscal pressure and political scrutiny over foreign aid, the government must clearly communicate why defending Ukraine and undermining Russian aggression directly serves the UK’s national interest. While Russia is the most significant hostile threat to Britain, the scale and intensity of the threat is not widely understood by the public. Most citizens remain unaware of the intensity of anti-British sentiment embedded in Russian elite and popular discourse or of the hybrid threats already targeting the UK. This information vacuum is not sustainable. Prevention begins with visibility.

Recommendation: Launch a serious public education and deterrence initiative, led by national security—not public relations.

This effort should combine civic resilience, threat prevention, and public inoculation:

- Educate the public, especially parents, about Russian hybrid and cognitive tactics, including recruitment via encrypted apps, gamified “tasks,” sabotage, and the manipulation of vulnerable individuals, especially youth;

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- Include tailored guidance on Russian hostile activity under Prevent, covering sabotage, subversion, and foreign influence, and integrate this into teacher training and public-facing materials. This should reflect the overlap with far-right and other extreme ideologies and is aligned with the CONTEST 2023 refresh, which emphasises threat-agnostic tooling and adaptive strategic planning;
- Support or create bloggers and grassroots voices to expose Russian narratives about Britain, especially through AI-translated content and locally grounded media initiatives;
- Publicise the real consequences of complicity, using the Ukrainian model: highlight sentencing for sabotage and espionage, warn parents, and make clear the risks behind “easy money” offers;
- Promote digital hygiene and critical media literacy through accessible toolkits, drawing on Finland’s multiliteracy model and adapting it for UK audiences;³²
- Establish clear and secure public reporting channels for suspicious recruitment efforts, sabotage planning, or disinformation incidents.
- Public awareness is not fearmongering. It is a democratic obligation. In an era where war is waged across cognitive, digital, and social terrain, the British public must not be the last to know they are already on the battlefield.

4. Unify Counter-Disinformation Efforts

The UK’s current handling of disinformation can at times underestimate its strategic function. Russian cognitive operations are not soft-power nuisances; they are a key operational capability within hostile statecraft, designed to shape the information environment, degrade institutional legitimacy, and prepare the battlespace ahead of cyber or kinetic acts.

Recommendation: Form a dedicated cross-HMG Counter-Cognitive Operations Unit under the Home Office’s State Threats Systems leadership.

- This unit should centralise disparate counter-disinformation, counter-influence, and threat intelligence teams currently siloed across departments.
- It must coordinate directly with GCHQ, MOD, the Foreign Office, and domestic security partners to ensure rapid threat triage and a unified government response.
- Integrate cognitive signal tracking into broader national security threat modelling—including election interference, anti-UK narrative acceleration, and societal fracture attempts.
- Framing disinformation as an “influence” issue weakens deterrence. The UK must instead recognise it as *pre-conflict shaping behaviour* and treat it accordingly.

5. Develop Our Understanding of Russia’s Threat Ecosystem in the UK

Current UK understanding of Russian hostile activity is heavily weighted toward cyber, kinetic, and diplomatic domains. Yet many of the Kremlin’s most effective operations operate through sociological vectors—identity, trust, grievance, and fear. To understand and counter these

³² Finnish National Agency for Education. “Multiliteracy and Media Literacy.” *oph.fi*, <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/multiliteracy-and-media-literacy>.

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threats, the UK needs targeted, academically grounded research that maps how these influence structures operate within British society.

Recommendation:

Through SONAC, commission a structured programme of independent research to examine the sociological dimensions of Russian threats to the UK.

This programme should focus on:

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- **Mechanisms of recruitment and tasking:** How do Russian state and proxy actors identify, approach, and engage individuals in the UK? What role do ideology, financial precarity, online radicalisation, and diaspora networks play?
 - **Diaspora dynamics:** What roles do different segments of the Russian-speaking diaspora in the UK play in either facilitating or resisting hostile state activity? How do fear, family ties, or media consumption shape their responses?
 - **Comparative exposure:** Which other Western states are targeted in similar ways? Are there shared vulnerabilities, or lessons from allied responses, particularly in frontline countries? • **Perceptions of Russia in the UK:** What do British citizens believe about Russia and Russians? How do these perceptions affect social cohesion, political narratives, and the credibility of government messaging?
 - **Grievance amplification and narrative uptake:** How are Russian narratives received, modified, or resisted within different UK communities (e.g. online conspiracist, far-right, anti-establishment milieus)?
 - **Media and message ecosystems:** What are the entry points for Russian influence content into the UK's information space? How does this intersect with domestic distrust, social fragmentation, or content virality?

Understanding the *human terrain* of Russian threat operations is essential for credible policy. This research will not only improve institutional awareness, it will help the UK stay ahead of adversaries who exploit the sociopolitical seams of open societies.

Conclusion

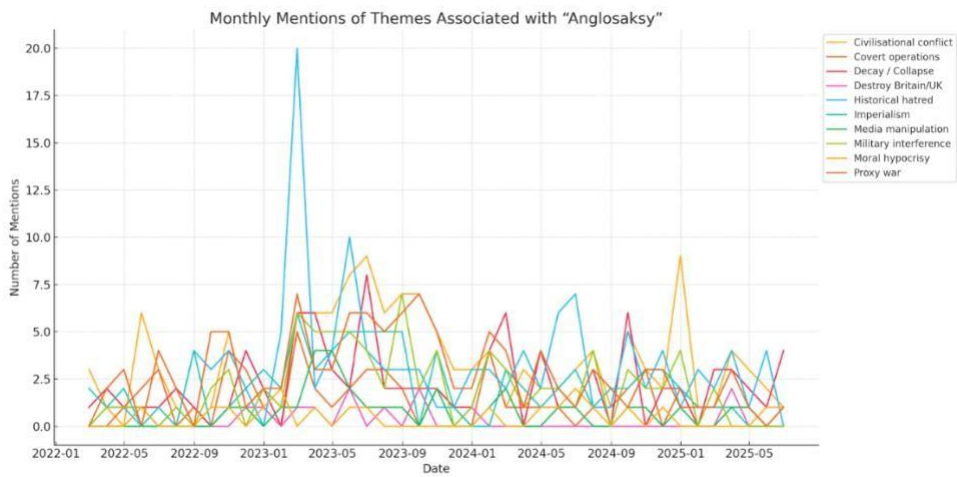
Britain must accept that it is a permanent Russian target. So long as the UK supports NATO, Ukraine, and a rules-based European order, the Kremlin will view it as an obstacle to be undermined. This will not change unless Russia itself changes.

Britain should embrace this role and plan accordingly, ensuring its influence in Europe remains visible and unavoidable, militarily, diplomatically, and symbolically. Strategic partnerships with frontline states like Finland, Poland, the Baltics, and, of course, Ukraine must be deepened and reinforced. Presence alone is not enough; it must be backed by investment in resilience, deterrence, and a long-term strategic posture.

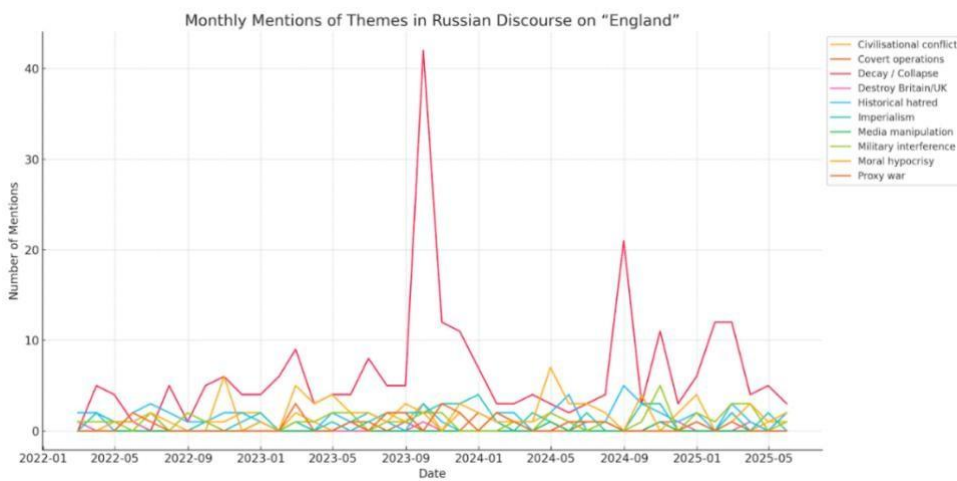
These are not wartime measures. They are measures for an age in which war and peace are no longer binary and in which Britain is already under attack across that spectrum. Russia does not need to like us. But it must learn to fear the cost of targeting us.

Annex

Anglosaxon mentions of themes across time period

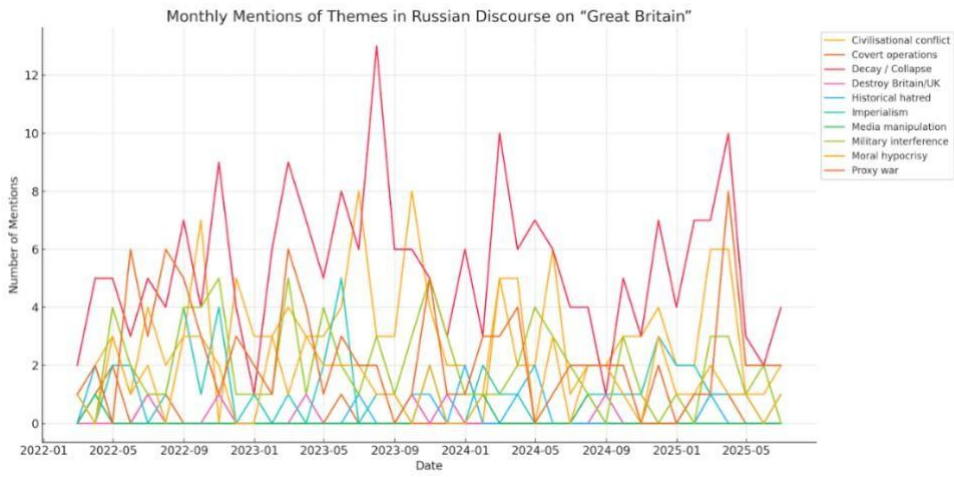


England mentions of themes across time period



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Great Britain mention of themes across time period



UK mentions of themes across time period

