Deaf Ears and the U.S.-EU-Russia Sanctions Tangle: Contending Strategic Discourses and Mutual Emboldenment

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Abstract

The contemporary strategic landscape between Russia and the West is marred by interlocking economic sanctions, despite little tangible evidence that they are effective. Both Russia and the West seem complacent about the “high incidence-low effectiveness” of their sanctions-related behaviour, and there are no obvious off-ramps to the continuation or escalation of current sanctions policies. What factors caused this U.S.-EU-Russia sanctions tangle, and what can be done to address it? This article addresses these questions by comparing the sanctions-related discourse of the Russian and western strategic communities as expressed in over 1,000 academic research articles published since 2010. Statistical analysis of publication output, citation patterns and the textual content of these articles reveals contending Russian and western “world views” according to which each strategic community embraces fundamentally different understandings of the meaning, objectives, processes and legitimacy of sanctions-related behaviour. This suggests that breaking the sanctions tangle will require that the Russian and western strategic communities deepen their understanding of, and engage with, each other’s world views, and in so doing re-examine the beliefs, objectives and expectations that form the basis of each side’s current use of sanctions.

Key words: sanctions; Russia; US; EU


Sanctions mar the contemporary strategic landscape between Russia and the West, having emerged as a prominent tool of economic warfare. In June 2019, EU Council members voted unanimously to sustain economic sanctions against Russia as part of a hardening of response to Moscow’s actions in Crimea and Sevastopol...
and the stalled peace accord for East Ukraine. With passage of the Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act of 2017, efforts to pressure Moscow by sanctioning individuals, firms and sectors of the economy were codified into U.S. law. Sanctions, in effect, are a blunt instrument of American policy toward Russia; politically costly for the president to resist imposing, and now with a legal voice in their lifting, empowering the U.S. Congress with strong incentive to take a tougher line to constrain executive leaderships in both countries. Accordingly, bipartisan proposals circulating within the U.S. Congress calling for the blacklisting of large Russian state banks and the blocking of future transactions for Russian debt issuances hang like a sword of Damocles over western investors in Russia [Kluge, 2019]. The Russian leadership, too, currently embraces counteractions, having streamlined intergovernmental decision-making, extended travel bans and broadened the embargo on targeted agricultural goods to include a variety of processed and prepared food staples and luxury items imported from the EU, U.S., Australia, Canada, Norway and Iceland.

Yet, there is a yawning gap between the prevalence of sanctions and counteractions, and tangible evidence of their success. Western sanctions on Russia have failed flatly to secure Moscow’s formal compliance with stated objectives, from restoring Ukraine’s sovereignty over Crimea, fully implementing the Minsk accords, admitting guilt to ordering the Skripal attack, withdrawing support for the Assad regime in Syria, and for the U.S., restraining from election meddling. Notwithstanding the growing target list of Russian energy companies and posturing over sanctions imposed on firms involved in constructing the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline, the volume of Russian gas exports to Europe has steadily risen to unprecedented levels since 2014. More fundamentally, the sanctions have been flawed both by design – e.g. absolute, overlapping and confused objectives; different priorities and pain tolerances associated with American, European and Asian stakeholders; overestimation of the global exposure and influence that Russian business elites have on national security decision-making; vulnerability to oil price volatility; insensitivity to the modalities of Russia’s securitization of economic policy responses – and by implementation – erratic imposition and removal of sanctions targeting Russia’s aluminium giant, Rusal; the spectre of shifting goalposts; lack of a broader strategic framework for escalation and de-escalation; and absence of institutionalized dialogue among American and European decision makers to forge common objectives and off-ramps [Connolly, 2018; Keatinge et al., 2017].

By the same token, Russia’s explicit sanctions-related behaviour has foundered. The potency of Moscow’s counteractions is diluted by ad hoc exemptions to

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2 According to the EU Council, the renewal of the economic restrictions and sanctions was passed in response to the “illegal annexation” of Crimea and Sevastopol, otherwise regarded in Russia as the “reunification” of territory. For justification of discrete EU economic sanctions, see especially [EC, Council of the EU, n.d.].
the embargo on European agricultural imports, Belarus’ emergence as a willing re-exporter, Russia’s restricted trade footprint and dependence on western financial systems, as well as the declining purchasing power of Russian consumers. Policies adopted to insulate firms from western sanctions degrade the Russian investment climate by exacerbating structural problems, compounding legal uncertainty over ownership and control and fuelling competition and unpredictability in the allocation of state funding for large-scale projects [Trickett, 2019]. Although overall trade and investment with Beijing have risen to embellish high profile deals and gestures of political unity, concerted efforts at strategic trade diversification have been stymied by Chinese reticence at pursuing large-scale investment in Russian infrastructure projects and state-owned companies largely out of fear of poor returns and of ending up on western sanctions lists [Simes, 2019]. By President Putin’s own account, western sanctions have cost the economy roughly $50–55 billion, if not the nearly 1.5% gross domestic product (GDP) loss per annum assessed by foreign experts. Despite claims that Europe has suffered more by comparison, Moscow has failed outright to stem the escalation of sanctions or drive a political wedge between western partners with different stakes and levels of hostility toward trade with Russia [President of Russia, 2019].

Curiously, however, there is widespread complacency about this disconnect between the “high incidence-low effectiveness” of sanctions-related behaviour. Why? Is it a product of wishful thinking, whereby all parties are banking on respective sanctions or countermeasures to gain traction over time? Alternatively, is the success of economic statecraft more indirect, captured by the symbolic and deterrent value of registering displeasure and discouraging even more offensive behaviour by the target? Or, are sanctions simply regarded as the least-bad option to allay domestic pressure to do something in protest of the offensive policies by the other while averting the risks of more precipitous action? Do the respective domestic political costs of inaction outweigh the strategic costs of allowing tensions to simmer with the perpetuation of otherwise flawed sanctions?

This article addresses these questions to explicate the contemporary sanctions tangle between the West and Russia by drawing focus to contending strategic approaches. As suggested above, there are numerous conditions and precipitating factors identified by scholars and practitioners alike that confound strategies adopted by respective senders and targets of sanctions. However, at the crux of these strategic problems is a misalignment between western and Russian preconceptions and expectations of sanctions, as opposed to irrational calculations, cognitive dissonance or the leaderships’ disregard for the strategic costs. As gleaned from data

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1 By other accounts, Russia’s countersanctions have had only a marginal effect on European exports (both overall and in the agro-food sector) and the annual loss to Russian GDP may be twice the magnitude cited by Putin. See especially Aslund [2019] and Gros and Di Salvo [2017]. For broader discussion, see Kastakova, Baumgartner, Zatko [2018] and Timofeev [2018, pp. 120–4].
analysis of large-scale trends in scholarly and policy analytical discourses, a conceptual divergence exists where each community embraces fundamentally different understandings of the meaning, objectives, processes and legitimacy of sanctions-related behaviour. Rather, contending western and Russian world views of sanctions confound strategic interaction by reinforcing asymmetrical preferences, ascribing different meanings to similar events, muddling threats, rationalizing costs and thwarting tailored initiatives, while affirming each side’s parochial assessments of its leverage over the other and the success of its sanctions-related behaviour. Accordingly, perpetuation of the status quo fuels not only mutual misperceptions and strategic acrimony between western and Russian policymaking communities, but also risks dangerous escalation otherwise masked by wishful thinking or fixation on domestic audience costs.

This article first deconstructs the strategic logic of sanctions and critiques common assumptions that undergird contemporary assessments of effectiveness. It then describes the value of applying data analytical methods to systematically extract and disaggregate broad and rich patterns in world views from large corpora of strategic discourse. Findings regarding trends in the structure and content of western and Russian scholarly discourses on sanctions and countersanctions are summarized. The article concludes by teasing out the implications of divergences in strategic world views for the efficacy of respective western and Russian sanctions-related activities, as well as the search for possible off-ramps to escalation.

It Takes (at Least) Two to Tangle

Economic sanctions are tools of statecraft aimed at withholding economic and financial exchanges to advance foreign policy objectives, broadly or narrowly defined. Typically, they are designed to impose pain on a rational calculating target such that the costs of compliance outweigh the benefits of resistance for the latter, while presenting a cost-effective option for the sender. Smart sanctions, as described by Daniel Drezner, are a subset tantamount to “precision-guided munitions” for economic warfare. They are “designed to hurt elites and key supporters of the targeted regime, while imposing minimal hardship on the sanctioned country’s mass public. By altering the material incentives for powerful supporters, the argument runs, these supporters will eventually pressure the targeted government into making concessions” [2018, p. 252]. Based on this logic, sanctions can be employed in pursuit of alternative ends, such as compelling or deterring a target’s future action, restraining a target’s current behaviour, punishing a target’s regime or forcing regime change, or sending a message to underscore discontent or the importance of a norm to a target and third parties. Sanctions strategies come in different forms, including threats of levelling comprehensive punishment or the application of gradual
or tailored pressure on a target, or the imposition of penalties on home-based firms or extraterritorial partners with commercial connections to a target; they can be directed at enemies and allies alike, as well as at domestic constituencies. Accordingly, sanctions by definition are dynamic and strategic; both the comparative utility of alternative forms and outcomes are shaped by the interaction of expectations, preferences and behaviour among senders, targets and third parties.

The effectiveness of sanctions is neither obvious nor uniform. Success — attainment of the strategic purpose of a sanction — is distinct from impact — the observable political and economic costs imposed on the target caused by the sanction [Connolly, 2018, p. 10]. As the product of strategic interaction, success is beyond the control of any single state’s policies. Not surprisingly, prevailing research is generally pessimistic, revealing that only one third of post-war era sanctions events successfully altered the behaviour of the target, and much less (5%) if the attainment of a sender’s partial objectives is not considered [Hufbauer, Schott, Elliot, 1985; Pape, 1997]. Moreover, concessions to sanctions do not follow directly from cost-benefit calculations made in a strategic vacuum. Rather, causal pathways vary across context. For example, the operative objective of a sanctions strategy is significant. Here the predominant research reveals that sanctions are more likely to succeed when formulated as a symbolic gesture or as a threat to deter or compel a target, as opposed to a form of imposing material punishment, restraint, regime change or new international norms [Connolly, 2018, pp. 11–14; Drezner, 2003].

Although the scholarly literature is rife with debate, prominent conditions of success are associated specifically with senders, targets and third parties. For senders, these include sanctions that are of short duration rather than open-ended; involve multilateral and institutional cooperation with third parties; and are targeted or otherwise narrowly hit actors with influence over a regime’s policies. Similarly, key conditions that augur well for a target’s compliance relate to sanctions that hurt friends or those that value an existing exchange relationship with a sender more than enemies; that impose costs greater than the salience of the issue to a target; and that hurt status quo, as opposed to revisionist targets or those that expect conflict to be highly likely in the future. In addition, research suggests that regime type matters for target states, as insulated authoritarian leaderships are well poised to pass along the costs of sanctions to broad societal elements and to bolster resilience from “rally ‘round the flag” effects. Conversely, democratic targets are more prone to compliance as they are susceptible to median voter pressure coming from adversely affected societal elements [Ang, Peksen, 2007, pp. 135–45; Connolly, 2018, pp. 16–22; Copeland, 2014; Drezner, 2003; van Bergeijk, Biersteker, 2016]. Still other scholarship demonstrates conditions propitious for sanctions-busting behaviour by third parties. Black knight firms and states are more likely to emerge where there are profitable trade opportunities created by sanctions, while third-party
states are more likely to step into the breach with politically motivated aid-busting behaviour when the issue at hand is politically salient [Early, 2015].

From a practical perspective, the challenge for successful sanctions rests with manipulating the dynamic cat-and-mouse game between sender and target. As summed up by one former practitioner, “the objective is to design a maze around the sanctioned quarry that drives them to make the policy switch desired by the sanctioner, thereby completing the maze”. This entails that senders adhere to axioms, such as clear identification of objectives for the imposition of pain and minimum remedial steps by a target for relief; deep understanding of the target’s vulnerabilities, interests and commitments; imposition of graduated and competitive pressure on target vulnerabilities and avoidance of respective strengths; close monitoring and adroit recalibration in the face of unexpected target resolve; reassurance that target compliance will be met with commensurate removal of pain; and willingness to admit failure and explore alternative strategies or accept long-term costs of sustaining sanctions [Nephew, 2018, pp. 179–85].

Moreover, the strategic terrain is strewn with paradoxes. As noted above, sanctions tend to be more effective against a sender’s friends and allies — where there is something of value to hold in abeyance — than against enemies. Similarly, what may be most effective for signalling a sanctions threat may ultimately undermine the capacity of a sender to sustain if called upon to implement. Put differently, sanctions threats are more credible and distinguishable from “cheap talk” if the sender is willing to incur costs of following through on the threat. However, sanctions that incur lower costs of implementation are more sustainable. Accordingly, senders confront a “Goldilocks dilemma” in crafting sanctions, whereby they must threaten to incur sufficient costs needed to credibly deter or coerce but avoid actually incurring costs that are so high as to undermine efforts at effectively sustaining the pressure brought to bear by the sanctions. There also is considerable nuance associated with the impact of regime types. Democracies, for instance, may be more effective as senders than as resilient targets of sanctions. Drawing on the broader coercion literature, democratic polities may be more credible at issuing sanctions threats owing to both the restraining and confirming effects of transparent institutional checks and balances, while the opacity of authoritarian leaderships can undermine the ability of targets to distinguish bluffs from sincere threats and operative audience costs, thus fuelling their resistance [Hart, 2000; Schultz, 2001]. Yet another paradox is that sanctions tend to be more effective when coupled with reassurance and clear off-ramps, but the integration of positive inducements risks exacerbating moral hazard problems and establishing reputations for appeasement [Haftner-Burton, Montgomery, 2008]. At the same time, the very effectiveness of sanctions at curbing trade and market access for targets can generate incentives to establish and enrich informal, organized criminal, illicit and black-market activities...
that provide effective relief and weaken transparent exchange mechanisms beyond target states [Andreas, 2005; Long, 1996].

Notwithstanding the conditionality and paradoxes of contending arguments, there are several basic assumptions that cut across the extant literature. First, actors are treated as rational; senders and targets calculate costs, benefits and probabilities in their respective decisions to impose or comply with sanctions. Accordingly, sanctioners that can threaten or impose greater punishment are more likely to have their demands accepted by a weaker target. Power advantages — economic and military — mostly affect considerations of the magnitude of pain that can be levelled by a sender that shape the ultimate decision of targets to defy or comply [Byman, Waxman, 2001]. By extension, the failure to comply with mutually recognizable costly sanctions is typically attributed to exogenous political factors, cognitive dissonance or otherwise corrupted or irrational decision-making.

Second — and stemming from the rationality assumption — both senders and targets presumably share common conceptions of costs and benefits. Although preference hierarchies may vary and sanctions can affect groups differently within a target state (necessitating more targeted applications), there is presumably a common appreciation that the greater the pain incurred by influential targets, the more likely they will seek relief through compliance. Sanctions work because they impose significant costs on politically relevant stakeholders that lead them to modify behaviour of the target; they fail when the link between economic costs and political influence is disrupted [Drezner, 2018, pp. 251–70]. The challenges for a sender, therefore, rest mostly with finding and targeting the relevant social forces within a target country, as opposed to convincing the latter that compliance is the appropriate response for alleviating the imposed pain.

Third, it is widely assumed that the threats of sanctions issued by senders are received as intended by targets. Given uncertainty, misperceptions and information asymmetries, the credibility of a sender’s threat derives mostly from its efforts to demonstrate resolve via costly signalling. In traditional coercive bargaining contexts, the latter typically can come from conveying that the sender either has incurred significant sunk costs with issuing the threat of sanctions (that are difficult to reverse), or that its hands are tied by domestic or third-party stakeholders such that there is no choice but to follow through on imposing sanctions in the face of target non-compliance [Sescher, Fuhrmann, 2017]. The more conspicuous the latter, presumably the more credible the threat and the more likely a cost-sensitive target will comply. The crux of bargaining, therefore, turns on the communication between senders and targets through signals and other diplomatic measures.

These traditional assumptions, however, are problematic. The balance of power can affect the magnitude of a sender’s demand, as much as the target’s assessment of costs of non-compliance. Taking into account how a demand is received, a strong
sender can issue greater demands while a weaker one can settle for smaller ones. Furthermore, communication is not the only problem at the root of international signalling. How signals are received can be as much a function of how in tune a target is with a sender when processing them, cognitively or politically. Asymmetries in prior understandings concerning the legitimacy and efficacy of sanctions, for example, may lead targets to draw very different conclusions about the credibility of threats or meaning of specific actions, irrespective of how transparent a sender may be at conveying the sincerity of threats or its bluntness at implementing sanctions. By the same token, both senders and targets can incur sunk costs and confront domestically tied hands that lock in mindsets and policies to offset the marginal significance of diplomatic communication.

Alternative causal claims linking economic pain to political concessions are typically caveated by “all things equal.” But as Drezner notes, all things are not equal [2018, p. 268]. How the U.S. chooses to demonstrate resolve or processes credibility and effectiveness of sanctions may be fundamentally different from how Russian targets interpret these actions, let alone how they issue their own signals. Similarly, how a target perceives and chooses to respond to sanctions may vary; reciprocating with countersanctions is only one option. In the case of Russia, scholars are beginning to uncover not only contrasting cognitive frames that are used to evaluate respective interests and perceptions of threat posed by western sanctions, but altogether different conceptualizations of the interplay between regional foreign policy priorities, the country’s position within global geo-economic structures and prevailing business frames. The latter, in turn, shape the geographic scope, financial levers and institutional features of Moscow’s sanction-related behaviour, as well as trigger divergent perceptions of threat from across economic sectors [Aalto, Forsberg 2015; Golikova, Kuznetsov, 2016]. Also, targets like Russia can exploit a range of policy tools to respond asymmetrically by insulating affected sectors from the pain of western sanctions, strengthening reliance on domestic resources and diversifying strategic trading relations [Connolly, 2018]. Others may opt to react orthogonally, taking action across different domains. Furthermore, Moscow seems to eschew the mirror-imaging of sanctions strategies that revolve around exploiting economic dependencies. Some suggest that the Kremlin is more prone to practicing “differentiated retaliation” with its countersanctions, aimed less at leveraging economic advantage against vulnerable western targets than instrumentally directed at exacting maximum punishment against those particular mainstays of anti-Russian policies while minimizing strategic damage to important major powers [Hedberg, 2018]. These observations of asymmetrical behaviour are significant because assessments of credibility, options and pain tolerances in a bargaining context are in the eyes of the beholder — the targets of sanctions. The latter can be filtered not only by information asymmetries and misperceptions but through a target’s differ-
ent preconceptions of opportunities and costs, as well as sense of appropriateness of available responses to similar actions. These issues can be fundamentally disruptive to the traditional strategic logic and expectations of sanctions processes if such basic understandings of the meaning, processes, legitimacy and effectiveness of sanctions-related behaviour vary significantly across sender and target states.

Methods and Data

As suggested by the critique above, presuppositions about sanctions lie at the crux of western and Russian postures. These world views are comprised of basic beliefs, values and coherent understandings concerning the definitions, processes and significance of sanctions that are shared within each strategic community. They constitute pre-analytic visions that influence which challenges are recognized, which issues are emphasized and which policies are endorsed within a strategic community for grappling with international issues such as sanctions. World views are not theories or logical explanations of events as much as they are comprised of axioms concerning relevant types of issues, actors, goals and appropriate relationships that inform construction of causal arguments. Holders of world views interpret new information through these pre-analytic prisms. Although they represent deeply rooted knowledge within a community, their tenets and coherence are conspicuous and can be readily articulated [Griffiths, 2007; Mowle, 2003; Phillips, Brown, Stonestreet, 1996; Thompson, 1982]. Common beliefs among distinct world views can provide the basis for constructive dialogue and exploration of shared interests across respective strategic communities. Alternatively, contending world views that lack commensurate beliefs can create distinct, if not clashing, value systems and cognitive referents for updating knowledge. As such, they can present impediments to identifying mutual interests or engaging with a phenomenon that cannot be reconciled by common appeal to empirical observation. As noted by Michael Lind [2011], even if rivals agree on the facts they may disagree on conclusions because of their different premises. In the sanctions context, this can account for why different strategic communities may seem to talk past one another, sustain mutually costly policies or otherwise ascribe different values, meanings, assessments and significance to the same actions and counteractions.

The digitization of information provides a means by which we can identify and assess respective preconceptions, axioms and logical connections at the crux of the discourse within the strategic communities through the application of bibliometrics, a subfield of library and information science. Bibliometrics refers to a set of research methods, analyses and tools that support the statistical analysis of research articles, books and other online content. The field emerged during the late 1950s and 1960s within the hard sciences as a means by which researchers could engage
with the rapidly expanding and increasingly global body of scientific knowledge. By many accounts, the field originated with U.S. scientist Eugene Garfield, who in 1955 published his first article on the value of citation analysis, a methodology within bibliometrics that examines how scientists refer to existing studies when publishing the results of their research [1955]. Garfield argued that studying the patterns within these citations could help to identify critical but underappreciated research studies, reveal axioms and the internal structure of knowledge, and map the evolution of knowledge in a research field. De Solla Price [1965] built on this work, using Garfield’s newly established Science Citation Index database to identify researcher collaboration networks focused on a particular aspect of a field, as well as to describe the diffusion of ideas between these networks over time. More recently, social science researchers have begun incorporating bibliometrics into their work, such as by using natural language processing to identify national differences in the assumptions, approaches and foundational literature underlying the research in an academic field [Schwemmer, Wieczorek, 2019].

Bibliometric tools can help determine if there are significant differences in how Russians and non-Russians conceptualize sanctions. One way to draw out such differences is by examining the body of academic research on sanctions that the Russian and non-Russian social science research communities have published since 2010, when the U.S. imposed a first round of sanctions on the Russian Federation with the Magnitsky Act. These sanctions marked the inception of a prolonged process of western sanctions on Russia, preceding the sanctions and countersanctions that followed after 2014 in response to the Ukraine crisis, election meddling and other issues of international acrimony. Given the critical importance of the U.S.-Russia relationship to the international community, as well as the expansion of the breadth and severity of U.S./EU-Russia sanctions over time, this nine-year period has produced a significant body of sanctions literature by Russian and non-Russian academic researchers.

We compared summary information from the articles published by Russia-based researchers to those published by non-Russian researchers, using three of the most established methods within bibliometrics:

- **Publication output analysis** in which we compared the volume of articles published by each group as well as the journals in which they published. This comparison helps to inform our understanding of the relative importance that each group assigned to the topic of sanctions after 2010, as well as the degree to which the two groups engage in debates within the same publications.

- **Citation analysis** in which we examined the degree to which the research of certain authors shares a common basis in existing literature. Common references across Russian and non-Russian-authored papers suggest that the communities have a shared understanding of the importance and evolution of the
respective research. Conversely, a lack of common references suggests that Russian and non-Russian researchers see sanctions from fundamentally divergent world views.

- **Content analysis** in which we probed the level of substantive convergence within the titles and the abstracts of articles from each group. This analysis helps to establish the areas of most important terms, topics and other characteristics of the content of each group’s research, as well as the degree to which these research areas are shared.

In order to build a relevant corpus from which to mine using these bibliometric techniques, we applied a standard search query to the two highest quality, globally available, citation indexing databases: Web of Science, owned by Clarivate Analytics, and Scopus, owned by the academic publisher Elsevier. Both databases are subscription-based and curated, with discipline-specific editors responsible for selecting only those journals for inclusion that are subject to critical peer review, and which meet other standards including editorial focus, journal impact, longevity and local prestige. Although they provide only article metadata — title, date, authors, abstract, keywords, citation and funding information — they structure, clean and format the data in a way that is tailored to bibliometric analysis. Specifically, each database enables researchers to conduct complex searches, filtering to identify the most relevant articles for a topic, as well as to perform analysis within the web-based platform. The latter affords the ability to filter results by the geographical location of the author’s reported institutional affiliation, which we used to categorize articles as “Russian” or “Non-Russian.” The majority of articles in each database are in English or English plus an additional language, but Web of Science also offers the Russia Science Citation Index (RSCI), a citation database produced in partnership with eLibrary.ru that focuses on the most-cited and influential scholarly journals published in Russia. While the overwhelming majority of this literature is in Russian, the journals included in RSCI provide both Russian and English language versions of all metadata structured in the same manner as that of English-only articles. We utilized this database, in conjunction with articles from the general Web of Science and Scopus databases with Russia-based authors, to expand the breadth and depth of our Russian article corpus. After searching, filtering and cleaning the data, we amassed a dataset of 2,060 articles in total, of which 41% were Russian (854 articles) and 57% were non-Russian (1,206 articles).

**Findings: Western vs. Russian Sanctions World Views**

Our data analysis is part of an ongoing programme of international research that aims to foster and improve understanding across Russian and non-Russian academic and policy communities. The research to date suggests that there are sig-
significant differences between Russian and non-Russian research on sanctions. This includes both methodological and substantive differences between the two communities that could, in turn, reflect the existence of two world views of research on international sanctions. Below is a summary of the most salient differences from this preliminary research.

**Finding 1: Differences in where Russian and non-Russian sanctions scholars publish suggests that Russian sanctions scholarship developed independently and largely hidden from non-Russian scholars.**

The simplest analysis of Russian and non-Russian academic research on sanctions comes from our publication output analysis which compared the number of academic research articles on sanctions published by Russian and non-Russian authors since 2010, who wrote them and where they were published. The first question that we assessed was how the volume of articles published by each group changed after the U.S. and its allies imposed sanctions on Russia during the 2014 Ukraine crisis. Figure 1, which shows the annual volume of sanctions articles produced by the two groups since 2010, indicates that non-Russian scholars published consistently more sanctions articles before 2014. The 2014 sanctions changed this pattern, with both groups increasing significantly the number of published articles in 2015–19 versus 2010–14. This chart suggests two points related to Russian sanctions scholarship. First, sanctions scholarship has not been a central focus of ongoing Russian academic research, especially prior to 2014. However, Russian and non-Russian sanctions publication rates responded in similar ways after 2014, suggesting that research in both communities may be stimulated by major contemporary events.

The two groups show more distinctive differences when we examine where each group published respective sanctions research. While 822 journals published at least one of the 2,060 articles in our dataset, over 25% (522) of the total publication output was concentrated in a core group of only 31 journals, each of which published 10 or more articles on sanctions from 2010–19. Of this core group, 19 journals are published in Russia and are not widely available outside the country. Together, these journals published 409 articles, 72% of the output of the core journal group and 20% of all the articles in the dataset. In total, there were 82 Russia-sourced journals represented in our dataset, and they published approximately 25% (578) of all articles, suggestive of a robust dialogue on sanctions among Russian scholars. However, this discourse is largely not accessible to western academic researchers. While each of the Russian journals that are part of the “sanctions core” are included in at least one of the two major academic indexes used by western scholars (Scopus and Web of Science), they are not easy to access.4 This is espe-

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4 In Web of Science, a researcher must have a subscription to the Russian Science Citation Index and perform a separate search to reach Russian-language content, and both Scopus and Web of Science present results to search queries sorted by a relevance score which is heavily weighted
cially problematic since nearly two thirds (523 of 822 articles) of the sanctions-related articles in our dataset were written by Russian authors were published in these Russian language publications. Accordingly, there is a large body of Russian research on sanctions that is not engaged by mainstream non-Russian scholars. In addition, there is little geographic diversity among the articles published by the preferred publication outlets of Russian and non-Russian sanctions scholars. For example, 71% of the Russian-authored articles in our sanctions article dataset (584 of 822) appeared in journals that exclusively published sanctions articles authored by other Russia-based scholars. Another 16% of Russian-authored articles (128 of 822) was published in journals where greater than 90% of sanctions content was written by other Russians. Conversely, non-Russian scholars appear equally infrequently in Russia-based journals. Non-Russian sanctions scholars appear in only six of the 19 core sanctions journals, and in total they published only six articles in

by the impact factor of the publishing journals in the results. This scoring biases against journals published in languages other than English, which from a practical perspective means that few non-Russian researchers will find the rich body of Russian sanctions literature published since 2014.

Fig. 1. Comparison of Sanctions Articles Published Annually by Russian and Non-Russian Researchers, 2010–19 (n = 2,060)

Source: Compiled by the authors.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Journal Rank (Sanctions Articles in Dataset)</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Russian Journal</th>
<th>Total Sanctions Articles (2000–2019)</th>
<th>Russian Author</th>
<th>Non Russian Author</th>
<th>% Russian Articles</th>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>MGIMO REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>BALTIC REGION</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>AZIYA I AFRIKA SEGODNYA</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>OSTEUROPA</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>SURVIVAL</td>
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<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>TERRA ECONOMICUS</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>PROBLEMS OF POST-COMMUNISM</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST POLICY</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>EKONOMIKA REGIONA-ECONOMY OF REGION</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES-FACTS TRENDS FORECAST</td>
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<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL POLITICS</td>
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<td>EUROPEAN SECURITY</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>EURASIAN GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMICS</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>EKONOMICHESKAYA POLITIKA</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL TRENDS</td>
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<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>ECONOMIST (UNITED KINGDOM)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>MEZHDUHARODNYE PROTSESSY</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>157</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 2. Journals Publishing 10+Sanctions Articles, 2010–19 (n = 2,060)*

*Source: Compiled by the authors.*
non-Russian sources. This suggests that Russian and non-Russian researchers who write about sanctions are engaged in dialogue only within their respective local research communities, rather than as part of an international epistemic community.

**Finding 2: Russian and non-Russian research communities cite different sources, suggesting different core assumptions about international sanctions and their use.**

The finding that Russian sanctions scholarship is isolated from that of non-Russian scholars is reinforced by examination of citation patterns among respective communities of researchers. While publication analysis suggests that separate communities of sanctions scholars exist within the Russian and non-Russian academies, this does not necessarily mean that Russian and non-Russian scholars have distinctive approaches to sanctions scholarship. To test this idea, two additional bibliometric analyses were employed. The first is citation analysis, which uses the references that authors make to previously published scholarship to understand the state and evolution of knowledge within an academic discipline, including shared assumptions, frameworks and practices that characterize a field’s dominant research paradigm, as well as the emergent approaches, theories and methods that characterize a field’s research front. Comparing the most-cited sources in the collection of Russian-authored articles to those cited by non-Russian authors can help determine whether the two groups work from a common base of knowledge about sanctions. If so, they are likely to reference at least some of the same journals, and by extension the same major authors and research papers in the field. In addition, the proportion of articles in the dataset that cite these common sources should be roughly equal in the Russian and non-Russian articles in the dataset, although we would expect modest variation due to the fact that until 2019 Russia was the only great power since the end of the Cold War targeted for significant external sanctions.

Figure 3 depicts the overall sources (journals) that Russian and non-Russian authors referenced in their publications, which provides a high-level perspective of the body of literature underlying each group’s research. The two tables list the 25 most-cited journals by each group, as well as the number of citations that the group made to each journal. There is no overlap between the two lists; Russian authors most frequently cite only journals published in Russia, and non-Russian authors have none of these journals within their own most-cited sources list. The absence of Russian journals on the non-Russian author list is particularly striking, given the large body of literature on sanctions that Russian authors have published in Russian journals since 2014. These citation patterns suggest that Russian and non-Russian sanctions scholars may be working from different core conceptualizations of the sanctions literature, and also that little if any learning is occurring today across more recent scholarship by the two groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank, Non-Russian Articles</th>
<th>Top Sources (Journal): Non-Russian Authored Articles</th>
<th># of References to Source (Journal) in Non-Russian Corpus</th>
<th>% of Papers in Non-Russian Corpus Citing Source (Journal)</th>
<th>Rank, Russian Articles</th>
<th>Top Sources (Journal): Russian Authored Articles</th>
<th># of References to Source (Journal) in Non-Russian Corpus</th>
<th>% of Papers in Non-Russian Corpus Citing Source (Journal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MIROVAYA EKONOMIKA I MEZHHDUNARODNYE OTNOSHENIYA</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OSTEUROPA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>EKONOMIKA SEL’SKOGO KHOZYAISTVA ROSSIi</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>EKONOMIKA SEL’SKOHKOZYAISTVENNYKH PERERABATYVAYUSHCHIKH PREDPRIYATIYI</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TURKISH POLICY QUARTERLY</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VOPROSY EKONOMIKI</td>
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<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MIDDLE EAST POLICY</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>AGRARNYI VESTNIK URALA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>EUROPEAN SECURITY</td>
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<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL POLITICS</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>SHIA I KANADA: EKONOMIKA POLITIKA KULTURA</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>SURVIVAL</td>
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<td>INTERNATIONAL TRENDS</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ECONOMIST (UNITED KINGDOM)</td>
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<td>1.0%</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PROBLEMS OF POST-COMMUNISM</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EKO</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>EURASIAN GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMICS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>EKONOMIKA, BIZNES, BANKI</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>AZIYA I AFRIKA SEGODNYA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>INSIGHT TURKEY</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>BALTIC REGION</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MGIMO REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>IHS JANE'S DEFENCE WEEKLY</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>TERRA ECONOMICUS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES-FACTS TRENDS FORECAST</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>THIRD WORLD QUARTERLY</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>EKONOMIKA REGIONA-ECONOMY OF REGION</td>
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<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>EKONOMICHESKAYA POLITIKA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>APK: EKONOMIKA UPRAVLENIE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>CAMBRIDGE REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>UPRAVLENETS-THE MANAGER</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>248</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.6%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>430</strong></td>
<td><strong>50.4%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 3. Journals Cited Within Russian- and Non-Russian-Authored Sanctions Papers, 2010–16**

Source: Compiled by the authors.
Finding 3: Russian and non-Russian research communities study different topics, suggesting increasing divergence in the future between the two communities.

The second analysis that we used to assess substantive differences between Russian and non-Russian sanctions literature is topic modelling, which examines mathematically the frequency and co-occurrence of words and phrases within unstructured text. We compared the content of Russian and non-Russian-authored articles on sanctions from two perspectives: article titles, which provide either the most concise or provocative summary of the author’s research, and the abstract, which is also concentrated but allows authors more space to express the details of their approach. For both perspectives, we used machine learning, which applies statistical analysis to the text of research articles in order to find patterns in word usage and word co-occurrence. For the title analysis, we performed keyword co-occurrence mapping, which identifies frequent clusters of terms within the same title. We visualized this co-occurrence and identified specific clusters of co-occurring terms in the two network diagrams in Figure 4. In the top diagram, which represents papers produced by non-Russian authors, there are six distinctive clusters of terms which can be distinguished by their colour, and whose size indicates their relative importance within the group. The two largest clusters overlap, and they focus on the international economic aspects of Russian sanctions (orange) and the effect of sanctions on international security and balance of power issues (light blue/green). Three additional clusters (purple and light green) focus on sanctions on Iran and North Korea and nuclear security, as well as the United Nations’ role in sanctions (blue). In contrast, the bottom diagram in Figure 4 represents the same analysis applied to the title of Russian-authored articles. There are only two clusters in this diagram, and they differ significantly from those of non-Russian authors. The larger cluster (light blue) focuses on the economic effects of sanctions, but it incorporates terms such as “agrarian,” “region,” and “development,” indicating that the research focus within this cluster is on the domestic economic effects of sanctions and the Russian government’s policies to reduce their effects. The second cluster (light orange) also focuses on the economic effects of sanctions, but the emphasis is on Russia’s export economy, inflows/outflows of capital investments, as well as Russian government policy to blunt the effect of sanctions on Russian exports. These two diagrams provide further evidence that Russian and non-Russian authors have fundamentally different approaches to the broad tenor of each group’s research on sanctions.

Another perspective can be formed by examining the content of the abstracts of each group’s articles, for which we utilized LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) topic modelling. Topic modelling is a technique to distil the most distinctive topics in a large collection of related documents based on the patterns of words that authors se-
For this analysis, we created separate topic models for the Russian and non-Russian articles in our dataset using the text contained in the article abstracts when writing.\(^5\) LDA topic modelling assumes that authors writing about a specific topic will make similar word choices, and LDA modelling identifies groups of words that most frequently occur near each other across the documents. The “topics” produced by the LDA model are the groups of words that can most clearly distinguish between different documents within a collection of documents, and each word in a topic has a weighting that reflects its importance to that topic. By aggregating across the set of texts written by Russian and non-Russian authors, and then comparing each group

---

\(^5\) LDA topic modelling assumes that authors writing about a specific topic will make similar word choices, and LDA modelling identifies groups of words that most frequently occur near each other across the documents. The “topics” produced by the LDA model are the groups of words that can most clearly distinguish between different documents within a collection of documents, and each word in a topic has a weighting that reflects its importance to that topic. By aggregating across the set of texts written by Russian and non-Russian authors, and then comparing each group
Fig. 5. Topic Models and Associated Words for Russian- and Non-Russian-Authored Articles, Based on Abstract Text

Source: Compiled by the authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>Terms in Topics: Non Russian</th>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>Terms in Topics: Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Russia* -- region* -- intern* -- politic* -- relation* <em>(IR)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Product* -- meat -- dairi* -- milk -- import* <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Russia* -- sanction* -- econom* -- region* -- develop* <em>(DE)</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Russia* -- sanction -- new -- foreign -- China <em>(IPE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Industri* -- develop* -- econom* -- region* -- innov* <em>(DE)</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Food -- import -- countri* -- Russian* -- state <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Polici* -- govern* -- issu* -- author* -- include* <em>(IR)</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Russian* -- develop* -- econom* -- market* -- sanction <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Statist* -- compani* -- process* -- Russia* -- financi* <em>(DE)</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Polici* -- sanction -- Russia* -- trade -- oil <em>(IPE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Defenc* -- missil* -- replac* -- metropolitan* -- Moscow* <em>(S)</em></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sanction -- Russia* -- state -- politi* -- econom* <em>(IPE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Russian* -- econom* -- develop* -- new* -- save* <em>(DE)</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Russia* -- region* -- intern* -- relat* -- polit* <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Econom* -- develop* -- region* -- Russian* -- industri* <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Russia* -- relat* -- econom* -- sanction -- Ukrain* <em>(IPE)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Russia* -- China* -- right* -- relat* -- strateg* <em>(IR)</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Budget* -- econom* -- region* -- integr* -- develop* <em>(DE)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key: (IPE) International political economy; (S) Security; (D) Domestic economy; (IR) International relations; (O) Other*
abstracts for each group. For each group, we created models with five to 40 topics and assessed the accuracy and comparability of each. Based on these assessments, our final models for each group contain 10 topics, which are in Figure 5. This table contains an ordered list of each group’s topics, each of which consists of the five words most closely associated with the topic and that describe its contents. After reviewing the topics, we added a label to the end of the topic words that indicates a broad category of the topic’s contents, such as international political economy or domestic economy.

Despite some areas of alignment between the two groups at the broad category level, Russian and non-Russian scholars focus on different aspects of sanctions phenomena. The focus of Russian sanctions scholarship is economic, as all 10 of the topics fall into the broad category of either domestic or international political economy. The six domestic economic topics cover the major dimensions of the Russian government’s efforts to blunt the effects of sanctions through policies supporting domestic food producers (Topic 1 [T1] and T3), regional economic development (T4, T7 and T10) and industrial development (T6 and T8). The international economic topics focus on strengthening Russia’s economic ties with China (T2), increasing oil exports (T5) and one less-clear topic containing economic terms as well as Ukraine (T9). The topics of non-Russian scholars are more diverse and reflective of mainstream sanctions scholarship, with research covering economic, international relations and security aspects of economic sanctions. Of the six economic topics, five cover areas related to Russia’s domestic economy, but there is limited overlap with the work of Russian scholars. For example, while four non-Russian topics cover regional economic development, one appears similar to a Russian topic (T2, similar to Russian T9), while the others focus on areas not in the Russian list, including regional innovation (T3) and research and development (T7 and T8). The other four non-Russian topics (T1, T4, T9 and T10) focus on international relations and security, which do not appear as focal topics of research on the Russian list.

Taken as a whole, the research topics extracted from the abstracts of the articles in our dataset provide evidence of substantially different research interests and approaches between Russian and non-Russian scholars studying sanctions. This finding reinforces similar evidence of the two worlds of research found in our analysis of publication and citation patterns.

Discussion and Implications

This article applies data analytics to identify patterns in western and Russian strategic discourse surrounding sanctions. Drawing on insights from bibliometrics, we of authors’ relative focus on each topic, we can make a substantive, empirically based assessment of whether the two groups form one or two world views related to academic research on sanctions.
distil the frames of reference and character of research within and across strategic communities. We also uncover patterns in the substantive themes and priorities that provide the contours to respective world views about the meaning, processes, legitimacy and significance of sanctions.

This preliminary analysis underscores that western and Russian strategic communities are worlds apart in thinking about sanctions. The respective scholarship enjoys very little overlap or even common links to third parties. The two communities have little in common, publishing in different journals, citing different sources and studying different sanctions-related topics. Although the two communities reference similar literature concerning the general failure of sanctions, they draw different conclusions about the sources and modalities of such ineffectiveness.

Substantively, the two communities are seemingly further apart. A close qualitative review of the key works in respective sanctions literature reveals that whereas Russian scholarship is almost categorically pessimistic about the success of sanctions at altering foreign policy behaviour, western commentary is generally marked by debate over alternative conditions for success. Moreover, as highlighted in the data analysis, while western scholarship addresses a variety of causes and effects for sanctions with a core focus on the strategic dimensions, Russian academic analyses tend to cluster narrowly around the macroeconomic impact of sanctions, as well on the utility of asymmetrical responses, including import substitution, domestic regulation, national innovation and strategic trade diversification away from the West and toward India and China. Finally, Russian scholars range from questioning the legitimacy of sanctions altogether as a dangerous threat to the norm of sovereignty, to acknowledgement that certain confining conditions, such as multilateral and intergovernmental endorsement, can provide the legal justification for the tactical, temporary application of sanctions. Conversely, issues concerning the violation of sovereignty are not prominently featured within the western discourse on the strategic role of sanctions, and there is considerable attention devoted to the viability and effectiveness of unilateral sanctions, especially as practiced by the United States.

These findings caution against embracing unidimensional strategic perspectives on sanctions. Rather than reflecting interaction between uniformly calculating senders and targets, the respective literature highlights the asymmetrical and distinct frames of reference. They cast doubt, for example, on the reciprocal nature of Russian sanctions. The communities tend to talk past each other, highlighting divergent interpretations and drawing different conclusions and courses of action from the same set of sanctions-related events.

These conceptual incompatibilities also carry distinct implications for respective western and Russian sanctions strategies. For the West, the credibility of sanctions threats and related signalling may warrant greater empathy and richer understanding of how they are interpreted in Russia. In the West, sanctions are generally
accepted as presenting a target with a choice between compliance and non-compliance. Within the Russian discourse, however, the main element of choice rests with policy options for blunting the negative impact of sanctions. Therefore, calculated western efforts to demonstrate resolve by resorting to diplomatic gestures of tying hands or sinking costs, may indeed be counterproductive by affirming the prominent conceptions in Russia that there is no choice but to remain steadfast and resilient in the face of what are widely viewed as illegitimate and revisionist offensives by the West. Attuned primarily to the long-term opportunities for macroeconomic, distributional, autarchic and third-party relief, the Russian strategic community may be generally prone to overlook the short-term costs of non-compliance in favour of perceived long-term gains of reduced dependence on an inconsolable West.

By the same token, the asymmetry of western and Russian preconceptions can subvert the promise of targeted sanctions. Put simply, the challenge for implementing effective western smart sanctions on Russia may require more than unlocking the black box of opaque Kremlin decision-making to refine targets of political influence. Rather, the deeper conceptual divide over the legitimacy of sanctions and Russian attention to mitigating their impact, suggests that discrete coercive initiatives that do not disrupt comprehensive trade flows may make it not only easier for the Kremlin to evade, but convey a lack of commitment on the part of western senders. Thus, while smart sanctions may make it less costly and more amenable for western senders to impose and sustain sanctions, they can directly embolden Russian resistance to policy change.

The divergence in sanctions world views also poses challenges for Russian policymakers. Admittedly, the research presented does not illuminate the motivations behind the academic discourse, leaving unclear whether the trends reflect sincere beliefs among independent-minded scholars or instrumentally constructed narratives. Irrespective of the origins, however, the narrow clustering of perspectives reveals a circumscribed national discourse on sanctions. This may provide a grave disservice to Russian decision makers, as it can deprive the leadership of outside assessments of the full range of opportunities and costs that they confront when imposing and responding to sanctions. On the one hand, the confined discourse can highlight the short-term problems of western sanctions and macroeconomic opportunities for relief at the expense of fleshing out long-term, indirect costs or systematic assessment of the implications of western sanctions for magnifying the country’s structural economic and political problems. Here a narrow focus on impact mitigation may distort the significance of issues, such as evidence of a “rally ‘round the flag” effect of western sanctions, treating them in an analytical vacuum divorced from correlates of either episodic or broader patterns of support for the regime’s assertive foreign policies otherwise driven by preceding popular and elite attitudes toward the “reunification” of Crimea and/or domestic economic op-
portunities. Fixation on the former, therefore, may either over or understate the short-term instrumental benefits to the regime presented by discrete western sanctions, masking broader public and elite insensitivity to foreign threats, media effects at shaping opinion in Russia, and/or the fundamental nature of political support for the leadership [Frye, 2017; Kazun, 2016; Sherlock, 2019]. On the other hand, dismissing sanctions based on their perceived illegitimacy and ineffectiveness can conflate cheap talk and hubris with sincere interests in constructive engagement, as perceived by prospective western interlocutors.

Notwithstanding the conceptual incompatibilities and attendant risks of escalation, the die is not cast for a mutual sanctions deadlock. Mutual attention within western and Russian strategic communities to common costs and the negative impact of sanctions, as opposed to their success, may provide the foundation for future dialogue and exploration of off-ramps to conflict escalation. Here the key to advancement may well rest with searching out areas of overlap related to modalities for limiting and containing costs to macroeconomic stability, trade diversification and sanctions blowback. In light of contending world views, however, such dialogue must either await a breakthrough in the relationship caused by developments along other fronts or follow from dramatic unilateral and empathetic gestures at breaking the sanctions tangle. Incremental approaches to sanctions relief will likely fall on deaf ears, as they can be easily integrated into prevailing strategic frames. In addition, there may be richer analytical territory to mine for assessing conditions for the effectiveness of sanctions practiced cooperatively against third parties, such as Iran and North Korea. Given that the status quo is not stable, with the costs of disconnected western and Russia sanctions-related behaviour mounting, the time is ripe for rethinking the premises of strategic interaction. Engaging respective world views, therefore, can be the first step in breaking the sanctions tangle and derailing a trajectory toward dangerous escalation.

References


Глухота сторон в клубке санкционных противоречий между США, ЕС и Россией: противоборствующие стратегические дискурсы и взаимное «подстегивание»¹, ²

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Современный стратегический ландшафт отношений между Россией и Западом омрачен взаимными экономическими санкциями, несмотря на незначительное число убедительных доказательств их эффективности. Складывается впечатление, что и Россию, и Запад устраивает ситуация, при которой их поведение, связанное с применением санкций, характеризуется высокой частотностью случаев наложения санкций при их низкой эффективности; при этом отсутствуют очевидные развязки для продолжения или эскалации вынужденной санкционной политики. Какие факторы стали причиной формирования клубка противоречий между США, ЕС и Россией по вопросу о санкциях и какие шаги могут быть сделаны для их преодоления? Авторы статьи ищут ответы на данные вопросы путем сравнения связанных с санкциями дискурсов российского и западного стратегических сообществ. Исследование основано на выборке из более чем 1000 академических статей, опубликованных с 2010 г. Статистический анализ выпуска публикаций, анализ паттернов цитирования и текстовой контент-анализ данных статей показывают, что российское и западное «мировосприятие» противостоят друг другу: для каждого сообщества характерно свое понимание значения, целей, процессов и легитимности связанного с применением санкций поведения. Это, в свою очередь, позволяет сделать еще один вывод: чтобы разрубить клубок санкционных противоречий, российское и западное стратегические сообщества должны углублять понимание мировосприятия противоположной стороны, вовлекаться во взаимодействие друг с другом и постепенно переоценивать свое понимание убеждений, целей и ожиданий, лежащих в основе существующей практики применения санкций каждой из сторон.

Ключевые слова: санкции; Россия; США; ЕС


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² Спонсором данного исследования любезно выступила Корпорация Карнети в Нью-Йорке.
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