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ENEMY-IMAGE CONSTRUCTION IN POLITICAL COMMENTARY: ANALYSIS OF ANTI-RUSSIAN RHETORIC

Abstract. This article analyzes how English political commentaries construct an enemy image of the Russian Federation through rhetorical and discursive mechanisms. The study identifies techniques of moral dehumanization, stereotyping, historical indictment framing, delegitimization and threat inflation. The findings demonstrate how emotionally charged language and selective historical narratives are mobilized to create a polarized moral framework in which Russia is depicted as a fundamentally aggressive and illegitimate actor, while the UK is positioned as morally superior and justified in its responses.

Keywords: enemy image; dehumanization; stereotyping; political discourse; propaganda; historical framing; delegitimization.

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Научная статья

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КОНСТРУИРОВАНИЕ ОБРАЗА ВРАГА В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ КОММЕНТАРИЯХ: АНАЛИЗ АНТИРОССИЙСКОЙ РИТОРИКИ

Аннотация. В статье анализируется как англоязычные политические комментарии создают образ врага с помощью риторических и дискурсивных механизмов. В исследовании выявляются методы моральной дегуманизации, стереотипизации, формулирования исторических обвинений, делегитимизации и раздувания угроз. Полученные результаты демонстрируют как эмоционально насыщенный язык и избирательные исторические нарративы мобилизуются для создания поляризованных моральных рамок, в которых Россия изображается как агрессивный и нелегитимный субъект, в то время как Великобритания позиционируется как морально превосходящая и оправданная в своих ответных действиях.

Ключевые слова: образ врага; дегуманизация; стереотипизация; политический дискурс; пропаганда; историческое обрамление; делегитимизация.

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The construction of an enemy image is a recurring theme in political communication, particularly within contexts of geopolitical confrontation. The analyzed publication offers a striking example of how discursive strategies shape national antagonisms and justify political positions. Written as a commentary on British-Russian relations, the text frames Russia as a morally degenerate and historically criminal actor, while presenting the United Kingdom as a reasonable, humane, and ethically grounded counterpart.

One of the central mechanisms employed is moral dehumanization, which does not rely on biologically degrading metaphors but instead portrays Russia as a state incapable of moral conduct. The description of Russia as a «state-recidivist» implies a perpetual criminal nature, removing any sense of legitimacy or rationality from Russian political behavior. Such characterizations reduce the target to a moral caricature, making political dialogue appear futile and retaliation inevitable.

The publications rely heavily on broad national stereotypes, constructing a homogeneous image of «the Russians» as rude, intrusive, hypocritical, and inherently aggressive. Individual complexity and political nuance are erased in favor of a monolithic national archetype. This essentialist representation creates a clear «us versus them» division, reinforcing the idea of Russian inherent hostility. The stereotype is further strengthened through condescending descriptions such as references to «Moscow snobs» and claims about the «quarrelsome nature» of Russians [1]. This narrative is explicitly reinforced by statements like: «Allies in the Chinese pro-

ject fear that Chinese will hold separate negotiations with a common adversary – in this case, with Russia. For such foreign-policy tricks are characteristic of the Russian authorities. They always deserve suspicion of intrigue, even if such suspicions are later not confirmed, as happened during the Great War, when Stalin was suspected of backdoor contacts with Hitler». The Guardian article «Britain says Russian drone incursions pose 'new challenge' to Black Sea security» uses a whole range of language strategies that shape the reader's perception of what is happening and construct an image of a threat¹. At the level of vocabulary, syntax and composition, it is noticeable how a politically colored text is created from a neutral information message, where one side of the conflict is presented as a source of danger, and the other as a responsible and rational actor.

Methods of persuasion (logos, pathos, and ethos)

The logos is presented through links to official sources: military, NATO representatives and security analysts. The article provides specific information about drones, their routes, the military's response and airspace control measures. These facts give the reader a sense of the authenticity of the information, supporting the argument through trusted sources. Using modal constructions like «reportedly» and «appears to have» allows you to keep the facts correct and at the same time create an analytical context [2].

Pathos is manifested through vocabulary and metaphors that enhance anxiety and a sense of danger: «threat», «escalation», «security risk», «incursion», «challenge». Verb constructions like «reports Russian drone incursions» create dynamics, a sense of active invasion². The metaphors of threat and invasion form an emotional image of Russia as an aggressive and dangerous actor, and the Great Britain and NATO as calm and rational defenders. Thus, the reader experiences emotional tension and a sense of the significance of what is happening.

The ethos is ensured through quotations from official structures and experts. The author uses the names of officials, mentions of NATO and the British military, which increases the reader's trust. At the same time, the absence of a Russian version of the event creates a one-sided interpretation, which makes the credibility of the source even stronger from the point of view of the Western audience. The manipulative techniques in the article are manifested through framing: the drone incident is presented as part of a global threat to NATO and the region, even if it was a local event [3]. Vocabulary, structure, and quoting only the «correct» sources create an image of the enemy and reinforce the perception of strategic danger. Emotional and logical arguments are intertwined with ethical ones, forming a complex influence on the reader.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/dec/03/the-guardian-view-on-us-russia-talks-on-ukraine-a-warning-to-europe-to-move-faster-on-security-cooperation> (accessed: November 25, 2025)

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/05/putin-vows-oil-shipments-to-india-will-be-uninterrupted-in-defiance-of-us> (accessed: November 28, 2025)

A major component of the enemy-image narrative is the weaponization of historical memory. Articles present an extensive catalogue of grievances—from the Cold War up to now – culminating in demands for reparations and territorial restitution. These references serve not merely as historical reminders but as devices to frame Russia as eternally culpable, unredeemed and fundamentally predatory. By selecting specific episodes of imperial history and omitting contextual complexities, authors construct a linear narrative of uninterrupted Russian wrongdoing [4]. This technique, known as historical indictment framing, enforces the idea that Russia's past defines its present and that its current actions should be interpreted through a lens of inherited guilt. The image of the enemy is formed through the selection of verbs and nouns that emphasize the activity, aggressiveness and consistency of Russia's actions. Terms like “incursions”, “violation of airspace”, and “challenge to security» create a sense of purposeful pressure and threat in the reader. Even if in reality it may be a separate episode, the language design turns these episodes into part of a large hostile strategy. The wording «new challenge to Black Sea security» not only describes the fact of the drone's appearance, but places it within the framework of a regional threat: Russia is becoming the source of a «new challenge», which means the most likely «enemy» of collective security. Moral polarization further amplifies the enemy-image framework [5]. Articles set up a binary opposition in which Russia embodies moral corruption, while Britain is depicted as guided by «laws of conscience» and committed to dialogue. This valorization of the in-group enhances the legitimacy of Britain's stance and frames its actions as defensive rather than assertive. The contrast between Britain's purportedly humane diplomacy and Russia's arrogance underscores the broader ideological narrative texts aim to promote [6].

The text selectively highlights those facts that confirm the risk and danger. For example, cases of previous drone incursions are highlighted, British officials are quoted as expressing alarm, as well as mentions of the reaction of Poland and NATO. However, there are no alternative interpretations, such as technical explanations, the possibility of navigation errors, or different interpretations of the drone's origin. Russia appears in the text only as a source of threat, and not as a participant who could provide a comment. The use of the words “Russian drone” or “Russian aggression” forms a label that the reader does not question. As a result, any uncertainty is automatically associated with the assumption of Russian hostility³.

Finally, publications make use of delegitimization and threat inflation. The Russian Federation's sovereignty and territorial presence are questioned in sweeping terms, with claims that Russia «has no place» in numerous regions and should «shrink in size». Such assertions deny the RF any rightful role in global affairs. Meanwhile, Russian involvement in international issues is depicted as intrusive and destabilizing, contributing to a percep-

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/04/macron-believes-us-may-betray-ukraine-on-territory-says-der-spiegel> (accessed: November 28, 2025)

tion of constant threat [7]. This reinforces the necessity of a firm, even confrontational, British response, presented as both justified and inevitable.

The analysis demonstrates that the publication constructs a highly polarized and emotionally charged enemy image of the Russian Federation through interconnected rhetorical strategies. Moral dehumanization, stereotyping, selective historical narratives, and delegitimization work together to portray Russia as inherently aggressive and illegitimate. At the same time, texts position Britain as a morally superior actor acting in self-defense. Such discursive frameworks serve not only to mobilize domestic support but also to justify political decisions within a narrative of historical grievance and contemporary threat. Ultimately, this case illustrates how enemy images are produced and maintained through the strategic use of language, memory, and moral evaluation in political discourse.

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