

April | 2018

Vladimir Putin's Worldview and Perspectives on Space

An Analysis of Public Discourse



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Prepared for: US Department of Defense (DOD) Strategic
Multi-Layer Assessment (SMA) Office J-39



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Executive Summary

A corpus of Vladimir Putin's speeches was drawn from his official Kremlin website. The corpus was examined using semi-automated discourse analysis to gauge Putin's concerns with space and how these are articulated with general political and cultural issues. The primary findings from the discourse are presented as Putin's perspectives and worldview with respect to the space domain and general themes.¹

Putin's Perspectives and Worldview Regarding the Space Domain

- Putin primarily associates space with **missile capabilities** and **deterrence** but he also discusses a wide range of other space-related topics including **satellite technology** and **space travel**.
- In all cases, these endeavors are developed and executed by the government run company, Roscosmos.
- Putin is beginning to consider the development of a military-industrial complex that would serve both the civilian as well as the government sectors.
- **Pride, success** and the **military** are discussed in association with all space themes, indicating a **strong, positive emotional connection to space issues**.
- **Missiles** are the most often discussed space topics and are associated with cultural emotive themes such as **pride, sacrifice, victory, enemies, and adversaries**. This indicates a strong emotional connection and an association with Russia's enemies.
- Missiles are associated with military operations, troops, and **deterrence**.
- Putin's rhetoric regarding **satellites** reinforces the pride associated with space ventures and also the involvement of **civilians and the private and military sectors**.
- **Pride, success** and Russian **nationalism** are associated with **space travel**, as is courage and loyalty to Russia for those who venture into space. These are potent sentiments attached to how Putin regards Russia's space travel.

General Worldview and Values

- **Putin's primary concern**, as expressed through thematic density is **the Russian economy, followed by the Russian military**. The findings of this latest study parallel earlier analyses with respect to Russian influence in Eurasia and the Middle East (Kuznar, 2016b; Kuznar, Popp, & Peterson, 2017a, 2017b; Kuznar & Yager, 2016).
- **Russia** itself is associated with ominous themes such as competition, danger, and threat.
- **The US** is involved with themes that have negative connotations such as threat, adversaries, international violations, the Cold War, and economic sanctions.

¹ This analysis also provides insight on SMA-Space Question 2 regarding how different entities conceive of space for military and commercial purposes.

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Background

This study focuses on how language used in discussion about the space domain reveals the interests of state actors. A corpus of speeches delivered by Russian president Vladimir Putin between 2013 through 2017 were analyzed using a codebook designed to generate quantitative measures of the extent to which emotive and cultural themes, political themes, entities and rhetorical devices are employed. These measures provide a quantitative analysis of Putin's worldview and goals and how Putin generally view space.

Methodology & Methodological Terms

People knowingly and unknowingly signal their values and intentions in the way they use language (Beeman, 2001; El-Badawy, Comerford, & Welby, 2015; Fairclough, 2001; Rahimi & Sahragard, 2006; van Dijk, 2005). Thematic analysis focuses on themes people employ that reveal what matters to them (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Ryan & Bernard, 2003), while discourse analysis focuses on the linguistic tools people use to deploy and emphasize these themes (Farnell & Graham, 1998; Schiffrin, 2003; van Dijk, 2005). The approach used in this study combines thematic analysis and discourse analysis to identify which issues matter most to a speaker and to what degree they do so. Because people are often unaware of the extent to which they signal their values and intentions, identification of key themes can provide early indicators and warnings (I&W) of political actions. The authors have employed this approach in studies of both state (Fenstermacher, Kuznar, & Yager, 2012; Kuznar, 2013, 2014, 2016b; Kuznar, Popp, & Peterson, 2016; Kuznar, Suedfeld, Morrison, & Spitaletta, 2014; Kuznar & Yager, 2013, 2016; Kuznar et al., 2012) and non-state (Kuznar, 2016a, 2017b; Kuznar & Hunt, 2015; Kuznar & Moon, 2014; Kuznar & Yager, 2012) actors.

Codebook Typology

The codebook is a taxonomy of themes and rhetorical devices that represent topics mentioned, persons, places, things, ideas, and ways of using language that amplify the sentiment associated with the themes. The following terms describe the highest-level categories of the codebook taxonomy.²

- **Theme** – something that can be nominalized (named); can be a person, place, thing, idea, or emotion
- **Emotive Theme** – themes that convey emotion (sentiment); their mere mention evokes an emotive response
- **Rhetorical Device** – a way of using language to amplify or dampen sentiment
 - Includes repetition, lists, intensifiers (very, huge), lexicalization (special word choice), pejoratives (contemptuous or demeaning terms), use of kin terms, titles etc.

The primary categories of the themes, emotive themes and rhetorical devices include:

- **Entities** – countries, formal organizations, regions, and sub-state groups
- **Cultural Emotive Values** – themes that evoke emotions in audiences

² As a convention, actual themes and rhetorical devices will be capitalized and italicized throughout the text, in order to differentiate them from more generic uses of the terms. When appropriate, footnotes defining themes will be given.

- **Negative Extreme Emotive** – a cultural theme that tends to evoke an extremely negative response.
- **Negative Normal Emotive** - a cultural theme that tends to evoke a negative response that is not extremely negative.
- **Positive Extreme Emotive** - a cultural theme that tends to evoke an extremely positive response.
- **Positive Negative Emotive** - a cultural theme that tends to evoke a positive response that is not extremely positive.
- **Political Factors**
 - **Positive Cohesive Concerns** – political issues that tend to imply cooperation.
 - **Disruptive Security Concerns** – political issues that tend to imply conflict.
 - **Other Security Concerns.**

Rhetorical Devices – ways of using language that amplify or dampen the sentiment associated with a theme (see above).

Space Themes – themes associated with outer space, which include but are not limited to:

- **Space themes aggregated** – all space-related themes, including those in sub-categories below
- **Space Technology** – general issues involving technology in space
- **Missiles** – space-bound missile technologies, especially including ballistic missiles
- **Satellites** – issues related to satellites
- **Space Business** – private sector connections to space
- **Space Military** – connection of military to space
 - Space Military Organizations – specific military space organizations
- **Space Science** – general outer space science concepts
- **Space Travel** – prospects and operations involving human space flight

Semi-automated Coding

In order to facilitate rapid coding of large corpora of text, the autocode feature of MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software was used. This required development of a thesaurus of terms and phrases that would represent a particular theme. For instance, the strings, “seiz,” “aggress,” or “attack” might represent the theme of Aggression. The thesaurus is the accumulated result of ten years of research application to national security issues (Kuznar, 2013, 2017b; Kuznar & Hunt, 2015; Kuznar, Popp, & Peterson, 2017; Kuznar & Yager, 2012; Kuznar et al., 2012; Toman, Kuznar, Baker, & Hartman, 2010). The codebook contains 324 codes for themes and rhetorical devices, including 18 themes related to outer space and space technologies. The codebook is refined with each new project as new codes are added and better ways of representing themes and rhetorical devices are discovered. The coding for this project represents the codebook as it existed January 3, 2018.

Key Metric: Density

The key metric for measuring themes is **density**: the number of times a theme occurred in a document or speech, divided by the number of words in that document. This provides a normalized measure of how often a theme is used that can be compared across documents and between authors, groups, and through time. Comparison of densities between themes also places a theme in a broader context, and thus guards against bias by judging the relative importance of themes. The underlying assumption is that the more densely a theme is used, the more important it is to the author, and therefore to a potential



audience. Theme densities were calculated for each document, and the variations of these densities through time were used to identify trends and possible indicators and warnings (I&W). Only those trends that were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or less are reported.

Metrics for Sentiment and the Use of Emotional Language

The use of rhetorical devices and emotionally charged themes are ways to interject emotive appeal into an argument. When done unwittingly, this may be an indicator that the speaker is in a more emotive state, as opposed to a more rational and deliberative state. Therefore, the ability to detect departures from a rational state of mind can provide clues that the speaker's decision calculus is departing from the deliberative, cost/benefit calculus that is at the heart of traditional deterrence theory (USSTRATCOM, 2006).

In order to measure the use of more emotive language, themes were classified as Extreme Negative Emotive, Negative Emotive, Extreme Positive Emotive, and Positive Emotive. In addition, Rhetorical Devices were coded. Each of these categories was tallied for each document and subsequently normalized as densities. In addition to these categories, the Extreme Negative and Negative Emotive themes were summed as were the Extreme Positive and Positive Emotive themes. This provides nine measures of the use of emotive language against which different actors or speakers can be compared.

Putin's Discourse on Space

Corpus

A corpus of President Putin's statements on major issues were compiled from the official kremlin.ru website ([link](#)) in English containing 105 articles spanning from 2013-2017. They range in formats from select speeches, transcripts, long-form interviews and addresses from a wide variety of forums ranging from forums to meetings, direct interviews and summits. Topics cover the political activity of President Putin and consist of a wide array of diplomatic, security, economic and domestic related issues to be highlighted to the English-speaking world. This source was chosen for the diversity of topics and formats of President Putin's interaction with Russia and the rest of the world.

The corpus contains 105 documents that range in length from 195 to 34,983 words and average 4256 words. They span the period of time from March 29, 2013 to May 14, 2017. 29,219 segments of text were coded into 270 themes and rhetorical devices.

Space: What is Vladimir Putin thinking?

Space-related themes were uncommon in this corpus as measured by density. Aggregating all space themes together yields a density of 0.000398 themes/word, which places in about the 77thth percentile of all themes and rhetorical devices. No space-related themes had densities that were more statistically significantly than the average for all themes. For President Putin, space is primarily associated with government and especially military activity. Secondly, Putin often mentions space travel, space business and general space technology topics (Table 1). Since space, as an aggregated category, has some statistically significant associations (more specifically missiles, satellites, space military and space travel have some unique associations), each category will be treated separately.

Table 1. Density of Space Themes Mentioned by Putin

Rank	Rank Percentile	Theme	Density
61	77.4%	Space	0.000398
108	60.0%	Missiles	0.000167
112	58.5%	Space Military	0.000150
136	49.6%	Satellites	0.000086
143	47.0%	Space Military Organization	0.000075
167	38.1%	Space Travel	0.000048
214	20.7%	Russia Missiles	0.000014
223	17.4%	Space Business	0.000012
239	11.5%	India Missiles	0.000005
241	10.7%	General Space Technology	0.000005

All space themes aggregated together are positively correlated with cultural themes such as pride, success, and with the military (Table 2).



Table 2. Themes Associated with Space in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Pride	0.429	0.000
Success	0.204	0.037
Military	0.320	0.001
Materiel	0.568	0.000

The following quote demonstrates the close association of pride and success with the space program.

“maths is indeed one of the fields in which Russia can be proud of its achievements. This has always been the case. Maths has been the foundation of all of our big successes of the previous decades: the nuclear programme, the space programme, and our metals studies, with its implications for shipbuilding, our nuclear submarine fleet, and our achievements in space.”
3/29/13

Missiles are especially associated with emotive themes such as conflict, sacrifice, enemy, adversaries and pride, they are also associated with political themes such as deterrence and infrastructure (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes Associated with Missiles in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Regulars	0.699	0.000
Conflict	0.644	0.000
Materiel	0.619	0.000
Military Ops	0.459	0.000
Deterrence	0.322	0.001
Infrastructure	0.302	0.002
Sacrifice	0.257	0.008
Victory	0.228	0.019
Enemy	0.208	0.033
Adversaries	0.207	0.034
Pride	0.200	0.041

Putin evokes a glorious past for Soviet missile programs.

“you recalled the golden age, as you called it, of Soviet science and its nuclear and missile projects. ...That is precisely why such enormous, truly colossal resources were channelled toward these goals, including intellectual, financial and other special resources. And the problems were resolved – resolved in a brilliant and timely manner.” 4/25/13

The importance of missiles for strategic deterrence is made plain.

“I would note the good organization of the command and staff training exercises involving nuclear deterrence forces, which took place for the second time in modern Russian history.



Land, navy and air forces successfully launched missiles and confirmed the reliability of Russia's nuclear shield." 12/10/13

Satellites are also associated with pride and civilians, indicating that Putin sees Russian satellite technology as key to Russian pride and wants to involve the civilian sector as well as the military (Table 4).

"Vostochny is Russia's first civilian spaceport for preparation and launch of scientific, socioeconomic and commercial satellites. The main construction works were completed in mid-January of 2016." 4/28/16

Table 4. Themes Associated with Satellites in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Materiel	0.411	0.000
Pride	0.341	0.000
Civilians	0.256	0.008

Putin also sees a key role for the private sector in advancing Russia's space program.

"We must direct the defence industry to produce up-to-date competitive civilian products for healthcare, energy, aviation and shipbuilding, space exploration and other high-tech industries. The share of civilian products must increase to at least one-third of the defence industry's total output within the next 10 years." 12/1/2016

Space military is associated with the military, regular troops and pride, a particularly potent sentiment (Table 5).

Table 5. Themes Associated with Space Military in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Materiel	0.533	0.000
Pride	0.395	0.000
Military	0.354	0.000
Deterrence	0.291	0.003
Regulars	0.204	0.037

"The combat capabilities of aerospace defence troops, especially the missile attack warning system, are improving." 12/10/13.

Space Travel is not only associated with pride, but also with success, nationalism, loyalty and courage, all very strongly positive, but compelling emotive themes (

Table 6).



Table 6. Themes Associated with Space Travel in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Pride	0.403	0.000
Materiel	0.358	0.000
Success	0.233	0.017
Nationalism	0.211	0.031
Loyalty	0.201	0.040
Courage	0.199	0.042

“Thus, complex programmes of long space flight missions require stamina, willpower and true courage. We seem to be getting used to these flights, but every such event is a feat of heroism, a huge risk. For the successful performance of such a flight Sergei Ryazansky receives the titles of Hero of Russia and Russian Federation Pilot-Cosmonaut.” 12/10/15

Cultural and Political Themes: *What motivates and concerns Vladimir Putin?*

The theme with the highest density is economy and development, indicating President Putin’s primary concern; its density is 52% higher than the next highest theme, military (Table 7).

Table 7. Density of Cultural, Emotive and Political Themes in Putin's Speeches

Rank	Rank Percentile	Theme	Density
5	98.1%	Economy and Development	0.004577
6	97.8%	Military	0.002999
7	97.4%	Political Process	0.001703
9	96.7%	Success	0.001615
10	96.3%	Governance	0.001604
11	95.9%	Cooperation	0.001579
13	95.2%	Extremism	0.001186
14	94.8%	Materiel	0.001137
17	93.7%	Security	0.001107
18	93.3%	Progress	0.001096
19	93.0%	Troops	0.001089
20	92.6%	Terrorism	0.001068
21	92.2%	Syrian Conflict	0.001043

“We will be doing this by using very realistic and very modest forecasts for prices of hydrocarbons, of energy resources – oil, gas – proceeding from \$50 a barrel. This will allow us to concentrate greater resources on the main task facing us, which is now actually even easier to resolve than in conditions of high prices on traditional export commodities. The task is to achieve structural changes in our economy, and this is what all our actions will be based on.” 10/13/15

Positive themes such as success, and progress also appear. However, the majority of themes concern political issues with negative connotations such as extremism, terrorism and the Syrian conflict.

Entities: *Who* concerns Vladimir Putin?

As with all other countries, the primary entity mentioned is itself – Russia. Conflict areas such as Ukraine and Syria are mentioned often. Next, key strategic relationships are mentioned such as the US, Turkey (REF), the U.N. and Europe (Table 8).

Table 8. Densities of Primary Organizations and Politics Mentioned in Putin's Speeches

Rank	Rank Percentile	Theme	Density
3	98.9%	Russia	0.004677
12	95.6%	Ukraine	0.001472
15	94.4%	Syria	0.001120
31	88.5%	US	0.000694
44	83.7%	Turkey	0.000508
47	82.6%	UN	0.000488
50	81.5%	Europe	0.000479
70	74.1%	E. Ukraine	0.000338

In Putin's discourse, Russia is associated with highly emotive language and rhetorical devices, positive attributes such as prosperity, friendship happiness, security, unity, and the masses. Russia is also associated with ominous themes such as competition, danger, and threat. Russia is also intimately tied to democratic ideals and US president Donald Trump (

Table 9).



Table 9. Themes Associated with Russia in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotive Language	0.438	0.000
Trust	0.407	0.000
Rhetorical Devices	0.359	0.000
Prosperity	0.355	0.000
Friendship	0.345	0.000
Happiness	0.343	0.000
Security	0.333	0.001
Unity	0.331	0.001
Trump	0.328	0.001
Democratic	0.328	0.001
Masses	0.319	0.001
Obama	0.308	0.001
Democracy	0.295	0.002
Betrayal	0.275	0.005
Respect	0.273	0.005
Reunification	0.270	0.005
Ideology	0.257	0.008
Competition	0.256	0.008
Sovereignty	0.237	0.015
Danger	0.233	0.017
Stability	0.232	0.017
Threat	0.227	0.020
Ability	0.192	0.050
Courage	0.191	0.051
Confidence	-0.222	0.023

"We are now united by an ambition to build a dynamic, prosperous and wealthy country that is respected in the world" 5/23/14

"True, we are under the influence of external threats to our economies. There is no point in discussing the reasons behind them; we all know them." 2/25/16

"Today, many nations are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures. Society is now required not only to recognise everyone's right to the freedom of consciousness, political views and privacy, but also to accept without question the equality of good and evil, strange as it seems, concepts that are opposite in meaning. This destruction of traditional values from above not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority, which does not accept the changes occurring or the proposed revision of values." 12/12/13

The US is primarily associated with current conflicts in which it is involved and that impact Russian strategic interests, to include Iraq, The Syrian conflict, and ISIS. Putin's rhetoric also often expresses personalized connections to US leaders, such as President Obama (negative connotations) and President Trump (positive connotations). The US is involved with themes with negative connotations such as threat, adversaries, international violations, the Cold War, and economic sanctions (Table 10).

Table 10. Themes Associated with the US in Putin's Speeches

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Iraq	0.534	0.000
Syrian Conflict	0.523	0.000
Syria	0.509	0.000
ISIS	0.487	0.000
Obama	0.436	0.000
Threat	0.416	0.000
Trump	0.415	0.000
Prosperity	0.390	0.000
Happiness	0.381	0.000
Adversaries	0.337	0.000
International Violations	0.317	0.001
Cold War	0.293	0.002
Legitimacy	0.272	0.005
Great Power	0.232	0.017
Economic Sanctions	0.227	0.020
Iran	0.223	0.022
Assad	0.221	0.024
Cooperation	0.206	0.035
Economic Development	-0.198	0.042

“Many curious and funny things happened back then. For example, we learned today that officers of the United States’ CIA operated as consultants to Anatoly Chubais. But it is even funnier that upon returning to the US, they were prosecuted for violating their country’s laws and illegally enriching themselves in the course of privatisation in the Russian Federation. They did not have the right to do this as active CIA officers. In accordance with US law, they were not allowed to engage in any kind of commercial activity, but they couldn’t resist – it’s corruption, you see.” 4/25/13

Trends through Time

Positive themes that increase through time in President Putin's discourse include trust, unity and the future. A number of themes have decreased through the time covered by this corpus. They include the masses, nuclear weapons, deterrence, and economic problems. It is interesting that, in the current time when the US is occupied with deterrence against the DPRK's nuclear capability, Putin expresses less of a concern with this very issue (Table 11).

Table 11. Trends through Time in Putin's Discourse

Theme	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Trust	0.250	0.010
Unity	0.221	0.024
Future	0.216	0.027
Sacrifice	0.214	0.029
Rights	-0.193	0.048
Masses	-0.195	0.046
Nuclear Weapons	-0.207	0.034
Deterrence	-0.226	0.020
Faith	-0.229	0.019
Economic Problems	-0.242	0.013
Ukraine	-0.315	0.001



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