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Russian–American relations: From Tsarism to Putin

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Abstract It is agreed that US–Russian relations today are in a crisis. This article seeks a better understanding of the current US–Russian relationship by examining its origins. Russia and the United States have always had conflicting interests as great powers, as the realist school would argue. Opportunities for cooperation were also constrained by longstanding ideological differences neglected by structural realism. Nevertheless, Russian–American relations from 1781 to 1824 were conducted according to realistic assessments of national interests, and in America, Russia was perceived as a friendly power. However, by the late nineteenth century ideological currents in American political culture reversed this favorable image of Russia. Negative perceptions peaked during the Cold War – and have survived the collapse of communism. It should thus come as no surprise that Russia and the United States in the early part of the twenty-first century are capable of conducting diplomacy based on notions of power and interests. A neo-classical realist approach considers norms and cultural forces that frame national interests, providing a more nuanced explanation of international relations in a world where elites are no longer isolated from public opinion.
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Interests and Ideology: US–Russian Relations in an Earlier Era

Why, more than two decades after the end of the Soviet communist regime, are Russian–American relations so troubled? Recent data by the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project found that in Spring 2014 fully 72 per cent of Americans viewed Russia unfavorably, while 71 per cent of Russians held an unfavorable view of the United States.[1] However, tensions and suspicions have been building in the two decades before the Ukraine crisis. European Union and NATO enlargement in the 1990s, NATO's bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, the color revolutions in

Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in the early 2000s, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, and American support for democracy movements in the Middle East and along Russia's periphery convinced many in the Russian elite (and in the general population) that Washington was trying to weaken Russia, exploit its natural resources, impose alien values and effect regime change (Bratersky, 2014; Korovin, 2014; Starikov, 2014). Russia's state-dominated media were employed to frame a discourse of anti-Americanism, blaming Washington and its allies for a wide range of domestic and international problems.

For many Americans, Russia after the collapse of communism was a Western democracy in the making, which rapidly devolved into a violent, mafia-dominated society led first by the alcoholic and buffoonish Boris Yeltsin, and then by the increasingly authoritarian former KGB colonel Vladimir Putin. Russia's defense of Serbs engaged in ethnic cleansing, its opposition to popular movements for political reform in the CIS states and around the globe, its neo-imperial approach to the former Soviet space (most visibly in Georgia and Ukraine), the military modernization program initiated in Putin's second presidential term, and increasingly belligerent rhetoric from the Kremlin convinced many Americans that Putin was determined to restore an expansive Russian empire based on nationalism, Orthodoxy and autocracy – the old governing triad formulated by Sergei Uvarov, Minister of Education to Nicholas I, in 1833 (Galeotti and Bowen, 2014; Stent, 2014). These negative perceptions of Russia predated the Ukrainian crisis, but reached unprecedented levels with the annexation of Crimea and the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17.

Historical perspective is critical to understanding Russia's confrontational posture. Selectively interpreting history mobilizes support for Kremlin policies, strengthens Russia's post-communist identity and focuses popular dissatisfaction on the West. In his presidential address on the annexation of Crimea, Putin repeatedly referenced history to justify his decision, citing Russia's historic claim to Crimea, the sacrifices of World War Two (the Great Fatherland War, in Russian parlance) and the injustice of Nikita Khrushchev's decision in 1954 to transfer Crimea to Ukraine. Putin also condemned the 'infamous policy of containment' of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries to create the impression that the Western powers had consistently sought to deny Russia its rightful place as a great power in global politics (Putin, 2014).

But Putin got the history wrong, at least with reference to the United States. American–Russia relations were quite friendly and productive before the twentieth century; there was no form of containment, and no attempt whatsoever by the United States to interfere with Russian politics. Contrary to what one might expect, relations deteriorated some two decades before the establishment of communism in Russia, and mutual suspicion between the two nations has survived the Soviet collapse by another two decades. What explains the evolution of this uniquely hostile relationship? Russia's current political regression toward a version of the nineteenth century tsarist empire, and a fascination with the pre-Soviet period among officials and the Russian public, suggests we may derive some insights from the history of

US–Russian relations. This article explores how the two powers managed relations in an earlier era.

International relations specialists would assert that as great powers Russia and the United States by definition have conflicting interests. Certainly, political, military and ideological rivalry between the United States and the USSR defined twentieth century global politics, but Cold War enmity was something more than merely great power rivalry. Structural realism cannot provide an answer. It is true that American power was rising in the late nineteenth century, and a realist analysis would predict that a rising power would become more confrontational toward other major powers. America's emergence as a great power did lead to war with Spain, the acquisition of an empire (albeit a rather small one), and greater global activism. Yet a neorealist approach would be hard-pressed to explain why Russian–American relations, marked by a century of amity and cooperation, deteriorated so dramatically, while ties to Britain, traditionally the greatest threat to American security (and still a power to be reckoned with), improved substantially. Americans have under wartime conditions demonized their enemies (think Germany and Japan), but no global rival has earned the enduring hostility evidenced toward Russia.

Drawing on neoclassical realism (Zakaria, 1998; Layne, 2009; Lobell *et al*, 2009; Schweller, 2009), I argue that the level of antipathy between Russia and the United States is more than great power competition, as a structural realist approach (Waltz, 1979) would contend. The earliest period of Russian–American relations was characterized by pragmatic assessments of national interests. Balance of power considerations dominated; relations were businesslike and often warm, though disputes surfaced over access to resources in the Pacific. Starting in the late nineteenth century, however, the two sides constructed hostile, competing images that often obscure what in many respects might have been a mutually beneficial relationship. These hostile images have continued to shape relations to the present.

Hostility and Mistrust

More than 20 years after the collapse of Soviet communism Russian–American relations remain plagued by mistrust and hostility. With Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Moscow's support for violent separatists in eastern Ukraine and the imposition of Western sanctions on Russian leaders, observers began referring to a new Cold War. While Russia's machinations in Ukraine brought tensions to a new high, relations between Russia and the United States had deteriorated significantly from the end of the Yeltsin era.

At the state level, Washington and Moscow had cooperated through the 2000s on a range of issues, from supplying NATO troops in Afghanistan to developing oil and gas resources in Central Asia to securing nuclear material to educational exchanges. Yet many members of Congress, attuned to public opinion, resisted revoking the

Jackson–Vanik amendment years after Russia opened its doors for emigration, for Jews as well as for everyone else in the country. When Congress did finally repeal Jackson–Vanik and extended permanent normal trade relations to Russia, they substituted the Magnitsky Act barring US entry visas for officials suspected of human rights abuses. Russia's President Vladimir Putin is regularly reviled by American media outlets, the country's human rights record is criticized vigorously by members of Congress and Russian gangsters have replaced communist *apparatchiks* as the ubiquitous villains in Hollywood productions. During the 2012 Republican presidential campaign candidate Romney (2012) referred to Russia as 'without question our number one geopolitical foe', a perspective at odds with any objective assessment of the threat posed by Moscow.[2]

In Russia, portraying the United States as a hegemonic power intent on regime change and domination is popular among elites (Lukyanov, 2005; Shlapentokh, 2011). Average Russians accept the Kremlin's slanted version of events as portrayed in the state-dominated mass media, blaming US and CIA plots for popular demonstrations across the globe, from the Arab Spring to Ukraine's Maidan movement. Russian nationalists harass US ambassadors for meeting with opposition NGOs, warn of American plots to spark color revolutions, accuse NATO of threatening Russian security and complain about American cultural imperialism. Nationalist politicians enacted a ban preventing Americans from adopting Russian orphans, and in response to the Magnitsky Act, the Duma approved a 'Guantanamo List' of US officials to be denied entry to Russia. Kremlin officials, discounting Western fears of Iran's nuclear program and supporting the Assad regime in Syria, strongly oppose Washington's plan to deploy anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe and Turkey. Russia's government has criticized the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program as 'discriminatory' by forcing Russia to divulge sensitive information about its nuclear program, and announced its intention to withdraw from the framework. Anti-Americanism is fueled by nationalistic and occasionally anti-Semitic diatribes, some of which originate from respectable sources (Gracheva, 2009; Rasstrel Tsarskoi sem'i, 2012).[3]

Clearly, the possibility that Russians and Americans would become close partners after the former shed their communist ideology was not realized (Midlarsky *et al*, 1994). The reasons for the recent falling out have been detailed in a number of studies (Aggarwal and Govella, 2012; Stent, 2012–13), but few have provided historical perspectives on the relationship. From the earliest days, relations between Russia and America were businesslike, even amiable, notwithstanding deep differences in political philosophy and governmental structure. Not until the late nineteenth century did rational calculations of interest give way to moralist reactions (to tsarist autocracy and Russian anti-Semitism) on the American side, reciprocated by communist demonization of capitalist democracy by the Soviet regime in the twentieth century. This moralistic or ideological component of international relations coincided with the rise of mass politics – the closer integration of state and society in the modern era

obliged rulers to justify power interests by referencing moral principles (Morgenthau, 2006, pp. 97–109; Schweller, 2009).

In this article I review the origins of Russian–American relations during the late eighteenth through early nineteenth centuries in order to put contemporary ties in historical perspective. Surprisingly, although diplomatic and economic interactions between the two countries were fairly limited, they were important to both countries, and were quite close until the end of the nineteenth century. The purpose here is not to present a history of the relations – others have covered this ground in great detail – but rather to provide a better understanding of current US–Russian ties by examining the origins of the relationship.

Different Systems, Different Eras, Common Interests

International relations scholars justifiably tend to focus on nations' interests, perceived threats and opportunities, and capabilities. An examination of the early era in Russian–American relations suggests that, like today, the two countries' interests diverged on some issues, but dovetailed on others. In those cases where disputes arose – over territory, sovereignty and trade – resolutions were achieved in a businesslike manner. Although there was (especially in the United States) some political posturing for a domestic audience, by all accounts Russians and Americans managed to resolve their differences amicably.

In the early twenty-first century US politicians have a very different understanding of America's global interests than did their eighteenth and nineteenth century predecessors. The founders of the United States held a strongly realist perspective on America's emerging national interests. They understood the weak international position of the United States during and after the Revolutionary War, and found in Russia a distant albeit useful balancer against the more proximate threats posed by Great Britain, Spain and France. The moralizing, ideological component of foreign policy so evident in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was not apparent at the beginning of the republic. This moralism, which has shaped US–Russian relations for more than a century, had resulted in a foreign policy that often loses sight of fundamental national interests.

At the time of the American Revolution, Russia and the confederal States of America were quite different political entities. Russia was a long-established, absolutist and stable monarchy under the rule of Catherine II; the 13 States, by contrast, were a loose amalgam of British colonies in revolt against King George III. Russia and the United States were distant geographically, and knew little about each other. However, both were Christian nations, and both were slave-owning societies, though the Russian model of serfs tied to estates differed from the American practice of personal bondage. The two countries were competitors with Britain, and as expansionist powers they would eventually meet at the Pacific Ocean.

The first contacts between America and Russia date from the time of the Revolution, when Catherine the Great was Empress (1762–1796). The weak, isolated American states needed friends and allies to counterbalance Britain's overwhelming naval superiority. Although Russia was officially on good terms with the United Kingdom, the court at St Petersburg benefitted from the prospect of an expansionist Britain hobbled by the upstart Americans. But Catherine, for all her fascination with Enlightenment ideals, could not countenance the revolutionary actions and concepts of republican government that were espoused by the Americans; after all, Catherine's most notable accomplishment had been imperial – the dramatic expansion of Russian boundaries southward and westward, incorporating the north Caucasus, Crimea and parts of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

America's tenuous international situation was reflected in the difficult task facing Francis Dana, the Massachusetts lawyer who was designated Minister-Resident to Russia in December 1780. Dana, along with his young interpreter John Quincy Adams, arrived in Russia early in 1781, with instructions from Samuel Huntington, President of the Continental Congress, to secure formal admission for the United States to Catherine's League of Armed Neutrality (Huntington, 1780). The League of Armed Neutrality, initiated by the Tsarina's decree of February 1780, exemplifies the coincidence of early Russian and American interests. Russia sought to prevent belligerent powers from boarding and searching neutral merchant ships for contraband, a common practice among the British and French during the wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At this time the great bulk of Russia's trade was carried on British ships manned by British sailors. Russia both resented the dependency this entailed and sought to constrain Britain's freedom to interfere with the transport of its goods (Bolkhovitinov, 1975, pp. 12–14, 79–82). Although the League had little practical effect against the powerful British Navy, it did promote the key American goal of unimpeded maritime commerce, critical to a victory for the Revolution.[4]

In addition to gaining admission to the League, Dana was also charged with convincing Catherine of the justice of the American cause, negotiating a treaty of friendship and commerce with Russia, reporting back on prospects for mutually beneficial relations in trade, agriculture and the arts, and in general providing the revolutionary government with intelligence on the situation in Russia and Europe. On the advice of Robert Livingston, the Continental Congress's Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and the French Minister to St Petersburg, Dana (1782) refrained from declaring his public position to the Russian court; Dana also communicated to Livingston the simple fact that as a belligerent the United States could hardly join a league of neutrals. Catherine never received Dana, and he eventually left the country in 1783 without having accomplished the tasks set down by the Continental Congress. Formal diplomatic relations would not be achieved for nearly three decades, although the United States did eventually open a consulate in St Petersburg in 1803.

There is an instructive parallel between the early period of Russian–American relations, and that following the collapse of the tsarist system under Nicholas II in 1917. In each case the establishment (and reestablishment) of full diplomatic relations took an inordinately long time. In the first instance, the Americans had approached St Petersburg in 1781 with the Dana mission, but formal diplomatic relations were not established until 1809, in the early months of James Madison's administration. In the twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson's government severed ties with the revolutionary Bolshevik government in December 1917; Washington refused to restore formal diplomatic ties with the new Soviet state until 1933, 16 years after the Communist victory.

The reasons in each case, however, appear to be very different. Non-recognition of the new Soviet state was based in a Wilsonian moral disapproval of and ideological opposition to Bolshevik revolutionary principles, Moscow's subversive activities internationally, and its disregard for private property, including international debts, a position that carried over into the Republican administrations of the 1920s. American officials refused to normalize relations based on fear of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution's excesses, concerns over Soviet efforts to spread communist ideology, religious intolerance and repression, and the repudiation of Russia's outstanding debts to the West. Public opinion was strongly anti-communist, and granting diplomatic recognition to the USSR would have been perceived as a violation of core American principles (Gaddis, 1978, pp. 87–117).

By contrast, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century diplomatic recognition consisted less of moral approbation than it did acknowledging the international legal standing of a sovereign state. Obstacles to normalization in early US–Russian relations were related to the changing dynamics of great power conflicts on the continent, poor timing, missed signals and financial stringencies. Francis Dana's efforts to secure recognition foundered on Catherine's reluctance to alienate Great Britain, her insistence that new diplomatic credentials be reissued after the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris, and the peculiar Russian custom of requiring side payments (essentially bribes) to each of her four chief ministers upon signing any treaty.[5] Although relations might have been established had Dana stayed a few months longer in St Petersburg, his correspondence from the period indicates a growing frustration with both the Russian Court and the Continental Congress.[6]

The early American government maintained amicable relations with St Petersburg in the absence of formal diplomatic ties. Federalists in particular were well-disposed toward a stable Russia seeking to contain the excesses of the French revolution, but Republicans also were willing to work with St Petersburg. Thomas Jefferson, for example, carried on a brief correspondence with Alexander I during 1804–1806. Jefferson initiated the exchange to thank Alexander for interceding in the rescue of the *Philadelphia*, an American frigate that had been seized by pirates in Tripoli. This connection facilitated the eventual formal exchange of diplomatic representatives in 1809 (Bashkina *et al*, 1980, pp. 403–405, 41–419, 438–439, 457–458, 527).

At the very end of his second term Jefferson appointed William Short as the first US Minister to imperial Russia, but the Senate unanimously rejected his choice. Following his inauguration in March 1809 James Madison nominated John Quincy Adams to the position, and after initial Senate rejection and several months' delay Adams was approved as the first US Minister to Russia. Although the presidency had evolved over the past three decades into a formidable institution, Congress still exercised its constitutionally mandated dominance over US foreign policy, a pattern that would hold until the end of the nineteenth century (Zakaria, 1998; Fisher, 2011, pp. 235–276).

Balance of power considerations strongly influenced Tsar Alexander I to seek formal relations with the republican United States. Alexander saw the United States 'as a kind of rival of England', a country that, like his own, opposed British despotism on the high seas. His policy was a continuation of the freedom of maritime commerce principles laid out in Catherine's League of Armed Neutrality.[7] Increasingly isolated from Napoleonic France, and drifting toward war with Britain, the United States welcomed support from its new international partner. The American policy of avoiding entanglement in great power politics on the continent aligned the United States closely with Russia's interests.

Ensuring a smooth relationship between the two nations required skilled diplomacy, however. The Democratic-Republican administrations of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe tended to be supportive of France, and suspicious of Great Britain. Russia's alignment with France after the Treaty of Tilsit (1807) was uneasy at best, and deteriorated as Napoleon's ambitions led toward the invasion of 1812. Russia then found itself allied with a Britain that was at war with the United States, while trying to preserve good ties with America's Francophile leaders. The countries' official representatives – John Quincy Adams in St Petersburg and Andrei Dashkov in Philadelphia – bear a good deal of credit for keeping the relationship on an even keel. Dashkov, for example, worked assiduously to offer Alexander's services as a neutral arbiter in the British–American conflict (Schlafly, 1997, p. 43).

The court in St Petersburg had sent Andrei Dashkov, a young nobleman with a keen interest in American laws and customs, to Philadelphia in 1808 with three briefs: as *chargé d'affaires*, consul general, and special representative of the Russian American Company, the joint stock company established in 1799 to develop the fur trade in Alaska and along America's Pacific coast (Schlafly, 1997). Commercial considerations strongly influenced the Russian government's efforts to formalize diplomatic ties with the new republic. Dashkov was dispatched following Short's nomination, and had clear instructions never to discuss publicly the actions of the American government, nor to take sides in party factionalism. Dashkov was ordered to familiarize himself with the US Constitution and to focus on encouraging trade and enhancing diplomatic relations (Bolkhovitinov, 1975, pp. 197–198). Dashkov effectively served as ambassador until July 1810, when he was briefly replaced by the higher-ranking Count Fedor van der Pahlen. When Pahlen left for Brazil in July 1811, Dashkov resumed the role of minister, serving until 1819.

Before Dashkov's appointment trade between the two countries had been anemic, and much of what America delivered to Russia were foreign goods rather than those originating in the United States. Trade was also hampered by the disastrous Embargo Act of 1807, President Thomas Jefferson's response to France's Continental Blockade, designed to choke off British shipping, and Britain's retaliatory measures against French trade. Commercial warfare between the two belligerents interfered with American shipping, and the Embargo Act was targeted at punishing both France and Britain. Instead, the Act ruined trade in New England and the South, and generated vocal domestic opposition to Jefferson. When the Embargo was replaced with the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809 trade with Russia surged – total US exports to Russia grew from US$884 261 in 1809 to more than $6.1 million in 1811 (Bolkhovitinov, 1975, p. 222).

When diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia were finally established in 1809, Britain and France were causes for mutual concern. John Quincy Adams, in his capacity as the first US Minister to Russia, was tasked with promoting America's overriding goal of freedom of the seas, and in general keeping the United States out of Europe's political entanglements. British interception of American ships and impressments of American sailors had reached a peak in 1807 with the Chesapeake–Leopard affair, and war with Britain seemed likely.[8] Conveniently, Russia had been at odds with Britain since the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), and the new American state, though hardly a major power in world politics, could prove a useful partner in the struggle for unrestrained trade. Russia and the United States also opposed the Napoleonic Continental system, whereby France's puppet states were obliged to seize any vessels carrying British goods, or those having virtually any contact with British officialdom (Bemis, 1956, pp. 166–172).

The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1809 signaled the start of a promising relationship. Adams and Alexander I became good friends, meeting informally during walks along the Neva River in St Petersburg. The Russian Tsar even offered to serve as godfather for the Adams' daughter. At this time American merchants were shipping goods to Russia, incurring the displeasure of the French who under Napoleon were seeking to weaken their eastern neighbor. Alexander issued an *ukaz* (decree) freely admitting American ships through the Baltic Sea, essentially blocking French and Danish attempts to choke off trade. During the War of 1812 Adams (1813) also sent back dispatches informing the US government of Napoleon's ill-fated campaign.

From his position in St Petersburg Adams observed the changing balance of power on the continent. The French defeat and subsequent Congress of Vienna left France greatly weakened, Britain in control of the seas, and Russia as the dominant continental power. In the years after 1815, Russia would become the chief opponent of revolution and defender of the *status quo*, in Europe and further afield, a position that would align its interests contrary to those of the United States. Alexander's determination to preserve Christian monarchies through the Holy Alliance would

find Russia and the United States supporting different sides in Latin America, while Russian mercantile interests would present Americans with a more immediate challenge in the Pacific. These commercial and political disagreements, however, were resolved pragmatically through skilled diplomacy.

Russia and America in the Pacific

From the earliest days of the Republic, Americans, at least those in what Walter Russell Mead calls the Hamiltonian school of US foreign policy, viewed the Pacific as a 'natural and necessary' part of American commerce (Mead, 2001, p. 113). The lure of land at free or nominal cost drew Americans westward, while merchants quickly discovered the vast wealth of furs, fish and whale oil that could be harvested along the continent's Pacific coast. Russians, however, had discovered and settled in the region well before Americans came on the scene.

Following the exploratory voyages of Vitus Bering (circa 1725–1741), Russian settlers began arriving on the Western coast of North America in the late 1740s, settling in various small Alaskan villages and intermarrying with the native Alutiiq (Miller, 2010). By the end of the eighteenth century enterprising New Englanders were trading food and other provisions for the otter furs harvested by the Russians. Under Tsar Paul I (1796–1801) the Russian American Company was chartered in 1799 as the country's first joint stock venture, with the goal of developing the fur trade in Alaska and along the Western coast.[9] The Russian American Company established its headquarters in Sitka, and pushed as far southward as San Francisco in search of food to supply the Alaskan settlements. In 1812 the Russians constructed a military outpost in northern California, naming it after their homeland, Rossiya, now known as Fort Ross.

Americans moving westward in search of furs, whales, fish and other profitable ventures encountered Russians moving eastward for similar reasons. Neither government exercised much authority over these remote regions, but as the number of Americans reaching the Pacific increased, the Russian court became more defensive about their position in Alaska. The Tsarist government was especially incensed that the 'Bostonians' (shorthand for all American merchants) were depleting sea otter stocks, whose pelts brought huge profits on the Chinese market. Furthermore, Russia protested the American practice of supplying small arms, ammunition and whiskey to the native population, who frequently turned these weapons against Russian colonists (Dashkov, 1810).

The idea of Manifest Destiny, though not yet articulated as doctrine, was nonetheless shaping America's position on territorial expansion in the far West. In 1820 Congressman John Floyd of Virginia, supported by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, introduced a resolution supporting American settlements in the Oregon Territory and Columbia River basin. Floyd's proposal raised alarm bells

in London, where the British energetically defended the Hudson's Bay Company's exclusive right to trap the Columbia River basin, and in St Petersburg, where it appeared Russia's foothold on the Pacific Northwest was threatened. In addition to their growing presence along America's Pacific coast, the Bostonians were also plying Russian territorial waters in the Russian Far East, disrupting the Russian American Company's monopoly by trading with the Chukotka natives (Stephan, 1994, pp. 492–495).

As American territorial ambitions expanded, so did the scope of their economic interests, and the perception that these interests were threatened by Russia. In reality, competition between American merchants and Russian traders in the Pacific reduced the Russian American Company's profits – starting around 1820–1821 the Company found itself in financial difficulties and unable to pay dividends to its shareholders. Company directors lobbied Alexander I to protect their mercantilist position, and in 1821 Tsar Alexander I responded with an *ukaz* granting exclusive privileges to the Russian American Company in the Pacific north of the 51st parallel, and 100 Italian miles (115 British miles) from the coast, for trading and fishing. Faced with this challenge to the American principle of freedom of the seas, President James Monroe and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams reacted firmly but diplomatically to the question of Russia's maritime jurisdiction. Alexander may have signed the *ukaz* without thinking through the consequences; in the event, he quickly let it known that the 100-mile edict would not be strictly enforced, leaving American merchants free to exploit the riches of the Western seaboard (Bemis, 1956, pp. 492–498; Saul, 1991, pp. 96–105).

Alexander's decree was perceived in America as threatening the country's commercial interests, and constraining American expansionism westward. Control of the entire continent was increasingly viewed as a logical development of the American nation-building process, as the American population doubled every 20–25 years (LaFeber, 1994, pp. 40–93). John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State under President James Monroe, refused to recognize Russia's claims, and in early 1823 proposed to the British that they join together to contain (balance) Russia in the Pacific. Further complicating Russian–American relations was the Tsar's opposition to republican governments in Latin America that, like America several decades earlier, were in the process of breaking their colonial bonds. Alexander's Holy Alliance upheld the principle that Spain had the right to reestablish control over the rebellious South American colonies. For the United States, defending freedom and the right to revolt against colonial masters was secondary; minimizing the influence of European great powers in the Western hemisphere was the primary objective.

The dispute over Russian presence in the Pacific contributed to the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine, the cornerstone of American foreign policy over the next century. As a new and relatively weak power, the United States early in the nineteenth century feared the machinations of the major European states. European wars were of minor concern as long as they were restricted to the continent, but the decline of Spanish power led to a wave of independence movements in South America and the possibility of European intervention. Americans supported the

forces of republicanism in the southern hemisphere, but more importantly they were determined to prevent any reassertion of monarchy and colonialism that could impede America's territorial expansion and influence.

The perceived threat of European intervention in the Americas may have been exaggerated, but policymakers act on their perceptions. Alexander's turn toward religious conservatism following the Congress of Vienna, in 1815, conferred on Russia the role of chief defender of monarchy and the *status quo* in Europe. The Holy Alliance, formed ostensibly to promote Christian values, but with the additional goal of preserving the old order in Europe, stood in contrast to American republican principles. Russia's opposition to republican government and radicalism extended to the new world, and politicians in Washington feared the Holy Alliance would support Spain's claim to reassert control over its restive colonies. Having just acquired Florida from Spain in February 1819, US expansionists were determined to limit the great powers' maneuverability on the continent, whether French, British, Spanish or Russian.

A central principle underlying the Holy Alliance was the right, or duty, to intervene in nations' internal affairs in order to defeat the forces of revolution, secularism and republicanism. Many Americans were repulsed by the excesses of the French Revolution, and were themselves highly religious, but the concept of intervention violated the fundamental American principle of avoiding being drawn into Old World conflicts. For that reason, the US government declined repeated invitations by Alexander I to join the Holy Alliance (Bemis, 1956, pp. 364–366; Hunt, 1987, pp. 92–102).[10] The reciprocal expectation, eventually embodied in the Monroe Doctrine, was that intervention by the European powers in America's geopolitical domain was unacceptable.

Limiting the influence of Europe's great powers in the Americas was the main objective of the Monroe Doctrine, drafted in part by John Quincy Adams and enunciated in President James Monroe's 1823 report to Congress. In his address Monroe expressed sympathy with the Greek struggle for liberation from the Ottoman Empire, and support for the 'liberty and happiness' of those in Portugal and Spain who were subject to the Alliance-backed French intervention. The President emphasized that in the wars of the European powers, America had 'never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so'. In the interest of amicable relations with Europe, Monroe declared 'we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere, as dangerous to our peace and safety'. The restoration of monarchical control would strengthen the presence and influence of European colonial powers in the Western hemisphere, and hence was incompatible with US national interests. The United States would remain neutral in any conflict between the new South American governments and Spain, Monroe asserted, but would equate European attempts to oppress independence movements as manifesting an 'unfriendly disposition' toward the United States (Monroe, 1823; May, 1975).

As Monroe and Adams were developing the non-colonization principle that would be articulated in Monroe's address, Henry Middleton, the US ambassador in St Petersburg, was negotiating an agreement on maritime sovereignty and the northwest territorial boundary. The result – the Russian–American Convention of 1824 – was the first formal treaty between the two countries. It set the southern boundary of Russian holdings in the northwest at 54°40′, and promised Americans access to the region, as long as they did not supply the native peoples with weapons, ammunition or liquor. The Russian American Company protested the 1824 Convention, contending that the agreement infringed on the company's privileges and was a threat to its continued existence (*Entsiklopediia,* 2001, p. 430). There was some opposition to the Convention in the US Senate, led by James Lloyd of Massachusetts, but the treaty was highly favorable to the United States and was eventually ratified in January 1825. Washington and St Petersburg had negotiated from a position of mutual respect, both made some concessions, and neither gave in to the more extreme demands of domestic forces. The United States preserved its commercial rights in the Pacific, and retained Russia as a potent balancer to British claims in the Northwest. Mutual interests in preserving the balance of power would subsequently shape relations during the American Civil War, and influenced Russia's decision to sell Alaska to the United States.

The Civil War and the Purchase of Alaska

Close ties between the North and Russia were of great importance to both sides during the Civil War. The Lincoln administration, determined to preserve the Union, feared British and French support for the Confederacy. Both the British and French ministers in American had recommended that their governments grant recognition to Jefferson Davis's government. France, with an economy heavily dependent on imports of cotton from southern plantations, and visions of imperial expansion in Latin America, sought to divide and weaken the United States (LaFeber, 1994, pp. 149–153). The British were less dependent than the French on American cotton imports, but they resented Northern interference with British-Confederate diplomacy and trade. Tsar Alexander II (1855–1881), however, explicitly refused to recognize the Confederacy, and his foreign minister, Aleksandr Gorchakov, stated that Russia would not consider French or British proposals to intervene in the American conflict (Saul, 1991, pp. 321–339), a position immensely reassuring to the North. Although immersed in the war, Americans were also troubled by the French invasion of Mexico in 1862 (with the support of Britain and Spain), which contravened the Monroe Doctrine, and the subsequent installation of Maximilian I as Emperor.[11]

Russia, severely weakened after the defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856), in turn needed the United States to remain united to balance the two dominant European powers. Russian–American relations were quite warm throughout the Civil War.

Russian–American friendship, and a clear-eyed calculation of interests, dampened criticism of Russian suppression of the Polish revolt in 1863, although some American papers sympathized with the Poles (Saul, 1991, p. 338). St Petersburg demonstrated its support for the Union with the prominent visit of Baltic Fleet warships to the Eastern seaboard in 1863. The Americans responded with an outpouring of hospitality, feting the Russians in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. Washington reciprocated with a naval visit of its own in 1866. The war disrupted much of Russian trade with the American continent, but economic cooperation took new forms, including the joint expedition to map out a route for an Alaskan–Pacific–Siberian telegraph.[12]

The sale of Russian Alaska to the United States in March 1867 constitutes one further example of the coincidence of political interests between the two countries (Lukin, 2012, pp. 154–155). St Petersburg had several reasons for abandoning the territory: imperial overextension and a weakened position following the Crimean War; the increasing unprofitability of the Russian American Company and the financial burden of maintaining a presence there; the vulnerability of Alaska to possible British occupation; and Russia's preoccupation with consolidating and developing territory in Central Asia, Siberia and along the Amur River (Rasche, 1967; Gibson, 1979; Saul, 1991, pp. 388–396). American interests included expansion of territory in keeping with the concept of Manifest Destiny (which had an ardent exponent in Secretary of State William Seward), strengthening the country's foothold in the Pacific Ocean and the prospects for Asian trade, and containing Britain's presence on the continent. The Alaskan agreement, based on each country pursuing its national interests, marked the apogee of Russian–American cooperation in the nineteenth century.

Evolving Perceptions and Capabilities

American and Russian international behavior in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was shaped by classical realist assumptions about the international environment and relative power alignments. The revolutionary American states in 1781 were in an extremely weak, tenuous position, seeking powerful allies where they could. Russia, though unresponsive to American overtures in the late eighteenth century, became an important balancer for the United States in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps more importantly, America's capabilities developed rapidly over this half-century. In 1781 the country was a loosely organized confederation of 13 small states with a population under 3 million and no standing army. By 1823 there were 24 states in the union, and American territory now spread across much of the continent. The population had swelled to over 10 million, and while US state and military capabilities were modest by comparison with European great powers, the potential was apparent.

As American power and potential evolved, so did perceptions of threats and opportunities. In the early years of US–Russian relations the American view of that distant land was shaped by a favorable interpretation consistent with American national interests. Russia supported the American position on freedom of the seas, the importance of maritime commerce and the need to balance against major European powers. Although Russia was a monarchy embodying principles fundamentally at odds with American republicanism, US influence was strengthened by aligning with St Petersburg. Moral considerations may have found some resonance among the population, but carried little weight with policymakers.[13]

The favorable view of Russia as America's 'distant friend' would change in the late nineteenth century, as George Kennan's revelations about Russia's labor camps, Mark Twain's polemics (Twain was strongly influenced by Kennan's lectures), and disgust with anti-Jewish pogroms transformed American public opinion, which was developing a 'moral self-righteousness' about world affairs (Good, 1982; Travis, 1990, p. 377; Saul, 1996). In addition, the international power equation had shifted over this period, and American interests and diplomatic objectives changed significantly (Gaddis, 1978, pp. 27–56). Rapid industrial development projected the United States into the ranks of the great powers, and with expanded capabilities came new foreign policy interests and new international alignments (Gaddis, 1978, pp. 27–56). Congressional dominance of the executive had been replaced with a vigorous, assertive presidency that pursued a more overtly expansionist, colonial foreign policy (Zakaria, 1998).

One constant in American foreign policy has been the emphasis on trade and commerce, and opposition to any restrictions on imports and exports. Mead (2001) notes that through most of history economic questions have taken precedence in US foreign policy, in contrast to traditional continental realism's focus on the political (pp. 36–67). Early American foreign policy was strongly dominated by the economic (the country was deeply in debt at the time), and commercial issues returned to a position of prominence after the Cold War as the United States once again became a debtor nation. During the Cold War interregnum Soviet isolationism and autarchy allowed the United States to employ a strategy of economic warfare against its chief enemy, employing trade and investment restrictions that incurred few real costs on Americans.

Following the collapse of communism, trade and economic cooperation between Russia and the United States expanded, but slowly. America is now deeply integrated into the global economy, but its major trading partners are China, Japan, Canada and Mexico rather than Russia, which comes in a distant 20th on overall trade.[14] As during the Cold War, in the post-communist era US foreign policy toward Russia can focus on political topics (human rights) and ignore economic issues without serious consequences. This could change, however, as Russia becomes an active member of the World Trade Organization. Russia is not and will not soon be a dominant economic power on the order of China, but it is a major source of hydrocarbons,

ranking among the top nations in global oil and gas production. Russia's key role as major energy supplier to Europe and its influential political position in energy-rich Central Asia confer global economic influence beyond what its modest GDP would indicate.

In the early period of Russian–American relations, public opinion seldom influenced foreign policy. Alexander's decisions were occasionally shaped by powerful ministers or business lobbies, as with the Russian American Company, but as absolute autocrat his policies could not be vetoed by other institutions. In the United States the president was constrained by Congress, especially when it came to funding foreign policy, and had to be attentive to elite public opinion. Yet where the two countries disagreed, as over territorial claims and mercantile interests in the Pacific, or over the issue of support for newly independent governments in Latin America, disputes were resolved amicably, without the recriminations common in current political discourse. Much of this can be attributed to the limited forms of political communication in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the ability to conduct diplomacy in secrecy, and fewer opportunities for elites to mobilize public opinion.[15] In this environment Thomas Jefferson, a fervent republican and admirer of the French Revolution, could carry on a friendly correspondence with the autocratic Tsar and eventually lay the groundwork for full diplomatic recognition.

Today politicians in both countries pay far more attention to public opinion, and where positive mirror imaging dominated relations two centuries ago, today mutual perceptions are far more negative and more emotionally charged. For Americans, the shift to a negative image of Russia began before communism was established in the late nineteenth century.[16] Fear of 'Godless communism' and Soviet expansionism solidified anti-Russian attitudes in America in the twentieth century. These perceptions moderated during the alliance against Germany, only to reach a peak in the Cold War decades after World War II, as the nuclear arms race raised the specter of mutual annihilation. Negative mirror imaging in the Soviet Union was fueled by anti-Western propaganda, the American policy of containment and a series of proxy wars in the developing world.

One constant in US–Russian relations is the strong sense of national pride on the part of both nations, and the need to be respected as an influential power (Mead, 2001; Bacevich, 2008; Tsygankov, 2012).[17] Russia emerged from the Napoleonic wars as the dominant continental power in Europe, yet Alexander I was willing to deal with Americans as virtual equals. Following the Soviet collapse in 1991 Americans reveled in their bloodless 'victory' over communism, and immediately set about teaching democracy and capitalism to the new Russia. Missionaries – Protestants, Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and many more – flooded into the country, along with American products and companies. Russian nationalists, the hierarchy of a revived Russian Orthodox Church and many ordinary Russians resented these foreign influences as alien to the Russian tradition; these anti-American attitudes were shaped into a powerful negative image by Russian elites

(Shlapentokh, 2011). America at this point was no longer the nation that, as Adams (1821) said, had for nearly half a century 'respected the independence of other nations' and 'abstained from interference in the concerns of others'.

Americans and Russians often overlook or slight the common interests that, as in the past, should make for pragmatic relations between the two countries at present – combatting the threat of global terrorism, containing Islamic radicalism, restricting nuclear proliferation, developing the petrochemical resources of Central Asia and the Caucasus, addressing climate change and stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. In part, this may be due to the power imbalance. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Russia was one of the three most powerful European nations, while the United States was weak and vulnerable. Today, the United States is the single greatest power in the world, while Russia has struggled to reassert itself as a major power. Common interests are frequently overshadowed by political posturing on both sides, as leaders seek to construct positive identities of their own country as a great power, and negative identities of the other as a threat, to strengthen their political base (Ziegler, 2012).

Conclusion

The early years of Russian–American relations are instructive not because they established a pattern for later interactions, but rather because of the contrast between the early era of shared interests and mutual trust, and the suspicion and mistrust of the past century. The first century of American foreign policy was marked by realism, with diplomats and politicians fully cognizant of American capabilities and interests. This should not be surprising – after all, many of the fundamental components of realism were derived from studies of seventeenth to nineteenth century great power politics, when domestic influences on elite decision making were minimal to non-existent. Even the United States, at that time the world's most democratic nation, still conducted a largely elitist foreign policy. Constitutionally, Congress had been granted extensive powers in war making and foreign policy, and frequently exercised those powers to restrain presidential activism in foreign policy and to curtail spending on 'frivolities' like diplomacy (Fisher, 2011). But public opinion in the modern sense had minimal impact on foreign policy decisions.

Russia, with its absolutist monarchy, fit even more closely than did the United States the billiard ball realist model of international relations. Unlike in the early United States, the great bulk of Russia's population was illiterate, isolated serfs and peasants. Even at the ministerial level, Russia's elite had little if any influence on policy. Alexander I was, in the words on a prominent historian, his own foreign minister; his ideas and character were decisive in shaping Russian foreign policy in the early nineteenth century (Grimsted, 1969, pp. 287–303).

By the latter part of the nineteenth century America's perspective on Russia had evolved in a more ideological direction as new forms of communication and an increasingly literate population became more informed about Russia, and overtly critical of Russian policies. Absolutism and reaction under Alexander III and Nicholas II mobilized American public opinion against Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although anti-Russian attitudes were restrained compared with the hysterical anti-communism that followed the Russian revolution. Early Bolshevism presented an existential challenge to American democracy; Stalin's totalitarian regime, as the antithesis to an open, tolerant, democratic society, provided an even more threatening enemy. The American identity constructed during the twentieth century – as the chief defender of the Free World – survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. In stubbornly failing to adopt the essence of Americanism, and choosing to challenge America's global dominance, Russia preserved and even enhanced its negative image among the US public, many academics and key members of Congress.

Although realist considerations of capabilities, power distribution and the global security environment remain central to international relations, the twenty-first century is also an era of identity politics for both democracies and authoritarian states. Russia's evolving national identity incorporates an expansive ethnic program to gather the Russian world, the assertion of conservative Christian values in contrast to perceived decadent Western liberal morality, a geo-economic project that is more inward focused and oriented toward the non-Western emerging markets (the BRICS), and an authoritarian form of governance that rejects Western liberal democracy (Bratersky, 2014; Zevelev, 2014). Russian foreign policy is not formulated in a vacuum, isolated from Russian society, but reflects traditional Russian values and practices rooted in history. The history that Russia draws on, however, is not that of the twentieth century communist system, but an earlier era of tsarist autocracy, Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism. The political distance between today's Russia and the United States certainly cannot be greater than it was in the nineteenth century, and yet leaders on both sides hold distorted perceptions that constrain their ability to understand the legitimate national interests of the other side. Each side frames the relationship in negative terms, exaggerating differences and neglecting common interests.

Our understanding of American and Russian foreign policies is enhanced by a neoclassical realist approach that considers ideology, social norms and cultural forces that frame national interests, along with more traditional power and security concerns. The ideological must also be taken into account to provide a more nuanced explanation of international relations in a world where elites are no longer as isolated from the public as they once were, but rather must respond to a range of demands from opposition parties, journalists, non-governmental organizations, academics, policy wonks, bloggers and protestors. In an earlier, simpler era Russia and the United States were able to conduct diplomacy based on power and interests, objectively defined by their respective leadership and shielded largely from political

posturing aimed at public opinion. The fundamentally different relationship between state and society in both systems makes replicating this experience in the twenty-first century unlikely.

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Notes

1 Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, at www.pewglobal.org/database/, accessed 9 August 2014.
2 In the interview Romney did distinguish between the greatest threat to world security – Iran – and Russia as our greatest opponent for refusing to help contain such threats. Tsygankov (2009) attributes continuing negative images of Russia to a conservative/neoconservative lobby of journalists, think-tank analysts, academics and ex-officials.
3 Gracheva's book (2009), which blends Orthodoxy and anti-Semitism with attacks on the Obama administration, is reportedly popular among the Russian military leadership. One member of the Academy of Sciences, Petr Mul'tatuli, even suggested that a cabal of leading American bankers and industrialists, led by Jacob Schiff, urged the Bolsheviks to slaughter Tsar Nicholas II's entire family, in 1918 (Rasstrel Tsarskoi sem'i, 2012).
4 Denmark, Sweden, Portugal, Prussia, Austria and the two Sicilies joined Russia in the League, which was dissolved in 1783 following the Treaty of Paris.
5 For each treaty a payment of 6000 rubles to each minister, or about 4500 pounds sterling total, was required (Dana, 1782). In current US dollars this would be well over half a million. The Continental Congress, saddled with debts from the Revolution, understandably balked at such extortionate fees.
6 See, for example, the dispatches from St Petersburg of Francis Dana to Robert Livingson and John Adams, 27, 29 and 17 August 1783 (in Bashkina *et al*, 1980, pp. 199–206).
7 These comments were contained in Alexander's instructions to Count Feodor Pahlen, who replaced Dashkov as Russia's chief representative to the US in 1810–1811 (Bolkhovitinov, 1975, pp. 214–217).
8 On 22 June 1807 off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, the British warship *Leopard* attacked and boarded the USS *Chesapeake* without warning, killing 3 crew members, injuring 18 and arresting 4 for desertion. The incident caused an uproar among Americans, with some members of Congress calling for war against Britain (Cray, 2005).

9 Alexander I, members of the imperial household and leading officials were major shareholders in the Russian American Company (*Entsiklopediia*, 2001, p. 429).
10 Today the positions are reversed, with the United States asserting a right to intervene to promote democracy or protect vulnerable populations (the Responsibility to Protect norm), while Russia adamantly rejects any form on interference in sovereign domestic affairs.
11 Although Secretary of State William Seward communicated to France Washington's unwillingness to see a foreign or monarchical government in Mexico, the administration clearly understood it could not fight two wars simultaneously, notwithstanding pressure from Congress to expel the French. Once the Civil War ended the United States did at least implicitly threaten war with France over Mexico (see Bancroft, 1896).
12 The telegraph project, which was made redundant in1867 with the completion of a trans-Atlantic cable, was staffed by engineers, demobilized officers and naturalists from the Smithsonian Institution, along with George Kennan (Saul, 1991, pp. 367–370).
13 Alexander I, for example, was perceived by many Americans as a virtuous Christian who supported liberal principles and was a true friend of the United States, at least until the later years of his reign (Nakajima, 2007).
14 In 2011 total US–Russia trade was $42.9 billion (Office of the US Trade Representative, at www.ustr.gov/russia, accessed 19 October 2012).
15 As Schweller (2009) persuasively argues in his study of Nazi Germany, ideology enables leaders to extract resources and mobilize support in the age of mass politics.
16 This, of course, is a simplification. Americans were attracted to Russian cultural developments in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and there was great sympathy for Russia during the famine of 1891–1893. But positive developments in US–Russian relations following the American Civil War foundered on increasingly critical attitudes toward Russia (Saul, 1996).
17 In the United States, honor and pride are often manifested in references to 'American exceptionalism' or the country's 'special providence' (see, for example, Mead, 2001). Bacevich (2008) makes the argument for a true realism in American foreign policy, shorn of a providential determination to remake the world in our own idealized image. Tsygankov (2012) argues that honor has been a major factor in Russian foreign policy over the past two centuries.

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