

# Russia and the Russian Federation

**R**ussia, the world's largest country, has a two-hundred-year history of diplomatic relations with the United States.

Started in 1807–1809, these relations were interrupted by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and reestablished in 1933, when Russia had become the lead nation in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Today's Russian Federation began its diplomatic relations with the United States in 1991, after the disintegration of the USSR.

The Russia of today is much more likely than the Russia of Soviet days to have the United States as one of its major partners in international affairs. No longer as pro-American as it was from 1991 to 1996, Russian foreign policy today is based upon *realpolitik* and attempts to chart the course that is best for Russia in its dealings with the United States. At the same time, there is evidence that Russia still perceives the United States as a strategic partner in facing new security threats (such as global terrorism) and as an important source of economic investments.



relations with Native Americans and other Europeans in North America, but the lack of a real trade infrastructure, the great distance from Russian administrative centers, and the Russian government's failure to invest enough in the colonies caused the Russian outposts in North America to experience difficulties. One of the biggest problems was a lack of bread (a staple food for Russians at this time). At the same

time, the Russian-American Company was experiencing a constant struggle for survival, in large part because of unequal conditions of competition with its much more powerful competitor, the British Hudson's Bay Company. In 1812 Russia founded Fort Ross in California, in part to supply grain to the northern Russian territories. That arrangement did not work out, so the Russian-American Company signed a trade agreement to purchase the grain from the Hudson's Bay Company. Finally, Fort Ross was sold to Great Britain in 1839.

Meanwhile, the United States was developing its northern territories rapidly and coming into competition with the Russian-American Company more and more. In the middle of nineteenth century it became obvious to the Russian government that its colonies in North America were not profitable, and in 1867 Russia sold its northern territories (now Alaska) to the United States—the most famous trade deal between the United States and Russia prior to the twentieth century.

## History of Relations with the United States

In 1698 the first formally documented meeting of prominent Russian and North American historical personalities (the emperor Peter the Great of Russia and William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania) took place in London. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries numerous trade and scientific and cultural contacts were established. Russians always had an interest in the North American continent, and the Russian government provided limited support for explorations and expeditions to the continent. In 1728 a Russian expedition headed by Vitus Bering reached the Aleutian Islands. Russians discovered a number of islands around Haiti in 1741. They established their first permanent settlement in North America in 1784, on Kodiak Island. In 1799 the city of New Arkhangelsk (now Sitka, Alaska) was founded and became the administrative center for Russia's North American colonies.

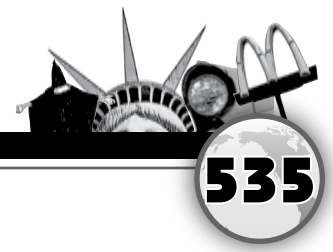
### Russia's North American Colonies

That same year saw the establishment of the Russian-American Company. The company's main purpose was to establish trade

### Early Diplomatic Relations

It is well-known that even before establishing official diplomatic relations with the United States, Russians had great sympathy toward Americans. Catherine the Great (1729–1796), the famous Russian empress, was known for her policy of neutrality during the American Revolution. That policy helped to render the British blockade of the American colonies ineffective and objectively worked for the success of the American Revolution.

On 24 October 1809 John Quincy Adams, the first official diplomatic representative of the United States, arrived in Russia and initiated the two nations' diplomatic relations. For the rest of the century there were warm relations, mostly based on trade and ally cooperation against Great Britain. These relations were



interrupted in 1917, when the U.S. government refused to recognize the newly established Bolshevik government. However, formal relations were reestablished in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. The United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II, when they both combated Nazi Germany.

**The Cold War Years**

However, once the war was over, their cooperation gave way to the hostilities of the Cold War. The confrontation was a global bipolar competition between the capitalist system, championed by the United States, and the Communist system, championed by the Soviet Union. Hostilities were at their peak during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, when the Soviet Union placed missiles in Cuba (a Soviet ally) in response to American missiles in Turkey. The United States placed a naval blockade around Cuba, and the world hovered on the brink of a possible nuclear conflict. (The tensions dissipated when the Soviet Union removed its missiles from Cuba.)

During the Cold War, there were very few informal interactions between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the two countries did have some informal interactions through cultural connections, the educational sphere, and through sports (although the United States boycotted the 1980 Olympic Games held in Moscow and the Soviet Union boycotted certain sport activities hosted either by the United States or by its major allies).

One notable extended informal collaboration started in 1959: the famous bilateral dialogue process known as the Dartmouth Conference. Called the Dartmouth Conference because the first meeting was at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, the process involved private citizens from the United States and the Soviet Union coming together to talk about U.S.-Soviet relations. Those discussions continued for twenty-nine years.

**Relations after the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the disintegration of the bipolar system and gave both the United States and the former Soviet republics, including Russia, the opportunity to construct new relationships based on cooperation and peace maintenance. The changing structure of world politics was a serious challenge not only for Russia, but for the United States as well. Both countries had to redefine themselves, though Russia's position was perhaps more ambiguous as it was entering a period of major transformations of its political, economic, and social systems.

At the same time, the Russian Federation was in the process of determining what was fundamental to the realization of its main national interests. It sought to avoid the reemergence of the confrontation strategy that had been its main response to the United States and the Western Hemisphere during the Soviet era. Democratic Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, declared in 1991 that Russia regarded the United States not only as a partner

**STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT OF RUSSIA**

<b>Capital</b>	Moscow	<b>Languages</b>	Russian, many minority languages
<b>Government type</b>	federation	<b>Religions</b>	Russian Orthodox 15–20%, Muslim 10–15%, other Christian 2% (2006 est.); note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has large populations of non-practicing believers and non-believers, a legacy of over seven decades of Soviet rule
<b>Area</b>	17,075,200 sq km; approximately 1.8 times the size of the U.S.	<b>GDP—purchasing power parity (PPP)</b>	\$1.589 trillion (2005 est.)
<b>Population</b>	142,893,540 (July 2006 est.)	<b>GDP—per capita (PPP)</b>	\$11,100 (2005 est.)
<b>Population below poverty line</b>	17.8% (2004 est.)	<b>Military expenditures—% of GDP</b>	NA
<b>Infant mortality rate</b>	male: 17.43 deaths/1,000 live births; female: 12.7 deaths/1,000 live births (2006 est.)	<b>Oil consumption</b>	2.8 million bbl/day (2005 est.)
<b>Life expectancy at birth</b>	male: 60.45 years; female: 74.1 years (2006 est.)	<b>Roadways</b>	537,289 km
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	7.6% plus considerable underemployment (2005 est.)		
<b>Literacy</b>	male: 99.7%; female: 99.5% (2003 est.)		
<b>Internet users; % of population</b>	23.7 million (2005); 17%		



## PAVEL SVIN'IN (1787–1839)

Pavel Svin'in served as the secretary to the Russian Consul General in Philadelphia (1811–1813). In addition to his diplomatic duties, Svin'in insisted on exploring as much of the American east coast as possible. He recorded what he saw most accurately through his artwork, but he was also a writer. His watercolors and pen sketches were unique because they were the first to portray the everyday scenes of American life.

Svin'in likened the United States to Russia in that they were both large nations that had recently gone through periods of rapid development, and at the time, he saw them both as nations of asylum for the persecuted around the world. He portrayed the United States as he saw it. To him, the United States was a society that was centered on money, perhaps too much so. Nevertheless, he hoped to see a growth in business between the United States and Russia. He celebrated the lack of disparity between social classes in America. While there might not have been an intellectual elite class, he saw that all citizens had access to a general education so that, compared to Russia, Americans

on average were better educated than the average Russian. Svin'in's own passion for the arts also gave him a great appreciation for American painters and artists, which his writings reflect.

When he returned to Russia, he founded the journal *Annals of the Fatherland* in 1818 and served as the editor for twelve years publishing many short travel essays. But Svin'in's reputation as a writer and publisher declined due to repeated factual inaccuracies in his works. And so it was that his paintings and drawings eventually came to overshadow his travel essays. This process began in 1815 with the publication of *A Picturesque Voyage through North America*. This publication was the first of its kind, the first real, and illustrated, travel account of the United States by a Russian.

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but also as an important ally. For its part, Russia was expecting in return a privileged partnership with the United States. Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's minister of foreign affairs at this time, believed that a strategic partnership of this sort between Russia and the United States would encourage Russia along its democratic path. The United States was perceived as a source of economic investment that would help bring about favorable social and economic changes that would transform Russia into a highly developed democratic country. For those reasons, Russia in the early 1990s was extremely pro-American, almost always accepting fully the actions of the U.S. government and even copying them.

However, from 1996 onward, as Russia's economic and social problems grew and in the absence of sufficient help from the United States, Russians became disillusioned and disappointed with the

United States. Policy makers began to suspect that a weak and poor Russia was what the United States really desired. Such thoughts made them especially anxious about NATO's expansion. Russians came to the conclusion that the United States had no intention of treating Russia as an equal partner in international affairs, preferring to rule the world itself, without input from Russia or any other nation.

In 1996 Russia also began a military campaign in the rebel province of Chechnya. The United States constantly criticized Russia for human rights violations in that campaign, and those criticisms, combined with its increasingly negative assessment of the United States, led Russia to turn to its former allies, particularly in Eastern Europe and Asia. The policies of this period were formulated by Yevgeny Primakov, who replaced Andrei Kozyrev

## QUOTES FROM RUSSIAN GYMNAST SVETLANA BOGUINSKAIA

*Russian Gymnast Svetlana Boguinskaia recounts her experience competing in the United States.*

I remember before all the major competitions against the Americans, the coaches would put us in a room and we would have a meeting. They said "you must win for the government. This is for your country. You have to be perfect. We expect you to win." They would have the Soviet flags and the Soviet national anthem. They told us we had no choice but win, and we thought we didn't.

Before perestroika, they always told us on television that America

was bad, that people have no life there. They said it was all drugs and bad things. But when I came here for the first time, people treated us so nice. I thought, "The Russian people are lying to us." I didn't know what to think anymore.

Source: Lopez, J. P. (1996, January 28). Reason to smile: Gymnast Boguinskaia sheds hard-bitten image, returns to former coach. *Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved October 2, 2006, from [http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl?id=1996\\_1321267](http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl?id=1996_1321267)

as minister of foreign affairs. During these years Russia also abandoned its unrealistic hopes for a privileged partnership with the United States, observing that there was not enough support from the U.S. side for such a relationship. A number of factors led to that conclusion:

1. Russians felt that the United States did not provide sufficient economic support for democratic tendencies in Russia.
2. The expansion of NATO was touted as increasing European security, but Russian involvement was rebuffed. NATO's air strikes in Serbia in 1999 elicited negative reactions nationwide in Russia.
3. The United States maintained visa barriers. This provoked corresponding isolationist moods among Russians.
4. The perceptions and expectations of the Russian and U.S. elites toward each other did not correspond.
5. A Cold War mentality appeared to still exist in public consciousness. The United States did not make an adequate effort to respond to Russia's overtures and dispel that mentality.

Nevertheless, Russian-U.S. relations in the economic and security spheres continued to grow rather actively, mostly at the intergovernmental federal level through traditional diplomatic channels and through new forms of diplomacy, like the Gore-

Chernomyrdin Commission, which was created in 1993 to facilitate cooperation in the fields of space, energy, and technology and which later came to address cooperation in other fields as well. Relations in the social and humanitarian fields grew even more strongly, perhaps because they lent themselves more readily to U.S.-Russian cooperation at every level of government—federal, state, and municipal—and among varied types of institutions as well: nongovernmental organizations, foundations, community organizations, businesses, and even individuals.

### Relations after September 11

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, moved Russia toward rethinking its relationships with the United States. President Putin's administration proposed to the United States mutual cooperation in the area of intelligence data exchange and offered a limited opening of Russian air space to U.S. aviation, when necessary, as well as support for U.S. military actions in Central Asia, including Afghanistan. He also offered to act as a mediator between the United States and some of the Central Asian states. In return, the United States welcomed Russia as a member of its antiterrorist coalition and granted it a special status in recognition of its important role in Asian politics and the respect accorded it by most Muslim and Central Asian states. September 11 made both countries recognize their common enemy—terrorism—and



A Russian fleet in the harbor of Riga, Latvia. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russian influence waned in nations like Latvia, opening up the opportunity for closer relations with the U.S. Source: istock/Dainis Derics.



## PAUL ROBESON (1898–1976)

Born on 8 April 1898 in Princeton, New Jersey, Paul Robeson was a man of a great many talents—actor, singer, scholar, athlete, and political activist. Performing around the world as he championed human rights issues, Robeson became a beloved figure in many countries.

He was awarded a four-year scholarship to Rutgers University, only the third African-American to attend the school. At Rutgers, he was chosen for two All-American football teams, received twelve letters in four sports, and was valedictorian of his class.

Robeson went on to graduate from Columbia Law School and worked for a short time in a law firm, but he left after a white secretary refused to take dictation from him. By 1924, he was making his living as an actor and singer. He starred on Broadway in a long-running production of *Othello*, among other leading roles. His films included *The Emperor Jones* (1933), *Showboat* (1935), and *Song of Freedom* (1936).

Speaking fifteen languages (and singing in some twenty-five), Robeson also became a much-loved artist around the world, appearing on the London stage and in British films, and performing in the Soviet Union and throughout Scandinavia. Robeson became known for his rich bass-baritone interpretation of African-American spirituals—as well as his repertoire of songs from labor and social movements sung in the native languages of the countries he visited.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Robeson gave benefit concerts for social justice causes and spoke out against racism in the United States and fascism in Europe. Robeson also embraced African language and culture, seeing Africa as the spiritual homeland of black people in

America. He and his wife, activist Eslanda Robeson, were vocal opponents of colonialism. In their trips to the Soviet Union, the Robesons were impressed by what they saw as Joseph Stalin's encouragement of national minorities—at a time when they saw no such support in other parts of the world.

In the virulent anti-Communist years following World War II, the Robesons' positive statements about the Soviet Union caused them to be labeled as Communists. In 1950, when Paul Robeson refused on principle to sign a statement that he was not a Communist, his passport was confiscated. (U.S. State Department documents revealed that the travel ban was intended to curb Robeson's vocal criticism of American racism in speeches he gave outside the United States.)

It took eight years for the State Department to reinstate Robeson's passport, and he resumed concert tours outside the United States. But his health and his career had suffered in the intervening years; he retired in the 1960s and stayed outside of the spotlight until his death on 23 January 1976, at the age of seventy-seven.

After his death he was honored by the United Nations in 1977 for his opposition to apartheid in South Africa, and in 2004 the U.S. Postal Service issued a Paul Robeson stamp—joining three other nations who had already given Robeson this honor.

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motivated both political elites to overcome their existing difficulties. On 11 November 2001 Putin and President George W. Bush met to confirm their resolution to overcome traces of the Cold War. During this meeting Putin also toned down Russia's criticisms of NATO extension, while Bush acknowledged Russia's military actions in Chechnya as a fight against terrorism.

Bush's withdrawal in December 2001 from the Treaty on Antiballistic Missile Systems, which the United States and the Soviet Union had signed in 1972, provoked a crisis in Russian-U.S. relations. That treaty had been aimed at reducing the chances of using nuclear weapons when maintaining national security. Bush also announced his intention to continue construction of an antiballistic missile defense system—a move that would not have been possible under the treaty—saying that in the face of the world's new global threats, the United States considered the treaty to be inadequate. Russia's diplomatic position was that even if the treaty was to be abandoned, the two nations should work to be sure that transformations in the global security system did not give rise to new security threats. The two countries worked through the crisis

and resolved it by signing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty on 24 May 2002.

The U.S. military action in Iraq in 2003, which the United States embarked upon without U.N. backing, greatly concerned Russia, which fears that reliance on force to handle international tensions and disagreements will provoke new cycles of tension and violence. The military action greatly increased negative perceptions of the United States in Russia, confirming Russians in their opinion, formed after the U.S. air strikes in Serbia in 1999, that the United States does not take the Russian point of view into consideration when undertaking actions in the international arena.

## Perspectives on the United States

Russians' general perspectives on the United States vary depending on historic circumstances, age, social and economic situation, and so on. Many Russians know that Russia was among the first

countries to recognize the United States as an independent sovereign state, and in Russia the U.S. Constitution is recognized as one of the most important documents in the history of democracy. In both World War I and World War II, the United States was an ally of Russia. However, between the world wars and during the Cold War era, the United States was perceived as a potential enemy. During the era of perestroika (Russian: “reconstruction,” 1985–1991) Russian attitudes toward the United States changed rapidly from hostility to admiration. The huge lines of Russians waiting to enter Moscow’s first McDonald’s restaurant became just one of the symbols of the perestroika epoch.

Today’s Russian political elite aspires to take its place among the Western countries, including the United States, and the general population wishes to enjoy Western living standards. People’s perspectives on the further development of a Russian–U.S. relationship are wrapped up with their feelings about the construction of a new global security system. Most Russians perceive the United States as one of Russia’s main partners in maintaining global security. Russians, however, prefer a multipolar model of the modern world to the unipolar model embraced by the U.S. political elite in the early twenty-first century.

The September 11 events inspired a new wave of pro-U.S. attitudes within Russia. However, sympathy for the American people as victims of this terror soon became combined with disapproval of the aggressive actions of the U.S. government—both actions taken two years before September 11 (in Serbia) and actions taken two years after September 11 (in Iraq). Research conducted in Rus-



U.S. postage stamp commemorating U.S. singer, actor, athlete, and civil rights activist Paul Robeson, who because of his communist ties, was more popular in Europe than in his homeland.

## U.S.-RUSSIAN JOINT STATEMENT

*The following extract is from a U.S.-Russian joint statement on Bush-Putin talks at Camp David, 27 September 2003.*

The Presidents agreed on next steps in a number of areas to strengthen the existing U.S.-Russian partnership. They issued specific instructions to their respective governments identifying tasks to be undertaken by the appropriate agencies and specifying time lines for doing so, and they underscored their shared intention to monitor fulfillment of these tasks. In particular, they identified key areas where progress might be made in the near term, including, among other issues:

- ❑ implementing effectively the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (Treaty of Moscow), and continuing efforts to increase transparency and build confidence on strategic issues;
- ❑ building cooperation between the American and Russian military establishments, as critical to joint efforts in areas such as counter-terrorism, missile defense, and peacekeeping;

- ❑ strengthening commercial and economic relations through further cooperation in enhancing global energy security, eliminating barriers to trade and investment, promoting high-technology cooperation, and protecting intellectual property rights;
- ❑ strengthening consultation and cooperation in dealing with regional problems; and
- ❑ deepening cooperation in the battle against HIV/AIDS, which will benefit the United States and Russia, and contribute to the global effort against this modern plague.

*Source: Embassy of the United States (2003, June 1). Joint statement by president George W. Bush and president Vladimir V. Putin on the new strategic relationship. Retrieved October 2, 2006, from [http://www.usembassy.ru/bilateral/joint\\_statement.php?record\\_id=30](http://www.usembassy.ru/bilateral/joint_statement.php?record_id=30)*



## RUSSIA'S OPINION OF THE UNITED STATES MIXED IN 2006

Polls conducted in April 2006 tell us that Russians have a positive view of the American economic system (73% favorable) and system of government (54% favorable). But, the polls also show that many Russians (61% unfavorable) believe that the U.S. has a mainly negative influence in the world, view the U.S. use of military power and the threat of force unfavorably (74%), and see the effect of U.S. foreign policy over the past few years as negative for Russia and its interests (56%). Most Russians also have an unfavorable view of President Bush (59%).

Source: Polls conducted by the Levada Center in Russia and by WorldPublicOpinion.org in the United States.

sia in 2001–2004 by a group of organizations working under the umbrella of the New Dartmouth Conference identified four positions that Russians, after engaging in public discussion, are more or less likely to take regarding what kind of relationship Russia should have with the United States. Thirty-three percent of those surveyed favored an equal partnership with the United States in various fields. These respondents had friendly feelings toward the United States. Twenty-seven percent had unfriendly feelings toward the United States and expressed themselves in Cold War rhetoric, with negative comments about U.S. dominance and actions in the world. Sixteen percent identified the United States as a model that they would like their own nation to follow. Twenty-four percent were isolationists, rejecting any special U.S. presence or influence in the Russian economy, its mass culture, or its politics.

The research also brought out that for Russians, the United States is a major symbol of the Western Hemisphere and of capitalist economics, as well as a historical model of democracy. That is why some perceptions of the United States are similar to the perceptions Russians have of Western nations as a whole. However, in the early years of the twenty-first century there is also a clear tendency to appraise the United States more negatively than Western Europe. Nevertheless, most Russians favor some form of partnership with the United States, although public opinion demonstrates that Russians do not necessarily feel that the partnership should give the United States the right to dictate what is wrong and what is right in the Russian search for its model of democracy. Many Russians doubt that U.S.-style democracy is a universal key that can unlock any totalitarian or authoritarian system and convert it to a democracy.

It is also important to point out that the traditional value

systems of the United States and Russia differ substantially. For example, respect for human rights, equality, respect for private property, and the rule of law either enjoy no consciously attributed importance in the Russian reality or else possess features so specific that they become incompatible with the practices defined by these values in the United States.

Russians admire the successes Americans have achieved in just a few centuries, starting from scratch and creating the world's most powerful economic and political system. (However, they are also aware of the United States' more questionable achievements, such as the first use of nuclear weapons in 1945.) Russians are impressed by the global significance of the U.S. computer technologies industry, by the U.S. space exploration program (many elements of which are now carried out in close cooperation with Russia), and by the United States' powerful financial stability. Russians perceive U.S. political scandals, such as Watergate and the revelations of President Bill Clinton's infidelities, negatively, and Russian public opinion is that a nation that recognizes itself as an example for others should not allow such governmental scandals to happen. Many Russians are concerned with the influence that dubious aspects of U.S. mass culture have had on Russian life after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For many Russians, perceptions of the United States are primarily based either on television news reports, which show the U.S. military shooting people in different parts of the world, or on overly violent Hollywood movies. Therefore Russians visiting the United States for the first time are often pleasantly surprised to realize that U.S. society is very tolerant, and that it has many features of ethical and political correctness that Russians should develop within their own society.

Russians feel a special closeness to Americans because of the many features the nations share, such as extended territories, importance on the world stage and in history, a multicultural and multiethnic population, love of freedom and independence, and, finally, a desire to make the world a safer place.

*Denis V. Makarov and Olga Krasina*

See also Baltic Nations; Central Asia; Georgia; Belarus

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