

U.S. Is Russia's Best Friend

By [Grigory Yavlinsky](#)

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U.S. President Barack Obama took his second oath of office on Jan. 20. The following Sunday, also in Washington, Metropolitan Tikhon was enthroned as the primate of the Orthodox Church in America.

A second major phenomenon largely overlooked by the media is that 1 million Orthodox Americans affirm the importance of upholding their faith in that multicultural "melting pot" — even though most speak English and were not raised according to traditional Russian customs. Although many American Orthodox believers are not Russians or Europeans, and some are not even direct descendents of Russian and European immigrants, they often had an even stronger personal connection to the Russian emigres and anti-Bolsheviks of the 18th and 19th centuries and responded more passionately when the Russian Orthodox Church was driven partly underground.

Against the backdrop of these two factors, we should take another look at the deeper significance of U.S. relations with Europe and Russia — and not at the shifting winds of political trends that often determine the outlook of provincial-minded Russian officials.

First, we should be aware that the U.S. does have many shortcomings. Even though many U.S. citizens have European roots and might naturally be expected to feel close ties to their forebears across the Atlantic, Americans most decidedly do not consider themselves Europeans. They refuse to let go of their right to carry arms — even assault weapons. They have a peculiar and very formal justice system. Many states have the death penalty.

Traditionally, Americans (like Russians to some extent) do not like to compromise. They are not so much imperialists as they are deeply provincial: They hold an overly high opinion of their own rules and principles. At times, they seem to think that the whole world is an extension of the U.S., so they are genuinely surprised when somebody does not want to live according to their standards. This often leads to serious and dangerous misunderstandings. At the same time, they are wealthy and truly effective in many spheres of activity. That is why it is difficult to befriend the U.S. while maintaining independence and the right to say "no."

But, then, who said it should be easy? Is it easy to get along with Russia — heir to the Soviet empire and often unhappy not only with itself but with its neighbors as well?

In fact, Russia and the U.S. are linked by special historical, cultural and political ties and are united by many common interests. Emigres from old Russia were probably among the top five largest groups that helped settle and are still influencing the United States today.

The Russian Empire had an excellent relationship with the U.S. Washington never took a confrontational stance toward the Russian Empire and even acted as a counterbalance to several European states. Russia supported America's freedom-loving spirit, which it combined with conservatism and its ability to incorporate and improve upon fresh and dynamic ideas. It is impossible to imagine the U.S. without its Russian immigrants. In the 18th and 19th centuries they were present at Fort Ross and Alaska. There was German the Monk and St. Innocent of Alaska (later Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia). And after 1917, the U.S. was enriched by Russians seeking a safe haven from persecution. Sergei Rachmaninoff composed his outstanding music there, Igor Sikorsky created the helicopter, Vladimir Zworykin invented the television, and Wassily Leontief formulated his unique economic theory. More recently, Russian emigres such as ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov and Google co-founder Sergey Brin have made major contributions in their respective fields.

The U.S. twice helped Russia in wartime. As a result of the October Revolution, Russia withdrew from its alliance with the U.S. and suffered severe consequences. Although U.S. involvement in World War II was by itself not enough to topple Nazi Germany, without that help, the Soviet Union would have paid a far higher price for victory — a fact that should be firmly acknowledged. The U.S. gave shelter to many persecuted people from Russia, but also committed an unforgivably horrible act by repatriating many Russians, dooming them to suffer or die in Stalin's labor camps. Over the past 20 years, the Russian economy has been largely built with the aid of U.S. technology and know-how, a lack of access to which would have had disastrous consequences for this country.

Russia must halt its shameful anti-Americanism and stop earning Herostratus-like fame (as well as money, most likely held in dollars) through trivial and dangerous provocations and conspiracy theories. If the U.S. can be faulted for anything, it is only that Washington sometimes pays too little attention to Russia. But then, is the U.S. responsible for solving

Russia's problems?

Of all the powers in today's world, the U.S. best answers Russia's need for a strong ally capable of making and fulfilling treaty obligations, more than China, India, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. The mutual understanding built up between Russia and the U.S. is a far more significant factor in world politics than the surrogate peripheral structures that Moscow is member to now. Those might serve well enough for propaganda purposes, but the Moscow leadership understands perfectly well how limited in scope and duration such alliances can be.

Russia should firmly defend its interests — but only when they actually exist. It should not artificially invent them at every step in order to "stick it to Washington" and "teach those Yankees a lesson," only punishing itself in the end. Russia should not swagger and goad others. Such behavior does not befit the leaders of a major power, at least not if they want their children to see Russia's heyday in their lifetime.

Hopefully, the U.S., with all its diversity, will not forget its roots and will ensure a significant place in this century's history by winning not only recognition of its might, but genuine esteem for its character.

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