

Why Should Russia and the United States be Enemies When They Have a 240-Year History of International Friendship and Support?

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April 25 marked the 77th anniversary of the “Oath of the Elbe,” when U.S. and Russian soldiers embraced in a historic meeting on the Elbe River in Torgau, Germany, to mark the final end of the Third Reich and pledge mutual understanding, empathy and peaceful relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union

Despite today’s hysterical hostility towards Russia—fomented by U.S. corporate interests, implemented by opportunistic politicians, and enflamed by a complicit mass media—the Russian and American people have a long tradition of friendship and mutual support.

A Suppressed History

Long forgotten is a history of U.S.-Russian cooperation that goes back to the era of Catherine the Great who supported the American revolution.

[Believing that the American colonists were right](#), Catherine [refused a request by King George for 20,000 Russian troops to help crush the revolution](#). King George subsequently tried to [bribe Catherine by offering an island of Menorca in the Mediterranean Sea in exchange for convincing France to exit the war and thus forcing the American rebels to fight alone. Again, however, the offer was turned down](#).

During the Crimean War in the 1850s, when Russia was invaded by Britain, France and Turkey, President Franklin Pierce [sent arms and munitions, as well as engineers and doctors, to assist the Russians](#).

Russia returned the favor during the American Civil War (1861-1865), when Abraham Lincoln called for Russian help because Great Britain and France began supporting the Southern Confederacy in an attempt to destabilize and weaken the United States.

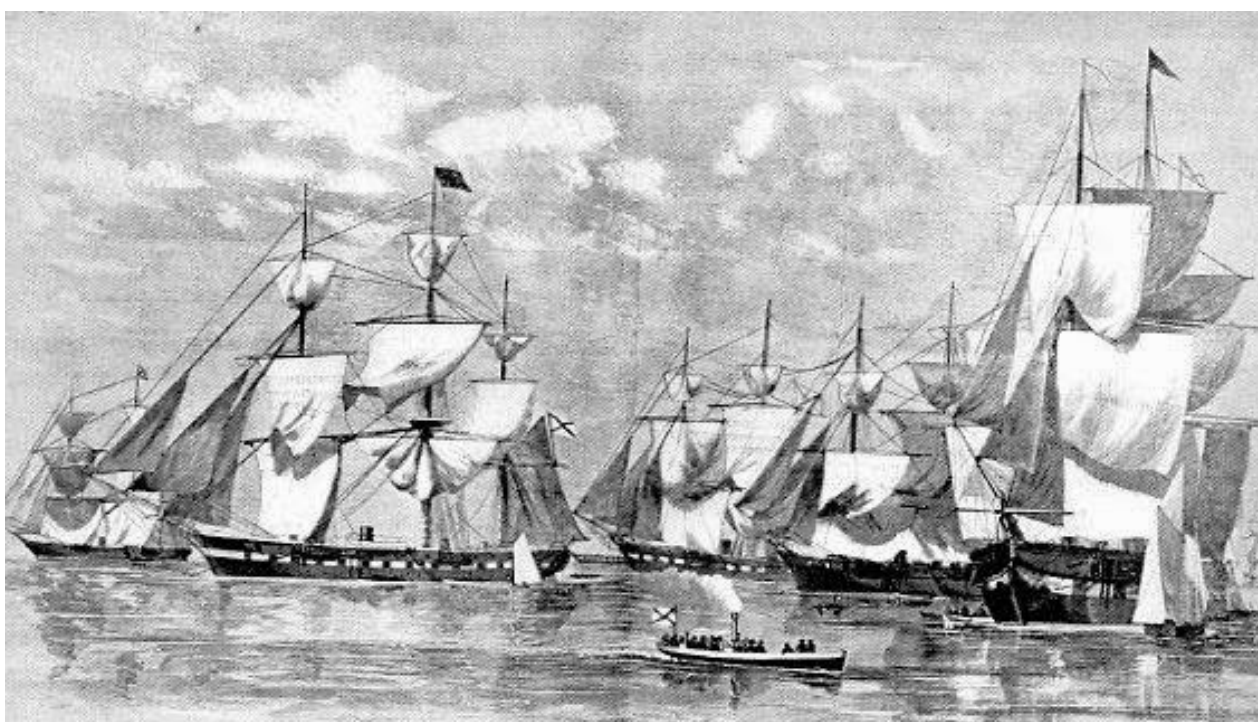


EXTREMES MEET.

Ab. Imperial son of NICHOLAS the Great, | You with your Poles, with Southern rebels I, | *Alex.* Vengeance is mine, old man; see where it falls, | You gibbets, where the struggling patriot hangs,
We air in the same fix, I calculate, | Who spurn my rule and my revenge defy. | Behold yon hearths laid waste, and ruined walls, | Whilst my brave myrmidons enjoy his pangs.

Cartoon depicting Abraham Lincoln and Russian Czar Alexander II shaking hands as fighting rages all around them. [Source: usrussiarelations.org]

The Russians sent the Imperial Navy's flagship, *Alexander Nevsky*, along with four other vessels into New York harbor four days after the Union defeat at the Battle of Chickamauga as a warning for the British and French to back off—which they did.^[1]



Russian Imperial Navy's flagship, Alexander Nevsky, sailing into New York harbor as depicted in Harper's Weekly. [Source: boweryboyshistory.com]

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles wrote in his diary afterwards: "God Bless the Russians," while future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a Union army lieutenant, wrote a song about "the nation who was our friend when the world was our foe."^[2]

In *Lincoln and the Russians* (1952), historian Albert A. Woldman wrote:

"New York City, gaily bedecked with American and Russian flags, bubbled over with sumptuous hospitality for the Muscovite naval officers wearing gold laced chapeaux [who] were cheered as they were being driven up Broadway. The city's merchants and businessmen gave a banquet in their honor at the Astor House and there was a Grand Ball for the officers at the Academy of Music [which] according to the editor of Harper's Weekly was undoubtedly the greatest ball ever given in this country, with excepting the ball to the Prince of Wales."^[3]



Great Russian Ball at the Academy of Music, November 5, 1863. The tables were decorated with the likenesses of Washington and Peter the Great, of Lincoln and Czar Alexander. *Harper's Weekly* referred to the Russians as "Slavic heroes," and described the Ball as a "very wonderful and indescribable phantasmagoria of humanity." [Source: opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com]

Harper's Weekly specified that the feting of the Russian sailors had "a political significance....Every [U.S.] citizen felt bound to do what in him lay to testify to the Russians our sense of gratitude for the friendly manner in which Russia has stood by us in our present

struggle, while the Western powers have done not a little to work our ruin.”^[4]

How quickly we forget!

Lincoln was generally a visionary who understood the benefits of close diplomatic relations with the Russians. The great man of letters, Leo Tolstoy, praised Lincoln as “a man of whom a nation has the right to be proud; a Christ in miniature, a saint of humanity whose name will live thousands of years in the legends of future generations.”^[5]

Tolstoy would have had similar high regard for Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Vice President Henry A. Wallace (1941-1945), who would almost certainly have embraced and implemented the Elbe spirit. But any such possibility was sabotaged when Wallace was ousted from the vice-presidency at the 1944 Democratic Party convention in Chicago in a coup and replaced with Harry S. Truman, who betrayed Roosevelt’s legacy as president by starting the Cold War.

Of course, none of the above ignores the reality that the Russian-U.S. relationship has not always been ‘wine and roses.’

Toward the end of WW I, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson joined with Britain, France and Japan to launch a military invasion of Russia that included 8,500 American soldiers. It was originally intended to block the German war effort, but after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Allied forces stayed on until 1920 in a futile attempt to overthrow Russia’s Bolshevik government.



U.S. soldiers in Siberia in 1918 in an ill-fated invasion designed to overthrow the Bolshhevik revolution.

[Source: military.com]

And after World War II, U.S. government propaganda cynically transformed Russia into a threatening demon to justify the transformation of America into a permanent military economy for the enrichment of the military-industrial complex.

Nevertheless, it would be a good idea if the lost history of U.S.-Russian cooperation were to

be remembered at this dark historical moment, since the fate of the world may depend on it.

Joseph Polowsky and the Elbe River Spirit

A person with his own private reason for remembering this history of Russian cooperation was a Chicago taxi driver named Joseph Polowsky.

Every year on April 25, prior to his death from cancer in 1983, Polowsky would stand on the Michigan Avenue bridge and pass out leaflets calling for a halt to the spread of nuclear weapons and Cold War.

When approached by passersby, he would tell them about the historic meeting between American and Russian soldiers at the end of World War II, along the Elbe River in Central Europe.

Polowsky didn't just know the details of the meeting, which marked a crucial step toward the end of the war, he had taken part in it.

Today, Polowsky's son, Joseph Wolff, is carrying on the tradition and spirit of the Elbe River meeting.

On the seventy seventh anniversary of the linkup, Wolff, called for a renewal of the Elbe River oath at a commemorative Zoom event.

The event was sponsored by the Eurasian Peoples' Assembly and Edward Lozansky, president of the American University in Moscow (now Moscow International University), who has long promoted U.S.-Russian friendship.

Wolff reminded the audience that the meeting between U.S. and Soviet troops on the Elbe River on April 25, 1945, marked the end of the Third Reich.

The troops made a pledge for mutual understanding, empathy and peaceful relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union which, Wolff said, his father worked for for the rest of his life.

Today, with U.S.-Russian relations at a breaking point, Wolff said that the time to renew the Elbe oath is now.

"The threat of World War III is real and the stakes are too high," he said. "With the conflict in Ukraine, the threat from the pandemic and climate change, the world needs the U.S. and Russia to work on the same team."

"All of us are part of one race, the human race. We need to set our grievances aside and have our two great nations work together for the human race to flourish for hundreds of years into the future."

Despite the strenuous efforts by Biden and his surrounding coterie of war hawks and imperialist profiteers to paint Russia as a fearful enemy seeking world conquest, perhaps the spirit of Polowsky and the Elbe River oath might yet prevail if people mobilize in support of it.

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Notes

1. See Albert A. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1952), 135. The Battle of Chickamauga took place in September 1863.
2. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians*, 136, 248. The Russian czar had his own interests for sending the ships, including seeking American support as the Russian army crushed a Polish insurrection.
3. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians*, 137.
4. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians*, 140.
5. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians*, 251.

Featured image: U.S. and Soviet troops embrace on the Elbe River on April 25, 1945, to celebrate their defeat of Naziism. [Source: history.com]

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