

The 1812 Russian-American Alliance: Lessons for the Trump Administration

by Judy Hodgkiss

Feb. 13—The overturning of the policy axioms of the 2009-2017 Obama Administration—a happy result of the recent U.S. Presidential election—has now, once again, created a potential for a dramatic shift in U.S.-Russian relations, and such a breakthrough could effect a profound change for the better in world affairs. The opportunity for a needed paradigm shift is now a very real prospect before us.

The Cold-War ideology of 1945-1989, followed by Obama's demonization of Russia in the recent period, has led many Americans to believe that Russia and America are historical adversaries; but nothing could be further from the truth.

Within recent memory we have the World War II strategic/military alliance between Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin—an alliance which not only ensured the defeat of Nazi Germany, but also posed a critical challenge to the British, French, and Dutch colonial world order.

We can say that the very existence of our Union owes a debt to an earlier U.S.-Russian military alliance: during the U.S. Civil War, the Russian navy of Czar Alexander II harbored in New York and San Francisco, delivering a blunt warning to the French and British allies of the Confederacy that deterred any thoughts of interventionism.

These military/strategic combinations were not based on mere short-term convenience. The U.S.-Rus-

sia friendship has deep roots, based in events that occurred long before either the U.S. or Russia represented any kind of world-class military power.

That historical friendship is of great significance for current events. Today, Russia is assuming a leading role, together with China, Japan, India, and many other nations, in bringing into existence a global “win-win” policy of peace and economic development. Were President Trump to use this opportunity, in the context of

repairing and improving U.S.-Russia relations, to fully embrace that global effort—to join, not only with Russia, but with all of her partners—the world would change for the better in ways that most individuals can not imagine.

The opportunity is before us; but the danger would be to continue into the new paradigm with the “practical thinking” suited to the old paradigm. Therefore, let us look back

to the year 1812, when two great statesmen, U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Quincy Adams, and Russia's Foreign Minister Nikolai Rumiantsev, designed an alliance that was anything but practical. Our new paradigm of today will, in fact, require that those kinds of very impractical, yet very necessary ideas be brought into consideration now.

Students of history think they know what happened in the War of 1812, when the United States under President James Madison defeated an invading British army. And they think they know what happened—in an en-



Count Nikolai Rumiantsev

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John Quincy Adams

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tirely separate universe!—when, in 1812, the Russian Czar Alexander I defeated the invading armies under the command of France’s Napoleon Bonaparte.

But, in 1812, while the Americans were at war with the British, and the Russians were at war with the French, it was also the case that the French and the British were at war with one another. Therefore, even the better informed historical analyst generally assumes there is no reason to even look for evidence of a Russian-American alliance: what nation would be so foolish as to ally with the friend of their mortal enemy, particularly during wartime?

But that is in fact exactly what Russia and the United States did.

During the previous three years, 1809-1811, U.S. Ambassador Adams and Foreign Minister Rumiantsev had developed a close relationship based upon a shared vision of world peace, and of joint economic prosperity. The two of them agreed that the war between France and Britain was, in fact, a war of pretense, merely a cover beneath which the two belligerents attacked and plundered the other nations of the world.

The ultimate goal of the sham “war” was a world divided: a maritime empire for Britain and a continental empire for Napoleon.¹ In his conversations with Adams, Rumiantsev described the British and the French as the sea madmen and the land madmen (*des enrages de mer comme de terre*).

Between 1809 and 1811, in order to avoid the jealous eye of the powerful “British Party” inside the Russian court, Rumiantsev arranged for Adams to have more than a dozen “coincidental” meetings with Alexander I, as the czar took an occasional stroll through the gardens and streets of St. Petersburg. For his part, Adams then communicated the agreed upon policy to Secretary of State James Monroe, who in turn was tasked with convincing President Madison of the importance of the economic and strategic alliance with Russia.

It was, in fact, precisely because the United States and Russia were successful in helping each other, economically and strategically, during the extremities of 1811-1812, that the two nations escaped the otherwise



St. Petersburg residence of Count Rumiantsev. Built by his father, the bas relief portico with Apollo and nine muses of arts and sciences was installed by the count. The residence and its collections were bequeathed as a gift to the Russian people upon the count's death.

certain doom of perpetual warfare and economic devastation planned by the sea mad-men and land mad-men.

Likewise, the London/Wall Street imperial mad-men of today can be destroyed by just such a principled Russian-American strategy.

A Story Waiting To Be Told

John Quincy Adams left the evidence for all this in his many letters, dispatches, and diary entries—all of which material was painstakingly gathered together and published in many volumes by his son, Charles Francis. Why then are we today left in such ignorance on the subject? There are two answers to this question.

The major problem is that the first historical study of this period, proclaimed today generally to be the definitive interpretation of Adams’ material, was written by one of the most slavish admirers of the British Empire ever born in America—John Quincy Adams’ own grandson, Henry Adams, the third son of Charles Francis.

Henry Adams’ mission, in his *History of the United States During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* was to represent his grandfather as a weak man, who was pushed around in Russia by the

1. But Napoleon, of course, just like Adolf Hitler later, was never to be an equal partner of the British Empire, but merely a useful tool, disposable in the end.



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The magnificent Kunstkamera of St. Petersburg, on the Neva waterfront, was built by Peter the Great to house Leibniz's Academy of Science.

evil calculator and French agent, Count Rumiantsev. In order to obscure both the nature of the British Empire's methods and the nature of the brilliant strategy developed by John Quincy Adams and Rumiantsev to fight it, Henry Adams had to lie outrageously.

The second problem is that even the small handful of historians who pay no attention to the lies of Henry Adams, and who have, in good faith, closely studied the subject, still are unable to grasp the significance of the intense strategic dialogue between Adams and Rumiantsev. One of the best of these historians, Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, wrote *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations 1775-1815*, in the 1960s, under difficult circumstances at the height of the Cold War. Bolkhovitinov presents a sympathetic view of the 1812 Russian-American alliance in a (commendable) effort to counter what he calls, "an attempt in the West to utilize the history of Russian-American relations to foster the idea that, something like a 'natural' and 'age-long' hostility between Russia and the U.S. existed." Bolkhovitinov is particularly concerned about the rhetoric of John Foster Dulles and the influence of Cold-War books such as *America Faces Russia: Russian-American Relations from Early Times to Our Day*, by Stanford's Thomas A. Bailey, 1950, and the 1953 *Russian Influence on Early America*, by Columbia University's Clarence Manning. But Bolkhovitinov is always on the defensive and fails to grasp the true quality of the encounters between Adams and Rumiantsev.

Two other books that are worth reading are: *America, Russia, Hemp, and Napoleon: American Trade*

with Russia and the Baltic, 1783-1812, Alfred Crosby, Jr. (1965), and *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867*, Norman E. Saul (1991). Saul gives little space to the Adams-Rumiantsev relationship, but is a great source for the later, 1860-65 Civil War, Russian-American military alliance.

The Coincidence of Opposites

Honest histories of the subject report that the American and the Russian, from their first contact, felt an immediate affinity for one another. It may seem a strange idea

that an autocratic imperial society, where a small number of landowners, an inherited nobility, reigned over a population made up largely of serfs, would warmly welcome the coming into existence of an upstart republic bent on eliminating all relics of feudal political and economic systems. It came as a surprise to the Americans visiting Russia that there existed a boundless curiosity about the American experiment, and a genuine excitement about encountering beings who were so eager to sail a mighty ocean, risk attacks from belligerents, pay large sums extorted from them by those controlling certain sea channels (i.e., the Danes), all in order to find a trading partner located at the northernmost reaches of the globe.

In 1803, before the establishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Russia, Joseph Allen Smith from South Carolina entered Russia as a tourist and found that with just the mere mention that he had, in London, made the acquaintance of Rufus King, then the U.S. ambassador to Britain, and the Russian ambassador, Count Vorontsov, he was then swept up to the highest levels of the Court, including meeting Czar Alexander himself. Rufus King, a protégé of Alexander Hamilton, had been engaged in a dialogue with Vorontsov about a potential commercial treaty between Russia and the United States. Smith wrote to King after his trip,

"The marks of friendship and attention which I received in that city [St. Petersburg] were far beyond what I expected or deserved. I should say no more on this subject if I did not think that they were in many instances directed rather to the country to which I belong

than to myself. At the fetes of the Court I was put on a footing with the Foreign Ministers, and often, as an American traveler, I found myself more favoured than if I had had a diplomatic character... The Emperor invited me to dine with him *en famille*, placed me next to him, and conversed with me some time respecting America and France.”

John Quincy Adams arrived as America’s official ambassador to Russia in 1809. Adams had been in St. Petersburg before, when he served as personal secretary to Francis Dana, appointed by the Continental Congress to the court of Catherine the Great as Minister Plenipotentiary during the American Revolution. Dana and the fifteen year-old Adams had been part of the Revolution’s diplomatic representation in Paris, but as soon as Catherine announced that she would use her navy to protect neutral (American) shipping on the high seas, and was forming a League of Armed Neutrality, the Continental Congress ordered Dana and Adams to depart for St. Petersburg.

Dana was recalled as soon as the treaty was signed by Britain ending the Revolutionary War, and more than twenty years would pass before the U.S. and Russia would establish formal relations. Dana reported that he had been assured by Russian Vice Chancellor Ivan Osterman, just before his departure, that full recognition of the United States was imminent. Unfortunately, there were those in the United States who knew nothing of Russia, and questioned Catherine’s motives. They asked: beyond just using the colony’s rebellion as leverage against Britain for geopolitical purposes, what interest could Catherine have in a new nation founded on principles diametrically opposed to her political and economic system?

But there were others who began to study Russia’s history, and found that there were a number of intriguing contradictions. Yes, Russia did maintain its feudal system long after other nations of Europe had moved beyond such backward practices; but Russian czars, starting with Peter the Great, struggled to modernize, against both the enormous power and opposition of the landed aristocracy that ruled over vast stretches of territory, and also the entrenched, anti-technology backwardness of the peasant. These czars pushed forward a variety of enlightened policies regarding the advancement of scientific knowledge and the acquisition of new technologies, and many among the nobility in St. Petersburg and Moscow were supportive. Within the Russian intelligentsia, there were those who argued that

their problem of serfdom was comparable to America’s problem of slavery.²

In the early 1700s, Peter the Great had made efforts to reform education, liberalize the legal system, and introduce technology into agriculture. His most noted achievement was the construction of the splendid city of St. Petersburg,³ with the Kunstkamera, the building housing the newly established Russian Academy of Sciences, at its heart. The Kunstkamera came complete with the world’s most advanced astronomical observatory on its roof.

Czar Peter was advised by Gottfried Leibniz, the founder of the Berlin Academy of Sciences and the original source and inspiration for the ideas of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Leibniz had proposed the establishment of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1711. Some of the world’s most advanced studies in the areas of astronomy, meteorology, geodesy, topography, and chronography would be carried out there, with Daniel Bernoulli, Leonhard Euler, and Jakob Hermann taking up residence in St. Petersburg in order to participate.

Catherine the Great had mobilized the Academy’s scientists to participate in the international measurements of the once-in-a-century phenomenon of the transit of Venus across the sun, which would provide clues to the size of the solar system. Russia set up observations in eight locations, at one of which the Academy’s director, Mikhail Lomonosov, found the first evidence of an atmosphere on Venus. As part of her enthusiasm for the project, Catherine acquired for the Academy eighteen volumes of the original manuscripts of Johannes Kepler, the man who had predicted the transit one hundred years earlier.

Quincy Adams’ collaborator in St. Petersburg, Count Rumiantsev, was the son of Field Marshal Peter Alexandrovich Rumiantsev, widely understood to be the illegitimate son of his godfather, Peter the Great. The field marshal and his sister were confidantes of Catherine, the sister handling Catherine’s private communications.

Before becoming the foreign minister/chancellor for Alexander, Count Rumiantsev had been commerce minister (1802-1808), and had personally financed sev-

2. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and Czar Alexander II’s decree for the emancipation of the serfs occurred nearly simultaneously.

3. Adams, who had seen Paris, London, and Berlin, proclaimed St. Petersburg to be the “most magnificent city of Europe, or of the world.”

eral voyages of discovery to the Pacific coast of America and to the South Pacific. Species of American butterflies and orchids were named after him, and, when the Russians claimed northern California, Bodega Bay had been Rumiantsev Bay. He also was the primary sponsor of Russia's first circumnavigation of the globe.

Upon his death, the Rumiantsev Museum was established, housing his collection of maps spanning the globe and his rare Russian historical manuscripts and books. When the capital was moved to Moscow in 1918, the Rumiantsev Mansion on the Neva waterfront was maintained as a museum with his personal effects, but his collection became the basis for the Moscow Rumiantsev Library—renamed the State Russian Library.

When Alexander I came to power in 1801, he started a new journal, called, *A Collection of Works and News Related to Technology and Applications of Discoveries Made in Science*, and he drew up new statutes and dramatically increased the funding for the Academy. Alexander stated the purpose for his actions:

“To extend the range of human knowledge, perfect the sciences, enrich them with new discoveries, promote education, direct knowledge to the common benefit... to the use of Russia directly, promoting knowledge of natural resources of Russia, discovering means of multiplying such that make up the subject of popular industry and trade, of improving the state of factories, manufactures, trades and arts—these sources of the wealth and power of states.”

Before the War of 1812, Alexander arranged a contract for Robert Fulton to bring over his engineers and mechanics to build steamships for Russia. Fulton was granted a fifteen-year patent, with the proviso that the first steamship was to be built within three years; but because of the war the contract became defunct, and it was many years before Russia gained steamship technology.

During the five years that Ambassador Adams was in St. Petersburg, he often visited the Kunstkamera and exchanged communications between it and the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, the Boston Academy of Arts and Sciences, and Harvard University. It was here that Adams developed his lifelong passion for astronomy, a passion that propelled him to a thirty-year-long fight for the establishment of a national astronomical observatory for the United States.

America Ensures Russia's Survival

When Adams came to St. Petersburg in 1809, all of Europe was at a strategic tipping point. The British Empire, in partnership with its subcontractor Napoleon

Bonaparte, was ready to deliver the final blow. Napoleon had established, in 1807, the Continental System, under which each of the countries of Europe was supposed to manage its trade at Napoleon's whim. The target of Napoleon's blockade of the entire continent was ostensibly Great Britain, but, in reality, Great Britain was the main beneficiary of the system, and was consolidating control with the long-term goal of destroying the two countries at opposite ends of the earth who were still left to resist subjugation: Russia and the United States. The British plan for Russia was, under the threat of all-out war from France, the gutting of the Russian economy; the plan for the United States was perpetual low-intensity warfare with Britain, the curtailment of American trade, and, eventually, the destruction of the U.S. economy.

Who would have dreamed that America and Russia would combine to save each other?

Adams described the situation in 1810 in a letter to his brother, Thomas Boylston Adams,

Unhappily for mankind the present state of the world exhibits the singular phenomenon of two great powers oppressing the whole species under the color of a war against each other. France and England can do very little harm comparatively speaking to each other. But the armed legions of France lay the continent of Europe under the most enormous contributions to support and enrich them, while the naval force of England extorts the same tribute from the commerce of the world...

The two parties have already come to an arrangement de facto, which suits the purpose of both. All neutrality and neutral trade are by common consent of the belligerents annihilated. The British at settled prices grant licenses to any flag, French as well as any other, which are respected by her navy. The Emperor Napoleon gives licenses to any flag, English as well as any other, which are respected by all his subordinate authorities. All other commerce is proscribed, and under these double licenses the commerce between the British islands and the continent of Europe is now carried on, to an extent beyond that of the most active and prosperous times of peace. France and England both raise a large revenue from the licenses, which ultimates as a tax upon the consumption of the articles circulating by this new method of trade.”

The Russians had refused to buy the required licenses needed to maintain their trade with Britain, which had been, by far, Russia’s largest trading partner. The ensuing collapse of Russian trade led directly to a catastrophic drop in the value of the ruble by fifty per cent between 1807 and 1810.

The policy of Rumiantsev had been to encourage the substitution of British shipping with American. The bulk of British trade with Russia had, anyway, been composed of the re-export and re-import of goods to and from America. The British picked up ship-building materials from Russia: hemp for cordage and cables; coarse linen for sailcloth and sacks; and iron for anchors, chains, barrel staves, and cannon.⁴ Those items would be carried across the Atlantic, where they were exchanged for goods from the Caribbean and Brazil: sugar and coffee, mainly. Americans would trade these commodities in exchange for the Russian goods delivered by the British.

Very slowly, the Americans had developed their merchant marine to the point where they were beginning to replace the British intermediary with their own direct shipping. The table below grids the number of ships entering St. Petersburg’s harbor, Kronstadt, between 1785 and 1812. In 1807 Russia signed the Tilsit Treaty with Napoleon that banned Russian-British trade.

Ships Entering Kronstadt Harbor

	<u>British</u>	<u>American</u>	
1785	640	6	
1792	517	22	
1807	—	90	
1811	—	225	
(After U.S. declaration of war)	1812	36	7

In 1808, Napoleon decreed that all American-flag ships were to be considered British, and therefore to be banned. Russia ignored the decree. In 1810, Napoleon banned specifically all sugar and coffee coming into Europe and Russia, even setting bonfires to stores of those items. Russia refused to cooperate.

4. A forty-four gun frigate of the Constitution class needed two suits of sails, each ¾ of an acre in extent; 100 tons of hemp rope; 75 tons of iron, not counting cannon or ammunition. The Secretary of the Navy was asked in 1824, why not American hemp?, and answered: “cables and cordage manufactured from it are inferior in color, strength and durability to those manufactured from imported hemp, and consequently are not as safe or proper for use in the navy.”

Adams wrote from St. Petersburg to Secretary of State Robert Smith, on Dec. 5, 1810,

The refusal of Russia to seize and confiscate, or to shut her ports against future importations of colonial articles [sugar and coffee] was communicated to the French Ambassador on the first of this month, and he immediately dispatched it by a courier to his government. The determination of the Emperor, of Count Romanzoff,⁵ and of the whole Imperial Council is said to be fixed and unalterable, and I hope will prove so at the test to which I think it will be brought; but if a message comes, like that to Sweden, which is not impossible, the necessity of commerce and the real regard for the United States, which is undissembled and unimpaired, may yield to the first principle of the Russian policy at this time, which is at all events to keep on good terms with France.

Ten days later, Adams wrote,

Until lately... France has abstained from demanding of Russia measures ruinous to her own interests and derogatory to her independence. Such demands are now made, and as I have informed you have met with denial. It is not probable that France will be satisfied with this, and I think the relations between the two countries are approaching to a crisis on a point highly interesting to us.

Russia would not budge. And Russia not only survived the attempt at strangulation, she boomeranged the entire strategy back against Napoleon: Since no one in Europe could obtain a gram of coffee or sugar from any other source, Russian merchants began to smuggle the stuff overland, first into Vienna, then through all the border states, until Russian sugar found its way even into Paris. The ruble regained its losses, and more.

Upon receiving notice from the czar that he was refusing to interdict the forbidden products, Napoleon reportedly said, “Here is a great planet taking a wrong direction. I do not understand its course at all.” He then wrote, in a personal letter to Czar Alexander,

For myself, I am always the same; but I am struck

5. Romanzoff, Roumanzoff, Rummyantsev, it is all the same person.

by the evidences of these facts, and by the thought that Your Majesty is wholly disposed, as soon as circumstances permit it, to make arrangement with England [America], which is the same thing as to kindle a war between two Empires.”

In December 1811, Adams wrote to his brother,

This commercial phenomenon of colonial merchandises exported from St. Petersburg and Archangel into Germany, Italy, and even France, is one of those singular symptoms in the disordered state of the civilized world (if it deserves to be called so) which strike superficial observers with amazement. The Emperor Napoleon has been preaching abstinence of *sugar* and *coffee* to the people of Europe, with as much zeal as the hermit Peter once preached the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre from infidels... Notwithstanding all which sugar and coffee still make their way even into France... this channel of trade has been barely opened during the present year; but it has proved so advantageous, not only to the individual merchants, but to the revenues, the finances, and the credit of this empire, that it will probably be continued on a much more extensive scale the next summer, unless a new war should come and break it up altogether...

In this new state of European commerce our countrymen have hitherto been almost exclusively the carriers on the ocean... One effect of this incidental result of the continental system has been that the exchange here upon Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Paris, which nine months ago was from ten to fifteen percent below par, is now as much above it. The balance of trade which was so heavily against Russia, is now as much to her advantage. It is hardly possible however that France, perceiving this tax which she is paying



Public domain

Czar Alexander I

to Russia should submit to it, and if she can prevent it, she will probably not scruple at the means, though war should be among them.

Russia had survived the economic warfare, thanks to the Americans. Next, she had to survive the war, which she did—at least she survived the Franco-Russian War of 1812. As we will see, it was much more difficult for Russia to survive the other war of 1812, the U.S.-British one. The self-inflicted wound the U.S. suffered when she declared war against Great Britain in June, proved a difficult enough recovery for the U.S.; but in terms of Russia and the rest of the world, it was just the opening that the British

Empire needed to reassert itself, in just a slightly different form; and, as we will see, by the time the war was over, Russia’s czar would be the primary victim.

The Lost Opportunity

Napoleon’s forces crossed the Niemen River into Russia on nearly the same day in June that the U.S. Congress voted for war against the British. The forces arrayed against Russia were truly formidable: the Duchy of Warsaw, Napoleonic Italy, Naples, Holland, the German Confederation of the Rhine, Napoleonic Spain and the Swiss Confederation, totaling nearly 600,000 men, three times the number of troops under the Russian command. The Austrians and Prussians formed independent commands, guarding the northern and southern flanks of Napoleon’s army.

But Alexander had a plan. He had written a note to the French ambassador, Caulaincourt, and even told him of the plan two weeks before Napoleon invaded.

If Emperor Napoleon declares war, it is possible, even probable, that he will defeat us if we accept combat, but that will not bring him peace. The Spaniards have often been defeated and are neither conquered nor subjugated. However, they are not as distant as we are from

Paris, and they do not have our climate or our resources. We will not compromise. We have space and we shall keep a well-organized army in being... If the issue of arms goes against me, I shall retreat to Kamchatka rather than yield provinces and sign treaties in my capital that will merely be truces. The French are brave, but our privations and a bad climate would weary and discourage them. Our climate, our winter, will make war for us. Wonders are brought about for you only where the Emperor is present, and he cannot be everywhere when his armies are far from Paris.”

The great military strategist, Napoleon, had met his match. The war unfolded along lines very close to Alexander’s forecast: the Russian forces skirmished with the invading armies, drawing them further into the depths of Russia throughout July, August, and early September. The czar’s orders to his commanders: Do not fully engage; never risk the total exhaustion of the army.

The only major battle before Napoleon entered Moscow on September 14 was fought on the field of Borodino, seventy miles from Moscow, along the Moskva River. Napoleon’s forces had been decimated from disease, starvation and desertion. His supply lines were practically nonexistent, the troops fed by foraging. The battle at Borodino was particularly bloody: each side began about evenly, with around 200,000 troops, and each side losing 40-50,000 over the course of two days.

At the point Napoleon’s forces seemed to be gaining the upper hand, the Russians, under the cover of the smoke and confusion, fell back, then ran. Moscow, which had been evacuated over the previous few days, was torched in several places just as Napoleon’s troops entered the city. More fires were set over the next week, and most of the city burned. But Napoleon settled in: he assumed that Alexander knew that he had been beaten, and would soon respond to a letter demanding Russia’s total surrender.

Alexander’s surrender letter never arrived. What did arrive was Russia’s winter.

On October 18, Napoleon gave the order for his half-frozen army to pack up and head home. The Russian forces harassed the retreating troops mercilessly, as they froze, starved, or just dropped dead from exhaustion. By the time that the Grand Armée reached the Niemen River, where it had started with 600,000 men,

there were only 20,000 left.

By December 1812, the Russians’ defensive war was over. The other harried victims of Europe were now rising up, helping the Russians to hound Napoleon’s forces back across Germany towards Paris. No nation was any longer interested in enforcing the Great Conqueror’s edicts on trade.

The game was over, the jig was up: now “neutral shipping” was just normal shipping. Now the American Merchant Marine was free to expand its fleet and openly replace the British who had once dominated the harbor at Kronstadt. But,— America had declared war on Great Britain.

As can be seen by the table presented above, in 1812, American trade with Russia collapsed to practically nil, while Britain was starting to fill the gap. Even after the War of 1812 was finally settled in 1814, American shipping to Russia never fully recovered and was never able to compete with the British again for space at Kronstadt harbor.

Historian Alfred Crosby’s characterization of these developments, although slightly skewed, is essentially correct in its broad sweep,

Russo-American trade never became one of the main channels of world commerce, but in time of world crisis it has twice had great importance. The most recent occasion was, of course, during the terrible years of World War II. The other was during those momentous years between the rape of Copenhagen and the gutting of Moscow, when peaceful Yankee merchants provoked Napoleon and Alexander I to mortal combat, when the world trembled to find itself turning on an axis that ran from the docks of Boston, United States of America, to the waterfront of Kronstadt, Russia.

Russia Ensures America’s Survival

In June 1811, one year before the declaration of war against Britain by the United States, Ambassador Adams wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State, James Monroe,

On this occasion it may be proper to inform you, with the request that it may be received as in the closest secrecy, that I have recently had two accidental conversations with his Imperial Majesty [the Czar], in which he manifested the desire to be informed, what was the precise state of our

present relations with England. In the last of them, which was the day before yesterday, he told me that he had received very interesting dispatches from Count Pahlen [Russian ambassador to the U.S.], which had given him much pleasure. I have it from a good source that in those dispatches the Count gives it as his decided opinion that there will ultimately be no war between the United States and England, and I know from authority equally good that the Russian government earnestly wishes there may be no such war.

And in April, to his brother, Thomas:

We hear, and I most sincerely hope, that the non-importation act [cutting off trade with England]... did not eventually pass: It was a trap to catch us into a war with England; a war which England most richly deserves, but which would on our part be more than ever impolitic at this time.

Two months before the declaration of war, Rumi-antsev sent a letter, transmitted through Swedish Crown Prince Bernadotte, to the English diplomat, Edward Thornton:

Having studied the state of relations between Great Britain and America, His Majesty the Emperor came to the conviction that it is impossible for Great Britain not to do everything in her power to avoid war with the United States; and she cannot avoid this war if she does not revoke the so-called orders-in-council. Apparently the majority of Parliament considers their repeal advantageous, and the nation, it seems, also wishes it.

As a result, British Prime Minister Liverpool wrote a highly agitated letter to Foreign Secretary Castlereagh:

I fear the Emperor of Russia is half an American, and it would be very desirable to do away any prejudices which may exist in his mind.

What were the “orders-in-council,” and how were they part of the “trap” to catch the U.S. in a war?

In 1806, Napoleon’s “Berlin Decree” forbade allied

or neutral ships to trade with Britain. Britain’s response came from its Privy Council (hence, orders-in-council), with orders to forbid allied or neutral ships trading with France.

The result: between 1806 and 1812, Britain captured 917 American vessels, France captured 858. Both the French and the British often stole seamen from these American ships and “impressed” them into service onto their own vessels. The British were much the worse in this latter practice, claiming that many Americans were actually Englishmen who had deserted from the British navy.

But there was no dramatic increase in the harassment from the British in the twelve months before the U.S. declaration of war. The fact is, that there *was* an increase in harassment—but by the French and their Danish satrapy, not the British.

Adams wrote to his brother in December 1811,

Nothing will I trust have been done in [the Congress] to precipitate a rupture with France or England, and I hope nothing will produce it. Both of them are still doing, as they have done, their worst against us short of involving us with them in their quarrel. But all the evil they have done us is but the dross of which that would be the ocean.

The U.S. declared war on Britain on June 6, 1812. The howling irony here is that the states most involved in the business of shipping, and hence suffering the most losses in men and money, were the New England states and New York—those very states who most opposed the idea of the war. The states most aggressively pushing a declaration of war were the southern states and the frontier states of Kentucky and Tennessee. It was that combination of states, the slave states, that wanted to break the power of the northern states.

The “War Hawk” party was led by Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. They allied with certain representatives of the northern states who were interested in the opportunity to attack Canada. The combination won the vote, but barely.

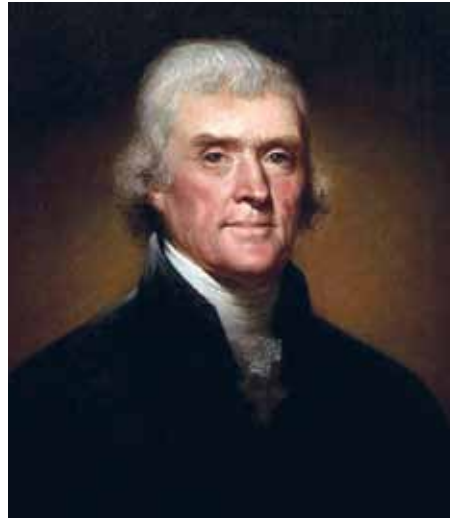
The War Hawks made wild promises. In the debate before Congress, Clay said,

It is said, however, that no object is attainable by war with Britain... The conquest of Canada is in your power. I trust I shall not be deemed pre-

sumptuous when I state, what I verily believe, that the militia of Kentucky are [able] alone to place Montreal and Upper Canada at your feet.

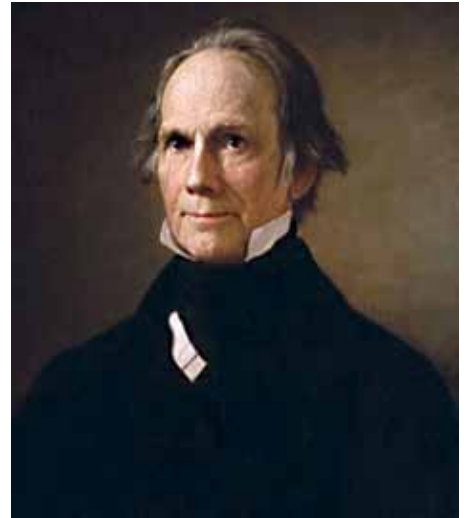
John C. Calhoun stated,

I believe that in four weeks from the time a declaration of war is heard on our frontier, the whole of Upper Canada and part of Lower Canada will be in our power.



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Thomas Jefferson



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Henry Clay

Thomas Jefferson, not holding any office at the time, weighed in with a letter to the editor of Philadelphia's Jacobin newspaper, *Aurora*:

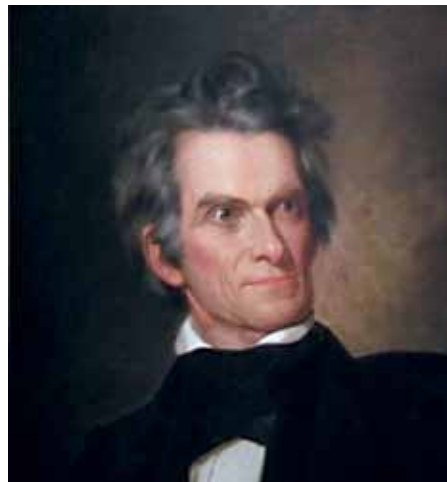
The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching.

For those who believe that the War of 1812 began when Britain "invaded the United States," let it be stated here that the first military action of the war was an invasion, by the United States, of Canada, only four weeks into the war. As we now know, ultimately no territory in Canada was captured. In fact, the war did not go well at all. The British knew they could not conquer the U.S.; but that was never their aim in drawing the U.S. into the conflict: The goal was the perpetual skirmishing in itself, which they hoped would end in the eventual bankruptcy of the northern and Great Lakes states who were doing the fighting, while the slave states were to remain intact.

And that was exactly where the United States was headed. Without the intervention of Czar Alexander on September 30, 1812, with an offer to mediate the conflict—an offer which caused the British to fall back on their heels—America were likely to have been eliminated as an economic power altogether.

In April 1813, President Madison announced:

We are at present occupied with the Mediation of Russia. That is the only power in Europe which



Public Domain

John C. Calhoun

can command respect from both France and England; and at this moment it is in its Zenith.

By the spring of 1813, the U.S. government was on the verge of insolvency, caught between a collapse of tax revenue and the need for outgoing payments to build up the navy. Madison's publicizing of the Russian mediation offer

worked like a charm to revive confidence, as recorded in a report written by Russian Consul-General in Philadelphia, Nikolai Kozlov, and sent to Rumiantsev:

Since then [since Madison's announcement of the Czar's intention] obstacles to the loan [to the U.S. government] have been overcome, and the Treasury received all the \$16 million at no more than 7½ %.

Madison ordered a peace delegation to proceed to St. Petersburg to join Quincy Adams and wait there for Britain to send a delegation from its side. The U.S. delegation sat there for months, but there was no response: the British did not want to negotiate peace at all, much

less accept Russian mediation in the process.

Foreign Minister Castlereagh wrote to Lord Cathcart, Britain's ambassador to Russia, July 5, 1813:

It [the mediation offer] has enabled the President to hold out to the people of America a vague expectation of peace... This evil, however cannot now be avoided, and it only remains to prevent this question from producing any embarrassment between Great Britain and Russia.

At that point, the British decided to make an offer: they would concede to direct negotiations with the U.S. representatives, but not in St. Petersburg, and not with any outside mediation. Adams wrote to Monroe, July 14 1813:

My own information from private sources, and that of all the American and English here from their correspondents, concurs to show that the British government have been both surprised and mortified by the Emperor's offer of mediation... They do not appear at all to have foreseen that their most powerful and closest European allies would ever take any concern in a contest upon the question of impressments, and as a motive for declining the Russian mediation they have alleged that it was a dispute involving principles of internal administration, as if the United States were a mere appendage to the British dominions.

Even the offer of direct negotiations was a stalling tactic. The peace terms proposed by the British were outrageous and were designed to prolong the war, not end it. The British demanded an Indian buffer territory north of the Ohio River, the loss of U.S. fishing rights off the Newfoundland coast, and the expansion of Canada to allow access to the Mississippi River. One of the American negotiators, U.S. Senator Bayard, later stated "Their terms were those of a conqueror to a conquered people."

Nevertheless, although the St. Petersburg initiative did not result in an immediate peace treaty, the Russian intervention bolstered the financial credit of the United



By Amédée Forestier, in the Smithsonian American Art Museum

John Quincy Adams (center right) shakes hands with British Baron Gambier at the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812.

States government and sent a message to London that Russia would not tolerate an open-ended continuation of the war.

Rumiantsev continued to work with the American delegation. He relayed notes from Alexander, now traveling with his troops into Germany and Austria, notes that were still able to frighten the British. The British were worried that Alexander might demand that a discussion of the rights of neutral shipping be placed on the agenda for the upcoming Congress of Vienna, where post-Napoleon relations were to be worked out among the European states. The Congress of Vienna began in November 1814; on December 25, the British finally agreed to the Treaty of Ghent with the United States, with terms that seemed to restore the pre-war status quo. The Americans were happy to get what they could.

The Truth Will Out

The problem was that the United States was not really returned to the status quo of 1812. In the spring of 1812, the U.S. had a thriving shipping industry, which was increasing the power of the northern states, while the slave system of the southern states was actually in decline; in 1812, the U.S. was set to connect New York harbor with the Great Lakes states by finishing the Erie Canal, but funding for the Canal vanished during the war, and by 1815 it was a half-dug decaying ditch; and, in 1812, the U.S. had a world-historical relationship with the up-and-coming power of Europe—Russia. The American-Russian combination had represented a

new kind of power bloc, not just one based on economic relations and geopolitical considerations, but a power bloc of the *mind*.

John Quincy Adams and Count Rumiantsev were the distillation of the best of their respective countries. They shared the excitement of a new world of possibilities for the growth and development of the human potential, as against the decay and denigration of the human spirit occurring in Old Europe.

After 1815, the British Empire had to make sure that such a strategic potential might never recur. The first step would be to rewrite the history of what had actually happened between America and Russia, to eradicate the truth about that partnership. And what better person to do the job than a direct descendant of John Quincy Adams?

Henry Adams' *History of the United States During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* presented his grandfather as a weakling in the hands of cynical Russians and brilliant Englishmen. He writes,

[Adams] found a condition of affairs in Russia that seemed hopeless for the success of his mission. The alliance between Russia and France had reached its closest point. The Foreign Minister of Russia, Count Roumanzoff, officially known as Chancellor of the Empire, and its most powerful subject, favored the French alliance. From him Adams could expect little assistance in any case...and Adams soon found that at St. Petersburg he was regarded by France as an agent of England. He became conscious that French influence was unceasingly at work to counteract his efforts in behalf of American interests... Adams labored under the diplomatic inferiority of having to transact business only through the worse than neutral medium of Roumanzoff.

Henry Adams quotes, from his grandfather's diary, Lord Walpole's comments during the peace negotiations—as if John Quincy believed it:

[Lord Walpole] was as sure as he was of his own existence, and he believed he could prove it, that Roumanzoff had been cheating us all.

Henry Adams takes as proof of Rumiantsev's perfidy that Alexander had decided, after a couple of years

traveling in the companionship of the likes of Nesselrode, Metternich, and Lord Cathcart (as they finished off Napoleon and began settlement negotiations in Vienna), to unofficially give Rumiantsev's functions over to Nesselrode. But at that point Alexander was once more in the grip of the British shipping empire, and was so financially strapped that he was taking subsidies from Britain to support his troops in Germany and France.

Rumiantsev's real problem was that he had tied himself totally to the Americans,—not that he had tied himself to Napoleon; and it was as a result of the weakening of American power during the War of 1812, that he had become an outcast, not because of the downfall of Napoleon.

In a letter to Monroe, Feb. 15, 1814, John Quincy Adams quotes Rumiantsev's own comments on his predicament, and then he takes his measure of the man:

'To be Chancellor of the Empire for the sake of signing passports and giving answers about law suits is not worthwhile... I can say that my heart is American, and were it not for my age and infirmities, I would now certainly go to that country.'

It was not the first time that the Count had suggested that the idea of going himself to America was floating in his mind. He had mentioned it before both to Mr. Gallatin and Mr. Bayard [treaty negotiators]...

The Count is a sincere and genuine Russian patriot. Of the statesmen with whom it has been my fortune to have political relations, I never knew one who carried into public life more of the principles and sentiments of private honor. His integrity is irreproachable; but his enemies are numerous... It is only in America that he could hope to find an asylum from the persecutions which will be the reward of his virtues and of his services to his country.

In February 2017, the promise of the Adams-Rumiantsev partnership has risen again. This time, it is the bankrupt and crumbling trans-Atlantic financial empire—the historic enemy of both Russia and America—that finds itself weak and besieged. Recent telephone discussions by President Trump with Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Shinzō Abe all point in the right direction. This time, the promise of 1812 stands ready to be realized.