



Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of U.S.-Russia Relations

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Remarks Made at the Embassy of the Russian Federation

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UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure for me to be here to represent our government and the U.S. State Department as we celebrate the bicentennial of this extraordinary relationship between our two great peoples. I look around this room and I see many members of the U.S.-Russia Business Council, which has been such a great force to bring our businesses together. I know your President, Gene Lawson, is here. He has worked untiringly, ceaselessly, for many years to support this relationship. Gene, thank you for being here.

There are also so many of my colleagues from the American Foreign Service. Ambassador Tom Pickering, who was such an outstanding American Ambassador to Russia and in many other countries; Ambassador Jim Collins is here, another outstanding American Ambassador to Russia; Ambassador Steve Pifer, who played such a big role in the 1980s and '90s; Ambassador John Evans, who was our Consul General in St. Petersburg and a good friend; and Ambassador Avis Bohlen is here. Think of the contribution that her family made to the success of our relationship with Russia and the Soviet Union, to the understanding that both of us have to arrive at to be able to work together. I hope I didn't miss any Ambassadors, it's always perilous to do that, but I wanted to just greet all of these outstanding American diplomats and --

VOICE: (inaudible).

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I was just about to say, we have another great Ambassador in the room, Ambassador Yuriy Ushakov, so thank you for the invitation. [Laughter]. I was going to get to you, Ambassador. We're celebrating today, at the Ambassador's invitation, a great relationship between two great peoples who have contributed so much to Western and international culture, to science, to music, to the arts for hundreds of years. We're celebrating the relationship between two continental powers who began their relationship in the 19th Century and then became global powers together in the 20th Century.

Both of us struggled against the balance of power system of Europe in the 19th Century, and then came to dominate that same system, to inherit responsibility for it in the 20th Century. We had auspicious beginnings back 200 years ago. We sent a truly great American Ambassador to Russia 200 years ago. He was the son of our second President. He later became our Secretary of State and then our sixth President, and was the only American President to then go back to the Congress, to the House of Representatives, where he served with great distinction until his old age: John Quincy Adams. He formed a political bond, because we were both struggling against empire in the 19th Century, and we Americans supported Russia in its great struggle against Napoleon's empire.

We actually had the strongest trade relationship in the world in those early years with Russia. The greatest volume of trade the United States had in those years was not with Britain or France or the Netherlands, it was with Russia. Auspicious beginnings indeed.

But as the Ambassador said, this has also been a complicated and tumultuous and often rocky 200 years. We have so much respect still for what Russia, the Russian people, and the Soviet Union accomplished during the Second World War. We were your allies during that war. To remember the enormous suffering of Russians at the hands of Nazi Germany, and to remember the indispensable will of the Soviet Army in defeating Nazi Germany. All Americans, especially sons of veterans of that war -- and my father was a veteran of that war -- have to still remember and say to Russians thank you for what you did to defeat fascism.

And we remember the complicated part of our relationship that lasted about 50 years hence, the Cold War, when together we brought the world to the brink of a hot war in Berlin in 1948, and in Cuba in 1962. But we overcame that. Many of the senior diplomats in this room were part of the delegation of Russian and American diplomats who prevented a hot war, who brought some reason to the arms race and began the historic process that lasted for many decades of trying to ratchet down the nuclear arms race and the military rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Those were complicated years, but America was always a friend to the Russian people. We provided a safe harbor to some great Russians. To Solzhenitsyn, to Rostropovich, to Baryshnikov. Then of course when that great day came and we became friends again a lot of us in this room -- and I was working for Jim Collins and Tom Pickering when this happened, when I was involved in Russian affairs -- that great period of hope in the early to mid 1990s when we rediscovered the bonds between Russians and Americans, when we built the new relationship that continues to this day, that period of hope that these two great countries could be a force for good and for stability and for peace in the world.

I would conclude, because I shouldn't give history lessons here -- the Librarian of Congress should give the history lesson and I'm sure a better one than I've tried to give -- that we have such an extraordinary obligation together for world peace. We must always remember that.

And on the two great issues of our time right now, we have a partnership with Russia. We are both victims of terrorism and of global forces that would strike at both of our countries, and we continue to be partners in that struggle to defeat terrorism. We are both partners in the struggle against those who would raise again the specter of the nuclear threat in North Korea and in Iran. Russia and America are working together today to try to hold back the nuclear threat from North Korea and prevent a nuclear weapons power from emerging in Iran.

So we proceed with some hope that our two countries can be that force of global peace and stability that we were always destined to be at the beginning of our relationship back 200 years ago. But we have to build this future, and it won't be easy. There is often mistrust in our relationship. There are times when we do have fundamental disagreements.

America is always going to stand for democracy in Russia and for freedom in Russia, and always stand for the sovereignty and independence of every European country. I hope very much that we'll be able to work through these present day struggles to regain the footing of this relationship and to redeem the promise of this relationship that was present 200 years ago, that was definitely present 15 years ago, and that still motivates President Putin and President Bush to create anew, as their successors must, this global partnership between our two countries.

So I am very happy to be here to represent our government along with all my colleagues from the United States government, and to hope that we may continue this process, overcome present difficulties, and make sure that our two countries always work together for the benefit of the world.

Yuri, thank you very much for this invitation; it's been a pleasure to be with you.



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