

Discuss relations  
between the united  
states of america and  
the soviet union  
from ...



The period between 1917 and 1945 saw several major changes in the relationship between the USA and Russia. Although traditionally the two countries were had had a harmonious relationship, it had been clear for some time before the Russian Revolutions that interests were diverging. The next 28 years saw the relationship between the two on a rollercoaster ride, which was underwritten by mistrust and ideological disparities, but punctuated by self-interest and necessity. 1917 was a tumultuous year for Russian leadership and saw two dramatic turns in relations between the USA and Russia. Wilsonian America was not displeased by the removal of Tsar Nicholas ii from power in Russia, and seemed to regard the putting in place of a provisional government in keeping with Wilson's ideas about self-determination, which he had discussed on 22nd January 1917 on Capitol Hill.

The new Russian regime promised to remain involved in WWI against Germany, and seemed on the surface to be a democratic government, despite its underlying weaknesses. The Duma was almost immediately recognised as the legitimate government of Russia by the USA, and on a more personal level, both Wilson and Roosevelt spoke out in favour of closer ties with Russia. LaFeber argues that this turn of events in Russia played a part in Wilson's decision to go to war, if not quite 'on behalf of democratic revolution', then at least because it was now possible to argue that all allies were ' " fit" partners for Americans' The provisional government in Russia was led by Aleksandr Kerensky, who was a moderate socialist, but liked by Wilson due to his commitment to the war. By mid 1917 however, cracks were appearing in Kerensky's regime, as the Bolsheviks seemed to grow in

influence, and by November, Russia was being led by its third government in under a year – the Bolsheviks led by Lenin.

This government immediately riled Wilson by publishing the Allies secret treaties of 1915, making a mockery of Wilson's ideals of self-determination, or at least making him look like a hypocrite. Perhaps more importantly however, the communist ideals of the Bolsheviks were diametrically opposed to many of the American capitalist ideas and processes. Lenin called for mass opposition to the war and world revolution against capitalism – two things that were very important to America and its way of government. Relations between America and the Soviet Union during the last phase of the war were somewhat inconsistent.

Wilson was torn between Lansing, who believed that Lenin and Trotsky were German agents and a great danger, and Colonel House, who felt that efforts should be made to relate to the new government in order to keep them involved in the war effort. It was House's advice that was accepted, which transpired by the USA writing the Fourteen Points to try to negate some of Lenin's fears by clarifying the Wilsonian post-war vision and addressing Lenin's issues regarding revolution, and no territorial annexations at the end of the war by promising an 'open door', rejecting secret treaties and specifically guaranteeing the SU the 'co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development'. Despite these efforts, Lenin seemed determined to stick to his guns and withdraw from the war, and became involved in almost daily negotiations with

Germany, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-relations-between-the-united-states-of-america-and-the-soviet-union-from-1917-to-1945/>

caused the USA to become hostile towards the SU, feeling that ' Russia had become, to all intents and purposes, a satellite of Germany' .

An atmosphere of panic ensued in America, that Russia would now become a puppet. This trepidation was somewhat pre-emptive as according to soviet experts such as George Kennan, it would be difficult, if not impossible for Germany to occupy Russia and still be aggressive in the west, but this was overlooked in the panic that resulted in the Red Scare of 1919 in America ( which may be seen as an early precursor to McCarthyism). It had become apparent that a Bolshevik government was unacceptable to the Allies in the first world war, and they decided to send three US battalions into Eastern Russia towards the end of 1918, ostensibly in the name of defeating Russia, but it is unlikely that there was no idea at all of presenting a military threat to Lenin's vocal challenge to American Socio-economic beliefs. American experts on Russia tried to stem the growing anti-Bolshevik feelings in lower level government, but as a communist Germany was narrowly avoided in January 1919, and Hungary became communist in March of the same year, feelings of suspicion and mistrust grew.

In what seems a precursor to Churchill's iron curtain speech, Baker spoke of the ' Black cloud of the east' descending. On the other hand, the SU took their exclusion from the Paris peace conferences to infer the same feelings about America, feelings which were solidified as the USA intervened to remove communists from Hungary and then Austria. Wilson sent Bullit to talk to Lenin in April 1919 in a futile effort to warm up relations between the two countries, but when these talks proved fruitless, Wilson announced that the USA would not be formally recognising the Soviet Union. It seems that Lenin <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-relations-between-the-united-states-of-america-and-the-soviet-union-from-1917-to-1945/>

had also decided his foreign policy by this point, making his primary objective to 'ensure the survival of the revolution in Russia itself'. This can be seen with the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 between the SU and Germany, which resulted in further complicating US political feelings.

Yet despite these political divisions, the economic relationship between the two countries flourished. The American economic policy of Laissez Faire meant that business need not follow the official political line, and there were many attractive opportunities within the SU, a situation which became even more important in the late 1920's and early 1930's when as most international markets went into decline, the Soviet Union seemed to continue to flourish. But as this went on, the political problems remained, as the actions of the Comintern in places such as Persia, India, Spain and the USA, though they remained fruitless, were seen as a threat. The economic relationship that had grown up between the two countries, and the fact that the USA was the only major country not to have recognised the SU resulted in pressure on the USA to formally recognise the Bolshevik government. In 1931 the Manchurian crisis led many to see the problems that could occur.

Although the USA and SU had a common aim, they were unable to collaborate in any concerted action, as, officially, the USA refused to believe that the SU existed! In the event, it was the growing power of Germany and Japan that led to recognition. It seemed necessary that they should pursue the common aim of keeping these two threats under control, and thus they engaged in the Roosevelt-Litvinov agreements. Despite the promise of better relations that these talks seemed to afford, it quickly transpired that each side had misunderstood the others intentions, and in reality, neither side was

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happy with the others terms. By 1934 it was generally accepted that ' the honeymoon atmosphere has evaporated completely' .

Gaddis argues that both sides expected too much form recognition. Russia had expected the relationship to help counter-balance the growth of Germany and Japan, while in reality, at this stage Roosevelt was more concerned with Comintern activities, and The USA had expected the behaviour of the SU to change in order to become more acceptable to the USA, which was never an option to Stalin. In 1936, Stalin's purges shocked and horrified America, while Stalin's increasing xenophobia had an effect on the whole country, both of which served to divide the two countries even more deeply. Roosevelt himself was not as hostile to communist intentions as some of his advisors. Bullit saw the communist threat as far greater than that posed by Japan or Germany, but Roosevelt felt that whatever the means, at least the aim of communism was a commendable one based on moral and humanist ideals.

He felt that it was possible for the two countries to co-exist with mutual benefits. With the resumption of Sino-Japanese hostilities in 1937, Roosevelt began to consider the possibility of an alliance against Japan, but the world at large saw Stalin as an unacceptable partner in peace keeping. By 1939, Stalin saw war as inevitable. Isolated by the Munich Pact of 1938. He felt that the best chance of protecting the Soviet Union lay in collaboration with Hitler, a sentiment that resulted in the Nazi-Soviet pact, an agreement that ultimately allowed Hitler to invade Poland, and thus begin the Second World War. Roosevelt still saw Hitler as the ultimate enemy, and tried to avoid viewing Russia as belligerent.

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Although this became difficult with the SU's invasion of Finland, he maintained the distinction, and when Germany invaded Denmark, Norway and France, he made a concerted effort to resume relations with Stalin, feeling that it would be desirable to have the SU against, rather than with, Nazi Germany. Talks began in July 1940, with little initial result, but as Germany seemed to isolate the SU, and eventually signed the Tripartite Pact with Japan and Italy, it soon became clear that they may soon have no option. Yet Stalin clung to the pact, ignoring British and American intelligence that there was a planned German invasion of Russia on the way, even until it had actually happened. Roosevelt's efforts, however, did make a difference in easing the way once this invasion had occurred. Gaddis commends Roosevelt's efforts at diplomacy during this period as an example of successful International Relations, which made the formation of the Grand Alliance possible. By the time of the invasion of Russia, Roosevelt and Churchill had already decided that all feelings must be put aside in order to defeat Hitler.

So, Lend-Lease was made available to the Kremlin in 1941, and soon after, the USA declared war on Germany. The Grand Alliance has been described as a 'marriage of convenience', which seems more true for the Soviet Union, pushed into the arms of an ideological enemy in order to protect itself, than for the USA, who planned to achieve it using diplomatic methods in order to defeat the common enemy. The SU was concerned by the delay of Britain and the USA in opening up a second front of fighting, feeling that it was a deliberate attempt to weaken them. In fact, the delay was because neither Britain or the USA were prepared to begin fighting at that point, and

also they were actually already involved in a second front, against Japan, which Stalin overlooked.

As an end to the war became visible, friction grew once more. Stalin's paranoia as to the security of the Soviet Union led him to discuss, as early as 1941 the retention of the territorial gains that the SU had gained under the Nazi-Soviet Pact. While the war was still being fought, however, the 'Big Three' presented a united front, and at Tehran in November 1943, Britain and America committed to opening a second front in Spring 1944, while the SU committed to entering the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany. But as the SU began to occupy the countries that Germany had defeated, they refused to allow the USA or Britain to have anything more than a token role, feeling that at Tehran a tacit exception in their case had been made to the Atlantic Charter.

At the Next meeting of the Big Three, at Yalta, attempts were made to minimise the effects of Soviet expansion, by trying to get them to at least expand in a way that was acceptable to the West. But this was rejected when Stalin exerted his influence on Rumania two weeks after these talks. It seems that Roosevelt's patience had finally began to wane, and he was willing to take a tougher line, in accordance with his advisors wishes, when he said on 23rd March 1945 ' We cant do business with Stalin. He has broken every one of the promises he made at Yalta' It seems that Roosevelt had finally realised the futility of trying to win Stalin's trust, but it was not until his death, and Truman's presidency that we can really see a shift in relations towards the SU.



Truman decided to get tough, first illustrated by his tempestuous first meeting with Molotov. Although he continued in Roosevelt's view by maintaining all his promises - such as 3 SU seats in the UN - he refused to grant any more concessions. Two days before Russia was due to join the war against Japan, the USA dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, thus ending the war very swiftly. The USA saw the bomb as having the side effect of evening out their position with the SU, and giving them a stronger bargaining position, but there was an underestimation of just how great the mutual mistrust was.

Russia was disturbed by the strength of the weapon, and saw it as a threat, and we can certainly say that in terms of the next few decades, the existence of nuclear capability shaped almost every aspect of USA/SU relations. The most common question asked by historians in the study of this period is 'Can we say from this that the Cold War was inevitable?' I feel that while inevitable is too strong a word, we can certainly see the seeds of the Cold war being sowed in this period. The behaviour of the two countries during this period is echoed and exaggerated in the years to come, but most is already in place by 1945. Ideological conflict, lack of communication, mistrust, fear and inconsistency punctuated the cold war, and all of these things can be seen in the period discussed here. It seems that the Cold war was simply an escalation of such feelings and events, rather than something new that emerged from them.