

RAGA

**By Vladislav Krasnov Ph.D.
President & Founder of RAGA.org**



When the USSR collapsed at the end of 1991, so did all official Soviet and pro-Soviet “friendship associations,” including The National Council of American-Soviet Friendship (NCASF). A friendship vacuum felt unnatural, and I decided to fill it with neither politics nor ideology, but a God-given feeling of Good Will with which both Russian and American people are richly endowed.

Ending my academic career as professor of Russian Studies (“sovietology”) at Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, I moved to Washington DC where the action was, certainly, in respect to a new Russia emerging from the ashes of the USSR. After talking to my friends and former students, I decided to project myself as intercultural communications consultant to US companies and NGOs that were then rushing to Russia. As a former Soviet citizen and propagandist who lived and worked later in Sweden and Japan, had behind him an American Ph.D., successful academic career and several published books, I was well positioned to become a

middle man between the two very different cultures, post-Soviet Russia and the USA.

Once stigmatized as a traitor but now “rehabilitated”, I was free to travel across my native Russia where many people hailed me as a hero who had discovered inadequacy of Soviet system ahead of time and predicted its demise. (See my 1991 book, “Beyond Communism: A Chronicle of National Rebirth”) Above all, everywhere in Russia I felt enormous reservoir of Good Will toward America that now seemed to an ordinary Russian a lot better than Soviet propaganda image of it. Alas, Russian ignorance of what made America tic was just as great. The same observation fully applied many Americans who now travelled to Russia in great numbers.

Unfortunately, some Americans, including in US Government, decided to take advantage of the void of authority when old Soviet system collapsed but a new one has not yet congealed. JanineWedel, an American anthropologist, described it best in her book “Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe,” for which she received 2001 Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order (<http://janinewedel.info/collusion.html>). The focus of Wedel’s book was on US pushing of Neo-Liberal “shock therapy” economic reforms in Russia which policy resulted in robbing the country by oligarchs and the emergence of crony capitalism.

Such interference in Russia’s domestic affairs was contrary to the spirit of Good Will proclaimed by RAGA. I knew there was no place for RAGA or myself in the scheme of things in which now both Russia (under Boris Yeltsin) and USA were involved. While working as a contract interpreter for the US Department of State, I began to use breaks between jobs to hone RAGA as a tool for people-to-people contacts and diplomacy. Among the highlights of our activities are:

- An Open Letter to President Bill Clinton demanding cessation of US interference in Russian reforms (1999);
- A Washington Post advertisement to welcome Russia’s Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov to Washington (he stopped the flight in mid-air to protest US bombing of Yugoslavia);

- Publishing articles and speaking at C-SPAN against US government's unquestioning support for President Yeltsin and against NATO's expansion;
- A letter to President George W. Bush to stress the need of joint US-Russia anti-terrorist exercise

Meanwhile I carried out my interpreting assignments which involved an extensive travel across the United States with various Russian-speaking groups from the countries of the former Soviet Union (Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrghizstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenistan). I handled a broad variety of topics, from municipal government and fighting AIDS to banking institutions, civic organizations (such as Mothers Against Drunken Driving, e.g.), ethnic and religious relations, trade unions and blood donation in the United States. I also interpreted for a number of anti-terrorist courses as well as for NATO's Partnership for Peace program at US Air Force Academy in Hurlburt Field, Florida.

Our Russian and Russian-speaking guests were invariably appreciative of what they saw and heard in the United States which made me proud as an "old" American. Our American hosts, across all fifty states, usually told them: "We are here to show you what we do here. It works for us. See if it works in your country too. But we don't assume what works here, will work in your country. Besides, we too have problems of which you have no idea."

Unfortunately, our foreign policy makers lack this attitude of humility, philosophical reserve and smart diplomacy. Instead they sought to impose on other countries such "unquestionably" good things as "free-market" economy and "democracy." As "teaching tools" they use open-face bombing (Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya) and stealthy illegal bombing by drones. Such policy wins no friends to the US, estranges our allies and is ultimately self-defeating.

Since the bombing diplomacy has been usually preceded by a massive propaganda campaign of US media working hand-in-glove with US government, the RAGA's main mission now is to counteract this disinformation--be it anti-Putin, anti-Russian or just Russophobe---with facts and good reasoning of leading American personalities.

In the process we build a coalition of all people of Good Will. Americans, Russians, people of various political persuasions—regardless of whether they are Democrat or Republican, Left or Right, pro-Capitalist or pro-Socialist—are all welcome to contribute to this site their wisdom, knowledge and Good Will.

We regard the maintenance of peace between social classes, ethnicities and nations as the paramount value. We believe that both Russia and the United States, as primary nuclear powers, bear additional responsibility for preventing a new World War that may well end in a nuclear destruction of all humankind and Our Beautiful Planet.

PLANETARIANS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

