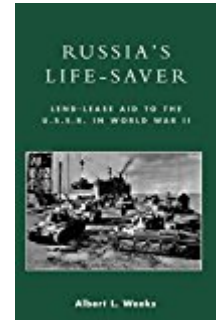


**Albert L. Weeks.** *Russia's Life-Saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. x + 186 pp. \$74.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-0736-2.



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One of the most striking recurring themes in the history of American-Russian relations is the invocation of past contributions to the survival of the other country. In May 2002, for example, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested that Catherine the Great's neutrality toward the American revolutionary war "played a significant role in allowing the United States to gain its independence and lay its foundations" (p. 128). Earlier generations of Russians and Americans were fond of the story that Tsar Alexander II had helped preserve the Union by sending Russian fleets to American ports during the Civil War, when the North faced the threat of British and French intervention. On the other side, American speakers and writers have declared that the Soviet regime could not have survived without famine relief from the American Relief Administration in the early 1920s and the Soviet Union could not have developed into an industrial power without massive assistance from American engineers and corporations in the 1930s.

In *Russia's Life-Saver*, Albert L. Weeks, a professor emeritus of New York University who

served in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, suggests that the Soviet Union would have been defeated by Nazi Germany if it had not received billions of dollars worth of aircraft, aviation fuel, aluminum, trucks, food, and other critical supplies from the United States. Weeks draws on recent research by Russian historians, especially B. V. Sokolov, who have revised upwards both the amount of Lend-Lease aid received by the U.S.S.R. (from \$11 to \$12.5 billion) and the percentage of Soviet production that that aid constituted (from 4 percent to 15 percent or more). Sokolov's conclusion, which Weeks endorses, is that "without these Western shipments under Lend-Lease the Soviet Union not only would not have been able to win the Great Patriotic War, it would not have been able even to oppose the German invaders" (p. 9).

Counterfactual propositions are, of course, impossible to prove. Weeks might have presented a more persuasive case if he had addressed questions such as how much military equipment was delivered by the fall of 1941, when the Red Army first held off the Wehrmacht outside Moscow. However, instead of developing a sustained argu-

ment, Weeks relies on references to Russian scholarship and seven detailed tables of Lend-Lease shipments. Ultimately, Weeks concedes that "the jury is still out" on "establishing exactly how crucial this aid was" (p. 134).

*Russia's Life-Saver* is too short to provide satisfyingly deep analysis of the significance of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union. The slender volume consists of only 138 pages of text, with barely 100 pages on the period of the Second World War. The book is also awkwardly organized: after describing America's movement toward war in chapter 2 and Stalin's views of America in chapter 3, Weeks shifts in chapters 4 and 5 to tracing the "Historical Roots of Lend-Lease" all the way back to the 1780s. Additional space is consumed by bibliographic information in the text, including both the full Russian and the full English titles of recent Russian books and articles.

More important, the major arguments seem muddled. Weeks depicts younger Russian historians as having courageously broken "the enforced silence surrounding the true extent and effect of the assistance given by the Soviets" (p. ix), yet at least some of the Russian publications Weeks cites appeared after September 11, 2001, when the Russian government emphasized American-Soviet cooperation during World War II as parallel to the alliance against Islamic terrorism that it hoped to cultivate. Weeks recognizes that President Franklin D. Roosevelt used "shrewd" methods to start aid to the Soviet Union, which was in the strategic interest of the United States because the Red Army could present serious problems for Nazi Germany (p. 6). Yet Weeks insinuates that FDR was a soft-hearted sympathizer with "Uncle Joe" Stalin (pp. 5, 14, 15) and that Lend-Lease was conceived by officials under the influence of Soviet spies (p. 7). Although Weeks acknowledges that even the strongly anti-Communist American Federation of Labor supported aid to the Soviet Union by the fall of 1941 (p. 24), he asserts that Lend-Lease "probably would have been inconceivable"

without the influence of Soviet spies and American fellow travelers (p. 42).

As this claim indicates, one of the peculiarities of *Russia's Life-Saver* is its highlighting of the role of "ubiquitous" Soviet spies (p. 14). Weeks handles this issue with less care than scholars such as Katherine A. S. Sibley and R. Bruce Craig. He endorses General Pavel Sudoplatov's characterization of Harry Hopkins as a "Soviet agent" and even states that "Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was said to have had a woman Soviet agent as a personal friend" (p. 45). Despite the anti-war Soviet propaganda line during the period of the nonaggression pact with Germany, Weeks suggests that Stalin and his agents somehow manipulated the United States toward entering the war between 1939 and 1941 (pp. 11-12, 21).

A systematic discussion of how Soviet and Russian views of Lend-Lease and the Grand Alliance have evolved since 1945 would be valuable. Unfortunately, that is not what this often polemical and speculative work delivers. The book is poorly written, with quotations and statistics often thrust at the reader without being integrated into the narrative (for example, pages 3, 80-82, and 84). It is marred by factual errors (for example, the Yalta Conference is said to have taken place in February 1944, not long after the Tehran Conference [p. 130]). The bibliography is incomplete (for example, none of the many important books and articles by Warren F. Kimball are included). In sum, it is difficult to recommend *Russia's Life-Saver* to any historians, except perhaps those who will be interested in the extensive quotation of recent Russian studies.

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