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Russia in Perspective

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Russia in Perspective: Contents

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Saint Basil's Cathedral
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Chapter 1: Geography

Introduction

Russia, the world's largest country, is remarkable in its geographic diversity.^{1,2} The nation spans two continents, contains more of the world's longest rivers than any other country, and exhibits topography ranging from below-sea-level basins (around the Caspian Sea) to towering volcanic peaks (on the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far eastern section of the country).^{3,4} Russia's largest population centers tend to be located in the west, in the more temperate region known as European Russia.^{5,6} Nonetheless, the quest to develop the vast natural resources of the country's eastern, Asian regions, known collectively as Siberia, has resulted in the establishment of several large cities, some of which lie in some of the world's coldest areas.^{7,8}



The Kola Peninsula
©Vlad Tuchkov/flickr.com

Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

Kola Peninsula

In the northwestern corner of Russia, adjacent to Finland and Norway, lies the Kola Peninsula. The Barents Sea, a part of the Arctic Ocean, lies to the north of the peninsula, and the White Sea, a bay of the Barents Sea, surrounds it to the south and southeast. The glacier-scoured surface of this region is rich in natural ores and minerals. Mosses, lichens, small Arctic birches, and other tundra vegetation constitute the only flora that can survive in the Kola Peninsula's severe climate. The primary city on the peninsula is Murmansk,

an ice-free port on the Kola Bay inlet that leads into the Barents Sea and eventually the North Atlantic.^{9, 10} Murmansk is the largest city in the world north of the Arctic Circle and is the administrative base of the Russian Navy's Northern Fleet.^{11, 12}

Russian Plain

Almost the entire European region of Russia consists of a rolling plain. Glacial- and fault-created features interrupt its otherwise uniform flatness. These features include the Valdai Hills, which lie between Moscow and Saint Petersburg; the Smolensk Upland; the Volga Uplands; and the Central Russian Upland.^{13, 14, 15}

The Russian Plain (also known as the East European Plain) is a huge region, extending from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Caspian Sea and Black Sea in the south. Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the nation's two largest cities, are located in the northwestern and central regions of the plain, as are the Volga, Oka, and Don rivers, which have served as important riverine transportation corridors throughout much of Russian history. In the southern region of the Russian Plain, near where the Volga River drains into the Caspian Sea, is the Caspian Depression, a below-sea-level area marked by sparse rainfall and the largest natural gas deposits in Europe.^{16, 17}



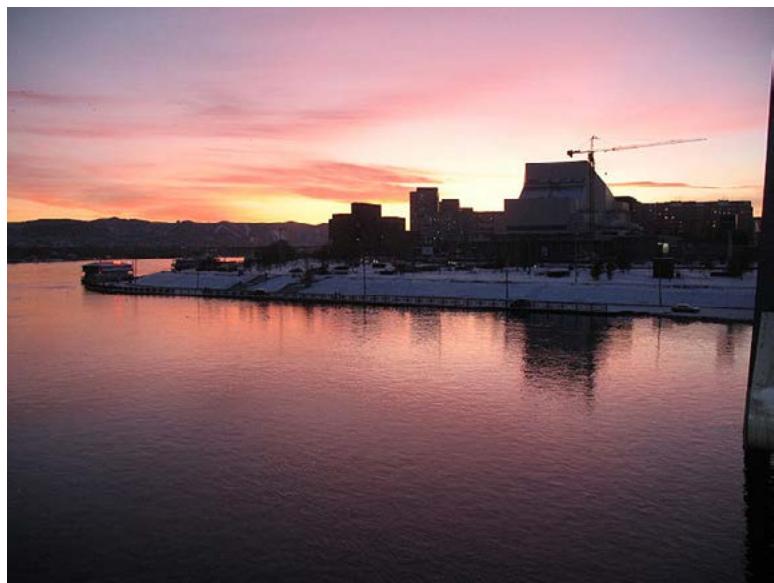
Caucasus Mountains
©Xevi B/flickr.com

Caucasus Mountains

Between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea on Russia's southwestern border with Georgia and Azerbaijan are the Greater Caucasus Mountains, an impressive range whose ridgeline forms much of Russia's southern border in this region.¹⁸ Mount Elbrus, a 5,642-m (18,510-ft) high extinct volcanic peak, lies just north of Georgia; it is the tallest peak in Russia and in Europe as a whole.^{19, 20} The largest cities in this region, most notably Nalchik and Vladikavkaz, are located at much lower altitudes in the northern foothills.^{21, 22}

Ural Mountains

Running in a general north-south direction, the Ural Mountains are a chain of low mountains that have traditionally marked the boundary between the European and Asian continents. To the north, the range bends northwest along the Pay-Khoy Ridge and extends into the Arctic Ocean as the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. Although the Ural Mountains have long marked a boundary within Russia, their relatively low elevation has kept them from representing a formidable barrier to east-west movement of armies or commerce. Most of the ethnic Russian population in the region lives in the southern portion of the Urals in the large cities of Perm, Ufa, Yekaterinburg, and Chelyabinsk.^{23, 24}



The city of Krasnoyarsk
©Kgbbristol/flickr.com

West Siberian Plain

East of the Ural Mountains lies one of the world's largest regions of uninterrupted flatland. Known as the West Siberian Plain, this region borders the Yenisey River Valley to the east, the Kara Sea (part of the Arctic Ocean) to the north, and the Kazakhstan border to the south. Much of the West Siberian Plain consists of poorly drained coniferous forestlands, which cover extensive oil and gas deposits.^{25, 26} The best soils for agriculture, as well as the large cities of Omsk and Novosibirsk, are located in the far southern part of the plain. The Northern Siberian Lowland, an eastward extension of the West Siberian Plain, separates the Taymyr Peninsula on the Arctic Ocean from the Central Siberia Plateau.²⁷

Central Siberian Plateau

Beginning east of the Yenisey River, the West Siberian Plain gives way to the Central Siberian Plateau, an upland region with an average elevation of 500–700 m (1,650–2,300 ft). The Central Siberian Plateau borders the Lena River to the east, the Northern Siberian Lowland and Taymyr Peninsula to the north, and the Eastern Sayan Mountains and Lake Baikal region to the south.²⁸ On the northwestern edge of the plateau, the volcanic Putoran Mountains rise as high as 1,701 m (5,581 ft), while the eastern edge of the plateau descends to the Central Yakut Lowland.^{29, 30} Major cities are rare on the plateau; the largest is Krasnoyarsk, an industrial city on the southern reaches of the Yenisey River.^{31, 32}

Taymyr Peninsula

The Taymyr Peninsula lies between the Kara Sea and the Laptev Sea, two arms of the Arctic Ocean. It is the most northern region in mainland Eurasia. Its central feature is the Byrranga Mountains, whose highest peaks reach 1,150 m (3,772 ft). To the south and north of the Byrranga Mountains lie tundra lowlands. Human habitation on the peninsula is sparse because of extreme climatic conditions.³³ In spite of the harsh climate, however, the peninsula is home to a variety of wildlife including the musk ox, caribou, polar bears, and geese.³⁴



Lake Teletskoe

©Arthur Kantemirov/flickr.com

Mountains of the South and East

Along Russia's southern borders with northeastern Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and northeastern China, there is an extensive and complex geographic region consisting primarily of mountain ranges. These mountains span northward into eastern Siberia and then jut southward along the Kamchatka Peninsula toward Japan.³⁵

The Altai Mountains are located at the west end of this region, along Russia's borders with eastern Kazakhstan, a small section of northwestern China, and western Mongolia. Within this range, Mount Belukha rises to 4,506 m (14,783 ft), making it one of the highest points in the Asian region of Russia.^{36, 37, 38} Immediately to the east of

the Altai Mountains are the Western Tannu-Ola Mountains. A narrow valley formed by the upper reaches of the Yenisey River separates them from the Western Sayan Mountains to their north.³⁹

Near Lake Baikal, the mountain ranges broaden and begin to trend toward the northeast. The dominant ranges of this region are the Yablonovy and Stanovoy ranges,

which serve as a drainage divide between the basins of the Lena River and Amur River, the two longest rivers in eastern Siberia. Extending northeastward from the eastern end of the Stanovoy Range, the Dzhugdzhur Range parallels the coast along the Sea of Okhotsk. Several ranges from the north merge toward the northeastern end of the Dzhugdzhur Range, most notably the Verkhoyansk Mountains and the Chersky Range. East of these ranges and to the north of the Sea of Okhotsk, the Kolyma Mountains continue the general trend of the Dzhugdzhur Range as they extend toward the far northeast. Other mountains beyond the Kolyma include the Koryak and Sredinny mountains of the Kamchatka Peninsula, whose myriad volcanic peaks compose the northwestern section of the Pacific Ocean's "ring of fire."^{40, 41, 42}

The largest cities in Russia's southern and eastern mountain regions lie along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which has long served as the sole land transport connection between Russia's Pacific coast and the rest of the nation. Among them are Vladivostok (Russia's largest Pacific port), Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, Ulan Ude, and Chita.^{43, 44, 45}



Snow in central Russia
©Victor Radzivn/flickr.com

Climate

With the exception of the Caucasus region, the adjoining lower Don and Volga river basins, a few areas in southern Siberia, and the southeast maritime region along the Pacific Ocean, all of Russia lies north of 50°N latitude.^{46, 47} By comparison, Alaska is the only portion of the United States that lies north of this latitude.^{48, 49} As a result, most of Russia experiences long and cold winters and short cool summers. A long strip of Russia lying along the country's Arctic Ocean coast exhibits a "tundra" climate in which the ground is permanently frozen, and little vegetation is capable of surviving the extremely cold temperatures.^{50, 51}

During the Russian winter, a large high-pressure cell forms along Russia's southern border, directing wind to flow from the southwest in European Russia, from the south in Siberia, and from the northwest along the Russian Pacific coast.⁵² As a result, average winter temperatures in Russia tend to show more variation as one moves from west to east (warmer in the west, colder in the east) than from north to south. In the far northeast, winter temperatures reach extreme lows in a region between the Verkhoyansk Mountains and the Chersky Range.⁵³ Oymyakon and Verkhoyansk, two villages in this so-called "pole of cold," have both claimed the title for lowest temperature ever recorded outside Antarctica, with figures of -68°C (-90°F) and -71°C (-96°F), respectively.⁵⁴

In the southern areas of the Russian Plain, as well as in scattered portions of southern Siberia, meteorologists classify the climate as “mid-latitude steppe,” which is comparable to that of the Great Plains of the United States and southern Canada. This climatic region corresponds closely with Russia’s grain belt.⁵⁵

Annual precipitation is modest throughout Russia and mostly confined to the summer season. In the Russian and West Siberian plains, annual precipitation is highest in the northwest and generally declines as one moves toward the southeast part of this region, with the exception of the higher elevations of the Ural Mountains. Mountain elevations and regions along the Pacific coast are the wettest areas in the Russian Far East.⁵⁶



Sailing on the Black Sea
©Fabio - Miami/flickr.com

Bodies of Water

Russia has some of the longest rivers and largest river basins in the world. Specifically, the four largest river drainage basins in Asia (the Ob, Yenisey, Lena, and Amur) all lie mostly within Russia, and the largest European river drainage basin (the Volga) is completely within Russia. Scientists classify the large Russian rivers by the bodies of water into which they drain.^{57, 58}

Caspian Sea/Black Sea

The Volga River is the primary source of water for the Caspian Sea. It drains a large portion of the central and southern Russian Plain, and it has long been the country’s most important inland waterway, carrying two-thirds of all river traffic.

The Volga’s source lies in the Valdai Hills northwest of Moscow, and it receives the water of more than 200 tributaries along its path to the Caspian. The Volga is a heavily engineered river system. A series of canals connect it to Moscow, the White Sea (in the Arctic Ocean), and the Black Sea. Furthermore, numerous large reservoirs on the Volga and its tributaries produce a hydroelectric generating capacity of about 11 million kilowatts.^{59, 60, 61}

West of the Volga River Basin, the Don River flows into the Sea of Azov, an arm of the Black Sea, which makes it the only navigable Russian river naturally accessible to the Mediterranean Sea (via the Bosphorus Strait). Near Volgograd, the Volga River links to the huge Tsimlyansk Reservoir on the Don River via the 80 km (49 mi) Volga-Don Ship Canal.^{62, 63} Halfway between the Don’s mouth (near the city of Rostov) and the Tsimlyansk Reservoir, the Donets River tributary feeds the Don River on its right bank.⁶⁴



Arctic Ocean

Most of the major rivers of Siberia flow generally south to north, emptying into various arms of the Arctic Ocean. The largest of these rivers are the Ob, Yenisey, and Lena, all of which are among the longest rivers in the world. The Ob is the principal river of the West Siberian Plain, and it has the world's sixth-largest drainage basin. On its upstream stretch, it supplies the power for a large hydroelectric plant at Novosibirsk, Russia's third-largest city and a major industrial center. Tributaries flowing from the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains feed the Ob. The Ob's source is located in the Altai Mountains, near the western

Mongolian border.^{65, 66, 67}

On the eastern edge of the West Siberian Plain lies the Yenisey River, whose major tributaries flow into it from the Central Siberian Plateau to the east. One of these tributaries is the Angara River, which drains Lake Baikal, the largest lake entirely within Russia and the oldest and deepest body of freshwater on earth. Lake Baikal's tremendous depth of 1,620 m (5,315 ft) makes it the world's most voluminous freshwater body—its waters represent roughly one-fifth of all freshwater on the earth's surface.^{68, 69} The largest city on the Yenisey River is Krasnoyarsk, which, like Novosibirsk on the Ob River, sits near a large hydroelectric plant at a Trans-Siberian Railroad river crossing.^{70, 71}

The Lena River separates the Central Siberian Plateau to the west from the various mountain ranges that lie to its east and south. The Lena's headwaters begin near Lake Baikal, from where the river sweeps northeast for much of its course, before bending back toward the northwest near Yakutsk. Yakutsk is an isolated river port city with a population of more than 200,000.^{72, 73} Ust-Kut, where the Baikal-Amur Mainline railroad crosses the Lena, and Lensk, a river hub for the diamond mines to its north, are the only other cities of any size along the river's 4,400-km (2,734-mi) path to the Laptev Sea.^{74, 75, 76}



Pacific Ocean

The high mountains that run along much of Russia's Pacific coast severely limit the number of significant rivers flowing to the world's largest ocean. The only major river that flows into the Pacific is the Amur River, which forms the Russian-Chinese border for almost 1,610 km (1,000 mi) from the point where the left-bank Shilka River and the right-bank Argun River meet to form the Amur proper. The Argun itself forms the Russian-Chinese border for 965 km (600 mi) before its confluence with the Shilka. Near Khabarovsk, the largest city on the Amur, the river bends toward the northeast before eventually

flowing into the Tatar Strait near Sakhalin Island. Khabarovsk is also the point at which the Trans-Siberian Railroad crosses the Amur River before turning southward toward the Pacific port city of Vladivostok.^{77, 78, 79, 80}

Major Cities

City	Population⁸¹
Moscow	10,381,222
Saint Petersburg	5,028,000
Novosibirsk	1,419,007
Yekaterinburg	1,349,772
Nizhniy Novgorod	11,284,164
Samara	1,134,730
Omsk	1,129,281
Kazan	1,104,738
Rostov-na-Donu	1,074,482
Chelyabinsk	1,062,919
Ufa	1,033,338
Volgograd	1,011,417



Moscow

From its modest beginning as a trading post on the Moscow River, Moscow has grown over the centuries to become one of the world's largest cities. Today, it is the political, educational, business, religious, and transportation center of Russia. The architectural centerpiece of the city is the Kremlin, a triangular fortress complex built upon a bend of the Moscow River. It is the ceremonial residence of the Russian president, and it has come to symbolize the center of Russian power, much as the White House and Downing Street have become synonymous with the leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom,

respectively. Although it has achieved an important position in global affairs over the last 90 years and, in earlier centuries, was an imperial capital, Moscow was not the capital of the Russian Empire from the early 1700s through 1917. During that time Saint Petersburg, Russia's "window on the West," was the capital.^{82, 83, 84}

Moscow regained its status as a capital city during Soviet rule, and it grew significantly during the early years of the U.S.S.R. Between 1926 and 1939, the city's population doubled from 2 million to 4.1 million as industrial development expanded in the city.⁸⁵ By 1960, Moscow initiated an urban development plan designed to limit the city's growth to the interior of the ring road, which encircled the city. But by the 1980s, as the city's population reached 8 million, Moscow's urban expansion surpassed the ring road perimeter.^{86, 87, 88}

Today, Moscow is as much a symbol of Russian capitalism as it was the center of Communist rule in earlier decades, and Russian economic power has centralized itself in the city. As of 2001, it contained roughly one-fourth of Russia's wealth, up from one-tenth in the 1990s.⁸⁹ Recently, statisticians recognized Moscow as the home of more billionaires than any other city in the world.⁹⁰ Even though the city is still an industrial center, much of Moscow's post-Soviet growth has come in the services sector; since the privatization of the Russian economy, Moscow has developed into a financial hub with an increasing number of retail businesses. One manufacturing industry that has defied this trend is food processing, which has modernized its practices and attracted foreign investment. Today, one-fourth of Moscow's industrial labor force works in this sector.⁹¹



The Hermitage
©Dennis Jarvis/flickr.com

Saint Petersburg

In terms of size, economic power, and historical and cultural importance, the only Russian city that remotely rivals Moscow is Saint Petersburg. The urban area developed around a swamp at the mouth of the Neva River, which was the source of several battles between Russia and Sweden in the 13th–18th centuries. The Russians recaptured the area in 1703, and Russian Czar Peter the Great soon began construction of the modern city of Saint Petersburg, which became the Russian capital in 1712.^{92,93} During World War I, the city's name was “Russified” to Petrograd; later, in 1924, Soviet officials changed it to Leningrad in honor of

the famed communist leader. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the city's voters elected to restore the traditional name of Saint Petersburg.⁹⁴

Saint Petersburg's position at the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland gives it access to the Baltic Sea, thus making it Russia's largest port. Saint Petersburg exhibits a different layout than most other Russian medieval cities in that it lacks a distinctive city center, which would traditionally be a fortress, or kremlin. Saint Petersburg's famed historical buildings are more Western European in design than those of similar or older age in other Russian cities, such as Moscow.^{95,96}

In 1941, residents of Saint Petersburg (then known as Leningrad), suffered greatly during a nearly 900-day blockade by the German Army. An estimated 660,000 people died from starvation or scurvy during this time, and the city did not return to its pre-World War II population of 3 million until more than 20 years later. During the post-Soviet period, the city's economy has grown faster than the nation's economy as a whole, fueled by an industrial sector that is second only to Moscow in output. Tourism has also become an increasing source of income for the city, and much of Saint Petersburg's industry has moved away from the city center in order to preserve the uniqueness of its historical districts.^{97,98}



Church in Novosibirsk
©William/flickr.com

Novosibirsk

Novosibirsk is the main city in western Siberia and Russia's third-largest city.^{99, 100} The modern metropolis came into being in 1893, when the small village of Krisvoshchekovo was chosen to be the site of the Trans-Siberian Railroad's crossing of the Ob River. From 1895 to 1925, the city was known as Novonikolaevsk, in honor of Russia's last czar, Nicholas II. Novonikolaevsk's early growth was halted during the Russian Civil War and its aftermath, when the Ob River bridge was blown up; during the same time period roughly 60,000 of the city's citizens died in typhus and cholera epidemics.^{101, 102, 103}

During the 1920s, Novosibirsk revived when it became a major transportation center for the Kuznetsk coalfields to the city's east. Its importance as a transportation hub increased during the 1930s when railways linked it to the city of Almaty, in Kazakhstan.¹⁰⁴ Rapid industrialization occurred during World War II, when many industries in European Russia moved to the Novosibirsk area for security purposes. In the 1960s, Soviet officials developed the town of Akademgorodok just south of the city to house a number of scientific research institutions. This development made Novosibirsk, for a time, one of the premier scientific research centers in the Soviet Union. While some of Akademgorodok's scientists have scattered since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the area retains scientific and technological talent. The region has attracted investment from international firms such as IBM, Intel, and Schlumberger and has seen the establishment of several local software development companies.^{105, 106, 107}

The city remains economically reliant on its industrial and manufacturing base. The local Novosibirsk Steel Works of Kuzmin is a key provider of alloyed steel products for all of Russia. Tin-smelting and gold-refining plants also operate in the region. Chemical products, processed food products, electrical equipment, machinery, textiles, and various consumer products are components of the city's manufacturing sector.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the city is the major cultural and educational center in Siberia. It is home to theater, ballet, opera, museums, and an orchestra. Approximately 24 institutions of higher education call the city home.¹⁰⁹



Nizhniy Novgorod

Nizhniy Novgorod is located about 420 km (260 mi) east of Moscow, at the confluence of the Oka and Volga rivers. The city's name, which means Lower New Town, distinguishes it from another city named Novgorod (located near Saint Petersburg). Nizhniy Novgorod has a long history, dating back to the 13th century, and its strategic river location has made it both a trading center and an area known for shipbuilding. From 1932 to 1990, Russians called the city Gorky, in honor of the writer Maxim Gorky, who was born in the city.^{110, 111}

From 1817 to 1917, Nizhniy Novgorod was the location of Russia's most important trade fair,

which attracted merchants from throughout Asia and Europe. As a result, the city quickly became one of the first manufacturing centers in Russia, and it has retained that identity to the present day. The production of civilian and military vehicles and vessels has been a significant component of the city's industrial sector. For example, the local Gorkovsky Avtomobilny Zavod (GAZ) automobile factory the second-largest largest producer of trucks, light commercial vehicles, and passenger cars in Russia.^{112, 113, 114} Several defense industries are located here including the Sokol aircraft and the Krasnoye Sormovo shipbuilding.^{115, 116, 117} Because of its important role in military production, the Soviets closed Nizhniy Novgorod to foreigners for many decades during the Cold War.¹¹⁸



Yekaterinburg

Yekaterinburg is the largest city in Russia's Ural region and the gateway to Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Express. Its history dates back to 1723, when Peter the Great founded it as part of his campaign to develop the mineral riches of the Urals. He named the city after his second wife, who became Empress Catherine I upon his death. During the Soviet era, the area was renamed Sverdlovsk after Yakov Sverdlov, a Bolshevik leader who authorized the execution of the Romanov imperial family in 1918.^{119, 120, 121} In July 1918,

Bolshevik agents murdered Nicholas II, the last Russian czar, and his family in the cellar of a merchant's house in Yekaterinburg.^{122, 123} Communist Party officials destroyed the house in 1977, but in 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians constructed a huge memorial church on the site. It has since become a site of pilgrimage.^{124, 125}

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviets developed the city as a major industrial center. One of the most well known of the numerous industrial facilities built in this era is the Uralmash, which over its long history has produced everything from mining and metallurgical industry equipment to armored tanks and drilling rigs. At its peak, the Uralmash employed 50,000 people, and although only a small percentage of that number now work there, the plant remains the city's largest commercial operation. Food processing, gem cutting, and manufacturing of engineering products are other important industries carried out in the city.¹²⁶

During the Cold War, Sverdlovsk was also a Soviet center for chemical and biological warfare research. In one infamous episode in 1979, which only came to light in the 1990s, a biological weapons facility on the outskirts of the city accidentally released an aerosol of anthrax spores. The release affected 94 people, of which 64 died. The former First Deputy Director of the civilian department of the lab has estimated that tens of thousands would have died that day if the wind had been blowing toward Sverdlovsk.^{127, 128}



Oiled bird
©Marine Photobank/flickr.com

Environmental Concerns

Water Pollution

Russia continues to suffer from a Soviet legacy of industrial, agricultural, and energy development practices that largely ignored environmental ramifications.^{129, 130, 131} Recent studies show that approximately one-third of drinking water samples had high levels of chemical contaminants.^{132, 133} Numerous bodies of water within or on the borders of Russia are severely polluted.¹³⁴ One of these environmentally damaged water bodies, the Volga River, now accumulates upstream contaminants from industrial and agricultural runoff due to the large dams built

along the river's course. At Astrakhan, near the Volga's delta on the Caspian Sea, runoff from farms and factories has caused algae blooms to flourish, thus depriving the river and wetland wildlife of necessary oxygen and greatly affecting the river's ecosystem.^{135, 136, 137} The Techa River runs along one of the most contaminated nuclear dumping sites in the world. Officials banned drinking, bathing, or irrigating with water from the river in 1953.^{138, 139} Concerns continue as pollution levels elevate in Lake Baikal. Pollution levels have increased so much in recent years that the world's deepest lake is turning into a swamp.^{140, 141, 142}

Nuclear Environmental Threats

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union built several secret facilities that were engaged in the development of the country's nuclear arsenal and resources. Safety standards for the handling and disposal of radioactive materials at these sites were often lax; today, there is continuing concern about how officials handle nuclear materials at the country's remnant nuclear development facilities. Russia also continues to operate 11 RMBK nuclear reactors near the cities of Saint Petersburg, Smolensk, and Kursk. This type of reactor, in which operators use graphite rods to control the nuclear chain reaction, is considered less safe than other reactor designs. The reactor that led to the nuclear accident at Chernobyl was an RMBK reactor.^{143, 144}

But the greatest source of environmental concern in Russia has been the Mayak nuclear waste processing plant, which sits in the eastern Urals, in the region between Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk, two of Russia's largest cities.¹⁴⁵ At least one authority has described the area around Mayak, where Soviet authorities produced plutonium for their nuclear weapons program, as "the most radioactively contaminated area in the world."^{146, 147} In 1957, a waste-storage facility at the Mayak plant blew up, producing the



Chernobyl aftermath
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second-worst nuclear disaster of all time, eclipsed only by the more publicized Chernobyl nuclear accident, which occurred nearly 30 years later.^{148, 149, 150} Storage reservoirs near the plant have now accumulated 1.2 billion curies of radioactive waste, the equivalent of 22 Chernobyls.¹⁵¹ One of these storage sites is Lake Karachai, where Mayak's wastes were first stored in 1951. Officials have now covered the lake with concrete in order to prevent its deadly sediments from eroding and blowing away in the wind. The lake is said to be so radioactive that an hour-long exposure along its shoreline delivers enough radiation to ensure acute radiation sickness resulting in death.^{152, 153}

Deforestation

Another major issue is deforestation resulting mainly from illegal logging. Data shows that between 2000 and 2012, Russia lost more forest than any other nation in the world. The rapid cutting of trees has raised levels of carbon monoxide and raised erosion levels, especially in the country's far eastern region.^{154, 155, 156} Aside from loss of habitat and loss of forest, deforestation also raises erosion levels. Scientists report that the quality of Russian soil, due in part to erosion and loss of topsoil, has resulted in major drops in soil fertility.^{157, 158} As a result, the amount of quality arable land has dropped. Productivity yields have dropped because of insufficient nutrients in the soil caused by erosion.¹⁵⁹



Flooded town
©Bev Sykes/flickr.com

Natural Hazards

Approximately 8,000 earthquakes are detected annually in Russia. More than half of these occur in the mountainous coastal regions of eastern Russia, particularly the Kuril Islands and the Kamchatka Peninsula, which are susceptible to both massive earthquakes and volcanic activity.¹⁶⁰ In March 2013, a magnitude 8.3 earthquake struck along the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far eastern region of the country. Scientists believe it is the deepest earthquake ever recorded.¹⁶¹ Russian scientists are predicting that more powerful earthquakes will wrack the far eastern region in the near term.¹⁶²

Elsewhere in Russia, the most costly natural disasters are tied to river flooding.¹⁶³ In June 2015, the Sochi was devastated by flash flooding caused by rains.^{164, 165} In 2013, one of the most devastating floods to strike the nation occurred in the Far East Region. As many as 100,000 people were evacuated and flood waters did not fully recede for weeks.^{166, 167} The Siberian rivers, in particular, are notorious for spring ice jams that can induce river flooding.^{168, 169, 170} If the jams grow too large or occur close to population centers, officials sometimes use explosives to break the ice and free up the river's flow.^{171, 172} In the spring of 2001, for example, authorities called upon a squadron of Russian SU-24 supersonic bombers to eliminate an ice jam on the Lena River that threatened to flood Yakutsk, a city of 200,000 people.^{173, 174, 175}

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Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Russian Plain makes up the largest area of the European region of Russia.

TRUE

Extending from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Caspian and Black seas in the south, the vast Russian Plain encompasses most of European Russia.

2. The West Siberian Plain is largely devoid of energy resources.

FALSE

Much of the West Siberian Plain consists of poorly drained coniferous forestlands, which cover extensive oil and gas deposits.

3. The area around the Mayak nuclear waste plant is highly contaminated with radioactivity.

TRUE

At least one authority has described the area around Mayak, where Soviet authorities produced plutonium for their nuclear weapons program, as “the most radioactively contaminated area in the world.”

4. Average winter temperatures in Russia demonstrate greater variation as one moves from north to south rather than from west to east.

FALSE

Because of atmospheric pressure and wind patterns, average winter temperatures in Russia tend to show more variation as one moves from west to east (warmer in the west, colder in the east) than from north to south.

5. The Volga River system is a major riverine transportation network in western Russia.

TRUE

Located on the Russian Plain, the Volga River and its tributaries carry roughly two-thirds of the nation’s river traffic.



Moscow Space Monument
©William Veerbeek/flickr.com

Chapter 2: History

Introduction

Russia's vast expanses have been the stage for momentous events in human history. Many of these events have been epic battles of war in which Russian armies waged numerous military campaigns to protect the nation from foreign invaders. During such conflicts, cold Russian winters and the long distances over which invaders struggled to maintain their supply routes often worked to the advantage of Russian troops. Genghis Khan and Hitler made deep incursions into European Russia over the centuries, but only the Khan dynasty was able to maintain any real control for more than a few years.¹

Throughout its history, Russia's military strength has allowed it to expand its empire. The Russian nation was initially only a fraction of its current size, at one time consisting of only certain regions of modern-day western Russia, Belarus, and northern Ukraine. As the Russian Empire expanded numerous regions became Russian in language and culture as they were incorporated into the fold. Today, Russia retains a significant number of ethnic minorities as a legacy of its expansive reach.²



Russian monument
©Dennis Jarvis/flickr.com

were Kiev, the modern-day capital of Ukraine, and Novgorod, located on the Volgoz River and south of the modern-day city of Saint Petersburg.^{3, 4}

By the ninth century C.E., these northern trading posts had come under the dominance of armies led by Scandinavian invaders known as Varangians. Some historians point to the Varangians as the inspiration for the word *Rus* (after the dominant Varangian clan name), from which Russia (meaning “land of the Rus”) derives.^{5, 6, 7}

The most influential of the Varangian princes who swept into the northern Russian Plain was Rurik who is thought to be the founder of a dynasty that ruled a collection of principalities in the East Slavic territories until nearly the beginning of the 17th

century. The lands under Varangian control stretched from the northeastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in the southwest to the upper reaches of the Dvina River in the northeast. To the southeast, in the region between the Baltic and Caspian seas, was the home of the Khazars, a Turkic-speaking tribal confederation. The Khazars battles against Arab invaders in the seventh and eighth centuries helped stem the expansion of Islam into Eastern Europe.^{8, 9}

Kievan Rus

Kievan Rus power emerged and flourished in a golden age between the late 10th and mid-11th centuries.¹⁰ The Rurikid prince, Svyatoslav and his son Vladimir I, successfully consolidated power in the north. Kievan Rus also dealt the Khazars to

Early History

Origin of the Russian State

Although different organized groups have lived in the territory now known as Russia since at least the second millennium B.C.E., much of the region’s early history is unknown. Sometime during the early centuries of the first millennium C.E., Slavic tribes migrated into the northern Russian Plain, probably from a large region to the south. East Slav ethnic groups that came to inhabit this region established many trading posts along numerous rivers that lay between the Baltic and Black seas. Among the most important of these



Sacred Place of Baptism
©Vyacheslav Argenberg/flickr.com



Monument of Genghis Kahn
©Francois Philipp/flickr.com

the south a series of crushing blows beginning in 965. To the east, the forces of Vladimir I fought the Volga Bulgars, a Turkic group.¹¹ Kievan Rus became Orthodox Christian in 988 after Vladimir I converted to the faith. This event marked the beginning of the Russian Orthodox Church, which played a dominant role in Russian life and culture.¹² Kievan Rus began to decline in 1054, when the various Rus principalities began to form alliances with bordering states.¹³ Foremost among these principalities was Novgorod, which eventually became the port for Russian trade with the Hanseatic League that dominated Baltic and North Sea trade for several centuries.^{14, 15}

The Mongol Invasion and the Golden Horde

In 1223, a band of armies under Mongolian warlord Genghis Khan invaded the former Kievan Rus region, defeating the combined armies of the

regional principalities further accelerating the fragmentation of the former Kievan Rus territories. The western and southern principalities fell under the domination of their Polish, Hungarian, and Lithuanian neighbors to the west. Today, these regions form the heart of Belarus and Ukraine. The principalities to the east and northeast are today the heart of European Russia.^{16, 17} The Mongols retreated toward Asia, but in 1237, Genghis Khan western and southern principalities fell under the domination of their Polish, Hungarian, and Lithuanian neighbors to a new khanate known as the Golden Horde, with its capital on the lower Volga River near the modern city of Volgograd. The Golden Horde khans ruled the region by proxy using loyal native princes. One of these local princes was Alexander Nevsky, who became Grand Prince of Vladimir after defeating Swedish and German invaders in the Novgorod principality.^{18, 19, 20}

The Rise of Muscovy (Moscow)

After Nevsky's death in 1263, the khan's son, Daniil, ruled the principality of Muscovy (Moscow). Under Daniil and his descendants, Muscovy gained prominence. In 1328, Daniil's son, Ivan I, became Grand Prince of Muscovy, making Moscow the new center of East Slavic principalities.^{21, 22, 23}

During the reign of Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Great (1462-1505), the Grand Principality of Muscovy broke from Golden Horde control and established itself as the dominant power in what is today European Russia. The surrounding principalities came under Muscovite control and by 1505; Muscovy had tripled in size, extending to



Muscovy Cathedral
©Bernt Rostad/flickr.com

the lower Ob River on the eastern side of the Ural Mountains.^{24, 25, 26}

The 28-year rule of Ivan the Great's son, Vasily III, was a relatively peaceful time. He consolidated territorial gains and integrated the remaining Russian principalities into Muscovy. After Vasily's death, Muscovite boyars served as regents for his young son, Ivan IV, until 1547 when he was crowned Czar of All Russia.^{27, 28, 29, 30} Ivan IV expanded his territory into the southern steppes and across the Ural Mountains. During the latter years of his rule, Ivan IV descended into madness and became known as Ivan the Terrible. In 1565, he divided Russia into two regions, one

consisting of towns and cities directly under his control (the *oprichnina*) and the other administered by a council of boyars (the *zemschina*). In the *oprichnina*, Ivan executed anyone suspected of disloyalty and confiscated their lands.^{31, 32, 33}

After Ivan's death, his feeble-minded son, Fyodor I, became czar under the regency of his brother-in-law, Boris Godunov who was the de facto Russian ruler. With Fyodor I's death, Godunov became czar.³⁴ Godunov's rule was challenged by False Dmitry who claimed to be Ivan IV's son. Although Godunov survived the challenge, he died shortly thereafter. Dmitry was crowned the czar but reigned less than a year amidst boyar power struggles.^{35, 36, 37} The next 8 years were a tumultuous period in Russian history. Battles for power among groups of boyars and their candidates for czar left the country in a state of anarchy. This period did not cease until a *zemsky sobor* (assembly of the land), consisting of boyars, church officials, and urban freemen, elected young Mikhail Romanov the new czar in 1613.³⁸

The Romanovs

Between 1645 and 1676, under Romanov rule, Russia enjoyed some stability and expanded its territory to include eastern Siberia.³⁹ But memories of the peasant revolts during the Time of Troubles contributed to governmental restrictions on the rights of landless peasants.⁴⁰

Peter I (Peter the Great), the first great Romanov leader, came to power in 1696.^{41, 42} His newly created city of Saint Petersburg grew rapidly and became Russia's capital in 1712. In 1721, Peter took the title of emperor, thus inaugurating the Russian Empire.^{43, 44, 45}

Peter I died in 1725, and with no male successor, a tumultuous period marked by uncertain leadership, frequent coups, and puppet czars followed. One exception was the 20-year reign of his daughter, Empress Elizabeth, who gradually loosened state controls



Romanov family crest
©Orange-kun/flickr.com

over economic matters, and formed political alliances with European powers.^{46, 47, 48} Peter III, Elizabeth's nephew, succeeded her but Peter had little support. Popular resentment led to his removal in a coup.^{49, 50}

That coup brought Catherine II (the Great), Peter III's wife, to power and marked the end of the Era of Palace Revolutions. In her 34-year reign, Russia again expanded, incorporating much of Poland.^{51, 52, 53} Russia annexed many of Ukraine, incorporating much of Poland.⁵⁴ Catherine divided the nation into provinces and districts and granted these local governmental entities expanded administrative responsibilities. The Russian elite increasingly reflected Western economic, intellectual, and cultural ideas and traditions, but much of the country's population was unaffected by these changes. Russian peasants continued to suffer fueling resentments that occasionally boiled over into rebellions. In 1773 into provinces and districts and granted these local governmental entities expanded administrative responsibilities.⁵⁵

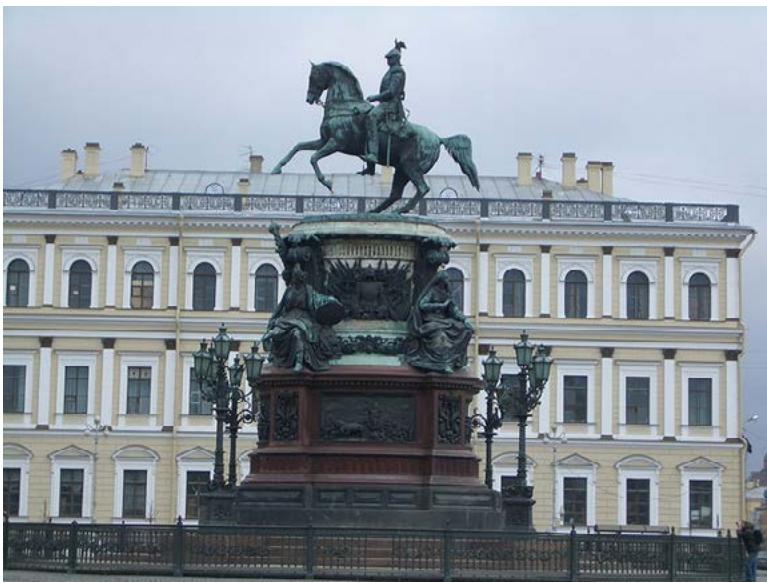
^{56, 57}

The Early 19th Century

After Catherine's death in 1796, her son, Paul I, ruled briefly. His policies quickly created enemies within both the military and nobility. He was assassinated in 1801 and replaced by his son, Alexander I, who ruled until his own death in 1825.^{58, 59}

Alexander's younger brother, Nicholas I, assumed the throne in spite of an uprising by Russian dissidents known as the Decembrists and ruled for the next 30 years.⁶⁰ Nicholas I instituted tight censorship controls and created the Third Department, a secret security force.^{61, 62} Russia's defeat by the Ottoman's in the Crimean War precipitated an economic crisis forcing Russia to sell its Alaskan territories to the United States in 1867 and strengthening the hand of reformers.^{63, 64, 65}

Czar Alexander II succeeded his father. He introduced reforms lifting censorship restrictions, modernizing the army and communications system, and introducing a legal system based on Western European models. Alexander granted powers to levy taxes to a group of provincial- and county-level elected assemblies (*zemstvos*).^{66, 67} One of the most important reforms was the Emancipation Act of 1861, ending serfdom in Russia.⁶⁸ The emancipation of the serfs escalated resentments against the czar's authority. City youths traveled to the countryside in the 1870s to incite peasant revolts. Although



Monument of Nicholas I
©Shira Karp/flickr.com

heavy industries spurred worker unrest. Despite a famine in 1891–92 that killed hundreds of thousands, the government proceeded with expansionist programs, including the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, resulting in extensive foreign loans and heavy taxation of Russia's peasantry.^{74, 75}



Nicholas II
©Robert Huffstutter/flickr.com

the government put down these early revolts, a terrorist faction known as *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will) initiated several assassination attempts against Alexander II finally succeeding in 1881.^{69, 70, 71}

Russia's next czar, Alexander III, ruled for 13 years during which he accelerated the process of Russification. Schools taught solely in Russian and the government forbade publications in certain foreign and minority languages. The government stepped up its persecution of minority groups and increased restrictions on Jewish settlements. A wave of violent attacks (pogroms) against Jews in the early 1880s reignited ethnic tensions.^{72, 73}

Harsh conditions in Russia rapidly expanding

the government put down these early revolts, a terrorist faction known as *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will) initiated several assassination attempts against Alexander II finally succeeding in 1881.^{69, 70, 71}

Revolutions and Civil War

Prologue to Revolution

Alexander III died in 1894, succeeded by his son, Nicholas II. Numerous political parties, many of them radical, formed in opposition to the government.^{76, 77} Popular dissatisfaction grew deeper in 1905 with Japan. Numerous political parties, many of them radical, formed in opposition to the government. Later that year, the czar, facing a general strike, issued the October Manifesto, conceding basic civil liberties and creating a popularly elected national parliament (the Duma). The army remained loyal and crushed the insurrection in December.^{78, 79}

Voters elected several Dumas over the next few years, but the government promptly dissolved each of them, because the Dumas disagreed with the czar over the extent of proposed governmental

reforms. At the heart of this conflict was the czar's unwillingness to concede autocratic rule. As the government increasingly modified the electoral system to ensure a Duma in closer alignment with the government's positions, the Duma became less representative of Russian society.^{80, 81}

World War I and the February Revolution: Stage One

World War I swept Russia into more turmoil. After initial military successes, the Russian Army suffered reversals in 1915. Nicholas II traveled to the front to take personal control of the army, leaving day-to-day government under the control of Czarina Alexandra.⁸²

In 1917, two shifts in power occurred, ultimately plunging the nation into revolution. The Russian Revolution of 1917 occurred in two stages. In the first stage, in February, the economic and social burdens borne by Russians during the three years of World War I coalesced into a spontaneous series of riots and strikes.⁸³ The Russian Army refused to intervene resulting in the collapse of the imperial government. A provisional government consisting of Duma representatives was quickly formed and given a mandate to rule until a new government could be established by a democratic parliament in January 1918.^{84, 85}

The October Revolution: Stage Two

Two Marxist factions existed in pre- and post-revolutionary Russia. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (better known by his pseudonym, Lenin) led the more radical group, the Bolsheviks which favored the violent overthrow of the Russian government.⁸⁶ A more

moderate wing, represented by the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionary Party, was the more powerful group in Petrograd (Saint Petersburg).⁸⁷ In the struggle for power between moderates and radicals, the provisional government banned Bolsheviks, causing Lenin to flee. Returning in April 1917, Lenin began calling for a dictatorship of the proletariat instead of a parliamentary democracy, which he saw as representative of the propertied elite.^{88, 89}

In the second stage of the revolution, in late October 1917, armed Bolsheviks seized government buildings in Petrograd overthrowing the provisional government. By March 1918, they had consolidated control, renamed themselves the Communist Party, signed a peace treaty with Germany that relinquished most of the



Lenin monument
©Giorgio Monteforti/flickr.com

Russian territories in the far western part of the old empire, and moved the capital to Moscow with Lenin as leader. During the ensuing civil war (1918-1921), the Red Army, commanded by Leon Trotsky, fought against the White Russians, conservative elements opposed to communist rule. During the war Lenin instituted harsh economic and political measures to support the Red Army effort and to initiate the social engineering goal of a classless society. By 1921, Lenin had declared a New Economic Policy and reinstated some forms of capitalism.^{90, 91, 92}



Soviet flag
©Greg Robbins/flickr.com

The Soviet Era

Josef Stalin

In 1922, the communists established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). In the same year, Lenin suffered the first of several strokes and a power struggle began. By 1929, rivals had forced Trotsky, increasingly marginalized within the party, into exile. Josef Stalin, the General Secretary of the Communist Party methodically eliminated his other opponents and, by 1930, controlled the Politburo, the Communist Party, assassinated Trotsky in Mexico in 1940.^{93, 94, 95}

Shortly after consolidating power, Stalin instituted plans to increase the Soviet Union's industrial might. He initiated an ambitious Five-Year Plan in 1929 aimed at quadrupling industrial output, particularly in non-consumer-related sectors such as power plants, mineral extraction, steel production, and railways.^{96, 97, 98} Under the new plan, the government collectivized agricultural production. This system required groups of farmers to pool their land and resources and to meet production quotas given by the state. The more prosperous peasant farmers, known as *kulaks*, resisted these new measures. Initially, the government fined those who resisted or

confiscated their lands, but the penalties quickly became deportations to Siberia and other Arctic regions. The collectivization process resulted in a massive peasant migration to the cities, deadly famines in grain-growing areas, and a sharp decline in agricultural output.^{99, 100, 101}

During the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin ordered the execution of huge numbers of suspected

disloyal Communist Party members, intellectuals, and other “enemies of the people” and sent others to Siberian work camps. Estimates of the total number of people killed during the purge are in the millions. Agents of the NKVD, a secret police organization that was a forerunner of the KGB, often took victims from their homes in the middle of the night. More visible were the show trials of ex-Bolshevik leaders, all of whom authorities later executed. Of the first nine full members of the Communist Party Politburo elected between 1919 and 1924, only two died of natural causes.^{102, 103, 104, 105}



World War II

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a Non-Aggression Pact dividing much of Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Germany received a large portion of Poland, and Russia acquired the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), certain regions of eastern Poland, and Finland. After Germany invaded Poland on 1 September, the Soviet Union invaded from the east. Russia secured easternmost Poland and the other regions in its sphere, with the exception of Finland.^{106, 107}

World War II monument
©Andrey Korchagin/flickr.com

Barbarossa. The Soviet Union suffered major losses of territory, military personnel, and equipment in the first months after the German invasion. The siege of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) lasted almost two-and-a-half years, costing hundreds of thousands of lives. Stalingrad (now Volgograd) was the site of a key battle that halted the German Army in its push toward the oil fields of the southern Caucasus. Nearly two million German and Soviet troops died in what would be the deadliest battle of the entire war.¹⁰⁸ Eventually Soviet forces, aided by the severe Russian winter, overcame the German Army. The heroic efforts of the Soviet people (both military and civilian) during World War II helped unify the country in a way that no other event had.^{109, 110}

As German forces crumbled during the latter stages of World War II, the Soviets liberated much of Eastern Europe. This region remained in the Soviet sphere of influence for the next four decades. Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) all adopted communist governments under Soviet influence. They eventually aligned themselves militarily in the Warsaw Pact as a counterpart to Western Europe and North America's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called the new boundary between Eastern and Western Europe the Iron Curtain, a name that lasted throughout the Cold War.¹¹¹



Khruschev and Kennedy
©Russavia/Wikimedia.org

Post-Stalin Era (1953-1991)

After Stalin's death in 1953, a power struggle among rival Politburo members ensued.^{112, 113} Nikita Khrushchev, a longtime Stalin ally, emerged victorious. Khrushchev's vilification of Stalin in a secret speech in 1956 to the 20th Party Congress marked the beginning of a de-Stalinization period during which the government released prisoners in the Soviet Gulag and closed the camps.¹¹⁴

Khrushchev was a modest reformer. The production of consumer goods increasingly became a priority after years of focusing on heavy industry. Khrushchev pursued the decentralization of economic decision-making. The Soviet Union became less aggressive in its foreign relations and

more open to coexistence with the West. Nevertheless, the Khrushchev years witnessed two major East-West confrontations: the Cuban missile crisis and the construction of the Berlin Wall.^{115, 116, 117} Relations with China, the Soviet Union's neighbor and competing communist superpower, declined during the Khrushchev era. Led by Mao Zedong, the Chinese government criticized the Soviets as revisionists because of their increasing willingness to negotiate with the West.^{118, 119}

In 1963, rivals removed Khrushchev from power settling on Leonid Brezhnev as his successor. Economic stagnation, increased repression, and contradictory foreign policy with the West were hallmarks of the Brezhnev era. Although this period included the era of detente (relaxed relations among international superpowers) and the signing of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), the Soviet government continued low-level confrontation with the West via Soviet sponsorship of proxy wars in developing nations.^{120, 121, 122} In 1982, former KGB chief Yuri Andropov replaced Brezhnev. After Andropov died in 1984, Konstantin Chernenko, a 72-year-old party apparatchik, succeeded him, ruling for only a year before his own death.^{123, 124}

The Politburo chose 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev as Chernenko's successor. Gorbachev immediately began transferring reform-minded Party officials into high positions in the Party and government. Two words, *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) came to signify the thrust of the Gorbachev reforms. Perestroika involved instituting market reforms to revive the ailing economy. Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy promoted an opening up of the political system, resulting in freedom of speech and democratic elections.¹²⁵

The Last Years of the Soviet Union

Many in the West viewed Gorbachev's reforms more positively than did people in the Soviet Union. As the economy slipped toward chaos, Gorbachev found himself positioned between Party hardliners who wished to return to a fully centralized command economy and others who favored a full free-market economy.¹²⁶ Reform movements in Eastern Europe ushered in a wave of democratically elected noncommunist governments between 1989 and 1990.

Gorbachev agreed to the phased withdrawal of Soviet forces from these countries, thus marking the collapse of the Iron Curtain.¹²⁷

After 1988, the Communist Party lost power. A new democratically elected body, the Congress of People's Deputies, chose members of the Supreme Soviet, the nation's legislative body, which wielded true legislative powers. In 1990, the Congress of People's Deputies selected Gorbachev to fill the newly created position of Soviet President.¹²⁸ In June 1991, the Russian Republic held an election in which Boris Yeltsin became the republic Soviet President.¹²⁹

In August 1991, members of the Party's old guard staged a two-day coup, placing Gorbachev under house arrest at his Crimean dacha. The conspirators named Vice President Gennady Yanayev to assume Gorbachev's responsibilities as Soviet President. On the second day of the coup, Yeltsin rallied opposition to the coup at the Moscow White House. Huge crowds opposed to the coup gathered in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and key military units that coup leaders had ordered to storm the White House refused to follow orders. The coup had failed^{130, 131}

Although Gorbachev had survived the coup attempt, the demise of his reign and the Soviet Union itself were seemingly inevitable. In early December 1991, Yeltsin announced that all Russian property in the Soviet Union was, from that point, under the control of Russia. He banned the Communist Party in Russia.

^{132, 133} Other Soviet republics declared their independence, and by 8 December 1991, the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. On Christmas Day, Gorbachev belatedly resigned and the Russian flag replaced the Soviet hammer and sickle in the grounds of the Kremlin in Moscow.¹³⁴



Boris Yeltsin
©Russavia/Wikimedia.org

Post-Soviet Russia

Economic Troubles

Russia's political and economic evolution since 1991 has been rife with problems. An economic contraction that spanned 1992–1997 characterized the government's transition to a free market economy. Authorities lifted price controls, leading to inflationary pressures. Crime and corruption became rampant. A new class of super-rich oligarchs built business empires by purchasing and controlling interests in key formerly state-run industries, such as oil.¹³⁵ Economic demand forced the nation's industrial base to shift its emphasis from defense and heavy industry production to consumer-oriented goods. The factories that survived from the Soviet era often proved noncompetitive in the world economy because of obsolete technology, excessive labor forces, and inordinate transportation costs for shipping and receiving.^{136, 137}

Yeltsin and his government were under tremendous political pressure. The tension erupted in a parliamentary revolt in 1993, during which the government declared a state of emergency and the military fired on the parliament building.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Yeltsin maintained political capital and, aided by Russian oligarchs, won reelection to a second presidential term in 1996.¹³⁹ He would

not, however, complete the term. In December 1999, amid growing pressure, Yeltsin stunned the nation and the world by resigning. Yeltsin turned over power to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer.¹⁴⁰



Chechnya

Conflicts in several administrative regions desiring autonomy or complete independence marked Russia's early years. Among these areas was Chechnya, located along the northern flank of the Greater Caucasus Mountains. The region had an established history of conflict with both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Stalin, during World War II, exiled all Chechens to Siberia, accusing them of collaborating with Nazi Germany. The government allowed them to return only after Stalin's death.^{141, 142}

Fighting in Chechnya
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costly guerrilla war, and retreated from the area in 1997. Although the two sides signed a peace treaty, they left the ultimate status of Chechnya undecided. By 1999, Russian troops had returned to Chechnya, after a number of bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities were attributed to Chechen rebels. This stage of the conflict continued well into the regime of the new Russian president, Vladimir Putin. By 2008, a pro-Moscow regime was again installed in Chechnya, which was reintegrated into the Federation. But attacks by remaining resistance forces continued to occur periodically.^{143, 144}



Putin and Medvedev

Putin was victorious in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections and became prime minister in 2008 under President Dmitry Medvedev.¹⁴⁵ During Putin's presidency, the economy improved. He garnered public support for his campaign to prosecute Russia's richest oligarchs. There were, however, charges that the campaign was targeted revenge against oligarchs who opposed him. Many observers expressed fears that Putin was not committed to freedoms of speech and the press.^{146, 147, 148}

Putin's relations with the West were mixed. The fighting in Chechnya was a magnet for Western criticism until the terrorist attacks against

the United States on 11 September 2001.¹⁴⁹ Russia's September 20 cooperation in international efforts to combat terrorism received praise from many Western leaders,

including U.S. President George W. Bush.^{150, 151}

In 2008, Russian troops entered Georgia under the guise of protecting Russian peacekeeping forces and nonethnic Georgians in two breakaway Georgian regions. The Georgian government alleged that Russia's attack was unprovoked. Many in the West saw the Georgian incursion as a heavy-handed use of force designed to intimidate and signal Russia's limited willingness to accept further alliances between the former Soviet republic and its allies in the West. The short Georgian war fueled fears that Russia and the United States and its NATO allies could enter into a new era of Cold War-like geopolitics.^{152, 153, 154}

Tensions and occasional outbreaks of violence continued in the Caucasus, especially Ingushetia and Chechnya. In 2009, with the Chechen situation apparently under control, Medvedev ended counterinsurgency operations. Chechen rebels continued, however to mount attacks which included the 2010 attack in a Moscow Metro.^{155, 156, 157, 158} In September 2011, Medvedev declined to run for a second term, paving the way for another Putin presidency.^{159, 160}

Putin's party lost its majority capturing less than 50% of the vote in December 2011 elections. Putin, however, won his third presidential term in March 2012. Protests erupted in Moscow over Putin's return to power.^{161, 162, 163} Some in Russia view Putin's reelection as a return to autocracy certain to degrade Russian freedoms. He immediately nominated Medvedev to serve as prime minister.^{164, 165, 166, 167}



Protest in Moscow
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Recent Events

Putin continued his assault on opposition leaders. In July 2013, Alexei Navalny, a leading opposition leader, was sentenced to five years in prison in a trial widely regarded as politically motivated. Although his jail sentence was suspended later that year, Navalny was barred from holding political office.^{168, 169, 170, 171} Also in December, the Kremlin announced that Russia were to be placed under the control of a pro-Kremlin figure well known for his anti-Western views.^{172, 173}

Putin also appears fixated on expanding Russia. Russian forces invaded Ukraine and took over the Crimea. After Crimean residents voted to

join Russia, Putin annexed the region.¹⁷⁴ The Russian move prompted the European Union and the United States to announce new sanctions which have seriously hurt the Russian economy.^{175, 176} Putin appears to remain undeterred by international criticism and sanctions. In October 2015, he ordered the Russian military to intervene directly

in the Syrian civil war. Some Russian ground troops were deployed into the country along with Russian fighter jets which have carried out numerous sorties against rebels in the country. Putin also ordered the launch of Russian missiles, fired from ships in the Black Sea, against Syrian targets. Although officially stating that that his actions are designed to help defeat the Islamic State (ISIS), many Western strategists have noted that the attacks have been focused on anti-government rebels rather than ISIS. Russia has admitted that it is supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad.^{177, 178} Some analysts fear that this latest move could result in a proxy-war between the United States and Russia.^{179, 180, 181}

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Chapter 2 Assessment

1. The principality of Muscovy (Moscow) remained a minor state until about 1600.

FALSE

Under the rule of Ivan III (1462–1505), the Grand Principality of Muscovy was able to break from Golden Horde control and establish itself as the dominant power of what is European Russia today.

2. The first Romanov was elected as czar in the early 17th century.

TRUE

A zemsky sobor (assembly of the land), consisting of boyars, church officials, and urban freemen, elected the first Romanov—Mikhail Romanov—czar in 1613.

3. The reign of Catherine the Great was a period of territorial contraction for the empire.

FALSE

Under the rule of Catherine the Great, the Russian Empire experienced significant territorial expansion. This included the incorporation of a large portion of Poland and the annexation of many of Ukraine's Black Sea coastal lands.

4. The first stage of the Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the fall of the Russian monarchy and the formation of a provisional government.

TRUE

After strikes and riots broke out in February 1917, the monarchy was overthrown and the revolutionaries formed a provisional government.

5. Vladimir Putin has served as president of Russia since 2000.

FALSE

Vladimir Putin was first elected president in 2000. In 2008, he stepped down to serve as prime minister. Then, in 2012, he was again elected president.



Kitsch market
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Chapter 3: Economy

Introduction

Russia transitioned toward a more market-based economy in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most industries were privatized in the 1990s but the energy and defense sectors remain under state control.¹ In recent years, rising levels of oil and gas production and increasing prices spurred several years of strong GDP (gross domestic product) growth. As world oil prices declined, however, and economic sanctions were leveled against Russia, the economy has staggered. It is now in full recession and 60 of Russia's 83 regions are in crisis mode, with as many as 20 defaulting on their debts.^{2,3} Data show the economy contracted 4.6% in the second quarter of 2015,

but may see some marginal growth in 2016. The ruble is continuing to depreciate against hard Western currencies such as the dollar, where its value dropped 43% between August 2014 and August 2015.^{4, 5, 6}

Russia's current economic problems can be attributed to several factors in addition to its dependence on oil and the current international sanctions.^{7, 8} Russia's economy is dominated by 100–200 large corporations, mostly in the energy and natural resources sectors. The lack of economic diversification continues to hamper growth. Small and medium-sized enterprises, the economic driver in most healthy economies, represent only 15% of Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).^{9, 10, 11} Corruption and low worker productivity also contribute to economic stagnation. Some argue that the biggest problem is the nation's denial that the current leadership is contributing to the problem. Even as the economy shrinks, President Putin's popularity is soaring. Without significant changes at the top, it is unlikely that any real economic reform will be forthcoming.¹²



Tending to wheat
©Sally/flickr.com

Agriculture

In 2014, agriculture accounted for a mere 4% of national GDP and employed about 10% of the labor force.¹³ Russia's harsh climate makes much of its land unsuitable for farming. Although Russia is the largest nation in the world, only 13% of its area is agricultural land.^{14, 15} Most of this land is in the "fertile triangle," a region encompassing most of southern and central European Russia and small stretches of land in southwest Siberia.¹⁶ The majority of Russian farms are cooperatives in which landowners are members of *kolkhozes* (collective farms) or *sovkhозes* (state farms).^{17, 18}

More than half of Russia's farmland is devoted to grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats), with fodder crops, including most of Russia's corn yield, grown on another one-third of Russian farmlands.^{19, 20} Sunflower seeds are the dominant oilseed crop, and farms grow sugar beets for sugar processing. Russians grow potatoes and other vegetables mostly on small private household plots.^{21, 22}

Russia's vast forest reserves are the largest in the world. Russia's forests constitute about one-fifth of the world's total, representing an area nearly as large as the continental United States. But the cold Russian climate inhibits rapid growth in logged areas. Logging has already claimed nearly one-third of Russia's original forests, a situation that led to legislation in the 1990s to slow down the rate of deforestation.^{23, 24, 25} Russia's forestry subsector contributes slightly more than 1% of its GDP and employs about 1% of the labor force. It accounts for 2.4% of Russia's export revenues.²⁶

Russia has the second-longest coastline in the world after Indonesia. With its access to 12 seas in three oceans and 2 million rivers, fishing is another important segment of the Russian agricultural sector.²⁷ Russian fishermen catch approximately four million tons of fish annually, most of which is exported.²⁸ Its canneries produce nearly one-third of the world's canned fish and one-fourth of its fresh and frozen fish.²⁹ Aquaculture is a small but growing part of the subsector.^{30, 31}



Factory in the distance

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Industry and Manufacturing

Industry and manufacturing remain a significant part of the Russian economy, accounting for roughly 36% of GDP and employing about 28% of the workforce.³² Overall manufacturing production for the first two months of 2015 was down about .4% with the automotive industry particularly hard hit.³³ Manufacturing continued to stagnate well into July based on reduced domestic demand.^{34, 35, 36} Excluding industries such as mining and energy resources development, most of Russia's industrial production comes from heavy industries and is primarily located in western Russia and the Ural Mountains region.

With the exception of Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, and a few other cities, most of Siberia is relatively unindustrialized and survives on forestry, oil and gas extraction, and mining. To the west, the larger cities, such as Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Yekaterinburg, are where most of the processing industries are located; these urban areas have done relatively well compared to smaller cities. The Soviet model of industrialization often led to clusters of related industrial enterprises in the same urban area, and this lack of industrial diversification has hurt some of the smaller and medium-sized cities during the post-Soviet era.^{37, 38}

Russia manufactures a wide range of products, although not all are competitive on the world market. Machine-building industries encompass products and services such as steam boilers and turbines, automobiles and farm machinery, equipment for the oil and gas industry, shipbuilding, machine tools, automation components, and durable consumer goods (e.g. refrigerators and other appliances).³⁹

One sector that appears to be bucking the trend is the defense industry. Revenues in the largest defense firms are up sharply. Rising defense orders and increased Russian procurement have spurred the industry. Exports of Russian military hardware soared to more than USD 13 billion in 2014.⁴⁰



Gazprom offices
©Konstantin Merenkov/flickr.com

than three-quarters of all production with state-controlled companies accounting for 50% of the total production.⁴⁵

Gazprom, the state-owned company that produces 73% of Russia's natural gas, dominates Russia's natural gas industry.^{46, 47} Despite Gazprom's near-monopolistic dominance, analysts believe future growth in Russia's natural gas production will come from independent companies.^{48, 49}

Energy

Oil and Natural Gas

Russia's economic engine is its energy sector. The nation is the world's leader in natural gas reserves and natural gas exports. It holds the second-largest coal reserves, the eighth-largest oil reserves, and is the world's second-largest oil exporter behind Saudi Arabia.^{41, 42}

Most of Russia's proven oil reserves are located in western Siberia, between the Ural Mountains and the Central Siberian Plateau.^{43, 44} Domestic oil firms dominate Russian oil production controlled largely by state-run agencies. Five firms account for more



Coal trucks
©Roger Greenhalgh/flickr.com

west of the Ural Mountains. Twenty of these reactors are more than 30 years old. Nine new reactors are currently under construction and are expected to go online in 2018.^{56, 57} Russia plans to increase its electricity supply from nuclear energy dramatically.

Coal and Nuclear Energy

Russia has about one-fifth of the world's coal reserves and is the world's sixth-largest producer of coal.^{50, 51} Most of the nation's coal comes from seven basins, three of which are west of the Ural Mountains and four of which are in Siberian regions. Most coal production is in the eastern region in the Kuznetsk Basin, the Donets Basin, and the Kansk-Achinsk Basin.^{52, 53} Coal accounts for about one-quarter of Russia's energy supply although in Siberia, where much of the coal is mined, use is much higher. Russia exports only 25% of its coal each year with the rest being consumed domestically.^{54, 55}

Russia currently has 34 operational nuclear reactors in 10 locations with nine of these located

Current goals state that about 30% of its energy will come from nuclear facilities. This percentage will increase to 50% by 2050 and to as much as 80% by 2100.⁵⁸ Russia is also a major exporter of nuclear plants to countries such as China, India, Turkey, Jordan, and Bangladesh.⁵⁹ Major concerns are that Russia's radioactive waste disposal sites are full and that much of the nation's spent-nuclear fuel accumulates in the most densely populated regions of the country. Approximately half of the world's nuclear waste currently rests in Russia, leading to concerns that this could be a recipe for disaster unless new disposal plans are developed and implemented.⁶⁰

Natural Resources

Few, if any, nations can match Russia's mineral wealth and diversity. Russia produces a large percentage of the world's supply of minerals. The nation is the world's second-leading producer of nickel, most of which is mined near the northern Siberian city of Norilsk, one of the world's largest cities above the Arctic Circle.⁶¹ United Company RUSAL is the world's largest aluminum producer and a major producer of alumina.^{62, 63} Russia is also among the world's top producers of lead, copper, and uranium ores.^{64, 65}

Additionally, Russia is the world's largest producer of rough diamonds, both gems and industrial.⁶⁶ The state-owned company ALROSA, which produces 25% of the world's rough diamonds, controls the diamond industry in Russia.⁶⁷ Most of the diamond mining sites are in the rugged northeastern part of Russia.^{68, 69}

Trade and Transportation

Trade

Russia's trade balance has been positive since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, due mainly to energy exports, which account for between 40% and 50% of all export revenues.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

Non-energy mineral resources (especially iron, steel, aluminum, nickel, and copper) are major contributors to Russia's trade. Other important export products are wood and wood products, fertilizers, organic chemicals, jet engines, nuclear reactor plants, raw diamonds, and wheat. Russia's largest export markets are the Netherlands (14%), China (8%), Germany (8%), Italy (8%), and Turkey (5%).⁷⁴

Russia's biggest imports by revenue are manufactured items such as machinery, automobiles and tractors, electrical equipment,



Goods at the market
©Michael Clarke Stuff/flickr.com

pharmaceuticals, and plastics. Several agricultural categories—especially meat and fruit—are also significant contributors. China (18%), Germany (12%), United States (7%), Italy (5%), and Belarus (4%) are Russia's leading import partners.⁷⁵

Russia's trade with the former Soviet republics, most of which are now part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), underwent a period of transition during the 1990s. For a while, the prices of goods traded continued to reflect artificially low rates from the Soviet era, but many goods have reverted to market values. But, the structure is not systematic: price values can still vary widely from one former Soviet republic to another.⁷⁶ The CIS (excluding Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) and Russia signed a fair trade agreement eliminating import and export taxes on many goods. Observers expect this free trade zone to increase trade among the nations.⁷⁷

In 2014, following Russia's incursion into Ukraine, the United States and the European Union (EU), along with other nations, imposed economic sanctions on Russia for one year.^{78, 79, 80} In June 2015, the trade sanctions were extended for another six months.⁸¹ These sanctions slowed investment in Russia and caused a serious slowdown in economic growth.^{82, 83}



Russian train
©Ben Godfrey/flickr.com

Transportation

Because of Russia's large size, products and materials often have to travel long distances. The railway system carries nearly 90% of the nation's freight. Russia's rail system is uneven, with the densest networks in the northwest and central regions and the lowest in east and west Siberia and the far eastern regions. Nearly 67% of the rail network is along the main belt of populated areas. East of the Ural Mountains, there are only a few major trunk lines fed by smaller branches to important economic centers.⁸⁴

The road system, the fifth largest in the world, is underdeveloped relative to the country's geographic size.^{85, 86} Terrain and climate make the building and maintenance of roads prohibitively

expensive in some areas. Medium-sized cities, such as the Siberian city of Yakutsk, are inaccessible by road or rail during parts of the year. The sole road leading to the city becomes impassable during summer rainstorms and is frequently included in listings of the world's worst roads.^{87, 88} Rivers are a major source of transportation.^{89, 90} But the Volga, Europe's longest river system, has seen commercial traffic drop as much as 83% in recent decades. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, ships were destroyed for cash and the metal, and restoring a fleet has proved costly and challenging.⁹¹

Companies transport relatively small amounts of freight by air. Most of the materials are high-value items destined for remote parts of the nation where air is the only means of available transport. Aeroflot-Russian Airlines, with the government as the majority owner, is the largest of the many airlines that now serve the Russian market.⁹²



Peterhof Palace St. Petersburg
©Jim G/flickr.com

Tourism

In spite of a large number of UNESCO heritage sites, historical sites, and other major attractions, Russia's tourism industry remains largely undeveloped, accounting for only 6% of GDP and employing 1.4% of the labor force in 2014.⁹³ Issues around ground transportation infrastructure, safety and security, difficulties securing visas, and a generally closed attitude toward tourism were contributing factors to the relatively low numbers of visitors.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Russia has become more affordable as the value of the ruble has slipped. According to the 2015 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, Russia now ranks 45th out of 141 countries included for study.⁹⁵

According to the report, 28,356,000 international

tourists visited the country in 2013.⁹⁶ That number is estimated to fall to approximately 27.4 million in 2015.⁹⁷ Roughly three-quarters of the tourism revenues were generated from domestic tourists.⁹⁸ In spite of its relatively strong ranking, however, Russia ranks 172nd in the percent of direct contribution to GDP.⁹⁹ The survey, however, was taken before Russia annexed the Crimea and travel bans were implemented by some nations. Following Russia's actions in the Crimea, tourism fell.^{100, 101, 102, 103} By the end of 2015, tourism is predicted to fall by 6% and to rise only slightly in 2016.¹⁰⁴

Russia's most famous tourist attractions are in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the nation's two largest cities; most foreign tourists arrive in Russia at one of these two cities. Other tourist attractions include Novgorod and the Golden Ring of Kievan Rus cities near Moscow, the Black Sea coast, and Lake Baikal in Siberia.¹⁰⁵

Recognizing the significant growth potential of the industry, the government approved RUB 396 billion (or less than 3% of its annual budget) for tourism development in 2014, but that is projected to fall by 17% in 2015. Russia is 184th in the world in terms of current tourism expenditures.¹⁰⁶



Russian ruble note
©LostBob Photos/flickr.com

banks have closed and the Central Bank has cancelled the operating licenses of others.¹¹⁴

^{115, 116}

Foreign banks have had limited success, and several major international banks announced plans to leave Russia. State-owned banks have a definite advantage over international banks based on access to low-cost funding.^{117, 118, 119} In keeping with agreements for Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2012, Putin signed a bill allowing only subsidiaries of foreign banks to operate in Russia to strengthen the Russian banking sector. Some say it makes no change in current conditions.^{120, 121}

Only about 25% of Russian households have bank accounts. Russians remain wary of banks after the collapse in 1998 when many account holders lost all their savings. There is a fledgling mortgage industry.^{122, 123} In recent years, deposits from the private sector have increased significantly, signaling a greater confidence in the Russian banking industry. The passing of legislation in 2003 introducing a Deposit Insurance Agency for banks has been instrumental in helping to address some potential depositors' concerns about the security of bank deposits.^{124, 125}

Russia's stock exchange began operation in September 1995.¹²⁶ By March 2015, the broad market's index capitalization had plummeted to USD 133.6, more than USD 70 billion less than in June of 2014 before sanctions hammered the financial sector.¹²⁷

Banking and Finance

Banking and Currency

The Russian currency is the ruble (currency code: RUB). The graphic symbol is the Cyrillic capital “P” which resembles a P with a horizontal stroke.^{107, 108} In 1995, inflation drove the exchange rate to over 5,000 RUB per U.S. dollar (USD).¹⁰⁹ As of October 2015, new inflationary pressures reduced the value of the ruble, which was trading at an exchange rate of 62.57 RUB per USD.¹¹⁰

In 1990, the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) took control of the nation's money supply and the regulation of the commercial banking industry.¹¹¹ There are about 923 banks in the country, but two state-owned banks, Sherbank and VTB, as well as the CBR, dominate the sector.^{112, 113} Russia's banking sector, however, is in crisis. Many banks are overwhelmed by bad debts. Hundreds of smaller

¹¹⁴

Foreign Investment

In the years of transition to a market economy, due to investor skepticism about the government, high inflation, and fluctuating exchange rates, Russia experienced years of stagnant and even negative amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI), with more money flowing out of the country than into it, especially in 2000, 2002, and 2003.^{128, 129} From 1994-2015, FDI averaged around USD 5,980 million. The first quarter of 2013 saw the highest amount of FDI ever recorded flowing into Russia, but by the first quarter of 2015, it had plummeted to USD -1,059 million. That number rebounded slightly later in the year reaching USD 2,264 million in July 2015.¹³⁰ In 2015, the lion's share of investments came from six nations: the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Ireland, British Virgin Island, Cyprus, and the Netherlands.¹³¹ Investment is still down, particularly following the implementation of economic sanctions. Weak oil prices and lack of support from authorities remain the biggest obstacles. Investment is likely to remain sluggish, especially in the near-term.¹³²

The largest beneficiary of foreign investment are the manufacturing (38%), trade, car maintenance (18%), and mining (17%) sectors, followed by real estate (11%), transport, and communications (8%).¹³³ In general, although the falling price of the Russian ruble presents cheap investment opportunities for foreign investors, the political risk is high and structural reforms are unlikely. New laws limit foreign ownership of media outlets to 20% and prohibit majority foreign ownership in some sectors.¹³⁴



Typical apartments
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Standard of Living

Improvements in the overall standard of living in the country brought Russians to a level comparable to populations in most European nations, but standards have fallen steadily since 2014.^{135, 136, 137} Average monthly wages in August 2015 were RUB 31,870 (USD 507).¹³⁸ In recent months, wages have stagnated and inflation has worsened the economic situation of Russians. Inflation has eaten away at real wages, increased the poverty rate, and put millions of households at serious economic risk. In the first quarter of 2015, nearly 30 million Russians fell below the poverty line ((USD 147/mo); a 15% increase over the

previous year. This means that nearly one in seven Russians now lives in poverty.^{139, 140, 141}

On the United Nation's Human Development Index, Russia ranks 57th out of 187 countries.¹⁴² Average life expectancy is 70.5 years (men 64.7/women 76.6), placing Russia below most European nations and in the lowest 33% of the world.¹⁴³ Nearly one

quarter of all Russian men, however, die before reaching the age of 55.¹⁴⁴ Russia has an exceptionally high rate of deaths related to cardiovascular disease and alcoholism. One study found that 30% of male deaths and 17% of female deaths over the last 20 years were related to alcohol.^{145, 146, 147} Russia compares unfavorably to Europe in terms of infant mortality rates (7/1,000) and lags behind both the United States.^{148, 149}

Employment

Russia's labor market is fragmented and characterized by earnings inequalities, poor enforcement of labor standards, and underdeveloped collective bargaining practices. The weak interface between the Russian education system and the job market has been instrumental in creating a lack of qualified skilled workers. Observers estimate the Russian unemployment rate to be around 5.8%. Among those aged 15–24, the rate soars to 15%.^{150, 151, 152, 153} Rural unemployment, however, remains much higher than in urban areas (8.1% vs. 5.1%). The country's highest rates of unemployment are in the North Caucasus: Ingushetia (23%) and Chechnya (17.7%). In the country's two major cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, unemployment is negligible (1.5% and 1.6%, respectively).¹⁵⁴ The workforce is nearly equally divided between men and women (51% vs. 49%).¹⁵⁵ Fears that the economy will not recover have prompted many Russians to seek jobs abroad.^{156, 157, 158, 159} Even so, Russia remains a key destination for migrants from other CIS countries seeking employment.^{160, 161, 162}

Economic Outlook

The economic outlook for Russia is weak with GDP expected to fall 3% in 2015 and grow only marginally in 2016.^{163, 164, 165} The economy is unlikely to recover quickly. The nation faces serious demographic, political, and structural issues, none of which are likely to see resolution in the near-term.^{166, 167}

There are serious challenges for sustaining a strong economy in the coming years. Russia's population is aging, and by 2020 analysts estimate that 26% of the population will be pensioners. The nation's low birthrate will create a shortage of workers to fill positions, threatening economic growth in the medium and long-term unless the trend reverses. Aging workers and a shrinking labor force could also stress the economy by creating a higher dependency ratio (the ratio of senior citizens to workers).^{168, 169, 170}

Another weakness in the economy includes the slow growth in the manufacturing sector. FDI remains sluggish to declining, and Russia's heavy dependence on oil revenues weakens the economy as oil prices remain low. Inflationary pressures are mounting, and observers expect inflation to increase in the coming years. Sanctions could continue to take a bite out of the recovery efforts.^{171, 172, 173, 174}

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Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Nearly one in ten Russian workers is involved in agriculture.

TRUE

Agriculture employs about 10% of the Russian workforce and accounts for less than 5% of GDP (gross domestic product).

2. Recently, Russia's manufacturing sector has significantly increased productivity.

FALSE

Overall manufacturing production for the first two months of 2015 was down about .4%, with the automotive industry particularly hard hit.

3. Less than 25% of Russia's exports are from its energy resources.

FALSE

Russia's trade balance has been positive since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, mainly due to energy exports, which account for 40–50% of all export revenues.

4. Russia is the world's largest producer of rough diamonds.

TRUE

Russia is the world's largest producer of rough diamonds, both gem and industrial. Most of the diamond mining sites are in the rugged northeastern part of Russia.

5. The Russian standard of living has fallen since 2014.

TRUE

Improvements in the overall standard of living in the country have brought Russians to a level comparable to populations in most European nations, but have fallen steadily since 2014. Nearly one in seven Russians now lives in poverty.



Traditional music
©Eugene Kaspersky/flickr.com

Chapter 4: Society

Introduction

Few societies have seen as many major upheavals as has Russia. From the Westernization policies of Peter the Great to the Bolshevik Revolution to post-socialist economic shock, Russian society has experienced ground-shaking events that have rearranged the political map and redefined its cultural and social landscape.¹

The Russian people have long been a mystery and a contradiction to outsiders. Foreigners who may tend to characterize Russians as gruff and unemotional often miss the personal warmth, problem-solving abilities, and endurance of Russians.² Russian culture is a complex mix of foreign influence and native Slavic tradition. Russia's vastness and harsh climate helped create its unique character. During the Soviet era, the state strictly controlled life, however, in the 1980s, these restrictions loosened and many folk traditions, along with religion, experienced a revival.^{3, 4}

Although the people of Russia vary greatly, there are some commonalities that define what it means to be Russian. For Russians, status symbols are highly important in a long-institutionalized society where inequality is expected and often accepted.⁵

Russian culture tilts toward collectivism where individual goals are subordinated to those of the family and the nation. Personal relationships are important and carefully cultivated as a means of getting information and furthering successful negotiations.^{6,7} However, Russians are generally less driven by competition, achievement, and success than people in the United States. Caring for friends and family are more important values than the attainment of individual success. Russians tend to be modest in public where it is unacceptable to tout personal achievements.⁸

Russians often feel threatened by ambiguous situations, which may help explain their rigid bureaucracy. They can be detailed planners and prefer to have a lot of background information and context when they interact. Russians are a pragmatic lot; in their planning, they tend to leave a lot of room for alternatives. This tendency is born of a long history of turmoil and change and a sense that one can never really know or control the future, and therefore, truth is often regarded as being relative. This pragmatism gives Russians a strong ability to adapt to change and the realities of life.^{9,10}



Elderly Tatar man
©Adam Jones/flickr.com

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Ethnic Russians represent nearly 80% of the population. Russia has more than 100 ethnic minorities, the largest of which makes up less than 4% of the Russian population. Although Russian is the official language, there are more than 140 additional languages and dialects spoken throughout the nation.^{11,12}

Tatars are the largest ethnic minority, representing about 3.7% of the nation's population.¹³ For many centuries, the term *Tatar* loosely denoted any group that was of Asian, Muslim, or Turkic descent.¹⁴ Tatars can more precisely be defined as descendants of Turkic-Mongolian tribes that migrated centuries ago from southern Siberia into the Volga-Urals region. These invaders, known

as the Golden Horde, intermixed with the Volga Bulgar population and converted to Islam.¹⁵ Today, Tatars are the majority ethnic group in the Republic of Tatarstan, where Tatar is an official language.¹⁶

Ukrainians, most of whom live in western Siberia and the far eastern parts of Russia, are Russia's third-largest ethnic group, making up 1.4% of the population.¹⁷ Like the

Russians, Ukrainians are a Slavic people.^{18, 19}

Bashkirs represent 1.1% of the population of the Russian Federation.²⁰ Their homeland is the Republic of Bashkortostan, located to the southeast of Tatarstan between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains. A Turkic people, they were originally nomadic pastoralists, but became settled agriculturalists in the 19th century. Today the village is the key element in the social structure of the Bashkirs, who are mostly Muslim or Eastern Orthodox.²¹

The homeland of the Chuvash (1% of the population) is the Chuvash Republic, immediately northwest of Tatarstan. Like the Tatars and Bashkirs, the Chuvash are a Turkic-speaking people in origin, but unlike these two groups, the Chuvash are predominantly Orthodox Christian rather than Muslim.^{22, 23}

Russia's most fiercely independent ethnic group is the Chechens, most of whom are Muslim. During World War II, Stalin deported all Chechens to Siberia. More than a decade later, the government declared the Chechens rehabilitated and allowed them to resettle in their homeland. Members of this Northern Caucasus group waged a separatist war with Russia during much of the 1990s and early 2000s.^{24, 25}



Russian Orthodox Church
©Dave Sag/flickr.com

Religion

Religious Demography

During the Soviet era, the government actively suppressed religious institutions in Russia. Authorities considered practicing religion and being a member of the Communist Party incompatible activities. Today, Russians once again freely practice their religions, but 70 years of religious oppression have greatly reduced the number of Russians who are actively religious.^{26, 27, 28}

Russian Orthodox Christianity is the largest religious denomination in the nation, claiming between 15 and 20% of the population as its members, although some estimates suggest the number may be as high as 43%.^{29, 30} Russian Orthodox Christianity is by far the most common religion among Russian citizens of Slavic origin (e.g., Russians and Ukrainians). Among ethnic Russians, as 74% self-identify as Russian

Orthodox.^{31, 32, 33} Between 10 and 15% of the population identify themselves as Muslim,

most of whom are Sunni.^{34, 35} Russia's Turkic groups, such as the Tatars and Bashkirs, are predominantly Muslim, as are some of the ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, such as the Chechens. In addition to the Volga-Ural and North Caucasus regions, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and parts of Siberia have significant Muslim populations. Most of Russia's Muslim population is indigenous rather than having immigrated to the country.^{36, 37}

Russian Jews have undergone several periods of discrimination and repression in both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. During the Gorbachev regime of the 1980s, a reform policy allowing greater freedom for Jews to emigrate to Israel and other countries seriously reduced the Russian Jewish population.³⁸ Today, observers estimate that between 150,000 and 750,000 Jews live in Russia, mostly in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.^{39, 40}

Christianity

The vast majority of Russia's Christians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. Christian groups lived in Kiev in the first part of the 10th century.⁴¹ The Russian Orthodox Church originated from the Byzantine Christianity of the Eastern Roman Empire.⁴² For centuries, the Christian Church had two main centers: Rome and Constantinople. In the 11th century, differing viewpoints regarding the nature of Christ drove a wedge between the two. By 1054, the Roman and Eastern churches had split, resulting in the formation of the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity.⁴³

Like other Christian faiths, the Russian Orthodox ("right believing") Church believes in the Holy Trinity and in the distinct but inseparable divine and human natures of Jesus. The Church recognizes a number of saints including Mary, the mother of Jesus.^{44, 45} The veneration of icons and the inclusion of mystical forms of prayer are central features of Orthodox practices. The Church has a strong monastic tradition, which means that, ideally, both lay people and monks should fulfill the same requirements, living their lives according to the teachings of Christ.^{46, 47, 48}

Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means "to submit" or "to surrender." So a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.⁴⁹ Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Allah's message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.⁵⁰

Regardless of sect, Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam, which capture the essential

beliefs and rites of the faith. The first is the *shahada*, the declaration of faith that “There is no god but God and Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The *salat* is the requirement to pray five times a day. *Sawm* is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. *Zakat* is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the *hajj* which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.⁵¹

Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. The traditions that govern the treatment of this book are: Treat Islam’s holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.⁵² Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{53, 54}



Russian borsch
©Tanya !/flickr.com

Cuisine

Russian cuisine reflects a medley of influences inherited from an empire spanning two continents, from the *plov* (pilaf) of Central Asia to the walnut-and spice-laden dishes of Georgia. French influences, introduced in the 19th century, include thick meat sauces, elaborate salads, and cream-filled tortes that serve as dessert for many Russian meals.^{55, 56}

The Russian *zavtrak* (breakfast) typically includes *bliny* (pancakes) with either sweet or savory fillings, *kasha* (porridge) made with buckwheat or other grains, and *syrniki* (fried cottage cheese cakes). A common condiment for foods is *smetana* (sour cream), which accompanies many favorite Russian dishes.^{57, 58}

Traditionally, the main Russian meal is *obed*, which Russians eat in the afternoon any time between 1 and 5 p.m. It begins with either *zakuski* (appetizers) or soup. The *zakuski* may include a wide range of items such as salads with mayonnaise-based dressings, caviar, cold meats, sliced sturgeon, pickled cabbage, and mushrooms draped with *smetana*. Some of the salads include fish or

meat: two of the more popular ones are *seledka pod shuboy* (literally, “salted herring in a fur coat”) and *salat olivye*, which includes chopped meat, cheese, and vegetables.^{59, 60, 61} Common soups include *borscht* (made from beetroot with vegetables and sometimes meat), *shchi* (made with cabbage or sauerkraut), and *solyenka* (a thick concoction of meat or fish, potatoes, and pickled vegetables).^{62, 63, 64}

Main courses generally include meat or various types of fish, such as pike, sturgeon, salmon, and chub. Some of the more common meat dishes are *pelemeni* (meat dumplings), various types of fish, *bifstroganov* (beef slices in a thick cream sauce), and *shashlik* (lamb kebabs, a popular food transplant from the Caucasus region).^{65, 66, 67}

The *uzhin* (evening meal), which is generally between 7 and 10 p.m., often consists simply of *zakuski* (appetizers) and black tea. At this meal, Russians frequently consume shots of freezer-cold vodka with the salty or savory appetizer dishes.^{68, 69, 70}



Traditional dress
©Franco Folini/flickr.com

Traditional Dress

The festive costume for women peasants in Russia was a *sarafan*, a brightly colored, jumper-like dress made with wide straps. Women wore the *sarafan* over a *rubakha*, a long-sleeved shirt with or without embroidered design motifs, braiding it around the waist by sashes with long, loose ends. The *kokoshnik*, a tiara-like headdress tied at the back with ribbons, often accompanied the *sarafan*. Women often elaborately decorated *kokoshniks* with mother-of-pearl, delicate needlework, and brightly colored stone and wore them with shawls. Numerous variations existed on this basic style, depending on the geographical location and the marriage status of the woman.^{71, 72, 73, 74}

Men wore a *kosvorotka* or long-sleeved shirt which came to the mid-thigh. The *kosvorotka* buttoned at the neck but had no other buttons. Russian peasant men also wore a *rubakha* that either hung loose like a smock or was tucked into the pants. They typically bound their trousers into leg wrappings or tucked them into high boots made of felt or leather. The most common form of outerwear for men was the *kaftan*, a long, loose-fitting robe with tight sleeves that overlapped in the front and was fastened at the side.^{75, 76, 77}



Woman in market
©Adam Jones/flickr.com

Gender Issues

In 2014, Russia ranked 75th out of 142 countries on the Gender Gap Index.⁷⁸ Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the resulting economic turmoil, the social status of women has declined. Patriarchal traditions are rebounding.^{79, 80}

Traditional views suggest that women should stay home and care for their families. Women continue to bear the major responsibilities for the home, even if they work. Women are being encouraged to stay at home and to have more children. New policies have been enacted to increase maternity leave benefits and to give financial help to families with two or more children.^{81, 82}

Although Russia has a higher female labor force participation rate than any other nation in the world (42%), a significant gap between pay for men and women exists. On average, women are paid 30% less than their male counterparts. On the other hand, 40% of senior managers are women, the highest proportion in the world.^{83, 84, 85, 86} Russia ranks near the bottom of female political empowerment, rating 125 out of 142. Women hold only 14% of parliamentary seats.^{87, 88}

Women are more likely to be poor and to fall below the poverty line.⁸⁹ Despite being more likely to live in poverty and having to cope with the effects of economic disruptions, women appear better able than men to cope with difficulties. Women are healthier and happier than Russian men are, as indicated by their longer life expectancy (77 vs 65), and lower alcohol consumption. Scholars attribute the difference to women's web of social connections that buffers them more than men when employment is disrupted.^{90, 91}

Domestic violence against women in Russia is a serious problem. Currently, there are no laws criminalizing domestic violence, although general charges may be levied under the criminal code. Women receive no support or protection from their abusers. Domestic abuse is still widely regarded as a private issue in Russia where many hold the view that the women bring the situation on themselves. Data suggests that as many as 14,000 women die annually from family violence and nearly 65% of homicides are purportedly related to domestic violence.^{92, 93, 94, 95}



Nesting Dolls
©Christina B Castro/flickr.com

Arts

Literature

Russians take great pride in their literature, and writers are among the most respected members of society.⁹⁶ Among 19th-century Russian writers, one stands alone in the hearts of many Russians. In poetry and drama, Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) established himself as the nation's earliest and foremost literary figure and remains a highly influential figure for Russian artists. A 1999 poll of Russians—asking which Russian had made the greatest contribution to world history—found Pushkin in second place, behind Peter the Great

and ahead of Vladimir Lenin.⁹⁷ Pushkin's seminal works include the drama *Boris Godunov*, written while Pushkin was in exile, and *Eugene Onegin*, a verse novel that later became the basis of one of Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky's most famous operas.⁹⁸ Other 19th-century writers whose works are still read or performed around the world include the satirist Nikolai Gogol; novelists Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy; and the dramatist Anton Chekhov.^{100, 101, 102}

Between 1900 and 1930 several Russian novelists and poets, such as Andrei Bely and Alexander Blok, embraced abstraction and mysticism in a style that collectively became known as Symbolism. Other Russian poets of the era, including Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova, took a more concrete, verbally precise approach known as Acmeism. These writers and others, including Boris Pasternak, found themselves censored or persecuted during the Stalin era when Social Realism became the only government-sanctioned literary style. Pasternak, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and other writers won Nobel Prizes for Literature. But Pasternak ultimately refused the award under intense pressure from Soviet authorities. Solzhenitsyn did not leave the Soviet Union to receive his prize, fearing the Soviet regime would not allow him to return home.^{103, 104, 105}



Russian ballet
©On The Go Tours/flickr.com

Visual Arts

Russian painting was strongly influenced by the adoption of Christianity in 988 C.E.¹⁰⁶ Paintings first depicted Greek Orthodox iconography, but the Russian style became idealized and spiritual rather than naturalistic.¹⁰⁷ Icons include images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints usually painted on wooden panels.^{108,109} Byzantine monks first painted icons in Kiev, but a distinct style emerged with Theophanes the Greek and was perfected by his student, Andrei Rublev who painted the *The Holy Trinity* in 1411.¹¹⁰

The perspective is inverted, so the figure is placed in the center and is larger in scale compared to the background. Light in icon paintings emanates from the inside, not the outside. The viewer is to focus inwardly on spiritual concerns.¹¹¹

Russian painting turned to secular subjects quite slowly. Although founded in 1757, the Russian Academy of Arts did not inspire national painting until 1870 with the emergence a group known as the Wanderers. Many touring exhibitions gave these painters their name and spread their influence across the nation.¹¹² The movement promoted social change and national consciousness, although subjects ranged from landscapes to portraits to social commentaries.¹¹³

With the arrival of the 20th century, Russian painters experimented with many styles—Impressionism, Art Nouveau, and Symbolism—gradually becoming more abstract.^{114,115} Avant-garde painters including Vasily Kandinsky featured a style in which the human figure was simply drawn with rough, unfinished lines.¹¹⁶ Other styles followed, including cubo-futurism which broke from all previous styles. Natalia Goncharova painted in multiple styles with themes of Russian folk art, and later depicted objects suffused with rays of light. Marc Chagall achieved a world-wide reputation for his paintings of child-like dream images reminiscent of Russian folk tales. Kazimir Malevich's work featured geometrical forms that no longer represented the physical world. His most famous paintings, Black Square and White on White, were simple shapes that were “doorways to the spirit,” or represented thinking on canvas.^{117,118}

From the Russian Revolution in 1917 up through Stalin's era, painting promoted “correct” values of the revolution. In 1930, all abstract forms were outlawed as was exhibiting foreign art.¹¹⁹ Despite its social realism label, these paintings depicted heroic peasants, brave soldiers, and completely positive portraits of Soviet leaders.¹²⁰ No notable painters emerged from this era, and Russian painting did not recover until the 1960's and 1970's.¹²¹



Orchestra theater
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Music

Russian classical music bloomed during the 19th century.¹²² Mikhail Glinka is generally credited as the father of a distinctive Russian style of classical music and opera built on the folk music of the Eastern Slavs, who inhabited the region that would eventually become Kievan Rus and later Muscovy.¹²³ Shortly after Glinka's musical breakthrough in 1836, there emerged a set of composers known as the Group of Five—Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, Mily Balakirev, and César Cui—who continued to look to Russian legends, history, and folk music for inspiration.^{124, 125, 126}

Pytor Tchaikovsky, not included in the Group of Five, displayed distinctly Russian elements in his music, although less so than his contemporaries. His symphonies (No. 6 in B Minor), operas (*Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades*), ballet scores (*The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*), and piano concertos (No. 1) are among the most renowned pieces in the modern classical music canon.^{127, 128, 129}

The generation of composers following Tchaikovsky included Sergei Rachmaninov and Igor Stravinsky, both of whom fled Russia after the 1917 revolution. Rachmaninov is best known for his works written for the piano, although he also composed several orchestral works, including three symphonies. Stravinsky (ballet *The Firebird*) was an innovative composer whose music for the ballet *The Rite of Spring* shocked European listeners with its originality and modernity when it premiered in 1913.^{130, 131}

Other composers continued to work in the Soviet Union, but increasingly found themselves under state criticism. In 1948, the Soviet Central Committee denounced several composers, including three of the Soviet Union's better known composers—Dmitry Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, and Aram Khachaturian—as artists whose works show “clear manifestations of formalistic distortions and antidemocratic tendencies in music that are alien to the Soviet people and its artistic tastes.”^{132, 133, 134}

Folk Culture and Folklore

Although dance in Russia is, to many, epitomized by classical ballet and the country's many famous ballet troupes, folk dancing has an even longer heritage in the country. Around the world, wherever there are communities of Russians, there are usually Russian folk dancing groups. Some of these dances are associated with groups in Russia who have long lived at the margins of Russian society, such as the Roma (gypsies), Jews, and Cossacks. Russian folk dancers perform to traditional music played on a *garmoshka*

(buttoned accordion), *balalaika* (triangular-shaped guitar), Roma seven-string guitar, and other instruments.¹³⁵

Russia has a rich heritage of folktales, many of which are familiar to people outside Russia because they form the basis of well-known Russian ballets and musical stories.¹³⁶¹³⁷ One example is the story told in the ballet *The Firebird*, which Stravinsky based on a synthesis of the two peasant tales, “Prince Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf” and “Kastchei the Immortal.” Other examples include *The Snow Maiden*, *Peter and the Wolf*, and *Petrushka*.^{138, 139}



Hockey player
©Francis Larrede/flickr.com

Sports and Recreation

Sports enthusiasts have long recognized Russian athletes for their prowess in international sporting competitions such as the Olympics. More recently, they have emerged as stars in sports for which Russians were rarely notable a few decades ago. Most remarkable of these may be tennis, particularly women's tennis, in which the rankings of the world's top-ranked players include Maria Sharapova, Svetlana Kuznetsova, Vera Zvonareva, Anna Chakvetadze, Nadia Petrova, and Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.¹⁴⁰ On the men's side, top players since the mid-1990s have included Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Marat Safin, both of whom have won two Grand Slam events, and, more recently, Nikolay Davydenko and Mikhail Youzhny. Many credit former president Boris Yeltsin, an avid tennis player and fan, for having played a significant role in Russia's upsurge in the sport.^{141, 142}

The two top spectator sports in Russia are football (soccer) and ice hockey.^{143, 144} The Russian Premier League is the nation's leading division in football. Until recently, clubs from Moscow (Spartak, CSKA, Lokomotiv) have dominated the league. But Zenit St. Petersburg, which is now majority owned by the Russian gas giant Gazprom, broke the Moscow stranglehold by winning the Russian

Premier League championship (2007, 2010, 2012, and 2015) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions Cup in 2008.^{145, 146}

Although the Russian national ice hockey team is not nearly as dominant in

international competitions as the old Soviet Union team was, it is still among the world's leaders in hockey. In 2015, the men's team was ranked second in the world and the Russian women's team ranked sixth.^{147, 148} Since 1990, most top Russian hockey players have played in the lucrative North American National Hockey League (NHL), although the recently formed Kontinental Hockey League, backed by several large state-owned Russian companies such as Gazprom, is attempting to sign back some of the better Russian players.^{149, 150, 151}

Another favorite Russian leisure activity is spending time in the *banya*, a Russian bathhouse noted for its super-hot *parilka* (steam room).^{152, 153} Both sexes enjoy this Russian tradition, but women and men seldom attend together unless it is a family *banya*.^{154, 155}

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Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Today Russians use the term Tatar to denote any group that is of Asian, Muslim, or Turkic descent.

FALSE

Although Russians used Tatar loosely this way for centuries, today Tatars are more precisely defined as descendants of Turkic-Mongolian tribes that migrated centuries ago from southern Siberia into the Volga-Urals region.

2. Russian Orthodox Christianity is the most common religion among Russian citizens of all ethnic origins.

FALSE

Russian Orthodox Christianity is the most common religion among Russian citizens of Slavic origin (e.g., Russians, Ukrainians). Russia's Turkic groups are predominantly Muslim, as are some ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, such as the Chechens.

3. Russian writers have made only a minor contribution to world literature.

FALSE

Russian writer Alexander Pushkin established himself as the nation's earliest and, foremost literary figure. Other world famous Russian writers include satirist Nikolai Gogol; the novelists Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy; and the dramatist Anton Chekhov.

4. Traditional Russian peasant dress for both men and women included a rubakha, a long-sleeved shirt with or without design motifs.

TRUE

Traditionally, the festive costume for women peasants in Russia was a sarafan, worn over a rubakha, a long-sleeved shirt with or without embroidered design motifs. Russian peasant men wore a rubakha that either hung loose like a smock or was tucked into the pants.

5. Russia ranks as the world leader regarding the number of women in senior leadership positions .

TRUE

40% of senior managers are women, the highest proportion in the world.



Russian tank

©Dmitry Ilyinov/flickr.com

Chapter 5: Security

Introduction

Russia shares borders with 14 countries, many of whom are part of a region referred to as the “near abroad,” a term that reflects the countries’ history as former Soviet republics. Some of these new nations have aligned themselves closely with the West, rejecting being part of the Russian sphere of influence.^{1,2} Others have developed closer

relations with Europe and the United States, while retaining economic and political ties with Russia.^{3, 4}

Since Putin came to power in 2000, Russia's main foreign policy impetus has been the desire for Russia's rise as a regional and global power, a strengthening its economy, and rebuilding its military. Relations with the West improved between 2001 and 2009 but have since seen some deterioration caused mainly by Russia's actions in the Ukraine and Syria. Putin perceives much of Western policy as hostile to his nation. As a result, Putin has been willing to draw strong lines against the West which he regards as undermining Russian hegemony.^{5, 6, 7} This has led to increased tensions with the West, particularly as NATO expands eastward and Russia sides with China in international disputes. Russia and China unite against the West in Middle East conflicts, such as those in Libya and Syria.^{8, 9, 10, 11} In spite of this, however, Putin appears to be interested in maintaining positive relations with the West.¹²



Obama and Medvedev
©Okino/wikimedia.org

U.S.-Russian Relations

Relations between Russia and the United States in 2015 were at their lowest point since the Cold War. Moscow is persistently unwilling to accept the U.S. role as a global superpower and strongly resents U.S. efforts to democratize Eurasian nations. The U.S.-led NATO missile defense efforts, which Putin regards as a clear threat to Russia's strategic deterrent initiatives, remain a thorn in Russia's side. For its part, Washington is wary of Russia's anti-democratic tendencies and on-going arms sales to global trouble spots. The U.S. fails to recognize Russia's annexation of the Crimea and continues to decry Russia's actions in Ukraine. Russia's recent military involvements in

Syria have also provoked tensions.^{13, 14, 15, 16, 17}

Following Russian intervention in the Crimea, the United States actively supported economic sanctions against Russia.¹⁸ In spite of official sanctions, trade between the two nations rose by 7% by the end of 2014. Trade fell off slightly in 2015, and the balance of trade favors Russia.^{19, 20, 21, 22}



Nagorno-Karabakh region
©Kylar/flickr.com

its military bases in Georgia. Observers estimate that Russia currently has about 3,700 Russian troops stationed in Armenia, a nation that remains in a military and political standoff with Azerbaijan because of its support for the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh.^{26, 27, 28, 29} Some have voiced fears that Russia intends to take Azerbaijan back into the Russian fold by force if the West does nothing to stall Russia's current expansionism.³⁰



Alexander Lukashenko (right)
©Fotospresidencia5/flickr.com

Belarus' imports come from Russia, including all of its oil and natural gas.^{35, 36}

Illegal drugs are trafficked across the Belarusian border into Russia.³⁷ Women and children are also victims of sex-trafficking and forced labor. Many of these victims are illegally trafficked across the border into Russia.³⁸

Relations with Neighboring Countries

Azerbaijan

Relations between the two nations are cordial, with occasional tensions. Trade and economic ties remain at the core of their relations.²³ In 2014, bilateral trade reached USD 4 billion, the highest ever recorded. Russia is Azerbaijan's largest import trading partner.^{24, 25}

Several outstanding issues plague bilateral relations. One is Russia's increased military presence in Armenia, a result of the closure of

Belarus

Of all Russia's neighbors, few have closer political and economic ties to Moscow than Belarus.^{31, 32} Russia's main focus has been the control of Belarus' economic assets including natural gas. Russia's heavy subsidization of crude oil to Belarus has been a core part of its relations and has helped shore up Belarus' ailing economy. More than 200 signed agreements form the foundation for strong bilateral cooperation between these states. Belarus exports machinery and agricultural products to Russia and cooperates in construction efforts there, and strong investment in Belarus is improving bi-lateral trade.^{33, 34} More than 56% of



UN Security Council
©Yang and Yun's Album/flickr.com

China

Russia and Chinese relations are good. In 2014, following sanctions on the Soviet Union, the two nations reached an agreement on gas exports. Although the details were not released, Russia appears to have made significant concessions to its neighbor, thereby elevating China's strategic importance to Russia.³⁹ The two countries are building stronger economic ties to include several deals on cross-border trade, loans, investment options, and the joint oil field development.⁴⁰ Bilateral trade volume between the two nations amounted to USD 95.3 billion in 2014 and is anticipated to double by 2020.^{41, 42}

In spite of their warm relations, however, there are points of friction. One problem for Russia is the large number of illegal migrants entering Siberia from China. Estimates place the number of illegal migrants between two and five million. Russian authorities are pressuring local governments to expel these illegal migrants and have stepped up border activities to halt such crossings.^{43, 44, 45} Another source of tension stems from the flagging economies of both countries. Russia's economic situation has left it unable to invest in pipelines related to a joint natural gas agreement. If the Chinese want to continue with the deal to import gas from Siberia, it looks increasingly likely that they will have to bear the financial costs.⁴⁶ China is also wary of Russia's actions in the Crimea because Beijing wants to avoid setting any precedent for similar action in rebellious Chinese territories including Taiwan and Tibet.⁴⁷

Estonia

Estonia's relations with Russia have been difficult and are presently considered lukewarm. Russia and Estonia have yet to demarcate their mutual border formally. Although prime ministers from both countries signed the agreement in 2005, the Russian Federation has not signed the agreement, claiming it gives Estonia territorial claims on Russia.^{48,49, 50, 51}

Tensions between the two countries persist in light of Estonia's memberships in both the EU and NATO.⁵² NATO patrols over Estonian airspace have angered Russia, and tensions in Russia-NATO relations have sometimes spilled over into diplomatic relations with Estonia.⁵³ In light of Russia's action in the Crimea, Estonia fears similar aggression in the name of protecting ethnic Russians living in Estonia.^{54, 55, 56, 57} Nearly one-quarter of Estonia's population consists of ethnic Russians and in some parts of the nation, that number jumps to 90%.^{58, 59}

The two governments often exchange counterclaims of espionage. In 2009, a court found an Estonian Ministry of Defense official guilty of treason for passing information to the Russian Intelligence Service and sentenced him to prison.^{60, 61, 62} A similar case and verdict occurred in 2012.⁶³



Finnish military
©Pavel Trebukov/flickr.com

Finland

Finnish-Russian relations are delicate given their shared history of violent conflict. Recent relations, focused more squarely on security concerns, have cooled since Russia's incursion into Ukraine. Finland is increasingly worried about Russia's aggressive stance in the region. The current Finnish government has adopted a hardline stance toward Moscow which it regards as a major security threat.^{64, 65, 66} Cross-border organized crime has also strained relations.⁶⁷

In spite of these tensions, however, Finland maintains strong trade relations with Russia, its third largest trading partners.⁶⁸ International sanctions against Russia have hurt the Finnish economy as trade between the two countries has dropped. In January 2015, Russia's trade total with Finland stood at USD 900 million.^{69, 70}



Georgian protest of Russia
©Snapperjack/flickr.com

Georgia

Russia's relationship with Georgia, its neighbor on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, has improved slightly since Russia's offensive in the South Ossetia region of Georgia in 2008. These attacks were quickly followed by advances of Russian ground troops into South Ossetia and Abkhazia (two breakaway Georgian territories) and eventually nearby areas in Georgia beyond these regions.^{71, 72} Moscow officially recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia although few other nations have recognized and extended formal diplomatic recognition to the two countries.^{73, 74} On 29 August 2008, Georgia responded to Russia's recognition of South Ossetia

and Abkhazia by breaking diplomatic relations with Russia.⁷⁵ In March 2012, Russia offered to reestablish diplomatic relations with Georgia. Although willing to begin talks, Georgia remains unwilling to restore relations until the Russian government recognizes Georgia's borders, including its sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's

expansionist policies have further hardened Georgia's line against Russia.^{76, 77, 78, 79}



National Oil Company Kazakhstan
©Ken and Nyetta/flickr.com

hardware from Russia, is strong. The Kazakh government cooperates closely with the Russian Federal Security Service in counterterrorism efforts. It has developed close relations with Russia's intelligence and law enforcement units. Kazakhstan announced it would join Russia and Belarus in plans to create a joint regional air defense network. Kazakhstan and Russia also cooperate through memberships in the Collective Security Treaty Organization as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.^{86, 87}

Russia is Kazakhstan's largest import and second-largest trading partner, and trade between the two nations reached more than USD 15 billion in 2010.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, trade relations worsened in 2014, reaching their lowest point since 1991. By April 2015, an unofficial trade war existed between the two nations as Kazakhstan banned imports of Russian products.^{89, 90, 91}

Kazakhstan

Russia's border with Kazakhstan—twice as long as any of its other borders—was finalized in 2005.^{80, 81} The two nations generally have enjoyed close relations and Kazakhstan remains one of Russia's strongest allies. Their close relations are based largely on Kazakhstan's large population of ethnic Russians as well as Russia's control of Kazakhstan's oil and natural gas pipelines.^{82, 83, 84} In addition, Kazakhstan and Russia are linked via membership in the Eurasian Economic Union.⁸⁵

Kazakhstan has been an important and reliable strategic partner for Russia. Military cooperation, including the purchase of equipment and



Manufacturing in Ventspils
©Marek Paju/flickr.com

Latvia

Latvia and Russia have had strained relations since Latvian independence but in 2015, diplomatic relations were strong.^{92, 93} Relations are complicated by Latvia's large ethnic Russian population (26%), whom many in the nation regarded as illegal immigrants. Like Estonia, Latvia fears its Russian population could be used as a pretense for Russian aggression.^{94, 95} Following Latvian accession to the EU and NATO in 2004, relations further

deteriorated when Latvia adopted a unilateral declaration to a border treaty with Russia. Relations warmed in 2007 when both parties signed a border agreement but worsened with Russia's incursion into Georgia.^{96, 97, 98}

Trade relations continue, with Russia being Latvia's second-largest export partner and fourth-largest import partner.⁹⁹ Economic ties, along with general relations, have worsened since Russia's exploits in Ukraine in 2014. In August 2014, Russia implemented an embargo on food products from the European Union, of which Latvia is a member.^{100, 101}



Mazeikiu Nafta oil refinery
©Maciej Janiec/flickr.com

Lithuania

Lithuania, which shares a border with the Kaliningrad exclave of Russia, has experienced troubled relations with Russia since achieving its independence in 1990 but relations between the two are generally stable.^{102, 103} As part of the negotiations for Lithuania's entry into the EU in 2004, the government negotiated a transit policy with Russia for travel through Lithuania to and from Kaliningrad.¹⁰⁴ Tensions between the two countries heightened with Lithuania's support of and cooperation with Georgia and its insistence that Russia withdraw its troops.¹⁰⁵ Tensions further escalated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine when Lithuania's president called Russia a terrorist-like state.^{106, 107}

Lithuania remains heavily dependent on Russia which remains its largest import and export trading partner.¹⁰⁸ Bilateral trade has been adversely affected by the EU sanctions imposed on Russia and Russia's ban of EU food products.¹⁰⁹ In 2014, Lithuania announced it was considering terminating its long-time association with Gazprom, the Russian oil company. Lithuania is trying to reduce its dependence on Russia, its only supplier of liquefied natural gas.¹¹⁰

Mongolia

Mongolia declared its independence in 1911 with help from Russia. In 1921, Mongolia became the first Soviet satellite state. From 1921 to 1990, the country had a communist government, which was dominated by the Soviet Union. Soviet loans and aid helped the country develop much of its energy and transportation infrastructure during this time.^{111, 112, 113} The two countries continue to cooperate on military and security issues. Mongolian army officers attend Russian training colleges, and the two armies conduct joint military exercises. Russia has provided much-needed military aid to Mongolia,



Mongolian forces
©Isafmedia/flickr.com

uranium, silver, and gold mines.^{119, 120} Several Russian state-owned conglomerates have large minority ownership stakes in joint-venture mining companies, including Mongolia's largest copper and molybdenum producer and the leading Mongolian fluorspar mining company.^{121, 122, 123}

including tanks and helicopters.¹¹⁴

The two countries are linked through trade and investment. Russia is Mongolia's second-largest import trading partner, supplying most of Mongolia's petroleum needs.^{115, 116} Russia uses Mongolia's railroads to supply oil to China. The rail line—which runs from the Russian to the Chinese border and is part of a Soviet-Mongolia joint venture—carries 60% of Mongolia's freight traffic.^{117, 118} Russia is investing heavily in developing Mongolian coal reserves, copper,



Former dictator Kim Jong Il
©Joseph Ferris III/flickr.com

North Korea

Russia's shortest border is with North Korea (18 km/11 mi).¹²⁴ Russia remains North Korea's most important ally after China. In recent years, Russia's main interest in North Korea has been focused on an expansion of Russian influence in the region. Russia's interest in North Korea also appears to be rooted in Russia's desire to interfere with U.S. efforts to isolate North Korea.^{125, 126}

North Korea's dire economic condition offers little to Russia. Nevertheless, the two nations are planning a number of projects, including a trans-Korean railroad and a gas pipeline. Russia also holds the lease on a wharf in the North Korean port of Rajin. In May 2014, Russia formally

forgave 90% of North Korea's estimated USD 11 billion debt accrued during the Soviet era.^{127, 128, 129} Trade between the two countries is strengthening. In 2014, Russia announced that trade will be conducted with Russian rubles. That year, Russian imports from North Korea topped USD 10 million. By 2020, bilateral trade is expected to reach USD 1 billion.^{130, 131}



Russian subs at North Pole
©MATEUS_27:24&25/flickr.com

to Russia's growing military in the Arctic, Norway held its largest military exercises in nearly 50 years along their joint border in March 2015.^{137, 138}

Norway is concerned over environmental issues and pollution caused on the Russian side of the border. One point of friction concerns high-level sulfur dioxide emissions from a nickel-smelting plant near the Norwegian border. Another surrounds the Russian Navy's 40 nuclear submarines, each with two reactors.^{139, 140} Leaks from Russian oil pipelines have caused environmental damage, and Norway is worried about the increasing tanker traffic along its coastline.^{141, 142, 143}

Norway

Russia and Norway share the world's second-most northern land boundary. Neither country is a key economic trading partner for the other.^{132, 133} Border tensions eased with the opening of economic, environmental, and cultural opportunities, and in 2010 their longstanding maritime border dispute was settled.¹³⁴ Relations worsened, however, after Russia's invasion of Crimea. Norway is a NATO member and has supported EU sanctions against Russia.^{135, 136} Russia's activities in the Crimea deepened Norway's mistrust of Russian intentions in the Arctic region, especially near the Barents Sea and prompted Norway to reassess its view of Russia's threat potential. Partially in response



Polish, EU, and NATO flags
©Pawel Kabanski/flickr.com

Poland

Poland's relations with Russia have declined sharply in recent years and, in 2015, could best be described as icy. Poland's entry into NATO and its membership in the EU have contributed to the cooling relations. Russia has expressed concerns over the status of the Kaliningrad enclave. Poland's close alliance with Ukraine has further strained relations.^{144, 145, 146, 147}

Despite strained relations between the two countries, Russia is Poland's second-largest import and seventh-largest export partner.¹⁴⁸ Trade sanctions levied against Russia have hurt trade relations.¹⁴⁹ Poland remains highly dependent on Russia for its oil and natural gas needs. Brief disruptions in these supplies during

2004 and 2006 encouraged the Polish government to proceed with plans for energy diversification. To date, the only concrete step taken by the Polish government has been to stockpile emergency reserves of both fuels. Plans are in the design stage to build pipelines that would transport Norwegian gas via Denmark, and Caspian Sea oil via a pipeline running from the Ukrainian Black Sea port of Odessa.^{150, 151}



Former PM Tymoshenko and Putin
©Jedimentat44/flickr.com

continuing to run high, the future of trade between the two countries does not look promising.¹⁵⁸ The normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries, if it happens, will be a long process.¹⁵⁹



Russian Naval guard
©Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff/flickr.com

Ukraine

Bilateral relations between Ukraine and Russia tanked in 2014 following Russia's involvement in the Ukraine's civil war which resulted in Russia's annexation of the Crimea.¹⁵² By October 2015, the civil unrest continued in eastern Ukraine.^{153, 154} In May 2015, Ukraine's parliament suspended military cooperation with Russia in a further sign of declining relations.^{155, 156} Ukraine banned all Russian air traffic, both commercial and military, from its airspace, beginning 25 October 2015. Russia threatened to ban Ukraine flights, a move which could effectively halt all travel between the two nations.¹⁵⁷ Trade between Russia and Ukraine suffered a 64% decline in the first quarter of 2015.

With no clear resolution in sight and tensions

continuing to run high, the future of trade between the two countries does not look promising.¹⁵⁸ The normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries, if it happens, will be a long process.¹⁵⁹

Military

Army

Russia's armed forces, the world's second largest, has a combined strength of approximately 695,600 to 766,000 active personnel. It consists of three main branches: Ground Forces (350,000), Air Force (159,400), and Navy (163,700).^{160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165} It has approximately 15,400 tanks, 31,300 armored vehicles, and 3,400 multiple-launch rocket systems.¹⁶⁶ In July 2015, Russia announced plans to cut 17,000 military and an additional 30,000 civilian personnel.¹⁶⁷

Russia's operational effectiveness is low although

sufficient to meet its current needs. Only fully combat-ready units have been left intact, reducing the overall number of units. No more than a dozen (mostly airborne and air assault brigades) are deployable in an hour, but most forces could fully deploy within 48 hours.¹⁶⁸

All Russian men between the ages of 18 and 27 must perform a year of military service. Russia's military relies on a draft to meet its manpower needs. Russia's low birthrate presents a problem for future needs as fewer than 700,000 men reach military age annually. The problem is further exacerbated by widespread attempts to avoid the draft. Because of these problems, the army is likely to increase the numbers of Muslim minorities, which currently constitute 15% of the force, in the near future. The army is concerned about the reliability of Muslim soldiers, especially if pressed into service in the North Caucasus or other inter-ethnic conflicts.^{169, 170}

Troop morale is generally low with desertion and criminal behavior rife. Morale is slightly higher among the officer ranks following a pay raise in 2012. Professionalism varies among the units. Conscripts are often under-trained and suffer from frequent lapses in discipline.¹⁷¹

Navy

Russia's navy is still grounded in a largely coastal defense posture although it is trying to adjust its capabilities to a broader scope capable of expanding its operations.

Russia's navy has approximately 350 vessels including one aircraft carrier, 4 frigates, 12 destroyers, and 55 submarines.¹⁷² The Navy has several fleets. The Northern Fleet operates out of the base at Severomorsk. The smaller Pacific Fleet operates out of several bases including Vladivostok and operates 13 nuclear-powered submarines. The Baltic Fleet is headquartered in Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave near Lithuania. The Black Sea Fleet and Caspian Flotilla are mainly operational in the Crimea and around the Black Sea near Ukraine.¹⁷³ Sustainability is problematic since many of the fleet is aging and crews are often poorly trained. As a result, overall readiness is low but has improved in the last several years. In late 2015, the Russian navy fired long-range cruise missiles from its Caspian Sea positions to Syria targeting rebel forces.¹⁷⁴

Like the army, the navy is officer-heavy. Conscripts are generally of higher quality than those who go into the army. The navy has difficulty recruiting qualified voluntary personnel and cannot retain them long. Morale is very low among both volunteer and draftee members of the service. Professionalism is variable but frequently inadequate. A recent report suggests that at least one-third of naval crews lack the necessary skills.¹⁷⁵

Air Force

Russia's air force currently has approximately 32,500 aircraft of which 769 are fighters and 1,305 are fixed-wing attack craft.¹⁷⁶ Like the other two branches of the military, Russia's air force faces challenges related to maintenance of current aircraft, shortages

of parts, and unskilled crews. Nevertheless, it has a reasonable degree of readiness.¹⁷⁷ In 2015, Russian planes were deployed to Syria on a bombing campaign against Syrian rebel forces.¹⁷⁸

The air force has problems meeting its manpower needs and has resorted to lower standards, including the drafting of criminals. Few members reenlist making it difficult to maintain trained crews. Even so, morale is higher than in the other branches. In the more remote regions, morale tends to be particularly low as are instances of bullying and corruption.¹⁷⁹



Police officer
©Daniel Beilinson/flickr.com

Police

In 2011, the Russian police force changed its name from *militsia* to *politsia* as part of reforms designed to end corruption and professionalize the force. Other changes include reducing the size of the force and raising pay by 20%. In 2015, there were 530,000 police officers and 20,000 paramilitary police. Russian police are notorious for their rampant corruption and inability to deal effectively with organized crime and gang warfare.^{180, 181, 182}

Organized along traditional Soviet lines, the units report to regional offices. Two paramilitary forces, the Special Designation Police Detachments

(OMON) and the Special Rapid Response Detachments (SOBR), supplement regional forces. OMON forces are specifically in charge of riot control, while the SOBR is a SWAT-like commando force. Both are also available for private hire by companies to provide security services. There is also an antinarcotics unit (GKNBONPV) tasked with law-enforcement and anti-trafficking operations.¹⁸³

A National Guard force (VV) made up of light infantry is responsible for managing civil demonstrations and emergencies. It also serves as a rear backup for the army. Authorities normally dispatch the unit to quell social unrest and enforce martial law. The Federal Security Service (FSB) is the Russian equivalent of the FBI. It runs both counterintelligence and counterterrorism services, as well as a border and immigration control force.¹⁸⁴



The Chechnya conflict
©LOreBoNoSi/flickr.com

Issues Affecting Stability

Terrorism and related violence are almost daily experiences in the North Caucasus republics. Chechen and other homegrown terrorist groups, which have become increasingly organized, conduct these operations. The terrorists use a variety of tactics and weapons including suicide car bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and sniper attacks. Terrorist groups in the region are radicalizing and increasingly forging links to one another. Russia claims it prevented 20 terrorist attacks within its borders in 2015.^{185, 186, 187, 188, 189}

Organized crime is a serious problem and is increasing dramatically. Worsening economic conditions in the country have fueled the uptick in organized criminal activity.^{190, 191} The Russian Mafia is a serious criminal threat, with up to 300 groups operating 12–15 networks in Russia.^{192, 193} These networks form loose associations of criminal cells from all backgrounds, including senior leaders and politicians, street gangs, the unemployed and the homeless. The world's wealthiest crime organization is the Solntsevskaya Bratva (Brotherhood), which is alleged to have close ties to Russia's federal intelligence agency.^{194, 195}

Russia is a known transit point for drugs from Afghanistan. Consumption of illegal drugs is on the rise, leading to increased crime rates. In 2009, Russia's President Medvedev rated drug addiction as one of his nation's most serious national security risks. According to estimates, Russia has more than seven million drug addicts, 90,000 of whom die from overdoses annually.^{196, 197, 198, 199}

In recent years, Russia has experienced a growing divide between the elite and the more moderate elements of the Russian population. Economic hardships have deepened resentments against the government among reformers who wanted political and social controls lifted.^{200, 201} Russia's involvement in Ukraine is another source of division. International sanctions have been partially responsible for the flagging economy. Political divisions within Russia over its role in Ukraine could fuel dissent sufficient to destabilize the government.^{202, 203}



Russian army
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Outlook

Decreasing oil prices, economic sanctions, and the conflict in Ukraine have increased the risk of political instability within Russia. Recent assessments have rated Russia as being at “high” risk for political instability.^{204, 205} Russia will hold parliamentary elections in 2016 and this is expected to cause more political turbulence within the country. Although the opposition is unlikely to oust Putin’s party, there exists the opportunity to gain seats and set the stage for a new government in the future.²⁰⁶ A recent analysis suggests that it will be difficult for Russia to survive in its present form. Others, however, believe Russia is sufficiently resilient to withstand the current challenges. Some experts predict that Russia will

lose its ability to govern its territories, significantly weakening the central government. Whichever way the situation plays out, Putin appears firmly in control for the moment but remains vulnerable.^{207, 208, 209, 210}

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Russia appears to have little interest in maintaining positive relations with the West.

False

In spite of recent actions that have antagonized the Western powers, Putin appears to be interested in maintaining positive relations with the West.

2. Economic relations between Russia and China continue to strengthen, driven in large part by China's increasing need for energy resources.

True

Bilateral trade volume between the two nations hit USD 95.3 billion in 2014 and is expected to double that figure by 2020.

3. Russia's relations with Belarus are tense.

False

Of all Russia's neighbors, few have closer political and economic ties to Moscow than Belarus.

4. Russia's North Caucasus region has been the nation's most peaceful area for the last two decades.

False

Terrorism and related violence frequently occur in the North Caucasus republics. Chechen and other homegrown terrorist groups, which have become increasingly organized, are the culprits.

5. Norway's relations with Russia are cooling.

True

Relations worsened after Russia's invasion of Crimea. Russia's activities in the Crimea deepened Norway's mistrust of Russian intentions in the Arctic region, especially in the Barents Sea, and prompted Norway to reassess its view of Russia's threat potential.

Final Assessment

1. The Ural Mountains mark the boundary between the European and Asian continents.
TRUE OR FALSE?
2. Saint Petersburg is located in central Russia, on the eastern side of the Ural Mountains.
TRUE OR FALSE?
3. The city of Yekaterinburg is an important industrial hub in Russia's Ural Mountain region.
TRUE OR FALSE?
4. Although once severely polluted, the Volga River has undergone significant environmental reclamation in recent years.
TRUE OR FALSE?
5. About 1,000 earthquakes strike Russia every year.
TRUE OR FALSE?
6. The Kievan Rus principality soundly defeated and expelled invading Mongolian forces in the 13th century.
TRUE OR FALSE?
7. Stalin's economic reforms introduced collective farming.
TRUE OR FALSE?
8. The emancipation of the serfs in the 19th century significantly reduced the level of social unrest in the Russian Empire.
TRUE OR FALSE?
9. Lenin, the architect of the Russian Revolution of 1917, died only a few years after the formation of the U.S.S.R. in 1922.
TRUE OR FALSE?
10. Vladimir Putin was the first democratically elected president of Russia.
TRUE OR FALSE?

11. Russia's wood and wood products are a major part of its agricultural export revenues.

TRUE OR FALSE?

12. In 2015, Russia's banking industry was in crisis.

TRUE OR FALSE?

13. Unemployment, especially in the cities, is nearly 10%.

TRUE OR FALSE?

14. About 25% of Russian men die before reaching the age of 55.

TRUE OR FALSE?

15. Russia's decreasing population will reduce unemployment pressures, thus strengthening the economic outlook.

TRUE OR FALSE?

16. The Chechens are Russia's most fiercely independent ethnic group.

TRUE OR FALSE?

17. During the Gorbachev era, a Soviet policy allowing greater freedom for Jews to emigrate to Israel and other countries seriously reduced the Russian Jewish population.

TRUE OR FALSE?

18. Russian cuisine remains largely uninfluenced by Europe.

TRUE OR FALSE?

19. Folk dancing has a longer heritage in Russia than classical ballet.

TRUE OR FALSE?

20. Women represent approximately one-third of the members of the Russian parliament.

TRUE OR FALSE?

21. Russia, although reluctant, is recruiting more Muslims into its armed forces.

TRUE OR FALSE?

22. Political relations between Russia and Poland have warmed in recent years.

TRUE OR FALSE?

23. Russia's armed forces suffer from low morale and lagging professionalism.

TRUE OR FALSE?

24. Organized crime activity has decreased significantly in Russia in recent years.
TRUE OR FALSE?

25. Russia's relationship with Georgia has moved from strained to confrontational.
TRUE OR FALSE?

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