

Russian Federation

Country Report

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Executive Summary:

The Russian Federation is the world's largest country, spanning nine time zones. Russia's economy has gone through major transformations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, from centralization and isolation to global integration. Russia has the largest global reserves of mineral and energy resources and is the world's second largest oil and natural gas producer. The natural resources trade helped Russia to overcome its 1998 financial crisis. Since then, the economy has grown on average by 7% yearly. Russia is the primary trading partner for most of the Soviet successor states and for some EU countries, whose dependency on Russian gas for energy needs may near 100%.

Russia struggled with a difficult transition from communism to capitalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Current president Vladimir Putin has been Russia's dominant politician since 2000, controlling political institutions and public and non-governmental organizations, restricting the independence of some religious groups and the media, and generally marginalizing political opposition. Corruption is widespread throughout all levels of government. President Putin has signed laws to control political opposition and restrict legitimate activities and criticism, and has increased pressure on independent news agencies, websites, and bloggers.

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has seriously set back relations between the West and Russia. Russia supported the Crimean referendum on "independence" in March 2014, and has incited separatism in Eastern Ukraine. In response, the United States and EU have imposed sanctions on Russia's financial and energy sectors and introduced targeted individual sanctions, including visa bans and freezing of assets and accounts.

Russian Jewry ranks as the world's fourth-largest Jewish community. Since the Soviet collapse, Russian Jewry has reestablished its diverse religious, social, and cultural life after decades of Soviet-era repressions and restrictions. Countless Jewish institutions now exist in Russia, including community centers, synagogues, schools, aliyah and emigration bureaus, youth groups, charity organizations, and mass media. However, challenges for Russia's Jewish community still exist, such as relatively low levels of religious observance, street-level anti-Semitism, and the growing needs of the elderly.

History:

The Russian Empire

The modern Russian state was established between the 15th and 16th centuries, as a result of territorial expansion of the Duchy of Moscow under Tsars Ivan III and Ivan IV. An earlier predecessor state, known as Kievan Rus (based in Novgorod and Kyiv), was founded in the 9th century, but was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century, and its Ukrainian and Belarusian territories came under Polish-Lithuanian rule. In the late 17th century Tsar Peter the Great expanded the Russian state and crowned himself the first Russian Emperor. Peter the Great's reign is considered to

Statistics

Population: 142,424,000
(July 2015 est.)

Size: 17,098,242 sq. km

Capital: Moscow

Major cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg

Jewish population:
600,000 (est.)

Head of State: President Vladimir Putin

Head of Government:
Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev

Foreign Minister:
Sergey Lavrov

Ambassador to United States:
Sergey Kislyak

Ambassador to Russia:
John F. Tefft

Freedom House Rating:
Not Free

be one of the most formative periods in Russian history: it established social, institutional, and intellectual trends that dominated Russia for the next two centuries. Peter the Great laid the foundation of the modern system of administration, reformed the army, and introduced Western customs into Russian society. During his reign, Russia became a major European power. His successors continued to expand imperial boundaries in all directions. At its height before World War I, the Russian Empire incorporated the territories of present-day Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, the Baltic states, most of Poland, the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia, and fought for influence with other great powers in China, Iran, Afghanistan, Ottoman Turkey, and the Balkans.

Russia remained an authoritarian and powerful, but relatively undeveloped state throughout the 19th century. Rooted in an agrarian economy, Russia did not abolish serfdom until 1861 and did not industrialize until the late 19th century. By the turn of the century, the pressures of a rapidly changing economy, compounded by incompetent autocratic rule, led to growing public dissatisfaction and opposition to Tsarism. Public discontent culminated in the violent but short-lived 1905 Revolution, which forced Tsar Nicholas II to grant Russia's first constitution. Russia's ill-fated involvement in World War I resulted in a popular rebellion against Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917. The monarchy fell to a Bolshevik coup led by Vladimir Lenin in October 1917.

Soviet Union and the Cold War

After the October Revolution a civil war broke out between the Bolsheviks and the White Russians, a loose coalition of monarchists, democrats, and socialists. Despite scarce resources and limited intervention by foreign powers, including the United States, Lenin's Bolsheviks prevailed. In 1922, the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was formally established. The Soviets reluctantly recognized the independence of Poland, Finland, and the Baltic countries, but reasserted control over much of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus, and all of the formerly Tsarist-ruled areas of Central Asia and Siberia.

After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Communist Party. During the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin's radical policies of rapid industrialization, ruthless collectivization of agriculture, forced relocation of "suspect" populations, and mass purges of suspected opponents resulted in millions of deaths. Despite the heavy human cost, the Soviet Union in a short span of time transformed from a largely agrarian economy to a major industrial powerhouse.

In late August 1939, the USSR signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, carving up Eastern Europe in a secret deal. One week later, German forces invaded Poland from the west. Shortly afterward, Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east. In August 1940 the Soviet Union forcibly annexed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; seized regions of Romania; and launched a limited but costly invasion of Finland. However, in June 1941, Germany violated the earlier non-aggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union, initiating Russia's involvement on the side of the Allies for the remainder of World War II.

The USSR played a central role in the Allied victory over Germany in World War II, suffering tremendous casualties. In the postwar world, the Soviet Union extended its sphere of influence to include Eastern Europe, and developed a nuclear arsenal to rival the United States for world power.

Stalin's repressive policies continued after the war. The territories formally annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945, including western Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic countries, and Moldova, were subject to rigorous nationalization and collectivization. Stalin's death in March 1953 marked the end of this brutal era.

In response to the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) defense alliance by the United States and Western European powers in 1949, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states signed the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

The pact formalized Soviet military and de facto political control over the region. From the 1950s until the late 1980s, the USSR competed with the West for influence in countries around the globe. In the Middle East, the Soviet Union backed the Arab states while the United States generally supported Israel. The U.S.-Soviet balance of power deterred direct conflict between the two superpowers, although crises such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1973 Yom Kippur War brought the two sides to the brink of nuclear confrontation.

Stalin's successors maintained an autocratic but less brutal rule. Nikita Khrushchev, who governed from 1953 to 1964, formally rehabilitated many individuals and groups repressed by Stalin. His successor, Leonid Brezhnev, concentrated primarily on domestic stability. Violations of basic human rights remained rampant.

By the late 1970s, critical problems inherent in the Communist political and economic system accelerated. As Soviet military power peaked, the economy stagnated. Social and political unrest mounted within Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe through the 1980s. In particular, Poland's Solidarity independent trade union, formed in response to labor turmoil, led to growing national resistance to Communist rule.

Mikhail Gorbachev was the last Soviet leader, following the two aged and infirm leaders Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. Gorbachev opened a new era with bold reforms aimed at modernizing the USSR, including economic restructuring ("*perestroika*"), and a loosening of restrictions on political, social, and cultural activity ("*glasnost*"). Gorbachev also moved decisively to reduce tensions with the West. His 1986 Reykjavik summit meeting with U.S. President Ronald Reagan signaled a shift in relations between the two powers, including a move towards greater cooperation, with a twofold focus on disarmament and human rights.

Gorbachev's reforms aimed at economic modernization but contained internal contradictions, resulting in economic chaos. The Soviet economic and political situation began to deteriorate, which led to the rise of strong nationalist and separatist movements. In August 1991, a coup attempt by members of Gorbachev's government led to the end of socialist rule. Gorbachev resigned as president on December 25, 1991, and the USSR was dissolved into fifteen post-Soviet states.

Russian Federation

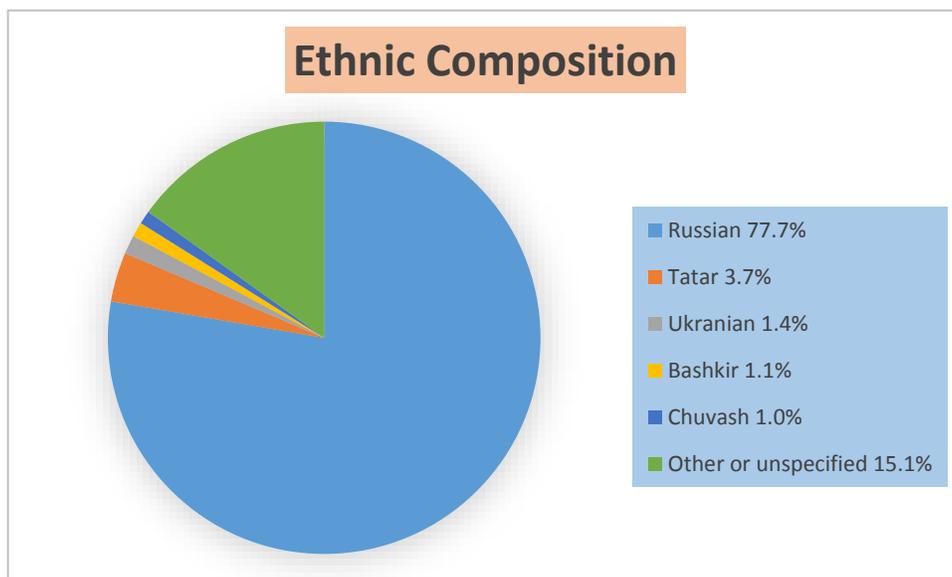
After the Soviet Union's collapse, Boris Yeltsin became president of the newly independent Russian Federation, which quickly entered a prolonged period of turmoil. Economic dislocation impoverished many Russians, and political chaos nearly paralyzed the government. Organized crime thrived. In October 1993, political conflict between the Russian Parliament and the Yeltsin government erupted into open warfare as the Russian Army crushed an armed uprising by Parliament supporters. In December 1993, a new Parliament was elected, and a new constitution with a stronger executive branch was approved by national referendum. Yeltsin was victorious in the 1996 presidential elections, defeating Communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin's last years as president were tumultuous, featuring frequent cabinet rearrangements and the surprise dismissals of several prime ministers.

Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent and later chief of the FSB, was the last prime minister appointed by Yeltsin in August 1999, before Yeltsin's resignation on December 31, 1999. Putin then assumed the dual role of prime minister and acting president until being elected president in March 2000. His domestic popularity soared in the period leading up to the election, in part due to his initiation of an anti-terrorist offensive in the province of Chechnya after apartment bombings in Moscow blamed on Chechen terrorists.

Putin's rise to power coincided with a major increase in global energy prices. He melded Russia's economic and energy policies with foreign relations. Putin was also assertive in using Russian nationalism to unite domestic constituencies. He put forward a Russia-first approach in foreign policy and has sought to preserve Russia's special

“sphere of influence” over the republics of the former Soviet Union.

Constitutionally barred from a third consecutive term as president, Putin stepped down after his term ended. In November 2007 he named his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, who won election in March 2008. Medvedev appointed Putin prime minister, which allowed Putin to continue to control Russian politics. During this period the constitutionally powerful President was effectively outranked by a highly influential Prime Minister, who also remained the country's most popular politician. During his presidency, Medvedev launched programs aimed at modernizing and diversifying Russia's economy and society, as well as an Anti-Corruption Campaign. Most experts view the results of these programs as inconsequential.



Vladimir Putin won reelection as president in March 2012. In the face of public protests opposing his candidacy, and widespread allegations that the campaign was neither free nor fair, Putin won 64.7% of the vote.

Domestic Situation:

Geography:

The Russian Federation is nearly twice the size of the United States. Russia extends across the whole of northern Asia and the eastern part of Europe. It borders Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, and North Korea. The territory of Russia occupies three-quarters of the former Soviet Union, and Russia inherited most of the USSR's industrial base, natural resources, military assets, international obligations, and population, with all their diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics.

Government:

The Russian government consists of three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branch. Russia is a presidential parliamentary republic. Political power is concentrated in the hands of the president. The government is headed by the prime minister and is composed of a cabinet of deputies, ministers, and other agency heads. As Russia's head of state, the president is empowered to appoint the prime minister, key judges, and cabinet members. The president is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces. A 2008 amendment to the Constitution, which took effect with the 2012 presidential elections, extended the presidential term from four to six years.

The Federal Assembly is the country's legislative body. It consists of the Federation Council (an upper house with representatives appointed from Russia's administrative divisions) and the State Duma (a 450-member popularly-elected lower house). The president's nominee for prime minister is subject to approval by the State Duma. If it

rejects a nominee three times or passes a vote of no confidence twice in three months, the president may dissolve the State Duma and call for new elections. All legislation must first pass the State Duma before being considered by the Federation Council. A presidential veto of a bill can be overridden by the legislature with a two-thirds majority.

Russia has a multi-party political system. Russian political system has been dominated by a few big parties, especially the center-right “United Russia” (the party in power), and the center-left “Just Russia,” whose leaders also support Putin and Medvedev. Smaller and older parties – liberals, Communists, and radical nationalists, all of whom oppose Putin – have faced an increasingly growing number of government-sponsored obstacles designed to marginalize them. In 2012, the Federation Council passed legislation aimed at making it easier for political parties to register. It will now be possible for parties to register with only 500 members, instead of the previously required 40,000.

Russia is divided into eight federal districts, which have eighty-three territorial units (subjects of the Federation): twenty-one national republics, forty-six regions, one autonomous region, four autonomous areas and two cities with federal status (Moscow and Saint Petersburg). Each subject is ruled by a governor (except Tatarstan, which has a president). Since December 2004, heads of the regions have been proposed by the state president and confirmed in their post by the regional parliaments, rather than being directly elected. Direct gubernatorial elections were reintroduced in 2013. Governors are elected for five year terms, serving a maximum of two terms.

Following the referendum on Crimea’s autonomy in March 2014, Russia recognized the Republic of Crimea as the newest autonomous republic of the Russian Federation and the naval port city of Sevastopol as a city with federal status. The United Nations General Assembly passed a non-binding Resolution that declared the Crimea referendum invalid and the secession of Crimea and Sevastopol illegal. One hundred UN member-countries supported the resolution, fifty-eight abstained, and eleven members voted against.

Russia’s federal judiciary is divided into the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the Superior Court of Arbitration. The Russian constitution does not clearly delineate the relative levels and roles of the federal courts, thus their duties sometimes overlap. Judges are nominated by the president and, subject to approval by the Federation Council, serve a life term. Jury trials are available in some regions.

Economy:

Russia has the world’s largest reserves of mineral and energy resources and is the world’s second-largest oil and natural gas producer. Oil, oil products, natural gas, coal, and electricity continue to occupy a dominant position in Russian exports. The European Union (EU) is Russia’s main trading partner and as of the end of 2011 accounted for 43% of overall trade, followed by China, Ukraine, Japan, and the United States. Trade in energy resources buoyed Russia’s economic growth during the 2000s.

Although rich in natural resources, industrial capabilities, and with an educated labor pool, Russia initially struggled in its transition from communism to capitalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the government struggled to push through vital economic reforms, in the face of considerable opposition from a Communist-dominated parliament. The social, environmental, and economic costs of Soviet-era failed policies and the USSR’s obsolescent infrastructure impeded reform. As a result, living standards, incomes, and economic output plummeted.

Currency: 65 Rubles = \$1 (Jun 2016)

GDP: \$1.236 trillion (2015 est.)

GDP per capita: \$14,611 (2013)

GDP Growth: -3.9% (2015 est.)

Russia's piecemeal and turbulent economic progress in the 1990s culminated in the 1998 default crisis. It was sparked by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, growing debt, and persistent structural weaknesses, including bureaucratic obstacles to direct foreign investment, widespread corruption, and the extensive influence of organized crime. Russian financial woes, in turn, strongly affected most other Soviet successor states. Capital flight took billions of dollars out of Russia to foreign tax havens.

In the 2000s, Russia experienced robust economic growth, aided in large part by the significant increase in world oil and gas prices. Poverty rates fell below 20%, regional disparities declined, and GDP, real incomes, consumer demand, foreign reserves, foreign direct investment (FDI), and federal budget surpluses rose.

Russia's main trading partners are the former Soviet Republics, EU countries, and the United States. Russia exports mostly gas, petroleum products, metals, and timber. Russian gas accounts for a quarter of total EU consumption, 80% of which transits through Ukraine. Some EU countries rely solely on Russian gas to meet their energy needs.

Russia acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012. Both the EU and the United States have designated Russia as a "free market" economy. However, Russia's refusal so far to ratify an energy and investment charter, and problems enforcing intellectual property rights remain persistent obstacles to greater trade. The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted trade with the former Soviet Union over emigration practices, had been a major bilateral issue in U.S.-Russian relations. In December 2012, Russia was graduated from the Jackson-Vanik provisions.

The 2008-2009 global financial crisis severely impacted Russia's financial markets. The banking sector was in turmoil. The stock market was among the worst affected in the world, losing 75% of its value. The government has injected more than \$200 billion of liquidity into the Russian banking system to ease credit pressures. The stock market rebounded in 2009, becoming a top global performer. Russia's annual growth rate in 2013 was 1.3%.

Observers note serious problems in the Russian economy, especially its current dependence on commodity exports. Both Russia's economy and the state budget remain vulnerable to swings in commodity prices. Exports of oil, natural gas, metals and timber, account for more than 80% of Russia's exports and a third of government revenues. Russia's industrial base is largely dilapidated, and facing rising production costs after decades of underinvestment. It requires substantial capitalization and modernization to compete globally.

Russia's shrinking population and low life expectancy, among working-age men in particular, are diminishing its labor pool. Experts believe that Russia cannot sustain current high levels of growth without accelerating structural reforms, even with higher oil prices.

Poverty remains a persistent problem. The poverty rate for 2015 has been estimated at around 13.4% (19.2 million Russians), although regional rates vary greatly. The minimum wage remains below subsistence levels. Government social programs often struggle to meet basic needs of Russian citizens, and their limited funding is sometimes wasted by bureaucratic mismanagement.

Governmental corruption and organized crime are widespread and pose a significant challenge to Russia's state, society, and economy.

The fall in the price of oil in 2014 and international sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Russian military intervention in Ukraine have increased market volatility in Russia and depreciated the national currency dramatically; experts project further decline in Russia's economic growth if the crisis worsens. In 2015, the Russian economy shrunk by 3.7% and is expected to shrink further in 2016.

Domestic Issues:

Modern Russian society offers a stark contrast to Soviet-era controls and institutionalized repression. Expansion of freedom, though still incomplete, has opened opportunities for individual and national achievement.

The future for an open and pluralistic society, however, has been called into question during President Putin's rule, which has steadily eroded political rights, and reintroduced some Soviet-era restrictions. As part of its recentralization of state power, the Putin administration has reduced the number of political parties, curbed media critics, restricted the independence of religious groups and non-governmental organizations, and generally marginalized political opposition.

The ineffectiveness of Russia's social safety net is also problematic. The social welfare system remains poorly oriented toward supporting the poor, and appropriate social services are not available to all. Despite significant expenditures on pensions and subsidies for the poor, the elderly, and the disabled, these programs are underfinanced. Nevertheless, state-funded education system provides quality education to all citizens, producing a 98% adult literacy rate.

The spread of HIV/AIDS remains a serious problem in Russia. This year, the number of people registered HIV-positive passed the 1 million mark, and the rate of infection reached record levels. Experts warn that Russia is in imminent danger of moving from a concentrated HIV epidemic to a generalized epidemic that affects wider segments of the population.

Freedom of Religion:

The 1997 Russian Religion Law, known as the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" named Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as Russia's four "traditional" faiths. The law declared all religions equal before the law, but noted the "special contribution" made by Russian Orthodoxy to Russian history, culture, and spirituality.

The 1997 law has been widely interpreted as granting a higher legal and civic status to the four "traditional" faiths over all other religions. The law required religious groups to register with state or local authorities, and only religions officially recognized in Russia since the 1980s could acquire full legal status. Despite a difficult registration process, most religious groups completed their registration, although a small number declined to do so.

The 1997 law allowed the government to legally liquidate groups that failed to register. The law also gave the government authority to ban religious groups. In general, minority religious groups most often encounter legal restrictions at the local and regional level. These officials are more likely to be influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church and local security services, both traditionally hostile to Western-based religious denominations operating in Russia. As a result of amendments to the 1997 Russian Religion Law and blasphemy law introduced in July 2013, freedom of religion in Russia has suffered additional recent setbacks.

Freedom of Press and Civil Society:

Some have described the current Russian system as "managed democracy," in which a government-controlled media and stage-managed elections guarantee pro-Putin, pro-Kremlin outcomes.

Religion

15-20% Russian Orthodox

10-15% Muslim

2% other Christian

note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has large populations of non-practicing believers and non-believers.

Most Russian media sources are either controlled by the government or by loyalist oligarchs. In 2016, Russia ranked 148th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index.

The government controls the three main television outlets – Channel One, NTV, and Rossiya , which calibrate coverage and omit what is deemed politically undesirable. Approximately 66% of the 2,500 television channels and more than 60% of 45,000 registered local newspapers and periodicals are owned either by the government or state-controlled companies.

Both Russian media and officials often point to the 2003-2005 “color revolutions” in neighboring Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan as examples of alleged subversion by Western-funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and claim that restrictions on NGO activity are necessary to prevent similar instability in Russia itself. Many Russia observers agree that Putin is pursuing a strategy of eliminating independent centers of power apart from the executive branch in Russia.

In July 2006, President Putin signed amendments to the law “On Countering Extremism,” which expanded the definition of extremist activity to include certain public speech. Two small opposition rallies and marches in Moscow and St. Petersburg in mid-April 2007 saw the use of massive police forces and the detention and beating of dozens of peaceful protestors, drawing widespread international negative coverage and reaction.

Public protests followed the parliamentary elections of December 2011, which were widely dismissed as fraudulent. Western monitors reported that the vote was marred by limited political competition, ballot box stuffing, and the use of government resources for the United Russia party's benefit. In the aftermath, Russia saw some of the biggest protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg since the 1990s. The protests criticized United Russia, and its leader Vladimir Putin, who had announced his intention to retake the presidency in the March 2012 elections, which he subsequently won.

On May 6, 2012, the day before Putin's third inauguration as President, protests involving close to 50,000 people took place in Moscow. The protests were marred by violence between the protesters and the police. About 400 protesters were arrested, including activist leaders Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov.

Since the protests, Russia has introduced restrictive laws that label NGOs receiving international funding as ‘foreign agents,’ expand the definition of treason, recriminalize libel, and create an internet ‘blacklist’. Russian authorities also have conducted sweeping raids of NGOs to ensure their compliance with the ‘foreign agents’ law. Hundreds of human rights groups, environmental, humanitarian, and religious organizations have been searched by representatives of the prosecutor's office, the tax department, and the Federal Security Service (FSB).

In 2013, the government increased pressure on news agencies with a reputation for objective reporting, such as Lenta.ru, Kommersant, Dozhd, and RIA Novosti. In December 2013, Putin signed a law that allows the authorities to shut down websites, without a court order, that promote rioting and contain extremist information. During the crisis in Crimea, authorities blocked websites that criticized Russian policy in Ukraine, and approved a law that imposes stricter rules on bloggers.

On February 27, 2015, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was assassinated near the Kremlin. At the time of the assassination, Nemtsov was working on a report demonstrating that Russian troops were fighting alongside pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

In May 2015, President Putin signed the so-called ‘Russian Undesirable Organizations’ law, a follow-up to the 2012 Russian foreign agent law. The law gives prosecutors the power to extrajudicially declare foreign and international

organizations 'undesirable' in Russia and shut them down. In July 2015, the National Endowment for Democracy became the first organization to be officially blacklisted by the Russian authorities under the law. In November 2015, Russia banned two branches of George Soros' Open Society Foundation under the law. In April 2016, Putin declared the creation of a new National Guard, which will be headed by his former bodyguard, Viktor Zolotov. According to the new law, Russian National Guard troops will have the right to shoot without warning in response to perceived 'security threats'.

Corruption:

Governmental corruption and organized crime are widespread and pose a significant challenge to Russia's state, society, and economy. Russian sources have estimated that as much as 25% of GDP may be generated by the underground economy, mostly controlled by up to 10,000 organized crime groups who often operate under legal cover and boast official patronage. In 2015, a corruption index compiled by Transparency International ranked Russia 119th out of 168 countries. Corruption is widespread throughout the executive, legislative, and judicial divisions at all levels of government, even though the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption.

The highly publicized case of Sergei Magnitsky, a thirty-seven-year-old lawyer who died in pretrial detention in November 2009, put an international spotlight on prevalent corruption in Russia. Magnitsky's testimony implicated police, the judiciary, tax officials, bankers, and the Russian mafia in large-scale tax evasion and fraud. Magnitsky was arrested and imprisoned in Moscow in 2008; he was denied family visits and life-saving medical treatment.

In 2012, in an attempt to sanction Russian officials thought to be responsible for the death of Magnitsky, the U.S. Congress passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act. Provisions of the Magnitsky bill were attached to a bill normalizing trade with Russia, which was signed by President Obama in December 2012.

Putin's campaign against former Yukos oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky was also one of the most prominent cases of Kremlin-oligarch conflict in recent years. Once the richest man in Russia, Khodorkovsky had publicly opposed state control of the pipeline industry, complained about corruption, funded various opposition parties, and reportedly was considering running for president. In October 2003 Khodorkovsky was arrested, charged with various counts of fraud and tax evasion, and tried, while his oil company was dismantled by the state. In May 2005, Khodorkovsky was found guilty of six charges, including tax evasion. At the end of 2013, Putin issued a series of amnesties, including one for Khodorkovsky.

Since the state's targeting of petroleum and media magnates Gusinsky, Berezovsky, and Khodorkovsky between 2000 and 2005, Russia's surviving "oligarchs" have largely been allowed to retain their grip on most of the country's commercial infrastructure, in return for loyalty to Kremlin. After coming to power, Putin largely subdued and assimilated the oligarchs through a combination of legal, economic, and judicial reforms, state persecution, and cooptation.

Chechnya:

The First Chechen War originated in 1994 as a conflict between the Russian Federation and its breakaway republic of Chechnya. While the war ended in 1996, without law and order in the region, Chechnya became a fertile ground for Islamic radicals.

After Chechen Islamic militants attacked the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan in 1999, Russian Prime Minister Putin sent ground troops into Chechnya, beginning the Second Chechen War and dramatically raising his popularity

with voters. Russian forces quickly recaptured most of Chechnya as hundreds of thousands of Chechen refugees fled the fighting. Although major combat operations ended in 2000, Chechen rebels have continued to wage guerrilla warfare, including terror attacks and assassinations.

By 2006 the rebels had lost most of their senior leaders, but attacks have continued sporadically. In March 2010 suicide bombings were carried out on the Moscow metro; in January 2011, a suicide bomber attacked the International Arrivals Hall at Domodedovo International Airport in Moscow.

Western experts do not see a likely end to the insurgency, attributing it to the region's stunted economy, repressive officials, and continuing harassment of observant Muslims. There has been persistent international criticism of Russia's conduct in Chechnya. International organizations cite widespread and systematic human rights abuses by Russian forces, including massacres of civilians.

Chechen Republic President Ramzan Kadyrov, himself a former leader of a Chechen separatist group, has been widely criticized for authoritarianism, nepotism, and human rights violations, including allegations of torture and politically motivated murders. Moscow continues to dismiss these reports.

Foreign Policy:

Since 1992, Russian foreign policy has substantially shifted from early compliance and cooperation with the West to a more Moscow-centered *realpolitik*. As the primary successor to the USSR, Russia inherited Soviet-era status and commitments in the international arena. Russia is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a member of the G20, the Council of Europe, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and is the leading member of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Successor States:

Russia has demonstrated concern about the status of millions of ethnic Russians living in its "near abroad" (Russia's term for the region comprising former republics of the Soviet Union). Russia has sought to preserve a special sphere of influence over the former republics, rooted in Russia's long history of domination in the region and its historical pursuit of power and influence on the world stage.

Throughout 1990s, Russia and Belarus enjoyed close economic and political ties. Belarus relies heavily on Russia for both export markets and the supply of raw materials, including energy resources. In December 1999, Russia and Belarus signed a treaty for a proposed confederated state. However, a series of disagreements arose over the control of the Belarusian gas transit system and price of natural gas. As a result, Russian media coverage of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has grown more critical. Russia continues to apply economic leverage over Belarus; disputes between the states over the price of energy resources persist.

Russian relations with Moldova are complicated by the continued presence of Russian troops in the separatist region of Transnistria. Although Russia has pledged in OSCE-mediated talks to withdraw all troops from the region, it maintains forces in the region for 'security' purposes. In February 2011, talks on resolving the issue resumed among Transnistria, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE, but real progress has been slow to materialize.

As Russia has sought to maintain Ukraine in its "sphere of influence," disputes over gas deliveries and ownership of a transit pipeline have been a source of tension in bilateral relations. Relations soured decisively when Russia openly supported Victor Yanukovich in the 2004 presidential elections, which sparked Ukraine's Orange Revolution. When

Victor Yushchenko came to power, bilateral relations became strained. In December 2005 Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine, accusing it of siphoning gas exports to Europe. Europe's gas supply was affected by the stoppage, and Russia was widely criticized for the move.

When Victor Yanukovich was elected president of Ukraine in 2010, Russian-Ukrainian relations improved. In 2010 Presidents Yanukovich and Medvedev signed the Kharkiv Accords, which extended the lease of the Russian Naval Forces Base in Crimea in exchange for discounts on the price of natural gas.

The 2013-2014 Ukrainian crisis, prompted by President Yanukovich refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union, and subsequent mass demonstrations that led to his ouster, resulted in a major deterioration in Russian-Ukrainian relations. In the aftermath of the Maidan revolution, Russia condemned the ouster of President Yanukovich as coup d'état, and deemed the new government illegitimate. Russia supported Crimea's referendum to join the Russian Federation. Ukraine and the West have condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, widely believed to be organized by covert Russian operatives, and similar attempts to incite and support separatism in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The confrontation in the Donbas area of Ukraine has escalated into armed conflict between the Ukrainian government and separatist forces.

The majority of the international community and organizations such as Amnesty International have condemned Russia for its actions in post-revolutionary Ukraine, accusing it of breaking international law and violating Ukrainian sovereignty. Western countries have implemented economic sanctions against Russia, Russian individuals, and Russian companies.

Moscow's relationship with the Soviet successor states in the Caucasus and Caspian regions remains contentious, especially since Russia retains strong economic interests in natural resources located in these regions. Russia seeks to maximize its share of Caspian Sea oil and gas and promote pipeline routes through its own territory. Moscow is also concerned about the spread of Islamic guerilla and terrorist groups that actively seek to overthrow authoritarian governments in the region.

Russia has signed a series of bilateral agreements with the Central Asian states, to ensure the transfer of military equipment and the coordination of military maneuvers. The increased U.S. presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, however, altered the power dynamic. The U.S. received Russia's consent to use Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states as bases for its military operations in Afghanistan, but increased U.S. activity and aid diluted Russia's continued influence in the region.

Relations with the Baltic States have improved since the 1990s, but are still problematic. The withdrawal of Russian troops, the status of the large populations of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Estonia, NATO membership by the Baltic states, Russia's military actions in Ukraine, and the issue of Russian transit through Lithuania to the Russian oblast of Kaliningrad have all contributed to tensions.

Energy is a critical issue in Russia's relations with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as all three states heavily depend on imports of natural gas from Russia. Conflicting views of the Soviet role in World War II and in recent Baltic history also remain persistent irritants in Russian-Baltic relations.

Russia-Georgia relations remain strained over the secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which culminated in a 2008 war. As Georgia tried to retake the breakaway province of South Ossetia, Russian forces entered South Ossetia and Abkhazia, expelling Georgian troops. Russia stationed additional forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and recognized the two regions as independent states. Following that, Tbilisi severed diplomatic relations with Russia. The conflict underscored Russia's ambitions to maintain Georgia in its sphere of influence, countering Georgia's

drift to the West since the 2003 Rose Revolution. While relations between Russia and Georgia have become less strained in recent years, Georgia's goal of integrating into the EU and NATO remains a point of strong contention.

Relations with the United States:

The U.S. Government has encouraged Russian economic development and privatization, continued arms reductions, and integration into Western structures. Russia acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012, with U.S. support. Russia has in the past cooperated with NATO on regional security, non-proliferation, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.

The reduction of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons stocks has been a continual focus of U.S.-Russian relations and treaties. On April 8, 2010, in Prague, Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed the New START Treaty, which limits by approximately one-third the number of strategic warheads deployed by the United States and Russia. The New START Treaty entered into force in February 2011.

Successive American administrations have been critical of Russia's military campaign in Chechnya, crackdowns on free speech, and elimination of an independent media. The U.S. has been concerned about the proliferation of Russian military technology and material to Iran.

Beginning in 2005, U.S.-Russia relations appeared to worsen as American observers decried what was widely seen as Russia's increasing authoritarianism at home and assertiveness abroad. Russia's refusal to end nuclear technology and conventional arms transfers to Iran; Russia's continued pressure on pro-Western neighbors such as Georgia and Ukraine, as well as restrictions on foreign companies seeking to invest in and develop Russia's energy sector, contributed to the tensions.

In counterpoint, Russia complained about the Bush administration's alleged preference for unilateralism and militarism, and failure to end Soviet-era trade restrictions. American plans to build limited missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic provoked a particularly sharp Russian response reminiscent of the pointed debates over NATO expansion a decade earlier. Likewise, persistent Russian and Western differences over the future status of Kosovo resembled earlier clashes over Serbia, Bosnia, and the Balkan Wars of the 1990s.

President Obama sought to "reset" relations with Russia and engage the Russian government in pursuit of foreign policy goals of common interest. During a July 2009 meeting in Moscow, Presidents Medvedev and Obama established the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Commission, consisting of sixteen working groups on issues including nuclear cooperation, space, health, military-to-military, cultural and sports exchange, and civil society.

In 2009, the United States and Russia worked closely to address the threat presented by Iran's nuclear program, and along with other members of the UN Security Council, were able to reach an agreement on comprehensive international sanctions against Iran. However, Russia has been highly critical and opposed to new sanctions imposed by the United States and its European allies since 2009. Russia allowed ground and air transit for troops and supplies for Afghanistan through Russian territory through the Northern Distribution Network until mid-May 2015.

The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted trade with the Soviet Union over emigration practices, had been a major bilateral issue in U.S.-Russian relations since the fall of communism. President Bush announced his intention in November 2001 to work for Russia's "graduation" from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. However, subsequent poultry and other trade disputes, and growing criticism of Putin's foreign and domestic policies kept Congress from moving to graduate Russia.

In December 2012, Congress did graduate Russia from the Jackson-Vanik provisions. However, in response to the Magnitsky bill provisions tied to Russia's graduation, Russia's government banned Americans from adopting Russian children, issued a list of U.S. officials prohibited from entering Russia, and posthumously convicted Magnitsky for financial crimes.

Anti-American and anti-Western attitudes in Russia have since increased. Since 2012, Russian authorities have passed a number of laws aimed at limiting Western support for Russia's democratic institutions and civil society. Restrictive laws that label NGOs receiving international funding as 'foreign agents,' expand the definition of treason, recriminalize libel, create an Internet 'blacklist,' and other measures introduced by the Putin administration and passed by Duma have severely impacted many NGOs operating in Russia.

The 2013-2014 Ukrainian crisis has led to even further deterioration of the U.S.-Russia relations. The U.S. has condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine, introducing sanctions against Russia that include visa bans and account freezes of those close to the Putin administration and responsible for the takeover of Crimea. The U.S. has sanctioned the financial and energy sectors of Russia's economy and imposed individual sanctions on people responsible for military and financial support of annexation of Crimea and warfare in Eastern Ukraine. In addition the U.S. continues to struggle on how best to address the human rights and democratization environment in Russia, which has severely deteriorated during recent years.

The Russian and American governments also spar over stronger sanctions against Iran, a more forceful international response to ongoing Syrian government atrocities, and arms sales to rogue states. Some consider the relations between the two countries to be at their worst since the end of the Cold war.

Relations with Middle East & Israel:

Israel

The Soviet Union recognized the State of Israel in May 1948. A decade later, however, the USSR made a dramatic shift in loyalty to Egypt and Syria, supplying them with Soviet arms and aid. The Six-Day War of 1967 precipitated a Soviet-Israeli break in relations that lasted through the mid-1980s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in pursuit of trade agreements with the United States, the Soviet Union began allowing Jews to immigrate to Israel. One of the key contributing factors to this development was the 1975 U.S. law known as the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. The wave of mass emigration grew throughout the decade, reaching its peak in 1979. The number of *refuseniks*, or those who were refused the right to leave, also grew. By 1980, however, Jewish emigration had dried up due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent worsening of U.S.-Soviet relations.

The Soviet Union restored diplomatic relations with Israel in October 1991. In 1992, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres visited Moscow and met with his counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. Yitzhak Rabin became the first Israeli Prime Minister to pay an official visit to Russia in 1994. In April 2005, President Putin became the first-ever Russian head of state to visit Israel. In September 2008 Russia and Israel signed a visa-free agreement. In 2010 Russia and Israel signed a five-year military agreement.

In recent years, there has been a growing number of high-level bilateral meetings. In March 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow. In July 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Israel for the opening of the memorial to the Red Army soldiers in Netanya. In November 2012, President of Israel Shimon Peres visited Moscow on the invitation of President Putin. In November 2013, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Moscow to discuss closer bilateral ties. In 2014, Russia began increasing fruit and meat imports from Israel, after banning food imports from the EU, Norway, United States, Canada and Australia. In October 2015, Israel and Russia held meetings on the crisis in Syria to coordinate and avoid accidental clashes in Syrian airspace. In 2015 and 2016, Prime Minister

Netanyahu visited Moscow three times and held discussions with President Putin on Syria, the Middle East and bilateral economic relations.

Middle East

Russia, the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations comprise the “Quartet,” which has been working since 2000 to bring about a Middle East peace agreement that would create a Palestinian state, while protecting the integrity of the State of Israel.

Israel and the United States have voiced increasing concern over Russian ballistic missile and technology transfers to Iran and Syria.

Russia has generally supported pressure on Iran to abandon nuclear enrichment efforts while defending Iran’s right to develop a civilian nuclear energy program and strongly opposing sanctions or military pressure on Iran. In 2007 the Russian-Iranian relationship deteriorated, following allegations of Iranian non-payment for Russia’s work on the Bushehr nuclear power plant. The Bushehr plant was not completed in 2007 as planned, due to payment problems and unspecified “technical issues.”

In 2010 Russia announced that it would not sell its S-300 anti-missile systems to Iran, canceling an 800-million-dollar contract signed in 2007. The 2007 agreement had been strongly criticized by the United States and Israel, who feared that Iran would use the air defense systems to defend its nuclear facilities. However, in April 2015, Russia resumed the talks on S-300 deliveries

Russia joined in a unanimous Security Council vote in March 2007 to impose new sanctions on Iran over its failure to halt uranium enrichment activities. In November 2011, however, Russia called new sanctions against Iran “unacceptable,” saying the new punishments would hurt efforts to talk with Tehran.

Currently, Russia is a major player in Iran nuclear talks as part of “5+1” framework. However, Russia’s position on the Iranian nuclear program continues to be ambiguous. While Russia might not want to see a nuclear armed Iran, it sees the issue as a “bargaining card” in its dialogue with Washington on other contentious issues such as missile defense. Economic cooperation also plays an important role; Russian oil and gas companies have expressed interest in projects in Iran.

Russia has opposed outside intervention in the Syrian conflict, and together with China vetoed the 2012 UN Security Council Resolution calling for the Syrian president to step down. Russia’s unwillingness to support strong international action against the Assad regime in Syria has been viewed as being motivated by the fear of foreign military intervention aimed at regime change as well as concern about Islamic extremists. The Syrian crisis has provided new common ground for cooperation between Iran, Russia, and China.

In September 2015, Russia began its military intervention in Syria after an official request by the Syrian government for military help against rebel and jihadist groups. The intervention consisted of air strikes primarily in north-western Syria against militant groups opposed to the Syrian government. In March 2016, Russia ordered the withdrawal of the “main part” of Russian forces from the country. Russian military operations in Syria have continued, albeit at a lower intensity.

Russia lost one jet during its Syria intervention, which was shot down by Turkish Air Force for violating the border in November, 2015. The downing of the plane has led to a temporary rift in Russia-Turkey relations. Russia responded by imposing trade sanctions and suspending Russian package tours to Turkey. However, on June 27,

2016 President of Turkey Tayyip Erdogan sent a letter to his Russian counterpart expressing regret over the incident and announcing legal proceedings against an individual allegedly responsible for the killing of the Russian pilot.

Another recent development is Russia's rapprochement with Egypt. In September 2014, Egypt reached a preliminary deal to buy arms worth \$3.5 billion from Russia.

Jewish Community

History:

Russia has inherited a long history of official and popular anti-Semitism from its Tsarist and Soviet predecessors, including residency, workplace, and education restrictions, periodic pogroms, and denial of emigration rights.

Jewish presence in Russia was first recorded in the 15th century. In this period, Jews were generally free from persecution. During the reign of Catherine II, the Russian Empire acquired large Lithuanian and Polish territories that were heavily populated by Jews. Catherine restricted Jewish residence to the Pale of Settlement, which included Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. Special provisions legally confined Jews to certain trades, levied special taxes, and placed restraints on religious ceremonies.

Under the rule of Alexander II, Jews were denied land ownership and were restricted in travel. A large-scale wave of anti-Jewish pogroms swept the Russian Empire after Jews were wrongly blamed for the assassination of Alexander II. Thousands of Jewish homes were destroyed in pogroms and many Jews were killed. In May 1882 Alexander III passed Temporary Regulations on Jews, which banned Jews from some villages and towns even within the Pale, placed quotas on the number of Jews allowed to attend secondary and higher education institutions, and expelled most Jews from Moscow and Kyiv. Between 1880 and 1920, two million Jews fled Russia. Some remaining Jews became prominent in Russian revolutionary circles.

In August 1919, the Communist government seized Jewish properties, including synagogues, and many Jewish communities were dissolved under anti-religious laws barring all expressions of religion and religious education. The chaotic years of World War I, the February and October Revolutions, and the Civil War were fertile ground for anti-Semitism and the pogroms that were endemic to tsarist Russia. Lenin and the Bolsheviks strongly condemned the pogroms, but some scholars view the efforts of the government as inconsistent.

Prominent Jewish intellectuals became targets of Stalin's paranoia after World War II. Although Stalin encouraged wartime solidarity between Soviet and Western Jews in an effort to gain American support, soon after the war's end he used links between Soviet Jews and the outside world as proof of alleged Jewish disloyalty and untrustworthiness. Beginning in 1948, Stalin moved forcefully against Soviet Jewry, disbanding the influential Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, ordering the death of its chairman Solomon Mikhoels, and launching a campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans," widely understood to mean Jews.

In 1952, Stalin had a number of leading Jewish cultural figures executed in what became known as the "Night of the Murdered Poets." In early 1953, a group of Jewish doctors was arrested on false charges of having murdered two leading Soviet politicians and plotting to kill others in an affair known as the "Doctors' Plot." Only Stalin's March 1953 death saved the doctors from execution, and possibly the entire Soviet Jewish community from a widely rumored impending mass deportation to Siberia and Central Asia, a fate suffered by other "suspect" nationalities under Stalin's rule.

While existential threats against Russian Jews subsided under Khrushchev, the Soviet State launched a new campaign to stamp out Jewish religion and culture. Jews were systematically excluded from professions and

institutes of higher learning, and many remaining synagogues were closed.

In the early 1960s, Soviet Jews were persecuted during a widely publicized campaign against “economic crimes.” While in the mid-1960s, the Soviets permitted limited Jewish emigration, Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six-Day War virtually froze this emigration, and precipitated a break in Soviet-Israeli relations that lasted until the late 1980s. At the same time, Israel’s victory sparked a reawakening of Jewish consciousness and pride among Soviet Jews.

Simultaneously, the international Soviet Jewry advocacy movement emerged. This movement involved the coordinated efforts of diaspora Jewry, Israel, human rights activists and Western governments, in concert with dissidents in the Soviet Union. *Refuseniks* (applicants for emigration to whom the Soviet government refused permission), lost their jobs and social status and fell victim to KGB surveillance, harassment, and even imprisonment. Thousands of U.S. citizens visited Soviet *refuseniks* in the 1970s and 1980s. U.S. officials hosted Passover Seders for Jewish activists at the Moscow Embassy to show support for Soviet Jewish emigration.

In conjunction with improved relations with the West during the era of détente, Jewish emigration increased from 1971 to 1973. However, in August 1972, the Soviet government instituted a new “diploma tax” for emigrants, prompting the U.S. Congress to pass the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Bill of 1974, which prohibited the extension of most-favored nation (now “permanent normal trade relation”) status to non-market countries that restricted emigration. Emigration increased once again from 1977 to 1979, reaching a high of over 51,000 émigrés in 1979.

After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the consequent sharp deterioration in Soviet-U.S. relations, Jewish emigration from the USSR again dropped significantly, reaching a low of 896 in 1984. In December 1987, 250,000 demonstrators converged on the National Mall in Washington, calling on Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to open the gates of emigration.

The onset of ‘*glasnost*’ and ‘*perestroika*’ eventually brought dramatic changes in Soviet policies toward the Jewish minority. Emigration increased substantially. Nearly 600,000 emigrated from 1989 to 1992, with most going to Israel. The many Russian immigrants of the later 1990s, together with this group, now make up approximately 20% of Israel’s population.

In 2013, 7,520 people, nearly 40% of all *olim* (new Israeli immigrants), made *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) from the former Soviet Union. In 2014, 4,685 Russian citizens relocated to Israel, more than double than usual in any of the previous 16 years. In 2015, nearly 7,000 or just over 20% of all *olim* came from the former Soviet Union.

Russian Jewish Renaissance:

Russian Jewry ranks as the fourth-largest Jewish community in the world, behind the United States, Israel, and France. Since the Soviet collapse, a dramatic Jewish revival has been underway. Russian Jewry has reestablished a diverse religious, social, and cultural life after decades of Soviet-era repressions and restrictions.

Countless Jewish institutions now exist in Russia, including community centers, synagogues, schools, *aliyah* and emigration bureaus, youth groups, charity organizations, and mass media. The 105-year-old Moscow Choral Synagogue and the Chabad-affiliated Marina Roscha Synagogue in Moscow are key centers of Jewish activity.

The Moscow Choral Synagogue, affiliated with the Moscow Jewish Religious Community, is a dominant religious symbol of Jewish communal life. The Moscow Jewish Religious Community conducts religious services and Jewish holiday celebrations, and organizes Jewish concerts, festivals, charitable education and outreach programs, and is

actively involved in the preservation of Jewish heritage sites and archival work.

The religious community of Marina Roscha, which has been in existence for more than 80 years, is a centerpiece of the Chabad Lubavitch movement in the FSU. The seven story Marina-Roscha building was renovated and expanded in 2000, and is a vibrant center of Jewish life, organizing various religious, social, and academic programs. It includes the sanctuary, a gym, amphitheater, social halls, classrooms, offices, and an internet café.

The major institutional players in today's Russian Jewish community are KEROOR (the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia), MERO (the Moscow Jewish Religious Community), REK (the Russian Jewish Congress), and FEOR (the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, itself affiliated with the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, or FJC). KEROOR and MERO represent Russia's non-Hasidic Orthodox and Reform congregations, REK is an umbrella group representing both observant and non-observant Jews, and FEOR is affiliated with the Hassidic Chabad-Lubavitch movement. FEOR's parent body, the FJC, is led and funded by billionaire Israeli businessman, philanthropist, and major Chabad donor Lev Leviev (a Bukharan Jew originally from Uzbekistan).

Rabbi Adolf Shayevich, the Russian-born Orthodox rabbi of the Choral Synagogue since 1983, and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Swiss-born Orthodox rabbi of Moscow's Jewish community since 1989, are affiliated with KEROOR and MERO, respectively. Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Italian-born Chabad rabbi of the Marina Roscha synagogue, has been head of FEOR since its formation in 1999. KEROOR, MERO, and REK recognize Rabbi Shayevich as the Chief Rabbi of Russia. In 2000, FEOR elected Rabbi Lazar as the Chief Rabbi of Russia. This has resulted in a Russian Jewish community with two chief rabbis.

Founded in 1996, REK emerged as the dominant Russian Jewish umbrella organization, thanks to the stature, wealth and drive of its founder Vladimir Gusinsky, a media and banking magnate described as one of Russia's "oligarchs" under President Yeltsin. REK built a new synagogue and Holocaust museum in Moscow's Victory Park in 1999. However, the growth of the Chabad movement in Russia during the late 1990s (FJC was established in 1998, FEOR in 1999), and the 2000 election of President Putin led to major changes. Gusinsky came into sharp conflict with the Putin administration. As a result, Gusinsky was arrested, prosecuted, and forced into de facto exile, and had to resign as REK president. Relations between the Chabad-affiliated FEOR and the non-Hasidic KEROOR and REK are complex, reflecting their conflicting visions for Russia's Jewish community, levels of funding, and relationship with the Kremlin.

The Jewish University in Moscow, established by Yevgeny Satanovsky in 1991, operates in conjunction with Moscow's Open University, and established a Center of Jewish Studies and Jewish Civilization at Moscow State University. In St. Petersburg, the Petersburg Institute for Jewish Studies has been operating since before 1992 and helps coordinate the activities of the Center of Biblical & Hebrew Studies at St. Petersburg State University. Together, these schools educate 400-500 students in higher Jewish studies. The Moscow Institute for Jewish Studies, an educational center led by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, operates seminars and teacher training, as well as various outreach projects. Similar programs under the auspices of Rabbi Steinsaltz operate throughout Russia.

Since 1991, NCSEJ has fostered partnerships between American Jewish federations and Russian Jewish communities through its Kehilla projects. The projects provide a framework for American Jewish communities to establish linkages and regular contact with counterparts in the FSU to support Jewish education, welfare, religious life, and advocacy. Partner cities include Washington, D.C. and Moscow, Cleveland and St. Petersburg, New York City and Moscow, and Palm Beach and St. Petersburg.

American and Israeli assistance organizations are active in Russia. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/ "Joint") has offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, and Kazan, to foster Jewish

communal life and help meet social welfare needs. Since before the Soviet breakup, JDC has provided basic and ongoing assistance to needy Jews across Russia, and remains the single largest provider of social welfare resources to Russian Jewry. JDC also cultivates educational, cultural, and religious life, partly through the establishment of community centers, libraries, and other communal facilities. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI/ “Sochnut”) operates, with local cosponsors, in sixty-two local offices across Russia, holding classes for potential émigrés and coordinating aliyah.

The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), active since 1991, works with twenty-nine progressive congregations in Russia as well as over sixty communities in other successor states. The Russian branch of Reform Jewry is known as OROSIR. The World Union maintains its Russian headquarters in Moscow, where it has established an Institute for Modern Jewish Studies (“Machon”) that trains Jewish leaders for other communities. Hineni, an active Reform congregation in Moscow, is supported by the World Union.

Shaarei Shalom, the first community-owned Reform synagogue in Russia, opened in St. Petersburg in June 2007. Built with \$2 million donated by British Reform Jews, the synagogue hosts a library, classrooms, kindergarten, youth club and kitchen. ORT, a worldwide technical-training organization founded in St. Petersburg in 1880, returned to Russia shortly after the Soviet breakup. It has established Jewish schools and technological upgrades for other Jewish resource centers in cities across Russia, including in Kazan, Yekaterinburg, Samara, Moscow, and St. Petersburg.

The global financial crisis has impacted support for Jewish organizations and activities. In November 2008, Lev Leviev asked the Or Avner system of schools, the largest system of Jewish schools in the FSU, to cut their budgets. Leviev is their main benefactor, and in 2008 alone his main holding company lost 75% of its value.

Hillel operates eighteen centers in Russia, as part of the worldwide network of the Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. Activities include holiday celebrations, youth leadership seminars, and cultural programs for students and young adults. Hillel oversees Birthright youth missions to Israel in cooperation with the Federation of Jewish Communities.

Project Keshet operates centers in Russia, offering leadership seminars, women’s empowerment programs, and support systems for those combating domestic violence and trafficking in women.

The Jewish Association of St. Petersburg (JASP) coordinates the activities of various Jewish public and cultural groups in Russia’s second-largest Jewish community, estimated at around 80,000-100,000. JASP has ten member organizations, including the Jewish University of St. Petersburg, *Ami* newspaper and the Jewish Welfare Society. In March 2006, with substantial support from the American Jewish community, “YESOD,” a new, modern, three-story community center opened in the heart of the city.

Jewish life in St. Petersburg is enhanced by the presence of the Grand Choral Synagogue—one of the world’s largest synagogues—as well as by the Tifereth Israel Day School, Sunday schools, Migdal Ohr Yeshiva High School, and the Jewish Cultural Society. The JDC-sponsored Hesed Avraham program relies on hundreds of local volunteers to supply aid and medical assistance to thousands of elderly Jews in the city. The Israeli organization Yad Sarah, which also assists the sick and disabled, operates a joint program with JASP.

Limmud, which means “study” in Hebrew, is a dynamic, multi-day event that gathers Jews together for learning. For many years, Limmud seminars and conferences around the globe have attracted Jews of all ages and backgrounds—Jews who have studied Jewish subjects and those who have very little knowledge—to participate in exciting, intense learning experiences. Limmud FSU holds regular annual conferences in Moscow, which attract hundreds of Russian-speaking Jews from within Russia and other participants coming from Ukraine, the United States, and Israel.

Breaking with their Tsarist and Soviet predecessors, presidents Boris Yeltsin, Dmitry Medvedev, and Vladimir Putin have fostered excellent relations with the Russian Jewish community. They have appeared at community events, and met with prominent Israeli and Jewish leaders. Russian officials have continuously made public statements on the necessity of counteracting anti-Semitism.

Putin's positive relationship with the Russian Jewish community and his generally sympathetic approach towards Israel contrast with his administration's seizure of assets of Jewish oligarchs, including the media and petroleum business empires of Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

While the Russian Jewish community has enjoyed a dramatic revival, at the same time, it faces serious challenges: relatively high rates of intermarriage and relatively low levels of religious observance, street-level anti-Semitism, including sporadic attacks by young skinheads and nationalists, as well as the growing needs of the elderly and infirm.

Anti-Semitism:

In the 1990s, several human rights organizations reported an alarming trend in the rise of ultra-nationalism and hate crimes in Russia. The hate crimes were concentrated largely in urban areas, and targeted mainly people from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Jews. Throughout this period a series of anti-Semitic attacks took place, including several bombings of synagogues, cemetery desecrations, dissemination of anti-Semitic literature, vandalism, and attacks on members of Jewish communities. Virulent anti-Semitic rhetoric was often been present in Russian political discourse.

By 2002, the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Russia had increased and grown more violent in nature. By 2007 close to 70,000 skinheads and members of extremist organizations were active in Russia, annually committing hundreds of hate crimes, of which only a handful were prosecuted, and extremist movements had expanded from major cities into small towns and villages. These incidents triggered anti-extremist activism by NGOs in response, and a more active government prosecution of nationalist extremists.

Since 2007, the apparent level of anti-Semitism has declined, despite a high level of general xenophobia. According to several observers, anti-Semitic activity continues to fall in Russia. Such decline can be attributed, according to the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, to a more active position taken by the Russian authorities to stop anti-Semitic activity, which became especially noticeable since 2009. Some observers also cited an evolution of right-wing conservative attitudes toward the Jewish community, including more positive views on Israel.

In 2012 and 2013, the SOVA Center registered eleven acts of anti-Semitic vandalism, while the Federation of Jewish Communities reported no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level. In July 2013, Chabad rabbi Ovadia Isakov was shot and seriously injured in the province of Dagestan, where 2,000 Jews live among a predominantly Muslim population. Officials considered it a hate crime and cited "religious motivations" behind the attack. Russian security forces shot and killed the alleged shooter along with four other suspected extremists during a raid.

Also in 2013, an anti-Semitic novel by Joseph Goebbels was sold in St. Petersburg, before being banned for extreme content. In February 2014, Duma Member Oleg Bolychev accused his political opponents of being "Jews" responsible for the 1917 Communist coup and the fall of the Soviet Union. In October 2014, on the second night of Rosh Hashanah, a group of five or six men disrupted a Jewish concert in the Great Hall of Moscow's International Music House with a tear gas attack. In July 2015, Sergei Ustinov, director and founder of a Moscow Jewish museum was shot and seriously injured outside of the museum. Police investigated several possible motives for the crime, including anti-Semitism.

There are concerns about the Kremlin's handling of anti-Semitic rhetoric by state-supported media against political opposition. Such incidents include an anti-Semitic article by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* journalist Ulyana Skoibeda in

2013, and an anti-Semitic publication by deputy chief editor of *Tomorrow* newspaper Vladimir Bondarenko in March 2016, which were not investigated by the authorities.

While violent anti-Semitism has declined in recent years, radical nationalism remains a persistent problem in Russia. Ultra-nationalists continue to target natives of the Caucasus, Central Asia, and “third world” countries.