

Russian Federation Country Report

Table of contents:

Executive Summary	2
The Russian Federation is the world’s largest country, spanning nine time zones. Russia’s economy has experienced major transformations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, from centralization and isolation to global integration. <i>Read more.</i>	
History	2
The modern Russian state was established between the 15 th and 16 th 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 9 th century but was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13 th century, with its Ukrainian and Belarusian territories coming under Polish-Lithuanian rule. <i>Read more.</i>	
Domestic Situation	5
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. <i>Read more.</i>	
Foreign Policy	9
Since 1992, Russian foreign policy has substantially shifted from early compliance and cooperation with the West to a more Moscow-centered <i>realpolitik</i> . As the primary successor to the USSR, Russia inherited Soviet-era status and commitments in the international arena. <i>Read more.</i>	
Relations with the U.S.	11
In 1990s, the U.S. Government encouraged Russian economic development and privatization, arms reductions, and integration into Western structures. <i>Read more.</i>	
Middle East & Israel	12
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 arms and aid. <i>Read more.</i>	
Jewish Community	14
Russia’s Tsarist and Soviet predecessors had a long history of official and popular anti-Semitism, including residency, workplace, and education restrictions, periodic pogroms, and denial of emigration rights. <i>Read more.</i>	

Executive Summary:

The Russian Federation is the world's largest country, spanning nine time zones. Russia's economy has experienced major transformations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, moving 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. After the ruble's collapse in 1998, the economy grew on average by 7% yearly. Since 2014, however, the Russian economy has stagnated. 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 nears 100%.

Russia struggled with a difficult transition from communism to capitalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union. President Vladimir Putin, Russia's dominant politician since his election in 2000, effectively controls political institutions and public and non-governmental organizations, restricts the independence of some religious groups and the media, and generally marginalizes 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, such as independent news agencies, websites, and bloggers.

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has seriously exacerbated relations between the West and Russia. Russia supported the Crimean referendum on "independence" in March 2014, and has contributed to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine through its military intervention in the region. In response, the United States and EU have sanctioned 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. Numerous 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 with its Ukrainian and Belarusian territories coming under Polish-Lithuanian rule. In the late 17th century, Tsar Peter the

Statistics

Population: 143,960,000
(August 2018 est.)

Size: 17,098,242 sq. km

Capital: Moscow

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

Jewish population:
500,000 (est.)

Head of State: President Vladimir Putin

Head of Government:
Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev

Foreign Minister:
Sergey Lavrov

Ambassador to United States:
Anatoly Antonov

U.S. Ambassador to Russia: John Huntsman, Jr.

Freedom House Rating:
Not Free

Great expanded the Russian state and crowned himself the first Russian Emperor. Historians consider Peter the Great's reign a formative period in Russian history: it established social, institutional, and intellectual trends that dominated Russia for the next two centuries. Peter the Great created a system of administration, reformed the army, and introduced Western customs. During his reign, Russia became a major European power. His successors continued to expand the Empire's boundaries. At its pre-World War I height, 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 through the mid-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 the autocracy. 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 subsequent short-lived Provisional Government 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 Bolsheviks established the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). 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 Soviet Union. During the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin's policies of rapid industrialization, ruthless agricultural collectivization, forced relocation, and mass purges resulted in millions of deaths. Despite the heavy human cost, the Soviet Union transformed itself from a largely agrarian economy to a major industrial powerhouse.

In late August 1939, the USSR signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, which divided Eastern Europe in a secret deal. One week later, German forces invaded Poland from the west. Shortly afterward, the Soviet Red Army assaulted Poland from the east and forcibly annexed the Baltic states. 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.

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

Stalin's repressive policies continued after the war. He subjected western Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic countries, and Moldova, to rigorous nationalization and collectivization. His 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 global influence.

Stalin's successors maintained an oppressive but less brutal rule. Nikita Khrushchev, who led the country 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 even after the Soviet Union accepted the Helsinki Accords. 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 in Eastern Europe through the 1980s.

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 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 with U.S. President Ronald Reagan heralded 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. As the Soviet economic and political situation began to deteriorate, strong nationalist and separatist movements rose. In August 1991, a coup attempt by members of Gorbachev's government precipitated the end of socialist rule. Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union 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 as corruption became rife and the rule of law broke down.

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 of supporters of the Parliament. In December 1993, a national referendum approved a new constitution, granting the executive branch greater powers. In the 1996 presidential elections, Yeltsin defeated Communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin's last years as president were tumultuous, however, due to frequent cabinet rearrangements and the surprise dismissals of several prime ministers.

Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent and FSB chief, to Prime Minister in August 1999. Yeltsin resigned 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 anti-terrorist offensive in Chechnya, in retaliation for 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 also employed 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 the election in March 2008. Medvedev appointed Putin prime minister, which allowed Putin to continue to influence Russian politics. During this period the constitutionally powerful President was effectively outranked by a highly influential Prime Minister. 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 initiatives as inconsequential.

In the face of public protests opposing his candidacy, and widespread allegations that the campaigns were neither

free nor fair, Putin won 64.7% of the vote in the March 2012 Presidential Election, and 77% in March 2018.

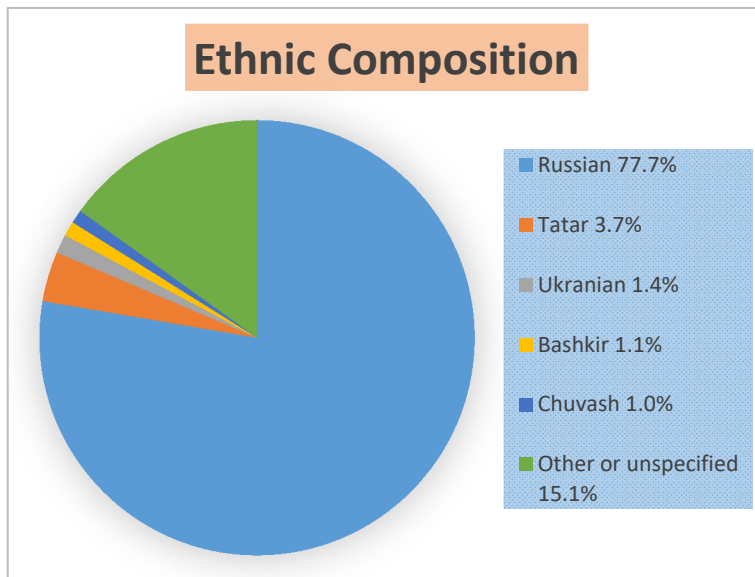
Domestic Situation:

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. 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:

Russia's government consists of executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Russia is a presidential parliamentary republic. Political power is concentrated in the presidency. 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 appoints 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 Duma. All legislation must first pass the Duma before being considered by the Federation Council.

Russia has a *de jure* multi-party political system. Since the Soviet collapse, several big parties have dominated the Russian political system, 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 opposition parties – liberals, Communists, and radical nationalists – face government-sponsored obstacles designed to marginalize them.

Russia is divided into eight federal districts, which have eighty-five territorial units (subjects of the Federation), including three cities with federal status (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Sevastopol). Each unit is administered by a governor (except Tatarstan, which has a president). Between 2005 and 2012, governors were approved by regional legislative bodies after recommendation by the President. Putin introduced direct gubernatorial elections in 2012. 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. Hydrocarbons and electricity continue to occupy a dominant position in Russian exports.

Although rich in natural resources, industrial capabilities, and with an educated labor pool, Russia initially struggled in transitioning from communism to capitalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the government struggled to enact vital economic reforms, facing opposition from a Communist-dominated parliament, and the social, environmental, and economic costs of Soviet-era failed policies. As a result, living standards, incomes, and economic output plummeted.

Currency: 65 Rubles = \$1 (August 2018)

GDP: \$1.283 trillion (2016 est.)

GDP per capita: \$8,748 (2016)

GDP Growth: -0.2% (2016 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.

The 2008-2009 global financial crisis severely impacted Russia's financial markets. The banking sector fell into 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 acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012. Both the EU and the United States have designated Russia as a "free market" economy. The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted trade with the former Soviet Union over emigration practices, had served as a major bilateral issue in U.S.-Russian relations. In December 2012, Russia graduated from the Jackson-Vanik provisions.

Observers note serious problems in the Russian economy, especially its 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. Poverty remains a persistent problem. The minimum wage remains below subsistence levels. Government social programs often struggle to meet citizens' basic needs, and limited funding is sometimes wasted by bureaucratic mismanagement. Governmental corruption and organized crime also pose significant challenges.

Falling oil prices and international sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Ukraine have increased volatility in Russian markets and depreciated the national currency dramatically; experts project further declines in Russia's economic growth if the crisis worsens. In 2015, the Russian economy shrunk by 3.7% and is expected to shrink further by 0.2% in 2018.

Domestic Issues:

Modern Russian society offers a stark contrast to Soviet-era controls and institutionalized repression. The prospects for an open and pluralistic society, however, has worsened during President Putin's rule, which has steadily eroded political rights, and reintroduced some Soviet-era restrictions. The Putin administration has recentralized state power, reducing the number of political parties, curbing media critics, restricting religious group and non-governmental organization independence, and generally marginalized political opposition.

The ineffectiveness of Russia's social safety net is also problematic. 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 AIDS remains a serious problem in Russia, with an estimated HIV infection rate from 1-2 million, many cases undiagnosed.

Freedom of Religion:

The 1997 Russian Religion Law, known as the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" named Orthodox Christianity, 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.

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. Officials are more likely to be influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church

Religion

41% Russian Orthodox
13% Atheists
6.5% Muslim
4.1% Unaffiliated Christians
35.4% Other

note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has a diverse religious spectrum ranging from the Abrahamic religions and Buddhism to Animists.

and local security services, both traditionally hostile to Western-based religious denominations operating in Russia. Amendments to the 1997 Russian Religion Law and a blasphemy law introduced in July 2013 has imposed additional restrictions on religious freedom in Russia.

The 2016 Yarovaya Laws on enhancing public safety operations imposed new restrictions on evangelism and missionary work by banning “missionary activities” in non-religious settings and by non-authorized religious groups and organizations.

Freedom of Press and Civil Society:

Some experts describe the current Russian system of government as “managed democracy,” where a government-controlled media and stage-managed elections guarantee pro-Putin, pro-Kremlin outcomes. Most Russian media sources are either controlled directly by the government or indirectly 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 politically undesirable stories. Either the government or state-controlled companies own about 66% of 2,500 television channels and over 60% of 45,000 registered local newspapers and periodicals.

Both Russian media and officials often blame the 2003-2005 “Color Revolutions” in neighboring Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan on subversion by Western-funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and claim that restricting NGO activity is necessary to prevent similar instability in Russia itself.

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. In the aftermath, Russia saw some of the biggest protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg since the 1990s. In May 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. Police arrested about 400 protesters, including activist leaders Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov.

After the protests, Russia introduced restrictive laws that label NGOs receiving international funding as ‘foreign agents’ and created 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 February 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 extra-judicially 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.

Corruption:

Government corruption and organized crime are widespread and pose a significant challenge to Russia's state, society, and economy. Russian sources estimate that as much as 25% of GDP may be generated by the underground economy, which is mostly controlled by organized crime groups who often operate under official patronage. In 2016, a corruption index compiled by Transparency International ranked Russia 131th out of 176 countries.

The highly publicized case of Sergei Magnitsky, a 37-year-old lawyer who died in pretrial detention in November 2009, put an international spotlight on Russian corruption. 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 November 2008; he was denied family visits and life-saving medical treatment.

In November 2012, to sanction Russian officials responsible for Magnitsky's death, 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 President Obama signed in December 2012.

After coming to power, Putin largely subdued and assimilated the oligarchs through a combination of legal, economic, and judicial reforms, state persecution, and cooptation. 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 Russia's richest man, Khodorkovsky had publicly opposed state control of the pipeline industry, complained about corruption, funded opposition parties, and reportedly was considering running for president. In October 2003 Khodorkovsky was arrested, charged with fraud and tax evasion, and tried, while the state dismantled his oil company. In May 2005, Khodorkovsky was found guilty of six charges, including tax evasion. In December 2013, Putin issued a series of amnesties, including one for Khodorkovsky.

Since the state's targeting of petroleum and media magnates Vladimir Gusinsky, Boris Berezovsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky between 2000 and 2005, Russia's surviving "oligarchs" have largely retained their grip on commercial infrastructure, in return for loyalty to Kremlin.

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 UN Security Council, a member of the G20, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and leads the Commonwealth of Independent States. In 2014, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus formed the Eurasian Economic Union.

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 oil and natural gas. Russia continues to apply economic leverage over Belarus; disputes 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 Viktor Yanukovich in the 2004 presidential elections, which sparked Ukraine's Orange Revolution. When rival Viktor Yushchenko won 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, shattered 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 a Crimean 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-2014 Ukraine, accusing it of breaking international law and violating Ukrainian sovereignty. Western countries have implemented economic sanctions against the Russian state, 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 governments in the region.

Under bilateral agreements with the Central Asian states, Russia provides military equipment and coordinates military maneuvers. The increased U.S. presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, however, altered the Central Asian 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 deteriorated since Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. 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.

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 remained 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.

Successive American administrations have criticized Russia's military campaigns in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine, crackdowns on free speech, and elimination of 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 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, and 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 preferences 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.

President Obama sought to "reset" relations with Russia and engage the Russian government in pursuing 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, reached 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.

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, trade disputes and growing criticism of Putin's foreign and domestic policies kept Congress from moving to "graduate" Russia from the Amendment's restrictions.

In December 2012, Congress did graduate Russia from the Jackson-Vanik provisions. However, in response to the Sergei Magnitsky Act provisions tied to 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,' create an Internet 'blacklist,' and other measures 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 Russian economy's financial and energy sectors and imposed individual sanctions on people responsible for military and financial support of the annexation of Crimea and warfare in Eastern Ukraine.

In 2016, the U.S. intelligence community claimed that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 U.S. elections. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that Russia's alleged interference in presidential campaign included hacking, disinformation and the dissemination of fake news. In December 2016, the U.S. imposed sanctions on the Russian Federation in response to the state-sponsored cyberattacks. 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.

Since his inauguration, President Donald Trump has sought to improve U.S.-Russia relations. In July 2018, President Trump met President Putin for a summit in Helsinki, Finland. During their conversation, the two discussed renewing anti-proliferation agreements, the conflicts in Eastern Ukraine and Syria, and Russian interference in the U.S. 2016 Presidential Election. Following the summit, Trump invited Putin to Washington in order to continue their dialogue.

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 arms and aid. The 1967 Six-Day War 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, with the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment law playing a key role. 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, Jewish emigration had dried up due to increasing U.S.-Soviet tensions.

The Soviet Union restored diplomatic relations with Israel in October 1991. After the USSR's December 1991 collapse, emigration to Israel resumed in earnest, and Russian and former Soviet émigrés constitute about 15% of Israel's total population. 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 recent years, the states have held 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 Netanya for the opening of a memorial to Red Army soldiers. 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, United States, and other countries. In October 2015, Israel and Russia held meetings on Syria crisis 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.

Since the beginning of 2018, Putin's relationship with Israel has grown even stronger, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has frequently visited Russia and of Russian delegations have traveled to Israel. At the May 2018 Victory Day celebrations marking the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, Netanyahu flanked Putin as one of only two foreign heads of states who attended the event.

Netanyahu and Putin also held consultations before the Helsinki Summit in Finland in July 2018 in order to ensure Israel's that the Russian leader would represent Israel's interests. The two also discussed concerns about Iran's growing influence in Syria, especially near the Gold Heights. Several days after the summit and a visit by a Russian military delegation to Israel, President Putin proposed the creation of a Russian administered buffer zone between Israeli and Iranian forces. Netanyahu declined the offer.

Middle East

Israel and the United States have voiced 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 be 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'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.

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 led to a rift in Russia-Turkey relations. Russia responded by imposing

trade sanctions and suspending Russian package tours to Turkey. However, in June 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.

Russia has proven instrumental in securing stability for the Assad regime since its intervention in 2015. In 2018, Russian backed Syrian forces secured remaining rebel held territory in the south of country, which borders the Golan Heights and Israel. Russia has also improved relations with Turkey dramatically since the incident in 2015. In April 2018, Russia and Turkey, a NATO ally, concluded an arms agreement that included the transfer of the Kremlin's most sophisticated anti-aircraft systems.

Jewish Community

History:

Russia's Tsarist and Soviet predecessors had a long history of official and popular anti-Semitism, 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.

In the late nineteenth century, Russian Jews were victimized by recurrent waves of pogroms, especially after the assassination of Alexander II. Thousands of Jewish homes were destroyed and many Jews were killed. In May 1882, Alexander III passed the "Temporary Regulations" or "May Laws", which banned Jews from some villages and towns even within the Pale, placed quotas on Jewish attendance at 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 Communist 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 August 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 murdering 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 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 the Soviets permitted limited Jewish emigration in the mid-1960s, 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 economic restructuring (*perestroika*), and loosening restrictions on political and social activity (*glasnost*) eventually brought dramatic changes in Soviet policies toward the Jewish minority. Emigration increased substantially. Nearly 600,000 Jews 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 15% of Israel’s population.

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 Moscow Choral Synagogue and the Chabad-affiliated Marina Roscha Synagogue in Moscow are key centers of Jewish activity.

The Moscow Choral Synagogue, established in 1906 and affiliated with the Moscow Jewish Religious Community, is a dominant symbol of Jewish communal life. The Moscow Jewish Religious Community conducts religious services and Jewish holiday celebrations, organizes Jewish concerts, festivals, charitable education and outreach programs,

and is actively involved in Jewish heritage site preservation and archival work.

The religious community of Marina Roscha, which has existed for more than 80 years, is a centerpiece of the Chabad Lubavitch movement in the former Soviet region. 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.

Rabbi Adolf Shayeveich, the Russian-born Orthodox rabbi of the Choral Synagogue since 1983, and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Orthodox rabbi of Moscow's Jewish community since 1989, are affiliated with KEROOR and MERO, respectively. Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Chabad rabbi of the Marina Roscha synagogue, has been head of FEOR since its formation in 1999. KEROOR, MERO, and REK recognize Rabbi Shayeveich 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.

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 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.

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.

St. Petersburg Jewish institutions include the Grand Choral Synagogue (one of the world’s largest synagogues), 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. In addition, Putin’s support of Russian nationalism is problematic. As indicated by his inauguration speech in 2000 and by later education policies, Putin has worked to create an official version of Russian history. As part of this aim, however, the government has rehabilitated numerous figures who fought for the notoriously anti-Semitic White Army during the Russian Civil War.

Putin’s relationship with the leadership of the Russian Jewish community mirrors his interactions with the Orthodox

Church in that the two work to bolster each other's influence. Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar, for example, welcomed the expulsion of Chabad emissaries from Russia in 2018 due to the threat they posed to his authority. Rabbi Lazar has also vocally supported Putin's conservative policies, such as the targeting of homosexuals. Putin, moreover, has labeled opponents as anti-Semitic to delegitimize them, despite the sometimes questionable validity of the application. Following the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine, Putin described the new government in Kyiv as neo-fascist and anti-Semitic due to the visible participation of far-right parties.

Putin himself counts numerous Jewish oligarchs as confidants, including Roman Abramovich, the owner of the Chelsea football club, European Jewish Congress president Moshe Kantor, and Mikhail Fridman, the co-founder of Alfa Bank.

The Russian Jewish community has enjoyed a dramatic revival, while 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 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. Anti-Semitic attacks included several synagogue bombings, cemetery desecrations, the dissemination of anti-Semitic literature, vandalism, and attacks on members of Jewish communities. Virulent anti-Semitic rhetoric has 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, incidents of anti-Semitism have declined, despite a high level of general xenophobia. According to several observers, anti-Semitic activity continues to fall. The decline can be attributed, according to the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, to a more active position taken by the Russian authorities toward combating anti-Semitic activity. Some observers also cited an evolution of right-wing conservative attitudes toward the Jewish community, including more positive views on Israel.

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 editor of *Tomorrow* newspaper Vladimir Bondarenko in March 2016, which authorities did not investigate. In February 2016, Russian lawmakers Vitaliy Milonov and Pyotr Tolstoy made anti-Semitic comments about two Jewish St. Petersburg city council members who protested transferring control of a historic cathedral to the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian authorities failed to stop production of an ice cream labeled "Poor Jews" before its release in Tatarstan in March 2018.