

The Geopolitics of **Russia**



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Introduction

Russia is the dominant power in Eurasia and as a result it faces challenges both domestic and foreign. Constantly drawn into wars, Russia historically sought alternative avenues to power.

Russia has always attempted to expand its borders to defend and protect its core. This inevitably led to numerous wars with other powers, and it also meant Russia needed to rule over other people's leading to growing economic challenges.

Whilst the Russian state collapsed at the end of the 20th century, it was able to revive itself in the 21st century, but it now faces major medium-to-long-term challenges that will need to be overcome if Russia is to remain a power.





Russia's strategic imperatives are all determined by its geography. Looking at any map of Russia it becomes clear Russia is a huge country. So huge it's the largest nation in the world by land area. Russia stretches 4,000 miles from the Pacific to Europe. It is twice the size of the US and China, five times the size of India and twenty-five times the size of the UK.

Moscow rules over 85 federal subjects, 21 national republics spanning 11 time zones. These range in structure from autonomous regions and republics to individual cities. Being a vast nation, Russia comprises different peoples, climates, natural resources and infrastructure networks. The population is also divided between urban and rural residents, 185 ethnic groups, four major recognised religions (Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism) as well as countless other faiths.

Despite being such a vast territory Russia's population is not evenly spread across Eurasia. If a line was drawn from Finland to Mongolia, this vast area east of this line is frozen for most of the year. As a result, agriculture is present in West European Russia only. This is why over 75% of Russia's 143 million population live in the area between Russia's border with Europe and the Ural Mountains. The country's most critical and important cities, including the seat of the government, are all close to Europe. Russia is therefore really the eastern portion of Europe. Russia is

a vast region with a huge population, but it is much poorer than the rest of Europe, but it has two assets, land and natural resources, which has always attracted the temptation of European powers.

When one moves away from the core of Russia, people are ethnically different, but Moscow has to control them if it wants to survive. Russia is populated by diverse ethnic groups that historically have been at odds with Moscow's centralised authority. As a result, Russia is home to highly regionalised economies in which wealth and prosperity are unevenly distributed.

Russian geography presents a major challenge. Whoever rules the country must manage the largest country in the world. The ruler must hold together this territory as a country and consolidate its society under one authority. Being such a vast nation means Russia is directly connected to other regions and nations and this is why Russia has clashed with the rest of Europe on multiple occasions.

Russia has few natural features that separates it from other nations. For this reason Russia needed to expand and take over, whether directly or indirectly, nations on its periphery as other nations may use them as forward bases to interfere or worse, invade Russia.

Whoever rules in Moscow, a monarch, dictator or a secret service agent, needs to control the territories that are in Russia's periphery to protect Russia's core. Russia's geopolitical imperatives are therefore to expand to protect its core and maintain internal stability despite ruling over different ethnicities. Moscow needs to develop an economy that can sustain a large population over its vast territory and build a military to protect its periphery.





Who are the Russian people?

The early roots of the Russian people can be traced back to the Slavic tribes, who lived in the region that is now Belarus, Ukraine, and western Russia. These tribes began to unite in the 6th century as they shared a common language and culture. Over time, these Slavic tribes merged and by the 10th century, they had formed a loose federation of principalities that was centred around the city of Kiev, which is now the capital of Ukraine. This federation, known as Kievan Rus, was the predecessor of modern-day Russia. It was ruled by a succession of Princes, the most famous of whom was Prince Vladimir I, who converted to Christianity in 988, thus beginning the spread of Eastern Orthodox Christianity throughout the region.

In the 13th century, Kievan Rus was invaded by the Mongol Empire, which ruled over the region for more than two centuries. During this time, the Mongols heavily influenced the culture and language of the region, and many Slavic and Turkic tribes intermixed. By the 16th century ethnic Russians became the ruling class with their territories spanning from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. They achieved this by breaking away from the Mongol and Muslim Tatar empires.

As Russia freed itself from Mongol control Russian identity formed. Waves of expansion spread Russian power into Europe, Asia and the Islamic world, taking disparate populations with varying values, languages, faiths and traditions under Russian rule. Moscow would make use of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Church expanded across the Russian Empire and incorporated local customs and languages in order to penetrate different population groups. Over the centuries, the state, the Church and the populations became interwoven, involving myriad ethnicities and languages.

In the 18th century, Russia underwent a period of significant modernisation and westernisation under the rule of Peter the Great. This period saw the expansion of the Russian Empire and the emergence of Russia as a major European power.

The Russian people have an identity that has been shaped by nationalism and is rooted in the country's long history and territorial expansion. Religion has also played a significant role in shaping the Russian identity. Eastern Orthodox Christianity has been the dominant religion in Russia for over a thousand years. The Russian identity is also influenced by the country's history of political and economic upheaval.



How did Russia Become Such a Large Country?

Modern Russia as we know it came into existence in 1283. With the Mongols invading and expanding their empire across Eurasia they were overrunning Eurasia and were at the edge of the Dnieper River. The Slavic tribes then relocated 400 miles north-east. Where they settled eventually became the Grand Principality of Muscovy.

But these Muscovites faced a major problem. Moscow sat along the northern European plain and unlike the core of most other nations that are relatively defensible, Moscow was not. For hundreds of miles in all directions there was lots of flat land but very few rivers, oceans, swamps or mountains that could provide a natural defence. The Russian nation's defining characteristic became its indefensibility. It would need to expand in order to defend the indefensible. It would need to gain strategic depth in order to deal with any invaders. Invasion would become a regular feature of Russian history.

The first phase of expansion was to the north and the east to the Urals. The north of Moscow to the Arctic was 430 miles away whilst the Urals was 770 miles away. This was the easiest territory for Russia to

grab as it was lightly populated and this territory was frozen for most of the year and it was also cloaked in forest.

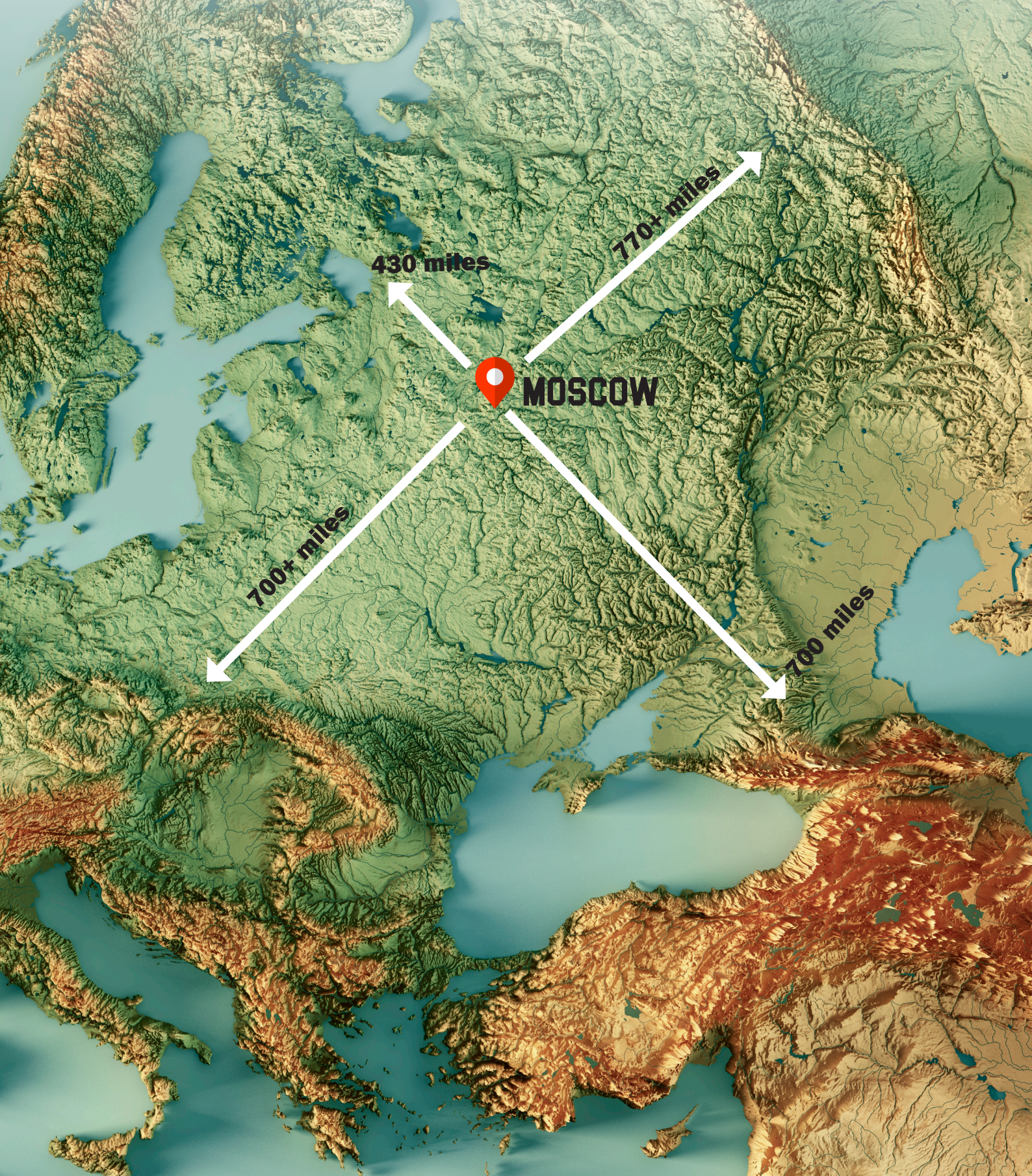
When Ivan the Terrible became the Tsar in 1533, he began the second phase of expansion that was far more aggressive. He and his successors moved to seal off the Mongol invasion route.

Russia pushed south and east, deep into the steppes all the way to the Urals in the east, the Caspian Sea (which was 700 miles from Moscow) and Caucasus Mountains in the south. They would capture several strategically critical locations, including Astrakhan on the Caspian, the land of the Tatars, a longtime foe, and Grozny which was soon transformed into a military outpost at the foot of the Caucasus. Muscovy had transformed from Grand Prince of Moscow to Tsar of all Russia, suggesting the empire to come. The capture of the Caucasus would provide defence against Asia Minor and Persia. Russia now had buffers. By holding territory that separated it from its foes Russia could bleed out any invasion.

The final region that Russia needed to expand into was and remains the most problematic and that is west of Moscow towards Europe. The best feature to use for defence was over 700 miles from Moscow, the Carpathian Mountains. In the 18th century, under Peter and Catherine the Great, Russian power pushed westward, conquering Ukraine and also incorporating the Baltic territories. Muscovy and the Tsardom of Russia were now known as the Russian Empire.

But whilst Russia achieved some semblance of security by establishing buffer regions, she expanded so far that holding the empire together socially and militarily became a monumental and ongoing challenge.

Russia expanded in order to defend its core which was the region around Moscow. Most of modern Russia is really large regions to protect its core. This is how Russia became the world's largest country.





Where Does Europe's Border End and Russia's Border Begin?

Where does Europe's border end and Russia's border begin? This may seem like a simple question, but it's defined the European continent for centuries. Europe, especially the northern part, is dominated by the Northern European plain. The plain begins in northern France and then opens up vertically in a 1,000 mile front from the Baltics down to the Black Sea all the way to the Urals. The border between Russia and Europe has constantly moved as a large chunk of Europe and European Russia sit on the Northern European plain. For a long period of history, the northern European plain has been a major route for invasions.

The Slavic people emerged in Muscovy in the 14th century, and they faced a major strategic challenge. Their homeland was surrounded by thousands of miles of flat land, making Moscow indefensible. Over the centuries Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great and the Czars defended Moscow by expanding Russia's borders. A united and expanding Russia came to pose a major challenge to Europe. But its two key assets, land and natural resources, became a constant temptation for European powers. In the last 600 years Russia has been invaded every century. In just the last 200 years Russia has been invaded, on average every 33 years by European powers.

Beginning with the Ottomans in 1571 when they burned Moscow to the ground to Napoleon's invasion in 1812 to Germany's two attempts in World War One and World War Two. The Europeans have for the last 600 years tried to expand Europe's borders deep into Russia.

What emerged after World War Two was Russia's borders expanded Westward from Moscow nearly 1,000 miles, all the way to Berlin in Germany. These were areas Russia had never occupied in its history. As Russia pushed back the Nazi war machine beginning from Stalingrad in 1943, the Red Army marched West across the Northern European plain and conquered East Germany. For the first time, Russia was able to expand deep into Europe and created a buffer zone between its heartland and its enemies. Russia finally had the strategic depth it always desired.

When the Cold War began after World War Two the world watched as they believed Russian tanks running vertically from Denmark down to Romania would try to seize the rest of Europe that was beyond the iron curtain. In response, the US created a containment line from Norway down to Turkey consisting of NATO, numerous bases, troops and nuclear

weapons to stop any Soviet advance.

After decades of the Space and Arms Race and rising tensions in the republics against Moscow's rule, in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, and Russia's borders would shift 1,000 miles Eastward as former satellite states and republics became independent nations. Once again, sensing the opportunity, Europe and the US would look to push the continent's borders deep into Russia again. But this time, rather than sending soldiers, they used NATO and EU membership. From 1991, many nations that were behind the iron curtain joined western institutions. When the Baltic nations joined both the EU and NATO in 2002 and 2004, Moscow was just 300 miles from Europe's borders. St Petersburg was a mere 100 miles away.

Since he emerged as Russia's paramount leader, Vladimir Putin has been trying to reclaim Russia's strategic depth. He has been able to slow down European encroachment with his invasion of Georgia in 2008 and by supporting pro-Russian leaders to power in Russia's buffer regions. Whilst Putin has been able to slow down Europe's advance he has not halted the centuries old struggle of European encroachment eastwards.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is the modern version of a centuries-old battle between the Russians and Europeans who want to push their respective borders across the continent for power, wealth, land and resources. Ukraine is the latest battleground for this centuries old struggle.



Invasions of Russia

Russia-Turkey war - 1568

The first invasion of Russia was by the Ottomans in 1568, beginning the first of 12 wars between them. The Ottomans looking to expand into the Black sea and the Caucasus, burned Moscow to the ground, but were eventually repelled by the Russians

Polish-Russian War, - 1609-1618

At the beginning of the 17th century the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth invaded Russia in order to conquer and subjugate it. It took the Russian people a decade to repel them

Great Northern War - 1700-1721

Swedish Kings had for long waged war against Russia and in 1700 Charles XII of Sweden invaded Russia in the Great Northern War. Despite protection from the Ottomans the Swedish King and his forces were defeated in 1709.

Napoleon's invasion of Russia- 1812

In June 1812, 600,000 European soldiers under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte began the invasion of Russia. Napoleon wanted to add Russia to his continental system and in September 1812 he entered Moscow. What he found, however, when he got there was an abandoned Moscow as the Russians retreated deep into Russia's interior. Trapped in Moscow in freezing temperatures without supplies or accommodation and failing to secure a peace treaty with the Czar, Napoleon retreated back to France. Only 20,000 soldiers made it back home.

World War 1 - 1914 - 1918

In WW1, the Germans were looking to establish a continent wide system, dominated by Germany. They pushed all the way to St Petersburg and completely destroyed the Tsardom of Russia. Germany would force Russia to give up Poland and the Baltic States and leave WW1, bringing an end to all fighting on the Eastern front. In the end, Germany would surrender in 1918, but the Russian capitulation would lead to the emergence of Communism in Russia.

World War 2 - 1939 - 1945

The German defeat in 1918 would see a second attempt at conquering Russia in 1941. Operation Barbarossa, beginning in June 1941 and would see the world's largest army of nearly 4 million assembled to conquer Russia. Staring at annihilation the Soviets would implement a meat grinder strategy of shipping poorly trained and poorly armed troops to be annihilated by the Nazi Wehrmacht. The Soviets hoped this would buy them time to counterattack. In the end the Red Army would conquer Berlin, but at a cost of 30 million Russian lives.



Why Were the Czars Overthrown?

The history of the Czars refers to the period of Russian history from the 16th century to the early 20th century during which Russia was ruled by a series of monarchs known as Czars. The first Czar of Russia was Ivan the Terrible in 1547. He centralised power in Moscow and expanded the Russian Empire through a series of military conquests.

The next significant Czar was Peter the Great, who ruled from 1682 to 1725. Peter was responsible for modernising Russia and transforming it into a major European power. He introduced many reforms, including the creation of a standing army and navy, the adoption of Western-style clothing and customs and the construction of St. Petersburg as a new capital.

The Czars, like many of the monarchies across Europe, had significant privileges and ruled over the masses with the support of a small segment of the population. The Czars depended on the landlords, who in alliance with the rich controlled the country. They supported the domestic and foreign policies of the Czars whilst the peasants, around 82% of the population, languished in poverty.

The Czars were responsible for the oppression and exploitation of many groups within Russian society,

particularly the serfs, who were effectively treated as slaves and were not granted any political or social rights. The Czars presided over periods of widespread poverty, famine, and economic hardship, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Moreover, the autocratic rule of the Czars stifled political and social progress in Russia, and their resistance to reforms and modernisation would ultimately contribute to their downfall.

As the 20th century approached Czarist Russia was not a pretty place. Czarist rule had become very oppressive. Political activity was illegal and there was no parliament or constitution and thus no avenue for the Russian people to deal legally with corruption, incompetence and injustice. This led to a revolutionary underground movement to emerge. Some concessions were eventually made. The Russian Duma, parliament, was formed by the Czar in 1906 as well as a semi-constitution after the disastrous war and defeat to Japan. Despite this many things remained illegal. Due to this many Russians joined the underground revolutionary movement including Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin and many came to see this as the only way to deal with the injustices and oppression Russia was experiencing.

The Czarist regime was in a pressure cooker situation. It wanted to be in the league of global powers alongside Britain, Germany, France and the US. But Czarist Russia was less literate, had less industry and modernity to even compete. The Czarist regime was fighting for its survival, but it wanted to be in the premier league of nations. As the 20th century proceeded the landowners and establishment in Russia came to see the Czarist monarchy as incompetent.

The Czarist monarchy tried to placate revolutionary sentiments with concessions, such as liberalising the press and the establishment of a parliament. But the end of the empire was accelerated by World War One. The Czar was unable to supply the war effort and deal with a food crisis in the country. The food crisis was caused due to the need to feed 5 million soldiers who were at war. 3 million lives were lost in the war by 1917 and soldiers were deserting en masse. Despite this the Czar insisted on staying in the war and in power. Deserting soldiers joined protesters in St. Petersburg, the Russian capital at the time. Rallies further surged when the grain harvest collapsed. When government soldiers refused to open fire on protesters the Czars' days were numbered.

Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in February 1917. A Provisional Government from members of the Duma was established. This new government was unable to win the war or end the food crisis. The provisional government was not up to handling the crisis.

Amongst this chaos an unlikely leader emerged. The underground revolutionaries who had been plotting for two decades under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin led a coup in October 1917. Lenin's message of "Peace, Land and Bread," i.e. basic rights for all was a message that spoke to a vast swathe of the population. Though the revolution devolved into a five-year civil war before the Bolsheviks solidified control, the sun had set on Russia's monarchy and the empire of the Romanov family. The Bolsheviks were the new rulers and would in 70 years face the same challenges as the Czars.

The failure to modernise and keep up with the wealth and economic levels of the West led to not just the masses but even the educated class and businesses elite to turn against the monarchy. World War One merely compounded their problems.



Vladimir Lenin addresses a rally in Red Square in Moscow on May 25, 1919



Stalin: National Hero or Cold-blooded Murderer

Joseph Stalin is considered by the Russian people to have raised a backward nation and turned her into a superpower that defeated the Nazis and developed nuclear weapons. Stalin spent his youth, the best part of two decades from 1898, underground with revolutionary forces who fought against the Czarist regime's injustices in the Caucasus. For this he was sent into exile to Siberian prisons on more than two occasions.

In the October 1917 revolution Stalin was hand-picked by Vladimir Lenin as part of his inner circle and as a key figure of the underground revolutionary movement. Stalin was appointed the general secretary of the Communist Party in April 1922 by Lenin. Lenin then died of a stroke two months later which left Stalin the most powerful figure in the Communist Party. Stalin then used all the power in his hands to create a cult of personality around himself and transformed Russia into a dictatorship.

Stalin was a true believer in communism and after he had consolidated control, he set about turning Russia into a communist nation. The utopia he wanted to establish would bring peace and stability to the world as Capitalism was evil, free markets needed to be replaced with public property and imperialism needed to be destroyed with global revolution. But Stalin faced some stark challenges in creating Socialism. The 1917 revolution really took place in the cities and not the countryside. When the Bolsheviks took over, they took over the cities, the countryside was Capitalist with people owning their own farms and buying and selling amongst each other at profit. The countryside consisted of 120 million peasants who for the first time owned their farms with the instability that had finally come to an end in 1917. By 1928 only 1% of farms were collectivised voluntarily, the other 99% were not.

Through coercion Stalin formed the world's largest collectivisation effort in history, forcing the masses into communal farms and giving up privately owning their farms. His regime dithered over how to transfer land from private hands to public and he made the ideological argument that socialism required this. Stalin instigated class warfare by introducing quotas on peasants. He introduced Kulaks, which was a derogatory term for better-off peasants. Stalin ordered the police and Communist Party members to execute and deport those who refused to give up their farms.

This led to chaos and caused 7 million to starve and another 10 million to suffer from malnutrition due to farms not being worked upon and harvests not taking place. Kazakhstan, which was still a nomadic society, saw 20% of its population die due to Stalin's collectivisation efforts. In Ukraine, which is a breadbasket, up to 7 million died!

Stalin's inner circle closed ranks with him when they saw this impending disaster. But none of them saw anyone else that could lead the nation. They only saw Stalin as the only one who could carry the regime, deal with the global situation and keep the secret police in check. They saw that only Stalin had the nerve and ability to see through this massive upheaval. Stalin was a dictator and they saw that he was needed in order to establish a communist nation. By 1935 Stalin was seen as a hero, Russia was considered a great nation and the harvest had got back to pre-collectivization levels and was then seen as a success.

To ensure there was no competition, Stalin launched the Great Terror in 1936 where 830,000 people were executed or died under interrogation. Millions were arrested for political crimes against the state, party and military apparatus, these were all the comrades who had implemented Stalin's collectivisation policy. Just 5 years later Stalin would send millions of Russians to their deaths in World War Two in a satura-

tion strategy to overwhelm the Nazi war machine.

Stalin accumulated powers and exercised them like nobody else. He ordered millions to be killed, tortured, imprisoned, hung and shot in order to establish communism. The leaders around Stalin believed this was the only way to establish communism as Russians overwhelmingly wanted capitalism i.e. they wanted to own and make profit with their farms. We know from the secret archives that have been declassified from the Soviet era that Stalin, like all the other communists in private, believed and wanted to establish communism. They were not in it for personal gain or wealth. Stalin's legacy can be described as establishing communism through mass slaughter of millions of Russians.

In a watershed moment at the first congress of the Communist Party after Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, the new general secretary denounced Stalin. He condemned the cult of personality Stalin had fostered and the crimes he had perpetrated, including the execution, torture and imprisonment of loyal party members on false charges. He blamed Stalin for foreign policy errors, for the failings of Soviet agriculture, for ordering mass terror and for mistakes that had led to appalling loss of life in the Second World War.



Nikita Khrushchev denouncing Stalin at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) On 25 February 1956

How Did the Soviets Defeat the Nazis?



When World War 2 ended in 1945 Russia lost over 30 million soldiers and civilians, a colossal loss of life when one considers the total loss of life in the great war was 60 million. Many Russians believe today that those who died early and quickly were the war's only victors. Russia was poorer when compared to the other powers such as Britain and Germany and the Nazis would spend many years in Russian territory. Despite all of this, Russia would defeat the Nazis and this victory is a key part of Russian history.

The Nazis launched the world's largest war with a 3.6-million-man army on the 22nd of June 1941 in Operation Barbarossa. In the two years leading up to the invasion, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed political and economic pacts for strategic purposes. Together they agreed to invade Poland, with Russia taking the eastern portion and Germany the west. For the Nazis this made the invasion much easier as it was its first major campaign. With the Nazis then busy with their invasion of France the Russians conquered the Baltics and parts of Romania. Following this, the German High Command began planning an invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941.

The Nazis in the invasion of Russia would cross a 1,000-mile front with 600,000 motor vehicles and over 600,000 horses. By the end of 1941, the Nazis

had captured much of western Russia, including the cities of Kiev, Minsk, and Smolensk. They were staring down at Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the centre and the southern thrust was looking to conquer the Caucasus. The Nazi invasion saw some of the most horrific atrocities. The Nazis captured some five million Soviet Red Army troops and deliberately starved to death or otherwise killed 3.3 million Soviet prisoners of war, and millions of civilians, as part of a plan to solve German food shortages.

What made things worse was the fact Stalin refused to believe the Nazis would invade Russia as he had signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler, and they had split Poland between themselves. Despite intelligence from the British and the US of Nazi war preparations to invade Russia, Stalin refused to believe the Nazis would invade the Soviet Union. Stalin had a mental breakdown when the Nazis eventually invaded and due to the huge losses the Soviets suffered. As the Red Army had not prepared, at least 40,000 Russian soldiers were dying each day.

But then the Soviets hit a stroke of luck. After months of war the winter season was in full swing in Russia where temperatures fall well below zero degrees. This was when the tide of war turned as Russia began to mobilise its unlimited supply of fighters. The Nazis had been fighting for months and expected

a rapid Soviet collapse, German planners did not plan to be fighting during the winter. Rapid Nazi advances caused the forces to outrun their supply lines, which were vulnerable due to Moscow being nearly 1,000 miles from Berlin.

In November 1942, the Soviet army launched a massive counteroffensive against the Nazis trying to conquer Stalingrad. In less than a week, Soviet forces had surrounded their enemy. After two more months of combat the surviving German soldiers surrendered. The German defeat and the death and capture of a quarter million soldiers at Stalingrad shocked the Nazis and this was the beginning of the end for them. The Soviets would throw huge numbers of poorly armed and trained troops to saturate the battlefield. The western Allies' bombing campaign was crippling German efforts to rearm and turning German cities to rubble. Lend-Lease from the US was leading to huge war material to arrive in Russia and by the end of 1943, Soviet forces had pushed Nazi forces out of most of Russia. In August 1944, Soviet troops crossed

into Germany and on the 2nd of May 1945, Berlin surrendered to Soviet forces, just days after Hitler committed suicide.

This was a huge turn around for the Soviets who just years earlier were staring into the abyss. Stalin is remembered today for leading Russia to victory, though Russia defeated the Nazis despite the actions of Stalin. The war was a moment of test and triumph, a time that proved Russia's worth on a global stage. Russians regarded their country as a superpower because it had the Red Army, which defeated Hitler and conquered much of Europe. Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians and the Germans bent their knees to Russia. Russia was the land of the heroes of World War Two and the likes of General Georgy Zhukov would be remembered forever.

The Soviet Union with the US would emerge after World War Two as the new superpowers and for the first time Russia's border went all the way to Germany, giving her a huge buffer zone.





Establishing a Communist Utopia

When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, they believed feudalism which had dominated the country had been destroyed by the capitalist class and now that the communists were in power, they were going to reorganise Russia on communist lines. Capitalism enslaved the masses and to be free the masses needed to destroy capitalism. Destroying capitalism was by establishing socialism and socialism was the means to get to the end utopia, communism, where everyone would be equal.

From a political perspective there was just one party, the Communist Party. All power was concentrated into the hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. There were no elections; just transitions and regular meetings of different branches to agree on policy. In capitalist nations the elite dominate the political system, in the Soviet Union the workers established the Communist Party and ran the country via committees from the Communist Party.

The communist system was looking to build the socialist concept of equality, both legal and economic, for all people. The Communist Party presided over this system, directly overseeing the USSR's political apparatuses, economies, industries, press and societies. In its principles and functions, the Soviet model stood in direct opposition to that of capitalism. Private ownership was seen by the communists as an evil that led to the emergence of the bourgeoisie.

The communists saw central planning as the way to stimulate and manage the economy. From 1921 the Communist Party created a series of 5-year plans to govern the economy of the USSR. From 1928 to 1991 the entire course of the Soviet economy was guided by central planning. The level of production, wages and prices replaced the free market, maximising efficiency in production and allowing for the more equitable distribution of goods and services. Industry and farmers were given quotas to fulfil and in time the Soviet Union would become one of the largest producers in the world. There was no market in the USSR, the market was replaced with a system of central planning called material balance planning, which balanced the total output of the economy with the total input, which would allow for the most equitable distribution of resources and eliminate waste.

The biggest challenge the communists faced in achieving this utopia was the fact that the communists did a coup in 1917 and therefore did not have mass support. The Czarist monarchy was overthrown in February 1917 and many peasants for the first time got to manage their own lands. By October 1917 the Bolsheviks undertook a coup and found outside the urban cities, they had no support. Once Joseph Stalin emerged as the communist leader in 1922, he forced his own party and workers to enforce collectivisation and communism upon the masses.



Did the Soviet Union Seek Global revolution?

World revolution is the Marxist concept of overthrowing capitalism in all countries through the conscious revolutionary action of the organised working class. Marxist theory saw these revolutions not necessarily occurring simultaneously, but where and when local conditions allow a revolutionary party to successfully replace bourgeois rule, and install a workers' state based on social ownership of the means of production. In most Marxist schools, such as Trotskyism and the communist left, the essentially international character of the class struggle and the necessity of global scope were critical elements.


The Soviet Union's ideological commitment to achieving global revolution included the development of socialism in one country and peaceful coexistence with other nations while engaging in anti-imperialism to defend the international proletariat, combat capitalism and promote the goals of communism, whilst consolidating control over the so-called Eastern Bloc states.

Moscow provided substantial material support to like-minded groups in distant proxy conflicts from Yemen to Angola to Latin America. Moscow also supported regimes across the world to break free from their colonial masters, Moscow was very effective in creating anti-imperialist global public opinion.

Moscow also made use of major arms sales to groups and regimes across the world. From Egypt to Syria to Cuba to Vietnam, Russia transferred rockets, jets, training and military aid in order to achieve global revolution. Moscow took part in many local conflicts by picking sides it believed would undermine western imperialism.

Both the USSR and the US spent the decades after World War Two embroiled in war, without actually ever directly fighting each other. Their global struggle played out in proxy battles across nearly every continent as well through trade wars. A major worry of leaders of every country was over the looming threat of nuclear war.

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the West was in a battle for global supremacy with the Soviet Union as it attempted to foment revolution across every continent and undermine capitalism. Capitalist leaders took the USSR's ideological message very seriously and what played out was the four-decade Cold War. Moscow's biggest achievement was the fact that it had achieved its major geopolitical imperative of expanding its borders all the way to Germany, deep into Europe, the most territory Russia would ever possess.



How did the Soviet Union Become a Victim in the Graveyard of Empires?

Russia's strategic interest in Afghanistan did not begin in 1979. Moscow's expansion into Central Asia in the 19th century coincided with British expansion in India, during a time of competition known as the Great Game. As tensions between Britain and Russia mounted, Afghanistan became a buffer zone between the two empires.

After a decade of instability, The USSR invaded Afghanistan on the 24th December 1979 as they believed the US would take advantage of the volatility in Afghanistan and Moscow came to believe shoring up the regime in Kabul was a geostrategic necessity. Three days later the Soviet army killed the Afghan president Hafizullah Amin and installed his rival Babrak Karmal. The Soviet strategy was to occupy the cities and main routes of communication. The Soviets used their air power against all opposition, regularly levelling villages.

The people of Afghanistan fought back by waging guerrilla war in small groups operating in the countryside, almost 80% of the country, where they escaped government and Soviet control. Fighters from all over the Muslim world flocked to training camps organised by Pakistan and financed by Saudi Arabia and the US to wage unconventional warfare against the Soviet invasion and occupation.

Soviet tactics became even more brutal as over 100,000 soldiers entered the Afghan battlefield but as the 1980s wore on Moscow was unable to defeat the

guerrilla fighters or stabilise the proxy government in Kabul. As US support to the Mujahideen increased and sophisticated weapons systems began entering the battlefield the odds of a Soviet victory began to ebb away by the middle of the 1980s.

With the cost of the invasion increasing and no victory in sight, Moscow decided to leave when Mikhail Gorbachev calculated that the war had become a stalemate and was no longer worth the high price in men, money and international prestige. Soviet troops began withdrawing from 1987 with the final Soviet soldier leaving on the 15th of February 1989.

In the decade that culminated in the USSR's humiliating defeat, much had changed. The union was in disarray with rebellion everywhere. When Gorbachev ended the Afghan war, two years later the Soviet Union would itself collapse. In the brutal nine-year conflict, an estimated one million civilians were killed, as well as 90,000 Mujahideen fighters, 18,000 Afghan troops, and 14,500 Soviet soldiers. Afghanistan would go on to descend into bitter civil conflict until the victory of the Taliban in 1996.

The Soviet Union believed with the US defeat in Vietnam there would be little the US could do with the Soviets invading Afghanistan. They also believed their invasion would be short and swift. In the end it lasted for nearly a decade, depleted Soviet resources, undermined the image of the Red Army as well as the Soviet Union and communism.



How did the USSR go from Utopia to Dystopia?

The Soviet Union emerged from World War Two as the victor over the Nazi's and a new super-power. In 1957 the Soviet Union launched the world's first satellite into orbit and by 1970 Moscow had reached nuclear and missile parity with the US. Moscow boasted it would bury capitalism and establish communism around the world. Whilst the USSR no doubt achieved many individual feats in the Space and Arms race this didn't lead to the utopia Soviet citizens were promised.

The origins of communism and the expansion into the broader USSR was through the implementation by brute force of central planning and banning of private ownership. For this a huge intelligence and espionage network was established in the form of the KGB. Many Soviet citizens had no choice but to submit to the Communist Party. As the Communist Party spread propaganda of its achievements around the world, life for most Soviet citizens was the complete opposite. Of the twenty million members of the USSR Communist Party, around three million made up the higher elite—a formidable bastion of power that encompassed the party apparatus, state bureaucracy, military, and KGB.

The USSR rose to become the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas, and the third largest

producer of coal, but it nonetheless suffered chronic energy shortages, what some experts called 'a crisis amid plenty'. That was because Soviet factories consumed energy in horribly gluttonous quantities, as if it were free.

Soviet industry was in a far worse state. In the 1920s, the Soviet economy was around 20% industry, transport, and construction. By the mid-1980s that percentage had risen to around 70%. No other country ever had such a high percentage of its economy in big factories and mines. But much of the Soviet industry had been built during the 1930s, or rebuilt after the destruction of the Second World War according to 1930s specifications. The USSR's Pennsylvania and Sheffield's numbered in the thousands, but they were obsolete in the post World War Two world. In 1976 only two thirds of Soviet families had a refrigerator, the US hit two thirds in the early 1930s. Soviet families had to wait years to get one, and when they finally got a postcard giving notice they could buy one, they had a fixed one hour slot during which they could pick it up. They lost their chance if they did not arrive on time.

The KGB and the CIA secretly reported that, beginning in the 1970s, the Soviet Union was overcome by malaise. The Soviet economy suffered from

stagnation and became increasingly dependent on undisclosed loans from capitalist countries that were members of the Paris Club while continuing to present marxism as progressive and superior to a market economy. At the moment of the USSR's dissolution, Russia alone owed \$22 billion to the Paris club.[1]

The inherent inefficiency of the Soviet apparatus meant it could not build a modern economy. The Soviet economy churned out heavy industrial products and military equipment, but it failed to provide consumer products to its people which eventually led to a thriving black market that frequently operated in foreign currencies, which most Russians lacked. The decline of oil prices from 1986 shattered the state budget and defence spending. Despite this the Kremlin was increasing defence expenditure to keep up with the US in the arms race.

By the 1980s, vast swathes of the Soviet Union's upper ranks, including academics, were travelling to the west, and whether patriots or cynics, they usually came back loaded up with boom boxes, VCRs, fancy clothes, and other western goods. The highest

officials had such items discreetly imported for them, while their children, the future generation of Soviet leadership, pursued coveted long-term postings abroad in the not very socialist occupation of foreign trade representatives. Many party posts, which served as vehicles for enrichment, were being sold to the highest bidder. In 1982, one defector derided the USSR as a 'land of kleptocracy.'

At the end of 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, there was no revolution. There was simply exhaustion. The elite were exhausted from trying to push the boulder of the Soviet economy and society up a steep hill. People were exhausted from standing in lines for hours to buy basic necessities. The general sense of failure was apparent not only in faraway capitals but in Russians' own lives. The Politburo selected Mikhail Gorbachev to solve these problems. He promised openness and restructuring. But the openness only revealed the catastrophic condition of the economy, and the restructuring, carried out by those who had created the disaster in the first place, didn't work.



Why was Communism a Failure?



From its inception, the Soviet Union had claimed to be an experiment in socialism, a superior alternative to capitalism, for the entire world. If socialism was not superior to capitalism, its existence could not be justified. In the inter-war period, during Stalin's violent crusade to build socialism, capitalism had seemed for many people to be synonymous with world imperialism, the senseless slaughter of the First World War, goose-stepping militarism, and Great Depression unemployment. During the rise of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s the West was in the Great Depression for a lot of that time. Mass unemployment, fascism and world wars all made capitalism look like a failure. Imperialism was still running riot around the world and many of the countries that are celebrated today as stable democratic rule of law countries, were fascist and totalitarian regimes. In this context the Soviet Union made the argument that they have a better answer – communism. Capitalism was the past, capitalism is mass unemployment, capitalism is war and capitalism is dictatorship and the communists could do it better.

Fascism had been defeated during World War Two and after the war the capitalist dictatorships embraced democracy. Instead of a final economic crisis anticipated by Stalin and others, capitalism experienced an unprecedented boom, which made the Great Depression a memory and homeownership a mass phenomenon. Economic growth in the US, after a robust 1950s, hit a phenomenal 52.8% in the 1960s; more significantly, median family incomes rose 39.7% over the decade. In Japan and West

Germany, losers in the Second World War, economic 'miracles' led to revolutions in mass consumption. New media technologies, such as cinema and radio, which had seemed so convenient for interwar dictatorships seeking to spread propaganda, turned out to be conduits of a commercial mass culture impervious to state borders.

All leading capitalist countries embraced the welfare state, stabilising their social orders, and challenging socialism on its own turf. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, the image and reality of capitalism changed radically. Affordable Levittown homes, ubiquitous department stores overflowing with inexpensive consumer goods, expanded health and retirement benefits, and increasingly 'democratic institutions' were weapons altogether different from Nazi tanks. If that was not enough pressure, the Second World War and its aftermath also set in motion a wave of decolonisation, which the Soviet Union sought to exploit but which ended up further undermining its own position.

The international context of the Soviet Union changed rapidly after World War Two. Capitalism was no longer in the Great Depression, but in a post-World War Two economic boom. West Germany and Japan had phenomenal post-World War Two economic growth. Both of those countries had been defeated and ruined in World War Two, and yet they rose from the ashes. When European imperialists gave up direct control of their empires there was no more imperialism in the old sense.

The absence of fascism, imperialism and the post-war economic boom, meant the Soviet Union now had a very different context compared to Nazi tanks. Now the Soviet Union was competing with confectionery, children's toys and women's stockings. It was facing western consumer society. The USSR never reached the consumer standards of the west because it never found an answer for it. They had an answer for Nazi tanks invading Russia but never came up with how they could challenge western consumption.

In the Cold War when the Western and Eastern bloc were picking their teams, the west first picked Japan, whilst the east chose Romania. The west then picked West Germany; the east chose East Germany. The

west then chose France, whilst the east chose Czechoslovakia. The Western alliance, compared to the Eastern bloc, was extremely unequal and the Eastern Block never stood up to the west.

Communism in Russia arose in a context where it had a compelling argument and vision for the world. After World War Two, communism was unable to adapt and provide a compelling vision and it was defeated by consumer products that capitalism was providing the masses, which in the end Soviet citizens all longed for. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, East Germans went shopping in West Germany and were mesmerised by the consumer products that were available to their fellow Germans.





Why Did the Soviets End the Soviet Union?

The Soviet Union, a massive empire with formidable military and economic capabilities, ceased to exist on December 26, 1991. This dissolution was not orchestrated by external forces like the CIA, George H.W. Bush, or the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. In the end the Soviets dissolved the Soviet Union themselves.

Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the Soviet Union's General Secretary in 1985 was the first general secretary to have been born after the 1917 revolution and was seen as a breath of fresh air after the stagnation of the Leonid Brezhnev years. He initiated significant reforms aimed at reviving the stagnating empire. His policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) sought to enhance freedom of speech and press, decentralise economic decision-making, and introduce multi-party elections. Gorbachev also ended military intervention when Warsaw Pact countries abandoned communism, accelerating the disintegration of Moscow's control over Eastern Europe.

The first session of the newly elected Congress of People's Deputies in June 1989 marked a significant

shift. Televised speeches criticising the state of the Soviet Union captivated the populace. The newly elected deputies made speech after speech criticising the Soviet Union, which led to a decline in industrial output as people were glued to their screens. This period of openness led to widespread demands for more reforms, more freedom, and more power, which the Kremlin was unprepared to grant. This unleashed a wave of nationalistic and separatist movements. The genie was now out of the bottle.

By the end of 1989, Hungary had opened its borders to the West, leading to mass defections. The Berlin Wall fell, and various Soviet republics, including Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia declared their independence. By 1991, ten more republics had followed suit, significantly shrinking the USSR.

Gorbachev's policies and the subsequent rise of Boris Yeltsin further destabilised the Soviet Union. Yeltsin, initially promoted by Gorbachev, became a vocal critic, pushing for more rapid and radical reforms. He argued that communism and the USSR were obsolete, advocating for a Russian nation-state. Yeltsin's resignation from the Communist Party in July

1990 and his victory in the Russian Federation's first presidential election in June 1991 made him the most popular politician in the USSR.

Moscow became the seat for two governments - the Russian republic and Gorbachev's Soviet Union. Yeltsin, enjoying popular support, became as powerful as Gorbachev. Both leaders recognised that the old system was untenable, but Gorbachev's proposal for a new union treaty to transform the Soviet Empire into a voluntary association of republics was met with resistance from the security establishment.

In August 1991, a failed coup attempt by Communist hardliners further eroded Gorbachev's credibility. Yeltsin emerged stronger, eventually assuming control over the army and nuclear codes. The final blow came in December 1991 when Ukraine, the second

largest republic, voted for independence. Yeltsin then led the leaders of Ukraine and Belarus to declare their independence, effectively there were no more republics within the USSR.

On December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union was formally dissolved. Yeltsin ejected Gorbachev from his office in the Kremlin and forced him to give a resignation speech live on TV. During his speech Yeltsin ordered the USSR flag to be replaced by the Russian flag on top of the Kremlin.

The largest empire in the world, in the 20th century came to an end, the Cold war ended with communism's defeat. The USSR was ended and dissolved by the Soviets themselves because they abandoned communism and therefore there was no place for the Soviet Union in the world.



Signing the Agreement to eliminate the USSR and establish the Commonwealth of Independent States. Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus Stanislav Shushkevich and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, December 8, 1991



Why Did the 1991 Military Coup Fail?

In 1991, a desperate attempt to save the Soviet Union from disintegration was made by a coalition of top military and civilian leaders who tried to seize power from Mikhail Gorbachev. The conspirators included nearly all major officials in the state apparatus except the premier himself. Including the defence minister, interior minister, KGB chief, the prime minister, the secretary of the central committee and the chief of the president's staff. Despite the overwhelming force the coup makers had at their disposal - their coup attempt ultimately failed.

The coup was driven by the conspirators' fears of the impending dissolution of the Soviet Union, particularly Gorbachev's negotiations for a new Union Treaty that would grant sovereign status to the republics. The conspirators believed it was their duty to prevent the dismantling of the Soviet Union. Confident in their strength, they expected to prevail without difficulty.

On August 18, 1991, the coup was set in motion. Five leading conspirators flew to Gorbachev's summer residence in Crimea, demanding he declare a state of emergency or resign. When Gorbachev refused, they placed him under house arrest and confiscated his nuclear briefcase. The junta declared martial law at 4:00 am the next morning, August 19, and announced that Vice President Gennadi Yanayev was now in charge due to Gorbachev's "health condition." Gorbachev's refusal to cooperate came as a surprise to many of the junta members, which led to bickering among them, as some became suspicious that the

others might try to back out and avoid responsibility for what they had done.

Simultaneously, KGB commandos surrounded Boris Yeltsin's vacation home near Moscow but failed to arrest him. Yeltsin swiftly moved to the White House, the Russian parliament building, and issued a public statement declaring the junta illegal and calling for popular support. His defiant speech atop a tank, captured by CNN, became an iconic image of the resistance. Thousands rallied at the White House that became the centre of opposition to the junta and was fortified with barricades and a defensive perimeter. Yeltsin and other coup opponents took up residence in the building. At this point a full 24 hours had passed since the coup began.

On the night of August 19, the junta held its first press conference, facing hostile questioning from journalists fearful of losing the media freedoms gained under glasnost. State-run media played a crucial role in undermining the coup by broadcasting images of Yeltsin's speech, crowds gathering at the White House, and negative reactions from foreign leaders. This resistance by the media was to prove critical to the coup's failure, as it appeared the junta had lost control over the content of public broadcasts and was having its claims to power undermined.

Yeltsin's rapid mobilisation of opposition caught the junta off guard. Misjudging his resolve, they wasted critical time negotiating with him. Despite having the forces to storm the White House, they hesitated

to launch an attack, fearing a potential bloodbath. Yeltsin admitted later that the White House would not have withstood an assault. Yeltsin and his allies in the media dominated the content of public broadcasts and created self-fulfilling expectations that the junta was not in control. Those who opposed the coup proved far better at manipulating information and expectations than the junta did. Pro-democracy forces kept up a steady drum beat of stories designed to make the junta seem far weaker than it was and Yeltsin far stronger than he was. They flooded the airwaves with false claims that military leaders did not support the coup or had even gone over to Yeltsin's side. These repeated assertions that the junta was not in control of the military became widely believed and they shaped expectations.

The coup plotters made plans to assault the White House but were obstructed by internal dissent within the military. Generals Grachev and Shaposhnikov privately opposed the assault, causing logistical delays. Not all designated units arrived at the prescribed location on the third night of the coup which was when the assault was scheduled to take place.

For reasons that are still a matter of debate, the junta never gave the final order for the assault. On the morning of Wednesday August 21st 1991, 4 days after the conspiracy began it was clear to all that the coup attempt had failed and collapsed. The coup's

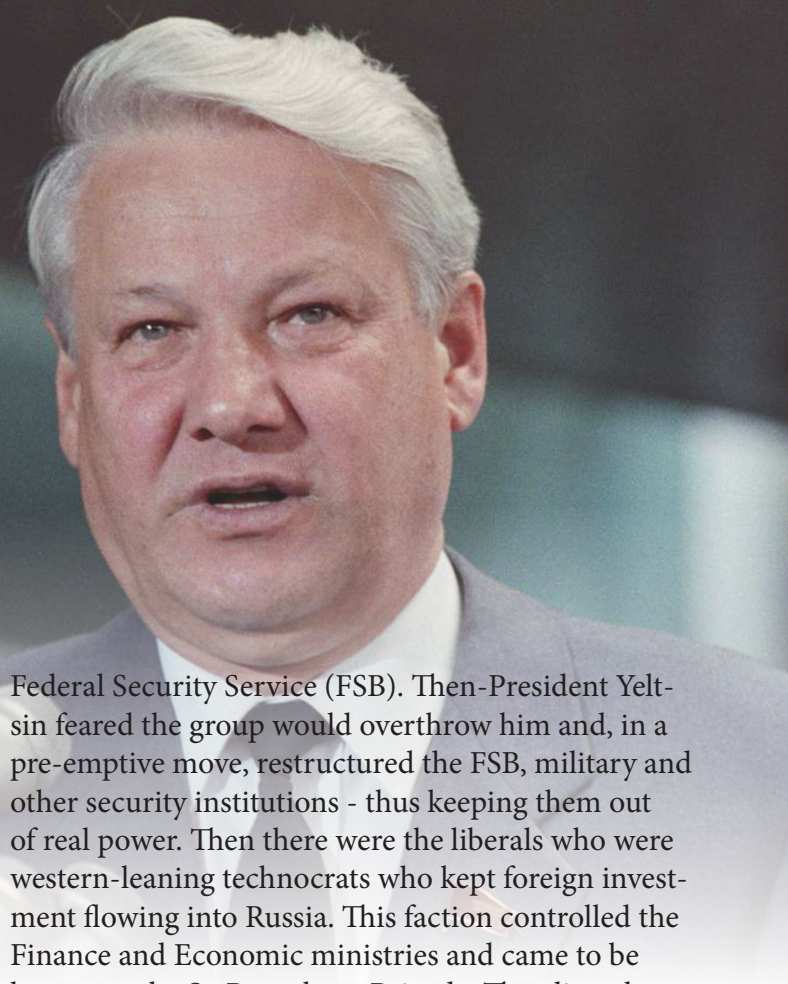
collapse became evident as troops began to withdraw from the city. The conspirators flew to meet Gorbachev, Yeltsin sent the Russian Republic's vice president and a supporting delegation who arrested and brought the conspirators back to Moscow along with the liberated Gorbachev.

The coup attempt failed because the conspirators were overconfident and failed to use the resources at their disposal. The junta proved completely incapable of countering the propaganda against them and showed little understanding of how important this was. Without adequate refutation, these stories picked up steam until they were believed inside the Junta itself. Fearing that an attack on the White House and Yeltsin might trigger a civil war, the Junta ultimately cancelled their scheduled assault at the last minute and the coup attempt collapsed. Repeated public assertions that the junta was not in control had become a self-fulfilling reality.

In the end, the critical decision to stop the attack came from the junta, which backed down rather than give the final order to proceed. They were afraid it might cause a fight among different security forces because they came to believe - due to Yeltsin and his supporters' use of the media, that the military was divided and against the coup. Even though this was not the case.



Why did Russia Fall Apart in the 1990s?



On the 31st of December 1999, Boris Yeltsin made a televised resignation speech and apologised to Russia's people: *"I want to apologise to you, I beg for your forgiveness for not making many of your and my dreams come true. What seemed simple to do proved to be excruciatingly difficult."*^[2] His approval rating when leaving office was a mere 2%. During his reign economic output plummeted 45%.

Nine years earlier Boris Yeltsin single handedly dissolved the Soviet Union. What should happen to the union's assets, wealth, industry and people was never agreed. The Soviet Union was a huge command economy and Boris Yeltsin acting as president ordered the immediate liberalisation of the economy.

Straight away prices skyrocketed throughout Russia and a deep credit crunch shut down many industries and brought about a protracted depression. The reforms in trade, prices and currency devastated the living standards of much of the population, especially the groups dependent on Soviet-era state subsidies and welfare programs. Through the 1990s, Russia's GDP fell by 50%, vast sectors of the economy were wiped out, inequality and unemployment grew dramatically, whilst incomes fell. Hyperinflation, caused by the Central Bank of Russia wiped out many people's personal savings and tens of millions of Russians were plunged into poverty. All of this led to the skyrocketing of crime and organised crime.

Boris Yeltsin implemented economic shock therapy, something recommended by western advisors which only led to economic volatility and inflation. An array of factions fought for control of the country's wealth, industries and assets. The Slovaks, Russian nationalists who were mostly former KGB and security service personnel, controlled the Foreign and Interior ministries and the KGB's successor, the

Federal Security Service (FSB). Then-President Yeltsin feared the group would overthrow him and, in a pre-emptive move, restructured the FSB, military and other security institutions - thus keeping them out of real power. Then there were the liberals who were western-leaning technocrats who kept foreign investment flowing into Russia. This faction controlled the Finance and Economic ministries and came to be known as the St. Petersburg Brigade. The oligarchs ruled most of Russia's vital business sectors. Most of these individuals rose to power during the Yeltsin economic reforms which led to confusion over who owned what following the Soviet collapse and to a mad scramble for the assets.

In 1994 Boris Yeltsin launched a military invasion to reinstate Russian government control in the First Chechen War. Russian soldiers fought the brutal and badly organised war until 1996 when they were humiliated into a truce, which gave Chechnya a large amount of autonomy.

As the 1990s continued things got even worse. In 1998, the Russian stock market crashed as fears rippled through the financial sector that the government would devalue the currency. The government soon defaulted on its domestic debt and devalued the ruble. The crisis caused the Russian economy to contract by more than 5% in 1998. The crisis raised poverty from 2 million to 60 million, a 3000% increase. UNICEF noted that this resulted in 500,000 'extra' deaths per year.

With Yeltsin's approval ratings in single digits, he resigned in 1999 and chose his Prime Minister to be his successor as president. His Prime minister had only been in the post for a few months. He was a former KGB agent called Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

How Did Russia Emerge Victorious in the Chechen War?



Chechnya declared independence in 1991 and Moscow feared other ethnic minorities within the Russian Federation would attempt to secede as well. In 1994, with much of Russia in disarray, Moscow went to war with the breakaway region. The war began with many generals questioning the logic of the war, each being replaced by Yeltsin. The war was launched during the winter months with many of the attacking Russian forces created from units that had not trained together. Command and control were substandard and combined arms operations were often poorly planned and executed.

On the last day of 1994 Russian forces moved in four columns, with tanks followed by infantry in a coordinated attack on Grozny. They expected the Chechens to submit when they saw Russian power. Instead, they faced a substantial and determined Chechen force with their own armed vehicles and artillery pieces.

The Russians fought a traditional military conflict, whereas the Chechens were not a traditional military force. They were led by a military commander — President Dudayev was a former Soviet air force general — but the Chechens were guerrilla fighters with little formal training and harassed Russia's long lines of communication, staged hit-and-run attacks and waged pitched battles on their own terms after they took to the mountains and forests in the face of overwhelming Russian strength.

The Russian military viewed the whole of the Chechen population as suspects. They built internment camps all over Chechnya which served as a rallying cry for all Chechens. Rather than dividing the populace from the insurgents, Russian counterinsurgency tactics, including the large-scale bombardment of villages, towns and cities only united the Chechen fighters.

As a result of Russian forces killing more than 250 civilians in Samashki, a Chechen rebel group targeted the Russian town of Budennovsk and seized a hospital, taking more than a thousand civilians hostage. More than a hundred civilians were killed during an attempt by Russian forces to raid the hospital and liberate the hostages. The experience showed the Chechens that terror attacks against the Russian heartland could be a very effective tactic. Chechen's would go on and target a Moscow subway station in 1996.

In August 1996, an estimated 1,500 Chechen fighters attacked Grozny and laid siege to some 12,000 Russian troops occupying the city. The siege finally prompted a tired Russia to negotiate a cease-fire. Russian Lt. Gen. Alexander Lebed and then-Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov signed the Khasavyurt accords, ending the hostilities. The Khasavyurt accords tabled a final decision on Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation later in 2001, leaving Chechnya with de facto independence but completely isolated in the region. The accords stipulated a humiliating Russian pull-out but also gave Russia

years to determine what went wrong with the invasion and to come up with a new plan while leaving the Chechens to their own devices. Chechnya found itself spurned by its neighbours on all sides with no sustainable economy or foreign patron to assist it.

Instead of consolidating their strength after the Russian withdrawal from Chechnya, the Chechens found themselves divided along clan, nationalist and Islamic lines. By the end of the 1990s rival factions weakened the Chechen government and Chechen unity that brought the Red Army to a stalemate.

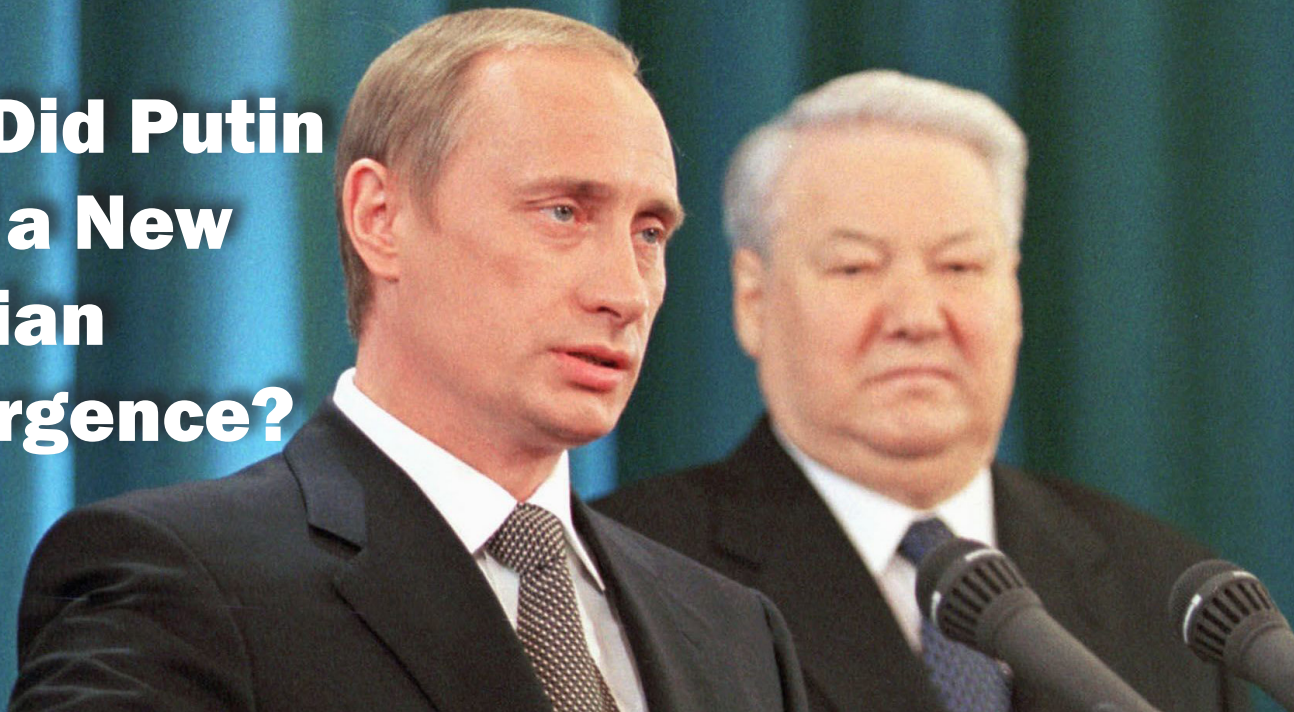
By 1999, the instability in Chechnya saw newfound confidence by Moscow to reassert its control over Chechnya. The Russian Ministry of the Interior had been planning a fight in Chechnya since March 1999. The number of troops deployed was almost double that of the 1994 invasion. All communications were encrypted, and instead of rolling into Grozny in columns, armoured forces took the high ground surrounding the city. Russia created a media blockade and only its version of events was reported within Chechnya and to the outside world. The most important difference was the condition of the Russian intelligence and security services (the FSB, SVR and GRU), which were unified and stronger. The fragmentation of the services caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union was no longer a factor. The intelligence services infiltrated the Chechen groups and made use of internal divisions between the nationalists and Islamic factions.

Moscow's exploitation of Chechnya's internal divisions gave it victory in the end. Moscow widened the divisions through bribery, negotiation and exacerbating concerns among Chechens over the terrible humanitarian conditions they faced. Moscow used Bislan Gantemirov, Grozny's former mayor, to gain critical intelligence on rebels and managed to turn the two most powerful nationalist clans, the Kadyrovs and the Yamadayevs, against the Islamic factions and in favour of Russia. Moscow would install the Kadyrov clan leader Akhmad Kadyrov as head of the new pro-Russian Chechen government when Grozny fell in February 2000. Ramzan Kadyrov, today's Chechen leader, is Akhmad Kadyrov's son.

Russia was able to turn around its humiliating defeat by dividing the Chechens and this ensured no lands from Russia proper seceded after the fall of the USSR in 1991. For Vladimir Putin this was the first act in ending the instability that dominated Russia after 1991.



How Did Putin Lead a New Russian Resurgence?



Vladimir Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin in 1999, a nationalist who endeavoured to change the fortunes of Russia. One of the first policies Putin pursued was to clean house. Russia's internal consolidation began with the Kremlin regaining control over the country politically, economically and socially while re-establishing its control over Russia's wealth of energy reserves.

The recentralisation of the Russian state resulted in the nationalisation of key sectors, assets, utilities and industries. Putin brought each of the nation's key sectors under Kremlin control one after the other. This was after a decade of the Russian economy being sold or taken by former Soviet functionaries.

The oligarchs benefited the most from the instability in the 1990s and by 2000 were effectively the Russian elite. Putin dealt with them by threatening them with state intervention in the empires that they had amassed. They were told their future wealth would be determined by how much business they could grow rather than how much they could pillage. The oligarchs were essentially looting the nation and Putin brought that to an end. Similarly, the nationalists under the leadership of Putin worked to counter the strength of the liberals and the influential elite during the era of Boris Yeltsin either by resorting to assassinating them or through a policy to lure them into submission by toppling some and drawing others into the Kremlin orbit.

Putin took full advantage of America's preoccupation with the Middle East to reverse all the American sponsored colour revolutions. The project to bring all of the former Soviet republics under Russian influence was a meticulous task led by Putin. Russia made

significant gains in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia. This was all consolidated with the reformulation of a political union in much of the former Soviet space.

Russian foreign relations under Putin were driven on reversing the post-Cold War trend and securing Russia's periphery by bringing all the former Soviet republics under its influence. Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia were already members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Moscow-led security group that comprised pro-Russian former Soviet states. Putin concluded a deal for a Customs Union with Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia. In 2015 Russia launched the Eurasian Economic Union.

By the mid-2000s with global energy prices rising Russia's treasury was flush with cash and Russia's GDP rose tenfold between 2000 and 2009. Russians' standard of living increased fourfold and real disposable income rose 160%. Unemployment and the poverty rate were reduced by half. With more income came more military spending and under Putin, spending on the military increased nearly fivefold. When Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, NATO stood on the sidelines. Russia's reversal was complete.

The West painted Putin as a thug and Russia as an aggressor, but the Russian people praised the man who helped their country return to being a regional and potentially a global power. Putin stabilised the domestic situation through economic policies which were only possible under a dictatorship. Any parliament or senate would have stalled on such huge decisions and would have allowed their own interests to get in the way.



Russia's Quest for Economic Development

An enduring theme of Russia's economic history since the time of Peter the Great has been a desire to catch up with the West. There have been periods of rapid progress towards that goal, such as during the late nineteenth century, after the abolition of serfdom, and again during the Stalin era. Yet these have invariably been followed by periods of stagnation and crisis that have seen the country lose ground again.

Under Putin, first as Prime Minister and then as President, between 1999 and 2008 Russia's economy grew from \$196 billion to \$1.7 trillion GDP, making it Russia's best decade of economic growth ever. Healthy budget and trade surpluses enabled the government to amass large foreign exchange reserves totalling \$600 billion in 2008, in addition to a Stabilisation Fund that reached \$157 billion in the same year. The impact on living standards was equally impressive, with average monthly wages rising from \$62 in 1999 to \$696 in 2008. The proportion of Russians living below the poverty line fell from 24.6% in 2002 to 13.3% in 2007 and 10.7% in 2012.

This economic recovery gave rise to a palpable sense of national rebirth. In 2007, the humiliations of the 1990s were consigned to the past as the collapse in output was fully reversed and GDP surpassed Soviet levels for the first time. Russia passed another psychological milestone in 2007 by paying off the remaining \$22 billion of its Paris Club debts years ahead of schedule.

But on closer inspection there was one main factor for this economic revival, namely the surge in the value of Russia's premier export commodities oil and gas. The price of oil increased from \$10 per barrel in 1998 to a peak of more than \$140 in 2008, while the volume of Russian oil exports rose by 66% in the same period. Although the volume of gas exports remained largely static, their value rose by approximately one-fifth because gas prices are linked to oil. As a result, total annual earnings from energy increased from \$28 billion to \$310 billion in the decade prior to the 2008 crash. According to RAND, this windfall accounted for an estimated 68% of the rise in GDP between 1999 and 2008.

A number of attempts have been undertaken to reform and modernise Russia's economy. In 2000 Putin launched the Gref plan (Programme for the Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Federation for the Period 2000-2010), named after the then economics minister and then Sberbank CEO German Gref. But the plan was abandoned when the 2008 crisis struck when it was only 30% complete.

When Dmitry Medvedev took over as president in 2008 he published a personal manifesto in 2009 and lamented Russia's 'primitive economy' and its 'humiliating dependence on raw materials.' His solution was a modernisation programme intended to turn Russia into a centre of high-tech innovation and a net exporter of technology. The centrepiece of Medvedev's modernisation plan was the Skolkovo Innovation

Centre, a technology hub built on the outskirts of Moscow, touted as Russia's answer to Silicon Valley. Built at a cost of \$4 billion, Skolkovo was designed to attract foreign investors, high-tech businesses and new start-ups and was anticipated to employ 50,000 people on site by 2020.

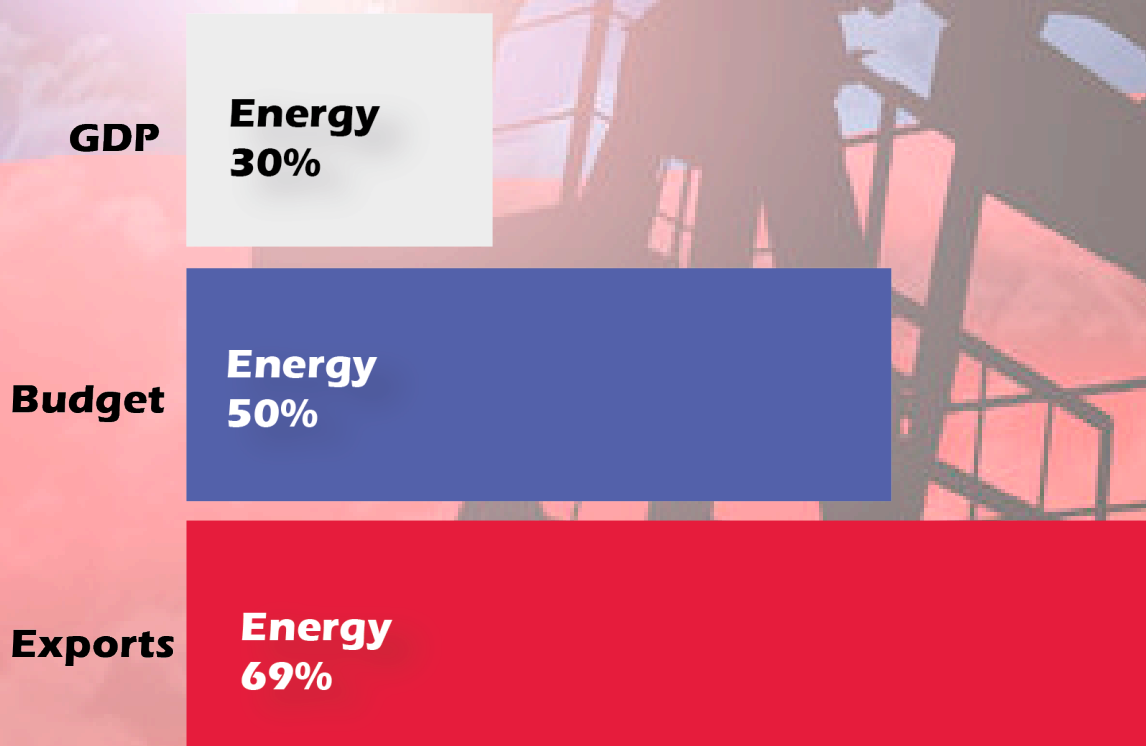
The return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2012 marked a change in fortunes as Skolkovo faced deep budget cuts, pressure from anti-corruption investigators, new restrictions on internet freedom and fallout from the conflict in Ukraine. The result was a brain drain that saw skilled workers and Russian tech companies looking to locate abroad.

In 2011, Putin instructed the Higher School of Economics and the Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration to create a new Strategy 2020, which resulted in the so-called first

round of the May Decrees in 2012. The result of the first round of May Decrees did little to reverse the slide into stagnation, so they were replaced with a new round of May Decrees in 2018 that have been augmented with the 12 national projects that were another attempt to transform Russia's economy.

Russia made no significant progress towards the targets set out in the 2020 strategy. Instead of posting annual growth rates of 6%, the economy has remained essentially static since 2008. If anything, Russia has become even more dependent on the production and export of raw materials than before. Oil and gas made up around 50% of the Soviet Union's export earnings and it still accounts for over 60% today. It doesn't help that the size of Russia's hidden economy is estimated to be 34%. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and international sanctions, Russia's economy has shifted to a war economy.

Snapshot of the Russian Economy





Who are Russia's Power Brokers?

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was in power in Russia for several decades. It possessed an immense security apparatus that included the KGB that maintained a grip on the lives of everyone in the USSR. Through central control of the economy the party controlled the key economic assets of the union, and this placed political and economic control in the hands of the Communist Party.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 an array of factions fought for control of the country's wealth, industries and politics. Boris Yeltsin, leader of the revolt against Communist party emerged from the ashes of the Soviet collapse. Yeltsin brought his relatives and other close associates into the government, and this allowed him to stay in power for the next decade.

The other factions that emerged in the chaos of the 1990s' were the oligarchs. These men rose seemingly out of nowhere, amassing spectacular fortunes as the country around them descended into chaos. Through shady deals, outright corruption, and even murder, these predatory oligarchs seized control of much of Russia's economy, and its fledgling democracy. The mass privatisation of Russia's economy in order to transfer from a command economy to a free market one, saw the oligarchs buy up the newly private companies at rock bottom prices. They then loaned the Kremlin billions of dollars in exchange for shares in Russia's most vital state enterprises when the gov-

ernment defaulted on its international loans and was desperate for cash. The oligarchs then bankrolled the deeply unpopular Boris Yeltsin's 1996 re-election bid.

Yeltsin had managed to keep the security services from power throughout the 1990s by splitting them into different organisations in order to weaken them. In 1999, Boris Yeltsin and his oligarchic allies agreed that an obscure former KGB officer named Vladimir Putin was the man to become Yeltsin's prime minister. He was a nobody, barely a public figure, but he had a reputation for loyalty. They trusted that, once in power, he would look after their interests.

Putin began his career working as a foreign intelligence officer in the KGB for 16 years before resigning in 1991 to pursue a career in politics, where he became an advisor to the mayor of Leningrad. In 1996 he moved to Moscow and became a deputy chief in the Kremlin. Yeltsin trusted him and within two years Putin would become the head of the presidential staff, then the head of the FSB, then Prime Minister and eventually President when Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned in 1999. Whilst the oligarchs believed Putin would be a continuation of Yeltsin, Putin who was originally from the KGB reviled the reform era of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, when Russia lost its empire and saw a host of liberal and pro-Western intellectuals take the helm of Russia. Putin, like many nationalists from the former security apparatus, wanted to reverse all of this.

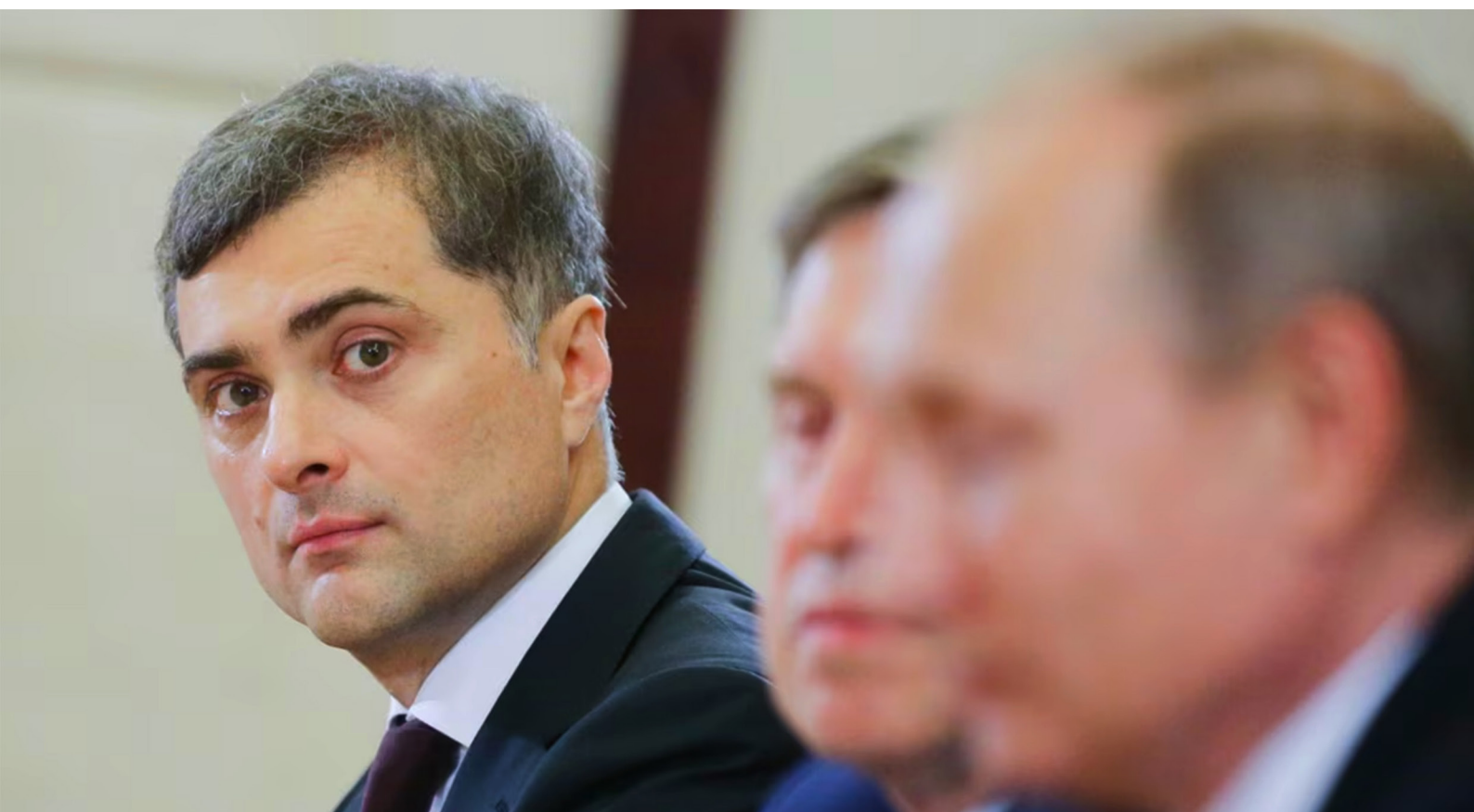
In the summer of 2000, Putin addressed 21 of Russia's richest men (oligarchs) at the Kremlin and offered them a deal. Bend to my authority, stay out of my way, and you can keep your mansions, superyachts, private jets, and multibillion-dollar corporations (corporations that, just a few years before, had been owned by the Russian government). Most oligarchs stayed out of Putin's way, others left Russia, whilst some challenged the unknown president and paid a hefty price. Mikhail Khodorkovsky was the richest man in Russia when Putin became president. In 2003, Khodorkovsky challenged Putin in a televised meeting, alleging corruption at a state-owned oil company. He was also considering a merger with the American oil company Exxon Mobil. He was arrested and charged with tax evasion and imprisoned in Siberia, where he languished for the next decade. The Kremlin took over his oil empire and Putin handed the keys to one of his longtime associates, Igor Sechin. Other oligarchs who reneged on Putin's deal and undermined Putin were thrown into prison, forced into exile or died in suspicious circumstances. The oligarchs that accepted Putin's deal, became loyalists, and got filthy rich during Putin's long reign.

Putin was able to achieve what he did because he was from the security class and utilised his links to navigate through the mess Russia was in and the monsters the crisis created. Putin's power base is the security class who previously were KGB agents or military men who looked on in horror in the 1990s to what was going on with Mother Russia. Putin's support base and support system came to be known

as the Siloviki who would eventually number over five million people and came to dominate Russia's state security, police, the investigative committee (Russia's FBI) and numerous other agencies, such as the National Guard. The Siloviki live by their own rules, rules not afforded to other Russians.

Throughout the 2000s Western-leaning economic technocrats, lawyers, economists and financial experts who became known as the civiliki emerged, who Putin needed in order to develop the Russian economy, especially after the 2008 global economic crisis where many Russian corporations collapsed and needed state bailouts. Vladislav Surkov would come to lead this faction and in time would compete with the Siloviki. Surkov was the deputy of the presidential administration and eventually became Putin's personal advisor. Surkov groomed Dmitry Medvedev and was the chief ideologue behind the spread of nationalism throughout Russia.

From 2012 Putin has firmly moved to the security class as his support base due to the mass protests that spread across the country against the Kremlin's repressive and oppressive grip on power. Putin tilted the balance which was between the Siloviki – the security class and the civiliki who controlled national development and economic growth. Putin moved completely to the Siloviki after the overthrow of Victor Yanukovich in 2014 and the subsequent occupation of Crimea. Power in Russia is now firmly with the security class. The security class have a state rather than the Russian people have a government.





Is Russia a Military Power?

Russia throughout much of its history has viewed power as military power. Russia prides itself on its military capabilities and its ultimate defence of its large territory is its military heft.

The Soviet red army was designed for the mobilisation of massive numbers of reservists to conduct deep mechanised theatre operations in the context of a major war. As the US developed intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, Russia also incorporated these weapons systems into its doctrine and posture. But when in 1979, the Red Army invaded Afghanistan, it was already overstretched, and the Soviet economy was in decline. The whole war was a disaster and undermined the Red Army. When the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan in 1989, worse was still to come.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the newly independent states dividing up the military's assets. The Russian Federation inherited the largest and most productive share of the former Soviet defence industry. Most Russian defence enterprises steadily lost their best workers to Western companies. Russia inherited the Soviet Union's large nuclear arsenal and also her huge conventional arsenal. However up to 90% of the equipment was not maintained and much of it could never be used.[3] The decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to economic and financial chaos leading to the deterioration of arms and equipment due to inadequate servicing.

The decline of the Russian military during the 1990s was regarded as a natural consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union, a crippled Russian economy and a political leadership in crisis. Many of Russia's military assets were allowed to fall into disrepair, while the modernisation of capabilities, or attempts at reform, were minimal. Of what military industry remained in Russia, inefficiency and corruption were rife and it suffered from over-capacity and a lack of research and development investment in advanced weapons systems. The result was a military-industrial complex incapable, with the exception of some niche areas such as air defence missile systems, to keep pace with the technological change taking place. Russia's military faced dramatic budgetary, readiness, and personnel shortfalls, as well as uncertainty of its role as Moscow struggled to determine its place in the post-Cold War world.

The military doctrines that followed the fall of the Soviet Union were an attempt to figure out how to sustain a large military and military industrial complex during a time when Russia was feeling the looming threat of NATO and facing significant domestic separatist threats. The Kremlin's focus on the Russian military and its doctrine started to take serious shape in 2000 under Vladimir Putin. His main focus was to reorganise the Russian military, purge the glut and shift to a tighter and smaller military. A new mindset of a stronger Russia was reflected in a military doctrine formalised in 2009.



Russia Sphere of Influence

Russia views herself as a land-based power, exerting influence in a sphere expanding outward from its Eurasian heartland into the Baltic, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Pacific Rim. Russia's geography has meant that historically whoever rules from Moscow would need to expand in order to protect the heartland. This is why historically Russia has always been a land power looking to expand into her surrounding territory. Russia's military doctrine is based upon defending her large territory and projecting power into the former Soviet Republics. Russia's military is not looking to be deployed more than 300 km from her borders as this is well beyond her goals and capabilities.

Georgia 2008 - When Russia went to war with Georgia in 2008 the Russian military was still a Soviet era mobilisation force structure almost completely equipped with outdated Soviet-era equipment. The war was given significant western media coverage and was seen as a major Russian victory. Many western intelligence agencies began to see Russia as a serious military power that should be taken seriously. The Georgian war was a very limited operation, it only lasted for five days. But Moscow realised a lot of their equipment did not physically work, especially on the communication side, which was critical for modern warfare. Russia performed so badly to the point soldiers were forced to use telephones in Georgia to communicate with their units back in Russia. The war made clear that Russia's military had

all kinds of shortcomings in equipment, training, battlefield coordination, and intelligence.

Syria 2015 - Russia's intervention in Syria also saw many around the world designate Russia as a superpower. The intervention in the Middle East, the resupply of troops and the saving of the Bashar al-Assad regime definitely afforded Russia global credibility. But Russia's Syrian intervention was really a small to medium operation for Russia. At most Russia had 5,000 troops in Syria and the sole purpose of the Russian forces was to carry out air attacks across Syria. The US, despite all its rhetoric, didn't carry out attacks against Russian forces. As the rebel groups lacked any air power Russia's presence was never under threat. Russia's Syrian intervention is therefore not a good example of Russia's military capabilities and proves little in terms of its capabilities as it was a unique and limited intervention.

Crimea 2014 - Similarly, when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, an intervention which gained Russia a lot of military credibility, there are some large caveats to this victory. Russia already had a military presence in Crimea prior to its invasion. Russia not only had forces in place at its Black Sea Fleet, but legitimate transit arrangements that were leveraged for a covert operation and the introduction of key military capabilities. Crimea really stands as a singular operation against a particular target and at a distinct time of opportunity when Ukraine was vulnerable.

We can infer a good deal about mobility, logistics, and the speed with which national decision-making results in use of force, but this operation told us little about the warfighting ability of Russia's armed forces against a conventional opponent and what lessons, if any, can be extrapolated to other conflicts.

Russia inherited a bloated, outdated and massive military from the Soviet Union. The 1990s saw Russia in disarray as the nation fell apart, politically, socially and economically. Russian leaders couldn't pay soldiers or replace ageing Soviet weapons systems and as a result much of Russia's military fell into disrepair. Russia was in no place to go to war in the 1990s and that's why for a decade Chechen rebels fought Russia to a stalemate. It was Russia's divide and rule tactics, rather than its military that gave it victory in Chechnya in 2000. Ever since, Russia has been very selective in the conflicts it's been involved in, in order to not expose the true state of Russia's military. At the same time it projected very well new weapons prototypes and next generation weapons systems to build an image of military superiority. It did this even though the ability of its defence industry to mass produce those capabilities have been severely lacking. The wars in Georgia, Crimea and the Donbas did not require Russia to carry out large conventional warfare. Whilst Russia no doubt has significant military capability, it is not the Red Army and question marks remain if Russia's military has the capabilities to achieve Moscow's political ambitions.





What Role Does Wagner Play in Russian Strategy?

Wagner has garnered significant global attention as it has popped up in places such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Serbia and Donbass. They are seen by many as Russia's unconventional forces.

At the height of her power the Soviet Union possessed a military that convinced many it would conquer Eurasia. The Red Army and the KGB were signs of Russia's hard power. The Soviet Union indeed saw her power through a military lens. The decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to economic and financial chaos leading to the deterioration of arms and equipment due to inadequate servicing. Today Russia is nowhere close to challenging America's global dominance and as a result Moscow began using hybrid warfare as a central component of her national security strategy, particularly in her dealings with the west. Because she no longer boasts the overwhelming conventional forces needed to stare down the US and reclaim the lands it lost in the crumbling of the Soviet Union, Russia has had to turn to other means to maximise her advantages and minimise her weaknesses.

This is where private military companies such as the Wagner Group come into the picture. The company has in the last few years been involved in several international conflicts which are strategic for Russia. In both Belarus and Ukraine, the security company operated right next to NATO's eastern flank, underscoring how useful a political tool Wagner became for Russia.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in most Russian soldiers becoming unemployed and as

a result they informally banded together to sell their services throughout the world. By the 21st century these former soldiers operated through a handful of private security companies in Russia, one of them, the Slavonic Corps, officially created in 2013 in response to the Syrian war consisted of former Russian special forces whose primary task was to protect the oil fields near Deir el-Zour in Syria.

Among the members of the Slavonic Corps was Dmitry Utkin, a former Special Forces commander in the GRU, Russia's military intelligence unit, who was referred to by his colleagues by his call sign, 'Wagner.' Although officially they were illegal, the Slavonic Corps were deployed to areas vital to Russian interests. One of the Wagner Group's biggest benefactors was billionaire Yevgeny Prigozhin due to oil and mining operations in Africa and the Middle East, who was a close friend of President Putin.

The Wagner group has since expanded its reach considerably, particularly in Africa. It has trained elements of the Sudanese military. It has participated in military parades in the Central African Republic (CAR). Its most high-profile client is Libya. Over 1,000 Wagner members fought alongside the Libyan National Army, led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

For Russia the allure of private military companies is they don't have the political baggage of total state affiliation, which gives Russia political leverage and manoeuvrability. They are well trained; they have their own equipment and training facilities, the primary one located in Molkindo in Krasnodar Krai near the Black Sea, and even have their own airfield. Yet,

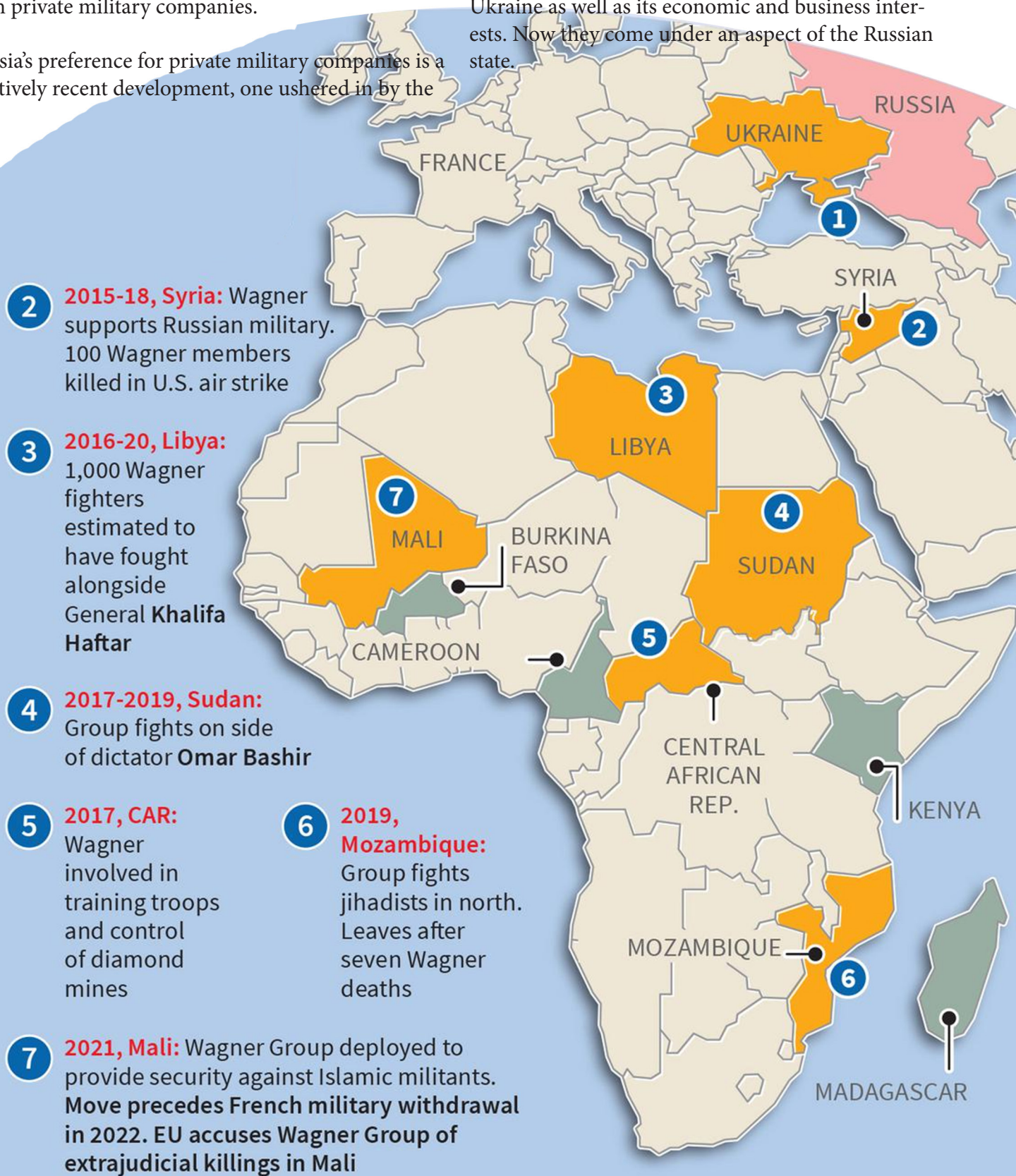
they are also relatively cheap on the global market. Salaries for the average soldier start at \$2,000 per month but can go as high as \$20,000 per month. The low end of that spectrum is higher than enlisted pay in the Russian military.

Groups like Wagner have secured facilities that conventional militaries can't or won't for political purposes and that makes Wagner useful for limited-scale conflicts. They give Russia another contingent of forces to work with. When Putin announced plans to partially withdraw from Syria, he in reality offset this with private military companies.

Russia's preference for private military companies is a relatively recent development, one ushered in by the

conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, which made it clear to Moscow that the Wagner Group is an effective supplementary global tool. They fill out the areas where Russia does not and cannot send its army.

Ever since Progozins rebellion back in June 2023 against the Army Chief and The Minister of defence who wanted to subsume Wagner onto the state and since Progozins death in August 2023. Wagner soldiers joined the Ministry of defence as well as the National Guard, Rosgvardia. Wagner has kept its brand and continued its presence in Africa and in Ukraine as well as its economic and business interests. Now they come under an aspect of the Russian state.





Why Does Russia Insist on a Sphere of Influence?

The most important arena for Russia's foreign policy is its periphery. Russia sees the borderlands adjacent to her in Europe as its sphere of influence, with Russia having exclusive control and power in these territories.

Russia's most defining geographic characteristic is her indefensibility. Unlike most powerful countries, Russia's core region, Moscow, has no barriers to protect it and thus has been invaded several times. Russian history can be summed up as expanding her geographic territory in order to establish strategic depth between the Russian core and the countless enemies surrounding it. Whoever the leader has been in Moscow they have all attempted to push Russia's borders as far as possible to natural barriers. Russian history has been one of expanding to the Carpathian Mountains (across Ukraine and Moldova), the Caucasus Mountains (past Georgia and into Armenia) and the Tian Shan on the far side of Central Asia.

The Northern European Plain has always been a major hole as this flat expanse of land from

northern France, through Germany, Poland all the way to Moscow has been a major thoroughfare of western encroachment into Russia. Russia has always tried to overcome this by expanding and claiming as much territory to the West of Moscow. Russia in the past occupied the Baltic states, Belarus, Poland and even Germany. When Russia could not extend her national borders it established buffer zones between Russia's core and other population centres, deep in Europe. The sheer distance needed to conquer Moscow is what ultimately led to the failure of Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler.

At the height of the Soviet Union, Moscow enjoyed an extensive buffer zone that stretched well into Central Europe, the Caspian and East Asia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost most of these territories and has been on the defensive ever since. In 1989 St. Petersburg was about 1,000 miles from NATO troops. Until recently, that distance was about 200 miles and continues to drop. Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia are for Russia the recent pieces in an age-old struggle.

How Important is Ukraine in Russia's Sphere of Influence?

Russia

UKRAINE

In its recent history Ukraine was the most important republic out of the 15 former member republics of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was one of the Union's largest republics and it remains the breadbasket of Russia. Ukraine's proximity to Moscow led to the development of its energy resources and the construction of energy infrastructure and pipelines. Due to this Russia supplied 80% of Ukraine's natural gas and most of Russia's energy to Europe transited through Ukraine until the 2022 war broke out. This for long linked Ukraine's energy directly to Russia's. Ukraine is crucial to Russia as its industrial, agricultural and energy sectors are integrated with Russia's and it is a buffer between it and Europe.

For Russia, Ukraine is a critical piece of real estate that successive Russian leaders have all seen as an existential threat if not in Russian hands and control. Russia connects to many regions of the world via land borders so having buffers has historically been Russia's method to defend itself. Expanding Russia's borders and having buffer nations gives Russia the strategic depth it needs. Russia has been regularly invaded in its history and despite the unlikelihood of this taking place today, it's not lost upon Russia's leaders that this can change.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became an independent nation and the US and Europe

expanded east via NATO and the EU all the way to Russia's borders. In some cases the US utilised colour revolutions to overthrow Pro-Russian leaders in former Soviet republics and when the Baltic nations all joined NATO and the EU, Russia's worst nightmares were coming true. In 2014 the US and Europe jumped at the opportunity when an uprising in Ukraine eventually led to the overthrow of the Pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich. The uprisings were supported by the west and Europe and the loss of Ukraine posed a major threat to Moscow.

Russia responded to the loss of Ukraine in early 2015 by utilising its naval presence in Crimea and annexing the peninsula and then carried out a referendum to legitimise its actions. Then Russia supported non-uniformed soldiers and militias to annex parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk territories in Eastern Ukraine. After this the Minsk and Normandy protocols were agreed between Ukraine and the pro-Russia rebels in the rebel territories. Germany, France and Russia oversaw this agreement which legitimised the actions Russia had undertaken.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was to really finish the job it started back in 2015. Whilst Russia struggled to carve out a rapid victory, this nevertheless shows the importance Russia places on Ukraine.

Why Did Russia Struggle in its 2022 Invasion of Ukraine?



Russia had many assumptions about its adversary which led it to go to war with huge levels of complacency. All armies have assumptions about their enemy when they go to war. Russia did not expect to fight a high-intensity battle in Ukraine and bet on a quick collapse of the Ukrainian state and military. Russian assumptions went further and included Kiev falling in a matter of days. Russia also assumed Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky was so unpopular the Ukrainian people would not oppose his overthrow. All of these assumptions which seem to have been based on little intelligence and a lot of hubris led Russia to be overconfident and deploy forces based on the best-case scenario rather than the worst-case scenario. Russia did not make the right preparation for the war due to these assumptions.

The US, through its intelligence agencies, knew of Russia's Ukraine invasion plan. US officials told Russia it knew of its war plans, and warned them against the impending invasion. The US even leaked Russia's war plan days before Russia invaded. But despite all this, Russia still went ahead with its invasion, despite all the details of how it was going to fight being in the open. For months, the White House made highly unusual releases of intelligence findings about Russian President Vladimir Putin's plans to attack Ukraine.

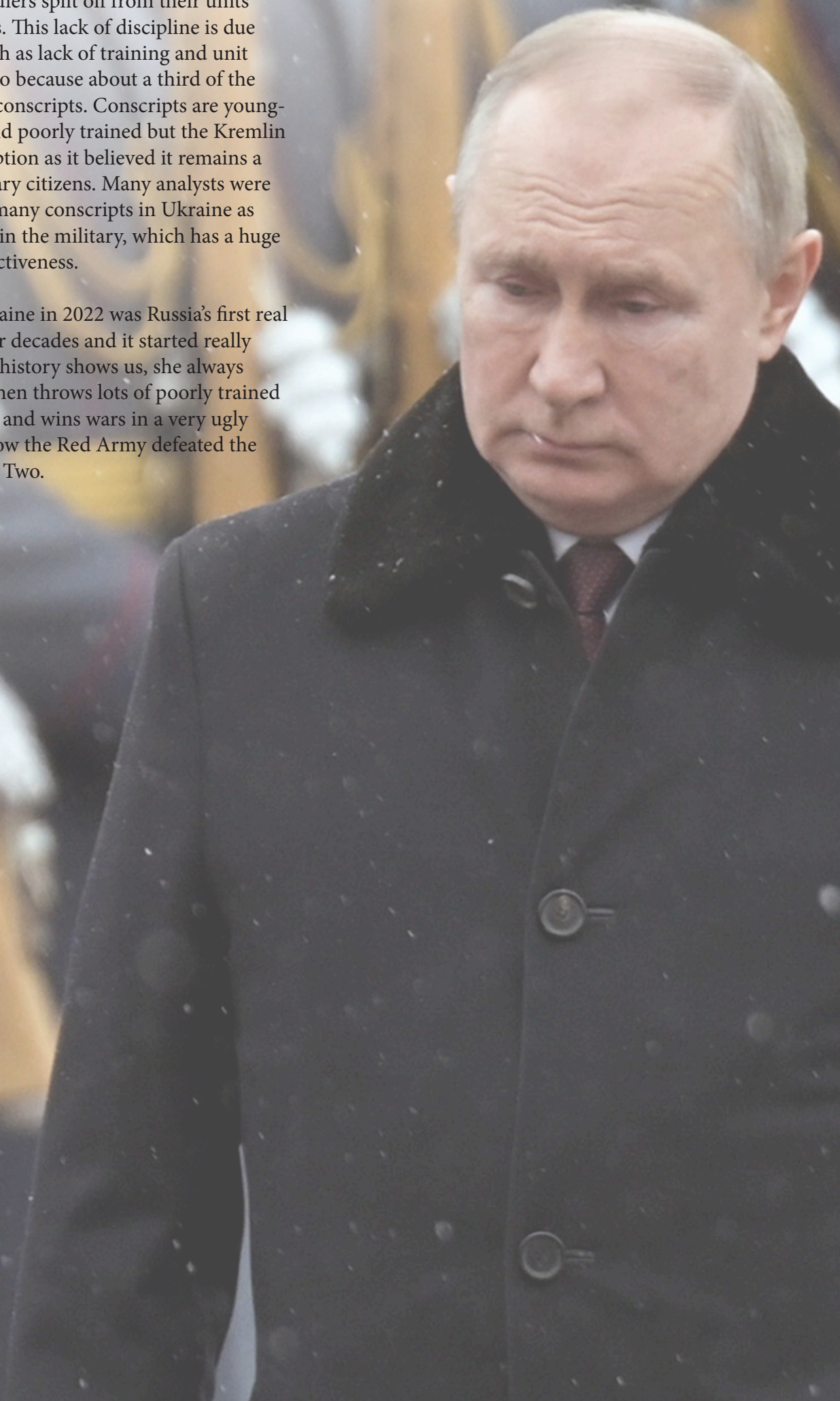
Despite all of the war plans being made public, Putin decided to still go ahead anyway. With Russia's war plans in the open this is likely what allowed Ukrainian forces to focus its limited resources to key nodes of Russia's invasion giving them an immense advantage.

Russian forces launched an invasion of Ukraine with a "three thrusts" battle strategy. Russia struck from the north from Belarus towards Kyiv, from the south towards Kherson and Odessa and into the Donbas from the east. But there was no coordination between these three forces. There was in fact no integrated battle plan, there were merely three separate theatres of operations. There was no overall commander, but three commanders in charge of each thrust. It took two months for Gen Alexander Dvornikov to be appointed overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine. When Kremlin officials wanted updates, they would have to contact the commanders in charge on the battlefield front. Up to 27 Russian generals and commanders died in the war as they were forced to move towards the frontlines to get accurate assessments of the war.

The performance of Russia's army in the Ukraine war bore little resemblance to the immaculate fighting

force of Red Square parades and Kremlin propaganda. Numerous videos made their way online that showed Russian soldiers split off from their units walking down roads. This lack of discipline is due to many factors, such as lack of training and unit cohesion. But it's also because about a third of the Russian army were conscripts. Conscripts are younger, less motivated and poorly trained but the Kremlin maintained conscription as it believed it remains a civic duty for ordinary citizens. Many analysts were surprised to see so many conscripts in Ukraine as they are forced to join the military, which has a huge impact on their effectiveness.

The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was Russia's first real conventional war for decades and it started really poorly. But Russian history shows us, she always starts wars poorly, then throws lots of poorly trained troops at the enemy and wins wars in a very ugly manner. This was how the Red Army defeated the Nazis in World War Two.





Are Russia and China in an Alliance?

Whilst Both the Soviet Union and China emerged from World War Two as the largest communist nations, relations quickly deteriorated as Moscow came to view China as a poor nation that could not contribute to global revolution. Things got worse in 1961 in the Sino-Soviet Split with a brief border war in 1969. With China opening relations with the US in the 1970s relations remained poor until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

For the next two decades from 1991 Russia has worked to build relations with China. In 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin made his first official visit to China. In 1996, at the end of Chinese Premier Li Peng's visit to Moscow, Russia and China issued a joint communique pledging to build an "equal and reliable partnership." This reinforced the China-Russian view that the US was their main competitor in the world. In 2001, the close relations between the two countries were formalised with the "Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation," a twenty-year strategic, economic, and military treaty. A month before the treaty was signed, the two countries joined with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Politically, Russia and China criticise the global order and the US dominance of it. They criticise the role of the dollar and how US dominated organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank indebted much of the world. Russia has projected an image that Russia and China are united in their anti-US alignment and that both nations share "no limits" to their commitments. Both nations do differ on their vision of the world. Russia believes the world should recognise its sphere of influence and her right to the territories surrounding Russia. China looks upon Eurasia from Europe

to the Pacific as an integrated whole criss-crossed by economic corridors connected by belts and roads.

On the energy front, Russia was looking to reduce its dependency upon European energy markets for some time. In 2014 Russia and China signed a 30-year gas deal worth \$400 billion. The infrastructure for this meant Russia's reliance on Europe would also reduce. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and sanctions and embargoes, Russia replaced Saudi Arabia to become China's biggest oil supplier.

On the military front, Russia has been a major supplier for China since the west imposed an embargo in 1989 due to the Tiananmen square protests. But as the 2000s progressed, China focused on domestic weapon designs and manufacturing, while only importing critical military products from Russia, such as jet engines. China sought to become independent in its defence sector and become competitive in global arms markets. As a result, Russia stopped selling certain military platforms over concerns China was reverse engineering Russian Su-35s and Tupolev Tu-22Ms. From 2018 Russia has been carrying out larger military exercises with China.

In 2013 in a state visit to Moscow by Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin remarked that the two nations were forging a special relationship. The two countries have enjoyed close political, economic and military relations and they support each other on various global issues. Russia and China officially declared their relations "Not allies, but better than allies." Russia has over time become more dependent on China, especially since it was hit with large-scale international sanctions when it invaded Ukraine in 2022.



Can Russia and Europe have Cordial Relations?

Russia's relations with Europe have historically been contentions and both have tried to expand territory into the other. During the Russian Czar, Russia was economically and technologically inferior and tried to catch up to European standards. European powers, one after the other invaded Russia and this is why Russia still today doesn't trust Europe.

Under communist rule Moscow became more powerful than many of the European powers and expanded its border all the way to Germany. Both Europe and Moscow prepared for war along a line stretching from Norway down to Turkey. This all ended abruptly in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In the post-Soviet world Moscow watched as the European Union swallowed up Soviet Republic after Soviet Republic. Russia responded through a variety of means, with the aim of keeping Europe divided. Moscow attempted to use its influence with former Soviet republics to bring pro-Russian politicians to power. This has largely been a failure, such as Ukraine where Russia had the most influence, but still the nation has been dominated by pro-western leaders. Russia used its large energy resources to influ-

ence some European nations. Germany's dependence on Russian natural gas has been highlighted by many over the years. For Germany, Russia provides cheap natural gas in volumes no one in the world could. The Soviet Union built the pipeline infrastructure and after 1991 German dependency on Russian energy only grew. Whilst this has not translated into policy dependency, once Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Germany cut its energy ties with Russia, and it remains to be seen if they will ever get back to the level they were.

With France, Russia has engaged in military ties with deals that included purchasing large naval vessels. France was desperate to find customers to keep its defence industry afloat, but with Russia's intervention in Ukraine this was all cancelled.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine beginning in 2015 and the full-scale invasion in 2022 has united Europe against Russia like never before. Europe has cut its energy ties, despite its dependency on Russian energy. At the end of 2022 relations between Europe and Russia were at the lowest point since the Cold War.



The Quest for American Respect

Russia views itself as a global power, a people with a long history and a civilisation that should be respected. After World War Two both the US and Soviet Union were the global powers and despite their animosity during the Cold War there were many areas where both cooperated, such as forcing the European powers to free their colonies as well as détente from 1961. For Moscow global agreements and negotiations were all indicators of her power and influence. But this didn't change the underlying tension between both as both nations had different views of how the world should look as both believed they possessed a way of life better than what the other had.

After 1991 Russia focused on its internal problems and relations improved with the US. After Vladimir Putin became President of Russia in 2000, he initially sought to improve relations with the US. The two countries cooperated on issues such as counter-terrorism and arms control. Putin worked closely with US President George W. Bush on the war in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. The US saw parallels with its own war on terror and Russia's war in Chechnya.

But as this was going on NATO was expanding into former Soviet territory and then for three years beginning 2003 colour revolutions took place in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan where the Soviet architecture was overthrown and western leaning leaders came to power. As a result, tensions began to rise between Russia and the US, especially as Putin

began to push back after consolidating his position domestically. Putin and the Kremlin began to see US policies as a threat to its security. This culminated in Russia's five day war with Georgia in 2008. The war came to be seen by the west as Russia's return to power and Russia began to get the much-needed respect it felt it deserved.

Putin drew up a strategy where he would protect Russia by pushing Russian influence in the adjacent territories, the former soviet republics, the Baltics, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This created tensions with the US as Russia bumped up against American attempts to win over this region. Russia made use of economic ties, political influence, military relations and energy relations to bring the former Soviet republics under Moscow's influence. The results have been mixed.

Despite Russia working with the US in Syria, this didn't change the underlying relations. When Victor Yanukovich was overthrown in 2014 in the Euro-maidan uprising, Russia moved, sensing that enough was enough. Russia annexed Crimea and began the long battle with the west, which ultimately culminated in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia believes it has been on the receiving end of western expansion. It feels the west supports anti-Russia forces in areas Russia considers its sphere of influence. As a result, today, Russia and the US are as far apart as they have ever been.



Is Russia the New Power in the Middle East?

The Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015 has been met with a wave of comments claiming that Russia has regained its position in the Middle East. Commentators from across the political spectrum view the US in decline and consider developments in Syria as evidence of America's waning regional influence. Many see Moscow having entered into the void created by the decline in the US position, as *foreignpolicy.com* put it: “...the Syrian war is over, and America lost.”^[4] Some commentators went further: “Obama thought Syria would be Russia's Vietnam: in fact, the Middle East has become Putin's playground. Thanks to diplomacy, arms sales and nuclear reactors - and Trump's policy chaos - Russia is back, big time.”^[5]

Russia's intervention in Syria and interactions in the Middle East are all cited as evidence of Russia's growing power in the region. Russia's resurrection of bases in Syria are cited as evidence of Russia's military muscle in the Middle East. Similarly, Russia's military sales and diplomatic relations with Egypt and Libya (especially with Khalifa Haftar) are cited as evidence of political and military heft. The energy deals Russia signed with Saudi Arabia in February 2018 were described by *rt.com* as: “...challenging US dominance in the Gulf region.”^[6]

Russia has been attempting to develop economic ties with the Middle East but, apart from Turkey, these efforts have not succeeded to any significant degree. The level of economic cooperation with the Middle East remains modest. In the early 2010s, the value of

cooperation (trade and services) with the entire Arab world was around \$10–12 billion a year. Russian exports to countries of the ‘broader’ Middle East accounted for around 1.7% of total Russian exports in the years 2011–2013, rising to 2.1% and 2.5% in the years 2014 and 2015, respectively. Trade even with Israel (\$2.5–3 billion a year) and Iran (around \$4 billion a year) is, at most, modest. The only country which stands outside of this picture is Turkey, whose trade with Russia has reached \$30 billion. Egypt is the only Arab state to report trade with Russia exceeding \$1 billion a year. Russia's number one export is energy, which is something the region has plenty of. But after intra-regional trade (9%) the EU is the region's main trade partner, supplying 30% of all goods and services.

Russia's foray into Syria and showcasing of new military equipment has seen many view this as the military ascent of Russia. The Middle East imports 32% of global weapons, the most of any region in the world, but Russia supplies a small amount of this. In 2016 Russia sold \$21.4 billion in defence equipment to the region, Russia exports more to Asia, which is a far more important region for it. One state, Algeria, accounts for nearly half of that sum. Russia does supply to Egypt, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Sudan but Algeria and Iraq make up 93% of all Russia's arms exports to the Middle East. Russia's defence industry suffers from numerous problems from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decade of chaos that ensued. Russian weaponry lags far behind the US in terms of effectiveness and technological inno-

vation and now China wields a level of commercial influence Russia cannot compete with. Syria which has been showcasing Russia's military superiority: one must keep in mind that its weapons met no real opposition on the battlefield. Despite Moscow's tests and displays, questions about the full extent of these weapons' capabilities remain.

On the political front Russia has presented no policies on the region's key issues. There is no Russian plan for the Palestinian issue; Russia in fact subscribes to America's two state solution. The Kurds in the region, the Sunni-Shi'ah schism, the Islamic faith and its role in the region, the relations between the autocrats and the people, Russia has neither presented nor pursued any political plan for these. Russia has never had such a level of influence to even be involved at such a depth in the region. Whilst Russian

officials may meet with the region's autocrats it is the US who dominates the politics of the region, despite not all US plans succeeding.

The simple fact is the regions which are critical to Russia and the ones it seeks to dominate, with political plans and influence are Europe, the Baltics, the Caucasus and Central Asia. These are all buffer zones for Russia and without controlling these, the regions beyond these zones are beyond Russian capabilities. Even at the height of the Cold War the Middle East was not the critical region for Russia, despite it having more capabilities than it has today.

Despite Russia's relations with Iran, Turkey and Syria, Russia's political, economic and military presence is severely limited to pose a challenge to the US in the wider region.





Are Russia and Iran in a strategic relationship?

Russia and Iran have a long history of wars, disputes, mistrust and rivalry. The Russian Empire as it expanded into the Caucasus and central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries bumped up against Persia. Several wars ensued and many border disputes were settled with Russia imposing settlements as Persia was too weak to push back. During the communist period Iran was firmly in the western anti-communist camp under the Shah. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the two nations have generally enjoyed close and cordial relations. Many analysts consider the relationship to be strategic.

Iran's anti-American positions and decades of sanctions and isolation has provided Russia with the opportunity to be on the side of a country that in its public relations criticises the US. Russia positioned itself as the defender of Iran against the US in the Middle East. Russia has promised to supply Iran with sophisticated weapons platforms, civilian nuclear technology and military equipment in order to

stand against the US in the Middle East. Russia, however, has interests in its periphery that will always trump every other region. Whilst Russia propagates its support for Iran, it has largely never delivered on them and as Iran is desperate for support, Russia has never needed to fulfil many of its promises. It is not in Russia's interests for there to be a confrontation between the US and Iran, as Russia doesn't plan to come to Iran's aid. After significant US pressure, Russia has never provided Iran with the S300 or S400 missile defence system, despite always saying it will. Russia however has provided the latest version of this system to both India and Turkey.

For Russia, she has been able to use Iran for its own interests. Presenting relations as strategic provides Russia with clout and influence on the global stage. Russia doesn't need to make good on this promise, as Iran is desperate for any foreign support. For Russia Iran is a low-cost venture which has delivered way more results than the costs incurred.



Is Russia Returning to Africa?

On the 22nd October 2019 Russia hosted its first-ever pan-African summit in the city of Sochi. More than 40 African leaders were in attendance for the two-day event, many of whom hail from countries Russia has never had exceptionally close relationships with. In an interview, Russian president Vladimir Putin said: *“The two-day summit... is an effort to revive former Cold War relations, when African regimes often allied with Moscow in the ideological contest with the US before the Soviet Union’s collapse, It’s “an unprecedented, benchmark event.”*[7]

The summit saw Russia striking business deals with some African leaders that included nuclear technology and mining. It set an amount worth \$190 billion for its investments in Africa. Moscow’s previous investments had been limited to North Africa, but with this summit Russia wanted to diversify its investments into other parts of Africa.

Moscow invested in new military capabilities on the continent, including nuclear systems that remain the most significant existential threat to the US. Exporting arms into Africa is Russia’s attempt to interfere in the domestic political affairs of some African countries to win over some rulers who will advance her interests.

Moscow has been a notable provider of low cost, low sophistication weapons to Africa for nearly 60 years.

During the Cold War, Russia supported various rebel groups and regimes across Africa in an attempt to compete with Western influence. This strategy also included directly supporting proxy wars against US and European-supported forces. Today, Russia’s direct involvement in Africa is nowhere near where it was during the Cold War era. But its political and economic relationships have survived in large part to the limited overturn of governance in many African countries. The leaders or future leaders that the Soviet Union educated and trained all still hold significant influence in many of these countries.

However, since the majority of African governments, if not all, are under the influence of Europe and US and due to Russia’ political weakness compared to US and Europe, the attempt faced major challenges and setbacks. Russia has a military presence in the Central African Republic, which is described as “strategically important” and a “buffer zone between the Muslim north and Christian south.

Unlike the Soviet days Moscow can no longer rely on the wave of local marxism and pan-Africanism that fuelled local support behind its Africa policy nearly 40 years ago. In the era of independence wars and postcolonial struggles, these political movements saw partnering with the Soviets as key to freeing their countries from Western colonial oppression. Such outspoken movements have since died out, though that hasn’t kept Russia from continuing to peddle

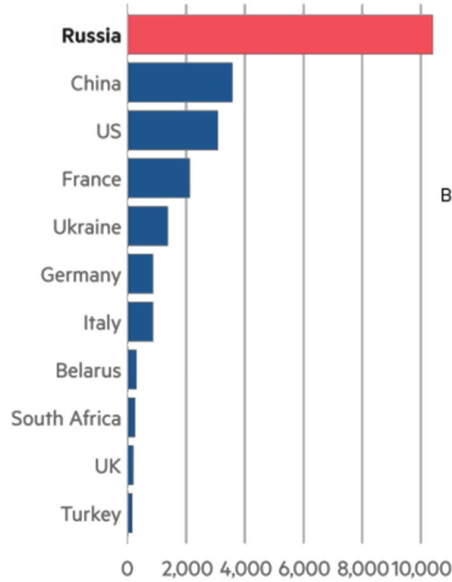
the narrative of opposing Western imperialism in its pitches to African countries.

Russia's main challenge is that other major powers are already looting Africa's extractive resources through their so-called 'business development gatherings' such as the US-Africa Business Forum,

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and Japan's Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD). Despite Russia's exportation of food substances worth \$25 billion and arms worth \$1 billion to Africa, it is a drop in the ocean compared to China, which in its exchange of goods with Africa has made a profit of \$204 billion!

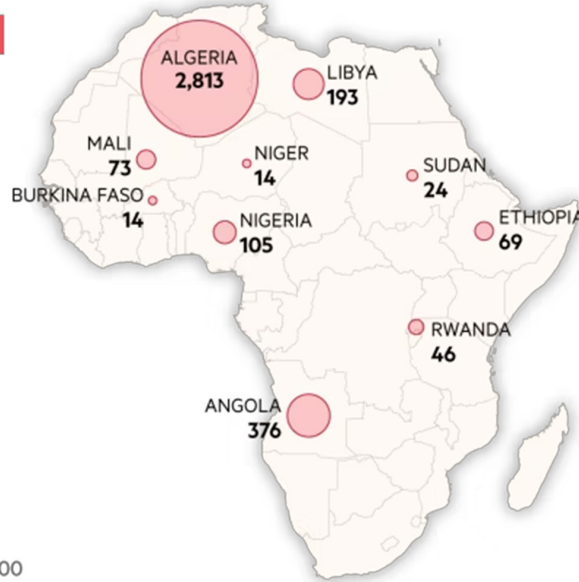
Top exporters of arms to Africa

2010-2021 (TIV*)



Top African importers of Russian arms

2017-2021 (TIV*)



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute *Trend-indicator value is a bespoke metric based on weapons production costs used to represent the transfer of military resources. © FT

Russia Ranks Cooperation in Africa

Documents leaked in December 2018 detailed levels of cooperation between Russia and governments in Africa.



Source: The Guardian



Can Russia Rely on India?

Russia and India enjoyed close strategic, military and economic relations during the Cold War. Although India maintained a non-aligned position through the Cold War, a close relationship between the US and Pakistan (India's rival) brought the former Soviet Union and India closer together. The Soviet Union was the biggest arms exporter to India and supported the development of India's public sector-led economy before liberalisation reforms in the 1990s. When the west imposed sanctions on India after its nuclear tests in 1974, the Soviet Union assisted India's civil nuclear program. The Soviet Union also supported India's war to liberate Bangladesh in 1971 and India tacitly supported Russia's occupation of Afghanistan. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has tried to maintain close relations with India but as India's economy liberalised and foreign investment and foreign companies flocked to India, Delhi has prioritised its other relations over Russia.

Russia supplies roughly half of India's total arms imports and 70% of its advanced military equipment, including battle tanks, aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered submarines and fighter aircraft. This reliance on Russian arms is unlikely to decrease in the medium term, as good ties with Moscow and constant defence supplies are all the more relevant at a time when India's relations with its regional rivals China and Pakistan are tense. In addition, India lacks options to quickly diversify its defence imports. This

is why India tried to ensure the international sanctions imposed on Russian companies did not affect bilateral arms trade by entering into a rupee-ruble trade arrangement with Russia to bypass the SWIFT system for global financial transactions. Since the outset of the war in Ukraine, India maintained a neutral position and refused to directly denounce Russia's actions, both in public and through votes at the United Nations. At the same time, India has also been careful not to breach any western sanctions on Russia, which has prevented a conflict with the west. India took the opportunity to source discounted oil from Russia as such oil exports were not sanctioned.

Despite its close ties with Russia, India seeks to have cordial relations with the west in general and the US in particular as a part of its balanced foreign policy. The strategic convergence to deter China's rise and influence has resulted in strong alignment in recent years with India becoming a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

Russia's relations with India are now primarily around defence equipment and whilst Russia tries to present its relations with India as some sort of bloc with other anti-US nations (such as the BRICS), Russia cannot rely upon India who has its own agenda, where China is its main priority and where Delhi doesn't take sides in any geopolitical conflicts.



Is Russia a Power in Latin America?

In its push to establish a global communist utopia, the Soviet Union encouraged exporting its revolution abroad to “liberate” workers around the world. One of these places was the Latin American continent. In creating problems in Washington’s own backyard, Moscow hoped to distract the US and its resources from other regions.

Moscow embraced the Cuban Revolution and attempted to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, a gambit that ultimately led to the Cuban Missile Crisis. But even after the Soviets removed their missiles from Cuba, they continued to use the island as a beachhead in the Western Hemisphere from which to expand their influence from Canada to Chile. It supported communist parties in the Americas, while also training, financing and arming a host of marxist terrorist and insurgent groups across the region. In South and Central America Moscow’s battle-hardened Cuban allies Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s carried the flag. Moscow was able to spread communism in Latin America and embroiled the US in a series of efforts that involved high-profile events such as the 1954 coup in Guatemala, the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba, the 1973 coup in Chile and support for the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s.

With the demise of communism in 1991 and the internal challenges Russia faced, relations with Latin America waned. Ever since Putin became paramount

leader, he has expanded relations with Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua and presented this as an anti-US alliance. Russia is working with former Soviet allies in Latin America to undermine US influence and distract Washington from Moscow’s activities elsewhere.

Russia uses Latin America to undermine US influence, but unlike the communist era Russia’s interactions have mainly focused on military deals and not on more strategic matters. Russia’s influence in Latin America remains modest overall, as Moscow lacks the will and the resources to significantly expand its presence in a region of the world where it does not have key interests. Russia ultimately does not view Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, which are located on the other side of the world, the same way it does countries within its periphery like Belarus or Ukraine, which it supports financially and politically. The Kremlin is thus unlikely to significantly increase trade relations or financial assistance to governments in Latin America. Without significant financial aid from Moscow, regional regimes are unlikely to risk triggering more sanctions and pressure from the US by allowing Russian troops or strategic weapons systems to be deployed to their countries.



Russia and Central Asia

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and the iron curtain fell the US came to see Central Asia as the next Middle East due to its hydrocarbon resources. The Neocons in the US wanted to link Central Asia with South Asia and they came to see Afghanistan as the critical link that would sever Moscow's influence over Central Asia

The Soviet Union used Central Asia as a raw materials supplier for the Soviet Industrial plant, but with the region being so far from the heartland the region's hydrocarbon resources were never developed. But as the iron curtain fell Central Asia would remain important for Russia as the region was to be a buffer from the Islamic world and Asia and future as energy and economic partners.

In 1991 when five new republics emerged in Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Moscow realised despite its weakness it needed to maintain strong ties and strong links with these new nations. Russia immediately established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was a loose Soviet Union, but many former Soviet Republics did not join and others left as the years went by. Russia established various organisations for the Central Asian nations to join. These ranged from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the CSTO's Rapid Reaction Forces.

Whilst the Communist Party collapsed in the Soviet Union and lost power as it was excluded from parliament by Boris Yeltsin. The heads of the Communist Party inherited power in the new Central Asian

nations. The leaders of these states during the Soviet Union continued to rule in the new republics after the Soviet Union collapsed.

It was Soviet policy to settle ethnic Russians in central Asia in order to maintain its influence. These ethnic Russians continue today to make up sizable minorities. A quarter of Kazakhstan's population consists of ethnic Russians, whilst Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have up to 10% of their populations consisting of ethnic Russians.

Due to the historical links between this region and Russia, Moscow remains the key export and import market for Central Asia and due to this Russia has been able to induct the region's nations into customs unions and the Eurasian Union. In this way Russia has been able to maintain ties with the region and ensured the US has not been able to gain influence over the region.



Can Russia Become the Global Hegemon?

It is extremely unlikely Russia will become the global hegemon. This is because despite all the noise that comes from the Kremlin and western media there are many things moving against Russia as well as a number of long-term challenges. Russia has managed to achieve a lot with a weak hand, but it's reached the limits of what can be achieved with the cards it's been dealt.

Demographics — Russia's population is in decline. A nation's population affects everything from the number of soldiers, tax revenues and social cohesion. The decline in the Slavic population is leading to minorities, especially Muslims, to be a significant proportion of the population. This is already leading to social cohesion issues and will only get worse. Russia will face significant internal issues going forward. It cannot be engaged abroad effectively when it has so many issues at home.

Ideology - Russia today has nothing in the realm of ideology, values, thought, philosophy or culture to spread around the world. Russian foreign policy is not aimed at advancing any values, Russia has no global values to propagate. Whilst the Soviet Union attracted many to the communist ideology, today the world in no way wants to model itself on Russia or its culture. Putin cares little about propagating values to Germany, Cuba and Vietnam. Russia has a kingdom and wants this to be respected. This is not how a nation becomes a hegemon.

Economy — Russia has failed to transform its energy revenues into a self-sustaining economy. This has made it vulnerable to price fluctuations. The fall in oil prices in 2014, caused a recession in Russia. There are little plans coming from Moscow to address this. Russia is a huge country, it needs infrastructure, transport and wealth for its diverse population. Russia is 70 times the size of the UK and 34 times the size of Spain, it has mineral wealth

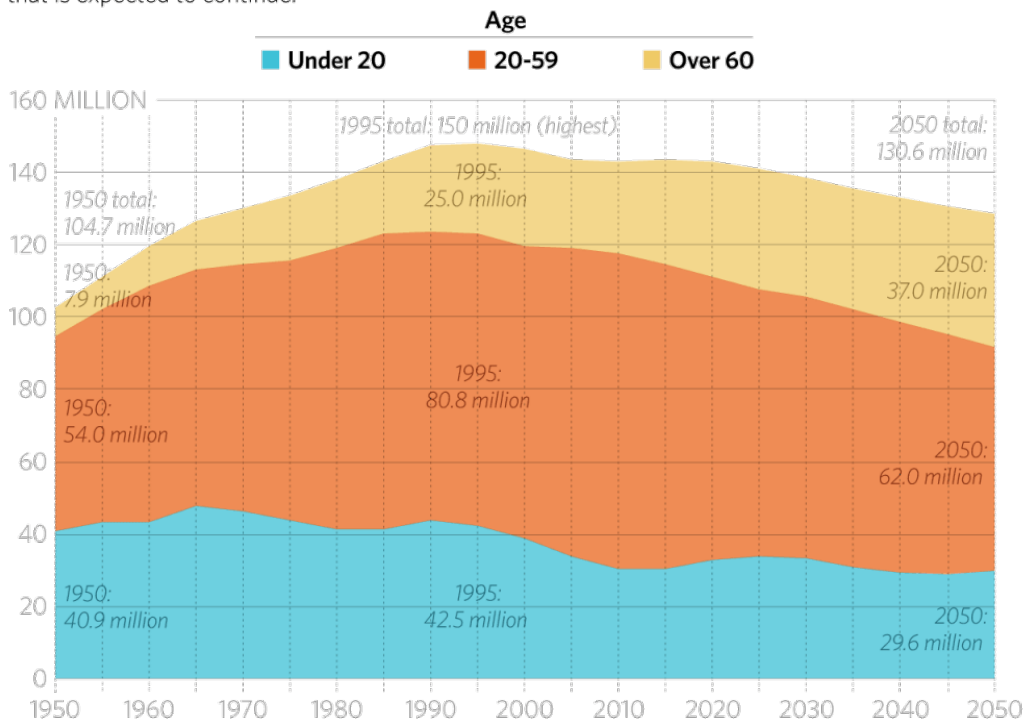
far in excess then both nations combined, but has an economy smaller than both of them. This is not an economy that gives you hegemonic status.

Military - Russia possesses a very sizable arsenal, which suffers with deep structural problems associated with age and the lack of maintenance. As the equipment continues to age, maintenance becomes more expensive, taking up more of the defence budget. The equipment will also be retired at an ever-increasing pace as it becomes obsolete. The Russian military therefore is dependent on increased military funding if it wishes to maintain its current combat potential, much less increase it. Whilst the Soviet Union challenged the US in the Arms and Space Race, today's Russia is militarily weak to use this as an effective tool.

Today, Moscow has played a very able role in keeping Russia in the game, despite what the country went through after the collapse of the Soviet Union. What we see is the able playing of a weak hand. The context of Russia today and the challenge any ruler would face ruling over Russia is the social, demographic, economic and technological tide ebbing away from it. So, the best Russia can do is to just hold onto what it already has.

Russia's Population Distribution

As the number of working-age Russian has shrunk, its elderly population has increased, a trend that is expected to continue.



Notes

[1] Russia pays off Paris Club debts, BBC online, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/5271122.stm>

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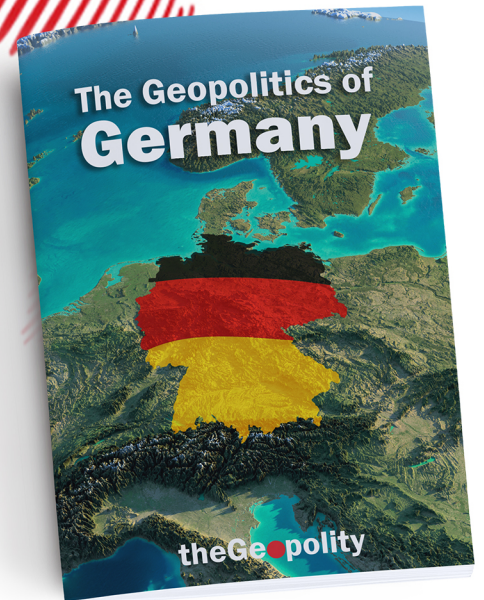
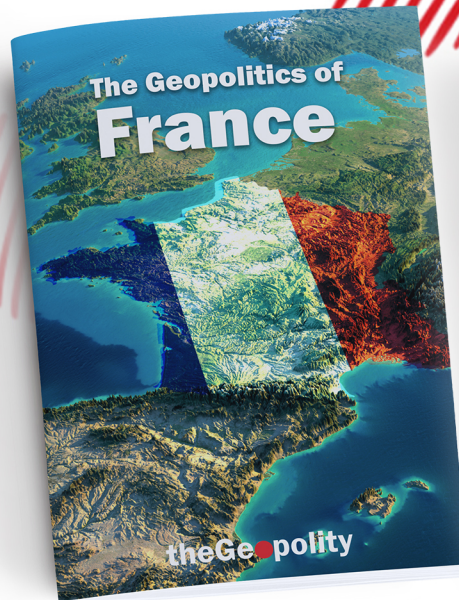
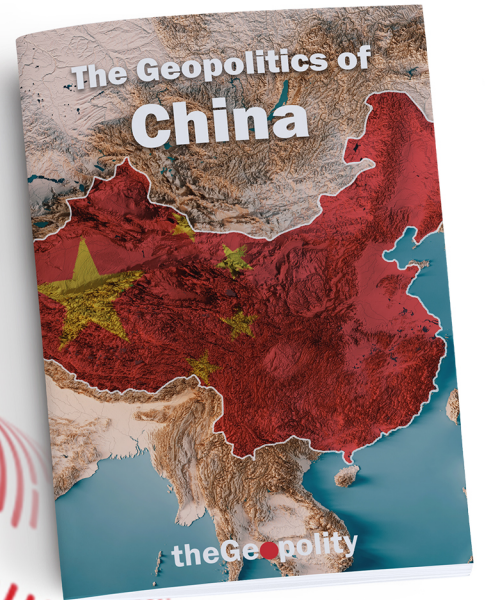
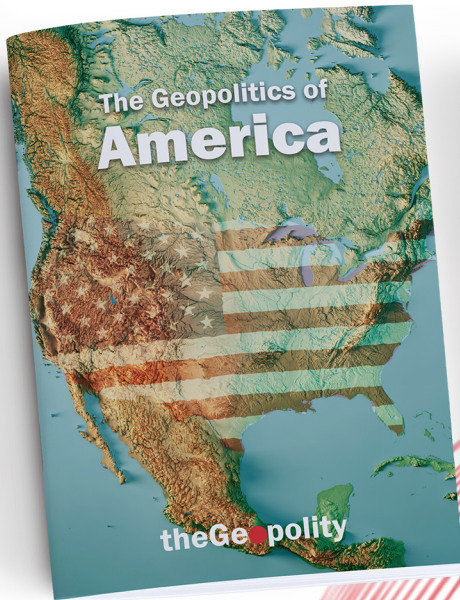
[3] Margarete Klen, Russia's Military Capabilities, 'Great power' ambitions and reality, SWP Research Paper, German Institute for international and Security affairs, October 2009, pg 6, http://www.swp-berlin.org/file-admin/contents/products/research_papers/2009_RP12_kle_ks.pdf and "Hawkish Medvedev orders major rearmament for Russian military", The Times, 17 March 2009

[4] See, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/23/the-syrian-war-is-over-and-america-lost/>

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[6] See, <https://www.rt.com/business/418852-russia-energy-deals-saudi-arabia/>

[7] Putin enters contest for Africa after humbling US in Mideast, Bloomberg, 23 October 2019, <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news-fast-news/putin-enters-contest-for-africa-after-humbling-us-in-mideast/>



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At geopolity.com we look at the world through the lens of power and ideology. We see forces such as geography, politics, economics and military capability constrain world leaders and nations. Through understanding these forces, we believe we can make sense of what nations are attempting to achieve. We also believe by determining the ideology nations embrace we can appreciate why the US is interested in the Middle East and why much of the world worries about Pakistan's nuclear capability.

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